

Cisneros, Senator Bob Graham, Representative C.W. Bill Young, Representative Michael Bilirakis, and Mayor Fischer made brief remarks on the St. Petersburg empowerment zone initiative.]

The President. Thank you, Mr. Mayor. I know you've got some other community leaders there, and let me just say to all of them, we're pulling for you. We appreciate what you're going through. We want to be here to support you. We know that you can realize your vision of how you want your community to work, how you want people to feel who are living there, and we're determined to stay with you all the way through.

Thank you very much, Mr. Mayor, again, for contacting me, for coming to see me, and for making me aware of the situation. We're going to keep going, and we'll be there with you every step of the way.

Mayor Fischer. Well, thank you very much. We appreciate you calling us this morning, and your response has been overwhelming. Thank you.

The President. Thank you, Mr. Mayor. Good-bye.

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:50 a.m. from the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Gov. Lawton Chiles and Lt. Gov. Buddy MacKay of Florida.

Remarks Prior to a Briefing on AIDS Research and an Exchange With Reporters

December 3, 1996

The President. As all of you know, this is World AIDS Awareness Week, and you also know I'm a little hoarse. I'm very excited about the progress we've made in the last 4 years. I'm determined to keep pressing until we have a vaccine and ultimately a cure. And I'd like to ask the Vice President to sort of take over for me with the opening remarks, and then we'll hear from Secretary Shalala. We have some of our Nation's top health officials—our top public health officials here. I thank them for coming, for their work, and I'd like to ask the Vice President to speak.

The Vice President. Thank you very much, Mr. President.

As you can tell, the President needs to conserve his vocal cords a little bit. He's had quite a lot to say about this topic of AIDS over the last 4 years, especially internally with this tremendous team that Secretary Shalala has pulled together and led on the President's behalf. And this is one of several briefings that the President has had periodically on the progress our country is making against HIV/AIDS.

And the experts here will provide some statistics to back these assertions up. But let me just briefly, on behalf of the President, note that this administration has presided over a 40 percent increase in NIH-supported AIDS re-

search, a 158 percent increase in Ryan White AIDS treatment grants, a 24 percent increase in CDC HIV-prevention activities, a 96 percent increase for HUD's housing opportunities for people with AIDS program. He has greatly strengthened the Office of AIDS Research at NIH. And as a result of Public Health Service guidelines recommending the use of AZT by HIV-positive pregnant women and their newborns, there has been a very encouraging 17 percent drop in the number of infants with perinatally acquired HIV infections—those are the last statistics available from '94 to '95; also responding rapidly to FDA approval of a new class of AIDS therapies called protease inhibitors, with increases in funding for State AIDS drug assistance programs. We have eased Social Security disability rules to speed approval of eligibility. And of course, the President created the Office of National AIDS Policy at the White House and the Presidential Advisory Council on HIV/AIDS.

Last year, at the White House Conference on HIV and AIDS, the President asked me to preside over an effort to look for ways to overcome obstacles in developing new therapeutics, vaccines, and microbicides to combat HIV and AIDS. And we have achieved a great deal since last year. Working with this team here today,

we convened meetings that led to the establishment of the Forum for Collaborative HIV Research. And I'm proud that the participants in this forum, AIDS clinicians, researchers, drug companies, insurance companies, and patient advocacy groups, have all expressed their belief that this has become an unprecedented and productive forum for discussing the future of HIV research.

These new scientific advancements in HIV and AIDS treatment light optimism and hope in the AIDS community for people with AIDS and their families. So this is a very positive report this year. And many are now feeling that there is cause for more optimism in the near future.

Through collaborative efforts like this new forum, and the cooperative efforts of the Government and private sector researchers, we'll continue the fight for better and more affordable prevention strategies, vaccines, and microbicides. We will not forget the children. The President is personally committed to focusing this research effort on the crying need to develop pediatric applications of these prevention and treatment strategies and products. And we've all talked a great deal about how to do that.

Working with our team assembled here and with our partners in research, we will continue to knock down every barrier to the development

of successful therapeutics, vaccines, and microbicides until we knock down the last barrier of all, the HIV virus itself.

Now, on behalf of the President, I want to turn this over to Secretary Donna Shalala to expand on the administration's efforts to defeat this terrible disease.

[At this point, Health and Human Services Secretary Donna Shalala began the AIDS briefing. While she retrieved a chart for the briefing, the following exchange took place.]

Political Strategist James Carville

Q. Mr. President, can you tell us how you feel about James Carville's effort to mount an offensive on your behalf?

The President. I can't comment.

Q. You're not going to talk to him about it?

Q. How's the Cabinet going?

Q. Any decisions, sir?

President's Health

Q. When can we expect an announcement? Are you glad you've lost your voice? *[Laughter]*

The President. It's a hoax. *[Laughter]*

Q. We suspected as much, sir. *[Laughter]*

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:45 a.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. A portion of these remarks could not be verified because the tape was incomplete.

Statement on the Resignation of Senior Adviser for Policy and Strategy

George Stephanopoulos

December 4, 1996

From the snows of New Hampshire in 1991 until the present day, no one has rendered me better advice, nor given more loyal service to this Nation, than George Stephanopoulos. There's no one in Washington who has a better understanding of the intersection of politics, policy, and the way those affect the American people. His work here at the White House is evidence of his deep respect for our country, its

system of government, and its people. He cannot be replaced.

George will undoubtedly be a great teacher at Columbia. His boundless intellectual curiosity will be put to good use, shaping the leadership of the future.

NOTE: Press Secretary Mike McCurry read this statement during his daily briefing.