

Remarks Announcing the Nomination of George J. Tenet To Be Director of Central Intelligence and an Exchange With Reporters

March 19, 1997

The President. Good afternoon. I have just completed a very productive meeting with the Senate and House chairs and ranking minority members of the Budget Committee, and all of you know I'm about to leave in a few hours for Helsinki for my meeting with President Yeltsin. But before we discuss those things, I want to announce my intention to nominate George Tenet, who is standing here with me with his family, currently the Acting Director of the CIA, as the Director of Central Intelligence.

He brings a wealth of experience and skill to the challenge of leading our intelligence community into the 21st century. Beginning in 1995, he served with real distinction as Deputy Director under John Deutch. Prior to that, he was my senior aide for intelligence at the National Security Council. He did a superb job of helping to set out our intelligence priorities for new challenges. And at the CIA, he has played a pivotal role in putting these priorities into place and leading the intelligence community in meeting the demands of the post-cold-war world.

As the longtime staff director of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, George Tenet understands the essential role Congress must play in the intelligence community's work. Since joining our administration, he has maintained a strong relationship in Congress. He knows well the concerns of the intelligence community as well. He knows that I must have the unvarnished truth. He knows how critical timely, reliable intelligence is to our Nation's security. I'm proud to nominate him for this vital job and very grateful for the service that he has rendered to our administration and to our country.

George.

[At this point, Director-designate Tenet thanked the President and made brief remarks.]

The President. Thank you.

Mr. Tenet. Thank you.

The President. Congratulations. Thank you.

Q. Do you think he will be confirmed?

The President. I do.

Q. Why?

The President. Well, because he's well-known to the Senate and well-respected by Republicans as well as Democrats.

Q. Mr. President——

Efforts To Balance the Budget and Summit in Helsinki, Finland

The President. Let me finish my statement.

Our first order of business when I get back from Helsinki must be to finish the job of balancing the budget. We have to do it this year. Recent statements by the leaders of the Republican Party in both the Senate and the House have given new impetus to this hope, and today we began to build on that momentum.

When I met with the Republican chairs and the ranking Democratic members of the Senate and House Budget Committees, along with our budget team, including Erskine Bowles, Secretary Rubin, Director Raines, NEC Chair Sperling, Legislative Director Hilley, and the Council of Economic Advisers Chair, Janet Yellen—of course, along with the Vice President—we agreed that, during the recess, they will begin an effort to reduce the differences among us in topics including Medicare and Medicaid, other entitlements, national defense, domestic spending, revenues, and other issues relevant to the budget, so that when I meet with the bipartisan leadership after Congress' Easter recess, we will be ready to make rapid progress until we reach a balanced budget agreement.

We agree on the goal. We have agreed on a schedule to start discussion. Now comes the hard work of writing the agreement, dollar by dollar, program by program, issue by issue. We have circled these issues long enough. It's time now to give the American people a balanced budget, and I believe we will do it and do it this year.

Tonight I'm leaving for Helsinki for my 11th meeting with Boris Yeltsin, Russia's President. Not too long ago, it was historic whenever the President of the United States and the leader

of Russia met. Today, our meetings have become almost routine as we work through problems and build cooperation. The increasing normalcy of our ties make it easy to lose sight of the great opportunity that lies before us now. We will focus on three important areas: first, on moving forward with our work to build a Europe that is undivided, democratic, and at peace for the first time in the history of the Continent; second, on continuing to reduce the danger of weapons of mass destruction; and third, on expanding the economic partnership that is good for Americans and Russians alike.

In Europe, we can complete the work that was only half-finished a half-century ago by bringing stability and prosperity to all the people on that continent. That work begins with NATO, the anchor of Europe's security. We are adapting NATO to take on new missions, enlarging NATO to take in new members, strengthening NATO's partnership with nonmembers, and seeking to build a robust partnership between NATO and Russia, a relationship that makes Russia a true partner of the alliance.

In Helsinki, we'll discuss the outlines of a NATO-Russia charter that NATO Secretary General Solana and Foreign Minister Primakov are negotiating. I believe NATO and Russia should consult regularly and should act jointly whenever possible, just as we are doing today in Bosnia.

Our two nations have a responsibility also to continue to lead the world away from the nuclear threat. We have already made remarkable progress, from signing the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty to extending the Non-Proliferation Treaty to bringing START I into force. Now we hope to see the Russian Duma ratify START II. Together with START I, it will cut arsenals by two-thirds from their cold war height. Just think about it; we will, with START I and START II, cut our arsenals by two-thirds from their cold war height. But we also want to do more. President Yeltsin and I will discuss possible guidelines for further reductions under START III.

Finally, we will focus on Russia's efforts to build a stable and prosperous market economy. The Russian people have made remarkable strides in a short time. They have created a private sector where once there was none. They've slashed inflation and stabilized the ruble.

Now the challenge is to create a climate that actually attracts more investment and promotes more trade so that Russia will have real economic growth and that that real growth will reach ordinary citizens. President Yeltsin and I will discuss the steps both of us will take to create that climate.

I'm encouraged by the new economic team President Yeltsin announced this week. It underscores Russia's commitment to continued reform. This is a time of extraordinary opportunity for America and for Russia, indeed, for the entire world.

I look forward to my meetings with President Yeltsin and to our common efforts to build a broad foundation for progress, prosperity, partnership, and peace in the 21st century. I look forward to balancing the budget, and I look forward to George Tenet becoming the next Director of Central Intelligence. This is a good day.

Director of Central Intelligence Nomination

Q. Mr. President, your decision to move so quickly with this announcement—is that a sign that you are concerned about the morale within the intelligence community?

The President. No, but it is a sign that I believe that we should not leave these positions vacant long, particularly in the national security area, but throughout the Government. You know, the Vice President and I have worked very hard to reform and to reduce the size of Government, and the Federal employees have taken on increasing responsibilities. But we believe where there is a mission, it ought to be done and done well, and we ought to keep the morale high and keep the direction clear.

You can't have a ship without a captain, and we need to get after it. And I think George Tenet is clearly the best qualified person to move quickly into the leadership. He has been the Acting Director, he did an outstanding job as John Deutch's deputy, he did a terrific job here for us in the National Security Council on intelligence matters, and he has the confidence of many, many in the Congress in both parties. So I didn't see any point in waiting around. We need to get this done and go on.

Russia and NATO

Q. Mr. President, if you want an undivided Europe, why are you leaving Russia out? Why

don't you take her into NATO and make it all one big, happy family?

The President. First of all, I have never left Russia out. I have explicitly said in every speech that I have made about this subject that I do not believe Russia should be excluded from NATO membership. I'm not sure that Russia would not prefer a special charter between Russia and NATO; that's what we're trying to achieve now. But I would be the last person to try to exclude them. I don't believe anybody should be excluded.

Q. Do you think she would join?

The President. I don't know. As I said, it's my belief that at this moment in time, Russia would prefer to have a charter setting out a relationship between NATO and Russia. But I would never exclude them from membership.

Look, I am trying to build a world for our children and grandchildren that will not repeat the worst of the 20th century and will take advantage of the best that the future offers.

Q. That's my point, that the two World Wars were started by nations being isolated, Versailles, Yalta, and so forth.

The President. That's why we've tried to get—right now, it's so hard to have a special charter between Russia and NATO, that's why we have made it clear that NATO is not an aggressive organization trying to limit, restrict, or undermine anyone who wants to treat their neighbors with respect and work in concert the way Russia and NATO and the United States particularly are working together in Bosnia.

I'll see you in Helsinki.

The Vice President. Mr. President, Helen [Helen Thomas, United Press International] played Madeleine at the Gridiron, and I think she's still in the role. [Laughter]

The President. Just come get on the plane. Believe me, I missed you, and I missed him, and I'm really sorry I missed you both.

Q. He was fabulous.

The President. I ought to—

Q. And you did pretty good.

NOTE: The President spoke at 4:49 p.m. in the Red Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to NATO Secretary General Javier Solana and Minister of Foreign Affairs Yevgeniy Primakov of Russia.

Letter to Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich on Proposed Compensatory Time Legislation

March 19, 1997

Dear Mr. Speaker:

America's working families find it increasingly difficult to balance the demands of work and family. Our nation's workers and their employers deserve responsible compensatory time legislation that gives working people the flexibility they need to meet their obligations at home and in the workplace, while upholding three fundamental principles: real choice for employees, real protection against employer abuse, and preservation of fair labor standards such as the 40 hour work week and the right to overtime pay.

The legislation currently pending House consideration, H.R. 1, the Working Families Flexibility Act of 1997, does not meet these principles. As a result, I strongly oppose H.R. 1 and will veto this bill if passed in its current form.

We should enact comp time legislation this year that meets the needs of working families and U.S. businesses. Last year, I proposed employee-choice flex-time legislation and included expansion of the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) so that workers could take leave for parent-teacher conferences or attend to the routine medical needs of their families. With these objectives in mind, I encourage you to support a substitute amendment to be offered by Representative George Miller. Unlike H.R. 1, the Miller amendment allows comp time without endangering fair labor standards, and without burdening business with greater costs or risks.

It is time for us to work together to give America's working families the help they need to succeed in an increasingly demanding environment. Although I am prepared to support and sign a responsible comp time bill, I intend