

[At this point, one group of reporters left the room, and another group entered.]

Q. Do you know at what moment David Trimble changed his mind? And do you have any idea why? Because on Wednesday he said, no deal, he couldn't accept your framework agreement.

Senator Mitchell. There was a process of negotiation which occurred between Wednesday and Friday in which changes were made to the draft document in a manner that led all of the parties to eventually find it acceptable. That's what comes out of negotiation.

Q. But at what point did he say, "Yes, that's it, that's what I was waiting for." Or did he never?

Senator Mitchell. I first knew that the agreement would be approved at 4:45 in the afternoon on Friday when Mr. Trimble called me and said that they were ready to go. We had distributed the agreement in its final form on Friday morning, and I had been in touch with all of the party leaders during the day to inquire as to when they might be ready to go with a final plenary session to vote on the agreement and to approve it.

And of course during those discussions I encouraged them and inquired of them as to whether they would be ready to vote for it. And gradually, over the course of the day, several of them said, we're ready to go now, and we'll vote for it. And at 4:45 p.m., Mr. Trimble called me to say he was ready to go and was prepared to get it done. And so as to make certain that it was done without any further interruption, I called the meeting right then and there.

Q. Would you have gotten the agreement without the input of President Clinton?

Senator Mitchell. I don't think there would have been an agreement without President Clinton's involvement—not beginning this past week but beginning several years ago. I think the President's decisions have been timely, have been critical, and I think it's very important to keep that in mind, that while the President was very actively involved in the concluding negotiations, including staying up all night and making phone calls to many people, including myself, they didn't begin there. They began 5 years ago, and what happened was the culmination of a long process of involvement by the President.

No American President has ever before visited Northern Ireland while in office. No American President has ever before placed the problem of Northern Ireland high on the American agenda at a time when it seemed that there was no prospect for success. It's an easy thing to get involved in an issue when it's on the downhill side and it looks like it's going to succeed. President Clinton got involved in Northern Ireland when no one gave any chance for success.

So the answer is yes, the President's role was critical. I don't think there would have been an agreement without his leadership and participate, and it began many years ago.

NOTE: The exchange began at 2:35 p.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, the President referred to Prime Minister Bertie Ahern of Ireland and Prime Minister Tony Blair of the United Kingdom. Senator Mitchell, independent chairman of the multiparty talks in Northern Ireland, referred to David Trimble, Ulster Unionist Party leader. A tape was not available for verification of the content of this exchange.

Remarks Announcing the Office of Management and Budget Transition and an Exchange With Reporters

April 14, 1998

The President. In a few moments I am leaving for Houston to speak to the men and women of NASA, visit with America's oldest and newest space hero, Senator John Glenn, and participate tonight in an ESPN townhall on race. But first,

I want to make a personnel announcement about a critical position on our economic team.

For 5½ years, our administration has brought a new vision of stewardship to our economy. We insisted on fiscal discipline, on bringing the deficit down from \$290 billion on the day I

took office to nearly zero today. At the same time, we were determined to invest in our people and their future, to give all Americans the chance to reap the rewards of our prosperity. This invest and grow economic strategy is clearly the right one for America.

To put this strategy into place, we have needed an able team. I have been proud to have at my side skilled and dedicated men and women, a true team of public servants who have helped to steer the economy through one of the longest peacetime expansions in our history.

For the past 2 years, Frank Raines has been a key member of that team. He has served the American people with true distinction as Director of the Office of Management and Budget. He is the first Budget Director to draft and submit a balanced budget since Neil Armstrong walked on the Moon. He brought a businessman's practical sensibility to the task of safeguarding the taxpayers' hard-earned dollars. He has earned the trust of Democratic and Republican Members of Congress alike. He has served as a key negotiator of last year's balanced budget agreement. He has shown true leadership in tackling the difficult problems of the District of Columbia. Frank Raines has been, in short, a brilliant OMB Director, a leader of this administration, a trusted adviser, an able spokesperson, and a real friend.

He has just informed me in the last couple of days that he has decided to step down as Director of OMB because of a wonderful, once-in-a-lifetime opportunity in the private sector. I regret his decision, but I certainly understand it. I think it's clearly the right thing for him, his wife, Wendy, and their children, and I wish them all the best.

I'm also delighted to announce my intention to nominate Jack Lew to be the next OMB Director. Only a handful of people in Washington have Jack Lew's profound knowledge of the Federal budget and the legislative process; almost none of them has his ability to explain it in plain English. Just as important, very few people in Washington also have his record of idealism, commitment, and conscience.

From his days as policy director for the Speaker of the House, when he and Tip O'Neill worked to strengthen Social Security in 1983, to his days fighting to create AmeriCorps, a national service initiative that has brought the spark of service and the opportunity for a college education to the lives of tens of thousands of young Americans, to his most recent work as Deputy Director of OMB, drafting our balanced budget, Jack Lew has been a true and dedicated public servant.

Like Frank Raines, with whom he has made a very good team, Jack works to balance the budget not just for its own sake but for the sake of the people whose interests and values he serves. He already serves as a valued member of our economic team. I look forward to his speedy confirmation as Director of OMB, and I thank him and his wonderful family for being here today and for being willing to undertake the sacrifice and rigors of public service for the honor and the reward.

Thank you very much. Now I'd like to ask Mr. Raines and Mr. Lew to make statements.

[At this point, Director Raines and Director-designate Lew made brief remarks.]

NationsBank and BankAmerica Merger

Q. Mr. President, what do you think of the big bank mergers? Mr. President, do you have any ideas about them?

The President. It would be inappropriate to comment now.

Director of the Office of Management and Budget

Q. Where is Mr. Raines going—this chance of a lifetime?

Director Raines. Stay tuned. [Laughter]

The President. Shortly. That's news, unfortunately, I can't make.

NOTE: The President spoke at 8:55 a.m. on the South Lawn at the White House, prior to his departure for Houston, TX.