

Then in 1814 a White House official disputed the idea that the burning of the White House was a setback for the Madison administration. [Laughter] “Yes, fire did consume the mansion,” he said, “but it was in desperate need of renovation anyway—[laughter]—and this salutary effort by the British actually saves us time and taxpayers’ money.” [Laughter]

Here’s one from the Jefferson administration in 1804. A spokesman for Vice President Aaron Burr asserted, “People don’t kill people, guns kill people.” [Laughter] Way back in 1773 a spokesman for Samuel Adams asserted unequivocally that the Boston Tea Party was not a fundraiser. [Laughter] “No one paid to attend; there was no quid pro quo,” he said. “The party was just a town meeting for colonists to get to know each other and discuss details of the new tax law.”

Well, we’ve been at this a long time. Helen ought to know; she was there. [Laughter]

Let me say one serious thing: Helen Thomas is not just the longest serving White House correspondent. One of the reasons she got that award tonight in her name is that she’s still the hardest working, the first to show up in the Press Office every morning about 5 o’clock, 5 days a week, for nearly 40 years. And I dare say tonight is the first time she has ever been completely scooped. By my calculation, she’s had about 10,000 mornings, thousands of notebooks, thousands of ballpoint pens, thousands of cups of coffee—sometimes brought to her by White House staffers—never has it compromised her yet.

For all of us in the White House, she is a rock; for everyone here tonight, obviously a symbol of everything American journalism can and should be: the embodiment of fearless integrity, fierce commitment to accuracy, the insistence upon holding Government accountable—all of that in the spirit of the first amendment and the free press it protects.

Helen, by tradition, you always get to ask the first question at the press conference. This has been a rather long opening statement, but to honor the tradition tonight you can ask me anything you want. But remember, in an even older tradition, I don’t have to answer. [Laughter]

Thank you, and good night.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:26 p.m. in the International Ballroom at the Washington Hilton Hotel. In his remarks, he referred to Larry McQuillan of Reuters, outgoing president, and Stewart Powell of Hearst Newspapers, incoming president, White House Correspondents’ Association; Earl Lane and Andrew Smith of Newsday, winners of the Edgar A. Poe Award; Michael K. Frisby, Wall Street Journal, winner of the Aldo Beckman Award for 1998; Ron Fournier, Associated Press, and Peter Maer, NBC Radio/Mutual News, winners of the Merriman Smith Memorial Award for 1998; Sam Donaldson, ABC News; and Helen Thomas, United Press International, first recipient of the association’s Helen Thomas Lifetime Achievement Award.

## Statement on Drug Use By Prison Inmates

April 26, 1998

The report on jail inmates released today by the Justice Department confirms the urgent need for Government at all levels to pursue a policy of coerced abstinence for drug offenders. The report shows that more than half of these criminals used drugs in the month prior to their arrest. We have an obligation to install a tough system of testing, treatment, and punishment for drug offenders to prevent them from returning to the streets with dangerous drug habits intact. Congress can take the lead

by adopting my administration’s proposals to promote coerced abstinence throughout the criminal justice system.

NOTE: This statement was made available by the Office of the Press Secretary on April 25 but was embargoed for release until 4:30 p.m. on April 26.