

Remarks During Discussions With Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi of Japan and an Exchange With Reporters in New York City September 22, 1998

President Clinton. Let me say that I'm very sorry that the weather didn't permit us to go up to Tarrytown today, but I'm pleased to welcome Prime Minister Obuchi and his entire team here. I have also invited the Prime Minister to come back for an official visit early next year so that we can work very closely together on the challenges we face. The United States has no more important relationship in the world than our relationship with Japan, for common security concerns, to advance democracy and peace, and in our common economic endeavors.

So we just had a good hour-long meeting, and we're going to have a couple of other sessions today, and then early next year we'll have another meeting.

Prime Minister Obuchi. I am very pleased to have this opportunity of having a discussion with President Clinton extensively on my first visit to the United States since I became the Prime Minister of Japan.

This meeting of mine with the President I had earlier today brought home to me the importance of Japan and the United States working closely together. And although I am only 2 months in office and the President has experience—a wealth of experience of over 5½ years as President of the United States, we spoke in a very candid manner as if we knew from before. I think although this was the first time that we met in this kind of setting, we had a very substantive and important meeting.

Let me take this opportunity to thank President Clinton for, as he mentioned earlier, extending to me the invitation to visit the United States early next year. I think that visit of mine will provide a good opportunity to continue our discussion further. And I do hope to make it realized. Details, I will instruct our officials to work out with U.S. counterparts.

As we moved from the prior room to this room, we talked about the Third Way, but the path that we had in between two rooms were not enough to complete the subject. [Laughter] So I do hope to elaborate on that subject later on.

Response to Independent Counsel's Referral

Q. Mr. President, would you consider an appearance before the House Judiciary Committee in person, as some in Congress have suggested?

President Clinton. Mr. Plante [Bill Plante, CBS News], I don't have anything to add to whatever the White House is saying about all this today. I'm here working on a very important thing for the American people and for the Japanese people. We have to work together to restore growth to the world and to help our friends.

Yesterday I was here working on terrorism and how to make the global economy work for ordinary citizens. That's what I'm doing, and I don't have any contribution to make to that discussion beyond whatever the White House has said.

Q. Do you pay any attention to what's going on other than this? Do you pay any attention to what happened yesterday, to what the lawyers are doing, to any aspect of this?

President Clinton. Not much. Believe it or not, I haven't read the report or my lawyers' replies. I think it's important that I focus on what I'm doing for the American people, and that's what I intend to do.

Japanese Financial Reform

Q. Mr. President, are you encouraged from what you heard today that Japan will be able to deal with its fiscal problems in a swift way and adequately?

President Clinton. Well, I think, first of all, let's look at the facts here. Japan is a very great country with a strong, sophisticated economy and immensely talented people and, as in America now, an increasingly complicated political situation. That is, we have a Democratic President and a Republican majority in the Congress. They have their government, and in one house of their Diet an opposition with more members. So they have to work out what is politically possible.

I think there is virtually unanimous support in the world for the kind of financial reforms that would restore economic growth in Japan. The rest of us want to be encouraging. We

want to do what we can to be supportive to help do whatever we can to create the climate which would permit a quick restoration of economic growth in Japan and therefore in Asia. That's what our objective is, is to understand that they have unique challenges but enormous strengths and to help find a way to get this done.

Q. Mr. Prime Minister, how optimistic or pessimistic are you about the prospects of getting reforms passed through your parliament?

Prime Minister Obuchi. I'm neither optimistic or pessimistic on this, but I think, as much as I do realize, many in Japan would realize,

that this is not only an issue for Japan but something that has major implications on economies of Asia as well as the whole world.

I think steps we take in Japan to address the issue of financial system has very large implications worldwide. So I think with this understanding, I intend to make my very best effort at addressing this issue. I am convinced that we will be able to do something.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:10 p.m. at the Waldorf Astoria Hotel. A tape was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

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President Clinton. Thank you. I'd like to say to the members of the Japanese press, I'm sorry that you had to go all the way to Tarrytown and then come back. But at least you have seen it—we didn't even get to see it. [*Laughter*]

I want to welcome Prime Minister Obuchi and his team here. We have had very good meetings already today. The United States has no more important relationship in the world than our relationship with Japan. We are very interested in deepening our partnership in the security area, in the political area, and in doing what we can economically together to restore growth in the world and to stabilize the world financial situation. All these matters we have discussed today in a friendly and constructive atmosphere.

I just wanted to say one other thing. I invited Prime Minister Obuchi to come back to Washington early next year for an official visit, and he accepted, and I thank him for that.

Prime Minister Obuchi. All the strong and solid partnership between Japan and the United States could not lift this fog, and it is unfortunate that some of you had to go to Tarrytown

and come back, and I'm sorry about that. But as the President said just now, I've been invited, and I've accepted his invitation to visit the United States in the early part of next year. And I look forward to meeting him again in Washington.

Legislative Agenda

Q. Mr. President, you've said how busy you are, but I just wonder if you haven't found some time to check with Congress about how things are going?

President Clinton. Well, we're just a few days away from the new budget year, and I'd say things need to go a little faster. We need an education bill; we need a health bill. We desperately need the IMF funding. They need to pass a good Patients' Bill of Rights. There's a lot left to be done. Things are not going fast enough to suit me on the people's business.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:02 p.m. at the Waldorf Astoria Hotel. A tape was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.