

Remarks on the Dedication of the James S. Brady Press Briefing Room and an Exchange With Reporters February 11, 2000

The President. It's the first time Joe Lockhart's ever introduced me, I think. [Laughter]

Press Secretary Joe Lockhart. Probably the last.

The President. I thought the last phrase was going to be, "and the man who makes my job somewhere between impossible and miserable every day." [Laughter]

Well, ladies and gentlemen, this is a happy day for all of us and, I believe, for people throughout the United States. I want to welcome Jim and Sarah and their son, Scott. I want to welcome Mike and Larry and Jerald and Pierre here, the former White House Press Secretaries. I also want to remember, as I know Jim and Sarah would want me to, Jim's Press Office Assistant Sally McElroy, who passed away last summer. Her husband, Robert Evans, is here, and we welcome him.

Today we honor a man whose courage, purpose, and humor make him a standout Press Secretary and an outstanding human being. Jim Brady, after all, was the man who convinced the White House Press Corps to abandon decades of tradition and actually raise their hands when they wanted to ask a question. [Laughter] Jim Brady was the man who changed press conferences forever, one day in the 1970's, when he invited journalists to see a bipartisan group of Senators cutting the budget—with hedge trimmers. Jim Brady was the man who, when Members of Congress proposed to give themselves a \$50-a-day tax deduction, responded with a press release that was one word long: Stupid. [Laughter]

Jim Brady is living proof that you can't kill courage, that it takes more than a cheap handgun to destroy a strong spirit. As he himself once said, "No one can shoot away your sense of humor."

Jim Brady was the man who changed press conferences forever for me on this issue. And I want to thank him and Sarah from the bottom of my heart.

Every time I saw him in the early days of my Presidency, and even before, when the Brady bill was being debated, I realized that

his ready smile and sense of humor had to overcome despair that none of us can fully understand and pain that none of us has ever really experienced. I realized that he could have chosen to live his life out in private regret, but instead he chose a public embrace. He could have been remembered, no matter what he did, as a good Press Secretary, a committed campaigner, a world-class chili cook. But he instead chose the connection to other human beings and an eye to the future. Even when he was still in the hospital and had doubts about his own future, he reached out to his fellow patients, to give them reasons to keep going. And for more than 15 years now, he has traveled our Nation on behalf of the National Head Injury Foundation and other groups, with a simple message: Persevere; never give up.

Jim and Sarah have known uncommon perseverance, and they have demonstrated to us what really counts in life. They have built a bipartisan coalition in this country to strengthen our Nation's gun laws, to make our children and our future safer. Against tremendous odds, they fought for 7 years to pass the Brady bill. It was my great honor to sign it into law in 1993. In 1994, we passed the assault weapons ban. We then made it illegal for a young person to buy or receive a handgun.

And what has happened? We have seen gun crime fall by more than a third. We have seen the Brady bill keep guns out of the hands of nearly a half-million felons, fugitives, and stalkers. We cannot know how many people are alive and fully strong and healthy today because of the labors of Jim and Sarah Brady.

Sometimes in Washington, it's easy to cover the politics and not the policy. And sometimes it's even more interesting, I'm sure, for all of you to cover the politics and not the policy. But when you see Jim and Sarah—for many of you not just colleagues but friends—you know that what we do here really does make a difference, and they have made a difference.

As we have been painfully reminded here in Washington these past few days, guns still are claiming the lives of too many of our children. There is more work to do, and Jim and Sarah

are ready to do it. They have called for extending Brady background checks to sales at gun shows, for mandating child safety locks to be sold with every handgun, for banning the most violent juvenile offenders from ever owning handguns, from ending the importation of large capacity ammunition clips, and for ensuring that all handgun owners have a State license, showing they've passed a background check and know how to handle a gun safely.

It is truly fitting that this room will be named for Jim Brady, for working here requires tenacity and perseverance and, above all, a sense of humor. Joe and I also thought about enacting another one of Jim's ideas that he and President Reagan advocated, hinging the floor to give deserving reporters immediate, involuntary access to the swimming pool below. [Laughter] But as much as I admire Jim Brady, I decided that I shouldn't do that. Even though I'm not running for anything, I still need a little bit of press pander from time to time.

Today we give name to a room. But Jim and Sarah Brady have already given far more to their national crusade. I want to finish my remarks by quoting a higher authority, Helen Thomas. [Laughter] A few years ago, Helen said these words to Jim Brady's biographer: "He's like a great tree standing by the river. He's a role model, and that's what life is all about. He realizes life is to be lived, that we should give our all, that we're lucky to be alive."

Jim and Sarah, may we all continue to draw inspiration from your strength and spirit here in the James Brady Briefing Room and all around our Nation.

Now, I want to unveil this plaque and read it to you.

[At this point, the plaque was unveiled.]

The President. It says, "This room is named in honor of James S. Brady, White House Press Secretary from January 23, 1981, until January 20, 1989. Mr. Brady served his Nation with honor and distinction, strengthening the bond between Government and press. May his courage and dedication continue to inspire all who work in this room and beyond."

Congratulations, Jim Brady.

[At this point, former Press Secretary James Brady and Sarah Brady made brief remarks.]

Internet Security

Q. Mr. President, do you want to update us on the cyberterrorism investigation? Anything new there?

The President. No, but as I said, we are going to have some people in next week, and we're going to look at our overall capabilities.

Q. What can you do; what can the Government do?

The President. Well, I think we've got a \$2 billion budget up there on the Hill now, to increase our capacity to make all systems less resistant to hacking and to train more young people and pay them better to come and help work on our side of this issue.

But let me say—I did a couple of interviews yesterday to make a general point I would like to reiterate to all of you. Basically, the development of the Internet and the sophistication of the computers has been a great thing for the world. It's brought us closer together. It's given opportunities to people who wouldn't otherwise have them, something that Jim and Sarah care a lot about. They've helped to empower people with disabilities all over America and all over the world to realize their full potential. But this greater openness and speed of this system and the importance of it have necessarily made for greater vulnerability for people who are just mischievous and people who have far darker motives.

And this is no different from any other development in human history. If you go back, from the beginning of time, where things of value are stored, people with bad motives will try to get to those things of value. Willie Sutton said he robbed banks because that's where the money is.

So now, vast things of value are stored in our computers, and transactions of great values occur on the Internet. And what you will see here, there will not be an instantaneous solution to this, but banks are a lot harder to rob today than they used to be. That's what's going to happen here. This will be an ongoing effort to try to make sure we get all the benefits of the Internet, all the benefits of the computer revolution, but we develop better defenses and better defenders. And I believe we will do that.

In terms of these specific instances, we're doing everything we can through our FBI center in western Pennsylvania, and in other places, to do the appropriate investigations.

Middle East Peace Process

Q. In the Middle East, Mr. President, do you fear that the Israel-Lebanon conflict is spinning out of control? And what does this mean for the peace process in general?

The President. Well, so far I think both sides have tried to keep it within control but take the—the Israelis have taken the retaliatory action they felt they had to take. But there has been some restraint there in the hope of keeping the peace process alive.

It seems to me that it is a sober reminder of why we ought to resume the peace process with great determination. A comprehensive peace between Syria and Lebanon and Israel is the only way, ultimately, I think, to resolve the continuing difficulties, over many years now, along that border. And similarly, I think peace between Israel and the Palestinians is critical to resolving the gnawing problems which reoccur from time to time within the borders of the countries.

So I would hope that it would redouble people's energy for it. And so far, I think that that's where we are, that you don't have the people who are the real players here—as nearly as I can see, and I watch it pretty closely, you know—giving up on the peace process. You do have a lot of frustration, anger. There's still a surprising amount of misunderstanding of each other's motives, given how long these folks have been living together and working together. But we'll see. I'm hopeful.

Northern Ireland Peace Process

Q. Mr. President, the British Government is on the verge of moving to suspend the power-sharing Government in Northern Ireland. How would you view that move, first, sir? And secondarily, the editorial opinion there seems to blame the IRA for the latest impasse. Do you have a comment on that, sir?

The President. Well, when the matter is resolved I might have more to say, but right now you should know that, at least before I came out here, the thing was still hanging some fire. But it wasn't clear to me what was going to happen.

I have been heavily involved, and the whole administration has been, in the last few weeks in trying to keep the Irish peace process on track. We believe that all the requirements of the Good Friday accords, which the voters of

Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic embraced, should be fulfilled. And we hope that a way can be found to keep this going. And until there is a suspension, that's all I want to say, because we're working hard on this, and there's still some chance that we can go forward without a suspension.

Should there be a suspension, it is imperative that all the parties do it on terms which do not allow a backsliding, and that the opportunity be taken to figure out a way forward that again will allow everybody to meet all the requirements that the Irish voters voted for in breathtaking margins.

I don't want to say anything else until we know how this plays out today. We've got a few more hours here. When we see how it's resolved today, I will say a little more. But I have to be very careful. I've been working very hard on this, and I want to be a positive, not a negative factor.

Press Secretary Joe Lockhart. This will be the last question.

2000 Election

Q. This is a tough political question that I hope all of your returning guests can appreciate. You've probably heard of the expression "Clinton fatigue," and I'm wondering what you think of that as a phenomenon and whether that will have some bearing on how many people you go out to campaign for in this election year.

The President. Well, I get tired from time to time. [Laughter] That's the only one I'm familiar with. [Laughter] I don't even know how to comment on that. I've got more requests right now to help than I can fulfill, and I think what I will be inclined to do is—I always feel that people running for office are the best judge of what's in their own interest, not me.

And I got plenty to do here. But so far, I've been asked to do more events than I can do. And I had—I went down to the Rio Grande Valley this week, for example, a place that I was the first President since Dwight Eisenhower to visit. And I made my third visit down there. I had a wonderful reception.

But I can't comment on that. I think that—my guess is that that will vary from State to State and congressional district to congressional district. I'll just—I'll do what I can to help the people and the causes I believe in, but I don't want to get in the way.

I also find that the ability of any outsider to affect in a positive way the course of an election is far more limited than is generally supposed. The voters understand that every election year they get to be in control again. And so, if you notice, like when I went to campaign for Mr. Street in Philadelphia, a place that has been enormously good to me, I was very careful in what I said to the voters. I said, "You shouldn't be for him because I am, but you know, I'm your friend. Here are my reasons. I hope you'll listen to my reasons and make up your own mind." It's a very delicate thing. I've watched this for years.

I remember once, Jim Brady's old boss, President Reagan, in '84, when he was winning every vote in America, came to Arkansas and made an appearance for my opponent. And afterward,

on Election Day, he got 62 percent of the vote, so did I. [*Laughter*] So you have to be—you've got to be humble in these things and just sort of show up for work every day.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:40 a.m. in the James S. Brady Press Briefing Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Mr. Brady's wife, Sarah Brady, chair, Handgun Control, Inc.; former White House Press Secretaries Michael McCurry, Larry M. Speakes, J.F. terHorst, and Pierre E.G. Salinger; and Mayor John F. Street of Philadelphia, PA. The transcript released by the Office of the Press Secretary also included the remarks of Press Secretary Joe Lockhart, who introduced the President, and of Mr. and Mrs. Brady. Mr. Brady was wounded in the 1981 assassination attempt on President Ronald Reagan.

Statement on Peacekeeping Efforts in East Timor

February 11, 2000

Over the last several months, the United States has worked with our partners in Southeast Asia to help East Timor in its transition to independence and peace. I am proud we were able to support the efforts of the Australian-led INTERFET force, which has brought security and hope to East Timor. With its mission accomplished, INTERFET is now handing responsibility to a U.N. peacekeeping mission, through which the countries of the region will once again provide the vast majority of troops.

Today I am announcing that the United States will continue to support our friends and allies in this important endeavor. A small number of U.S. officers will serve as observers in the U.N. mission. As part of their normal exercises, other U.S. personnel will contribute to humanitarian efforts, such as rebuilding schools and restoring

medical services. These efforts will complement our financial contributions to the peacekeeping operation, as well as humanitarian and development assistance to East Timor that will total over \$70 million this year. We will also continue to stand by Indonesia as it continues its hopeful democratic transformation.

In this way, we will contribute to the birth of two new democracies in a region where freedom and tolerance are taking root. And we will bolster the ability and willingness of the countries in that region to take the lead in building peace.

NOTE: The related memorandum of February 10 on U.S. military activities in East Timor is listed in Appendix D at the end of this volume.

Statement on the Northern Ireland Peace Process

February 11, 2000

The Good Friday accord, made possible by the courage of leaders from both of Northern Ireland's communities, responded to the peo-

ple's overwhelming desire for peace. It has been sustained by those leaders making the tough decisions necessary to keep the process moving