

wife, Cochi; Gen. Ehud Barak, chairman, Israeli Labor Party, and his wife, Nava; Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu of Israel; Chairman Yasser Arafat of the Palestinian Authority. The scroll and the award were presented by the Yitzhak Rabin Center.

Remarks to the Radio and TV Correspondents' Dinner

March 18, 1999

The President. Thank you very much. Thank you very much, Jim. I want to thank all the officers for making me feel so welcome. Evelyn, thank you for the great dinner conversation—Mr. Speaker, Members of Congress, my fellow Americans. I want to thank you for your invitation to come have dinner with 2,000 members of the Washington press corps. [Laughter] I accepted. If this isn't contrition, I don't know what is. [Laughter]

I know you can't really laugh about this. I mean, the events of the last year have been quite serious. If the Senate vote had gone the other way, I wouldn't be here tonight. I demand a recount. [Laughter]

Look, this is just the beginning of my week with the press. Tomorrow I've got a press conference and then the Gridiron dinner the day after that. You'd think I was selling a book. [Laughter] Now, I know it's been a long time since I had a press conference, but I remember it well. [Laughter] All those questions that day about the nomination of Zoe Baird. [Laughter]

Look, you can probably tell I'm a little nervous being around all these reporters tonight. So if you will forgive me, I'd like to employ a method that has worked pretty well for me over the last year.

[At this point, "Fuffles and Flurishes" was played and the Prime Minister of the United Republic of Carjackador, Joreb Onspot, was announced.]

The President. Your Excellency, welcome to the United States. [Laughter] The podium is yours. [Laughter]

[The Prime Minister spoke briefly in a foreign language.]

The President. Well your Excellency, without my headphones, I have no idea what you just said. [Laughter] But it sounded very much like words of praise. I want you to know that they mean more to me than I could possibly express. [Laughter]

[The Prime Minister replied briefly in a foreign language.]

The President. I agree with that, as well. [Laughter]

Now, your Excellency, this is just a dinner with the press. Tomorrow is the real press conference. I look forward to seeing you there. [Laughter]

Now, I know that the press corps has been busy preparing questions for me. So I've been working on the answers. Never mind the questions; here are the answers. [Laughter]

"Yes, Helen." "She was first, Sam. I'll get to you, Sam. Not yet, though." "The longest peacetime expansion in history." "No, I didn't watch it." [Laughter] "No, I haven't read it." [Laughter] "Yes, Wolf, I am doing this press conference because Joe made me do it."

Your Excellency, why don't you just have a seat right here, just listen to the translation, and I'll ask you to join me again if I need some cover. [Laughter]

Now, I know there's been a lot of interest in the future political career of the First Lady. I honestly don't know what she'll decide, but I can tell you this. Yesterday at breakfast, she was complaining that it is impossible to get a decent bagel in Washington. [Laughter] By the way, I'm from Arkansas. You know, what is a schmeer? [Laughter]

The Prime Minister. [Unintelligible]—Philadelphia Cream Cheese.

The President. Cream cheese. Thank you very much. I got it.

And you know, the Vice President's been busy, too. When I was in Central America, I turned on my trusty C-SPAN, and I saw the Vice President talking about how rough it is to travel on airplanes these days, the delays, the lost baggage, the disgusting meals. [Laughter] Al, I didn't know it was that bad on Air Force II. [Laughter] I think he's due for an upgrade.

Aren't you glad Garrison Keillor is here? I welcome you, sir, to Washington, where all the lobbyists are strong, all the politicians think they're good-looking, and all of the lawyers are above average. *[Laughter]* I'm glad Governor Ventura let you out of the head lock, and I hope he let's you go home to Minnesota.

Folks, I was going to make jokes about the House Republicans tonight, about the managers. It wouldn't be fair; they're not here to defend themselves. They're all at the "Taliban Correspondents Association Dinner." *[Laughter]* You know, the House managers were really unhappy with the Senate verdict. In fact, they're appealing it to the judges in the Holyfield-Lewis fight. *[Laughter]*

This is a pretty tough time for the right wing. The president of the Council of Conservative Citizens had to resign because of his alleged ties to Bob Barr. *[Laughter]*

Now, look, as I have often said, politics aside, this is truly a great moment for America. Since I took office, more than 18 million new jobs—opportunity abundant. But there are pockets of our economy that have been hurt by change—

Prime Minister. Oh, Bob Barr! *[Laughter]*

The President. He and I liked it better than you did. *[Laughter]*

Anyway, as I was saying, in spite of all this prosperity, there are some pockets of our economy that have really been hurt by change. For example, now that the trial is over, we have a responsibility to do something about the growing ranks of dislocated pundits. *[Laughter]* You know, in this era of technological change, the average worker will change jobs 7 times. And now we know that for a full 50 percent of them, one of those jobs will be a short stint as a panelist on MSNBC. *[Laughter]*

My friends, when their time in Washington is up, we simply must help displaced pundits make the most of the opportunities of the 21st century. This is a challenge best met at the State level. *[Laughter]*

So I propose a new relocation grant, to move Washington's pundits out to our 50 States, the laboratories of democracy—*[laughter]*—to give them new, fresh, vibrant

opportunities to torment our Nation's Governors—*[laughter]*—from Trenton to Tallahassee and Albany to Austin. I also want you to know that I am absolutely firmly committed to passing the long overdue Pundits' Bill of Rights: You have the right to a fresh Danish in the green room, the right to interrupt others, the right to shout down Chris Matthews—I think that's an obligation, myself—*[laughter]*—and never, never should you have to make the painful choice between the beat you cover and the talk show you love. *[laughter]*

Now, the cable networks have to fill 24 hours of news programming with 24 minutes worth of actual news. *[Laughter]* That's pretty tough. Anyway, here are a few of the better ideas for new shows: "MSNBC In Crisis"—*[laughter]*—"Inside the Politics of 'Burden of Proof'"—*[laughter]*—"Totally Subpoenaed Videos." *[Laughter]* But just for you tonight, we got our hands on a preview of cable news next really big show. Here it is, look on the video screen.

[At this point, a video of "Punditubbies" with journalist Robert Novak hosting Teletubbies Tinky-Winky, Dipsy, Laa-Laa, and Po was shown.]

I'll explain it to you later, your Excellency. *[Laughter]*

Well, there has been some real news this week. The DNC announced it will hold the 2000 Democratic Convention in Los Angeles. But what you may not know is that the Los Angeles Planning Committee insisted on some minor changes in the convention format. For example, the Democratic candidate must start his acceptance speech by thanking the Academy and saying what an honor it is just to be nominated. *[Laughter]* In addition to the red-meat rhetoric of usual, there will be a fabulous vegetarian plate prepared by Wolfgang Puck. Tough questions will now be handled by stunt doubles. There'll be a fundraiser at Grauman's Chinese Theater. And basically—even after it's over—in Hollywood, Oscars will still be bigger than the convention.

Speaking of the Oscars, everybody's got his or her own pick for Best Picture. Now, I like some in particular, but none of these were nominated. But there were a lot of pictures

about Washington this year, and I think they deserve a little consideration.

There was "Leaving Los Alamos," "You've Got Subpoenas,"—[laughter]—"Throw Momma in the Grand Jury." One of my favorites, the prequel to "Star Wars," "The Robert Fiske Story"—[laughter]—and "Saving Private Life." [Laughter]

Now that this speech has gone on long enough, I know we should work together to bring it to closure. So I want you to let me say something, just for a moment, serious. There are three journalists here tonight from Radio Free Asia who sought to cover my trip to China last year but had their visas canceled by the Chinese Government. I was pleased to sit for an interview with them before I left and took the opportunity to say that China had made a serious mistake.

This, of course, is part of a larger problem, because around the world, still, journalists are barred, harassed, imprisoned, sometimes even murdered, for the crime of seeking and speaking the truth. When leaders in China or anywhere else do this, it is a cause for dismay. And what leaders everywhere must realize is that a robust and independent press actually strengthens a nation. It promotes debate, and in a free society, given enough time, the people pretty much always get it right.

Together we must continue to state forcefully our belief that free expression and independent journalism are absolutely essential to building better societies and protecting the rights of all people. In the daily push and pull of our jobs and lives, we should never lose sight of that one goal, which I know every person in this room shares, not only tonight but every night.

All in all, this hasn't been too bad. I'd do it again. In fact, I'm dumb enough to do it again tomorrow. So I'll see you tomorrow in the East Room. Look for me. I'll be the guy without the red sash. [Laughter]

Thank you, and good night.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:30 p.m. in the International Ballroom at the Washington Hilton. In his remarks, he referred to Jim Mills, president, Radio and TV Correspondents Association; Evelyn Thomas, CBS News; former Attorney General nominee Zoe Baird; Helen Thomas, United Press International; Sam Donaldson, ABC News; Wolf

Blitzer, CNN; radio entertainer Garrison Keillor; Gov. Jesse Ventura of Minnesota; boxers Evander Holyfield and Lennox Lewis; Chris Matthews, CNBC; and chef Wolfgang Puck. Actor Nick Olcott appeared as the Prime Minister of the fictional nation of Carjackador.

Digest of Other White House Announcements

The following list includes the President's public schedule and other items of general interest announced by the Office of the Press Secretary and not included elsewhere in this issue.

March 13

In the afternoon, the President traveled from Texarkana, TX, to Little Rock, AR, and in the evening, he returned to Washington, DC.

March 15

The President announced his intent to nominate Brian E. Sheridan to be the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low-Intensity Conflict.

March 16

In the afternoon, the President traveled to Stuart, FL, and in the evening, he returned to Washington, DC.

The White House announced that the President will travel to Detroit, MI, and Boston, MA, on April 16.

March 17

In the afternoon, the President met with Prime Minister Bertie Ahern of Ireland in the Oval Office.

In the evening, the President met separately with Deputy First Minister Seamus Mallon of the Northern Ireland Assembly, Ulster Unionist Party leader David Trimble, and Sinn Fein leader Gerry Adams in the Oval Office.

March 18

The President announced his intent to appoint Iris J. Burnett as a member on the Board of Governors for the United Services Organizations, Inc.