

The President's News Conference

October 14, 1999

The President. Good afternoon. Thank you. In recent days, members of the congressional majority have displayed a reckless partisanship. It threatens America's economic well being and, now, our national security.

Yesterday, hardline Republicans irresponsibly forced a vote against the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty. This was partisan politics of the worst kind, because it was so blatant and because of the risks it poses to the safety of the American people and the world.

What the Senate seeks is to abandon an agreement that requires other countries to do what we have already done, an agreement that constrains Russia and China, India and Pakistan from developing more dangerous nuclear weapons, that helps to keep other countries out of the nuclear weapons business altogether, that improves our ability to monitor dangerous weapons activities in other countries. Even worse, they have offered no alternative, no other means of keeping countries around the world from developing nuclear arsenals and threatening our security.

In so doing, they ignored the advice of our top military leaders, our most distinguished scientists, our closest allies. They brushed aside the views of the American people and betrayed the vision of Presidents Eisenhower and Kennedy, who set us on the road to this treaty so many years ago.

Even more troubling are the signs of a new isolationism among some of the opponents of the treaty. You see it in the refusal to pay our U.N. dues. You see it in the woefully inadequate budget for foreign affairs and includes meeting our obligations to the Middle East peace process and to the continuing efforts to destroy and safeguard Russian nuclear materials. You see it in the refusal to adopt our proposals to do our part to stem the tide of global warming, even though these proposals plainly would create American jobs.

But by this vote, the Senate majority has turned its back on 50 years of American leadership against the spread of weapons of mass destruction. They are saying America does

not need to lead, either by effort or by example. They are saying we don't need our friends or allies. They are betting our children's future on the reckless proposition that we can go it alone, that at the height of our power and prosperity, we should bury our heads in the sand, behind a wall.

That is not where I stand. And that is not where the American people stand. They understand that, to be strong, we must not only have a powerful military, we must also lead, as we have done time and again, and as the whole world expects us to do, to build a more responsible, interdependent world.

So we will continue to protect our interests around the world. We will continue to seek from Congress the financial resources to make that possible. We will continue to pursue the fight against the spread of nuclear weapons. And we will not—we will not—abandon the commitments inherent in the treaty and resume testing ourselves.

I will not let yesterday's partisanship stand as our final word on the test ban treaty. Today I say again, on behalf of the United States, we will continue the policy we have maintained since 1992 of not conducting nuclear tests. I call on Russia, China, Britain, France, and all other countries to continue to refrain from testing. I call on nations that have not done so to sign and ratify the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty. And I will continue to do all I can to make that case to the Senate. When all is said and done, I have no doubt that the United States will ratify this treaty.

Partisanship also threatens our economic security. Exactly one week from today the continuing resolution I signed on September the 30th to keep the Government running will expire. And yet, Congress is not even close to finishing its work. At this time of unprecedented prosperity we must ask ourselves why is the congressional majority so unwilling or unable to make the tough choices? Why would we not be willing—or why would they not be willing to send me a responsible budget that saves Social Security, that strengthens and modernizes Medicare, that honors the priorities of the American people, and that clearly continues to pay down our debt keeping interest rates low and the economy growing?

When I signed the continuing resolution 2 weeks ago, I urged Congress to roll up its sleeves and finish the job the American people sent them here to do. I said they should stop playing politics, stop playing games, start making the necessary tough choices. Instead, we have the Republicans lurching from one unworkable idea to the next. Instead of sending me bills I can sign, the congressional majority is still using what the Wall Street Journal, the New York Times and others have called "budget gimmicks," to disguise the fact that they are spending the Social Security surplus. Their own Budget Office says so.

We've even seen them try to raise taxes for our hardest pressed working families. Now, they're talking about across-the-board budget cuts that could deny tens of thousands of children Head Start opportunities, drastically reduce medical research, sacrifice military readiness, jeopardize the safety of air traffic control. One day they raise the spending, the next day they talk about cutting it again.

I say to the congressional majority, enough is enough. We've got a job to do for the American people. It is not that difficult. Let's just do it. We can work together. We can fashion a budget that builds on our economic prosperity and continues to pay down the debt until it is eliminated in 2015 for the first time since 1835, that extends the life of the Social Security Trust Fund to 2050, the life span of almost all the baby boomers, and that invests in our people and our future, especially in our children's education.

The American people want a world-class education for their children. They want smaller classes, more qualified teachers, more computers in the classrooms, more after-school programs for the children who need it, more Head Start opportunities to ensure that our children all start school ready to learn. The majority so far has failed to come forward with a plan that protects these goals. I believe these goals are worth fighting for, and that's what this debate is all about.

They want us to keep making their communities safer; that's what the American people want. They want us to stay with the plan that has resulted in the lowest crime rate in

26 years. They want us to continue to put more cops on the beat and get guns out of the wrong hands. The majority wants to take us off that course and derail our progress. I want to keep us on track in education, in crime, in the budget, in Social Security, in Medicare.

The American people want us to stand up for the environment by preserving our treasured landscapes and enhancing our community's quality of life. The majority would roll back our progress there, too. I want to build on it. That's what this debate is all about.

I want to work with Congress to fulfill these important obligations. We have proved we can do it with the welfare reform bill, with the Balanced Budget Act, with the budget last year, in the teeth of a partisan election season, which made a big downpayment on our goal of 100,000 teachers. We need it again, a workable, bipartisan budget process. We don't have that today. We've got a week to go. They've got to go to work.

There are legitimate differences of opinion. But we can put an end to reckless partisanship, to gimmicks and gamesmanship. We can put people first and make a principled, honorable compromise. We can work for a season of progress, not a winter of politics. And I am committed to do just that.

Thank you.

Helen [Helen Thomas, United Press International]?

Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty

Q. Mr. President, hasn't the treaty rejection really wiped out our moral authority to ask other nations around the world to stop testing? And was there—do you think there was a personal element in the Republican—a personal vendetta against you in the turn-down, Republican—

The President. Well, to answer the first question, let me say I had the occasion to run into three Ambassadors last night, of nations that strongly support the test ban treaty. And they were concerned. They didn't know what to say to their governments back home.

And what I told them was that we were in a battle with the new isolationists in the Republican Party. They see this treaty against the backdrop of the failure to pay the U.N. dues and the failure to shoulder some of our

other responsibilities, the failure to pass a bill that would meet our obligations to the Middle East peace process and our obligations to keep working with the Russians to take down their nuclear arsenal.

But what I told them was the American people always get it right, and we are not going to reverse 40 years of commitment on nonproliferation, that the treaty is still on the Senate calendar, that it will be considered, that we have to keep working forward, and that I have no intention of doing anything other than honoring the obligations of the treaty imposed on the United States.

So I urged them not to overreact, to make clear their opposition to what the Senate did, but to stay with us and believe in the United States because the American people want us to lead toward nonproliferation.

Now, as to the second element, there were a number of partisan considerations, including some bad feelings between the Republicans and Democrats in the Senate, because the Republicans didn't want to bring this up at all, and then they didn't give us a legitimate process when they did. If you compare the debates here, one day of hearings here, with 14 days on the Chemical Weapons Convention, over 20 days on the INF Treaty under President Reagan, this was not a legitimate process.

Now, I know some people made some personal remarks on the floor of the Senate in the debate, but you know, it's been my experience that very often in politics when a person is taking a position that he simply cannot defend, the only defense is to attack the opponent. And that's what I took it as, a form of flattery. They knew they didn't have a very strong case, and so they were looking for some excuse for otherwise inexcusable conduct, and it didn't bother me a bit. I think it only exposed——

Q. It wasn't revenge against you.

The President. No, I think it only exposed the weakness of their argument. I think that it had a lot more to do with what's going on in the Senate and what they think will happen this year and next year. But I say that because if it did, that would be even worse for them. I mean, the idea that we would put the future of our children in peril and the leadership of America for a safer

world in peril for some personal pique, I think is unthinkable.

I just think when you've got—sometimes, I've seen people when they've got a very weak argument and they know they don't have a very strong position, they think that maybe they can deflect the analysis of their vote and their argument by attacking their opponent. That happens from time to time, and you can't take it too seriously.

Terry [Terence Hunt, Associated Press]?

2000 Election

Q. A question about politics, Mr. President. Do you agree with Vice President Gore's characterization of Bill Bradley as a disloyal Democrat? And how much of a difference would it make if Senator Bradley were the Democratic nominee, instead of Vice President Gore?

The President. I am not a candidate in the Democratic primary, and I do not think I should become one. I had to do that twice before, and I enjoyed it very much, but I don't get a third shot.

So what I would say to you is, as all of you know, I think Al Gore has been, by far, the best Vice President in history. He's certainly had more influence over more areas. I think that he is doing well in his campaign. I think he made a good decision to go home to Tennessee. And I expect him to win. But I expect to support the nominee of my party, as I always have. And I think that I can serve no useful function by talking about anything other than the issues. If you want to ask me an issue question related to any of them, I'll be glad to answer it. But I'm not going to get into that kind of horse racing.

Yes, Steve [Steve Holland, Reuters]?

Situation in Pakistan

Q. Given the military coup in Pakistan, are you now more concerned about the prospect of a war between India and Pakistan, and what can you do to calm tensions?

The President. Well, obviously, we have been in touch with the Pakistanis. We don't like it when military leaders forcibly displace elected governments, and we made that clear. We've had our differences with Pakistan over the years that have been sometimes sharp, we've also had strong alliances in many

areas. I still believe Prime Minister Sharif did the right thing to take the Pakistani troops behind the line of control and defuse what could have turned into a war, even a nuclear exchange. And so I appreciate that.

And I would hope that the military government will soon transition to a civilian one. And I would hope that nothing would be done at this time to aggravate tensions between India and Pakistan. India just had an election. Prime Minister Vajpayee has now been returned for another period of service. I think they have an opportunity to resume their dialog and to de-escalate the tensions.

Again, let me say to India and Pakistan, do not take yesterday's vote as a sign that America doesn't care whether you resume nuclear testing and build up your nuclear arsenals. We do care. You shouldn't do it. It's not necessary. It will hurt your economy and endanger your future. That's our message to Pakistan, and we hope they will move to a civilian government as quickly as possible.

Claire [Claire Shipman, NBC].

Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty

Q. To what extent do you think that you and the White House bear some responsibility for the outcome of the vote yesterday? There have been a lot of people heavily involved—supporters of this treaty—who say the White House didn't begin an effective lobbying effort early enough. And I wonder whether you also think that the year of scandal played some role in that, that the White House was just unable to work on this—

The President. No.

Q. —in the way it should have.

The President. For one thing, since I signed this treaty—let's look at the facts here—I've spoken about this 30 times or more. We always start a big public campaign in terms of White House events and other things. Go back and look at this. Look at NAFTA. Look at the Chemical Weapons Convention. Go back—when we know that we're on a hearing schedule and we're going to have a vote, until we were given 8 or 10 days notice, we had no earthly idea there would ever be hearings, much less a vote on this.

So this whole thing came as a complete surprise to us when we realized that we had

8 or 10 days on a subject that we thought they had decided in a very determined way not to bring up, because Senator Helms had made it clear that he didn't want to bring it up, and he wouldn't even talk about it until he disposed of two other treaties that he said were ahead of it in his consideration. We had no earthly idea that it was going to be on the Senate calendar.

So we did our best. We kept asking. And we thought if we ever got a yes, the yes would be like the yes we got on chemical weapons. "Yes, we can have this vote in a couple of months. We'll have 2 or 3 weeks of hearings." If we had had a normal process, you would have seen a much more extensive public campaign. There was simply no time to put it together. But I talked about this over and over and over again in many different contexts. And I think that, given the time we had, we did the best we could.

And besides that, once it became clear to me that they not only were going to force this close vote but that they weren't going to do what they do in every single treaty where there's serious consideration, namely, to allow the Senators of both parties to offer safeguards, to offer reservations, to offer clarifications, so that the treaty means something.

If you remember, the only way we ever passed the chemical weapons treaty is when the Senate—including Senator Helms—participated with us in a process that led to over 20 explicit safeguards and reservations. That's what the Senate is supposed to do. We said, ourselves, that we thought the treaty required six safeguards that we hoped would be put on it. And they said, "Not only are we going to make them vote on the treaty; we're not going to let you put your safeguards on there." So I think that ought to give you some indication of what was afoot here. We did the best we could with the time we had.

Q. [Inaudible]—the criticism has been not the public lobbying effort but behind the scenes—the sense that for a long time the Republicans were lobbying against this treaty when the White House wasn't lobbying very effectively on Capitol Hill.

The President. Well, but—you know, first of all, I just don't accept that. They told us that they had no interest in bringing it up.

It wasn't going to come up. We had no reason to believe we could do it. Before we can lobby the Members, we have to have some sense that we're lobbying them for something. And every time you talk to somebody, they say, "Well, that's not even scheduled. That's not going to come up." And I think the interesting thing is how many made commitments before they heard any arguments one way or the other.

John [John King, Cable News Network]?

Q. But Mr. President, given the importance you've placed on this, why did you wait until 5:15 yesterday to first call the Senate majority leader? And as part of the same question, if you were the Government of China and publicly stated on the record that you're looking to modernize your nuclear arsenal, why would you not take this now as a green light to test, and will you do anything to try to convince the Chinese not to do so?

The President. Well, let me answer the first question first. The one thing I did not want to do, once it became obvious—I had nothing to do with the schedule the majority leader imposed on the treaty, and I had no advance knowledge of it, so I couldn't have talked to him before then.

At that point, he had contact—I believe he and his office—he, personally, and his office, had contacts several times a day with Mr. Berger every day from then on out. What we were trying to do was to preserve the opportunity—just to deal with the question Helen asked in the beginning, you know, if anybody was out there saying, "Well, this is about President Clinton," and we were trying to preserve the opportunity for him and Senator Daschle to make an agreement so that the Senate could do this; the Senate could put it off, could schedule hearings, could deal with it in an orderly fashion.

Then, as you may know, the night before the vote, Senator Lott and Senator Daschle did, in fact, reach an agreement to put it off. And Senator Lott apparently was unable to convince enough of his caucus to honor the agreement he had made, so he had to withdraw. And it was at that point that I called him to see if there was anything else we could do.

But we were in constant contact with his office, and Mr. Berger talked to him innumerable

times. I would happily have talked to him. I thought I was giving him some protection not to do it so that he and Senator Daschle could make an agreement, and they could say the Senate did it out of a concern for the national interest, because it was manifestly the right thing to do. And I think Senator Lott believes today that putting it off was the right thing to do. I'm sorry it didn't happen.

Chinese Nuclear Testing

Q. And the question on China?

The President. Oh, China. Let me say—well, I will say again, the Chinese have taken the position we have, that they won't test. I hope they will continue to honor it. All I can tell you is, we're not going to test. I signed that treaty. It still binds us unless I go, in effect, and erase our name. Unless the President does that and takes our name off, we are bound by it. And we've not been testing since '92. So the Chinese should have every assurance that, at least as long as this administration is here, we support nuclear testing.

Now, if we ever get a President that's against the test ban treaty, which we may get—I mean, there are plenty of people out there who say they're against it—then I think you might as well get ready for it. You'll have Russia testing. You'll have China testing. You'll have India testing. You'll have Pakistan testing. You'll have countries abandoning the nonproliferation treaty.

The reason I wouldn't make a commitment to Senator Lott not to bring this treaty up next year—let's just put that out on the table—apart from the President's prerogative, constitutional prerogative, there is a substantive reason. Four years ago, we got all the countries that were in the nonproliferation treaty—even more than have signed the test ban treaty, I think 176 of them—and they say they're either not going to develop nuclear capacity, or if they have it, they won't share it. It's very, very important.

And a lot of the countries that were edgy because their neighbors had nuclear capacity or because they had nascent nuclear capacity and they wanted to develop it more—they really wanted to know, was there going to

be a test ban treaty, so that if they stopped dead in their tracks, they wouldn't be discriminated against by people who were a little ahead of them who could test. And the United States took the lead in assuring them we would continue to work until we got a test ban treaty. So we did. And that's why I was the first person to sign it, not only because I believe in the test ban treaty but because I think it is essential to reinforce the nonproliferation treaty.

Consider how each of you would feel if you were running a country and you thought you had the scientific capacity to develop these kinds of weapons and you had neighbors with them you felt threatened by, but they were a little ahead of you and they could test and you couldn't.

So the reason I—what I told Senator Lott was, I said, "Look, I believe if next year we have indications that three or four or five countries are going to bail out on the nonproliferation treaty, I could come to you, and I could convince you that we should bring it up. And therefore, I cannot promise not to bring it up. But, barring some international emergency, I wouldn't bring this treaty up until I thought we could get it ratified." To me it's not a matter of personal credit, it's a matter of leaving in place for the future a framework that will maximize the safety and security of the American people and minimize the prospect of nuclear conflict around the world.

So that's where it is. I hope very much that people will see in the steadfast determination of this administration and of the American people, the determination to stay on this path. And I hope they will stick with us. I think if we ever have a President and a Senate not for this test ban treaty, then all bets are off. You will see a lot of testing, and they will bail on the NPT. That's what I think will happen, and we will be in a much, much more dangerous world. But we are not there today, and I hope I can discourage people from going there.

Mark, [Mark Knoller, CBS Radio] and then Sarah [Sarah McClendon, McClendon News Service].

Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty

Q. Sir, just as you had experts saying, advocating the ratification of the treaty, the Republicans had experts saying that the treaty was dangerous. Why can't you accept the vote as a good faith expression of that opposition, rather than as a partisan attack?

The President. Oh, I have said every time that there were some Republicans who believed that in good conscience. The reason I can't accept it as only a matter of conviction are the following reasons.

Number one, they had a lot of people committed who didn't know very much about the treaty, who were asked to commit before there was ever an argument made.

Number two, the objections about the treaty essentially fall into two categories. One is that, notwithstanding the heads of the weapons labs, the entire military establishment and General Shelton's last few predecessors as Chairmen of the Joint Chiefs, and these 32 Nobel laureates, there are people who say, "I don't care what they all say, I just don't believe it. I just don't think that they can preserve the security of the nuclear arsenal without testing. Even though we're spending \$4.5 billion a year, and we're going to spend more, and we're far more likely to be able to do that than any other country in the world, I just don't believe it."

Now, my answer to them was, so we put an explicit safeguard in the treaty which says, when we have evidence, which we don't have now, that we cannot maintain the reliability of the nuclear deterrent, if at that time it is still necessary for us to do so, then we will have to give notice and withdraw. That's what you have these safeguards for. That's in our supreme national interest.

The other major argument against the treaty was that there can be some cheating because you can't always be sure, for underground tests under 5 kilotons and particularly under 1 kiloton. The answer to that is, that's true now. And this treaty makes it more likely that we will catch such things.

That wasn't a good argument, because this treaty would give us over 300 sensors around the world. And those sensors are far more likely to pick it up. This treaty would give us the possibility of on-site inspections,

something we don't have now. And this treaty would give us the possibility of marshaling a much sterner rebuke to any country that violated it than we do now.

There were other objections that were more minor, compared to these two big ones. That's why we offered these six safeguards, and invited the Senate to offer more. There were objections like this to the Chemical Weapons Convention. There are always going to be objections from the point of view of the country that feels it's in the strongest position. And that's why we have a process, an orderly process in the Senate, to allow the Senate to put these safeguards on. I think that's what Senator Byrd was saying yesterday when he voted "present" and condemned the process.

You know, keep in mind, I didn't ask them to ratify the treaty as it was written. I asked them to ratify the treaty with the six safeguards that would address those two major objections and some of the others.

Sarah, and then——

Deployment of U.S. Troops Abroad

Q. Do you think the American people agree with you on the fact that we send armed soldiers to every place in the world where there's a conflict?

The President. Do I think what now?

Q. Do you feel that we, the American people, agree with the policy that we send armed soldiers to other parts of the country when we're not involved, but they're having an armed conflict, and we send soldiers over there anyway?

The President. Yes, but I think——

Q. Do you think the American people agree with that?

The President. Let me say this. I think that the safer we make the world and the more we reduce the likelihood of war, the less likely we are to send people there. But you know, this is another argument for co-operation, however.

There's another point I'd like to make. The heads of the Governments of Britain, France and Germany took the extraordinary step of writing an op-ed piece—we don't have any better allies—they took the extraordinary step of writing an op-ed piece asking us to ratify this treaty and, in any case, not to de-

feat it. This was also an amazing rebuke to our allies. We say, "Okay you guys are with us every time we need you, the Gulf war, the Balkans, always in NATO, you're there, but you ask us to do something for your common safety, go take a hike." And you know, I think that's a very tenuous position.

If you look at what we did, we took a very leading role in trying to stop the violence and promote the integrity of the referendum in East Timor, a long way away. The Australians, the New Zealanders, the other countries in that region, they stepped right up and took the lion's share of the burden. They didn't expect America to do that. They asked us to help them with certain services that we are capable of providing, but they stepped right up. They looked to us and say, "You know, keep leading the world toward non-proliferation. We'll do this work with you." We say to them, "Go take a hike." I think it was a very dubious decision.

Go ahead.

FY 2000 Budget

Q. Mr. President, a question on the budget. Are you saying that you would veto a Republican plan for across-the-board spending cuts? And since they are adamantly opposed to your tobacco tax hikes and your loophole closings, and both of you don't want to spend the Social Security surplus, what is the way out of this box to avoid another Government shutdown?

The President. Well, first of all, I would veto a bill that I thought—here at the moment of our greatest prosperity, when we've got a surplus, if they wanted to cut education and gut our efforts to put more teachers in the schools, our efforts to give kids after-school programs, our efforts to do all of the things we're trying to do in education—hook up their computers to the schools by 2000, the Internet, all the classrooms to the Internet by 2000—all these things we're trying to do, would I veto that? I would. I would have to do that. I would have no choice. It would be unconscionable to think that America, at its moment of greatest prosperity, when we've got our first surplus in 30 years, is out there cutting education and several other areas. So, yes, I would.

Secondly, I know for ideological reasons they don't want to raise the tobacco tax, but just yesterday one of their long-time allies, Philip Morris, acknowledged that cigarettes cause cancer. And we know that more needs to be done to get our kids off tobacco. And we know that raising the price of a pack of cigarettes is one of the best ways to do it. So we—you know, they don't have to agree to raise it as much as I proposed, but it would help to sit down and negotiate that. If they don't like my offsets, what are their offsets? Maybe there are some other things we could agree on. We won't know unless we have a serious conversation.

I think the best way to do this is to avoid spending the Social Security surplus, even though it's been done every year for at least 16 years and was done before in times of deficits. This is a new thing, you know, not spending it. The only reason they're proposing not to spend it is that we have non-Social Security surplus, though much smaller.

There is a good reason not to spend it. And the good reason not to spend it is, number one, it will help us to pay down the debt and get this country out of debt in 15 years, for the first time in 165 years. Number two, it enables us to achieve interest savings, and those interest savings, I believe, for 5 years should be put back in the Trust Fund, and that will run the life of Social Security out to 2050 and take into account the retirement of all the baby boomers. So I hope we can do it.

But in order to do it, we're going to have to make some hard decisions. But it looks to me like, though, the decisions that I propose to make are less hard than slashing education at a time of great prosperity when you've got the biggest and most diverse student population in history or raising taxes on poor people, which was another one of their proposals or all these gimmicks. I mean, they proposed—for example, if they do this 13-month thing, you know, where they just, we spend the money this year but play like we're spending it next year, then they're just going to make an even bigger headache. We'll have the same headache next year. And we'll be here a year from now, and you will be asking me these same questions.

They say that the ordinary operations of the Pentagon are an emergency. That's one of the things they're considering. The ordinary operations of the Pentagon are an emergency. I think that will come as a surprise to people who have been working there for 10 or 20 years.

Susan [Susan Page, USA Today]?

2000 Election Issues

Q. Mr. President, every 4 years the American people revise and adjust what they're looking for in the President they're about to elect, often, in reaction to the President who is about to leave office. And I wonder if, looking ahead, what you think Americans are looking for in the President they'll elect next year? And if there are ways in which those qualities or qualifications are different from what they were looking for in 1992 and 1996 when you were elected?

The President. Well, I think that one big difference is the country is going to be in good shape instead of bad shape. And so they're going to be—right now, unless something unforeseen happens, by next February we'll have the longest expansion in history, peacetime or wartime. We'll have a 26-year-low in crime rate, a 30-year-low in the welfare rolls, a 29-year-low in unemployment, first back-to-back surpluses in 42 years. We'll have—the social fabric of America will be mending. And the economy is lifting. We have a low in poverty rate of 20 years.

So I think they'll be looking for things and thinking about—and they will know that they have a chance to shape the future in a way that we've not had in my lifetime. And so, I can only tell you what I think. What I think they will be looking for is someone who will offer big ideas about how to make sure that we deal with the aging of America, as we double the number of people over 65, how we deal with the explosion of children and their increasing diversity.

I hope that they will say—we see a little bit in this debate on the gun safety issue in the Senate now. I hope they will say, "Oh, it's fine we've got the lowest crime rate in 26 years. We want to vote for somebody that'll make this the safest big country in the world." And I hope they will say that they are now much more concerned than they

were able to be in '92, when people were worried about how they were going to get from one month to the next, that they really, really want us to make a sustained effort to bring opportunity to all the people and places that are still trapped in poverty. And I hope they will say that—they've been given a new issue now. I hope they will say that they don't want America to adopt a new isolationism, they want us to lead into the future. So there is a different sort of thing there. I also think that they want somebody who can deal in a sensitive way with the continuing evidence we have of violence in our country and of people manifesting all kinds of bigotry, that in its most extreme version you see in the killings in the Middle West and the shootings at the Jewish community school and all of that.

But it's a different world. On balance, it's better, but I think we're much more sensitive than we were 7 years ago to the problems of the poor among us, and that's a good thing. And I think we're much more sensitive to the problems of discrimination and violence against people because of their race or their religion or their sexual orientation.

You know, I hope that they will want someone, and I hope that—who will try as hard as I have tried and maybe be more successful—although I think they'll have to make some changes in Congress to do that—to create a genuine, constructive, bipartisan atmosphere. We get it here, but we get it about once a year, and it doesn't last long enough to suit me. When we get it, great things happen. [Laughter]

Mary, [Mary McGrory, Washington Post] did you have a question?

Anti-Ballistic-Missile Treaty

Q. Yes, sir. I was wondering if you have any plans to protect the ABM Treaty, which will almost certainly be the next target of the Senate Republicans, looking to start Star Wars?

The President. As you have—all of you have reported this, we have continued to work on missile defense. We spend quite a good deal of money on it. Some preliminary tests are encouraging. If we have the potential to protect our people against missiles that could be loaded with nuclear weapons or

chemical or biological weapons, coming at us from other countries—and this does not include the Russians with whom we have this ABM Treaty but all of these other countries that are trying to get missile technology—and it would be the responsible thing to try to deploy such a system.

The problem is, any such system, even a ground-based one, would violate the literal terms of the ABM Treaty. Now, there are—as you've said, Mary, there are people in the United States Congress who would like to just tear up the ABM Treaty and go on. I, personally, think that would be a terrible mistake. Look, we are—for all of our ups and downs and rough edges, we are working with the Russians, and we have made real progress in reducing threats as a result of it. And let me just tick off a few things. They continue to reduce their nuclear arsenals. If they ratify START II, we'll take our nuclear arsenals to 80 percent below their cold-war high. We're prepared to go into START III negotiations with them if we do. They've also taken their troops out of the Baltics, and they've gotten nuclear weapons out of all those other former Soviet republics.

We're getting something out of this, this partnership. And we, I think, would be very foolish to just discard the ABM Treaty.

So what we're trying to do is see whether or not we can work with the Russians in a way that enhances their security and ours, to share some of the benefits of these developments, and to go forward in a way that convinces them that they're not the problem. We're also trying to do other things to minimize the problem. As you know, we've been working very hard with North Korea to try to end the missile program there.

So I do not want to throw the ABM Treaty away. I do think it is the responsible thing to do to continue to pursue what appears to be far more promising than many had thought, including me a few years ago, in terms of missile defense. But we have to try to work the two things out together. And I'm confident that if the Russians believe it is in their security interest to do so, that we can. And that will happen if we work with them. If we just scrap the ABM Treaty, it won't happen, and our insecurity will increase.

Bill [Bill Plante, CBS News]? Go ahead, I'll take both of you, just one after the other. Go ahead.

Judge Susan Webber Wright's Decision

Q. Mr. President, you've never commented on Judge Wright's decision that you intentionally lied in the Jones deposition. Do you accept her finding? And if not, why have you or your attorneys not challenged it?

The President. When I am out of office, I will have a lot to say about this. Until then, I'm going to honor my commitment to all of you, to go back to work. I haven't challenged anything, including things that I consider to be questionable, because I think it is wrong. The American people have been put through enough, and they need every hour, every day, every minute I can give them thinking about their business. And so until I leave here, as I understand it now, all this is finished, and I don't have to comment on it. And unless there is some reason I legally have to, I'm not going to say anything else that doesn't relate to my responsibilities as President as regards to that. When I'm done, then I can say what I want to say.

Go ahead.

Dismantling of Strategic Arms Controls

Q. Mr. President, one of the arguments that some of your closest friends in the Senate make about this situation with the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty is that the Republicans aren't just after that treaty or the ABM Treaty, that really what they want to do is embark on the full dismantling of all strategic arms controls. We've known it since the end of the cold war.

The Republican argument is that arms control is an illusion and a delusion, that it lulls us into a false sense of security, and that it drains our will to maintain our military might. What do you think of those arguments? What's your response to them?

The President. Imagine the world we will live in if they prevail. I mean, imagine the world we will live in if they prevail. That's what I think of them. I mean, look, are we more secure because we made an agreement with the Russians to reduce our nuclear arsenals? I believe we are. Are we more secure,

given the economic and political tensions in that area that we made an agreement with the Russians to take those nuclear weapons out of Kazakhstan and Ukraine and Belarus? I believe we are. Are we more secure because other countries are not testing nuclear weapons and can only do so much in the laboratory? I believe we are. I think these arms control agreements have created a climate in the world which has helped to make us far more secure and helped to reduce the likelihood that nuclear weapons will ever be used again.

If the United States, with all of our wealth, all of our strength, more nuclear weapons than anybody else, says we are so insecure that we want more, more, more, what in the wide world could we ever say to the Chinese; to the Russians, who I hope will not be on their backs economically forever; to the Indians and the Pakistanis, who I hope will not be on their backs economically forever, to the Indians and the Pakistanis, who have all kinds of arguments, one against the other, and involving other countries; to countries that believe we are too aggressive in the world already and don't share a lot of our political or our philosophical views?

You know, I'm glad you said that. You're right. They don't believe that, and they think we ought to go it alone. It doesn't bother them that we don't pay our U.N. dues. It doesn't bother them that we're giving the Pentagon money in their budget that the Pentagon didn't ask for and say is not necessary for our national security, but they won't fund a decent investment in diplomacy and helping to lift the world's poor in places where people are trying to make democracy take root; that we're not funding our obligations under the Middle East peace process, our obligations to help the Russians continue to dismantle their nuclear weapons. That's right, and they do believe that. And I go back to what Mark said, there are—I don't believe they're yet the majority in the Republican caucus, but they are a very very potent minority. And they do believe this. But I think they're wrong. And the American people must understand that this is one of the choices they now have to make.

Q. Mr. President, you said imagine a world without these agreements. Please give some

examples of what you're driving at, because they said it's going to be a terrific world without these agreements, that America is going to be safer without the agreements than it is with them.

The President. First of all, we're all tied in knots now over this budget, right? I mean, it's totally unnecessary, but we are. We shouldn't be. Now, can you imagine if we had no arms control agreements, let's just suppose we tore them all up tomorrow—nothing, no nonproliferation agreement. Then this same crowd would be coming in and saying, "Well, now there's no nonproliferation agreements, you know, and here's a list of 12 countries that we think they have two scientists who can figure out how to put together a small nuclear weapon. And there's no Chemical Weapons Convention or Biological Weapons Convention, so they've got those labs chugging right along here. And therefore, we need you to increase the budget for all this to the labs and the Pentagon by another \$30 or \$40 or \$50 billion a year. So, I'm sorry, we'll just have to get out of the business of funding education. We can't afford to invest any more in health care. The American people just have to figure out what to do on their own." It would totally erode the fabric of our domestic climate.

Meanwhile, what happens overseas? Countries that could be putting money into the education and health care and development of their children, whether they're democracies or military dictatorships or communist countries, will be sitting there saying, "Well, you know, we'd like to lower the infant mortality rate. We'd like to lower the hunger rate. We'd like to lower the poverty rate. We'd like to raise the literacy rate. But look at what the Americans are doing. Look at what our neighbors are doing. Let's spend half our money on military." It would be great for the people that build this stuff, but for everybody else it would be a nightmare.

Consider the Japanese, coming out, we earnestly hope, of their long economic slump, having honored, since World War II, their commitment to be a non-nuclear state and to spend a small percentage of their income on defense. What in the world would they do in such a world? And if they had to divert 4, 5, 6 percent of their gross national

product to defense, what kind of economic partner would they be?

What would happen in Latin America, the area which has been the area that was the greatest growth for us in trade? After we have worked so hard, you've got Brazil to renounce its nuclear program. You've got former adversaries working together in trade agreements. What would happen if they, all of a sudden, got antsy and decided, "Well, you know, we have no national status. Our people, you know, we'll have the same elements in our country saying we can't defend ourselves. We've got to have a biological program, a chemical program, a nuclear program."

I mean, you know, all this sounds good. But the idea that the best way for us to go forward—since right now, at this particular moment in history, we enjoy the greatest wealth and the greatest power, is to build this big old wall and tell all of our friends and neighbors to go take a hike. "We're not cooperating with them anymore. As far as we're concerned any night—might be an enemy, and anything you want to do with your money is fine with us, because we have more money than you do, so whatever you do, we'll do more."

I think it will be a bleak, poor, less secure world. I don't want my children and my grandchildren or your children or your grandchildren to live in it. They believe that. I will do everything I can to stop it.

Yes.

Political Impact of Senate Action

Q. Sir, isn't it wishful thinking for the Democrats to think they can beat up on the Republicans next year over this treaty vote? Yes, public opinions show that most Americans do support the treaty. But you were not able, despite your 30-plus public appearances, you were not able to light a fire under public opinion. Can't the Republicans just walk away from this without any damage, particularly in the post-cold-war era? Isn't it true that Americans just don't worry about the nuclear threat?

The President. I think there is something to that. But you know, it was interesting, as I understand it, one of the reasons this came up—from what my Republican friends in the

Senate say—is that the Republicans were worried that the Democrats would keep beating on this next year if they didn't bring it up and dispose of it this year, and they were afraid it would be a political issue. I never wanted it to be a political issue. I never wanted the Chemical Weapons Treaty to be a political issue. I never thought this stuff would be a political issue. I always thought we'd have a bipartisan consensus to do what had to be done.

So they may have made it a political issue now, and it may or may not have any impact. But I will say this. I will say again—I believe the American people eventually—I think they will stay where they are, and I think we'll eventually get this treaty ratified. But it may be in every democracy—you know, the people decide what they care about. I told Senator Lott that I did not expect that this would ever be such a big issue. I think it might be now, and the people have to decide. This is part of the choices a free people make, and it's an important choice, and we'll just see what they do.

Yes, go ahead.

Protests at the Seattle Trade Talks

Q. Labor unions have stepped up their criticisms of the World Trade Organization and plan to demonstrate at the talks next month. You've sought to answer some of their concerns, but it's not likely that you're going to answer all of them before then. Is that going to weaken the U.S. negotiating position in the talks?

The President. No, because there will be a lot of people from other countries there demonstrating against it, too. [Laughter] I mean, you're going to have—there will be a lot of people there against it. And I think—I want to say two things. First of all, I am committed to launching a new trade round which will expand opportunities for us and for others on a fair basis. For example, if we stop export subsidies to agriculture, 85 percent of which are in Europe today, it would benefit farmers in my home State of Arkansas, but it would also benefit farmers in Argentina and farmers in Africa. And I would like to see that done.

I would like to see us make a commitment that electronic commerce would continue to

be tax free. And I would like to see us continue to make progress in other areas, because 3 out of 10—30 percent of our growth came from trade-related growth, until the Asian financial crisis, and because I think it's the best way to lift labor standards and to give countries the money they need to protect their environment. So I will continue to push for this.

Now, having said that, I don't think it's such a bad thing that all these people are coming to Seattle to demonstrate. Why? Because I went to Geneva to speak to the WTO, and then I went back to Geneva to speak to the International Labor Organizations to say that, particularly those of us in the wealthier countries, have a heavy responsibility to try to put a more human face on the global economy. And that means you have to bring labor interests and environmental interests into these deliberations, that not only do these factors have to be considered but the people themselves have to be heard. I think it is very important. And so we have proposed, for example, a trade and labor group, coming out of the WTO. We want to see more work done in the environmental area.

But the point I'd like to make is—if you'll just let me get off on this one little area in which I have an obsession. I think that, while I'm all for big ideas—you asked me about what the next campaign should be about; I'm all for big ideas—the world is still largely in the grip of a big idea that isn't true anymore. And that big idea is that in order for any country that's not rich to get rich, they have to burn more fossil fuels and put more greenhouse gases in the atmosphere, because that's the way we got rich, and that's the way the British got rich, and that's the way other countries got rich. And that's not true anymore.

The whole economics of energy and the economy have changed. And we could have a revolution in the environment with more trade and investment in available, presently available, environmental technologies and alternative energy sources. That's just one example.

But it won't necessarily happen automatically. And just as—look at the domestic market in America. We have about the freest

markets you can imagine here. It's easier for—if any of you folks could leave what you're doing, if you weren't so devoted to it, and go make more money probably doing something else, you could get venture capital; you could come up with some idea; you'd fooled around with your computer so much you could probably start some new Internet company and be worth a couple hundred million dollars in no time. And that happens all the time. [Laughter] You know, those of you who are over 25 may be too old to do it, now. That's where all the money—[laughter].

But you know, we have an open economy. But what makes it work? We've got a Federal Reserve that works. We've got a Securities and Exchange Commission that works. We've got protections for consumers. We've got protections against monopolies. We have intermediate institutions.

The trading system and the financial system, the global financial markets and the global trading system, are creating a global economy. We need some intermediate involvement from labor and environment, just to name two, to make sure that we build an economy that benefits everybody and that literally has a more human face on it.

And so I'm actually not all that upset those folks are coming to Seattle. I welcome them. But if their fundamental view is, if we had less trade instead of more, that every economy could be self-sustaining and the environment would be better and people would make more money, I think that is simply not true. And I think you can demonstrate that's not true. So I want an expansive trade round that helps America and helps them, too.

Let me just make one final point. I have done everything I could to get the wealthy countries to do more for the poor countries. We're trying to pass an Africa trade initiative here, and a Caribbean Basin initiative. And it does have bipartisan support. Let me say that I'm grateful for the Republicans that are helping us with it. And I think we've got a chance to pass it this year. We're trying to get debt relief for the poorest countries in the world.

So I'm sympathetic with all these negative feelings. But one of the things that spawns these kind of negative feelings is, these folks

feel like they've been shut out. They think the WTO is some rich guys' club where people get in and talk in funny language and use words nobody understands and make a bunch of rules that help the people that already have and stick it to the people that have not. That's what they think. And so if we're going to change their perception, we've got to listen to their protests and bring them into the tent and go forward taking these concerns into account.

Gun Buy-Back Program

Q. Mr. President, you have alluded several times to anti-crime initiatives, and a big part of your anti-crime initiatives are gun buy-back programs. Recent studies that are coming out—that have come out—that are coming out show that a lot of people that hand these guns in are old shotguns that don't work. They're from the attic. They're from the basement, whatever. They're really not the kinds of guns that were used in Los Angeles, in some of the high profile crimes that the nation has been so fixed on in recent months.

Basically, I'm wondering, are you concerned that in putting so much focus on these buy-back programs that other initiatives like they've tried in Richmond, that have proven successful, and in Philadelphia, might languish as a result?

The President. Well, first let me say that I do believe that the gun buy-back programs will get all kinds of guns. And obviously, if you wanted the money and you didn't care about the gun, those are the easiest to give up. If you've got some old gun that doesn't work and you want \$25 or whatever you get for it, it's a good way to get it.

But keep in mind there are over—I don't know what the exact number is—but there is almost one gun for every person in America. There are way over 200 million guns in America. And all the new gun purchases, handgun purchases at least, require background checks. So I still think the more you can get done with that the better. I still think the more the better.

I agree with the import of your question, however. It would be a great mistake to emphasize that to the exclusion of law enforcement strategies that plainly work like the one

in Richmond, like the one in Boston that led to no child being killed by gun violence in nearly 2 years. It would be a great mistake to think that's a substitute for closing the loopholes in both our assault weapons bill and the Brady bill, especially the gun show loophole. It would be a great mistake to think that that could substitute for our efforts to put 50,000 more police officers on the street in the areas that still have crime rates that are still too high.

So I think we should stick with the gun buy-back program. I think we're spending about \$15 million on it, not an enormous amount of money, but it should be only one part of a very comprehensive strategy.

Yes, in the back.

Japan

Q. Mr. President, about steel imports from Japan. Why are you delaying your decision under Section 201 charges against Japanese steel wire? The ITC was divided; your advisers are divided, according to Mr. Sperling yesterday. Does that mean that you don't see any compelling reasons for taking action to protect domestic producers? And also, next—about CTBT, does Japan have any special role to play in preventing the spread of nuclear weapons?

The President. Let me answer the first question first. You answered the first question for me. I have delayed a decision because the ITC was divided, and my advisers are divided. So I have to make the decision. [*Laughter*] And it's a complicated issue, and I'm trying to work it through. And I only got the background material on it, oh, in the last few days. And as you know, we've been otherwise preoccupied with the test ban treaty. So I only looked at it, I don't know, yesterday, the day before, even at first blush.

So it's a decision that I will have to make and for which everyone can hold me responsible, because our people have not yet been able—they can't resolve all the details themselves. I will do what I think is right. You should not infer from the fact that a decision has been made that I will grant no relief, because I have not decided whether to grant relief or not. And I will decide in the most timely fashion I can.

Now on the second question you asked, which I think is the far more important question, I think in a way Japan may be in a unique position to play a role of global importance now. Why? Because Japan is by far the wealthiest, strongest country in the world without a nuclear program. And if the Japanese say—go to the Chinese and say, "Don't start testing;" go to the Indians and say, "Don't start testing;" go to the Pakistanis and say, "Don't start testing again;" say, "We want to stay where we are; we want to live in a 21st century world where our competition is commercial, not military, where we're worried about ideas, not atoms," I think it will have a very important effect in this period when people are going to try to sort out how they feel about what I've said at this press conference today as against the vote last night.

So I personally believe Japan can play a remarkably positive role. And I have great confidence in Prime Minister Obuchi; he's done a terrific job. And I hope that Japan will play that role.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President's 182d news conference began at 2:04 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif of Pakistan; Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee of India; Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi of Japan.

Remarks at the Dedication of the United States Secret Service Memorial Building

October 14, 1999

Thank you very much, Secretary Summers, Director Stafford, Commissioner Peck, Monsignor Vaghi, Ms. Worley, Congressman Kolbe and Congressman Hoyer, Sergeant at Arms Livingood, Mr. Berger, Secretary Johnson. And I especially appreciate the presence of three former Directors of the Secret Service here today, Eljay Bowron and John Magaw and Stu Knight. I thank them for coming.

I thank the Marines for giving us such wonderful music today. Didn't they do a great job? [*Applause.*] Thank you. I think that's the only thing I'm going to miss more