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the Year, but you know, you're really standing in the shoes of every other good teacher in your State. But if you can put this training in the hands of one teacher in every school building in America, which we ought to be able to do with this, it will upgrade the performance of all the teachers in the schools and it will change the culture of the schools. So I hope you will support that as well.

There are a lot of other things in our education program, but I wanted to focus on those two things, plus our efforts to wire the schools, to focus just on the public schools today. We're also trying to help the schools that are terribly overcrowded get some financial help to reduce the cost of new construction or repair work when the local districts are willing to do their part, and I hope that initiative will pass.

But the main thing I want to tell you is, what you do really matters. It matters to the country as a whole, it matters to individual kids, and if any—if at all possible, it matters even more now to our society at large than it did when I had all those teachers whose names and faces and voices and manners and stern rebukes I still remember. [*Laughter*]

Today we honor, especially, Sharon Draper. She happens to be one of our Nation's first master teachers and a member of the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, and I'm especially pleased about that.

For 27 years, she has inspired students with her passion for literature and life. The standards to which she holds her students at the Walnut Hills High School in Cincinnati are legendary, so much so that seniors wear T-shirts that proclaim, "I survived the Draper Paper"—[*laughter*]—when they finish their senior thesis. I was intrigued when I read that, and I asked her for one of those T-shirts. And I was denied because I haven't yet survived it. [*Laughter*]

Her gifted teaching has not gone unrecognized. She received both the National Council of Negro Women Excellence in Teaching Award and the Ohio Governors Educational Leadership Award. She is an accomplished author in her own right. She was honored with the American Library Association's Coretta Scott King's Genesis Award and its annual Best Books for Young People Award. She has devoted her career not only to teaching and to writing but to helping other teachers improve their skills as well.

Sharon Draper is more than a credit to her profession; she is a true blessing to the children she has taught. And it gives me great pleasure now to present her with the National Teacher of the Year Award and ask her to come forward and say whatever she'd like to say. Congratulations.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:10 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Gov. James B. Hunt, Jr., of North Carolina.

The President's News Conference
April 18, 1997

The President. Good afternoon. Less than 2 weeks from today, the Chemical Weapons Convention goes into effect, with or without the United States. The bottom line is this: Will the United States join a treaty we helped to shape, or will we go from leading the fight against poison gas to joining the company of pariah nations this treaty seeks to isolate?

With this treaty, other nations will follow the lead we set years ago by giving up chemical weapons. Our troops will be less likely to face poison gas on the battle field. Rogue states and terrorists will have a harder time acquiring or making chemical weapons, and we'll have new tools to prevent and punish them if they try. But if we fail to ratify, other countries could back out as well. We won't be able to enforce the treaty's rules or use its tools, and our companies will face trade sanctions aimed at countries that refuse to join.

As the Senate prepares to vote next week, I'm encouraged by the great progress we have made but mindful of the hurdles we still must overcome in order to gain approval of the CWC. I welcome yesterday's unanimous agreement by the Senate to bring the treaty to a vote, and

I thank Majority Leader Lott, Senator Daschle, Senator Helms, and Senator Biden, and all the Members of the Senate from both parties for their efforts. By going the extra mile, we've reached agreement on 28 conditions that will be included in the treaty's resolution of ratification, for example, maintaining strong defenses against chemical attacks, toughening enforcement, allowing the use of riot control agents like tear gas in a wide range of military and law enforcement situations, and requiring search warrants for any involuntary inspections of an American business.

These agreed-upon conditions resolve virtually all of the issues that have been raised about this treaty. But there are still a handful of issues on which we fundamentally disagree. They will be voted on by the full Senate as it takes up the treaty next week. We should all understand what's at stake. A vote for any of these killer amendments will prevent our participation in the treaty. Let me quickly address four of them.

The first would prohibit the United States from joining the treaty until Russia does. That is precisely backwards. The best way to secure Russian ratification is to ratify the treaty ourselves. Failure to do so will only give hardliners in Russia an excuse to hold out and hold on to their chemical weapons.

A second killer condition would prohibit us from becoming a party until rogue states like Iraq and Libya join. The result is we'd be weaker, not stronger, in our fight to prevent these rogue states from developing chemical weapons because we would lose the ability to use and enforce the treaty's tough trade restrictions and inspection tools. No country, especially an outlaw state, should have a veto over our national security.

A third killer condition would impose an unrealistically high standard of verification. There is no such thing as perfect verifiability in a treaty, but this treaty's tough monitoring, reporting, and onsite inspection requirements will enable us to detect militarily significant cheating. Our soldiers on the battlefield will be safer. That, clearly, is an advance over no treaty at all.

Finally, the opponents would force us to reopen negotiations on the Chemical Weapons Convention to try to fix two concerns that have already been resolved. First, they claim that a treaty expressly devoted to eliminating chemical weapons somehow would force its parties to facilitate the spread of chemical weapons. This interpretation is totally at odds with the plain language of the treaty. I have committed to the Senate that neither the United States nor our allies share this interpretation and that we will reaffirm that fact annually.

The opponents also misread the treaty to require that we share our most advanced chemical defensive technology with countries like Iran and Cuba, should they join the Chemical Weapons Convention. I have committed to the Senate that in the event such countries are threatened by chemical attack, we would limit our assistance to providing nothing more than emergency medical supplies.

America took the lead in negotiating the Chemical Weapons Convention, first the Reagan administration, then the Bush administration. Every Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff for the past 20 years supports it, as do the overwhelming majority of our veterans, the chemical industry, and arms control experts. Now we must lead in bringing this bipartisan treaty to life and enforcing its rules. America should stand with those who want to destroy chemical weapons, not with those who would defy the international community. I urge every Member of the Senate to support the convention when it comes to a vote next week.

Now, let me take this opportunity also to say a few words about the budget. Yesterday my economic team briefed me extensively on the full range of issues that are now being discussed as we continue serious high-level talks on the balanced budget. The progress we've made so far is encouraging, and I'm hopeful that a bipartisan balanced budget agreement can be reached.

We're working closely with Senate and House Democratic leaders and budget committee leaders as we move forward on this issue. I want to thank Senators Domenici and Lautenberg, and Congressmen Kasich and Spratt for working so hard and in such good faith with our economic team. There is no question that serious differences remain, but if each of us is willing to compromise our sense of the perfect, I know we can reach an agreement that advances the greater good. And we can both do so without compromising our deeply held values.

Based on the progress that we've made so far, I'm asking the bipartisan negotiators to continue their work. I hope that in the near future we can—they can recommend ways to bridge the remaining differences. This can be a victory

for all Americans. Over the past 4 years, we have shown that with hard work and strong resolve, we can make significant progress toward balancing our budget while still investing in our people and that both those things will lead us to the strong economy we have today and an even stronger economy tomorrow.

Neither side can have everything it wants. But we know that a good agreement must include at a minimum that our children will have the best education from the first days of life through college to prepare for the 21st century, that more children will have access to quality health care, that our environment will be protected, that we are living up to our obligations to the most vulnerable among us, and that Medicaid—Medicare will be strengthened while ensuring the solvency of its Trust Fund well into the next decade. This is what we can achieve and what I think we must achieve and why we all have to stay at the table until the job is done.

Chemical Weapons Convention and State Department Reorganization

Q. Mr. President, what is your outlook for ratification of the treaty? And how much of a quid pro quo was there with Senator Helms on reorganizing the State Department? Will the Voice of America still have its autonomy? All of these things are kind of worrisome.

The President. Well, yes, the Voice of America will still have its independent voice. It will still be the Voice of America. There was no linkage.

Senator Helms came to see me personally at the White House last year sometime—I don't remember when—and we met up in my office in the Residence for an extended period of time, with just a few of his staff members, a few of mine. He was going over his plan for reorganization of the agencies and why he thought it was right. I promised him that I would seriously consider the issue, that I thought there ought to be some reorganization. I had a slightly different take on it. And actually, since that time, but especially in the last few weeks, we have been working very, very hard to reach a consensus within the administration on an alternative proposal. I think it is warranted, and I think it's good on the merits.

I can tell you that there was no linkage between these two issues. I do not expect Senator Helms to vote for the Chemical Weapons Convention. I would be elated if he did. We have, as I said, resolved, I think, to his satisfaction, 27 of the 30 issues that we made.

Q. All of these were concessions on your part, weren't they, all the conditions?

The President. No, all these—well, they were—I didn't consider them concessions because I agree with them. There is nothing in any of these conditions that I think is bad for the treaty, bad for the system, or bad for the national security. But they do clarify questions that Senator Helms and other Senators had about the meaning of the treaty. But they all can be attached to the treaty without in any way undermining its integrity, its fundamental meaning, or its rules of enforcement and inspection, and that is the critical thing.

So I consider that the things that we've agreed to in good faith are really a tribute to the work that Senator Lott and Senator Helms and Senator Biden and a number of others did to really clarify what this convention will mean. I think it's a positive thing.

Bill [Bill Plante, CBS News].

Whitewater Investigation

Q. Are you concerned, Mr. President, by the statement of Mr. McDougal and the independent prosecutor that there is new evidence, new documents which, according to the suggestions that seem to be coming out of there, might cause you or Mrs. Clinton further trouble?

The President. No.

Q. Why not?

The President. For obvious reasons. I mean, go back, look at the RTC report; look at all the evidence that's ever come out on this. We did not do anything wrong. We had nothing to do with all these business matters that were the subject of the trial. No, I'm not worried at all.

Peter [Peter Maer, NBC Mutual Radio].

Bob Dole's Loan to Speaker Newt Gingrich

Q. President Clinton, what do you think about the deal worked out between Bob Dole and Newt Gingrich? Is this the right arrangement when you consider that it's not the kind of arrangement that most Americans could get in similar circumstances if they faced a fine?

The President. Actually, I was thinking of calling Senator Dole this afternoon—you know, Chelsea is about to go off to college, and it's pretty expensive. [*Laughter*] I——

Q. Where is she going?

The President. Let me say that this is a matter that has to be decided by the House. They have certain rules, certain standards, and they will have to decide whether it complies with those rules and standards.

John [John Donvan, ABC News].

Israeli Politics and the Peace Process

Q. Mr. President, the Prime Minister of Israel is having domestic troubles now, and occasionally, these sorts of issues can leak into the large international arena, particularly in regard to this peace process. Are you concerned about that sort of spillage, and have you had any conversations with him about it since the news was announced or during his visit here?

The President. He didn't say anything to me during his visit here which is inconsistent with what he's said in public since then. He made the same general statements to me. We have had no conversations since then. As you know, Dennis Ross has been there and helped to broker this meeting between the Palestinians and the Israelis on security. It's obviously an internal matter for Israel to deal with. They're a great and vibrant democracy, and they'll deal with that in their way. But I think that the important thing is that we get the security cooperation up and going, and then we just keep plugging ahead here. We cannot allow anything—anything—to derail the peace process, and I don't believe we will.

Hong Kong

Q. Mr. President, could you tell us a little bit about your meeting today with Mr. Lee? And one of the concerns since the day that—once Hong Kong is turned over to the Chinese, if there's any kind of erosion of liberties, is there much the United States could do?

The President. Well, let me say this: I think the United States has to make it clear that Hong Kong is important to us, the people of Hong Kong are important. The agreement made in 1984 by China and Great Britain, which they sought the support of the United States on when President Reagan was here, clearly commits China to respect not only the economic liberties but also the political and civil liberties of the people of Hong Kong. And our policy is that the agreement was a good one when we said we supported it in 1984; it's a good one in 1997, and it ought to be honored.

Wolf [Wolf Blitzer, Cable News Network].

Q. But, sir, do you—are you prepared to do something if you thought the Chinese were not living up to the agreement?

The President. Well, that's a hypothetical question. Let me say at this time, it's very important to us. We believe it's an important matter, and we expect that they will live up to their agreement. And it's our policy—strong policy—that they should.

Wolf.

Aberdeen Trials

Q. Mr. President, a lot of Americans have been shocked by the Aberdeen trial of the U.S. Army drill sergeant and the allegations that this is part of a much bigger problem that has developed in the U.S. military. I wonder if you'd share with us your thoughts on how serious a problem that this kind of alleged sexual harassment is? Is it a pervasive problem throughout the military?

The President. Well, as you know, there's now an inquiry going on, and the instructions that I have given on this are the same instructions I gave on the Gulf war issue, which is to get to the bottom of it, find the facts, tell the truth, and take appropriate action. And I think we ought to let that play out.

Domestic Terrorism

Q. Sir, in light of tomorrow's anniversaries of the Oklahoma City bombing and of the fiery end to the Waco standoff, first of all, are there any credible security threats that Americans ought to be worried about? And secondly, is this a date that Americans ought now view with trepidation?

The President. Well, my answer to the first question is that we are mindful of the issues and we have taken the actions that I think are appropriate. I don't think that I should say more than that.

I would hope that tomorrow, rather than viewing these actions with trepidation, the American people would be thinking about two things: First, with regard to Oklahoma City, as Hillary and I saw last year when we were there, some of the surviving victims and the families of victims who survived and who did not survive are still hurting and face some continuing difficulties, and I would hope that they would be in our prayers. And I hope that we would, as I said at the time, all take a little time to express

appreciation, rather than condemnation, for people who serve the public in the way they did. They were targeted solely because they work for the United States.

With regard to Waco, in light of what happened with the Heaven's Gate group out in San Diego, which was an entirely different thing but came to an equally tragic end, I would hope that the American people would say, "We really value the freedom of religion and the freedom of political conviction, and we want people to have their own convictions, but we need to all be sensitive and to be aware of what can happen to people if they develop a kind of a cult mentality which can push them off the brink." And we ought to do what we can to try to avoid that.

Terry [Terence Hunt, Associated Press].

James Riady and Webster Hubbell

Q. Mr. President, in the summer of 1994, you met at the White House with James Riady, and then just a little bit later, you met at Camp David with Webb Hubbell. And about the same time, the Lippo Group started paying Mr. Hubbell $100,000. What do you recall about the conversations with those two gentlemen?

The President. I don't have anything to add to what I've already said about both of them. Mr. Riady was there in the White House for 5 or 10 minutes, basically a social call. We had exchanged a few comments, and he said nothing about Mr. Hubbell that I can remember. I don't believe he did.

And when Mr. Hubbell came to Camp David, my recollection is we played golf and I took a walk with him and asked him point blank if he had done anything wrong. And as he has said now in public, he told me that he hadn't and that he had a billing dispute with his law firm and he expected it to be resolved. And I have really nothing to add to that. There was no correlation between the two.

Q. There was no discussion about——

The President. No.

Q. ——efforts to—for him, any assistance for Mr. Hubbell?

The President. No, I don't remember anything about that, and he didn't—we didn't talk about the Lippo Group at all.

Federal Bureau of Investigation

Q. Mr. President, the problems with the FBI crime lab are only the latest controversy involving the FBI. What is your current view of the performance of the FBI and its Director, Mr. Freeh?

The President. Well, let me say about the crime lab, obviously, I'm concerned about the lab, but I think that you have to give the Justice Department, the Attorney General, and Mr. Freeh credit for doing what I think should be—in any organization, you're always going to have some problems. I, frankly, think—I was impressed with the fact that they did what I want the Pentagon to do on the sexual harassment issue—I mean, the matter was looked into, the facts were laid honestly before the public, and now I think it's important that all appropriate corrective action be taken.

Budget Agreement

Q. One more on the budget. Do you share the view of many in Washington that the next week or maybe 2 weeks is really a make-or-break period on the budget, and if a deal is going to happen, it's going to become apparent in this next window?

The President. Well, let me say, as you know, there is also a view directly contrary to that.

Q. What's your view?

The President. There are people—well, I think it's important—there are people who think that all the various positions are so unsettled that even the budget leaders and the leaders of the Senate and House and White House acting in good faith can't put together an agreement that will hold up and produce significant bipartisan majorities in both Houses.

My view is, I don't believe in saying "make or break" because I don't believe in ever saying "never." I've seen too many things come back again and again. And I believe we'll get a balanced budget agreement this year because it is so important to the country and to our future.

We've got this unemployment rate down to 5.2 percent. Inflation seems to be dropping again. If we passed a balanced budget, I think it would remove a lot of other lingering fears about inflation out there. I think it would give a new jolt of confidence to the economy. I think it would keep the recovery going. And I think it would be very good for the long term, especially if it also protected the Medicare Trust Fund for significant numbers of years in the future, and if it—[*inaudible*]—investment.

Now, I am in the camp of people who believe it would be better to do it sooner rather than

later if we can do it. But I don't believe for a minute that it's an easy task, and I don't believe that an agreement at any price is worth doing it in the next 4 or 5 days. And I don't believe the Republicans do. I wouldn't ask them to do that either. You know, we have strong convictions. And you saw in 1995 and until the end in 1996, when we made a remarkable amount of progress there just right before the Congress adjourned for the election, that we have different and deeply held views, and they're honestly different.

But I do believe that if we could do it sooner rather than later and it would be good for the country and consistent with our principles and theirs, an honorable compromise—which I think is there—I think sooner rather than later is better. But I certainly won't give up if it doesn't happen. I'm going to keep on working until we get it done. I expect it to happen this year. I'm very optimistic. And I am hopeful that it can happen sooner rather than later. And I am committed personally to doing everything I can to put it together.

Thank you.

NOTE: The President's 141st news conference began at 3:40 p.m. in the Briefing Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Kenneth Starr, independent counsel; former Senator Bob Dole; Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel; Ambassador Dennis B. Ross, Special Middle East Coordinator; and James Riady and Webster Hubbell of the Lippo Group. A reporter referred to Martin Lee, head of the Hong Kong Democratic Party.

Letter to the Oklahoma City Memorial Foundation

April 14, 1997

Dear Friends:

Our nation will never forget that tragic day, almost two years ago, when we first learned of the bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City, and we will always remember the courage shown by the citizens of your strong and united city during that dark time. All Americans continue to support your recovery efforts, and our prayers are with you.

With the destruction of the Murrah Federal Building, we learned once again that America is a family, and that such a brutal attack on any American is an attack on us all. In uniting around the citizens of Oklahoma City, our nation proved once again that no force of hatred or terrorism can ever defeat the American spirit.

I want to express my support for your efforts to establish a memorial on the site of the bombing. This memorial will be a fitting tribute not only to those who died, but also to those whose lives were changed forever on April 19, 1995. I know that, by honoring our fellow Americans in this way, we can help to further the healing and restore hope for a brighter, more secure future.

Hillary and I will always remember the time we spent with the families and survivors. Please know that we are keeping them, and all the people of Oklahoma City, in our thoughts and prayers.

Sincerely,

BILL CLINTON

NOTE: This letter was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on April 19. An original was not available for verification of the content of this letter.