

Roe v. Wade

Q. Mr. President, Justice Blackmun has been known for his commitment to the decision in *Roe versus Wade* that legalizes abortion. How important is it for the Supreme Court to keep that philosophy toward the right to abortion? And I wondered if Justice Blackmun might say a few words about where he thinks the Court might be headed on that issue.

The President. Well, I don't know if he wants to talk about it. You know, of course, that I agree with the decision, and I think it's an important one in a very difficult and complex area of our Nation's life. But again, I don't want to talk about the appointment of a new Justice today.

Q. Justice Blackmun, could you say a few words about *Roe versus Wade*, what it's meant and why you think that it has been an important decision for our country?

Justice Blackmun. I didn't hear that. Can you repeat it?

Q. I'm sorry. Could you say a few words about the decision in *Roe versus Wade* and about why you think it's been important for women in this country, your continued commitment to it, and where you think the Court might be headed on it?

Justice Blackmun. Well, I didn't come in here to indulge in a question-and-answer session, but I'll try to answer that. *Roe* against *Wade* hit me early in my tenure on the Supreme Court. And people forget that it was a 7-to-2 decision. They always typify it as a Blackmun opinion. But I'll say what I've said many times publicly: I think it was right in 1973, and I think it was right today. It's a step that had to be taken as we go down the road toward the full emancipation of women.

Supreme Court Nomination

Q. Mr. President, I take it you've had some advance warning that this might be coming.

Could you give us some sense of how much opportunity you've had to get your process started and how far along it might be?

The President. Well, I spoke a little this morning with our staff about it. We will have, I think, a good process that will involve Mr. Cutler, the White House Counsel, the Attorney General, Mr. McLarty, and Mr. Lader, who's been overseeing our personnel operations. And I think it will proceed in a very deliberate way. You know, Justice Blackmun referred in his letter to a conversation we had several months ago indicating that he might—or that he intended to leave at some time during this year or announce his intention. I, frankly, kept hoping he would change his mind. But I think we are prepared, and I think we proceed forthwith.

Q. Mr. President—this is for Justice Blackmun. I thought you had taken the public decision that your doctors would tell you when it was time to go. That having been so, can you say how you reached your decision to retire? And would you add to that how you can get along without a daily fix of hate mail? [*Laughter*]

Justice Blackmun. I missed the punch line.

The President. He asked how you were going to get along without your daily fix of hate mail.

He offered to take some of mine. [*Laughter*]

Justice Blackmun. I think the President and I have a lot to share in those hate mail things, but we'll see. We'll let the future take care of itself. I'm advised there's a vacancy on the 8th Circuit I think I'll apply for. I'll be turned down, I know. [*Laughter*]

Q. Mr. President, it took you 3 months the last time. Will it take you that long this time?

The President. Thank you. Let's go.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:34 a.m. in the Roosevelt Room at the White House.

Remarks at the Funeral Service for William H. Natcher in Bowling Green, Kentucky
April 6, 1994

To the family of our friend Bill Natcher; Mr. Speaker; Governor; distinguished Members of

Congress; all those who have preceded me on the program: Reverend Welch; Reverend

Bridges, thank you for that wonderful sermon; Mr. Orendorf, thank you for making us laugh and for being so wise.

Mr. Speaker, thank you for proving that Reverend Bridges was right, there are still noble and good people in public life in America. Thank you all for making my role almost completely irrelevant. There is hardly anything else left to say.

I think I would like to tell you two things about Bill Natcher from my point of view. The country doesn't work very well in tough times, when difficult decisions have to be made, if the President cannot work with the Congress. We faced an enormously difficult position, Bill Natcher and I did, when I became President and he took the reins of the Appropriations Committee. Our country was drowning in debt, our deficit had been going up, our national debt had tripled in 12 years, and yet every person who studied the issue knew that there were some things we needed to invest even more money in. You heard people talk already today about the National Institute of Health, the need we had to make the changes so that our country could go into the next century and more Bill Natchers would have a chance to make their way in life. We had to find a way to bridle this debt and then invest more in education and in scientific research and in making the transition from a defense to a domestic, high-technology economy. And all that fell on the shoulders of the chairman of the Appropriations Committee.

I said to myself—I didn't know Mr. Natcher when I became President. I knew about him; nearly everybody in American politics did. Everybody's asking, "Can this young guy from Arkansas who has only been a Governor, never been in Congress, be President?" And I'm saying, "Can a man who doesn't own a fax machine run the Appropriations Committee?" [Laughter]

Well, let me tell you, he came to see me one day, and we sat alone in the Oval Office, and he almost held my hand, which is just about what I needed. And he said, "Now, Mr. President"—how many of you heard him say that to you, right—[laughter]—"now, we're going to get through this all right, and you're going to make some hard decisions, and I'm going to help you. And then if we're real lucky, we'll get it through the Congress. And you will have to be willing to be misunderstood for a while,"

which I thought was a delicate way of putting the position we were in. [Laughter]

But he said, "The end will bring us out all right." And sure enough, he set about doing his work. And he worked with all of the Members in the Congress and figured out some way or another to produce a budget that both brought the deficit down and spent more money on things that were critical to our future.

It was a service to the Nation that those of you here in his home district made possible. And it was a remarkable thing, a great gift that he helped to give to our country. And it was very, very hard to do. And I agree with the Speaker: It will affect people's lives in ways that are even more important than the shining example he set by never missing a vote and by being able to be in such harmony with his constituents that he never had to raise money or spend it or campaign or politic in ways that those of us who are more mortal have to do. And I thank him for that.

The other thing I thank him for, which may have an enduring benefit to the country, is far more personal. You heard the Speaker talk about how he was the chairman of the Gym Committee, and they have this dinner every year. And you know, I read all about how I spend too much time at McDonald's, and so I'm always trying to watch my weight in there. But I never wanted to offend Mr. Natcher. So I show up at his dinner, and he takes me to be seated, and he lays a big steak and a baked potato and peach cobbler there. And by the time he got through talking to me, I not only did not offend him, he had talked me into having two of everything. [Laughter]

And we talked some more, and our relationship developed some more. And then when he got terribly ill, I went out to Bethesda to see him, and I had the great honor of being there and presented him with the President's Citizens Medal. And I pinned it on his pajamas, and I talked to him about his life.

And I thought to myself: Why is it that I am so moved by this man? What is it that he has done, not just the votes and the no contributions and all that, what is it that he has done that if the rest of us could do it, we could really be true to the Founders of this country, true to the challenges of our time? We could bring more harmony and a stronger sense of community to our people. What is it, exactly?

And I think what it was is that he found a way to live in Washington and work in politics and still be exactly the way he would have been if he'd been here in Bowling Green running a hardware store. And this country works well when people in Washington treat each other the way they would have to treat each other if they were living in Bowling Green. And it doesn't work very well when everybody up there thinks, "Oh, this is a different place, and we have to treat each other differently, and we have to muscle each other around, and we have to posture rather than produce." And we're all so worried because we're bound to be misunderstood, being filtered to 250-plus million people, so that all of our positions on complicated issues get simplified and often distorted.

But somehow, Bill Natcher just had enough internal strength and coherence. Maybe he was just enough old-fashioned that he literally was able to live every day as he would have lived if he'd been here all the time. That was the beauty of his legacy. And if the rest of us can

remember that about him, even if we miss a few votes or have to go out and raise campaign contributions, if we can just imagine the roots that we had, the childhood friends that we had, who always reminded us of our foibles as well as our strengths, if we can remember what the church choir sounds like on Sunday, even on the Sundays when we don't show up, and every day imagine that we were living where the people who sent us to Washington still live, then we could do something really precious for Bill Natcher. We could do for the American people what he would have done had he lived another 84 years.

God bless you, Mr. Natcher, and thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 3 p.m. at Eastwood Baptist Church. In his remarks, he referred to Rev. Paul M. Welch, pastor, Eastwood Baptist Church; Rev. Richard W. Bridges, pastor, First Baptist Church, Bowling Green, KY; and Top Orendorf, who delivered the eulogy of friendship.

Remarks on Arrival in Topeka, Kansas *April 7, 1994*

Thank you, Governor Finney, for your friendship, your leadership, and your kind remarks, and for your belief that every American and every Kansan ought to have health care that can never be taken away. Thank you, Congressman Slattery, for your long personal friendship and your support and for being such a strong voice in the Congress not only for fiscal responsibility but for basic sanity in our national policies.

Ladies and gentlemen, I'm glad to be back in Kansas. I want to thank Major General Rueger for welcoming me, and Colonel Dewayne Ellinson. I want to thank the people who helped to put this event together today, the carpenters local, the floorlayers local. I want to thank the Topeka High School Band over there and the cheerleaders and all those who are cheering. The people who are here from Pauline South Elementary School, thank you for coming. I want to thank the members of the National Guard and the police officers and others who made this day possible. I also want

to acknowledge in the audience today the presence of the first American woman to be the Treasurer of the United States, Georgia Neese Gray. How are you, ma'am? God bless you for being here. I want to thank your Lieutenant Governor, your attorney general, your State treasurer, your local mayor, and the chairman of the Democratic Party for meeting me here at the airport. But mostly I just want to tell you it's nice to be back in Kansas.

You know, since Jim was kind enough to mention the basketball game, you all know that for most of my public life I didn't live in Washington, DC. I was the Governor of one of your neighboring States. I lived and worked in an atmosphere very much like the way you all live and work. And I didn't understand what I often saw in Washington, where every position was pushed to its logical extreme, whether left or right, where it seemed that every debate took on more rhetoric than reality and shed more heat than light, where people seemed to be debating whether the Government could do ev-