

Apr. 28 / Administration of William J. Clinton, 1994

NOTE: The telephone interview began at 9:20 p.m. The President spoke from the Residence at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Dick Kelley, his mother's husband, and James Morgan, coauthor of her autobiography, "Leading With My Heart."

Nomination for a Member of the Federal Labor Relations Authority

April 28, 1994

The President today announced his intent to nominate Phyllis N. Segal as a member of the Federal Labor Relations Authority.

"Phyllis Segal is uniquely qualified to fill this important role at the Federal Labor Relations Authority," the President said. "She has a keen understanding of the issues facing the organiza-

tion and Federal labor management relations. Her varied background will be an asset at the Authority."

NOTE: A biography of the nominee was made available by the Office of the Press Secretary.

Remarks to Native American and Native Alaskan Tribal Leaders

April 29, 1994

The President. Thank you very, very much. Chief Wilma Mankiller and to all the other distinguished leaders here today, let me first welcome you here on behalf of the First Lady and Vice President and Mrs. Gore. All of us are honored by your presence. I also wanted to especially thank those who have spoken and participated to this point and those who will participate in the remainder of this program. I have listened carefully and learned a lot.

This is, as all of you know, a time of great challenge and transition for our beloved country and for the world. As I travel across this country and talk to the people about the problems that all Americans share, whether it's crime or health care or the economy, I find a concern that goes deeper even in these specific matters.

There is a great yearning in this Nation for people to be able to reestablish a sense of community, a sense of oneness, a sense of cooperation, of shared values and spirit. Americans are searching for the chance to come together in friendship, instead of coming apart in anger and distrust. There is a yearning for us to be able to live together so that all of us can live up to our God-given potential and be respected for who and what we are.

It is in that spirit and with great humility I say to the leaders of the first Americans, the

American Indian and Alaska Natives, welcome to the White House. Welcome home.

So much of who we are today comes from who you have been for a long time. Long before others came to these shores there were powerful and sophisticated cultures and societies here: yours. Because of your ancestors, democracy existed here long before the Constitution was drafted and ratified.

Just last week, people all around the world celebrated the 24th annual Earth Day. Yet for thousands of years, you have held nature in awe, celebrating the bond between Earth and the Creator. You have reminded people that all of us should make decisions not just for our children and their grandchildren but for generation upon generation yet to come.

I believe in your rich heritage and in our common heritage. What you have done to retain your identity, your dignity, and your faith in the face of often immeasurable obstacles is profoundly moving, an example of the enduring strength of the human spirit.

We desperately need this lesson now. We must keep faith with you and with that spirit and with the common heritage so many of us cherish. That is what you came to talk to me about and what I would like to respond to today.

In every relationship between our people, our first principle must be to respect your right to remain who you are and to live the way you wish to live. And I believe the best way to do that is to acknowledge the unique government-to-government relationship we have enjoyed over time. Today I reaffirm our commitment to self-determination for tribal governments. I pledge to fulfill the trust obligations of the Federal Government. I vow to honor and respect tribal sovereignty based upon our unique historic relationship. And I pledge to continue my efforts to protect your right to fully exercise your faith as you wish.

Let me speak for a moment about religious freedom, something precious to you, something deeply enshrined in our Constitution. For many of you, traditional religions and ceremonies are the essence of your culture and your very existence. Last year, I was pleased to sign a law that restored certain constitutional protections for those who want to express their faith in this country.

No agenda for religious freedom will be complete until traditional Native American religious practices have received all the protections they deserve. Legislation is needed to protect Native American religious practices threatened by Federal action. The Native American free exercise of religion act is long overdue. And I will continue to work closely with you and Members of Congress to make sure the law is constitutional and strong. I want it passed so that I can invite you back here and sign it into law in your presence.

And to make certain that you can obtain the ritual symbols of your religious faith, in a moment I will sign a directive to every executive department and agency of Government, not just the Department of Interior, instructing them to cooperate with tribal governments to accommodate wherever possible the need for eagle feathers in the practice of Native American religions.

This then is our first principle: respecting your values, your religions, your identity, and your sovereignty. This brings us to the second principle that should guide our relationship: We must dramatically improve the Federal Government's relationships with the tribes and become full partners with the tribal nations.

I don't want there to be any mistake about our commitment to a stronger partnership between our people. Therefore, in a moment I will also sign an historic Government directive

that requires every executive department and agency of Government to take two simple steps: first, to remove all barriers that prevent them from working directly with tribal governments and, second, to make certain that if they take action affecting tribal trust resources, they consult with tribal governments prior to that decision. It is the entire Government, not simply the Department of the Interior, that has a trust responsibility with tribal governments. And it is time the entire Government recognized and honored that responsibility.

Part of being better partners is also being better listeners. The Department of the Interior and the Department of Justice have never before joined together to listen to the leaders of the Indian nations. It's time to change that. Next week, in Albuquerque, New Mexico, both Attorney General Reno and Secretary Babbitt and many of their sub-Cabinet officials will meet with you for 2 days at the first National American Indian Listening Conference. I'm looking forward to hearing their specific ideas from the conference on ways to move our nations forward together.

The same applies to the unprecedented series of 23 meetings that the Department of Housing and Urban Development, under Secretary Cisneros, will have with tribal governments by September to improve housing and living conditions in tribal communities and to listen to you about how you can take the lead in doing it.

All governments must work better. We must simply be more responsive to the people we serve and to each other. It's the only way we'll be able to do good things with the resources we have. I know that you agree with that. More and more of you are moving to assume fuller control of your governments. Many are moving aggressively to take responsibility for operating your own programs. Each year the Bureau of Indian Affairs is providing more technical services and fewer direct services.

One avenue for greater tribal control is through self-governance contracts. There are about 30 self-compacting tribes today. We're working with Congress to raise that number by 20 tribes every year. We'd like self-governance to become a permanent program. But we must ensure services will still be provided to the smaller tribes that do not choose to participate.

What is the goal of a better and more equal partnership, and more empowered tribes and more efficient government? Ultimately it must

be to improve the living conditions of those whom we serve. And that must be our third and final principle.

Together we must position American Indians and Alaska Natives to compete economically as we move toward the 21st century. I invited the leaders of every recognized tribe here today. But I'll be the first to acknowledge that not all have been able to join us because they simply don't have the resources to come. And I know well that many of you have come here at great personal sacrifice to yourselves and the members of your tribes. That only underscores the importance of our work. Let us dedicate ourselves to making certain that the next time we all meet together, conditions will be different and better and all of our brothers and sisters will be able to join us.

We must do more to create jobs, raise incomes, and develop capital for new businesses. I know there are more success stories in Indian country every year but not nearly enough as the people who bore witness to your conditions here today so eloquently said. Strengthening tribal economies will require new thinking and the courage to change. It will require investing in the health, the education, and the skills of American Indians and Alaska Natives, as we must do for all Americans.

To the extent that some of the building blocks can be put in place here in Washington, we are working to do that. Our empowerment zone legislation, for example, contains at your request special new incentives for investing in reservations. This is only part of the solution. We can continue to enforce the regulations of the Community Reinvestment Act to make sure local banks invest and lend in Indian communities. We've brought more tribal leaders than ever together with bankers to improve mortgage loans, financial services, and to cut regulations. We must make these efforts permanent and more effective. And we know a more comprehensive approach is necessary.

At my direction, the Vice President has established a working group on Indian economic development as part of our Community Enterprise Board. I've asked them to study the recommendations from last year's National Indian Economic Summit and to consult fully with you every step of the way. Our goal is clear: to work with you to enhance economic development in every tribe. I'd like to emphasize that what I have asked them to do in this issue,

I asked them to do on all issues. This great, historic meeting today must be the beginning of our new partnership, not the end of it.

I'd like to make a point about economic development that has to do with gaming. As a former Governor, I understand some of the concerns that the Governors have raised. But as President, I know that gaming gives you a competitive edge when you've had precious few. And the benefits often extend to surrounding communities in full measure. Some of you are now able to invest more in housing and health care and child care and infrastructure and taking care of your elders. I know that gaming is controversial, even among tribes. As many of you have acknowledged, it's also important that tribal governments continue to diversify their economies. Many of you are working with congressional leaders, Governors, and Secretary Babbitt to resolve tough issues.

My goal is this: I want the tribes to continue to benefit from gaming, and I want current disputes over the 1988 gaming regulatory act to be worked out. I strongly support the process now underway to achieve that goal. But just as with the national economy, we know we can't solve every problem overnight. The important thing is to create policies that give every tribe the chance to have a strong economy in the long run, to develop the will and the consistency to stick with those policies over time, and to keep working and talking together.

Last year, you were kind enough to invite the First Lady to the Indian Health Summit. You asked her to make certain your treaty rights to health care and your rights under the Indian Health Service be preserved and made a part of our health care proposal. Because we worked together and because of you and your input, only one of the health care plans now before the Congress addresses these issues and ensures that tribal members will receive the same high-quality health care as everyone else. That is our plan, thanks to you.

There has been a great deal of debate this year about the budget of the Indian Health Service. It was mentioned earlier. The fact is that we are operating under the tightest spending limits in memory. In our efforts to bring the deficit down, I have recommended the total elimination of 100 programs and cuts in 200 others. And that is contributing to the country's economic revival. But I believe the health needs of tribal communities and families and children

clearly require special attention. Therefore, I have amended next year's budget to restore more than \$120 million in funding for the Indian Health Service.

Finally, as we heard so eloquently today, there is in America, across the lines of race and class and region, a profound concern for our children. Too many are poor or sick or unsupervised. Too many are likely to use violence or be the victims of violence. Too many are unprepared intellectually for life or work. Yet nothing is so striking in tribal communities as your love of family and extended family and your devotion to your children. Every segment of our society could well take a lesson from you. But in spite of your best efforts, too many of your children also suffer from poor health and inadequate education. And we are trying hard to address these problems. You mentioned Head Start; our budget calls for continued, substantial increases and expansions of the Head Start program, as well as the Women and Infants and Children program.

Our education plan, called Goals 2000, for the first time sets world-class education standards for every school and all our children and gives local communities the grassroots support they need to achieve those goals. Goals 2000 contains millions more next year for BIA-funded schools and schools serving Native Alaskans. And these funds cannot be spent until the education goals of your community are considered.

In the 1980's, our Nation fell behind many Third World countries in the rate at which we immunized children against communicable diseases. I know the Indian Health Service does a good job of immunizing children. Beginning this year, under the Vaccine For Children program, every Indian child, no matter where he or she lives and regardless of whether they are fortunate enough to live near an IHS facility, will be eligible for free vaccine.

The Great Law of the Six Nations Iroquois Confederacy contained this advice: "In our every deliberation, we must consider the impact of our decision on the next seven generations." We are stewards; we are caretakers. That standard will keep us great if we have the vision of your forefathers.

As we look back on the American journey, the test ahead is always whether we are moving in the right direction of more tolerance, wider justice, and greater opportunity for all. It is the

direction that counts, always the direction. And our choices will set that direction.

Of course, as you well know, our history has not always been a proud one. But our future can be, and that is up to us. Together we can open the greatest era of cooperation, understanding, and respect among our people ever. I know that we will. And when we do, the judgment of history will be that the President of the United States and the leaders of the sovereign Indian nations met and kept faith with each other and our common heritage and together lifted our great nations to a new and better place.

Thank you all.

[At this point, the President signed the memorandums. The President and Mrs. Clinton and the Vice President and Mrs. Gore were then presented with gifts.]

The President. Before we go, I wanted to make a brief announcement to thank you, on behalf of the First Lady, the Vice President, Mrs. Gore, and our Cabinet for being here and for giving us a chance to be with you and for the wonderful gifts we have received.

In keeping with a tradition that goes back to the early days of our Republic, I want each of you, in leaving, to receive a miniature replica of the Jefferson Indian Peace Medal. On the front is a picture of our third President, Thomas Jefferson, author of the Declaration of Independence and one of the chief architects of our democracy. When you receive your medal, you will see on the back two hands clasped, one with a cuff showing three stripes and three buttons, the other wearing a bracelet engraved with an eagle. The hands join with the inscription "Peace and Friendship."

As we pray and as we leave, let us hope that this is the beginning of true peace, true friendship, and true progress.

Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 4:40 p.m. on the South Lawn at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Chief Wilma Mankiller of the Cherokee Tribe in Oklahoma. The memorandums on eagle feather distribution and relations with tribal governments are listed in Appendix D at the end of this volume.