

The President's News Conference With President Oscar Luigi Scalfaro of Italy

April 2, 1996

President Clinton. Good afternoon. Let me say again, it's a great pleasure to have President Scalfaro at the White House. For 50 years, Italy has been one of America's closest allies, a pillar of the Atlantic Alliance throughout the cold war, a strong advocate for freedom and democracy in the years since.

Over these many years of partnership, our Nation has had no better friend in Italy than President Scalfaro. The President began his public career with the founding of the post-war Italian state. He has served his country in a range of high positions, and he has always, always worked to strengthen the close cooperation between our nations. As President, he has stood firm for the values that we share, and America is grateful to President Scalfaro for his leadership and his wise counsel.

This is our third meeting. Today we focused in large measure on our shared interests and effort in building a free, stable, and undivided Europe. Nowhere is this common commitment more evident than in our work in the former Yugoslavia. I salute the Italian soldiers who are participating in the mission in Bosnia. America's soldiers are proud to serve with them in what is truly a joint endeavor. They and the other members of IFOR are doing invaluable work. They're giving the people of Bosnia a chance for peace. They are carrying on Italy's tradition of shouldering responsibility in the region that began with Operation Deny Flight and Operation Provide Promise. Italy is helping to build bridges to Central and Eastern Europe, bridges that can extend security and prosperity and democracy across the entire Continent.

As a member of NATO and the European Union, Italy is a force for cooperation and integration in Europe and around the world. I had the opportunity today to thank President Scalfaro for Italy's work in overcoming the old divisions in Europe and for his nation's global efforts to promote peace and security, from its support for the peace process in the Middle East to its vital help in the effort to halt proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, to its commitment that we strongly share to win the struggle against terrorism.

President Scalfaro told me about Italy's ambitious goals for its E.U. Presidency. The new transatlantic agenda, which I was proud to sign at Madrid at the U.S.-E.U. summit last December, promises to make our citizens on both sides of the Atlantic more secure and more prosperous. I am pleased with the cooperation we have enjoyed with Italy on problems such as international crime, narcotics, and refugees.

Finally, let me say we had a brief discussion of political change in Italy and throughout the world. Every nation in the West, including America, has been undergoing a period of adjustment in the wake of the end of the cold war. We in the United States are convinced that Italy's democracy is strong, its economy healthy, its people committed to playing a vital and constructive role on the world stage in the future as they have for so many decades. We are very pleased about that and, again, very glad to welcome you, Mr. President, to Washington.

President Scalfaro. Thank you very much, Mr. President. Thank you for the invitation and for the welcome during the state visit. But above all, I would like to express my great satisfaction for the words that you have repeated during this meeting and that you have repeated to me when I finished my speech at the arrival ceremony.

I have written down the sentences that have struck me the most and which are the reason for which I am so pleased with this meeting with you. As you said just earlier, Italy is a guiding force in the world. You added that in the meeting that we just had that we believe that Italy is a first-class ally in the international field, in all fields. And again, the American people—is very attached to the alliance between our two countries.

This visit, which is a visit based on friendship, is a visit in which a head of state, such as myself, has lived through these 50 years following the end of the war, following the War of Liberation, and these were very difficult years after the war, difficult recovery years. And based on de Gasperi's policy, which has always been based first of all on the agreement among free people, de Gasperi always taught us that the

fundamental approach of a state must be based, first of all, on foreign policy. And from this, in the logic of things, follows domestic policy. And therefore, this agreement among free people has as its pillar the United States of America, with the sacrifice made by their men and through the various stages that I have mentioned earlier, the initial agreements that we struck in Italy among the political forces. And it was because of this that we recognized in human rights and the values of mankind the values of peace.

Based on this approach, we have begun our fight against terrorism. I had the opportunity for 4 years when I was Minister of the Interior when, at the time, I was able to subscribe the first agreement with the United States on this issue. The danger of this violence, in other words, the violence against man and the attack against man's values, continues, persists today.

I have said earlier and I repeat today, when faced with terrorism, negating human rights, there is no such thing as neutrality. There is no such thing as abstention. He who says he is neutral before the aggression against human rights, he who says that he has abstained from this, must undoubtedly be considered as someone as being against the values of mankind and man's dignity. This is what our meeting was based on, and this is why I'm so pleased with our meeting.

Thank you, Mr. President.

President Clinton. Terry [Terence Hunt, Associated Press].

Russian Elections

Q. Mr. President, from the IMF to your own administration, the West appears to be bending over backwards to support or bolster Boris Yeltsin as the Russian elections approach. How important is it for the West to impede a comeback of the Communist Party in Russia, and what would be the repercussions if the Communists succeed?

President Clinton. Well, first of all, I think that none of us should take any position on the elections in another country, but the United States has been clearly on the side of reform in Russia, on both political and economic reform. And what would be the repercussions of an election, of a change in government in Russia would depend entirely on how the new government proceeded: what would be their policy on political reform, on democracy and freedom; what would be their policy on relating to their

neighbors; what would be their policy on economic reform in relating to the rest of the world?

So we have to judge—first of all, leave all free countries and free elections to their own devices, and then, secondly, we evaluate other countries based on what they do. But we have to say clearly that we are on the side of reform, political reform, democracy, respecting the rights of other countries, and economic reform.

Could we have a question from an Italian journalist? Mr. President, would you like to call on—

Italian Elections

Q. We are now in the largest democracy in the world. Can you confirm your doubts about the presidentialism? Do you see any reason for authority—

President Clinton. Do I see any reason for what? Are you asking him or me? [Laughter]

President Scalfaro. You're asking me a question? Okay. All right, just so we understand each other, because if—first, I'm going to ask—all right, let's do it one thing at a time. I'd like to hear the question first. Your question is based on the assumption—and lucky you who has this assumption—that I am concerned about—if there is a Presidential solution. I don't have these concerns. And since this debate grew from a speech that I gave to the Parliament in Mexico last week, I said precisely that I do not have any objections to a state based on a Presidential system. Now, if this sentence means that I'm against it, then you can explain it to me. I also added that what I believe to be crucial is that the Parliament must have full powers. And I said that wisdom would have it that there must be able to have a synthesis between these two principles.

Now, if somebody says that I said that the Presidential system is dangerous, then that means that you think something, and you attribute it to me. I think—I have thoughts, but I don't sublet my thoughts. This is as clear as I can be. Now if you want to debate it, then you can go ahead, but you can't forget the fact that in Italy a few weeks ago, just a few weeks ago, I asked the government to—I asked Senator Maccanico to create the government.

This did not come from me, because according to our constitutional laws, the head of state must gather all of the proposals from all the parties—from the right wing of Mr. Fini, which

had the support of Forza Italia, and these proposals were supported by the left wing of D'Alema. D'Alema said that—he said he could not—not be in favor of Maccanico, and that's how this whole thing started.

Excuse me, one minute—in this whole exercise, the lady has a little bit more energy than the man, but you have to wait. In this attempt, there was a broad understanding on a semi-Presidential system, and a sentence that Fini expressed, and I think I'm going to repeat it verbatim here, is, “without mortifying the Parliament in its exercise of its powers.” And I won't add anything more, because the political forces don't want to add anything to it, and that's it.

President Clinton. I feel as if we just got to sit in on a little family feud here. [Laughter]

Helen [Helen Thomas, United Press International].

1996 Presidential Election

Q. Mr. President, now that you know who your opponent will be in the November elections, what do you think of him? Also, this election is being called, rightly or wrongly, the center against the middle. What do you think are the real issues that will divide the two candidates?

President Clinton. Well, first of all, I think we should put off the politics for a little longer. I mean, for many people this election has gone on for—since the second I took my hand off the Bible in 1993. And I think that's not always good for the United States. And we have work to do.

Just last week, we at least extended the debt limit, passed the line item veto, something I have advocated for 3 years. We still have a balanced budget before us. I hope we can pass the right kind of balanced budget. We've got the welfare reform issue before us. We have a lot of other—we've got the antiterrorism legislation, which I still hope can be rescued.

So I think we should work on this. And I think I should do my job, and Senator Dole should do his. And we should not have a work stoppage between now and November just because we've got an election. Then at some point in the future, we'll have our conventions, and there will be plenty of time to have the political campaigns.

But I think the American people will sort out the differences pretty clearly. They laid their

markers down last year. They passed their budget, and they said, “If we have the White House and the Congress, this is what we intend to do for America.” That's their message. Read their budget. And I have different views, which I made clear last year. And we will be able to amplify those as we go forward. There are other differences as well.

But the main point is that we are not yet in an election—at least we shouldn't be—and we all are getting checks from the American people, both of us are and those who support us, to go to work and show up here every day. We shouldn't have a work stoppage between now and November. We ought to keep working until we pass a balanced budget, pass welfare reform, pass antiterrorism legislation, and keep going forward.

Q. That's not going to happen.

President Clinton. I don't think that you know that. I think that we might—I think we might do that. A lot of people thought that we wouldn't have the line item veto. I had to agree to wait until next year to exercise it, but I wanted it bad enough on the books that I was glad to do that. And we've done some other things that I think are worth doing. We lifted the earnings limits on Social Security, something I have long favored and I think will really benefit this country as the demographics of our work force change. So I think we can get things done here. We need to keep doing it.

An Italian journalist.

Italian Elections

Q. A State Department report foresees a key role for the ex-Communist Party after the Italian political polls on April 21st. How would that affect the U.S.-Italian relationship?

President Clinton. After the—how would what affect it? If we had a Communist-dominated government?

Q. Yes.

President Clinton. I'll answer the question the way I answered the question on Russia. First of all, we support freedom and democracy in democratic countries. So, if any government emerges as a result of the free choice of the people, under the rules of the constitution and laws of any country, that is that nation's business. We then evaluate those governments based on what their position is in relation to us: What is their economic position; what is their foreign policy position; what is their position on human

rights and freedom? And that's what we would do with any government.

And if you look at the whole history of the way the Italian governments have emerged and conducted themselves in the last 50 years, I don't know that we have any cause for concern, so I wouldn't express any here. I think that's up to the people of your country to decide what kind of government you have, and then you have to decide what the policies are.

Brit [Brit Hume, ABC News].

1996 Presidential Election

Q. Mr. President, to follow up on your last answer, Senator Dole and his advisers have indicated that the Senator will try during the course of this legislative session to pass as much of the Republican agenda as he can, to send it to you for your signature or, just as good for him politically, perhaps, your veto. Senator Daschle has indicated that he will do everything he can to block Senator Dole from doing that. So the very thing that you describe, the kind of political deadlock, election-year deadlock, seems in prospect. I wonder if you might have some advice for both sides in that.

President Clinton. That's what they say now, but you know, Senator Dole's just been through all these primaries, and you know, since the whole purpose of the primaries was to nominate someone that hopefully will defeat me in November, they had to—they ginned up a lot of red meat, and they got their juices flowing, and that's what they were doing out there.

But I would just say that the right thing for the country is for us to pass a balanced budget plan. We have now both identified more than enough savings to get there. They know what I cannot accept. We have 95 percent agreement, I think, on welfare reform, and we are very close on some other things; I just think it would be a mistake not to do this.

So there will be still plenty of things we disagree on. I mean, after all, they put their marker down last year. You can see it in their budget. I mean, there's plenty of differences between us that won't be evaporated by anything we do that's good for America between now and November, but we both have jobs to do and we ought to do them.

It may be that they will try to pass bills that they know that I will have to veto, but I'd far rather sign them. And I just hope we can avoid this sort of gridlock. There's no need for it,

particularly if you look on the budget, if you look at how we've identified—the American people must have a difficult time understanding how both sides could identify more than \$700 billion worth of savings, which is more than enough to balance the budget and give a middle-class tax cut to support childrearing, and not do it. I think that'll be very hard to explain. But I don't have a vote in Congress; I can only urge them to do it.

Is there an Italian question?

Extraterritorial Impact of Sanctions

Q. Mr. President, the U.S. has always been pro-free-trade as a country. But recently, Congress has passed a couple of bills, the D'Amato bill and the Helms-Burton bill, that are introducing secondary boycott and the concept of extraterritoriality of U.S. law. This will create a problem for many international companies, European companies and Italian companies who want to do business with the U.S. Don't you think that, by signing those laws, you will send the wrong message of the outside wall?

And just a question for President Scalfaro. Mr. President, did you talk about Ustica and the fact that NATO may have important documents that would help to resolve this issue?

President Clinton. Let me answer your first question. With regard to the Helms-Burton legislation, the United States believes that we need to take a very firm position in our dealings with Cuba, which is the only nondemocratic country left in our hemisphere and which recently shot down two American civilian airplanes over international airspace, in plain violation of international law.

The Helms-Burton bill provides the President with a waiver authority which I believe makes it possible for me to implement that bill in a way that does not violate the commercial rules and regulations governing nations and that will not undermine our strong, broad-based, and consistent commitment to open trade among nations, and I will do my best to do that.

Perhaps the President would like to answer the question you asked him.

1980 Ustica Island Airline Tragedy

President Scalfaro. Yes, I did speak about this issue with President Clinton. Obviously, I didn't ask him the questions because this is a NATO issue, but I did ask him for his support for the Italian request, and I told him that this

request did not come from political circles but came from a judge, the judge who has been responsible for this long trial.

I also added that there is a right—the right for Italy, which is part of NATO, to know the facts. Second place, there’s a right, and it’s even stronger a right that cannot disappear, which is the families’ natural right to know how their loved ones died.

I also added that, in my opinion, that if we were to be denied this request, it could cause speculation which could not help anyone. President Clinton very kindly replied to me that he had never discussed this issue before in NATO, but that he would gladly examine the case and that he would give his support to the request made by the Italian judges.

President Clinton. Ann [Ann Devroy, Washington Post].

Judge Harold Baer

Q. Mr. President, is it proper for the White House to criticize a sitting Federal judge, and do you now regret appointing Judge Baer in New York?

President Clinton. Let me answer—you have two questions: Number one, I don’t regret appointing him; number two, I think it is proper for the White House to say, or for the President personally to say if he disagrees with a judge’s opinion.

After all, I think there’s been a little over-reaction to this. The judge has lifetime tenure. So that to insulate the judge in our system from pressure, that does not mean that any judge should be entitled or any court should be entitled not only to lifetime tenure but a gag rule on everyone else.

So I supported the position taken by our United States Attorney in New York. On the other hand, I think that it’s important not to get into the business of characterizing judges based on one decision they make. Judge Baer had a rehearing on it, made a decision, and I have nothing to add to what our United States Attorney said. But I think that it’s very important that we say—at least for me to say—I support the system we have, I support the independence of the Federal judiciary. I do not believe that means that those of us who disagree with particular decisions should refrain from saying we disagree with them. It doesn’t mean we won’t obey them; we’ll all obey them. But if we don’t agree and we have reasons for not

agreeing, we should be free to say that. And that’s what I think should be done.

Now beyond that, however, I don’t think it’s fair to just characterize a judge or judges in some sort of sweeping way, as apparently members of the other party are now beginning to do. And I’m a little perplexed by that since I think only three of my judges had any—any of the ones I’ve appointed—had any Republicans voting against them. I believe all the rest of them went through without Republican opposition.

And there have been many articles talking about how, number one, the judges I have appointed had the highest ratings from the American Bar Association of any President since the appointments have been made; number two, they were more diverse in terms of gender and race; but number three, I have been criticized from all sides because they are less ideological. I didn’t—I have tried to appoint good, sensible people to the bench.

So I hope that we won’t have a big attempt to turn this into a political campaign issue. I think that it’s obvious what is going on here. The people on the other side are sort of embarrassed about their crime record. They fought the crime bill. They fought the 100,000 police. They fought the Brady bill. They fought the assault weapons ban. They fought things that they used to say they were for, so now they think they can sort of get well by making some outrageous claims about the judges I have appointed.

But that does not mean that every American shouldn’t feel free to express his or her opinion on a particular decision. That’s why you give these judges the insulation, but you still permit the free debate.

Visiting Heads of State

Q. You talked about European heads of state who come to the United States to promote themselves. Were you referring to a specific case?

President Scalfaro. No, if I were referring to someone in particular, I would have said so. You know me better than that. I said that there is a tradition. It’s not a new tradition, and you know it very well. This is the tradition that, following the Second World War, that heads of state come here because it’s a huge publicity stunt that they used in their own countries, or they do it to promote themselves. I wanted to

say that this is not my case, and I would be offended, and it would be a lack of respect for the United States and for the President of the United States, but also for Italy and for myself. And that's all I have to say.

President Clinton. Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President's 117th news conference began at 12:36 p.m. in Room 450 of the Old Executive Office Building. President Scalfaro spoke in Italian, and his remarks were translated by an interpreter.

Interview With Jon Miller and Fred Manfra of WBAL Radio in Baltimore, Maryland

April 2, 1996

Q. Here's the pitch to Bobby Bonilla, and Bonilla takes ball one outside. So I guess that ends some of the conversations about how Cone's arm is.

Hey, and look who just stopped in. Mr. President.

The President. How are you?

Q. How are you, Mr. President? Bill Clinton is here with us. The pitch to Bonilla—

The President. I'm the good luck charm when I'm on this radio—

Q. Oh, yeah, definitely. In fact, when you were with us last year, Bobby Bonilla came up and promptly hit one over the center field wall. And he drives this one deep into right center field—

The President. No, no. Yes.

Q. This one is bouncing over the wall.

The President. Ground rule double. That's good.

Q. And right after Bonilla hit that home run, then Ripken came up, and he did the same thing. In fact, President Clinton, you broadcast that Ripken home run which was an historic night. You were part of it. So let's go back now and take a listen here. This is how it happened.

[At this point, WBAL played an audiotape of the President's remarks in 1995.]

The President. That was a great day.

Q. We've played that 500 times since then, and everybody loves that. Here's Cal the following season as we pick up again, and President Clinton is here with us. And again, everybody with such indelible memories of that great night, Mr. President. What do you think now? Cal taking ball one from Appier.

The President. Well, he's got the only two RBI's, doesn't he?

Q. Two-run single in the first inning for Cal, and now we're a 2-2 ball game.

I'm glad you were able to come over today. We thought you might be able to be here yesterday, and then we got rained out. But we're very pleased—

The President. Beautiful day today, though, isn't it?

Q. Fantastic.

The President. And the wind's not too bad inside which is good.

Q. Two and 0 to Cal Ripken. Bonilla at second.

The President. Strike.

Q. Down around the knees. Two balls and one strike.

The President. A little too low to hit, though.

Q. Did you get a chance to see Cal before the game?

The President. Yes. He baited me about going out on the pitcher's mound because last year I stood in front of the mound and started—[laughter]—so he said, you know, "That's what that mound is there for. You're supposed to step up on top of it." [Laughter]

Q. And he fouls it off back out of play.

The President. So I asked him if he were baiting me. He said, "No, no." He said, "If you don't want to go out there and do what you're supposed to do, it's all right with me." [Laughter]

Q. Well that's great. You got the Ripken treatment.

The President. So I had to go up there and stand on the mound.

Q. You're like part of the family now if he was talking to you like that. Well, you stood