

Exchange With Reporters

March 16, 1997

Recovery From Knee Surgery

Q. How are you feeling, sir?

Q. Good morning, Mr. President. How are you feeling, sir?

The President. I feel fine today. I was a little sore yesterday, you know, the first day after the operation when the pain started to wear off—I mean, the painkiller, you know, the anesthesia. But I feel fine today, and I've done 2 days of therapy, learned to use my crutches.

Hillary wanted me to come home before she left for Africa. She and Chelsea wanted me well settled, so that's what I'm doing.

Q. Is that going to be difficult for you to use crutches for the next few months?

The President. I just want to do it well. It will be an interesting experience. I just want to be careful and not make any mistakes and do it well. But I think I'll be perfectly mobile and perfectly fine.

I also want to say that the medical team I had at the Bethesda Naval Medical Center did a magnificent job. They really were wonderful, and I feel very fortunate. And the American people should know that that military medical center is a very good place, not just for the President but for everybody who is treated there.

President's Planned Travel

Q. Did they have to twist your arm to get you to delay the trip to Helsinki for a day?

The First Lady. No twisting of arms—or any other limb. [Laughter]

The President. No, because I can go back to Copenhagen and do that probably when we do the NATO meeting.

Recovery From Knee Surgery

Q. Sir, does it hurt every time you move?

The President. No.

Q. It doesn't?

The President. No. You just have to learn to use a few different muscles. But it's quite interesting. I mean, it will be a learning experience. It's like going back to school and learning some new things.

Q. Do you think this will get you any sympathy votes in Congress for any of your bills? [Laughter]

The President. I don't know, but if it does, I'll take them any way I can get them. [Laughter] I'd be very grateful if it did.

Q. Glad to have him home, Mrs. Clinton?

The First Lady. Yes, I'm very glad to have him home.

The President. Goodbye.

NOTE: The exchange began at 11:46 a.m. on the South Lawn at the White House, following the President's return from the National Naval Medical Center in Bethesda, MD, where he underwent knee surgery on March 14. A tape was not available for verification of the content of this exchange.

Statement on the Murder of John Slane in Northern Ireland

March 17, 1997

I am deeply saddened by the murder last Friday of John Slane in Belfast. Our sympathy goes out to Mr. Slane's family and friends. This horrific killing deserves universal condemnation. I hope the British authorities will quickly identify who is responsible.

As I have said so many times, nothing worth having in Northern Ireland can be achieved by killing and maiming, terror and threats. The

people of Northern Ireland deserve a future of peace and prosperity unmarred by brutality and fear in their daily lives. I urge the people of both communities to make known in every way they can their repudiation of violence by any group, for any reason. I will continue to stand with those who stand for peace, today as we commemorate the saint who brought the message of peace to Ireland, and every day.

Remarks on Withdrawal of the Nomination of Anthony Lake To Be Director of Central Intelligence and an Exchange With Reporters *March 18, 1997*

The President. Let me begin by saying that while I do understand his reasons, Tony Lake's decision to withdraw from consideration as Director of Central Intelligence is a real loss to our country and to me. He would have been an outstanding CIA Director because of his intelligence, his unquestioned integrity, his extremely valuable experience. I respect his decision because nobody should have to endure what he has endured in the course of this nomination. But make no mistake about it, it's a loss for the country.

For 4 years, Tony Lake was one of my closest advisers and one of my most trusted ones. He was an integral part of every foreign policy decision we made, and his legacy can be seen around the world, from an end to the war in Bosnia to a fresh start for peace in Haiti, from real hope for peace in the Middle East and Northern Ireland to real progress on arms control. He is a patriot, a professional, and a statesman. Our Nation will miss his service very much, and so will I.

This episode says a lot about how so much work is done in our Nation's Capital. For too long, we have allowed ordinary political processes and honest disagreements among honorable people to degenerate first into political sniping, then into political revenge. And too often, that results in political destruction that absolutely builds nothing for the American people and is not worthy of our responsibilities to them. It is past time for all of us to stop remembering who shot first and why, and instead, to start remembering why we are here and the fact that the American people sent us here to work on their concerns and their future.

The cycle of political destruction must end. And I hope we will let it end today. We can't let partisan bickering stop us from doing the work we were sent here to do. I sense that more and more Democrats and Republicans believe that and believe as I do that we have to seize this opportunity to pass a bipartisan agreement to balance the budget.

There are now some new and hopeful signs that we are in a position to do that. Last month I proposed a balanced budget plan that secures

Medicare and Medicaid, extends health care coverage to more children, strengthens education, gives working families tax relief, and protects the environment. I believe that's the best way to balance the budget. As you know, as part of that plan, the day after my Inauguration I made an offer to the Republican Congress on Medicare, proposing savings that moved half-way toward those envisioned in the most recent Republican plan. Yesterday the Republican leaders showed me flexibility on tax cuts and economic assumptions. This new flexibility is a very positive sign, and I applaud their comments. They move us closer than ever to the point where we can reach an agreement on a balanced budget that is good for the American people.

I'm also encouraged by the extensive work being done by people of good will on both sides of the aisle throughout the Congress. Now it is time to build on all this momentum and make this a season of bipartisan cooperation on the budget. I want a balanced budget plan that can win the support of majorities in both parties in both Houses in Congress.

To that end, I am announcing three steps. First, I'm asking the leaders of the Budget Committees to meet with me tomorrow before I leave for Helsinki to give me their assessment of progress in Congress and the prospect of reaching a bipartisan balanced budget agreement. Second, I'll ask my budget team to meet with the congressional budget leaders over the congressional recess. I'll instruct them to be open-minded and flexible and to work in the spirit of bipartisanship. Third, I will ask these budget officials to report back to me and to the congressional leadership at the White House after the congressional recess on the progress they have made and the best means for reaching the bipartisan agreement we all seek.

This balanced budget plan must be tough and credible. It must strengthen education and protect the environment and protect health care while extending coverage to more children. But let us recognize, balancing the budget will require cooperation from all sides. No one will achieve everything he or she wants. Everyone must be prepared to compromise if we're going