

Apr. 24 / Administration of William J. Clinton, 1997

an exemption for small businesses, the Armed Forces, and religious organizations, including schools and other educational institutions that are substantially controlled or supported by religious organizations. This later provision respects the deeply held religious beliefs of many Americans. The bill specifically prohibits preferential treatment on the basis of sexual orientation, including quotas. It does not require employers to provide special benefits.

As I indicated when I originally announced my support of this legislation in October of

1995, the bill in its current form appears to answer all the legitimate objections previously raised against it, while ensuring that Americans, regardless of their sexual orientation, can find and keep their jobs based on their ability and the quality of their work. It is designed to protect the rights of all Americans to participate in the job market without fear of unfair discrimination. I support it, and I urge all Americans to do so. And I urge Congress to pass it expeditiously.

Remarks on Senate Ratification of the Chemical Weapons Convention and an Exchange With Reporters

April 24, 1997

The President. Ladies and gentlemen, the United States Senate has served America well tonight. Because they have ratified the Chemical Weapons Convention, our troops will be less likely to face poison gas on the battlefield, our hand will be strengthened in the fight against terrorists and rogue states. We will end a century that began with the horror of chemical weapons in World War I much closer to the elimination of those kinds of weapons. And once again, America has displayed the leadership that we must demonstrate as we build a safer world for the 21st century.

Two and a half months ago, Majority Leader Lott and I put together a process to work through the concerns that some Senators had about the treaty. Our negotiating teams held 30 hours of meetings; so did groups led by Senator Biden and Senator Helms. At the end of the day, because we went the extra mile, we resolved the problems that had been raised by the vast majority of the Senators.

I thank the Majority Leader for guiding these efforts so successfully. I applaud the efforts of Senators on both sides of the aisle, including Minority Leader Daschle, Senator Biden, Senator Lugar, and Senator McCain. And I've been so gratified that in these past few weeks, so many have put politics aside to join together behind this treaty, as we saw yesterday when Senator Dole and General Powell, Brent Scowcroft, and other Republicans joined me, as they had previously.

I thank the Vice President, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and so many of our military leaders, past and present, who also came out strongly in support of this treaty.

This vote is an example of America working as it should, Democrats and Republicans together, putting our country first, reaching across party lines, reaching for the common good. This vote is vivid proof that we are stronger as a nation when we work together. It's true when it comes to our leadership in the world; it's also true when it comes to dealing with our challenges here at home: strengthening our education system, finishing the job of reforming welfare, fighting crime, defending the environment, and finishing the job of balancing the budget.

The Chemical Weapons Convention truly was made in America, under two of my predecessors. It is right for America. Now it has been ratified in America, and it will make our future more secure. For that, on behalf of the American people, I am profoundly grateful to the United States Senate.

Budget Agreement

Q. Mr. President, Senator Lott said today that, in light of his support of this treaty, that you should show, quote, "similar courage against your base and make budget concessions that might upset Democrats." Are you willing to anger Democrats to balance the budget, if that's what it takes?

The President. Well, first of all, a majority of Republicans supported this treaty and all the Democrats. And I think we can get a balanced budget supported by a majority of Republicans and a majority of Democrats in both Houses if we work together in good faith. This was not some unilateral move. This was an honest, good-faith negotiation. We put 28 clarifying conditions on to the treaty that we worked very hard with Senator Lott and others with.

I am—what I am willing to do, I'm willing to work through this process on the budget just the way we worked through this. I'm very encouraged by it, and I think that America should be encouraged by it. If we work together in a very practical way to do what's in the national interest, I think we can get there.

Q. Mr. President, how far apart are you right now with the Republican leadership and the Democrats in Congress in achieving a balanced budget agreement?

The President. I don't want to characterize it. They're working hard, and they're working in good faith. And I want to leave it like that.

I'm going to—we're going to talk tomorrow. It's late. Let's go to bed.

Missing Military Trucks in Texas

Q. Mr. President, we're told that two military trucks are missing tonight, one carrying four unarmed Air Force missiles, the other said to be carrying machine guns and mortar. Mr. President, we're told that they are overdue 3 to 4 days. What's being done to find these trucks, and is foul play suspected?

The President. I've just been briefed on it. The FBI is working on it—working hard on it. It's my understanding that one of the trucks has been recovered, and that the other one has weapons that are inert and cannot cause any harm. But we're working on it. We'll have more reports tomorrow.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:51 p.m. in the Briefing Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to former Senator Bob Dole; Gen. Colin Powell, USA (ret.), former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff; and Gen. Brent Scowcroft, USAF (ret.), former National Security Adviser.

Remarks Prior to Discussions With Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto of Japan and an Exchange With Reporters

April 25, 1997

President Clinton. Everybody in? Let me say it's a great honor for me to host my friend Prime Minister Hashimoto here at the White House. We had a nice visit last night, and he was here at the time the Chemical Weapons Convention passed, so we shared a moment of celebration. And we have a busy agenda today, and of course we'll have a press conference later and we'll do our best to answer your questions.

But I think it's important to reaffirm that the relationship the United States has with Japan is unique and comprehensive and profoundly important to our future and to the stability and prosperity and peace of the world. And we intend to keep working on it and make it better.

Mr. Prime Minister.

Prime Minister Hashimoto. I find myself being a very lucky man. I was lucky enough to be invited by Bill last night, after arriving here in

the evening, and I could share the greatest moment with Bill for the wonderful passage of the splendid Convention in the Senate. The fact that I was able to share that wonderful moment together with the President, itself, makes my trip to Washington worthwhile.

I see all the familiar and very inquisitive faces in this room, so there will be many questions asked of me, but even with that fact, I'm very happy that I was able to share the moment with the President last night. And last night I was very appreciative of the kindness of Bill because he got Mickey Kantor on the phone without any fighting between us. [Laughter]

President Clinton. He tried to get him to switch sides, but he didn't do it. [Laughter]