

### **Exchange With Reporters Prior to a Meeting With the Close-Up Foundation**

*January 29, 1993*

#### **Gays in the Military**

**Q.** Mr. President, when are you going to announce your policy on gays in the military? What time today?

**The President.** Well, we're waiting for an analysis of the court decision now and how it affects what we would have to do anyway. So, that sort of—we were here, as you know, last night with Senator Nunn, and I thought it was quite close to an agreement that would give the military what I think ought to be done without anybody agreeing to change their position now—give them a chance to look into what the practical problems are. But this court decision may change that, and we are looking at it. And I will probably have something to say later today.

**Q.** But do you—decision because—get through now?

**The President.** Well, we talked about it a little last night, but I wanted to—the staff stayed here quite late. I thought they ought to get a chance to get a little sleep and then think through it. So, as you know, there is virtual agreement on everything but one issue anyway. So, you are trying to figure out how this court case fits, that and whether it changes anything for either side.

So, we'll talk about it this morning and then try to resolve it soon.

**Q.** Are you concerned, Mr. President, that this controversy this week has given the American people the wrong idea of what your priorities are?

**The President.** Yes, I do. Of course, I didn't bring it up; people in the Senate did. I just tried—I have not, frankly, spent very much time on it compared to the time I'm spending on the economy, which is what I was elected to do. And we've been working on that hard. So, I'm just going to keep doing what I was elected to do and try to stick up for what I believe and see if we can work through this.

NOTE: The President spoke at 8:37 a.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. A tape was not

available for verification of the content of these remarks.

### **Teleconference Remarks on the Family and Medical Leave Bill**

*January 29, 1993*

**The Vice President.** Ladies and gentlemen, can you hear me? This is Vice President Al Gore. I am going to introduce the President to you in just a moment. I want to start by thanking all of you for joining us on this conference call. It's especially important for your point of view to be heard by the Congress and by the Nation because this family and medical leave act will be acted upon next week by the Congress.

What's different this time, of course, is we have in President Bill Clinton a President who is in favor of it and who is prepared to sign it into law. So with the Congress and the President working together in behalf of the American people, we feel pretty good about the chances that this will be enacted. But the main reason for enacting it is you, and we're looking forward to hearing from you.

Before introducing the President, I want to mention some people in the Congress who have worked long and hard on this: Chairman Bill Ford in the House of Representatives; and Pat Williams from Montana; Marge Roukema, a Republican from New Jersey, who's been a real leader on this issue; Bill Clay from Missouri; and Pat Schroeder from Colorado. And then on the Senate side: Chris Dodd, who has fought for this tirelessly, along with Chairman Ted Kennedy; and Kit Bond, a Republican from Missouri; Dan Coats, a Republican from Indiana, both of whom have been very helpful in pushing this idea forward.

But again, what it's all about is you and the experiences that you have had. And with that, I want to turn it over to President Bill Clinton.

**The President.** Thank you very much, Al. And hello, ladies and gentlemen. I want to thank you for agreeing to join us on this telephone call today and through this telephone

call to speak to the people in your own State and throughout the United States.

One of the things that we are determined to do here in Washington is open the Government to you and never let people forget, who are here making decisions, that you and lives are at stake and that these matters that we discuss and vote upon here really do affect real people out in our country.

So with that, let me just now go from one person to the next and let each of you say something about how this family and medical leave act might affect your life in the future or could have affected your life in the past or the fact that we didn't have it affected you. And I'd like to start with someone whose situation I'm personally familiar with, Kathy Censullo from New Hampshire. Kathy, are you there?

**Ms. Censullo.** Yes, I am.

**The President.** Would you talk to the other folks and to the people who are listening to us all over the country?

**Ms. Censullo.** Yes, back in 1989, when my son, Anthony, was born, he was born with half of his heart missing. And my husband and I saw our places with our son, as do all Americans. And while we were down at Boston Children's Hospital, my husband was given the ultimatum to return to work immediately. And he chose to stay with our son for a short period of time until he was breathing on his own. And he was told at that time that it would be better to suffer one loss than two. And when he asked what that meant, he was told that the second loss could possibly be his job and that he'd better learn to separate his personal problems from his business obligations. And at that point, they sent us a telegram firing my husband from his job. We not only lost our income, we lost our home and for the past 3 years had quite a bit of financial devastation. But we have our son. He's come through three open heart surgeries and is still with us, as you can hear. So we're quite happy.

**The President.** Thank you very much. He sounds great. And I hope that no other parents will ever have to make the decision that you did after this bill becomes law.

**Ms. Censullo.** Well, I feel that it will become law, and I feel it should have become law the past two times that it was vetoed.

The American public wants it. Both Houses want it. And I don't see any reason why it shouldn't be in law. It's only going to protect people. It's going to help people, and it's not going to hurt anybody.

**The President.** Thank you very much.

**Ms. Censullo.** Thank you for having me.

**The President.** Good luck to you. Your son sounds great.

**Ms. Censullo.** Oh, he's doing great. He's doing phenomenal.

**The President.** I'd like to now go to someone that Vice President and Mrs. Gore met at the Johns Hopkins Hospital when their own son was recuperating from his accident, Mitch Philpott from Georgia. Mitch, can you hear me?

**Mr. Philpott.** Yes, sir, I can hear you well.

**The President.** Why don't you talk to us a little bit about your situation.

**Mr. Philpott.** Yes, sir. When Brett's seizures got bad enough and he was having 150–200 seizures a day, we were given the option for Brett to have brain surgery to stop the seizures, since medication wouldn't do it. My ex-wife asked for time off, leave to take care of Brett and to go to the surgery. And she was told she couldn't be given the time off; she had to resign. I was told I had to resign my job; I couldn't have the time off.

It was just like the lady before said, you were given a choice between being with your child or keeping a job. And there was no choice. No job was that important.

We were lucky enough to meet the Vice President and his wife. And through the campaign everybody talked about family values, and we saw that they know what family values really are. And this family leave bill will help just all kinds of families. To be going through that situation with your child is bad enough, the money part of it's bad enough, but to know that after it's all over you've got to go find a job is really tough.

**The Vice President.** Mitch, this is Al Gore. Let me say briefly it was great to see you and Brett and Cindy at the Faces of Hope luncheon. By coincidence, just yesterday the President asked me to go to Johns Hopkins to speak with the Democratic Members of the House at a retreat, and while the doctors and nurses that you and I got to know when our families were there at the hospital

were present, and we had a nice reunion. But it's good talking to you, and thank you for lending your voice and describing your experience in the effort to make sure this new proposal becomes law next week. Good to talk to you.

**The President.** Thank you, Mitch.

**Mr. Philpott.** Thank you, sir. We'll keep our fingers crossed, too.

**The President.** Thanks. I'd like to now call on Ann McGowan from California. Ann, can you hear me?

**Ms. McGowan.** Yes, hello.

**The President.** Hello. Tell us a little bit about your experience.

**Ms. McGowan.** Okay, my experience is a little different, because mine was with my mother-in-law. Nine years ago she moved in with us, and we had to take care of her. It was difficult finding adequate care at a price that you could afford; \$19 an hour for professional help was, you know, unheard of as far as I was concerned.

But anyway, with my job situation, as my mother-in-law's condition deteriorated, then my job situation became, because of the stress, became more difficult to deal with. So, in 1990 I, well, I took early retirement. It was not my intention to retire after 25 years, because I had planned to do another 5, but I had to stay home to take care of her. I earned less money than my husband, so that's the way the decision went.

With her, she's doing as well as can be expected for a 92-year-old lady right now. And now I have my mother with us, so we have two. So I have some experience as a caregiver.

I think the family leave bill would have been very, very helpful for me, had I been able to take off work for a period of time in order to find competent help at a price that I could have afforded. I think this will do a lot for many people in the country.

**The President.** Thank you very much. I'd like to now call on Eva Skubel from Connecticut. Eva, can you hear me?

**Ms. Skubel.** Yes, Mr. President, I can hear you. First of all I have to say, from a family perspective, your presence and Vice President Gore's presence in the White House couldn't come any sooner for families.

Our situation occurred back in 1988. My daughter was born with a rare brain disease, and her health had declined significantly back in '88. I was pregnant, had a very difficult pregnancy. And we were told that Jacinta, my daughter, would probably not make it. She was in the intensive care unit, very, very, very ill, and my husband had requested from his company 5 weeks of leave, either to help us prepare for Jacinta's funeral or hopefully get Jacinta home. And he was asked to leave his job.

We were left without an income, without health insurance benefits; we couldn't continue paying for them through COBRA. And we were devastated. And our daughter is still—requires quite a significant amount of skilled care. She's still very ill, and so without this legislation being signed into law, we have the great possibility of facing that situation again, and that's a terrifying position to be in.

So what family medical leave will mean to my family is that—and all families—that we will never, you know, we won't have to face those types of choices. There is no choice, as someone else said, you know, when you have to choose between your job and your family, you must go with your family.

It's not just a piece of legislation; it's real family support. And I thank you for recognizing families and including them in the policy, making them partners in the policy.

**The President.** Thank you very much. Let me just say to all of you this will just be the first of many initiatives that we hope to push that will strengthen the American family. And it will prove that we can value families again and build up the capacity of mothers and fathers to work together to bring their children up and to deal with their parents when they have the courage and the generosity to try to care for them. I really appreciate what all of you have been through.

The next person I would like to ask to speak is Carmen Maya from Illinois. Carmen, can you hear me?

**Ms. Maya.** Yes, I can, Mr. President. I feel like I won the lottery.

**The President.** Well, this is a good gamble you're involved in today.

**Ms. Maya.** Yes, it is.

**The President.** Tell us about your situation.

**Ms. Maya.** Well, Mr. President, I'm a single mother of three children. And during my pregnancy I was let go because—oh, I'm so nervous.

**The President.** You're doing fine.

**Ms. Maya.** I had maternity problems and I asked for—and then I delivered a special child. I was supposed to be able to return back to work, and just because I needed 12 weeks of family and medical leave, my job was no longer open for me. And it's put a lot of hardship and stress on our family. And I just can't believe in our modern society, so advanced in many ways, people still lose their jobs when they have compounding family or medical needs that keep them out of work for a short time.

**The President.** I just want to emphasize to everyone who's listening to this that you are a single mother with three children who wants to work and not be on public assistance.

**Ms. Maya.** No, I'm not; still to this day, I'm not on any kind of public assistance at all. I work part-time, and I'm going back to school. I've taken the negative part of this and turned it into a positive. I'm getting a better education now so my family won't have to go through the hardship that I've gone through.

I would like to study to become a social worker and help other people, so they don't have to go through the nightmares that I have experienced.

**The President.** Good for you. Well, we'll try to help you here next week.

**Ms. Maya.** I hope so, Mr. President.

**The President.** Thank you very much.

**Ms. Maya.** Thank you for taking time for the American family and their values.

**The President.** Thank you.

Is Phyllis Wisneski from Kansas on the line?

**Ms. Wisneski.** Yes, I am.

**The President.** Phyllis, tell us a little about your situation.

**Ms. Wisneski.** Well, I'm a single parent, too. And my son when he was 7 years old had pneumonia. He was in the hospital for about 10 days and then needed to recuperate at home for about a week. And I worked at

a smaller hospital at that point in time, and they only had 5 days of annual leave a year that you were allowed. And of course, I had to take more than that with him and lost my job at that time.

I ended up having to take three part-time jobs after that and scramble for money, try to make ends meet, and get back on top of things after he recuperated. And it was quite a hardship for some time.

The second instance I had was about 3 or 4 years ago when my mother had Alzheimer's and my father couldn't care for her anymore at home by himself. So, I did have to take time off from my job then to go down and pack all their things and move them up here to Kansas with me. Because I had a more lenient employer at that time and they did allow time off for family problems, they allowed me time off to go and move them up here. And then whenever mom was in the hospital or needed special doctors appointments or whatever, they did allow me time off for those things. So, they were very good at working with me. And it really was—I just can't even tell you the amount of difference in hardship to not add that concern of losing your job on top of the problems in the family as well.

**The President.** You're really the first person we talked to who knows both the bad and the good side of this. You know what it will be like when this is the law for all American families.

**Ms. Wisneski.** Yes, it really did take a big burden off, because I still had my son at home, plus I had my parents I was taking care of. So, I had all those responsibilities. And again, this responsibility falls on the woman more often than not. And a lot of women are single parents. And it leaves them in a very bad position if they lose their job. That's their only income. So it's a real problem.

**The President.** Well, I really appreciate your talking with us. And I appreciate your hanging in there with both your son and your mother and—

**Ms. Wisneski.** I appreciate your compassion. I'm really glad you're in the White House.

**The President.** Thank you. I hope I get to sign this bill next week.

**Ms. Wisneski.** Me, too.

**The President.** I'd like to now call on Brenda Iles from Louisiana. Brenda, are you on the line?

**Ms. Iles.** Yes, good morning, Mr. President.

**The President.** Good morning.

**Ms. Iles.** My name is Brenda Iles, and I'm from Duretta, Louisiana. And I'd like to tell you my story. On January 10th, 1985, I worked for the Sears Roebuck store here in Duretta. And my husband and I had decided that we would adopt a child after I had had health problems. And we had already had a son who was eight at the time. We put in for adoption, which took 2 years. So when I needed character references, of course, most of my time was spent with my employees, so I asked the management to give me character references. And they, you know, they readily agreed to give me the references.

It took 2 years, and when we initially received this our daughter, she weighed 5 pounds—a cold day in January—wasn't even eating properly. I walked into the Sears store and asked for time off, and they immediately told me that they were having problems, and they needed to call higher management. And when they did, he said to ask her to resign; Sears does not have to allow any time off. It's up to the discretion of the company whether or not you're allowed to be off.

And at that time, I was devastated because the day before I had just charged \$2,000 worth of baby things on my Sears account, not knowing that I was not going to have a job. When I realized that I had no choice but to be off because day care does not begin after 8 weeks. So you have to have a parent there.

And Mr. President, I do realize that these children in America need to bond with their parents. Those first weeks are critical in a child's life. And I think that that's the reason a lot of times you can see young people can take a gun to their parents' head is because they never actually had a chance to bond with them.

I don't feel like it's right in this country for a working person to have to make a decision between their family and their job, because certainly we do need both. I believe that it is—it was a punishment for me and

my family; the house that we had built, the dream home we had built for our daughter, we no longer have because we had to file bankruptcy. We had to pay all of the child's care.

We took a Government child, and I feel like the Government should pay back something to the working family. I think there should be some type of an incentive to get more working people to adopt. Maybe America could have some type of a tax credit to allow that person to adopt; or maybe it could be some way that the redtape can be cut out of adoption to make it easier for people to adopt.

I just feel like it was a punishment when we adopted our daughter, who is 8 years old now and doing very well. And we just decided that if we had to live in a tent, which we almost did, that we would just be together. And so I'm just grateful that you do realize the necessity of passing this bill, because it will not be just automatically handed to a working person by an employer. And I just thank you very much for giving me this opportunity, Mr. President.

**The Vice President.** Thank you, Brenda. This is Al Gore. Let me say that those who have worked on this legislation in the Congress included adoption, along with the birth of a child and the illness of a family member, for exactly the kinds of reasons you have brought to life in your statement here. And bless you for finding room in your heart and in your family for this little girl. It's so good that she's doing so great. Good luck to you.

**Ms. Iles.** Thank you very much.

**The President.** And I also agree with you that we should do what we can to encourage more adoptions. We'll be talking more about that later.

Now we're going to Pennsylvania to Joann Mapp. Joann, are you on the line?

**Ms. Mapp.** Yes, I am.

**The President.** Could you tell us a little about your story?

**Ms. Mapp.** Okay. I'm a single parent, and I work in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. I have a girl and a boy twin. They're 5 years of age. When my daughter was 2, she was hospitalized for salmonella poisoning, and I had to take off from my job to stay in the hospital with her and care for her. And again, she

got sick a year later, and she had hepatitis, which took me home again to stay with her and care for her.

But unlike your other callers, my daughter's sickness was short-term. But if it had been a long-term sickness and I didn't have time where I could stay home with her, your bill would be a blessing, because then I would be allowed to stay there and care for my child and make sure that she's taken care of and recuperating properly. And just being there with her is a blessing.

Those other parents, I sympathize with them losing their jobs. But fortunately, I didn't lose mine. And this bill being passed would ensure that I won't lose my job because I have their security behind the bill, giving me the time to take off to care for my child when she's sick. This is not only for single parents. It's for married couples and adoptive parents and everything. If you could pass this bill, it would just be a blessing.

**The President.** Thank you so much.

**Ms. Mapp.** And thank you for allowing me to speak and represent the people in Pennsylvania.

**The President.** Thank you. I'd like now to call on Linda and Rudy Fernandez in Massachusetts.

Can you hear me? Is that your family with you?

**Coworker.** Yes, it's just my employees.

**The President.** Your supporters?

**Coworker.** My coworkers.

**The President.** Your coworkers? I thought it might have been your triplets.

**Coworker.** No, my twins are here, though. My twins are with me here.

**The President.** Go ahead.

**Mrs. Fernandez.** Good morning, Mr. President. This is Linda and Rudy. We're the ones with the triplets.

**The President.** Oh, great.

**Mrs. Fernandez.** But we do want to say thank you for all of your wonderful help in getting this bill passed and for the help that you have received from Senator Kennedy's office, from Senator Dodd, Senator Coats, all of those people that were so wonderful to us when we testified.

He began working on the family leave bill even before we needed it, when I was a social worker with a child protection agency and

realized that some of the child neglect cases that were coming through were nothing more than a situation where the parent needed to take their child for care but could not do it because they couldn't get off of work. And we didn't realize at that time that we were going to need the bill ourselves. But years ago when our triplets were born, my leave policy wasn't sufficient enough to have them up and ready to go to day care.

When my job situation came that I had to make a decision to go to work or to give up my job, and my husband's company didn't have a family leave policy. And even though he saved up vacation for it, they denied him the vacation. I was in the hospital, unable to make medical decisions, and he was not available to make them because his company would not give him the time off.

**Mr. Fernandez.** Which at that time was—good morning, Mr. President.

**The President.** Good morning, Rudy.

**Mr. Fernandez.** At that time, the only policy they had was for women on maternity leave, but it was the shortest time they could possibly have—for the husband. Of course, with the triplets, the husband has to be involved. There's just no way one person could do it by themselves.

**Mrs. Fernandez.** So, eventually, what happened was that even though my husband asked for vacation time when the boys came home, he was going to work every day and staying up all night to help care for them. And eventually, he lost his job over it. We were saving up to buy a house. And, of course, once we lost the job, we had medical bills to pay, because we lost our benefits. What we've saved for the American dream now has just been used to pay bills. And now we don't know if we'll even be able to achieve the American dream.

I think this bill is very necessary. And one of the things I would say is, people who think it won't happen to them, it can happen to you. We never expected that we would need it. And I know that there are other couples out there that are in similar situations. And they need it, and I hope that we can get it through for them.

**The President.** Thank you so much. How are your kids doing?

**Mrs. Fernandez.** We're trying to keep them from cutting you off the phone.

**The President.** Well, they might become national celebrities if they did that. [Laughter]

**Mrs. Fernandez.** Can you say "hi"?

**Mr. Fernandez.** Can you say "hi," guys?

**Children.** No.

**The President.** [Laughter] That's probably good, too. Thank you very much, and good luck to you.

Our last participant is Mr. James Callor from Utah. James, are you on the line?

**Mr. Callor.** Yes, sir.

**The President.** Could you tell the people who are listening to us all over the country about your situation, your story?

**Mr. Callor.** Okay. On March the 13th, in 1980, my little girl, Jamie Anne, they found cancer on her; it was a neuroblastoma tumor. They found it up at the Primary Children Hospital in Salt Lake. And they done the surgery, and we brought her home. She was doing good. And then—I'm jumping around because I'm nervous.

**The President.** You're doing fine. Just relax and tell the people your story.

**Mr. Callor.** All right, in 1982, July the first is when she died, and a week prior, I asked the company that I was working for—and I had sick leave; I had vacation; I had the whole 9 yards, but I still felt that the company could have let me off, which I didn't care if I didn't get paid. I just wanted the time off, which I took the time anyway.

But to get back to what we were talking about—anyway, she passed away. And my deal is like when you go to a company and you ask them something and, I mean, these people never had no heart. And that's all I told the superintendent. I says, I hope one day something happens. And I didn't mean it, but I just told him, I hope one day if something happens, your boss will say like what you told me. And I didn't lose my job, but I lost my little girl.

**The President.** Thank you for telling us that.

**Mr. Callor.** And if you need any assistance or whatever, I'd be more than glad to come over there, because I could tell you from base one, right up to the time of her death. Maybe we could get—

**The President.** Bless you. Just telling it today will help very much.

**Mr. Callor.** Okay.

**The President.** Ladies and gentlemen, I know I speak for Vice President Gore when I thank all of you for your courage and your support on behalf of your own children and your own families and working families all across this country. We believe that next week, the Congress and the leaders who have worked on this in both parties will help our Nation join the 72 other countries who already have family and medical leave. And if it happens, it will be because of people like you and for people like you.

I think a lot of you said this, but I just want to close with this: It's easy for people to talk about family values, but it's also important for us to value families. And your Government is going to be given a chance to value the American family next week. We hope and pray they'll do it. And if it does happen, you all can claim a lot of the credit.

Thank you so much for being with us today, and have a wonderful time. And keep those kids making that good noise. I like to hear it.

Bless you all. Goodbye.

NOTE: The teleconference began at 11:41 a.m., and the President spoke from the Oval Office at the White House.

## The President's News Conference

January 29, 1993

### Gays in the Military

**The President.** Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. I'm sorry, we had a last-minute delay occasioned by another issue, not this one.

The debate over whether to lift the ban on homosexuals in the military has, to put it mildly, sparked a great deal of interest over the last few days. Today, as you know, I have reached an agreement, at least with Senator Nunn and Senator Mitchell, about how we will proceed in the next few days. But first I would like to explain what I believe about this issue and why, and what I have decided to do after a long conversation, and a very