AUTHENTICATED
U.S. GOVERNMENT
INFORMATION
GPO

Week Ending Friday, April 9, 1993

Question-and-Answer Session With the American Society of Newspaper Editors in Annapolis, Maryland

April 1, 1993

Bosnia

Q. Mr. President, I support your vision and am grateful to be here for this historic speech. As a journalist and a citizen I am deeply anguished over the reports from Bosnia: deliberate, premeditated rape, the shelling of innocent civilians, families forced from their homes, children crushed to death in desperate attempts to escape. I'd like to ask two brief questions. Do we have a national interest in checking the spread of greater Serbian ethnic cleansing in the Balkans? And are we losing our credibility as a nation as this horrifying aggression in a sovereign state continues without your unrestrained, forceful, and public condemnation of it?

The President. Yes, we have a national interest in limiting ethnic cleansing. I disagree with you that I have not given a forceful and public condemnation of it. I think the issue is whether you think the United States is capable of doing what Europe has not in somehow forcing its will upon Bosnia and the former Yugoslavia. Since I have become President we have dramatically stiffened the embargo on Serbia. We have hurt them very badly economically, but the war continues. We do not have the votes in the United Nations at the present time to lift the embargo on arms to the Bosnians. If we did, it would endanger the humanitarian mission there carried on by the French and British, who oppose lifting the embargo, and they have kept many people alive.

I decided that I would support the Vance-Owen peace process when it was clear that that was what our European allies wanted to do and that that was the best vehicle for a potential peace. Now, the Bosnians and the Croats have signed on to that, the Muslims and the Croats in Bosnia. We are waiting to see whether the Serbs will. If they do not, we will then have to contemplate where we go from there. But I would remind you that when I became President the situation there was already grave. We had a policy through the United Nations which I think was of limited effectiveness, which I have tried to stiffen as well as I could.

But the United States has many commitments and many interests, and I would just remember that the thing that I have not been willing to do is to immediately take action the end of which I could not see. Whatever I want to do, I want to do it with vigor and wholeheartedly. I want it to have a reasonable prospect of success. And I have done the best I could with the cards that I found on the table when I became President. If you have other ideas about what you think I ought to do that would minimize the loss of life, I would be glad to have them.

Q. Sir, do you condemn it here today?

The President. Absolutely. I condemn it, and I have condemned it repeatedly and thoroughly. And I have done everything I could to increase the pressure of the international community on the outrages perpetrated in Bosnia by the aggressors and to get people to stand up against ethnic cleansing. The question is what are we capable of doing about it from the United States. If you look at the responses that have been mustered so far from the European states that are even closer and that have a memory of what happened when Hitler, who was not shy about using his power, had hundreds of thousands of people in the former Yugoslavia and even then was unable to subdue it entirely.

I think you have to look at what our realistic options are for action. The question is not whether we condemn what's going on. Ethnic cleansing is an outrage, and it is an idea which should die, which should not be able

to be expanded. The question is, what can we do?

Now, I have said that the United States would be prepared to join with a United Nations effort in supporting a peacekeeping process that was entered into in good faith. If the Serbs refuse to do that, then we will all have to reassess our position. But we must be careful not to use words that will outstrip our capacity to back them up. That is a grave error for any great nation, and one I will try not to commit.

Freedom of the Press

Q. This is—[*inaudible*]—he is one of the leading editors at Izvestia, Moscow—[*inaudible*]—I hope you will take a question from him. My question, Mr. President: His newspaper in Russia has had deep trouble because of its criticisms of Parliament and Parliament's reaction to that. You in this country have taken some hits, some heavy hits in the campaign and as President from a critical, probative, intrusive, at times abusive press. I wonder if you could give us your feelings, perhaps, words of philosophy as to how you view press freedom given its critical and at times abusive nature?

The President. If you have in a democratic society any freedom enshrined in the Constitution, it is as certain as the Sun rising in the morning that the freedom will be abused. Think of any freedom enshrined in the Constitution. They are all capable of abuse, some in different ways than others. The freedom of speech is abused every day in the country. The freedom of the press, of course, can be abused. Other freedoms can be. People can claim to be practicing religion when perhaps they aren't. That is the price we pay for freedom, and we are stronger because of it.

I think that no one has done better for 200 years than Thomas Jefferson did when he said—and Thomas Jefferson got a pretty rough press, too, from time to time if you go back and read how people worked on him. My consolation is no one remembers the people who falsely blasphemed him in print. [*Laughter*] But Thomas Jefferson said that if he had to choose between maintaining the Government and the freedom of the press, he would choose the freedom of the press because democracy could not exist without it. And I agree with that. And Government restraint in the face of criticism is in some ways the most important test of a true democracy.

Trade Negotiations and Russia

Q. I wish to welcome you to the Free State of Maryland. Four times during the term of your predecessor the leaders of the Group of Seven industrial democracies assembled in early July, and each time they pledged their personal prestige to a GATT agreement, the new world reform of trade regulations. Each time they failed. My question is this: When you go to the Group of Seven summit in July, are you going to renew that pledge? And secondly, and this is pertinent to what you've been talking about, if we don't have a new GATT agreement, is there any way Russia will be able to enter the world trading system in a way that will lead to its evolution from its present situation?

The President. Well, as you know—first let me answer the first question. Yes, I will renew the pledge, and I will hope to do it without having the international press corps laugh since they've now heard it four times. We got an agreement on agriculture, so-called Blair House accord, which I hope will stand up in the wake of the recent elections in Europe. If it does, I am frankly optimistic that we will be able to proceed to a GATT agreement. There are other outstanding issues, but on balance the United States would be much better off with it.

We need to maintain a commitment to global economic growth in ways that are good for the wealthy countries of the world. As I said in my speech, one of the great challenges is for a wealthy country not only to maintain its technological lead and its capacity to generate growth but also its capacity to generate jobs.

In the 1980's Europe had at least two significant economic recoveries and generated no jobs. That's the thing that's bothering me now. This recovery allegedly started a long time ago, but the unemployment rate is higher than it was at the depth of the recession, and that's because we are now finding some of the same difficulties. So, I think the GATT

agreement can help that, and I will do what I can to get it.

The answer to your second question is not so simple. I believe Russia would be better off if it could be brought into the international trading system with a new GATT agreement, but the leaders of the G–7 this year obviously are the Japanese. This is Japan's turn to lead, and the Government of Japan has issued an invitation to President Yeltsin to attend the G–7 meeting. And as you know, on April 14th and 15th the foreign ministers and finance ministers of the G–7 are meeting in Tokyo to talk about what we can do in multilateral ways to help the process of Russian reform.

So, I believe a lot can be done even if there's no new GATT agreement. Indeed, I would argue that for the kinds of things which need to be worked out for Russia to really benefit from trade and for the rest of us to benefit from it, involve more either ad hoc relationships between businesses and governments dealing with Russia or changes within Russia itself relating to property rights, privatization, the reliability of contracts, the freeing up of the ability to contract in the energy area, and things of that kind.

I should have let you answer that question.

Russia

Q. Mr. President, I am absolutely sure that millions and millions of Russians would be really proud to listen to the words you have just said about my country. Unfortunately, we have not a lot of politicians who are able to do the same. Let me just add one thing. Russians are not just settling from new changes. There are millions and millions of young people who don't care about communism at all, and they enjoy new freedom and new situations. Many of them don't know who was Stalin or who was Lenin, but they do know who is William Clinton. And so here is my question: If a future friend shows once again that the great majority of Russians are committed to democracy and free market economy, can we expect this year your visit to Russia?

The President. If I gave you the answer that I want to give you, half of my Cabinet would have a heart attack—[*laughter*]—simply because I haven't discussed it with anyone. Let me say that I think I should follow the same practice I always do. I can't commit to a specific date, but if the process of reform stays alive in Russia, I want very much to go back there.

I had the honor to be in your country, briefly, 3 days before Boris Yeltsin was elected, as a completely anonymous citizen who was invited to come just for a few days. So I was able to walk the streets, to talk to people, to observe what was going on. I was immensely impressed. I had not been in Russia for over 20 years. Everybody in America now knows I went to Russia. We found that out in the Presidential campaign. I enjoyed that trip, too. [*Laughter*]

I would very much like to go back, very much.

Ross Perot

Q. I'd like to head back to the domestic front, if I could. Ross Perot spoke to us yesterday, and he said as he travels around the country he finds his supporters asking him about and upset about two recent events in Washington. I'd like to ask you about both of them. One is the dismissal of Jay Stephens as District attorney as he was pursuing the Rostenkowski case in the postage stamp for cash case. And the other was the story about the general who was supposedly told at the White House that he should leave quickly because the White House staff was not comfortable with uniformed military personnel. Could you comment on both of those?

The President. I will, and then I want to ask you a question. First of all, the United States attorney in Washington, DC, was not dismissed. They were all replaced, and they will all be replaced just like the Republicans replaced them all when President Carter was defeated by President Reagan. And in fact, many of them got, including the United States attorney in Washington, DC, got to serve extra time because of the difficulty in getting a new Attorney General. We did not replace any of them until we had a new Attorney General.

There is a provision now for appointing interim U.S. attorneys from people who are of long service within each office. There is no reason to believe that any particular case will be pursued in a different manner. But

I think you could make a very compelling case that that United States attorney and others served longer than they would have normally because there was not an Attorney General confirmed on the day I became President. Everybody else in my Cabinet was confirmed. So to say that that person was singled out is absurd.

The real flip side is some of the people in the other party are saying, why didn't we leave him in there all by himself because this is the most important case in America and no one else can pursue it. I just dispute that. I just don't agree with that. There is no evidence to support that. We followed a uniform policy that was exactly like the one followed by previous administrations, except we started later in time.

Secondly, the other story, like all those military stories, was an abject lie. And thank God some people in the press have finally started pointing it out and have even expressed some shame that they were guilty of printing those kinds of rumors. Some of the press have begun to print letters from people at the Pentagon who have been disputing some of these specific stories like the lieutenant general that was allegedly told by someone on the White House staff that she didn't speak to people in the military. Those kinds of stories they are all just made up out of whole cloth. And people who run them based on gossip or people who talk about them from podiums ought to be ashamed of themselves, without knowing they're true.

You know, Mr. Perot came to Washington the other day and attacked my Chief of Staff as not being a real business person, and he had to call him on the phone and personally apologize the next day. I mean, people can say anything from the podium. I'd be more interested in why my economic program, which is 85 percent what Ross Perot recommended in the campaign, except we raised taxes less on the middle class, more on the wealthy, and don't have unspecified health care savings, hasn't been endorsed since it's almost identical to the one he ran on.

I don't think we ought to be out here rumormongering myself. I think it does very little to support the public interest.

Public-Private Partnership

Q. Mr. President, in your speech you alluded to a global economy and also to the Marshall plan in the days in which this country stood alone as an economic power without competition. What, sir, do you feel is your responsibility and that of the Federal Government in assuring that this country's industrial might remains competitive in an intensely competitive environment in which competitors enjoy a different and more supportive relationship with their government?

The President. Well, I'm trying to change that in this country, as you know, by changing the whole nature of the relationship between Government and business. I want to have a Tax Code which rewards investment more. I want to have a strategy of partnership in the new technologies which will produce the lion's share of the jobs for the 21st century.

I think that it is imperative. If you look at what works, if you look at the high-wage, high-growth economies, Government must be a partner with the private sector. There should be limitations on the partnership. The Government can't pick winners and losers, but there are plainly some functions that if not embraced by Government will not be done properly.

And I might point out that most of the countries of the world with advanced economies are governed by what would be called their Republican Parties, if we used the Democratic-Republican parlance in other countries. And yet, every one of them has a more aggressive public-private partnership than we do when it comes to educating and training the work force, when it comes to investing in civilian technologies for jobs for the 21st century, when it comes to maintaining competitive policies that will guarantee at least that they'll have a chance to generate high-wage, high-growth jobs. And I think my responsibility is to try to implement an American version of that kind of policy.

Press Coverage

Q. Mr. President, how would you assess the coverage of your administration by the Nation's news media, particularly newspapers?

The President. Good. [*Laughter*]

Q. It doesn't have to be that short an answer. [*Laughter*]

The President. Well, first of all, it's different in different places, but let me say on balance I think it's been remarkably fair and thorough. The only frustrations that I feel since I've been President relate far more to what I would call almost the commercial imperatives that are on the press that have nothing to do with anybody trying to be unfair in their coverage. If I might, let me just give you one example.

I saw a survey recently that was reported somewhere, I'm embarrassed I don't remember where. They were asking the American people, this survey, is the President spending enough time on the economy, is the President spending enough time on health care, and a bunch of other questions. Only half the people said I was spending enough time on the economy even though that's what I spend all my time on. By two to one the people said I was spending enough time on health care. Why is that? Because the effort of the health care task force, chaired by my wife, to come up with a health care program is the subject of intense speculation because it hasn't been presented yet. So, given the propensity of people in Washington to leak, there's a new story every day about some little paper or another that's come out and all that. And then they have these public hearings, so there's a lot of anticipation.

The economic program was announced one month into my Presidency, and then I went to work on it in Congress. And what really is news is sort of around the edges; is he losing this or winning that or whatever. It becomes a process debate, and the American people tend to lose sight of what is the major focus of my every day, which is how to pass that jobs program and the economic program. That is simply a function of the way the news works.

The other thing I think is different about the news today than maybe 20 years ago, particularly for the coverage around Washington, is this: Because of CNN and others who now give virtually continuous direct access to the facts of whatever is going on to wide numbers of people, there is even more pressure than there used to be on everybody in the media to find an angle to the story, a unique angle, an insight, you know, a twist. And sometimes that's good, and sometimes it's not. But it always presents a different challenge to me than perhaps the President might have had 20 years ago in trying to keep the focus of the public on the big issues that I'm trying to deal with.

But I say that not as a criticism but simply as an observation. That is simply the way things are. On balance we're better off. People are getting more information more quickly than ever before, but it's changed the dynamics of how we relate to each other.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:07 p.m. in Dahlgren Hall at the U.S. Naval Academy. This item was not received in time for publication in the appropriate issue.

Remarks at the Conclusion of the Forest Conference in Portland, OR

April 2, 1993

I want to thank all of you for being here and for sitting through this long day, and all of the participants for everything you've done. I'd like to thank the Cabinet for coming and participating and the Vice President and our staff for all the work they did to put this meeting together.

One of the things that has come out of this meeting to me loud and clear is that you want us to try to break the paralysis that presently controls the situation, to move and to act. I hope that as we leave here we are more committed to working together to move forward than perhaps we were when we came.

I tell you, I'll never forget what I've heard today, the stories, the pictures, the passion from all of you. In a funny way, even when you were disagreeing, every one of you was a voice for change. Every one of you was saying we can't possibly do any worse than to stay within the framework which has now undermined our ability to work together and to build a sense of common community. Too many people are being hurt, and too many resources are being threatened. And we're going to do our best to turn this away from