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Nomination for Deputy Administrator of the General Services Administration

May 19, 1993

The President today named nationally recognized Chicago businesswoman Julia Stasch Deputy Administrator of the General Services Administration. Ms. Stasch joins Administrator-designee and former Western Digital CEO Roger Johnson at the head of GSA.

"Julia Stasch is exactly the type of aggressive and innovative business person this administration needs as it seeks to reinvent the way Government works," the President said. "I am confident Julia will work well with Roger Johnson to ensure economy and efficiency are standard rule at the new GSA."

NOTE: A biography of the nominee was made available by the Office of the Press Secretary.

Remarks on Signing the National Voter Registration Act of 1993

May 20, 1993

Thank you very much. Joel, thank you for the T-shirt. In a few moments I'll give out bill-signing pens, but I'd rather have the T-shirt. [*Laughter*]

Getting to know the young people across this country, beginning in New Hampshire, who pushed the motor voter bill, was one of the most rewarding parts of the 1992 campaign. But the effort that we come here to celebrate today has a long and venerable heritage.

A few moments ago, you heard the voice of President Johnson crossing the chasm of time back to 1965 as he signed the Voting Rights Act into law. As a southerner and as President, his words have special significance to me. During my childhood, no family's dinner table, no church congregation, no community, and no place of work was immune from the searing struggle for civil rights. To hear Johnson's voice is to make vivid for me once again those difficult, yet glorious years of struggle, difficult and terrible because so many people gave their lives moving the stone of freedom up the side of a mountain, glorious because the years of contention eventually gave way to an overdue season of reconciliation and renewal, and gave our region and our country a second chance to fulfill our promise.

The victory we celebrate today is but the most recent chapter in the overlapping struggles of our Nation's history to enfranchise women and minorities, the disabled, and the young with the power to affect their own destiny and our common destiny by participating fully in our democracy. When blacks and women won the right to vote, when we outlawed the poll tax and literacy test, when the voting age was lowered to 18, and when finally we recognized the rights of disabled Americans, it was because the forces of change overcame the indifference of the majority and the resistance by the guardians of the status quo. And who prevailed? Brave people working at the grassroots, impatient with an always imperfect democracy and dedicated to widening the circle of liberty to encompass more and more of our fellow citizens.

I have said many times in many places that in this country we don't have a person to waste. Surely the beginning of honoring that pledge is making sure the franchise is extended to and used by every eligible American. Today we celebrate our noble tradition by signing into law our newest civil rights law, the National Voter Registration Act of 1993, which all of us know and love as "motor voter."

An extraordinary coalition of organizations, many of whom played historic roles in our expanding democratic rights, joined many years ago with the hope that they would see this day come. I'm honored to share this podium with representatives with three fighters for freedom: the NAACP, the League of Women Voters, and Human Serve. I want to pay special tribute to Disabled and Able To Vote, to Project Vote, and to Rock the Vote, and literally, the scores of other groups for whom the goal of full voter participation has been a durable and lasting dream. I want to pay special tribute to the young people who lobbied me personally for motor voter and who voted with renewed energy and conviction for their own futures in the election last November.

They all labored hard because this bill was necessary. As many as 35 percent of otherwise eligible voters in our Nation are not registered, and the failure to register is the primary reason given by eligible citizens for their not voting. The principle behind this legislation is clear: Voting should be about discerning the will of the majority, not about testing the administrative capacity of a citizen.

The State of Washington instituted a similar measure during the 1992 election, and their motor voter program registered in that State alone an additional 186,000 people. Motor voter works at registering voters and people who register vote.

With this law and its appropriate implementation by States, voters can register by applying for a driver's license, through uniform mail application, or by applying in person at various agencies designated by the States. As a result, registration for Federal election will become as accessible as possible, while the integrity of the electoral process is clearly preserved.

As I said, I have long supported the idea of motor voter. More than a year ago, I promised as President that I would sign H.R. 2 and fight for its passage. I'm pleased to be able to keep the promise today that I made on this Rock the Vote card which still has my signature back in New Hampshire.

I also want to point out that all the President does is lobby for and sign laws. If the Congress doesn't pass them, they don't get passed. The Rock the Vote card that I signed here says, "Why don't politicians want you to vote?" Well, there are a lot of Members of the Congress here from both parties who do want you to vote, and I want to thank not only those on the platform here but all of those out in the audience who, after all, passed this bill into law. It was their votes that made this day possible.

This bill in its enactment is a sign of a new vibrancy in our democracy. With all the challenges and difficulties, with the years of accumulated economic problems we face, with all the divisions among our people, there is a new determination to make progress. You can see it in many ways: Voter participation was up in November, and after the election it didn't stop. Here at the White House, mail has climbed to unprecedented levels. After I had been in office 14 weeks, the White House had received more mail than was received in all of 1992. We have had the switchboards jammed, the E-mail system full. And if you haven't gotten an answer to your letter, we're working on it. [*Laughter*]

This country is pulsing with the power of individual citizens' ideas in their determination to get something done. The legislators who worked so hard to adopt this bill, the organizations that gave themselves so completely to its endeavor, the young people, the activists, MTV, all of them tapped a powerful current of energy that is still flowing in this country.

The Congress has responded in other ways: the United States Senate passing just a few days ago a lobbying bill requiring registration by all lobbyists and requiring the disclosure of lobbyists' spending on Members of Congress is an example of that. The campaign finance reform which has been presented, dramatically trying to lower the costs of campaigns and reduce the influence of special interest groups, is an example of that.

The current of reform is moving in this country. And those of you who helped to bring this bill to pass can take a large share of credit not only for this bill but for the general movement and energy and involvement and determination of all of our fellow citizens. It was never right to sit on the sidelines of our democracy. And now with motor voter, there will be fewer and fewer excuses for anyone to do so.

Let us remember this in closing: Voting is an empty promise unless people vote. Now there is no longer the excuse of the difficulty of registration. It is the right of every American to vote. It is also the responsibility of every American to vote. We have taken an important step this morning to protect that right. And I want to challenge Joel and all the young people who did so much to register voters for the last election, and all of you who did so much to bring this voting rights bill to law and all the ones that preceded it, to make sure now that we keep the rights alive by making sure that the responsibility to exercise it is exercised by every eligible American.

When we leave here today, we ought to say: This voting rights bill and the others will not be in vain. Every year from now on, we're going to have more registered voters and more people voting. We're going to make the system work. The law empowers us to do it. It's now up to us to assume the responsibility to see that it gets done.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:32 a.m. on the South Lawn at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Joel Shulkin, University of New Hampshire junior who was instrumental in achieving reform of that State's voter registration laws and who introduced the President. H.R. 2, approved May 20, was assigned Public Law No. 103–31.

Exchange With Reporters After Signing the National Voter Registration Act of 1993

May 20, 1993

Senator Boren's Budget Proposal

Q. Mr. President, can you talk to us?

Q. Can you accept Senator Boren's entitlement cuts?

Q. What's your reaction to Senator Boren's compromise with Danforth?

The President. Well, my first reaction was that it was a huge shift in lowering taxes on people with incomes above $100,000 and hurting people, both elderly people and working people just barely above the poverty line. It's basically a $40 billion shift away from wealthy Americans right onto people just above the poverty line, the elderly and the working poor. So I don't support that. I think that's a mistake.

Q. Would you rule out that kind of compromise to get rid of the energy tax?

The President. I think that that is not a good thing to do if you read the details of it. Obviously, the main purpose of some of them is to do away with the BTU tax, but the mechanics shift over $40 billion away from people with incomes above $135,000 down to elderly and working people just barely above the poverty line. I don't think that's good. There is also another provision which, if it's implemented in the way they propose, would continue to shift health care costs onto private citizens and private employers, which would hurt the economy and hurt jobs. So those are the two things which concern me.

Otherwise, I'm glad to have people talking and coming up with new ideas. But those are bad things.

Q. ——have you essentially heard enough——

The President. I can just tell you what—I've given you my answer. Look, we had 12 years where we made this economy more unequal and unfair. And to move $40 billion off of upper income people to people barely above the poverty line, it seems to me, is not a good way to go.

NOTE: The exchange began at 12:50 p.m. on the South Lawn at the White House. A tape was not available for verification of the content of this exchange.

Remarks on Cuban Independence Day

May 20, 1993

Before I say anything else, I want to acknowledge the presence here of some very special friends of mine, Jorge Perez, Jorge Bolano, and Willie Braceras, who helped me in Miami last year when I hardly knew anyone who lived in south Florida and when I needed to learn a lot about the issues affecting Cuban-Americans. I want to say a special word of thanks, too, to Simon Ferro who helped me to organize this event.

We join all Cubans today in celebrating this, the 91st anniversary of Cuban independence. Just as Cubans struggled for independence nearly a century ago today, a new generation of Cubans in our country and our time are struggling for freedom and democracy. And the American people stand by them and their brothers and sisters in Cuba as they struggle for freedom and democracy.

The people of Cuba deserve to be free and to determine their own future through free elections. They deserve to be free of political abuse and dictatorship. Our administration