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NOTE: The address was recorded at 6 p.m. on January 21 in the East Room for broadcast at 10:06 a.m. on January 22.

### Remarks in a Teleconference on the Los Angeles Earthquake

January 24, 1994

**The President.** Hello.

**Q.** Hello, Mr. President.

**Q.** Good morning, Mr. President.

**The President.** It's good to hear your voice. I've got Federico, Henry, and James Lee on the phone?

**Q.** Yes, sir.

**The President.** That's great. Well, I know you've all been working very hard. I know there was a problem with the overcrowding at the disaster assistance centers at first, but I'm really pleased by the work you've done. And I was glad to note in this morning's Los Angeles Times an acknowledgement that we'd gotten those centers up more quickly than in previous disasters and that things seem to be going better. But why don't you all give me a briefing. James Lee, why don't you start and just give me an overall briefing about where we are.

[Director James Lee Witt explained what the emergency response team is doing to help the victims of the earthquake and stated that FEMA is in the process of providing applicants with disaster assistance checks.]

**The President.** How long will it take to get the checks out?

**Director Witt.** We had checks coming out yesterday, and we will have thousands of checks coming out each day, and there will be more each day coming out. We're processing them very quick.

**The President.** What about the language barriers?

**Director Witt.** We have worked with Secretary Cisneros and Secretary Peña and other Cabinet secretaries and the State and local emergency management people in all of the language barriers, in printing every type of information in every language of that community.

**The President.** That's good. You mentioned Secretary Riley. I know he's on the way back, but we got a report from him, and I've already directed the Department of Education to send \$7 million to the school district there to provide emergency services for the students. That may not be enough, but it will get them started anyway. And I'm glad to hear that.

Henry, where are we on the housing situation?

[Secretary Henry Cisneros explained that tents and shelters are being made available to the increasing number of victims who have lost their homes. He stated that a voucher system is being used to provide permanent housing, but it will take a long time to help.]

**The President.** You know, there were a lot of other communities affected. What about their housing? I mean, what kind of system do we have to make sure we get out there to the other communities, too?

[Secretary Cisneros explained that HUD is working closely with housing authorities in surrounding communities.]

**The President.** Now, I know that only a minority of the houses had earthquake insurance, but what about those that had insurance? Are the insurance companies there? Are they speeding up payment? What's going to happen there?

**Director Witt.** Yes, sir, they are there. They're in there speeding up the payments as quick as possible.

[Secretary Cisneros explained that many people do not have earthquake insurance because of high premiums and high deductibles.]

**The President.** Is the voucher system the preferred way of dealing with this? I mean, are you going to come back and—will that be part of the supplemental that Leon Panetta sends up to Congress?

**Secretary Cisneros.** We've extended in this first effort 10,000 vouchers. I believe we probably will need to be on the safe side and ask for more. So the answer is, yes, it will be in the supplemental.

**The President.** Federico, what about the transportation situation? How are we doing

with cleaning up the debris and at least preparing to go to work?

*[Secretary Federico Peña discussed what the team of Federal, State, and local officials are doing to rebuild the highway system and deal with traffic congestion.]*

**The President.** What about getting—if we had more rail cars, would they be full?

**Secretary Peña.** Yes. We have—

**The President.** What do we have to do to get more cars? And what about the buses? How many buses are out there? How many more can we get?

*[Secretary Peña explained that by working with Federal agencies and private businesses they will be able to provide more buses and rail cars to help deal with the transportation crisis.]*

**The President.** On the contracting work, we heard from the labor council out here, even here at the White House, they said they really wanted to help and do whatever they could to make sure that all the work was speeded up and as much was done as possible. So I know you're getting good cooperation from the labor people out there, too.

*[Secretary Peña stated that contractors and city mayors have been very helpful in providing suggestions and assistance.]*

**The President.** The Labor Department, we were in contact with them, and I know they've already committed another \$3 million just to pay people to do the emergency and clean-up work. But I think the fact that we're ahead of schedule on that is important. And I know you're going to follow up on the question of how quickly then highway construction can be done, because, obviously, if you could do longer work weeks or 24-hour days in some of those places, it would make a big difference.

*[Secretary Peña explained that construction workers are working long hours to repair the highway system.]*

**The President.** Well, that's great. I was informed right before I came out to talk to you that Leon Panetta will be in a position to give me a report today, as I had asked last week, on the supplemental. Obviously, the Mayor and all the folks, the local leader-

ship in the Los Angeles area and the State folks have been very good about helping us to get the loss figures. So I think we'll be in pretty good shape today to know a little more than we have known for the last few days on what we can ask for from Congress when they come back. So I will follow up on that end.

I'm very encouraged that the lines have gone down some at the disaster assistance centers. And I just hope that we can just keep on top of all this. I appreciate the fact that all of you have stayed out there. I think that has been very good. And again, I want to compliment all the local folks. I'm sure there are a lot of people out there who have hardly slept since I was there a few days ago. So you all just keep your chins up and keep working at it. And we'll do what we can here to get the supplemental passed in a hurry.

*[Secretary Cisneros stated that he will be working with church leaders and volunteer services to provide help to those who are having difficulty dealing with their experiences.]*

**The President.** That's terrific. I think they can do an enormous amount of good. Cardinal Mahoney obviously is very concerned about these things, and he's got an awful lot of able leaders there among the priests and the nuns who can, I think, make a real difference. I've been in a lot of their schools, their community organizations. And there's also a very large Evangelical community there and other religious groups. So I'm glad you're involving them; they can make a huge difference.

If there's anything else we need to know back here, let us know. But we'll be able to give you a report back about what we think the supplemental will look like probably before the end of the day. And then we'll just have to keep working together closely over the next few days as the situation unfolds. And if you know more—because it will take a few days for Congress to act on this, obviously, so we'll have some time. But I hope we can nail down the broad outlines this afternoon.

Thank you very much, and give my regards to the Mayor and everybody else out there.

**Secretary Cisneros.** Thank you, Mr. President.

**The President.** Thanks.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:59 a.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Roger Cardinal Mahony, Archbishop of Los Angeles.

## Exchange With Reporters

January 24, 1994

### Secretary of Defense Nominee

**Q.** Mr. President, how close are you to naming a Defense Secretary?

**The President.** I think we'll have an announcement today, just in a few hours.

**Q.** Is Bill Perry your choice, Mr. President?

**The President.** We'll have an announcement. You can wait and see.

**Q.** Why do you think it took so long, and what do you account for what seemed to be a reluctance by a number of people to take on the job?

**The President.** Well, I don't think it has taken that long. I mean, it's been, what, a week—less than a week since Mr. Inman said he didn't want the job.

**Q.** And at least two people who reportedly have said they weren't interested in the job, and Mr. Perry—

**The President.** But the stories are basically inaccurate. The only accurate story is the one that I have confirmed, which is that I talked to Senator Nunn during the transition before I became President, based on the fact that he was not only the head of the Senate Armed Services Committee but a longtime personal friend of mine and someone I sought advice from on these matters. And he told me then that he was not interested in being Secretary of Defense. And the only thing I did was to call him back and make sure he had the same position then that he had now.

The job was absolutely not offered to anyone else. Absolutely, categorically, not offered to anyone else. And it wasn't really offered to him. I just said, "Are you still in the same position you were in before?" And he said, "That's right." He said, "I'm doing what I think I should be doing." But he knows, I think—I don't want to overstate it. I think Sam Nunn always knew that if he

were ever interested in that job, that I was very open to that. But—so the decision—then, after that, after it was clear that he was in the same position he was always in, I went about trying to pick a successor. I've done it, and I expect to have an announcement.

**Q.** Do you think you can twist someone's arm to take it?

**The President.** No.

### Bosnia

**Q.** Mr. President, there have been new calls for air strikes in Bosnia. You talked about that a lot over this past trip to Europe. Can you give us any update? And what about what you said was your resolve to do something about this?

**The President.** Well, what I said was that NATO should not reaffirm its position unless the circumstances that they set out for bombing, if those circumstances occurred they'd be willing to go forward. Now, I presume you're referring to what was said in the European Parliament yesterday.

**Q.** And also the President of Bosnia calling for air strikes, too.

**The President.** Well, the President of Bosnia, yes—but what the NATO leaders, what the others voted for was to leave on the table the proviso that bombing could be done in order to relieve Sarajevo if that were appropriate or to further the U.N. mission by opening the airstrip at Tuzla or, if necessary, to facilitate the transfer of troops from Canadian to Dutch at Srebrenica. Now, that is a very rather narrow NATO mandate.

And what happened was as soon as the meeting was over, it was not clear how strongly or firmly some of them felt about that. But I think it's also clear that the U.N. Secretary General, who has a say in some of those decisions, but not all of them, based on what the international law is now, is still opposed to it. And I don't have any information that leads me to believe that the other NATO allies, that the heads of state as opposed to people in the European Parliament, have changed their mind about whether there should be any bombing at this time. That's all I can tell you.

**Q.** What about—

**The President.** Let me say, I believe in general what I've always believed. There's