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The President's News Conference
March 24, 1994

The President. Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. Yesterday we were reminded that protecting our democracy and expanding its promise around the world can be costly and dangerous. Here at home we mourn the loss of the servicemen in the tragic aircraft accident at Pope Air Force Base, and we pray for a speedy recovery for those who were injured. This tragedy reminds us that the men and women who serve in the military put their lives at risk in the service of our Nation.

In Mexico, an assassin killed Luis Donaldo Colosio, the Presidential candidate of the Institutional Revolutionary Party. We send our condolences and our prayers to his family. And I urge the Mexican people at this difficult time to continue their strides toward economic and political reform and progress.

With the Congress beginning its Easter recess tomorrow, this is a good time to assess the real work we are getting done on behalf of the American people. We're moving forward on our economic plan. The budget now moving through Congress, when passed, will give us 3 consecutive years of deficit reduction for the first time since Harry Truman was President. In 1995, we'll have the lowest budget deficit as a percentage of our annual income of any of the major industrialized countries. A recovering economy produced 2 million jobs last year, and we're on track to create 2 million more in '94.

Around the world America's efforts have helped to bring much needed calm to Sarajevo and led to an important political accord between the Bosnian Muslims and Croats. Our call for restraint has helped to start talks again the Middle East. We will continue our efforts to stop North Korea's nuclear program and to seek progress on human rights in China, working to build a more positive relationship with that very important nation.

This Friday, a week ahead of schedule, our troops will return home from Somalia. Because of their courageous efforts, Somalia can now build its own future, a step it made in the right direction today with the accord between the leaders of the two largest factions in that country.

Since we came here, our country has been moving in the right direction. Just today, the House of Representatives passed our legislation to limit the influence of lobbyists. Our administration is completing work on a comprehensive welfare reform proposal. We have presented to the Congress our very important reemployment proposal, to change the unemployment system to provide immediate retraining to those who lose their jobs. In a few days, with bipartisan support, the country will have an education reform law that sets national standards for our public schools. In a few weeks, Congress will pass a crime bill and put more police on the street, tougher gun laws on the books, and make ''three strikes and you're out'' the law of the land.

Speaker Foley assured me last night that the crime bill will be item number one on the agenda of the House when it returns to work. And in a few months we will succeed in passing health care reform. Just yesterday, the House Subcommittee on Health passed legislation to provide health security for every American. And while there will be lots of twists and turns in the legislative process, this year Congress will pass and I will sign a health reform which guarantees health care security to every American that can never be taken away, with the right to choose a doctor, with a plan that outlaws insurance abuses: no more dropping coverage or cutting benefits; no more lifetime limits; no more raising rates just because someone in your family has been sick or some are older than others. We want to preserve and strengthen Medicare, and we believe in this administration that those health benefits should be guaranteed through the workplace, building on what works today.

I know that many people around America must believe that Washington is overwhelmingly preoccupied with the Whitewater matter. But our administration is preoccupied with the business we were sent here to do for the American people. The investigation of Whitewater is being handled by an independent Special Counsel whose appointment I supported. Our cooperation with that counsel has been total. We have supplied over 14,000 documents, my tax returns dating

back to 1978, and made available every administration witness he has sought.

I support the actions of the House and the Senate clearing the way for hearings at an appropriate time that does not interfere with Mr. Fiske's responsibilities. And I will fully cooperate with their work as well. Tomorrow I will make available my tax returns dating back to 1977 when I first held public office. Cooperation, disclosure, and doing the people's business are the order of the day.

This is the best moment we have had in decades to do the hard work on so many issues that affect not only our own progress and prosperity, but the very way we think about ourselves as a nation. The American people should know that I and my administration will not be distracted. We are committed to taking advantage of this rare moment and achieving these important goals.

Terry [Terence Hunt, Associated Press].

Whitewater

Q. Mr. President, you just said that you would release your tax returns back to 1977. Questions also have been raised about whether you made money or lost money in your Whitewater investment. Do you still believe that you lost about $70,000? And do you have any reason to believe that you owe any back taxes?

The President. I am certain that we lost money. I do not believe we owe any back taxes. If it is determined that we do, of course, we will pay. I am now sure that we lost something less than $70,000, based on an interview I heard on television, or I heard about on television, with Jim McDougal with one of the networks, where he said that he felt that one of the loans I had taken from a bank where we also borrowed money for the land development corporation, he said he thought one of those was a personal loan.

And so I started racking my brain to try to remember what that might have been, and by coincidence, I was also rereading the galleys of my mother's autobiography, just fact checking it, and I noticed that she mentioned there something that I had genuinely forgotten, which is that I helped her to purchase the property and what was then a cabin on the place that she and her husband, Dick Kelley, lived back in 1981, and that I was a co-owner of that property with her for just a few months. After they married, he bought my interest out.

So that's where that—I borrowed the money to go into that investment. I paid the money back with interest. That was unrelated to Whitewater. All the other losses that we have documented to date we believe clearly are tied to the investment Hillary and I made in Whitewater. So we, in fact, lost some $20,700 less than the Lyon's report indicated because that loan came from a different place or came for different purposes. And there was another $1,500 payment I made on it. So whatever the total in the Lyon's report was, you should subtract from that $20,700 and another $1,500. And we believe we can document that clearly.

Tomorrow, my counsel, David Kendall, will brief the press on the evidence that we have, what's in the tax returns. You will see when you see the tax returns that those losses were clearly there. And he will be glad to support it with other information as well.

Helen [Helen Thomas, United Press International].

Q. Mr. President, do you know of any funds, any money—Whitewater seems to be about money—having gone into any of your gubernatorial campaigns or into Whitewater, particularly federally insured money? Do you know of any money that could have gone in?

The President. No. I have no knowledge of that. I have absolutely no knowledge of that.

Rita [Rita Braver, CBS News].

Q. President Clinton, you just mentioned James McDougal, your former business partner. A lot of questions have been raised about his business practices. Can you tell us what drew you to him to begin with, and whether or not you still have faith now that he was—that he is an honest businessman?

The President. Well, I can tell you that when I entered my relationship with him—let's go back to then and not now—I knew Mr. McDougal and had known him for many years. I met him in the late sixties when he was running Senator Fulbright's office in Arkansas. I knew that sometime around that time, perhaps later, he got into the real estate business. When I entered into this investment, it was with a person I had known many

years who was in the real estate business who had never been in the S&L business or the banking business. That all happened at a later time. He had done quite well.

The reason we lost money on Whitewater is not surprising; a lot of people did at that time. Interest rates, as you'll remember, went through the roof in the early eighties. People stopped immigrating to my State to retire at least in the numbers they had all during the seventies; and the market simply changed. So we didn't sell as many lots, and the venture was not successful. So we lost the money. Principally, the money I lost was on the interest payments I had to make on the loans, which were never reimbursed because of the venture never turned a profit.

Q. Do you still believe in his honesty now and do you think that he——

The President. All I can tell you, to the best of my knowledge, he was honest in his dealings with me. And that's all I can comment on. As I said, when I heard about his comments on television, since he had—he's always told you that I had nothing to do with the management of Whitewater, that Hillary had nothing to do with it; we didn't keep the books or the records; that this investment was made, as you know, back in 1978; and that we were essentially passive investors; that none of our money was borrowed from savings and loans, and we had nothing to do with a savings and loan. So that's what he has always said. So when he said he didn't think this note, where I borrowed money from a bank not an S&L in 1981 had anything to do with Whitewater, I started thinking about it. We talked about it. We couldn't remember what else it could have been until I literally just happened to cross that in reading my mother's autobiography.

Andrea [Andrea Mitchell, NBC News].

Q. Mr. President, Congressman Leach made some very dramatic charges today. He said that Whitewater is really about the arrogance of power, and he didn't just mean back in Arkansas. He said that Federal regulators tried to stop investigators for the Resolution Trust Corporation in Kansas City from putting Whitewater into their criminal referrals. That would amount to a coverup and possibly obstruction of justice. Do you have any knowledge of that?

The President. Absolutely not. And it is my understanding——

Q. And are you looking into it?

The President. Let me just say this, it's my understanding that Mr. Leach was rather careful in the words that he used, and apparently he didn't even charge that any political appointee of our administration had any knowledge of this. So he may be talking about an internal dispute within the RTC from career Republican appointees for all I know.

Keep in mind, until I came here, all the appointees of the RTC were hired under previous, Republican administrations. There has never been a Democratic President since there's been an RTC. And I can tell you categorically I had no knowledge of this and was not involved in it in any way, shape, or form.

Q. Well, in light of all that's happened so far, Mr. President, do you think you made any mistakes in the initial investment and in the way the White House has handled this?

The President. I certainly don't think I made a mistake in the initial investment. It was a perfectly honorable thing to do, and it was a perfectly legal thing to do. And I didn't make any money, I lost money. I paid my debts. And then later on, as you know, Hillary and I tried to make sure that the corporation was closed down in an appropriate way and paid any obligations that it owed after we were asked to get involved at a very late stage and after Mr. McDougal had left the S&L. So I don't think that we did anything wrong in that at all. And I think we handled it in an appropriate way. We were like a lot of people; we invested money, and we lost.

I'd be the last person in the world to be able to defend everything we've done here in the sense that whatever we did or didn't do has sparked an inordinate amount of interest in a 16-year-old business venture that lost money. But to suggest—let me just say again, I have had absolutely nothing to do, and would have nothing to do, with any attempt to influence an RTC regulatory matter. And I think if you look at the actions of the RTC just since I've been President and you examine the facts that everybody that works there was appointed by a previous,

Republican administration, the evidence is clear that I have not done that.

Yes.

Q. Mr. President, you've been kind of tough at times on people you felt made out during the eighties and didn't pay their fair share. Can you tell us, sir, tonight that you have abided by the very high ethical standards——

The President. Absolutely.

Q. ——to which you've sought to hold others? And also, sir, if it turns out that you do owe something in back taxes, will you be prepared perhaps to revise some of those judgments you've made about others?

The President. No, not at all. I ask you to tell the American people what percentage of my income I paid in taxes in every year where I reported my tax returns. And let me tell you what my wife and I spent the eighties doing: I was the lowest paid Governor of any State in the country. I don't complain about it. I was proud of that. I didn't do it for the money. I worked on creating jobs and improving education for the children of my State. Every year I was Governor, my wife worked in a law firm that had always done business with the State. She never took any money for any work she did for the State. And indeed, she gave up her portion of partnership income that otherwise came to the firm, and instead every year gave an enormous percentage of her time to public service work, helping children and helping education, and doing a lot of other things, giving up a lot of income.

Now, we did that because we wanted to. The fact that we made investments, some of which we lost money on, some of which we made money on, has nothing to do whatever with the indictment that I made about the excesses of the eighties. And we always made every effort to pay our taxes. I would remind you that we, like most middle class folks, we turned our records over to an accountant. I always told the accountant to resolve all doubts in favor of the Government. I never wanted any question raised about our taxes.

When it turned out in our own investigation of this Whitewater business that one year we had inadvertently taken a tax deduction for interest payments when, in fact, it was principal payment, even though the statute of limitations had run, we went back and voluntarily paid what we owed to the Federal Government. And if it turns out we've made some mistake inadvertently, we will do that again. But I have always tried to pay my taxes. And you will see when you look at all the returns that we've always paid quite a considerable percentage of our income in taxes.

Yes.

Q. Mr. President, during the campaign you said your administration would set a higher standard. Yet, in the travel office case last year, your own Chief of Staff found some of your aides used their official position to advance their personal interests. While recently, we've seen a senior White House official delinquent in Social Security taxes that disqualified others from serving in your administration and others in the White House neglecting until recently to undergo a security clearance required of other Government officials handling classified information. Why, sir, do you think it's so difficult for members of your staff to live up to your campaign promise?

The President. First of all, let's deal with those things, each in turn. Now, the finding was not that anybody who worked for me sought to advance themselves personally, financially in the travel office issue. That was not the finding. We found that the issue had not been well handled. And I might say, unlike other White Houses that stonewalled, denied, or delayed, we did our own internal investigation and admitted what mistakes we made and made some changes there. I'm proud of that.

Secondly, no one was barred from serving in our administration because they hadn't paid Social Security taxes, but people were barred from serving in Presidential-appointed positions that required Senate confirmation unless they complied with administration policy. Mr. Kennedy did not do that entirely, and he has been reassigned. He has had a difficult time, and I am convinced that he has done a lot of work that's been very valuable for us. But I think that he should not have done what he did, and I think he should fully pay. He has done that. I think that's what he should have done.

Now, on the White House passes thing, let's just talk about what the facts are. About

90 percent of the people who work here have been through all the clearances. The others are going through the clearances. I learned when I read about this that apparently previous administrations had had some of the same problems. That is, they'd been lax because of the cumbersome nature of the process. So we've now basically put in rules that say that anybody who comes to work here now has to get all this done in 30 days or is immediately on leave without pay. They can't get paid unless they do it. I asked Mr. McLarty and Mr. Cutler to fix this and make sure it never happens again. So I feel confident that we have.

But since you raised the issue, let me also ask you to report to the American people that we have and we have enforced higher standards against ethical conflicts than any previous administration. When people leave the White House, they can't lobby the White House. If they're in certain positions, they can't lobby the White House for a long time. If they're in certain positions now, they can never lobby on behalf of a foreign government.

I have supported a campaign finance reform bill that I am hoping the Congress will pass, and I believe they will, which will change the nature of financing political campaigns. I have supported a very tough lobby reform bill which will require more disclosure and more restraint on the part of lobbyists and public officials than ever before. And we will comply with those laws.

So I think our record on balance is quite good here. And when we make mistakes, we try to admit them, something that has not been the order of the day in the past.

Peter [Peter Maer, NBC Mutual Radio].

Q. Thank you, Mr. President. So many things have happened since this Whitewater story broke or resurfaced, depending on your point of view, your Counsel has resigned, a number of your top aides have been subpoenaed because of their contacts with Treasury officials in on the investigation. I'm curious, who do you blame more than anything else for the Whitewater mess that the administration in is now?

The President. Well, I don't think it's useful to get into blame. I think what's important is that I answer the questions that you have that are legitimate questions, that I fully cooperate with the Special Counsel, which was requested widely by the press and by the members of the Republican Party, and who is himself a Republican, that we fully cooperate. And we've done that. Senator Inouye from Hawaii pointed out today, he said, "I've been experienced in these investigations." He said, "You folks have claimed no executive privilege. You've fully cooperated. No one can quarrel with that." And then I get back to the work of getting unemployment down, jobs up, passing a health care bill, passing the crime bill, moving this country forward. I think the worst thing that can happen is for me to sort of labor over who should be blamed for this. There will probably be enough blame to go around. I'm just not concerned about it.

Q. To follow up, sir, do you feel ill served in any way by your staff?

The President. I think on the—I've told you what I think about these meetings. Now, let's go back to the facts of the meetings. We now know that Mr. Altman's counsel checked with the ethics officer in Treasury before he came over and gave the briefings to the White House. But I have said—so it appears at least that the counsel thought that Mr. Altman had an ethical clearance to come and do this briefing. We certainly know that no one in the White House, at least to the best of my knowledge, has tried to use any information to in any way improperly influence the RTC or any Federal agency.

Would it have been better if those had not occurred? Yes, I think it would have been. Do we have people here who wouldn't do anything wrong but perhaps weren't sensitive enough to how something could look in retrospect by people who are used to having problems in a Presidency or used to having people not telling the truth? I think that we weren't as sensitive as we should have been. And I've said before, it would have been better if that hadn't occurred.

But I think the one thing you have to say is, you learn things as you go along in this business. None of this, in the light of history, will be as remotely important as the fact that by common consensus we had the most productive first year of a Presidency last year of anyone in a generation. That's what mat-

ters, that we're changing people's lives. That's what counts. And I'm just going to keep working on it.

Yes.

Q. Mr. President, you and your wife have both used the phrase, ''bewildered, confused about why all the interest in Whitewater.'' Yet, in the Arkansas savings and loan business, your wife represented Madison Savings and Loan before the Arkansas Savings and Loan Board, whose head was a former lawyer who had done work for Madison Savings and Loan. Do you not see any conflicts of interest in your action, or your wife's actions, which would appear to contradict what you just said about her not doing any work before the State, that would cause people to question your actions?

The President. No, that's not what I said. I did not say—I said that when my wife did business, when her law firm represented some State agency itself—State agencies all over America use private lawyers—if she did any work for the State, she never took any pay for it. And when the firm got income from State work, she didn't take her partnership share of that income. She gave that up because she wanted to bend over backwards to avoid the appearance of conflict.

Was there anything wrong with her representing a client before a State agency? And if you go back and look at the facts, basically the firm wrote the securities commissioner a letter saying, is it permissible under Arkansas law to raise money for this S&L in this way? And it showed that she was one of the contacts on it, and the securities commissioner wrote her back and said it's not against the law. That was basically the extent of her representation.

Now, all I can do is tell you that she believed there was nothing unethical about it. And today, in an interview, Professor Steven Geller, of New York University, who is a widely respected national expert on legal ethics, once again said there was nothing at all unethical in doing this. These kinds of things happen when you have married couples who have professions. And the most important thing there is disclosure. There was no sneaking around about this. This was full disclosure. Professor Geller—I brought the quote here—said, ''I think this is a bum rap on Mrs. Clinton, and I'm amazed that it keeps getting recirculated.'' Now, there's a person who doesn't work for us whose job it is to know what the code of professional responsibility requires.

Yes.

Q. Mr. President, one thing that puzzled a lot of people is why, if you did nothing wrong, did you act for so long as if you had something to hide. And now that you're about to release these documents to the public, your tax records and other things, do you think it would have helped if you had released these documents to the public earlier? Would it have stopped this issue from reaching the proportions that it has?

The President. I don't have any idea. But I don't think I acted as if I had anything to hide. After all, I did volunteer—I had already given out my tax returns going back to 1980. And then keep in mind, when the furor arose at the request for the Special Counsel—even though everybody at the time said, ''Well, we don't think he's done anything wrong; there's no evidence that either he or the First Lady have done anything wrong; we still think there ought to be a Special Counsel''—I said we would give all this over to the Special Counsel. It was only after the Special Counsel had all the information that the people who first wanted the Special Counsel then decided they wanted the documents as well. So we're making them available.

Perhaps I should have done it earlier, but you will see essentially what I've told you and things that you basically already know.

Yes, Gwen [Gwen Ifill, New York Times].

Q. Mr. President, you said a few minutes ago that the people in the RTC who are involved in Congressman Leach's allegations are all career Republican officials. But aren't they members of your administration? And do you plan to take any action in speaking to either Mr. Bentsen or Mr. Altman about taking action and investigation of Mr. Leach's charges?

The President. I think the last thing in the world I should do is talk to the Treasury Department about the RTC. [*Laughter*] You all have told me that that creates the appearance of impropriety. I don't think we can have a—it's not just a one-way street; it's a two-way street. Mr. Leach will see that what-

ever should be done is done. But I can tell you, I have had no contact with the RTC. I've made no attempt to influence them. And you can see by some of the decisions that they have made that that is the furthest thing, it seems to me, that ought to be on your mind.

Q. Do you abandon all responsibility for a department, a Cabinet Department in your Government?

The President. I haven't abandoned all responsibility. You can't have it both ways. Either we can talk to them or we can't. I just think this is a matter of public record now. And Mr. Leach will certainly see to it that it's looked into. He's already said that that's his job, and I'm sure he will see that it is.

Yes.

Q. With so many questions swirling around Whitewater and the Rose law firm, there's some concern that the moral authority of the First Lady is eroding as well. Are you reconsidering her role as the point person for health care reform?

The President. Absolutely not. Absolutely not. People should not be able to raise questions and erode people's moral authority in this country. There ought to have to be evidence and proof. We live in a time when there is a great deal of question-raising. It seems to be the order of the day. But I know what the facts are, and I'm giving you the facts on this.

Here we just had—all these questions were raised about whether she was properly or improperly representing a client before a State agency—to do something, I might add, that the Federal Government had asked savings and loans to do, that is, go out and raise more capital to become more solvent. So that's what she was doing in the full light of day in full disclosure.

Now we have, even in retrospect, an eminent national expert saying that she is getting a bum rap. When people ask questions that don't have any basis—I think you should ask whatever questions you want to ask, and I think that we should do our best to answer them. But I think that the 20-year record she made as a lawyer, never before having her ethics questioned, never before having her ability questioned, when everybody who knew her knew that every year she was giving up a whole lot of income to do public business, to advance the cause of children and to advance the cause of our State. No, I don't think so. I think in the end when all these questions get asked and answered, her moral authority will be stronger than it has ever been, because we will have gone through this process and been very forthcoming, as we are, to the Special Counsel. And then in the end, people will compare how we did this with how previous administrations under fire handled their business. And I think it will come out quite well.

Mexico

Q. Mr. President, the assassination of Mr. Colosio today has shaken the financial markets in this country, created doubt about the stability of Mexico. Mexico opens its stock market and banks tomorrow. You said you would help Mexico in this. What can the United States do to help Mexico in these trying times?

The President. Well, first of all, let me say, Mexico is a very great country that has made enormous progress economically and politically. There is a lot of ferment and change going on there that is inevitable and that can be very positive. What I think the United States can do, first of all, is to tell the rest of the world that we know this about Mexico. They're our neighbors, and we think they have a great future. And we don't expect any long-term damage to come from this terrible personal tragedy and political setback.

Secondly, the only business I did last night on this—and I called President Salinas as a friend, as well as the President of the United States, to express my sorrow—the only business I did was to talk to the Secretary of the Treasury about what we might be able to do in the event there was some sort of unusual trading against the Mexican currency. And there may be something we can do to step in and stabilize that. As you know, there have been times in the past when our friends have had to come to our aid. The Germans, the Japanese and others have come to our aid when there was unusual trading against the dollar. And we are prepared to try to help the Mexicans if that is necessary. But we hope it won't be.

Today, we did just a little bit on Mexican securities when we suspended trading here in the United States for a very short time so that the American who would be interested in this would at least be able to verify what the facts were and what they were not about the terrible incident last night. And I think that helped a bit. I certainly hope that it did.

Whitewater

Q. Increasingly polls are showing that more and more Americans are unsure whether you acted properly in Whitewater, that maybe you did something wrong. Does that concern you? And when do you think it would be proper for the First Lady to answer questions about Whitewater?

The President. Well, first of all, does it concern me? Only a little bit. The truth is, I am amazed. When I read in the New York Times or someplace that there have been 3 times as much coverage of Whitewater as there had been of health care, I'm amazed that there hasn't been more change in the polls. I think what the American people are really upset about is the thought that this investment that we made 16 years ago that lost money, that did not involve savings and loans, might somehow divert any of us from doing the work of the country, getting the economy going and dealing with health care and crime and the other issues.

So, in that sense, I think people are right to be concerned. And they want to know that I'm going to answer the questions. A lot of people don't even know, I don't think, that there is a Special Counsel, that we have fully cooperated, that he has said we have, that the Watergate prosecutor, Sam Dash, contrasted our conduct with previous Presidents and said we'd been highly ethical. And we're moving forward.

Now, the First Lady has done several interviews. She was out in three different places last week answering questions exhaustively from the press. I think she will continue to do that. And if you have questions you want to ask her about this, I think you ought to ask the questions.

Deb [Deborah Mathis, Gannett News Service].

Q. Mr. President, you and the First Lady have several times said that you've been amazed and dismayed by the intensity of both the opposition and the scrutiny surrounding Whitewater in particular. Has any of this been instructive for you? Have you taken any lessons from this ordeal, whether it's about the Presidency, about the process, about the city, or anything?

The President. Oh, I think I've learned a lot about it. I think one of the things I've learned about it is that it's very important to try to decide what the legitimate responsibility of the President is, to be as forthcoming as possible, and to do it.

It's important for me to understand that there is a level here—and this is not a blame, this is just an observation—because of the experiences of the last several decades, of which I was not a part in this city, I think there is a level of suspicion here that is greater than that which I have been used to in the past—and I don't complain about it, but I've learned a lot about it—and that my job is to try to answer whatever questions are out there so I can get on with the business of the country.

And I think I've learned a lot about how to handle that. I've also learned here that there may or may not be a different standard than I had seen in the past, not of right and wrong, that doesn't change, but of what may appear to be right or wrong. And I think that you'll see that, like everything else, this administration learns and goes on. We always learn from our mistakes, and we have proven that.

Yes, sir, in the back.

International Affairs

Q. I wonder if you realize the situation that is developing in Korea, what is expected? What will be the situation in South Africa next month? And do you believe that the former Soviet Union, Russia, has—[*inaudible*]—that will contribute to peace in the world? How do you respond?

The President. That's the quickest anybody ever asked me three questions at once. [*Laughter*] First of all, the situation in Korea is serious, and we have responded in a serious way. The North Koreans themselves have said they are committed to a nonnuclear Ko-

rean Peninsula. We want that. We want a good, normal relationship with them. They have terminated the IAEA inspections. We are examining what we can do. We are talking to our South Korean partners as well as to the Chinese, the Japanese, the Russians, and others.

We still hope that this can be resolved, and we believe it can be. But the choice is really up to North Korea. Will they be isolated from the world community, or will they be a full partner? They could have a very bright future indeed. They have many contributions to make, indeed, to a united Korea. And we hope that it will work out. But I did decide to deploy the Patriots on the recommendation of General Luck as a purely defensive measure in the wake of the difficulties we've had, and we'll make further decisions as we go along.

With regard to South Africa, I am immensely hopeful. I have tried once to encourage Chief Buthelezi to join in the political process. And I still have some hope that he will. It is not too late, and they have made real efforts to try to accommodate the conflicts between national and local interests. But I think we will be celebrating in late April a great triumph of democracy of the first nonracial or multiracial democratic process in South Africa.

With regard to Russia, I think that on balance, our relationship is still sound. It is based on our perception and their perception of our shared interests, and when we disagree, we will say so. And we will act accordingly. But I do think that the Russians have made a constructive contribution to our efforts in Bosnia which have had a lot of success. We've got a long way to go, but we've had some real success. And I'm hopeful that they will elsewhere. I know they made a suggestion on Korea today, and we'll see what happens there.

Press Secretary Myers. Last question.

Health Care

Q. Mr. President, Congressman Stark's health care bill doesn't do everything that you have proposed. Would you veto it if it reaches your desk?

The President. No, because it does what I ask. It doesn't solve all the problems. But it does provide universal coverage. It emphasizes the workplace. That is, there is no tax on people unless they elect not to take out insurance. And it provides comprehensive benefits, which I think are very important. And it leaves Medicare alone with the integrity of Medicare.

There are things that it doesn't do that I wish it did. I don't think it's as successful or would be as successful in holding down costs and expanding opportunity as our plan, but certainly if it were to be enacted by the United States Congress I would sign it, because it meets the fundamental criteria I set out of covering all Americans with health care.

One more, then I guess we've got to go. Everybody wants to be watching these ball games, I think. [*Laughter*] You know, I'm going to make—nobody's asked me if we're going to tax gambling or anything. [*Laughter*] Go ahead.

Q. Mr. President——

The President. This is a set-up; it's my joke. Only people who bet against my team in the NCAA. [*Laughter*]

Whitewater

Q. Mr. President, I take it that the tax returns you're putting out tomorrow are the ones that have already gone to the Special Counsel. If the Special Counsel wanted to question you about that, would you answer a subpoena? Would Mrs. Clinton? And what about congressional hearings, what would be the protocol on going before Congress to explain it to them?

The President. Let me answer the first question first. We decided in addition to putting out the '78 and '79 returns, we should go ahead and put out the '77 returns, that that would be an appropriate starting point, because that's the year I first entered public life. I know there's—it's kind of a moving bar here. None of us are quite sure how far back anybody should go anymore about anything. But we thought that we would do that. And at least you would then have a complete record of the money we earned and the taxes we paid, Hillary and I together did, as long as I've been in public life.

In terms of the information, I expect that the Special Counsel will want to question me

and will want to question the First Lady. It's my understanding that typically in the past it's been done in a different way. I mean, I will cooperate with him in whatever way he decides is appropriate.

Similarly, if Congress wants any information direct from us, we will, of course, provide it to them in whatever way seems most appropriate. Again, I understand there are certain protocols which have been followed in the past which I would expect would be followed here. But I intend to be fully cooperative so that I can go back to work doing what I was hired to do.

Thank you very much.

Welfare Reform

Q. [*Inaudible*]—welfare reform?

The President. What did you say about——

Q. What about welfare reform?

The President. What about it?

Q. [*Inaudible*]—going to tax——

The President. No. What I said, I made a joke about that. I said I was going to try to tax anybody who bet against my team in the basketball finals.

But I have made no decision on the financing of welfare reform. I can tell you this, it's a tough issue because we have to pay for anything we do. And there are all kinds of proposals out there. I know that the Republican welfare reform proposal has a lot of things in it that I like. But I think it's way too hard on financing things from savings from immigrants. I think it goes too far there. So there are no real easy answers.

But I can say categorically that I have been briefed on a very wide range of options and that nobody in this administration has made any decision, and no one will make a decision except me, about how to fund it. That decision has not been made. We will come forward with that plan. We do think it offers the real promise of ending welfare as we know it, of moving people from welfare to work if we can also guarantee these welfare parents that when they go to work their children will not lose the health care that they have on welfare, so they won't be punished for going to work. That's the key issue.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President's 54th news conference began at 7:30 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he refered to Lt. Gen. Gary E. Luck, USA, Commanding General, XVIII Corps, and Mangosuthu Buthelezi, leader of the South African Inkatha Freedom Party.

Statement on the Assassination of Luis Donaldo Colosio

March 24, 1994

I am profoundly saddened to learn of the brutal assassination of Luis Donaldo Colosio, the Presidential candidate of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) in Mexico. I deeply deplore this senseless act of violence and have conveyed my deepest sympathies to the Mexican people and to the family of Mr. Colosio, his wife, and two young children.

Mr. Colosio dedicated his life to public service and to the betterment of his nation. It is particularly tragic when an assassin's bullet slays a man who still had so much to contribute to history. It is a great loss not only for Mexico but for all of North America.

I telephoned President Carlos Salinas de Gortari shortly after midnight last night to express my sorrow and that of the American people and to offer my condolences to the Colosio family. I told President Salinas that the United States stands ready to assist Mexico in the coming days in any way we can.

Exchange With Reporters on Departure for Fort Bragg, North Carolina

March 25, 1994

Air Collision at Pope Air Force Base

Q. Mr. President, why are you going to Fort Bragg?

The President. I'm going down there because it was a very, very serious accident. A lot of our service people lost their lives; many, many others were quite seriously injured. And I just want to go down there and visit the hospital and express my concerns to the people who are still hospitalized and to their families and all the people at Fort Bragg for the losses they suffered. I think it's an appropriate thing to do.