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and they will allow us to understand each other at the highest levels.

You had a second question, I think. [*Laughter*] What was that?

Q. Which was, when will you allow more Palestinian workers to work?

Prime Minister Netanyahu. As soon as the security conditions—I deem—as soon as I deem the security conditions will allow it, I will ease the closure.

President Clinton. Let me just say, one of the most encouraging things to me about our conversation was the clear understanding the Prime Minister showed of the difficulty the closure is imposing on the Palestinians, not only in terms of not being able to move across the borders and go to jobs in Israel but also in destabilizing their own environment and undermining our ability, for example, to encourage others from the United States and elsewhere to invest in their territory.

So we understand that. And also, I think that security is clearly the test. So this is, obviously, the next area where Mr. Arafat and the Prime Minister and his government need to go to try to reach an understanding. But I was encouraged by that.

In terms of your suggestion about a summit, my experience, sir, is that when these things are called there needs to be an understanding in advance about what is going to be achieved and how it's going to be achieved. To be fair to the Prime Minister, he has just taken office not very long ago; he's just constituted his government. And I think it would be premature to do that at this time.

But I believe the more contact we have at the higher levels, the better off we're going to be and the greater the likelihood of achieving peace. But I do not believe it's the appropriate time to do that now.

Thank you.

NOTE: The President's 127th news conference began at 2 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Chairman Yasser Arafat of the Palestinian Authority and President Hafiz al-Asad of Syria.

Remarks on Senate Action on Minimum Wage Legislation and an Exchange With Reporters

July 9, 1996

The President. Good afternoon. This was a very good day for America's working families. Today's vote by the Senate means that 10 million hard-working Americans will get a little bit of help to raise their children and keep their family strong. A 90-cent increase in the minimum wage will honor our most basic values, work and family, opportunity and responsibility. It will help working people without hurting our economy, and it is plainly the right thing to do.

Today the minimum wage is not a living wage. You can't raise a family on $4.25 an hour. This action by the Senate today restores the bipartisan commitment that the minimum wage will keep pace with the cost of living. This action will directly benefit millions of hard-working Americans.

Sixty percent of minimum wage workers are women. More than a third are the sole breadwinners in their household. Over 2 million children live in poor or near-poor families where a worker earns the minimum wage. And they will now get a raise.

I'm gratified that a bipartisan majority of the Senators rejected a killer amendment that would have stopped this bill. The provision would have been a powerful incentive for employers to push employees out of their jobs after 6 months. It would have locked millions and millions of Americans into lower wages.

The way has now been cleared for final passage of a minimum wage bill. I call on Congress to send me the final bill quickly. The differences between the House and Senate versions are not significant. An American worker should get their raise as soon as possible. There's no reason that minimum wage workers should have to wait any longer for their raise. This is not a time to nickel and dime our working families. Our economy is sturdy; we have 10 million new jobs; unemployment at 5.3 percent; nearly 4 million new homeowners; rising real hourly wages for the first time in a decade. Now we have to make

sure that all Americans have the opportunity to benefit from a growing economy.

This has been a difficult fight. But it turned out to be a real victory for the working families of this country. Today's vote by the Senate will make it possible for more of our people to be rewarded for their hard work, to believe that there is opportunity on the other end of their responsibility.

Again, I thank the Members of the Senate who took this step. I thank the Members of the Congress, both parties, who supported it in both Houses. I look forward to the speedy resolution of the two bills and to signing it into law.

Let me say one other thing. Today is a special day for me, and since the Vice President's here, I wanted to announce that this is our fourth anniversary. It was 4 years ago today that I asked and he accepted the—I asked him to become Vice President, or at least the nominee for Vice President, and he accepted it. It has been 4 years of great adventure. It's been a wonderful partnership. And I believe that historians will record that he has been the most effective and influential Vice President in the history of the country. And I just wanted to have this chance to acknowledge 4 great years and to thank him for his remarkable service and his steadily improving sense of humor. [*Laughter*]

Budget Legislation

Q. How do you feel about a CR that runs through March, sir?

The President. A CR to do what?

Q. [*Inaudible*]—that runs through March at fiscal—[*inaudible*].

The President. Well, I would hope we could get some of the appropriations bill passed. My understanding is that there are some that we're pretty close to an agreement on. And I would hope that we could keep working into September after we have the August recess to see what else can be done.

There's still a lot of things that need to be done. We need to pass Kennedy-Kassebaum. We need to pass a good welfare reform bill. And I'm still open to any kind of progress we can make on the budget. So I will work with the Congress in any way possible. We have to keep the Government open, and we have to keep the fundamental functions of the country going forward. But I would hope that we wouldn't give up this early on the prospect of progress.

Minimum Wage and Former Senator Dole

Q. Mr. President, former Senator Dole's press secretary says you're playing maximum politics with the minimum wage, yet you were silent for the first 2 years of your administration on the increase of the minimum wage and that he has supported an increase in the minimum wage. Are you playing politics with the minimum wage?

The President. Does that mean that he's changed his position, and he now supports this minimum wage increase?

Q. He says he supports—as of May 24, 1996, he was in support of the minimum wage, according to the Congressional Record and the press release that they put out.

The President. Well, good for him. That's good.

The Vice President. With or without the poison pill?

The President. I mean, if he is now in support of this bill, I hope he will say so and urge the leadership in the Senate and the House of his party to send me the bill right away. And I think the American people should say that we're glad he supports the bill. If in fact he changed his position in May to support it, I think it's good.

Let me say, I never opposed—the implication that I, like Senator Dole and the Republican leadership, opposed the minimum wage increase in the first 2 years is simply false. Let's remember, though, we did first things first. The first thing we did was to double the earned-income tax credit, so that we could say over a period of years we were going to take all working families who work 40 hours a week who had children in the home out of poverty. That was a very important thing to do on its own merits. And that took a lot of doing. That took virtually all of 1993. It was an important part of our economic plan, and it was opposed by all the Members of the other party in the Congress. So we focused on the earned-income tax credit in the first 2 years.

The change of parties in the '94 election had nothing whatever to do with raising the minimum wage. When I ran in 1992, I said

I thought we ought to take action to keep the minimum wage up with inflation. And it hadn't been raised in 5 years; it needs to be raised.

1996 Election

Q. Mr. President, on this anniversary it seems only fair to ask you when you plan to officially announce what has clearly been your intention all along here, to seek reelection?

The President. I don't know. [*Laughter*] I don't know. We haven't made a decision about an official announcement. I can tell you this, that I'm going to try to keep my team together. I hope that we'll—I'm hoping for an eighth anniversary. How's that?

Small Business and the Minimum Wage

Q. Mr. President, what do you say to small business owners who say they'll have to lay off workers if the minimum wage is increased?

The President. I would say two things. First of all—first, in 1993, when we made 90 percent of the small businesses in this country eligible for a tax cut by increasing the expensing provisions by 70 percent, and again in this minimum wage bill, there are tax relief provisions for small businesses, a number of them which will actually put more money into the hands of small businesses. So that this—even the most hard-pressed small businesses should not be adversely affected by this.

Secondly, there have been study after study after study showing—the vast majority of the studies show that a moderate increase in the minimum wage, especially in a strong economy, does not increase the unemployment rate. We have produced over 10 million new jobs as a country in the last 3½ years. But the people who are still out there working for $4.25 an hour can't live on it. And it is simply a myth to say that most people on the minimum wage are middle class kids living at home with their parents.

I was in Chicago the other day, and some of you probably were with me at that Taste of Chicago event. And I went to one of the food booths, and there was a woman there who said, "I really appreciate you trying to raise the minimum wage. I'm a single mother with two children working full time on the minimum wage and going to school at night. And it's just not true that we're all living in comfortable circumstances. Most people are having a tough time like me."

And that's what I think the answer is. This country has been well-served over a long period of time by having a minimum wage that guaranteed a decent level of subsistence. And remember this, these are people that virtually have to spend everything they make. And when they earn more money, they will turn right around and spend it with small businesses all across the country. They'll spend it at those eating establishments. They'll spend it at the dry cleaners and the places that do laundry. They'll spend it on supporting their children. And therefore, they will be lifting the American economy up, and they'll be helping a lot of small businesses, too.

The Vice President. Could I say something? Could I add a word since in view of the occasion I feel it's okay to interject one word here. I remember when we started this fight. I believe it was the Jim Lehrer show went and asked the question you just asked——

The President. I remember that.

The Vice President. ——to employees who are making the minimum wage. And you know, they're the ones who really ought to give the answer. And I remember vividly one woman in southern Virginia who was making the minimum wage, was asked by the reporter, what about this argument that if they increase your minimum wage X amount, your employer might reduce the number of jobs in your workplace. She thought just for a minute and looked at him straight in the eye and she said, "I'll take my chances."

And that's the way people who were making the minimum wage feel about this question. And the studies indicate that they're right, especially in today's economy.

Helms-Burton Legislation

Q. Mr. President, do you plan to implement—[*inaudible*]—Helms-Burton legislation that would allow lawsuits to move forward?

The President. Would you say that again, please?

Q. Do you plan to implement title 3 of the Helms-Burton legislation which is due on July 16th to allow those lawsuits to move forward?

The President. I'm sorry, I have not made a determination on that. That has not come to me for a determination yet, so I can't comment.

Let me—before I leave, I also want to say a special word of thanks to my longtime friend Secretary Reich, who has carried on this fight for the minimum wage and for a minimum wage that would not be crippled by exempting millions and millions of workers from its impact. And so this was an especially sweet day for him as well, and I thank him for his efforts. And I thank you again, all of you, for being here. This is a great day for our working families.

Thank you.

Assault Weapons Ban

Q. Mr. President, what's your response to Dole's statement on assault weapons?

The President. Let me say, I'm not entirely sure what he meant when he said what he said. My position is clear. I fought for and passed the Brady bill, the assault weapons ban, the 100,000 police. If he now believes that we were right on that, then I applaud that. But it's not clear to me that that's what he said. So I can't comment on what he said because I'm not sure what he said.

Thanks.

NOTE: The President spoke at 5:10 p.m. in the Rose Garden at the White House.

Statement on Training and Equipping the Bosnian Federation

July 9, 1996

I am pleased to announce the start of the U.S.-led train and equip program for the armed forces of the Bosnian Federation. The purpose of this program is to assist in providing Bosnia with the ability to defend itself and thereby promote security and stability in the region. The program will also help ensure that upon IFOR's departure, a military balance exists among the former warring parties so that none of them are encouraged to resume hostilities.

Full commencement of the train-and-equip program was conditioned on the Bosnian Government fully complying with two commitments: first, the Dayton provision mandating the withdrawal of foreign forces and terminating its intelligence cooperation with Iran, and second, the passage of a new Federation Defense Law leading to the integration of Federation military forces and the creation of western-oriented defense institutions in Bosnia. On June 26, I certified that the Bosnian Government had met its commitments with regard to foreign forces and relations with Iran.

I am very pleased to say that this afternoon the Bosnian Federation Parliament adopted a new Defense Law. Bosnian President Izetbegovic and Federation President Zubak have overcome many significant issues in order for the Defense Law to become reality. Their leadership reflects a commitment to a workable Federation Government, and this law is an essential building block of a functioning Federation. When implemented, it will strengthen security for all Bosnians and contribute significantly to a lasting peace in the region.

With the passage of the law, the Bosnian Government has made good on its commitments. Now we can make good on ours: the U.S.-led, international train-and-equip program will begin immediately. We anticipate the program will start in a matter of days in Sarajevo when the Federation signs a contract with MPRI, a U.S.-based company which will execute and manage the program within Bosnia. MPRI will conduct its first training session for senior military leaders in Bosnia within approximately 3 to 4 weeks.

The U.S. drawdown and transfer of approximately $100 million worth of military equipment to Bosnia will also now begin soon. The drawdown package includes individual equipment items, tactical communications assets, small arms and ammunition, main battle tanks, armored personnel carriers, light antitank weapons, and utility helicopters.

NOTE: In his statement, the President referred to President Alija Izetbegovic of Bosnia-Herzegovina, and President Kresimir Zubak of the Bosnian Federation.