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NOTE: The President's 138th news conference began at 2:36 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu of Israel; Chairman Yasser Arafat of the Palestinian Authority; King Hussein I of Jordan; President Hafiz al-Asad of Syria; and President Ernesto Zedillo of Mexico.

Statement on Senator Wendell H. Ford's Decision Not To Seek Reelection

March 10, 1997

Senator Wendell Ford has served his home State of Kentucky with pride and distinction for four terms as a Member of the U.S. Senate. He has been a leader in the Democratic Party and a personal friend for many years. Senator Ford's tireless efforts as a veteran, businessman, Lieutenant Governor, and Governor before coming to Washington, have earned him the admiration of all who know him. I will miss his leadership and advice on Capitol Hill but know that he will continue to find ways to improve the lives of the constituents he has served so well for so long. Kentucky and the Nation are better for his dedication and service. Hillary and I wish him, his wife, Jean, and their family well in the years to come.

Letter to Congressional Leaders Transmitting the Report on Peacekeeping Operations

March 10, 1997

Dear _____:

Enclosed is a copy of the 1996 Annual Report to the Congress on Peacekeeping, pursuant to section 407(d) of the Foreign Relations Authorization Act, Fiscal Years 1994 and 1995 (Public Law 103–236).

Once again in 1996, multilateral peacekeeping operations proved their worth in helping to defuse conflict and alleviate humanitarian crises around the world. Our support for the United Nations and other peacekeeping options allows us to protect our interests before they are directly threatened and ensures that others share with us the risks and costs of maintaining stability in the post-Cold War world.

The concerted efforts we have made over the past few years have brought greater discipline to peacekeeping decision-making in national capitals and at the United Nations. Tough questions about the mandate, size, cost, duration, and exit strategy for proposed missions are asked and answered before they are approved. Careful attention is also given to ensuring that those responsible for leading the mission—whether the United Nations, NATO, or a coalition of concerned states—are capable of doing the job at hand.

I hope you will find the enclosed report a valuable and informative account of how the United States uses peacekeeping to promote stability and protect its interests. It is important that peacekeeping remain a viable choice when we face situations in which neither inaction nor unilateral American intervention is appropriate. To that end, I look forward to working with you on my proposal to continue our reform efforts at the United Nations and to pay off our peacekeeping debt.

Sincerely,

William J. Clinton

NOTE: Idential letters were sent to Jesse Helms, chairman, Senate Committee on Foreign Relations; Strom Thurmond, chairman, Senate Committee on Armed Services; Ted Stevens, chairman, Senate Committee on Appropriations; Benjamin A. Gilman, chairman, House Committee on International Relations; Robert L. Livingston, chairman, House Committee on Appropriations; and Floyd Spence, chairman, House Committee on National Security.

Remarks to the Conference on Free TV and Political Reform and an Exchange With Reporters

March 11, 1997

The President. Thank you. What a gift. [*Laughter*] Thank you, Walter Cronkite. Thank you, Paul Taylor, for your passion and your commitment. Thank you, Senator McCain, Chairman Hundt, Ann McBride, Becky Cain. And thank you, Barry Diller, for what you have said about this important issue. I am delighted to have the chance to come here today, and I thank the sponsors of this event.

Again, let me say that I participated in the last election in the free television offered by the networks. Thanks to the efforts of Paul Taylor and Walter Cronkite and the members of the Straight Talk Coalition, Senator Dole and I were given a unique opportunity to talk directly to the voters—no gimmicks, no flashy graphics—a full minute or two at a time. And I really enjoyed it. I put a lot of effort into those opportunities, and I'm sure that Senator Dole did as well. I felt that they were a great gift.

And Walter and I had a talk backstage before we came out about how it might even be done better in the next round of elections. Maybe my opinions will carry more weight on such matters since I never expect to run again for anything. And I do believe that the free television was a very important thing. I think if it could be done, as we were discussing, at the same time every evening on a given network and back to back so that the candidates can be seen in a comparative context, I think it would be even more valuable.

We have to do some things to improve the way our political system works at election time and the way it communicates, or its leaders communicate, to people all year around. This should not be surprising to anyone. The Founding Fathers understood that we were an experiment. We're still around after all of these years because we have relished the idea that we are an experiment, that America is a work in progress, that we're constantly in the making. We always have to change.

A lot of good things have happened to expand participation in the political system from the time we were a new nation, when only white male property owners could vote, and we have to make some more changes now. But if you look at the changes which have been made in the last 200 years, we should be hopeful.

Television has the power to expand the franchise or to shrink the franchise. Indeed, that is true of all means of communications and all media. We know that television is a profound and powerful force. We know that we don't fully understand all of its implications—even what you said, Walter, we don't really know what the connection is between television and a diminished voter turnout. It could be because there is a poll on television every night that tells people about the election, so some people think that there's no point in their voting, because the person they're for is going to win anyway or the person they're for can't win anyway.

We need to think about that, and that's not the subject of this meeting, but we need to—we really need—all of us need more information, more research, about why people vote and why they don't vote. There was a very—I've seen one survey, done I believe for the Democratic Leadership Council, of the nonvoters. It's a poll that doesn't pay off. You know, it was done, after the election, of the nonvoters. But it was very interesting, and some of the findings were quite counterintuitive about why people did or didn't vote. But I would urge those of you who are interested in it to get that, look at it, and think about what new work could be done to look into that.

Today we want to talk about whether the medium of free television could be used to diminish the impact of excessive money in politics and about whether it can be used, therefore, to reform our system in a way that makes it better and, ultimately, that leads to better decisions for the American people. It is now commonplace—everybody will tell you—that campaigns cost too much and it takes too much time to raise the money and the more money you raise from a larger number of people, the more questions will be raised about that.

Major party committees spent over 3 times as much in this last election cycle as 4 years before. And that doesn't count the third party expenditures, both the genuinely independent third party committees and those that weren't really independent although they claim to be. Spending in congressional campaigns has risen sixfold in the last two decades. That's over 3 times the rate of inflation. The biggest reason for this is the rise in the cost of television. But of course, there is also now more money being spent on mail, on telephoning, on radio, and on other print advertising as well.

In 1972, candidates spent $25 million for political ads; in 1996, $400 million. Presidential campaigns now routinely spend two-thirds or more of their money on paid ads;

Senate candidates, 42 percent of their money on television; House races, about a third. Interestingly enough, that's often because there is no single television market which just overlaps a House district and often the cost is prohibitive, particularly in the urban districts. But you get the drift; it's the same everywhere.

We are the only major democracy in the world where candidates have to raise larger and larger sums of money simply to communicate with voters through the medium that matters most. Every other major democracy offers candidates or parties free air time to speak to voters, and we can plainly do better, building on the big first step urged by this group in 1996. We have an obligation to restore our campaign finance system to a system that has the broad confidence of the American people but also of the American press that comments on it. In order to do that, television has to be part of the solution. I have said before and I will say again, everybody who has been involved in this system has to take responsibility for it and for changing it.

Those of us in public life know better than anybody else what the demands of prevailing in the present system are, and those who control the airwaves understand it well also. First and most fundamentally, I came here to support Senator McCain. We have to take advantage of this year to pass campaign finance reform. The campaign finance laws are two decades out of date. They have been overtaken by events, by dramatic changes in the nature and cost of campaigns and the flood of money that has followed them. The money has been raised and spent in ways that simply could not have been imagined when the people who fashioned the last campaign finance law in Congress did it.

They did the best they could, and I will say again, I believe that they did a good thing and that that law did improve the financing of our campaigns and restored a level of confidence to our politics and made things better. It is simply that time has changed, and we need new changes to reflect the things that have happened in the last 20 years.

It will not be easy to do this, but the situation is far from hopeless. After all, the first thing I want to say is, the American people do care about this, and our politics, I think, in terms of traditional honesty, is getting better, not worse. I have asked over a dozen people, just in the last 2 years, who have been living in Washington for the last 30 years, who have been in politics—the most recent person I asked was Senator Dole—whether politics was more or less honest today than it was 30 years ago, and all 12 or 15—however many I asked—all gave the same answer. They said it's more honest today than it was 30 years ago. I think that's where we have to start.

It is important to put this in the proper perspective, if you want people in Congress to vote to change it. They cannot be asked to admit that they are doing something that they're not or that they are participating in dragging the country down the drain, because anybody who knows what went on 30 years ago and what goes on today would have to say that the system is still better than it was then. On the other hand, anybody who denied that, at an exponential pace, changes are occurring which imperil the integrity of the electoral process and the financing of campaigns, would also be badly amiss.

The second thing I'd like to say is, we should be hopeful because we have seen over the last 4 years, in other contexts, real bipartisan processes to improve the way politics works, not in campaign finance reform, but there was bipartisan support for the motor voter law, for the lobby disclosure overhaul, that was the first one in 50 years, in which Congress banned meals and gifts from lobbyists to lawmakers but also required much more disclosure. And that's the most important thing. When you get 100 percent disclosure of an area where there hasn't been any before, then that offers all of you in the press the opportunity to communicate to the American people what the activities of lobbyists are and to let them and you draw your own conclusions in terms of the results produced by decisionmakers. We required Congress to live under the same that they impose upon the private sector.

Every single one of these things has happened in the last 4 years with broad, bipartisan support. So I think it is very, very important that we recognize this will not happen unless there is bipartisan support. But there

is evidence that if the environment is right, if the support is deep enough, if the calls are strong enough and positive enough, we can get this kind of change.

Now, let me also say that I think it's important to make this point, because I see all these surveys that say that campaign finance reform is important to people, but if you rank it on a list of 10 things, it will always rank 10th behind balancing the budget, education, an all this. That can be used by politicians as an excuse, if you will, not to deal with it. They say, ''Well, look at all these surveys. Campaign finance reform—sure, people like it—but it's not as important to them as whether we'll have national standards for reading and math,'' for example, one of my passions.

What we have to do is to make a connection between the two for the American people. What we have to argue is, yes, we really need to be up here doing the public's business. We need to be balancing the budget, improving education, reforming welfare, expanding health care coverage to children who don't have it, passing a juvenile justice reform, the kinds of things that I'm passionately interested in.

But having the right kind of campaign finance reform system and having the right kind of straight talk on television and having issues be more—elections be more issue-oriented and having the debates of both sides heard clearly by all people and increasing voter interest and voter turnout, all these things will increase the likelihood that this laundry list of good things will be done and will be done in better fashion than would otherwise be the case. I think it is very important that those of you who care about this make this connection because that's how to build broad and deep support for this endeavor.

It seems to me that we do have an historic opportunity to pass campaign finance reform. And I think the public owes a lot of gratitude to Senator McCain and Senator Feingold and Congressman Shays and Congressman Meehan and all of their supporters for the legislation they have offered. It is real and tough. It would level the playing field and reduce the role of big money in politics. It would set voluntary limits on campaign spending and ban soft money, all corporate contributions, and the very large individual ones. It would restrict the role of political action committees and lobbyists and make needed reforms within the confines of the Constitution as defined by existing Supreme Court case law.

In all these ways, it would set ceilings on money in politics, and just as important, it would also provide a floor. And I think that is very important—it would also provide a floor. You actually have some Members in Congress who come from districts where there's a very low per capita income, for example, who are very afraid of campaign finance reform because they're afraid, among their own constituents, they'll never be able to raise enough money in their district to compete the first time a multimillionaire runs against them.

So the law has to give a floor. And McCain-Feingold does that by giving candidates free air time to talk directly to the voters if they observe the spending limits of the law. And we need to emphasize that any ceiling law should have a floor to guarantee that people have their say and are heard. It gives candidates deeply discounted rates for the purchase of time if they observe the limits of the law. In all these ways, it will level the playing field, giving new voices a chance to be heard and being fair to both parties.

I have supported the idea of free TV time for many years. When the Vice President was in Congress, he actually introduced legislation to require it. It was first proposed by President Kennedy in 1962. It has been around long enough. We now tried it in the last election more than ever before, and we know that it advances the public interest.

In my State of the Union Address, I asked Congress to pass the McCain-Feingold bill by July 4th, the day we celebrate the birth of our democracy. I pledge to you that I will continue to work with members of both parties to do this. I will be mustering more support out in the country—and that will be announced over the next few weeks—for this endeavor.

We have to use the present intense interest in this, as well as the controversy over fundraising in the last election and all the publicity on it, as a spur to action. We cannot

let it become what it is in danger of becoming, which is an excuse for inaction.

And that again is something that I challenge all of you on. Do not let the controversy become an excuse to do nothing and to wallow around in it. Use it as a spur to changing the system, because until you change the system, you will continue to have controversies over the amount—the sheer amount—of money that is raised in these elections.

The second thing I'd like to discuss is what Walter talked about in some detail, and that is how broadcasters can meet their public interest obligations in this era. Ever since the FCC was created, broadcasters have had a compact with the public. In return for the public airwaves, they must meet public interest obligations. The bargain has been good for the industry and good for the public. Now, startling new technologies are shaking and remaking the world of telecommunications. They've opened wider opportunities for broadcasters than ever before, but they also offer us the chance to open wider vistas for our democracy as well.

The move from analog signals to digital ones will give each broadcaster much more signal capacity than they have today. The broadcasters asked Congress to be given this new access to the public airwaves without charge. I believe, therefore, it is time to update broadcasters' public interest obligations to meet the demands of the new times and the new technological realities. I believe broadcasters who receive digital licenses should provide free air time for candidates, and I believe the FCC should act to require free air time for candidates.

The telecommunications revolution can help to transform our system so that once again voters have the loudest voice in our democracy. Free time for candidates can help free our democracy from the grip of big money. I hope all of you will support that. There are many ways that this could be done. Many of you here have put forward innovative plans. I believe the free time should be available to all qualified Federal candidates. I believe it should give candidates a chance to talk directly to the voters without gimmicks or intermediaries. Because campaign finance reform is so important, I believe it should be available especially to candidates who limit their own spending. It is clear under the Supreme Court decision that this can be done, and I believe that is how it should be done.

Candidates should be able to talk to voters based on the strength of their ideas, not the size of their pocketbooks, and all voters should know that no candidate is kept from running simply because he or she cannot raise enormous amounts of funds.

Last month, the Vice President announced that we would create an independent advisory committee of experts, industry representatives, public interest advocates, and others to recommend what steps to take. Before I came over here today, I signed an Executive order creating that committee. The balanced panel I will appoint will advise me on ways we can move forward and make a judgment as to what the new public interest obligations of broadcasters might be. But today, let us simply agree on the basic premise. In 1997, for broadcasters, serving the public should mean enhancing our democracy.

Finally, let me challenge the broadcasters as well. Broadcasters are not the problem, but broadcasting must be the solution. The step the broadcasters took in this last election, as I have said over and over again in other forums, with the encouragement of Straight Talk for TV, was a real breakthrough. Now I ask broadcasters to follow up on this experiment in democracy, and I'm especially pleased that a leader in the industry, Barry Diller, has challenged his colleagues to open up the airwaves to candidates. He has made clear, forcefully and very publicly, that he and all of his colleagues have an obligation to society, and his presence here today makes it clear that he is willing to assume the mantle of leadership. But surely there are others—I know there are—who will gladly join in and take up this cause as well.

There are many questions about political reform. Many skeptics will look at all proposed reform measures and ask whether they'll work and whether there will be unintended consequences. The truth is that they will work and there will be unintended consequences.

But if we use that for an excuse not to change, no good change in this country would ever have come about. There will always be something we cannot foresee. That's what makes life interesting and keeps us all humble, but that must not be an excuse for our refusing to act in this area. We know—we know—when we work to expand our democracy, when you give people a greater voice and advocates of all political views a firm platform upon which to stand, we are moving forward as a nation. By passing campaign finance reform, by renewing the compact between broadcasters and the public to better serve in this new era, we can do that again.

And I will say again, I will do all I can on both these fronts, on campaign finance reform legislation and on requiring free use, free availability of the airwaves to public candidates. We need your support for both, and we need broader and more intense public support. And again I say, that has to be built by demonstrating to the public that this is not an inside-the-beltway exercise in both parties trying to find ways to undermine each other but a necessary way of opening our democracy so that we can better, more quickly, and more profoundly address the real challenges facing the American people in their everyday lives. These two steps will help, and together I hope we can make them this year.

Thank you very much.

1996 Elections

Q. Mr. President.

The President. Hello, Sarah [Sarah McClendon, McClendon News Service].

Q. I want to know—you said that you would not have been reelected had you not raised that money——

The President. I think—no, I think I probably—I might have been, because I'm the President and a President has unusual access to the public. And you have the Presidential debates, which are unique in terms of their viewership and their potential impact. But I believe that if you just look at the races for Congress and the number of votes that changed just in the last 5 days and how the votes were counted when the votes changed and the movement changed, there is no question that the amount of money deployed in an intelligent way can have a profound impact on the outcome of these elections. And what you want to do is to make sure that everybody has the same fair chance at the voters and nobody has an excessive chance. And given the Supreme Court cases, the way the McCain-Feingold bill is drawn up, plus the effort to get more free air time, are the best responses to overcome the undue influence of excessive money.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:12 a.m. at the National Press Club. In his remarks, he referred to Walter Cronkite, chair, and Paul Taylor, executive director, Free TV for Straight Talk Coalition; Ann McBride, president, Common Cause; Becky Cain, president, National League of Women Voters; and Barry Diller, former chairman, Fox Broadcasting.

Remarks Announcing the Economic Plan for the District of Columbia

March 11, 1997

Thank you. Thank you very much. Mr. Vice President, Representative Norton, Representative Moran, members of the administration, Mr. Mayor, Chairman Brimmer, Mr. Evans, and especially all the citizens of the District of Columbia who are here today. You know, every year millions of visitors come here, but even those who don't come know a good deal about our Capital. America's eyes and the eyes of the world constantly focus on Washington. They see the good, and there is much good.

There is history here, everywhere, tremendous resources and talent from all over the world. But there is more as well. There are the people of the District, some of whose families have lived here for generations. They are hardworking, and they are committed to making the community and their neighborhoods better. There are businesses which strive to make it, sometimes under very difficult conditions. There is much dedication and much heart.

In my State of the Union Address, I said that we have to renew our Capital City, to make it the finest place to learn, to work, and to live, because people here deserve no less and because the District matters beyond