

**Remarks Announcing the
Nomination of Dr. David Satcher To
Be Surgeon General and an
Exchange With Reporters**
September 12, 1997

The President. Thank you very much. Madam Secretary, our distinguished guests representing the health professions, to the Satcher family, and ladies and gentlemen.

Just yesterday, we learned of the strong public health progress our Nation has been making in recent years. We learned that last year, infant mortality declined to a record low, prenatal care reached a record high, the teen birth rate declined for the fifth straight year, and death from HIV and AIDS declined more than 25 percent. These are huge gains for public health, and much of the credit goes to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and their gifted leader, Dr. David Satcher.

As you heard from the Vice President, Dr. Satcher's many accomplishments are built on a deep foundation of personal experience. On the small corn and peanut farm where he grew up, he relied on a dedicated country doctor, the only African-American doctor in the area, to come to his family's side in times of need. That man, named Dr. Jackson, helped save David Satcher's life, and then he and other mentors and family members inspired him to dedicate his life to caring for the health of other people's families.

They inspired a man, whose parents didn't have the opportunity to finish elementary school, to himself become the first black M.D., Ph.D. in the history of Case Western Reserve University, then go on to become President of Meharry Medical College and the Director of the world-renowned Centers for Disease Control.

In part, because of the inspiration of his family doctor, David Satcher is uniquely qualified to be America's family doctor. He's a mainstream physician with a talent for leadership. And I'm proud to announce that I intend to nominate him to be both Assistant Secretary for Health and the Surgeon General of the United States.

Only once before has the President asked one person to fill two of the Nation's most prominent public health offices. I do so today

because in his role as Director of the CDC, the agency that is the world's best defense against disease, David Satcher has demonstrated his profound medical expertise and eloquent advocacy for the Nation's public health. He's helped to lead our fight to improve the safety of our food, to wipe out the scourge of emerging infectious diseases, to expand access to vital cancer screening.

I particularly want to thank him for guiding our childhood immunization initiative. Child immunization levels have now reached an all-time high, and cases of childhood diseases that can be prevented by vaccines are at an all-time low.

Now I look forward to working with Dr. Satcher on our most important public health mission, to free our children from the grip of tobacco. Every year, more Americans die from smoking-related diseases than from AIDS, car accidents, murders, and suicides combined. And we all know if people don't begin to smoke in their teens, it's unlikely they will ever begin to do so. We have to make the most of this historic opportunity to protect our children against the dangers of tobacco by passing sweeping legislation that focuses first and foremost on reducing smoking among our young people. And he will lead our Nation's efforts on many other health issues, as well.

Over the past three decades of serving the health needs of our Nation, David Satcher has earned the highest respect of public health officials around the Nation and, indeed, all around the world. No one is better qualified to be America's doctor. No one is better qualified to be the Nation's leading voice for health for all of us. And I am grateful that he is willing to serve.

Before I call on Dr. Satcher to speak, let me make one more comment about another nomination. I'm very disappointed that my nominee for United States Ambassador to Mexico, Governor Weld, did not receive a hearing before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee today.

Because our relationship with Mexico is so very important to our security and to our economy, I want an Ambassador who can represent all Americans. In a spirit of bipartisanship, I selected a highly qualified individual in the Republican Governor of Massachu-

setts. I believe the full Senate should find a way to move forward on this nomination. And I am encouraged by suggestions that Senators are seeking a way within the rules of the Senate to do so. After all, a majority of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee wants him to have a hearing, a majority of the United States Senate wants him to have a hearing, and all I have asked for is a fair hearing and an up-or-down vote on a man I believe to be highly qualified.

Now, I hope I'll receive a quick hearing and up-or-down vote, which will, doubtless, be up on Dr. David Satcher.

Dr. Satcher.

Q. Mr. President—

The President. Please, let me finish.

[At this point, Dr. Satcher thanked the President and made brief remarks.]

Nomination of Governor William Weld

Q. Mr. President, Senator Lugar says that it's now up to you to prevail on Senator Lott to get the Weld nomination to the Senate floor. And, while I'm at it, will you go for a recess appointment if that doesn't work?

The President. Well, I certainly intend to talk to Senator Lott about it, although, I would hope that Senator Lugar would do the same thing, and the other Republicans who want the fair and decent thing done. And my position is that this man should have a hearing. He's been a good Governor. He was a distinguished member of the Justice Department under President Reagan, and he's entitled to a hearing. And I believe if he gets a hearing, he'll be confirmed and he'll be able to go to Mexico. And that's what I'm working for.

Police Brutality

Q. Mr. President, the Congressional Black Caucus is in town, and they're calling on you today to address the problem of police brutality—[inaudible]—to the Justice Department. What do you have to say to the Caucus about the issue of brutality, and what should be done about it?

The President. Well, I believe that—first of all, I think that when any kind of State action rises to the level of a constitutional violation, the Justice Department ought to be on top of it. And I look forward to meeting

with—I'm going to be with the Black Caucus, and I look forward to hearing from them and to seeing what else they think we should do. This administration, I think, has done more for law enforcement than any administration in modern history, and we've been very supportive of it. And I think those of us who believe in law enforcement and support it should also hold it to the highest standards of conduct.

Tobacco Settlement

Q. Mr. President, you're meeting with your tobacco advisers this afternoon on the proposed settlement. Can you tell us what direction you're leaning in, and do you think that the penalties that are posed on the tobacco industry are severe enough?

The President. Well, let me say the direction I will lean in is I'm going to do whatever I think will best further public health and will best increase the chances that we can dramatically reduce smoking among young people. And I will do that—not only what, but when I do that. There are questions of substance and timing here, and it's a highly complex issue.

I want to thank Secretary Shalala and Bruce Reed for heading the process for our administration to review all aspects of this and also to hear from all people involved, including the tobacco farmers, which Secretary Glickman worked on. And I will be—at least I'll begin my review of that later this afternoon, and then I'll do whatever I think is best. But I can't—I don't want to make any specific comments until I have a chance to hear from my folks. They've been working on this very hard.

Nomination of Governor William Weld

Q. President Clinton, on the—back on the Weld nomination, what do you make of Senator Helms' implied threat that this could have fallout in your relationship with him on other foreign policy matters?

The President. Oh, I don't think it was implied. I thought it was explicit. [Laughter] I like that about Senator Helms; he always tells you where he is and what he's doing. This is just a—we've had a very cordial relationship, partly because we've been very can-

did and honest with each other, and this is just an area where we have disagreement.

I think Governor Weld would be a good ambassador; he doesn't. I think whether you believe he'd be good or not, he's entitled to a hearing, especially when a majority of the members of the committee and a majority of the Members of the Senate want him to have it. And so that's where I am, and we're at loggerheads. Now, as—Senator Lott operates the Senate under the Senate rules, and they may well have the ability to prevent this from ever happening, and they may prevail, but the battle is not over yet.

Q. Mr. President, Mr. Weld used the term, "despotic" to describe today's proceedings. Would you go that far?

The President. Well, I think there are a lot of things about the Senate that when they operate properly may be good—the Senate was designed to slow things down in America by the Founding Fathers—but when they're abused can be bad. I think, among other things, that filibuster has been grossly overused in the last 5 years, and I know of no precedent for this action. But we'll just have to see.

I didn't answer that question on purpose. That's right, I didn't answer—let me remind you of what the situation was in the last recess. We just finished a recess, and Senator Lott told me in no uncertain terms that if I intended to recess-appoint Governor Weld, the Senate would not go into recess, and that he would do whatever was necessary to make sure the Senate did not go into recess. And again, I value my relationship with—we got a balanced budget out of this Congress in part because we trusted each other to tell the truth. So I have to be careful how I handle this. I would never mislead Senator Lott, and he might have the same position this time he had last time.

So I think it's premature to talk about that. We should do this the right way. This man has been a distinguished public servant, and he ought to get a hearing. Let's do this the right way and not talk about—there are circumstances under which recess appoint-

ments are appropriate, but the appropriate thing to do here is to give this man a hearing.

Thank you.

Surgeon General Nomination

Q. Mr. President, there has been some criticism on why you waited so long on appointing a Surgeon General. Can you address those criticisms, and also, the other criticism that there doesn't even need to be a Surgeon General?

The President. Well, first of all, I—we had this ready to go. We thought the appropriate thing to do was to wait until right after the break instead of doing it right before the break. So we've been ready for some time. But I thought to do it after the August recess would give it greater national visibility and greater impetus going into the congressional hearing process.

And secondly, you could make an argument that we don't need a lot of folks, I guess, but my view is that the country is better off with a Surgeon General than without one. And I think of the contributions that Dr. Koop has made. I think of contributions many of our other Surgeons General have made. I think the idea of having a person who can be looked to by ordinary Americans for good advice and for strong advocacy on what they can personally do, on what the public policy of the country ought to be, and who can advise us about what we should be doing in policy and research, and things of that kind, is very, very important.

I think the country kind of likes the idea that there ought to be a doctor that they can trust, that they can turn to for old homespun advice and for also keeping them on the cutting edge of whatever modern medical developments are. And I know that I certainly feel that way, and I'll feel a lot better when Dr. Satcher has been confirmed.

Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:30 p.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to former Surgeon General C. Everett Koop.

Digest of Other White House Announcements

The following list includes the President's public schedule and other items of general interest announced by the Office of the Press Secretary and not included elsewhere in this issue.

September 7

In the afternoon, the President and Hillary Clinton returned to Washington, DC, from their vacation at Martha's Vineyard, MA.

September 8

In the morning, the President traveled to Gambrills, MD, and in the afternoon, he returned to Washington, DC.

In an evening ceremony in the Oval Office, the President received diplomatic credentials from Ambassadors Arnold T. Halfhide of Suriname, Mohamad B. Chatah of Lebanon, Ahmed Ould Sid'Ahmed of Mauritania, Marwan Jamil al-Muasher of Jordan, Semere Russom of Eritrea, Abdulwahab Abdullah Al-Hajjri of Yemen, Ramiro Guelar of Argentina, Rene Antonio Leon Rodriguez of El Salvador, Crispin Grey-Johnson of Gambia, Alberto Maspons Guzman of Ecuador, Sean O'hUiginn of Ireland, and Rolf Ekeus of Sweden.

The President announced his intention to nominate David L. Aaron for the position of Under Secretary for International Trade at the Department of Commerce.

The President announced his intention to nominate Robert H. Beatty, Jr., to serve as a Commissioner on the Federal Mine Safety and Health Review Commission.

The President announced his intention to nominate Edward M. Gabriel to be Ambassador to Morocco.

September 9

In the afternoon, the President participated in a roundtable discussion in the Cabinet Room with representatives of various ethnic groups.

The President announced his intention to nominate Ernesta Ballard to serve as a mem-

Administration of William J. Clinton, 1997

ber of the Board of Governors of the U.S. Postal Service.

The President announced his intention to nominate Robin Lynn Raphel to be Ambassador to Tunisia.

September 10

The President announced the appointment of Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, Secretary of Defense William S. Cohen, Secretary of Education Richard W. Riley, Secretary of Health and Human Services Donna E. Shalala, and Federal Emergency Management Agency Director James Lee Witt as members of the American National Red Cross Board of Governors.

September 11

The President announced his intention to nominate Betty Eileen King to be U.S. Representative on the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations, with the rank of Ambassador.

The President announced the appointment of Bruce A. Lehman as Acting Chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities.

September 12

In the morning, the President met with Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Chief Executive Tung Chee-hwa in the Oval Office.

The President announced his intention to nominate Katharine G. Abraham to serve a second term as Commissioner of Labor Statistics at the Department of Labor.

The President announced his intention to nominate Representative Corrine C. "Lindy" Boggs to be Ambassador to the Holy See.

The President announced his intention to nominate Stephen W. Bosworth to be Ambassador to Korea.

The President announced his intention to nominate Susan King to serve as Assistant Secretary for Public Affairs at the Department of Labor.

The White House announced that the President will travel to Pittsburgh, PA; Little Rock, AR; and Houston, TX, September 24-28.