

Democratic National Committee; Cynthia Friedman, national cochair, Women's Leadership Forum; and Bernard Bailyn, professor emeritus, Harvard University.

Remarks and an Exchange With Reporters on Departure for Baltimore, Maryland

February 19, 1998

Situation in Iraq

The President. Good morning. I have just had a very good conversation with the President of France, Jacques Chirac. We agreed that U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan's mission to Baghdad is a critical opportunity to achieve the outcome that all of us would prefer, a peaceful and principled end to this crisis.

The Secretary-General is backed by the unambiguous position of the Security Council. Saddam Hussein must give the weapons inspectors full, free, unfettered access to all suspected sites anywhere in Iraq. That is the clear standard which Saddam himself agreed to at the end of the Gulf war and that the Security Council has reiterated on many occasions since. He simply must adhere to that standard.

Let me also say that I have asked Vice President Gore to postpone his planned trip to South Africa. In the coming days I want my full national security team on hand to take part in our deliberations and decisions on this vitally important issue.

We hope the Secretary-General's mission will succeed. But let me be clear: If diplomacy fails, we must be—and we are—prepared to act. The choice is Saddam Hussein's. We hope he will accept the mandate of the world community. He has, after all, agreed to it already, years ago. If not, he must bear the responsibility for the consequences.

Q. Mr. President, what did you learn, sir—sir, what did you learn from the divided town meeting yesterday?

The President. Well, I thought it was a good old-fashioned American debate. But I would say, I was, first of all, very proud of the Secretary of State, the Secretary of Defense, and Mr. Berger. I thought they answered the questions well. And I believe strongly that most Americans support our

policy. They support our resolve. I think an overwhelming majority of Americans also want a peaceful resolution of this, but if it's necessary for us to act, I believe America will do what it always does. I believe it will unite, just as we did in 1991. I believe it will unite behind taking the necessary action.

Q. Mr. President, do you think Saddam Hussein is emboldened to stiff-arm the international community based upon what happened in Columbus yesterday?

The President. Not if he understands the first thing about America.

Q. Mr. President, are you ready to deal with a deadline if Saddam Hussein—

Q. Does that mean you're going to start bombing next week?

The President. I've made no decision about a deadline.

Independent Counsel's Investigation

Q. Mr. President, are you prepared to assert executive privilege in connection with the testimony of Bruce Lindsey and John Podesta, other of your top assistants before the grand jury?

The President. It's my understanding that the White House Counsel is trying to resolve that issue today, and while he's working on it, I don't think I should comment about it.

Q. Thank you, Mr. President.

Situation in Iraq

Q. Mr. President, are you considering delivering a more formal address to the American people about the need to deal with Saddam—[inaudible]?

The President. Well, if further action becomes necessary, I will obviously speak directly to the American people about it.

Q. Mr. President, do you feel like you have articulated the goals of this policy, if we do, indeed, have to attack Iraq?

The President. I believe that the speech I gave at the Pentagon was quite clear about that. We want to significantly reduce his capacity to produce chemical and biological weapons and his capacity to deliver them and to visit them on his people, his neighbors, and people throughout the world. I believe the more the American people learn about the dangers of chemical and biological warfare, the kinds of problems they can

present to us now and in the future, the stiff-er their resolve will be.

And so I feel that time is on our side. And I believe that 10 years from now, not in the heat of this moment, 15 years from now, when people look back at this time, they will want to look back at a period when those of us in positions of responsibility fulfilled our responsibility by trying to rid the world of this danger.

Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:25 a.m. on the South Lawn at the White House.

Exchange With Reporters at the Living Classroom Foundation in Baltimore

February 19, 1998

Water Testing

Q. Tell us, what does it mean?

The President. Well, this water is from here. So they wanted to test the water to see if it could accommodate life. And you had to put this free agent in the water, and then you shake it up, and then you match it up with these colors here, to see which one it's like. So we put it in here, and the color is most like this one—7.5 to 9, and then here's the chart. It's around neutral; this way it will accommodate life. If it's too acidic, obviously it won't. But if it gets way out here, it's too basic, it won't. So anywhere in this range, right, 7 to 10 is okay. And you see the color here is like in between these two.

I learned all that from Brandon here, my science instructor—[*laughter*—my marine biology instructor here. You did a great job.

Brandon Hunter. Any time.

The President. And so did you, Aaron.

The Vice President. Aaron did a great job, too.

Brandon. This was fun.

The President. Was it fun for you?

Brandon. Yep.

The President. It was fun for us, too. Thanks.

President's Travel

Q. Mr. President, if you're grounding the Vice President, will you be skipping some of your trips over the next couple of weeks, too?

The Vice President. We're going to go do this event now, and then we'll—

The President. I didn't ground him. Don't get too carried away with the school metaphors here. I just asked him to stay around.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:55 a.m. at the Living Classroom Foundation. In his remarks, he referred to Brandon Hunter and Aaron Hunt, Middlesex Elementary School students who participated in a water testing project. A tape was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

Remarks Announcing the New Clean Water Initiative in Baltimore

February 19, 1998

Thank you very much, Thank you. I don't know about you, but I thought that Larry Simms did a terrific job. Can we give him a hand? [*Applause*] I've been in public life long enough to know when a guy throws a sucker punch. When he got up there and said, "Oh, I'm just this lowly president of"—[*laughter*—I thought this guy is fixing to give us a heck of a good talk. [*Laughter*] And sure enough, he did.

I thank you for providing as much as anything else, Larry, a historic perspective, going back through generations of your family's life, and also reminding us that we all have a stake in clean water one way or another, and all of us who depend upon you and the people like you to provide us with good, clean, safe seafood have sometimes a bigger connection than even we're aware of.

Thank you, Mr. Vice President, for your leadership and your inspiration to me over these last 5 years. Thank you, Secretary Glickman and Administrator Browner. I thank Senator Sarbanes, a truly remarkable person, for all the many wonderful things he has done for Maryland and with our administration. I thank Senator Mikulski, who doubles the energy of any room she is in. [*Laughter*] Barbara couldn't see me, but I was rolling my eyes when she said, well, she never dreamed she could get the President to come, and maybe it just happened to be—if you believe that—[*laughter*]. When she makes up her mind to do something—you're just like my dog, Buddy, grabbing a bone.