

decent, able man. He was an outstanding candidate for this position, and he deserved the opportunity to be considered by the full Senate. I appreciate the support he received from Chairman Thurmond, Senator Levin, and many other Senators in both parties. I thank Mr. Jones for his willingness to serve his country. I am confident that he will continue to make vital contributions to Florida and to our Nation.

Remarks on the Nation's Heat Wave and the Resignation of Press Secretary Mike McCurry and an Exchange With Reporters

July 23, 1998

The President. I have not become the White House Press Secretary—yet. [*Laughter*] I have two announcements to make today; one involves the gentlemen on my—plural—right and left. But first I'd like to make an announcement about the heat wave.

All Americans have been deeply concerned and troubled by the human toll of the record heat wave that has spread across many parts of the United States. Already this summer in many Southern and Southwestern States, temperatures have been 20 percent higher than normal. This scorching heat shows no signs of abating. It has destroyed crops, led to widespread power outages, and worst of all, has resulted in the deaths of over 100 people. The most vulnerable—the very old, the very young, people with disabilities—are at greatest risk. Those who cannot afford air-conditioning are at real peril of further health risks as the heat wave goes on.

In times of human crisis we have an obligation to act, to strengthen the ties that bind us as one nation. When fire or flood or earthquakes strike, we step in. When blizzards and high energy costs put elderly and poor citizens at risk, we step in. When smothering heat threatens the lives of people, we can step in, and that is what I am doing today.

The Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program, LIHEAP, makes funds available for emergency use to help at-risk families in times of weather distress. Today I am directing the Department of Health and Human Services to release \$100 million in

emergency funds for the 11 hottest Southern and Western States, to help families pay for air-conditioners, fans, electric bills, and other ways to beat the heat.

This emergency relief was paid for in the bipartisan balanced budget agreement reached with Congress last year. It reflects the longstanding commitment by both parties to help citizens protect their families in severe weather conditions.

It is, I might say, in light of these terrible weather conditions—and I would point out, I believe—I saw one television program yesterday that pointed out that the 9 hottest years on record have occurred in the last 11 years; that 1997 was the hottest year on record; that in each and every month in 1998, it has beaten the previous record month. So this will be the hottest year on record if something doesn't happen.

Therefore, it is all the more disturbing that Republican leaders in the House of Representatives are attempting to entirely eliminate the LIHEAP program. If Congress proceeds to try and eliminate all funding for this vital emergency assistance, it would be an act of political irresponsibility. It would put partisanship ahead of the progress and the people of our country.

Now, only a few days remain in this session of Congress. We can still make it a time of progress. We can fund the LIHEAP program. We can enact a Patients' Bill of Rights. We can continue our policy of fiscal discipline by reserving the surplus until we fix the Social Security system. We can strengthen education. We can save our children from the dangers of tobacco. There is still time to choose people and progress over partisanship and division.

For my part, I am determined to take every action within my power to help our people, and I look forward to working with lawmakers of both parties to restore LIHEAP funding and to make further progress. Meanwhile, I hope these funds will be of help to people in those 11 States. I know there are many volunteer efforts going on, and I would encourage them.

This is an especially difficult time in a lot of these States. I was home in Arkansas last weekend, and the temperature was above 100 degrees on both days. There are an awful

lot of people, especially elderly people, living in rural areas without access to air-conditioning, or people on limited incomes that can't pay their bills that are at real risk. So I hope we can all band together and redouble our efforts.

Now, I now have the privilege of making the second most important personnel announcement in the news today. I have no information about the status of any of the Chicago Bulls. [Laughter] However, the long-awaited coup in the Press Office is finally taking place. [Laughter]

Much to my regret but with my full understanding and support, Mike McCurry will be leaving us in the fall. I have also determined to appoint Joe Lockhart as his successor.

Quite simply, Mike McCurry has set the standard by which future White House Press Secretaries will be judged. In an age where Washington has come to be governed by a 24-hour news cycle and endless cable channels with their special niche audiences, Mike has redefined the job of Press Secretary in a new and more challenging era.

Whatever the news, in good times and bad, he is trusted by the American people and trusted by our administration to provide accurate information about our policies and to be a forceful and effective advocate for them. His ability and his eagerness to fight the good fight on political or policy issues is well known. And few could hope to match his intelligence and wit from the podium.

But the most difficult and sensitive part of being White House Press Secretary is explaining the foreign policy positions of the United States to the world. His mastery of foreign policy, his understanding not only of broader issues but of the nuances of them, his ability to respond to developments precisely—and when necessary, not so precisely—have made him a unique and instrumental element of our Nation's public diplomacy around the world.

Hillary and I have both enjoyed and deeply valued Mike's presence, not only for his obvious skills but for his wonderful sense of humor and his genuine friendship. We've appreciated his hard work, his loyalty, and his ability. We will miss him a great deal, and we're glad he's going to be around a while longer.

I am also very fortunate to have in Joe Lockhart an outstanding successor for Mike. I've had an opportunity to work with him very closely, especially over the last several months, not only on important trips to Europe, to Africa, to Latin America but also on our work on economic and other domestic issues. He is smart; he knows our policies, foreign and domestic. And he has skillfully articulated them.

Mike and Joe were a great team in our 1996 campaign. Mike served as Press Secretary at the White House; Joe did a superb job for Vice President Gore and me during our reelection effort. You all know that the great teamwork has continued here at the White House, with Joe and Barry Toiv serving as Mike's deputies.

When Mike told me at the beginning of the summer that he would begin planning an orderly transition, I knew that Joe would be the ideal replacement, not only for me but I believe also for you. Joe knows you well, and you know him well, and that's probably half the battle. Joe knows that he can only serve my interests well if he takes care of yours also by being your advocate here at the White House. He does that well already, and I know he will continue to be sensitive to your requirements when Mike leaves later this year.

I'll have more to say about Joe and about Mike this fall when we actually make the change. But it's rare in this White House that I get to announce my own personnel decisions—[laughter]—especially involving the press. So I wanted you to be the first to know—after Mike's Press Office staff, who were just told a few moments ago.

Joe has accepted my offer to be Assistant to the President and Press Secretary.

I also would like to say a word about two very special women who are here—Debra McCurry and Joe's wife, Laura Logan. While these guys have the pleasure of working until all hours here, it's their families, especially their spouses, who make very special sacrifices. We appreciate them and their willingness to lend Mike and Joe to the American people for a short while.

Now I'm going to be with you later at a meeting for Congress, and I'll be able to answer your questions then. So I'd like to get

back to our regularly scheduled programming, under the leadership of old what's his name over here. [*Laughter*]

Q. What does this say for Joe's credibility when I asked him yesterday if McCurry was leaving? [*Laughter*]

The President. Did he say no or not yet?

Q. He didn't say no—yes, he said no; he didn't say not yet.

The President. Well, the answer yesterday was no. [*Laughter*] The answer today is no. But at sometime in the near future, the answer will be yes.

Mike, thank you so much.

Q. —sir, is there anything else you can do about the drought conditions, the heat wave? Is there other stuff we ought to be thinking about?

The President. Well, we're looking at it. I wish I could seed the clouds and make it rain. But this is very disturbing. We're going to be looking at it. In all the States, I'm sure there are vigorous efforts going on through the State emergency offices, and my understanding is—I've asked for an update, I didn't get it before I came out here, of the volunteer efforts that are going on. This happened to me once when I was Governor, and we had to move a lot of seniors into our senior citizen centers, because they were air-conditioned, and just set up cots. And we were handing out, literally, hundreds and hundreds of fans to people who had no air-conditioning in their homes.

We can give the money out, and we're going to look and see what else we can do. We're going to look and see whether we can get some more help from other States, perhaps, that aren't so hard-hit. Actually, ironically, a few more than half of our States are having temperatures slightly below normal this year. But these 11, there are some more above the 11 who are a little above average, but these are 20 percent above average in the hottest months. So we're looking at it. If I can determine anything else I can do, believe me, I will do it, because there are an awful lot of people that just cannot take this heat without some more help. And we'll do whatever we can.

Q. Mr. President, how serious is this Iranian missile test?

The President. I'll answer all the other questions when I—I'll be glad to answer the questions, but I just—I want to wait to let you do this thing with Mike, and then I'll see you about an hour or whenever.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:15 p.m. in the Briefing Room at the White House. A tape was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

Remarks Following a Meeting on Agricultural Assistance and an Exchange With Reporters

July 23, 1998

The President. After the clicking stops, here's what I want to do. [*Laughter*] As you can all see, I'm here with Senator Daschle, Senator Harkin, Senator Conrad, Senator Dorgan, and Secretary Glickman, Deputy Secretary Rominger; and these young people here are national officers of the FFA.

In a few moments, I'm going to do a national radio press conference with agricultural reporters from agricultural radio networks around the country. I've got a brief statement here that I would like to read, and then I'd like to give the Senators a chance to make whatever comments they would like to make. And then I will do what I said I'd do in the pressroom a while ago, I'll let you all ask some questions, if you have questions on other subjects, and then we'll go do the ag press conference.

We're here because all of us are profoundly concerned about the communities that are suffering from both low prices and all kinds of natural disasters around the country. In Texas, about three quarters of the cotton crop has been lost. Senator Dorgan said the other day that North Dakota retired auctioneers are being pressed into duty to handle all the families that are being forced to sell their farms.

For 5½ years we've worked hard to help America's farm families with disaster assistance to ranchers who've lost livestock, surplus commodity purchases for school lunches, diversifying the sources of enterprise and income in rural America. We've increased our use of export credits by a third in the last year alone.