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like these two men here, who are serious about the work they do and for whom winning an election is just a prelude to the most important thing, which is the job. Because you know, this is a chance in a lifetime we have. And I've lived long enough now to know that these things come, and they go. The good news is bad times don't last forever. But good times don't either. And so when they come along, you have to focus and move, act.

So this is a big deal, this election. One of the reasons, apart from all my personal feelings about him, that I want Al Gore to be elected President so bad is he understands the future, and he knows how to get us there. And that's what we ought to be thinking about. Who understands the future? Who can get us there?

And your presence here says you know that about your Governor. But when you go back to Indiana, I hope you'll give that as a reason for the rest of the folks sticking with him, without regard to party. If you're producing, if you're serious, if you care about the future, stick with him.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 8:52 p.m. in the Columbia A Room at the Hyatt Regency Capitol Hill. In his remarks, he referred to Judy O'Bannon, wife of Governor O'Bannon; Lt. Gov. Joseph E. Kernan and his wife, Maggie; Senator Evan Bayh, his wife, Susan, and his father, former Senator Birch Bayh; Michael J. Sullivan, general president, Sheet Metal Workers International Association; Mark Weiner, treasurer, Democratic Governors' Association; Robin Winston, chairman, Indiana State Democratic Party; and Joseph J. Andrew, national chair, Democratic National Committee. Incumbent Governor O'Bannon is a candidate for reelection in Indiana. The transcript was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on March 29.

The President's News Conference

March 29, 2000

The President. Good afternoon. Please be seated. I would like to begin by saying that yesterday's announcement that OPEC members will increase oil production is good news for our economy and for the American consumer. These increases should bring lower prices, which will help to sustain economic growth here in America and also, and very importantly, throughout the world.

It will also, I hope, bring relief to hard-pressed truckers in this country, who have been especially hard-hit, and others who have high fuel costs, by providing a greater balance between oil production and consumption.

While home heating costs and the price at the pump are both expected to fall in the next few weeks, I urge the oil companies to do everything they can to bring the savings to consumers as quickly as possible. Meanwhile, we will continue to monitor developments in world markets closely.

Since January, our administration has taken significant action to address high oil prices, from helping more low income and elderly citizens to pay their heating bills, to calling for the creation of a regional market reserve in the Northeast, to asking Congress to immediately reauthorize the Strategic Petroleum Reserve.

It is also very, very important for Congress now to act on my proposal to strengthen our long-term energy security, including new tax incentives and investments to support domestic oil producers and to promote the development and use of alternative fuels and more efficient energy technologies. We can become much more energy efficient and support economic development if we do.

Congress also has an opportunity and a responsibility to make progress on a number of other important issues for the American people this year. First, we must work together to reduce the staggering toll of gun violence in America by passing my proposal for more prosecutors and stronger gun enforcement and by finally passing a strong juvenile justice bill that closes the gun show loophole, requires child safety locks for all handguns, and bans the importation of large capacity ammunition clips.

For 9 months now, key congressional Republicans, egged on by the NRA, have stood on a bill and stopped it from being considered by keeping it from coming out of conference onto the floor of both Houses for a vote. Fourteen days ago a House resolution passed with bipartisan support, sponsored by Representative Zoe Lofgren of California. It

simply said that House and Senate conferees should meet to settle their differences on the bill that has been languishing in Congress for too long. But after 14 days, the response to Representative Lofgren's resolution has been deafening silence and still no action. It appears the opponents of reform have run out of arguments, so now they're just trying to run out the clock.

This makes no sense. With crime at a 25-year low, and the Brady law keeping guns out of the hands of a half-million felons, fugitives, and stalkers, the argument is over. Gun safety measures do work and do not interfere with the interests of ordinary hunters and sports people. So it's time to build on our proven success and pass this commonsense legislation.

Three weeks ago I asked Congress to finish the gun bill and send it to me by the anniversary of the Columbine tragedy, April 20th. That deadline can still be met. So again, for the sake of our children, I ask Congress to stop the delay. This should not be a partisan issue, and it should lead to action, not argument.

There are some other issues I'd like to mention briefly. First, to make sure the benefits of Medicare keep pace with the benefits of modern medicine, we must reform Medicare and add a voluntary prescription drug benefit. Three out of five older Americans lack dependable, affordable drug coverage. Since I first raised the issue last year, virtually every Member of Congress has voiced support for some kind of new prescription drug benefit. I call on Congress to pass a bill that ensures all Medicare beneficiaries the option to choose an affordable, accessible drug benefit. If they do, of course, I will sign it.

Second, to protect the interests of 190 million Americans in health plans, we should pass a strong, enforceable, bipartisan Patients' Bill of Rights. This isn't a partisan issue in America. The House has already passed a strong bill, but the insurance lobby continues to oppose it. All we need is for the conference of Senators and Representatives to let every Member in both Houses vote his or her conscience on a real Patients' Bill of Rights. If it passes—and it will—I will certainly sign it.

Third, we should raise the minimum wage by a dollar over 2 years. A bipartisan majority in the House voted to do so earlier this month, but Republican leaders held the pay raise hostage for tax increases for the wealthiest Americans—tax decreases, excuse me—tax breaks that could make it impossible to pay down the debt or strengthen Social Security and Medicare. I ask again to the Congress: Do the right thing. Everyone knows we need to raise the minimum wage. Send me a clean bill that raises the minimum wage by a dollar over 2 years, and I will sign it.

Fourth, we must keep the economy growing, first by opening new markets here at home in our hardest pressed communities, rural and urban, and second, by opening new markets for American products and services around the world. Especially, we need to give our businesses, farmers, and workers access to the world's largest consumer market in China. There is no more important long-term international economic or national security issue facing us today.

Congress should pass permanent normal trade relations with China this spring. I will say again, this requires us to take no further action on our part to lower tariffs or open markets. All the concessions are being made by China in return for entering an open trading system. If we do not do this, then the full benefits of all we negotiated will flow to all the other countries in the WTO but not to the United States. The economic consequences will be bad. The national security consequences will be worse.

Fifth, we must invest more in our public schools and demand more from them. I ask again Congress to endorse the principles in the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, which call for ending social promotion and funding only those things which work to raise student achievement. And we know that our students can't learn in schools that are falling apart.

Yesterday a bipartisan school construction bill was introduced in the House that would provide $24.8 billion in tax credit bonds to modernize up to 6,000 of our schools. If the Republican leadership doesn't prevent it, Congress could vote on this proposal tomorrow. I ask the Congress to pass this bipartisan legislation, and I will sign it.

Sixth, to save the lives of thousands of young people who every year get hooked on cigarettes, we must now pass legislation allowing the Food and Drug Administration to require tobacco, like the dangerous substance it is, to be regulated by the FDA. There is strong bipartisan support for this idea, and I hope the Congress will pass it. If they do, I will certainly sign it.

Finally, I would like to say a few words about the importance of passing the supplemental budget requests without delay. This is urgent funding for pressing needs at home and abroad: to help the families that were victims of Hurricane Floyd; to provide needed energy assistance for families struggling to cope with rising oil prices; to help keep illegal drugs out of our Nation by supporting the Colombian Government's courageous fight against drug traffickers; to keep the peace, provide for our troops, and build stability in Kosovo; and to provide needed debt relief to the world's poorest nations.

When Congress adjourns this summer, we ought to be able to look back and say we took real steps to make America better. The issues have been decided; they are clearly there. They have also been debated. The American people want action, and they deserve it. The only thing left is for the congressional leadership to reach across party lines and to work with us to break the grip of special interests and do the people's business.

Thank you very much.

Helen [Helen Thomas, United Press International].

Israel-Syria Peace Talks

Q. Mr. President, you said that the ball is in Asad's court. Is that because you think that his insistence on the return of all Syrian land under occupation in exchange for peace lacks logic or possibility?

The President. It's because he now knows in great detail what the Israeli proposals were. And I believe, since they have made an effort to be specific and comprehensive, if we're going to make progress, they should now be able to know what his specific and comprehensive response is on all the issues.

There is more than one issue here. And if we're going to have a negotiation, I don't think it's enough to say, "I don't like your position. Come back and see me when I like your position." And I understand how strongly he feels about it, but if he disagrees with their territorial proposal, which is quite significant, then there should be some other proposal, I think, coming from the Syrians about how their concerns could be handled. And that's what I meant by that. I did my best to try to just present what I thought the options were. And if we're going to have a negotiation, it takes two people coming up with ideas—or three sides, in this case, if we are being asked to mediate it.

He, obviously, has the perfect right to take whatever position he believes is in Syria's interests and whatever he thinks is right. But if there is a genuine desire for peace here on both sides, and I believe there is, and if both sides face certain significant political constraints within their countries, and I believe they do, then they both need to come up with some ideas and start talking.

I mean, the one thing there should be no doubt about is that there is a real effort being made here to resolve this. And I think it is clear that Prime Minister Barak would like to resolve it, and I think President Asad would like to resolve it. So once you know what the other side wants and you don't think you can do it, then you ought to come up with some alternative way of trying to respond to the underlying concerns that are behind the position. That's what I've suggested, and I hope that will happen. And meanwhile, the rest of us will keep working. I had a good talk with President Mubarak yesterday about that, and I hope we can continue to move forward.

Yes.

New York City Police

Q. Mr. President, three unarmed black men have been shot and killed by police in New York City in the past 13 months. Do you believe that the New York Police Department has a racial problem, and does that department require Justice Department oversight?

The President. Well, I believe there is a Justice Department review of the practices in the department, which I think has been a matter of public record for some time. And

in the Diallo case, there was a specific reference to a review of the action there for possible civil rights violations. I think the important thing I'd like to say is, first of all, there's a lot of evidence that in city after city where the crime rate has dropped—and the crime rate's gone down a lot in New York; it's gone down a lot in every major city in America—there is now ample evidence that the crime rate can go down, and the tenor of community police relations can go up. And it's largely a matter of the right sort of training, the right sort of policies, and consistent effort there.

On the specific cases, I think I should say no more, particularly in view of the latest incident, which was tragic. There is a good U.S. Attorney in New York, and I have confidence that whatever decision is appropriate will be made as all the facts come out, and that's what's being done here.

But I think that the focus ought to be everywhere on having the right kind of training and the right kind of policy direction to say that we're going to bring the crime rate down, and we're going to bring the quality of police community relations up. The two things are not inconsistent. In fact, I think, generally, they reinforce one another, and I think that that's what we all ought to be working for in New York and everywhere else in the country.

Randy [Randy Mikkelsen, Reuters].

President-Elect Vladimir Putin of Russia

Q. Mr. President, when you spoke with Russia's President-elect Putin the other day, what did he tell you to indicate how he might run the country, particularly in the areas of the economy and foreign policy? And do you think it would be a good idea for you or your successor to try to build the same sort of personal relationship with Putin that you had with Boris Yeltsin, in view of criticisms that U.S. policy was too focused on one individual?

The President. Well, first, he has expressed a genuine commitment to economic reform—and the Russian economy is growing again—and a desire to put together a first-rate team. And that was encouraging.

In foreign policy, he expressed an interest in working with us to pursue matters of mutual concern, particularly in the area of arms control and in some other areas. And I'm looking forward to working with him on that.

With regard to the personal relations, I think that—President Yeltsin, keep in mind, was the first democratically elected President of Russia. And he had the sort of personality that was difficult not to—it was difficult to remain neutral in dealing with him. And I did like him very much, but I also thought he was committed to democracy, and I think the fact that he stepped down and that we had a genuine democratic transition in Russia is some evidence of that.

So I think that regardless of personal chemistry—and I hope that mine with President Putin will be good, and I hope that my successor's will be good with him—the United States and Russia have vast national interests that require them to work together on the things with which we agree and to manage the difficulties between us where we have honest disagreements. So it is the relationship that is important. And the personal chemistry will come and go, depending on the personalities. But the point is, the fact that I liked Boris Yeltsin didn't stop me from differing with him when we were differing, and it certainly never stopped him from differing with me in his classic style. And I don't expect that to change with President Putin.

But I think the relationship is very important to the United States and to Russia, and it must be worked on constantly. We just have too much in common, and we have to work on it.

Yes, Ellen [Ellen Ratner, Talk Radio News Service].

States and E-Commerce

Q. The Internet commission is meeting on electronic commerce, and they are giving some proposals. What are your thoughts about what proposals you think they should come out with? And also what about the States, as electronic commerce becomes more and more available on the net and may take revenue from the States?

The President. Well, I think— first of all, I supported the moratorium on taxes, and I saw where Mr. Gephardt did as well a couple of days ago, and I think that's good. I think that we should.

I think that the process that has been set up is the right one. I don't know what the solution is, but I think the States are going to have to get together with these companies and figure out—first of all, I don't think there should be any access taxes or new transactional taxes or anything that will overly burden Internet commerce, because it is making a real contribution to our economy.

The real issue is, as a higher and higher percentage of sales are conducted over the Internet, what happens to the sales tax base of the States? Are they going to have to go to a different kind of taxation? Because they don't want to prejudice ordinary retailers. On the other hand, some of the people in the Internet business think that any sales tax will put them at a disadvantage because they have to charge shipping charges.

So I think that is a matter that the States will have to work out. Since they are basically State taxes, I think we ought to leave it to them. But the Governors are highly attuned to economic development. They will not lightly hurt their economies. But they also have responsibilities to fund their schools and other public services. And I just think they are going to have to work through it.

I think over the next year or so, you will begin to see some kind of consensus emerge.

Yes, go ahead.

Israel-Syria Peace Talks

Q. Mr. President, are you prepared to deploy American advisers, monitors, or troops on the Golan Heights to secure an Israeli-Syrian peace accord? Did you discuss that at all with President Asad and, if so, what was his response?

The President. We did not discuss it. So far, all the options being discussed by Syria and Israel do not entail that. The only time I ever even discussed it is as a theoretical possibility was many years ago with the late Prime Minister Rabin. And it was clear to me, even then, that both sides were looking for a way to resolve this that would not require an international force including American troops there, and I think they are still trying to get that done.

Yes, John [John Cochran, ABC News].

Elian Gonzalez

Q. A possible confrontation is looming between the relatives of Elian Gonzalez and Federal authorities. As a last resort, would you permit Federal authorities or some kind of Federal agents to go in there to forcibly take the boy so that he could be sent back to Cuba?

The President. Well, I think, surely, we are some distance from that because they have to—they will, doubtless—if they do not prevail in court, they will clearly appeal. And I would just hope that the law would be followed by everyone, including them. I think that there is a legal process here. I have done my best to avoid politicizing it. And I think that the appropriate authorities, in this case the judges, will make a decision. And when that is done, I think that the people on all sides should accept the rule of the court. And I——

Q. So the relatives realize that is an option?

The President. What do you mean?

Q. That marshals might have to come in there and say, "Release the boy."

The President. Well, that's—it's no more an option there than it is for anyone else who doesn't—who says, "I don't like the way the courts decide." I don't think they should be singled out. I don't think there should be any extra pressure put on them. But on the other hand, I think that they should observe the rule of law; just like if they prevail in court, the others should accept it. I have done my best not to overly politicize this, and I don't think we should. There is a legal process here. We ought to let it play out.

Yes, go ahead, Jim [Jim Angle, FOX News]. I'll take you both. Go ahead.

Federal Reserve Board Nominations

Q. The Senate so far has not acted on two of your nominees to the Federal Reserve Board and shows no inclination to do so. A third slot is open as well. Do you have any realistic expectation of seeing action on that front this year, or will those slots be filled by your successor, whomever he may be?

The President. Well, I don't know. I hope that the Senate will continue to move forward on appointments. We had some success with judicial appointments recently. They are

approving a smaller percentage of nominees than is customary when the President is of one party and the Senate majority is of another, and I think that is regrettable. But I have worked with the Senate, and I have consistently sent the appointments up there, for example, recommended by Republicans for Republican slots on various boards and commissions. And I hope we will have some progress there.

They are also holding up a couple of Ambassadors for reasons that are totally unrelated to the nominees or any objection that they have to their qualifications, and that's not good for America's foreign policy interests. So I hope we will continue to see—we will have some breaking of logjams the way we did on the judges just a few weeks ago.

Go ahead, Jim.

Mayor Alexander Penelas of Metro-Dade County, Florida

Q. Mr. President, the mayor of Miami—back on the Elian Gonzalez case—the mayor of Miami said today that he would withhold any assistance from the city, including police, if Federal authorities decide to return Elian Gonzalez to Cuba. And if there were any violence in the streets, he would hold you and Attorney General Reno personally responsible for that.

That seems to sound like an invitation for the community to block Federal authorities and an assurance to them that the Miami police will stand aside.

The President. Well, I like the mayor very much, but I still believe in the rule of law here. We all have to—whatever the law is, whatever the decision is ultimately made, the rest of us ought to obey it.

National Rifle Association

Q. Mr. President, Charlton Heston is on the college speaking circuit. And he said last night, "It amazes me that the President is so stubborn when it comes to guns." And he notes that there are already 22,000 gun laws on the books by his count, which he says that the administration does not enforce.

Could you do more to enforce existing gun laws, and how do you feel about the attack that the NRA has mounted on you and your administration?

The President. Well, let me answer the question on the merits. Gun prosecutions are up under our administration. And I have asked in this budget for a significant increase to enforce the laws, including more prosecutors, more ATF agents.

But again, I would make the main point: The NRA's position is that if somebody does something wrong, throw the book at them but do not have any preventive measures when it comes to guns. They believe that unlike every other area of our life, there should be no prevention. So they say—they didn't want us to have the Brady bill. They said it was too burdensome on people. But it hasn't been burdensome. They don't want us to close the gun show loophole. They say it's too burdensome. They're not even for the research into smart-gun technology or for banning large ammunition clips.

There's a case where we have a law on the books that can't be effectively enforced. These assault weapons are illegal, but the ammunition clips, the big ammunition clips, can be imported because of a loophole in the law, so the law we have can't be effectively enforced.

And I think that it's just wrong to say that because of the second amendment or because there are a lot of people that like to hunt or sport shoot that prevention plays no role in this.

How would you feel if I said, for example, the following: "You know, all these people that go through airport metal detectors, 99.999 percent of them are law-abiding, good people. And it is really a pain to go through those metal detectors if you've got a money clip in your pocket or a rodeo belt buckle on or something else, and you have to go through two or three times or take your belt off or whatever. It's just too burdensome, and I'm just sick and tired of it, and I'm going to take these metal detectors down in the airports, and the next time a plane blows up, we're going to throw the book at them."

Now, you're laughing. But what if I said, "You know, most people who drive are good, honest, responsible people, and we should just—we ought to repeal the laws, the drivers license laws, and repeal the speed limits, and

the next time somebody does something wrong and has a 25-car pileup, we'll just throw the book at them."

I mean, a sensible society has a balance between prevention and punishment. And when we put these 100,000 police out, a lot of people said that wouldn't work. But the truth is, the community policing program, I believe, has contributed more to lowering the crime rate by preventing people from committing crimes in the first place than even by catching them more quickly.

So all I can tell you is, I just disagree with that. And in terms of their attacks on me, you know, that's what I get hired to do. That's part of the President's job description, being attacked by people who disagree with him. That doesn't matter. I still think Charlton Heston's a great actor, and I love his movies—[*laughter*]—and I still watch him every time I get a chance. And I loved having him here at the White House not very long ago, when he got one of the Kennedy Center Awards.

But that's irrelevant to me. The only question is, what is best for the safety of the American people? And guns are no different than any other area of our life. We need a balance between prevention and punishment.

Go ahead. Did you have a question? Go ahead, John [John King, Cable News Network] and then Mark [Mark Knoller, CBS Radio].

Privacy Act and the White House

Q. Mr. President, a Federal judge, with whom you have disagreed in the past, today said it was his opinion that you had committed a criminal violation of the Privacy Act by releasing those Kathleen Willey letters during the Independent Counsel investigation. What do you think of that ruling? And do you agree with the take of one of your legal advisors earlier today, who called this judge "a loose cannon"?

The President. Did one of my legal advisors do that? [*Laughter*] Well, he does seem to have somehow acquired a significant percentage of the cases involving the White House. That's an interesting story.

But anyway, you know, obviously, we don't agree with the ruling. And I can say that when the decision was made to release those letters, I didn't even have any conversation with anybody about the Privacy Act. I never thought about it, never thought about whether it applied or not, and decided to do it reluctantly only because it was the only way I knew to refute allegations that were made against me that were untrue. And I think they plainly did that, and I would not have done it otherwise.

But I think in terms of the law, there are other reasons that I disagree with the law, with the idea that the Privacy Act, which was generally designed to protect people who had business with the Federal Government or were complaining about something that the Government was doing or had reasons for confidentiality and having to give the Government records, there were all kinds of reasons for the Privacy Act. And so I just don't believe that it—I think that the opinion of our counsel's office and many other judges who ruled on this is that that act does not apply to this kind of correspondence in the White House. And so we disagree, and we will proceed accordingly.

Yes, go ahead, and then Mark. Go ahead, Larry [Larry McQuillan, Reuters].

Gas Tax

Q. Mr. President, in light of the fact that OPEC has decided to increase production, do you see it as a mistake for the Senate to proceed with a bill that would suspend the gas tax? And if it reached your desk, would you veto it?

The President. I don't expect it to reach my desk because there seems to be bipartisan opposition to it in the House, including among the leadership. But the problem I have with it, apart from what it might do to the Highway Trust Fund and the spending obligations that have already been incurred by the acts of Congress—the budgets—is that I'm not sure that the savings would be passed along to the consumers, in addition to that.

So I think there are a lot of questions about it, but I don't expect it to pass. I do think, however, we shouldn't minimize the real bind that some Americans have already faced by these high fuel costs. For most of us

who—of course, I don't drive myself anymore—but for most people who don't have to drive a long way to work, it may seem an irritant but not a burden. But there are a lot of Americans who do have to drive a long way to work, who work for not very much money. And there are a lot of Americans who are in the trucking business who have been really, really hurt by this.

So I think we have to just keep our powder dry, keep our options open. But right now I think the prudent thing is to see how quickly these prices can come down with the increase in production, and for the House to reauthorize the Strategic Petroleum Reserve. We've got to have that reauthorization of the Strategic Petroleum Reserve. My authority even to use that, even as a possible option, expires on Friday. And it's very, very important for that to pass.

Go ahead, Mark.

Paternity Leave and Prime Minister Tony Blair

Q. Mr. President, I wonder if you've got any thoughts or advice for your friend, British Prime Minister Tony Blair, and the dilemma that he faces—[*laughter*]—on whether he should take parental leave, as his wife has suggested, when their next child is born? And if you don't want to share your advice with us, what would you do in that situation? [*Laughter*]

The President. I would like to have been a fly on the wall when they first talked about that after it appeared in public. But you know, I feel very close to both Tony and Cherie. I don't want to get in the middle of that. [*Laughter*] But I think Mrs. Blair said that there must be a "third way" to handle this challenge. [*Laughter*] That's what she said, although I thought it was a good line.

First of all, I envy him very much. I think it's a great thing for them, and it'll keep them young. And it's a wonderful thing. You know, for me, even though Presidents have a very hard schedule—you know, we keep very long hours—you have some more flexibility with your time because we live above the store, so to speak. So I wouldn't have the same burdens, if we were having a baby. I could spend a lot of time with the baby and still work and work it out.

But I think that that's something they ought to work with. I do think that the Prime Minister's government did a good thing to try to provide fathers as well as mothers family leave, though. [*Laughter*] I think it's a good policy.

Yes, go ahead. Go ahead, Mara [Mara Liasson, National Public Radio].

Normal Trade Relations Status for China

Q. Mr. President, you are lobbying Congress to pass permanent trade relations for China. You're having a difficult time getting your own Democrats to vote for it. Vice President Gore has said even though he is for this agreement, if he was President he wouldn't negotiate trade deals like this, he would only negotiate trade deals that included labor and environmental standards. How is that stand of his complicating your efforts to convince Democrats to vote for this?

The President. It isn't, because if we were having a trade agreement with China, instead of an agreement on their accession to the WTO, we could do that. But keep in mind, I favor—I believe I was the first person in a national campaign ever to advocate the inclusion of labor and environmental provisions in trade agreements. And we put some in NAFTA. And we've gotten some good environmental improvements as a result of it. Even though there are still environmental problems along the Rio Grande River, a lot has been done. And there have been some labor standards improvements as a result of it in some places. So I know a lot of the people who wanted it aren't satisfied that we've done as much. But it was a really groundbreaking effort.

I went to the International Labor Organization in Switzerland, and to the WTO, and to Davos, Switzerland, to argue for a different approach to trade. I don't think you can take economics in a global economy that is becoming increasingly globalized and act as if it's totally separate from child labor or other abusive labor practices or what the impact of economic activity on the environment is.

That is not what this agreement is. I still believe if we can just get everybody to read what this agreement does, it will pass handily,

because this agreement will create jobs for America; it will create jobs for labor union members; it will grow the economy. I will say again, in this—I mean, this is an agreement about the conditions under which China enters the WTO. The United States doesn't lower any tariffs. We don't change any trade laws. We do nothing. They have to lower tariffs. They open up telecommunications for investment. They allow us to sell cars made in America in China at much lower tariffs. They allow us to put our own distributorships over there. They allow us to put our own parts over there. We don't have to transfer technology or do joint manufacturing in China anymore. This is a hundred-to-nothing deal for America when it comes to the economic consequences.

And most of what we have negotiated, we will absolutely lose the benefit of. If they go into the WTO and we don't approve normal permanent trade relations with them, what will happen is, all the work that Charlene Barshefsky and Gene Sperling did to get those concessions will go to Europe and Japan and all the people who didn't negotiate it. They'll get all the benefits, and we won't.

So the consequences, the economic consequences are quite clear and unambiguous for the United States. And so I think, to—and under the rules of the WTO, we couldn't impose different standards on their membership than were imposed on us or anyone else. See, that's the difference in this.

I agree with the Vice President. When he gets to be President—I believe he will be—he should continue to work harder on integrating a whole vision of the global economy that includes labor and environmental standards and the whole idea of what it will mean to be part of a global society in the 21st century. I think that's important.

But if people understand what this is, this is a vote on whether we will support their membership. And the only way we can do it—and that we will benefit from their membership. And the only way we can do it is if they get permanent normal trade relations. It is not like we had a bilateral trade agreement with China; that is not what this is about.

So if we were in bilateral negotiations, we could argue more strongly for certain agreements on, for example, climate change, because we'd be giving them something while they were giving us something. We're not giving up anything here. These are the terms of their membership, and it's a hundred-to-nothing deal for us. All we lose here is if we reject it, we will lose economic opportunities we will regret for 20 years and will hurt our national security interest.

Yes, go ahead, Susan [Susan Feeney, Dallas Morning News].

Campaign Finance Reform

Q. Sir, could you comment on the Vice President's plan for a $7 billion democracy endowment to pay for congressional and perhaps Presidential campaigns?

The President. Yes, I thought it was a good idea. I kind of wish I thought of it myself. And I think—I'll tell you why I think it's a good idea, very briefly. I think you can't ever really solve the problem in campaign finance reform unless you have—because what is the problem? The problem is that it costs so much money to communicate with people over the mass media.

So if you want to solve the problem, you either have to have a different source of funding or there have to be requirements for free or drastically reduced media time. That's the problem. Otherwise, you're just sort of rearranging where the money comes from or how you do it. I don't mean—I think McCain-Feingold is important. And let me reiterate what the Vice President said. His proposal should not be interpreted in any way as a reduction of the administration's support for McCain-Feingold. The Shays-Meehan bill, which is the partner bill, has already passed the House. Again, if we could bring it up to a vote in the Senate, it would pass the Senate. A minority is blocking it in the Senate. We can pass it in the Senate. And we ought to pass it, because it will do some real good.

But the thing I like about it is, the American people have reservations about public financing of campaigns. We even have some trouble with the dollar check-off for the Presidential campaigns. This proposes to give incentives to people to try to raise the money in a more voluntary fashion from non-tax sources. So if it could be done and if the

trust fund could be filled up, I think it is actually quite a good idea.

Go ahead, John [John Harris, Washington Post].

Leadership in China

Q. Mr. President, when you finished your trip to China 2 years ago, you gave a news conference in Hong Kong in which you praised Chinese President Jiang Zemin as a visionary, a man of good will, and someone who was the right leadership at the right time for China. Since then, China's record on abusing human rights and threatening Taiwan has, of course, continued to be quite checkered.

I wonder if today you still think Jiang's leadership still deserves that praise you gave it or if your judgment today would have to be more severe?

The President. Well, I still think, given the alternatives of who could have been the President of China, that I'm aware of, and who could have been the Premier, I think that President Jiang Zemin and Zhu Rongji are the best team that could have been in their positions at that time.

As you know, I generally strongly disagree with the Chinese view that to preserve stability in their society, they have to repress political and sometimes religious activists to the extent that they do. I think that's wrong. And there have been several cases in the last couple of years that have deeply disappointed me.

I know that China has a historic—almost a phobia of internal disintegration because of the problems that they faced in the last—if you just take the last 100 years, problems that our society has never faced. I know that they say that to some extent their cultural views are not as oriented toward individual rights and liberties as ours are. But I believe that the U.N. Declaration of Human Rights is a universal document, and I believe it should be observed, and that's why we voice our disagreements with China every year, and so I don't like that. And I hope that—I will say again, I hope that we will see a lessening of tensions across the Taiwan Straits.

I support the "one China" policy. But part of our "one China" policy is that the differences between China and Taiwan must be resolved by dialog, and I feel very strongly about it.

But having said all that, I still believe that, given the available alternatives of which I am aware, these two men have been the best team that was available for China. And I think this decision they've made to join the WTO is a decision basically to modernize China in ways that will go far beyond the economy. I think it will lead—you get all this telecommunications revolution permanently manifest in China, they will not be able to control the Internet; they will not be able to control access to information; they will not be able to control freedom of expression. It will become a more free country and a more open country. And that is a very, very good thing. That's another big reason we ought to sign onto this, because we ought to be a part of their opening.

There will be more openness in the next 5 years, if China enters the WTO and all the telecommunications revolution hits at full force, than there has been in the last 20 years, since Deng Xiaoping started this.

Yes, go ahead.

Campaign Finance Reform

Q. Mr. President, I'd like to return to campaign finance reform, if I could. Vice President Gore, in announcing his proposal, called himself an imperfect messenger on that subject. Isn't that an acknowledgement, sir, of something you and he have long denied, that there was an attempt to bend, if not break, the spirit, if not the letter, of campaign finance laws during your reelection campaign?

The President. No, I disagree with that. He said—he has never said that he knew that any of the money that he raised was not lawfully raised. And I don't believe he did. And I can certainly tell—you look at the difference in the way we reacted in 1996 and the way the other party reacted to allegations of illegal foreign money, for example.

What did we do? We spent $4 million, that we had to go out and raise, to put all these records on computer disks, to give it all to the Justice Department, to make sure that everything was there. There was no slow-walking, no stonewalling, no nothing. I was outraged when I found out that the system

for checking the backgrounds of contributors and things like that had been dismantled without my knowledge or approval.

And I did not do all that work. And keep in mind, you mentioned '96—we didn't have—we raised the funds we needed for my Presidential reelection in 7 months. And I believe—you can go check this—but I have been told that ever since the campaign finance laws came in, in the seventies, that we had the smallest number of violations and fines of any Presidential campaign, the Clinton/Gore '96 campaign did.

So—I know those funds were raised through the party, but I was as appalled as the next person when I found out that we had taken funds, that people had given us money that wasn't legal. We didn't need it to win. It was wrong, and we did everything we could to try to correct it and set it right. And we spent a lot of money doing it.

And so I think what he meant is that he had been involved in one incident which he felt was unfortunate, and we raised soft money. And we've done it aggressively because we don't believe in unilateral disarmament.

But I would just point out that 100 percent of our caucus, the Democratic caucus in the Senate and the House, 100 percent of us—and the White House—the whole Democratic Party in Washington, DC, support the McCain-Feingold bill. So if it had been up to us, it would have been law years ago. And I think that's worth something.

So I think he's a good messenger. You know, I think he was showing a little humility, and I think that's always a good thing. We're all flawed in some way or another. But I think that, you know, he passionately believes this. And he worked very hard to come up with not only our support for McCain-Feingold, and his, but some way to build on it to solve the real problem.

The thing that I worry about, for example, in addition to—you know, most of you are concerned about the large contributions and the soft money. But something else, I think, that should concern you—not so much for me, because I have, it's easy for me to get around, and I have great living conditions here, and the Vice President does—but it bothers me that Republicans and Democrats in the House and the Senate have to spend the time they have to spend raising the funds for their campaign. And the wear and tear on them—getting on those airplanes, you know, once or twice a week, all the time, when frankly, I think, if they were home resting, you know, reading good books, spending time with their families—you're laughing. This is a serious deal.

You think about it. This is a significant cost to our political system, that these people have to spend the time they have to spend to raise the funds required to wage their campaigns. It wears them out, and I worry about them. You know, this is a hard enough job. And I really believe that Congress would function better if they didn't have to spend this much time. So that's another reason that I support not only McCain-Feingold, but I think that this idea of the Vice President's, or something like this that would alleviate the burden of spending so much time, I think the American people would get a lot better Government, and the Members of Congress would get a lot more sleep.

George [George Condon, Copley News Service].

China-U.S. Relations/Taiwan

Q. Mr. President, back on China for a second. This morning the Chinese told Sandy Berger that U.S.-Chinese relations were at a critical juncture. Do you agree that things are critical right now? And also, you mentioned your continued support for a "one China" policy. Do you envision any circumstances in which you could support Taiwanese independence?

The President. Well, first, I think they're at a critical stage primarily because of this—of the China-WTO decision before the Congress. And secondly, I think that they would be at a critical stage if we were to abandon our "one China" policy.

But you know, we made an agreement with the Chinese a long time ago. When we normalized relations under President Carter, after a period of years of developing them, starting with President Nixon's historic trip there, it has been the unanimous bipartisan position of every President and every administration that that was the right decision. It

has also been, to this point, the position of all elected leaders in Taiwan.

I remember, I was there as a Governor in 1986 at their Tientien Day celebration, and they had a map of China which showed Taiwan being a part of China, too, even though they had the political tilt the other way.

And I think that they have so much to gain from each other. I mean, the investment of Taiwanese in China, for example, as you know, is enormous. And if they just keep talking, they'll work this out. They'll find a way to work this out. The Chinese have been quite clear that they were willing to be patient and to negotiate an arrangement which might even be different from that in Hong Kong. And I think that Taiwan's got a lot going for it. And I don't think either one of them needs this crisis right now.

So I just think they need to—and I've been very impressed by the President-elect in Taiwan and the way he's handled this since his election, what he's had to say. And he seems to be quite well aware of the weighty responsibility he now has and the great opportunity he has. And so I just think they need—this is a big issue. They need to get together, start the dialog again, and figure out where to go from here.

But if you look at the future that awaits the Chinese and that is already embracing the Taiwanese, you know, they have huge market percentage globally in a lot of the various components of the computer industry, for example—huge. And I just don't think they want a political problem to take all that away from their people. And they'll find a way to do it. They need to stick with this framework and find a way to get their dialog going again.

Yes, go ahead.

Chelsea Clinton

Q. Although not unprecedented in history, it's unusual for a President's child to have such an important limelight as Chelsea had during your state visit to the Asian subcontinent. With the First Lady fully engaged in New York, will we be seeing more of Chelsea? Did she express an interest to make more state visits with you, sir? How do you think she did?

The President. Well, I think—she's like Hillary and me. All three of us, I think, we want to savor the weeks and months we have ahead in this, our last year. And I told her that if she could take time off from school, I'd like for her to go with me on some of these trips.

I was—I think she was kind of taken aback by the attention she got in India, in particular. And I think it was because she had been there with her mother before, and they had both made a very favorable impression in Bangladesh and India and Pakistan. So—but I think she was quite surprised by it, and I don't think she sought it out in any way. But you know, when your child grows up—I think any parent with a grown child can identify with this—you're always sort of pleasantly surprised when they still want to hang around with you a little. And it's a wonderful thing. So for me, it is just a personal thing. And any time I can be with her, I want to be with her.

Yes, go ahead.

White House E-Mail

Q. Mr. President, it was reported today that the White House had a computer disk with Monica Lewinsky's E-mails. Sir, what do you think about the notion that it wasn't turned over sooner, and how would you assess your administration's overall handling of E-mail problems at the White House?

The President. I don't know it, but I believe that was known years ago. I believe that. I don't—I don't—I don't handle the E-mail things. I can tell you this: my Counsel, Beth Nolan, is going up to the Hill, I think tomorrow, to talk about this. I believe that it is accurate to say that we had turned over everything that had been found, and from what I understand, some things were not found because they were in a different system. So now we're working out how to cooperate with the Congress.

But my Counsel will talk about it tomorrow, and I'm confident that whatever is the right thing to do, we will do.

Yes, go ahead.

"American Beauty"/Youth Violence

Q. It's coming up on the year anniversary of Columbine, and around this time last year,

you had a summit at the White House where you talked not only about the gun aspect of violence but also the cultural aspect in our society of it. And considering that we just had a movie sweep the Academy Awards that had a pretty violent ending, I wondered whether you felt the entertainment industry has made much progress in this area?

The President. Well, first of all, I certainly don't believe that movie glorified violence. I have never suggested that we should have movies that—as long as there is a good ratings system—movies that didn't have violence, which is part of a normal theme.

I thought it was an astonishing movie, actually. And I certainly don't think anyone who watched it and understood it would think of it as glorifying violence. I think it would be—I think a lot of the tragedy and fear that is behind people who misuse guns would be apparent there. And so I think, if anything, it was an antiviolence movie.

I think that some progress is being made. I think that there are still problems with whether the ratings systems make sense and make sense in relations to one another, between the movies, the TV programs, and the ones that are being developed for the Internet—I mean, the video games and I just—I think there are still some improvements that need to be made.

I know that Hillary said that she thought there ought to be a uniform system, and I think that that would—if it could be made more uniform, more simple, more understandable, I think that would make a difference. And I still think there is too much gratuitous violence produced in entertainment. But I don't think that applies—that that is a fair criticism of "American Beauty."

Let me say this. Since the year, though, since you mention that, the National Campaign Against Youth Violence, with our Executive Director, Jeff Bleich, has done a lot of work, and they're doing a lot of work on city-by-city efforts and efforts by specific sectors of the community and dealing with all these aspects. So there's quite a lot of vigorous involvement. We've even got a Youth Advisory Council now, and they're working.

So I've been pleased by what they're doing, and I hope we can get a lot more people involved in it in my last year here. And then when I leave, I hope that the new administration will take this up and keep it going, obviously with whatever personnel they choose. But I hope this will become a permanent fixture of the National Government's efforts as well as the council we have within the Federal Government to work on this until the youth violence rate goes way down. There's just tons of work to do.

Yes, go ahead.

Situation in Kosovo

Q. A question, please, about Kosovo. A short while ago, a senior Pentagon official was quoted as saying, we're at ground zero in terms of building a better and more secure society over there. And there have been some instances that suggest U.S. troops are coming in to more danger. How does it appear that this situation will be in the future, more dangerous, less dangerous? What are the stakes for us now?

The President. Well, first, I think that there clearly are still deepseated aversions in the Serbian and Kosovar-Albanian communities for each other. There is a lot of fear, a lot of mistrust, a lot of hatred. There is continuing activity of which we do not approve by some radical elements in the Kosovar-Albanian community. There is some evidence that the Serbs may be trying to work a little mischief in the northern part of Kosovo.

But the main problem is, those people were oppressed for a decade, and then they were all run out of their country. And there is still a lot of bad blood, and it's not going to go away in a year or 2. But I think that the international community did a very good job of sending the soldiers in. But we have to do more. And I've been on the phone quite a lot about this, by the way, in the last, oh, month or so, trying to make sure that all of us get our money there on time and that we get more police there. We've offered more police, and many of the European countries have, as well.

We need more civilian police there, and then we need to make sure that the money flowing to Mr. Kouchner at the U.N. Mission flows in a timely fashion so that people can be paid and that the civil institutions can get up and going. But you know, this takes time.

I remember, when we started in Bosnia, people thought it would never get any better, and it's better. And there's still problems, but it's better. This is not going to be done shortly.

But I would say this: I would urge the Congress to pass both the military and the nonmilitary components of the Kosovo supplemental request, because if we want the Europeans to do their part, and they are—I must say, in the last month or so, they have really geared up the speed with which they are moving their investments into Kosovo—then we're going to have to do our part.

But you know, we have to find ways to get people, first of all, to accept living normal lives, to provide basic protections, and then to get used to, in halting steps, living and working together. And this is not easy, but it can be done. And when I think of the other peace processes in which I have been involved, most of them really take hold after people have lived with the insanity of their previous position so long that they are tired of it; they are bored with it; and they are willing to lay down their hatred and hurt.

And we're still at a point where, in Kosovo, a lot of people are carrying their hatred and hurt around, and a lot of others seek political advantage over it. All I can tell you is I think we did the right thing to go in there and let those people go back home. I think it's better than it would have been if we hadn't gone in there, and I think we are just going to have to work like crazy to try to make it work. I never thought it would be easy, but I do think it's possible.

Yes. Go ahead.

Energy Policy

Q. Mr. President, tomorrow on the Hill, Republicans will accuse you of a failed energy policy when we look at America's continued dependence on foreign oil. Even a Member of the Democratic Senate says that not enough has been done, that we have grown complacent.

And when you look at the popularity of sport utility vehicles in this country, sir, have you done enough, both practically and psychologically, to promote the idea of weaning this country off of fossil fuels?

The President. Well, maybe not. But I've done a lot more than the Congress has. And I think it is ironic that they would say that since, for years now, I have been pleading with them to give us some more tools to promote the development of alternative fuels and to promote both the manufacture and the purchase of energy-saving technologies.

You know, I have talked until I was blue in the face about this for years, and a lot of times it's like you're alone in the forest and no one hears you. I felt like the tree falling in the forest. If no one hears it, did it fall and make a sound? You know, I—maybe we should do more, but maybe now people will be listening more.

Of course, different Members have different takes on it. Some Members think we ought to have more oil production at home, and for some Members, that means we ought to have oil production offshore in places we don't have it now. But if you look at all of our proven reserves, I don't think anyone really believes that we can become more energy independent unless we become more energy efficient and develop more alternative fuels. That is the long-term answer here. And believe me, if the Congress—if any Member of Congress of either party wants to do more on that and is ready to do more than I have done in the past and ready to advocate something beyond what I've advocated in the past, I will be the first person to applaud that person, and I will work with them in any way, shape, or form I can.

I hope very much that this is a little bit of a wakeup call for all of us and that we can put this on the front burner and get some action. And I think—I am like everyone else—after you say something several times and you look like you're not going to make any progress on it, you tend to go on to something where you can make progress. And it was hard to get people interested in it, especially when oil prices dropped to $12 a barrel. And I think—I hope this has been a sobering experience for the American people and for all of us and that we can now do more. And I'm certainly prepared to do more and prepared to give others the credit for taking the lead. I don't care about that. And what we should—we can do a lot, a lot.

Again, let me just review one or two of the things that I said in the State of the Union, just very briefly. We are reasonably close, I believe—most of the scientists I've talked to think that we're reasonably close to cracking what I would call the fuel-to-biofuel conversion problem. If you, for example, if you want to produce ethanol today, it takes about 7 gallons of gasoline to make about 8 gallons of ethanol. You wind up a little ahead, but not much.

Scientists believe that if we can unlock the chemical problem that is analogous to cracking the crude oil molecule that made gasoline possible, we can get down to a conversion ratio of 1 gallon of gasoline for 8 gallons of ethanol. If you do that and then we get 80-mile-a-gallon cars, you're looking at 500 miles to the gallon, in effect. So that's important.

I have done everything I can, and the Vice President has taken the lead on this partnership for new generation vehicles, where we've worked quietly, now, for over 7 years to work with the auto companies to develop high mileage vehicles—vehicles that run on electricity that have self-regenerating batteries, so you don't have to pull in every 80 or 90 or 100 miles to recharge them, or dual-fuel-use vehicles that are beginning to come on the market.

Now, on the sports utility vehicles, I think, you know, the American people, they want to drive those vehicles. They like those big vehicles. But if they're going to drive them, we're either going to have to find a way for them to get better mileage or run on alternative fuels over the long run. And I think we will be able to do that.

In the—and let me just give you one other example. I don't want to beat a dead horse, but one of my proposals was to give tax incentives for the manufacturers and to purchasers—for consumers—to buy certain energy-efficient materials. The National Home Builders has worked with HUD and the Energy Department to build lower cost housing for working people on modest incomes in various places that cut the fuel bills by 40 to 60 percent, just by using better insulation, new solar panels that look just like ordinary shingles on roofs, and glass that lets in more light and keeps out more heat and cold.

These things are out there now, and we just need to increase the percentage of people that are using them. If you can afford the right kind of light bulb, which may cost you 2½ times as much, it'll burn 4 or 5 times longer and can save a ton of greenhouse gas emissions just over the life of a big light bulb.

So there are lots of things we can do, but we need to create some markets for doing this. And there hasn't been a lot of interest in it, I think, probably since the high prices of the seventies. But even at modest oil prices, the profits are there if we can just highlight this. So I hope—I will say this: I think I should do more. I hope I can do more. But I'd like their help to do more, as well.

Thank you.

NOTE: The President's 189th news conference began at 2:10 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to President Hafiz al-Asad of Syria; Prime Minister Ehud Barak of Israel; President Hosni Mubarak of Egypt; former President Boris Yeltsin of Russia; Charlton Heston, president, National Rifle Association; President-elect Chen Shui-bian of Taiwan; Special Representative of the Secretary-General and head of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo Bernard Kouchner; and Representative Richard Gephardt. A portion of this news conference could not be verified because the tape was incomplete.

Memorandum on the Continued Commitment to the Javits-Wagner-O'Day Program

March 29, 2000

Memorandum for the Heads of Executive Departments and Agencies

Subject: Continued Commitment to the Javits-Wagner-O'Day Program

The Javits-Wagner-O'Day (JWOD) Program, named for its legislative sponsors, is a Federal initiative that generates employment and training for more than 34,000 people who are blind or who have other significant disabilities. These individuals, working in more than 600 nonprofit agencies associated with the National Industries for the Blind (NIB) or with NISH (a national nonprofit agency that serves persons with a wide