

Remarks on the Unveiling of the Domestic Violence Hotline and an Exchange With Reporters

February 21, 1996

The President. Thank you, Candice. Thank you, Secretary Shalala. Thank you, Senator Kennedy, Senator Leahy, Representative Conyers. I want to thank Bonnie Campbell for doing such a great job as the Director of the Violence Against Women Office at the Justice Department. And I thank the Attorney General and Associate Attorney General John Schmidt and the others at Justice who have supported this endeavor for the first time. I want to thank you, Ellen Fisher, and your entire team for your hard work and your leadership. We are counting on you.

I want to thank all the brave women in this audience who have survived the horrors and the fears of domestic violence and who have gone on to work, like Candice, as advocates. And I want to thank the men and the women who are here today, some in law enforcement, some in other walks of life, who are here because they believe in this effort and they want to support it.

I was just sitting here thinking how many of you had the same reaction to Candice that I did. She sort of stepped up here and started talking, it sounded like another ordinary speech—I've done thousands of these now in the last 22 years—and it was almost hypnotic, just a calm, even-voice narrative that seemed almost unbelievable except for those of you who have lived through it so often.

When I gave the State of the Union Address and asked the American people to look beyond the present battle over the budget to the real challenges facing our country, not just our Government but our country, I pointed out that our first and foremost challenge now and perhaps forever will be to have good, strong families and to give childhood back to all the children in this country. Most of us have known the joys of—some of the joys of family life. And anybody who's been in a family knows that none of them are perfect. But there's a world of difference between a family with its joys and its problems and a family terrorized by violence and abuse.

For all the economic problems facing poor children in America, I would rather them be poor in homes with loving parents than have their childhoods robbed by violence in their homes. So I say again to all of you, this is not a women's issue; this is an issue for families and for children and for men as well. And it is an American challenge that we have to face.

This issue has been swept under the rug for too long. We have tried to take it out into the daylight, to let people talk about it, to give people a chance to find courage in the efforts of others and to know where they can find help. That's what the Violence Against Women Act in the 1994 crime bill was all about. And again, I thank Bonnie Campbell and all those at Justice who have supported those endeavors.

It's also what our efforts in the crime bill to train people locally to be more sensitive to this are all about. We're making progress now. We're actually getting a core group of police officers and prosecutors and judges who really understand this problem and how it should be dealt with. This past September, Federal prosecutors used the Violence Against Women Act to help ensure that a man convicted of severe violence against his wife was actually sentenced to life in prison. So I think that we need to continue this effort.

The second thing we need to do is to make sure that women who are struggling to take control of their own lives know how to do it. And for all the reasons that Secretary Shalala said, this number—this hotline will make a difference to women everywhere, whether they're isolated in rural areas, whether they're in big cities without enough money for a quarter for a telephone call—everywhere that people can see this number they will be able to use it.

So I guess what I'd like to do now is to wrap up my remarks and say that we're really, all of us, here for people who aren't here. And my greatest hope about this press conference is that people out there across America will see it tonight or hear about it, and if they are victims of domestic abuse or if they suspect that someone they know and care about is a victim of domestic abuse, they

will pick up the phone and call this number—1-800-799-CARE.

Secretary Donna Shalala. SAFE.

The President. SAFE, I mean. [Laughter] I can't read. Maybe it will get overused and we'll have to have two. [Laughter]

If this hotline—if one person does this and it saves their lives, if one person winds up safe, it will have been worth the effort. But all of you in this room know that it's not one person, that there are thousands and thousands and thousands of people out there.

I'm going to be very interested to see what the report is after 1 month and 2 months and 3 months. And I'm going to ask to get a report: how many calls, how many people out there, feeling alone and lonely and bereft and abandoned will dial that; how many people will commit to memory 799-SAFE and dial it, because I believe that all of us, even those of you who are advocates, may well be surprised by the sheer numbers, the volume of calls.

So I ask you as you leave today to reaffirm our common commitment to an end to domestic violence; to reaffirm our common commitment to saying to people, you must not raise your hand in violence against members of your family in your home; and to reaffirm our commitment to get this number everywhere. I want schoolchildren to know that there is a 1-800-799-SAFE. I want every police officer to know there's a 1-800-799-SAFE. I want every mayor to know it. I want every church leader to know it. I want it to be emblazoned in the synagogues and all the houses of worship in America. I want people to know this number. This is a way that we can bring the marvels of modern technology to solve a very old problem in a profoundly human way.

So again, I say, I thank all of you for your efforts. As you know, it means a lot to me personally. But it will only count if everyone in America who needs to know this number, knows it; and if everybody who needs to know it, knows it and feels that they can use it; and then that the people on the other end of the line do their job. I'm convinced that people on the other end of the line will do their job. [Laughter] And I'm convinced those of you who are out there in the fields will continue to do your job.

So I ask you to celebrate today, but remember, there's a lot of doctors and teachers and police officers and others that we need to gather into this great American family committed to doing away with this problem. I think—I will say again, if we can do this, and then we can make some progress on the real issue, which is getting every man in America to make a personal pledge never to raise a hand in violence in the home, this is a problem that America has that can actually be solved. And I think all of you are going to hasten the day when we do it.

Thank you very much.

Q. Mr. President, Can we have a question on this topic, sir?

The President. Yes.

Q. Following up on what the speaker said, could you or your family or your mother have benefited from a service like this when you were growing up, considering the problems that were in your household?

The President. The honest answer is, I don't know. I think that—I think yes because at that time in our country's history, most women were too embarrassed to talk about it. They didn't know that anybody else—they didn't know if anybody else had the problem, and if they did, they had no way of finding out who they were. And I think that the sense of shame, the ambivalence that maybe somehow this must be partly my fault or this is my burden to bear, that this is not anything that I can get out of—I think that's how it would have been most helpful.

I had a—my mother was one of the most remarkably resilient and self-reliant people I knew, but I think she came of age at a time when women in America simply didn't know that there was any way out of this. And I bet you there's still a lot of women out there who just don't know that there's any way out of this. So I would think that would have been the most important thing that would have helped us.

Thank you.

Audience member. May I ask you a question also?

The President. Sure.

Audience member. I wonder if you could just take a moment and speak to the fact that with the billions of women who are battered, those that are the least addressed are those

that are deaf, and that there is also a TDD line—

The President. Oh, I'm sorry.

Audience member. —and maybe a special thank-you to Senator Kennedy for seeing that that happened. [Laughter]

The President. Thank you. Would you like to say something about it?

That's the TDD line, and for the last couple of years we've done some things to point out what telephone technology is doing to bring communication to the deaf. And this TDD line is 1-800-787-3224.

I thank you for mentioning that.

Thank you. Thank you all.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:38 p.m. in the Roosevelt Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Candice Slaughter, domestic violence victim, and Ellen Fisher, hotline director.

Letter to Congressional Leaders Transmitting Budget Rescissions

February 21, 1996

Dear Mr. Speaker: (Dear Mr. President:)

In accordance with the Congressional Budget and Impoundment Control Act of 1974, I herewith report three rescission proposals of budgetary resources, totaling \$820 million. These rescissions offset the emergency FY 1996 Defense supplemental appropriations, which support the Bosnia peace implementation force. The rescissions affect the Department of Defense.

Sincerely,

William J. Clinton

NOTE: Identical letters were sent to Newt Gingrich, Speaker of the House of Representatives, and Albert Gore, Jr., President of the Senate.

Remarks to the White House Conference on Empowerment Zones

February 22, 1996

Thank you very much, Mr. Vice President, Hannah and Vinnie and the congressmen, the mayors, county officials, and others here. Can you believe the Vice President—[laughter]—asked me in front of all of you about this trade deal? [Laughter] I figured that

the—you know, in this league there's only two teams. [Laughter] Nobody on their team I want to trade him for. [Laughter] I'm a lot more worried about the other team treating him like a free agent, making him an offer he can't refuse. [Laughter]

I want to say to Vinnie Johnson, all of us saw him play on television with Detroit, but I was in my very first term as Governor of Arkansas when he was a star at Baylor. So I want to say here in front of all of you, I forgive him for all the points he scored against my team—[laughter]—when I was trying to succeed at everything, in every endeavor.

I thank him; I thank Hannah for their stunning examples. I want to thank the Vice President and Secretary Cisneros and Assistant Secretary Cuomo and Secretary Glickman and all the people in our other Departments who have worked to make this community empowerment effort a success.

I had believed in this concept long before I became President, long before I ran for President. But to make it work in the way that it has worked required an incredible amount of planning and discipline and followup and effort. And I must say, I have been pleased beyond my wildest dreams not only with what you have done but with the role that our administration has played and the role that they have done. The idea and the passing of the law in Congress was only the first step, and had they not done such a superb job in the followup—all the people on the Community Empowerment Board, but beginning with those I mentioned and starting first and foremost with the Vice President, this would not have happened. So I want to thank them for what they did.

I also want to say, just before I get into my remarks about you, the Congress is coming back next Monday, and in the weeks since they've been gone you can see that sometimes partisan activities lead to inattention to the public's business. Now we've got a real opportunity for action between now and Easter when the Congress goes out for its next recess, and I think it's time that we here got down to doing our work the way you are doing your work in your communities. It's time to deal with the unfinished business of this country: to continue to create oppor-