

curriculum, and integrate technology and high-quality instructional materials into the classroom, as well as motivate students and help them understand how math concepts are applied in the real world. The strategy should identify significant Federal programs, activities, and partnerships available to improve teaching and learning, ensure that these resources are appropriately focused on helping students reach challenging math standards, and determine how these resources can best support State and local reforms. In developing this strategy, the inter-agency group should review the current status of improvements in math education and identify and address critical areas of need, drawing on research and input from educators and professional organizations.

Because teaching and learning in math and science are so integrally related, and because success in both subjects is vitally important in this information era, the working group should also review how Federal resources and partnerships with other organizations can help improve student achievement in science.

The working group should make its recommendations and submit its action strategy to me within 90 days.

William J. Clinton

**Letter to Congressional Leaders
Transmitting a Report on
International Agreements**

March 6, 1997

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

Pursuant to subsection (b) of the Case-Zablocki Act (1 U.S.C. 112b(b)), I hereby transmit a report prepared by the Department of State concerning international agreements.

Sincerely,

William J. Clinton

NOTE: Identical letters were sent to Newt Gingrich, Speaker of the House of Representatives, and Jesse Helms, chairman, Senate Committee on Foreign Relations.

**Message to the Congress
Transmitting a Report on the Trade
Agreements Program**

March 6, 1997

To the Congress of the United States:

As required by section 163 of the Trade Act of 1974, as amended (19 U.S.C. 2213), I transmit herewith the 1997 Trade Policy Agenda and 1996 Annual Report on the Trade Agreements Program.

William J. Clinton

The White House,
March 6, 1997.

The President's News Conference

March 7, 1997

The President. Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. Today we learned some very good news about the American economy. Our Nation has created almost 600,000 new jobs in the first 2 months of 1997, almost 12 million since January of 1992. At the same time, the deficit has been reduced by 63 percent; investment in our people has increased; inflation remains low. Our economy is on the right track. But to stay on that right track, we have to balance the budget while we go forward with the work that leads to continued growth and low inflation. That's what our balanced budget will do, eliminating the deficit in 5 years and strengthening critical investments for the future of all of our people.

Last week the Congressional Budget Office certified that even under its assumptions, because of the protections we built into the budget, it would be balanced by 2002. So I am hopeful, and I want to say again that the talks we have been continually having with congressional leaders in both parties will produce a balanced budget agreement this year and in the not too distant future.

I also want to talk a moment about our commitments to our Gulf war veterans. And I thank Secretary Brown and the other veterans leaders who are here, including Elaine Larson from the Presidential Advisory Committee on Gulf War Illnesses, the leadership of the Veterans of Foreign Wars and other veterans organizations, and the Persian Gulf veterans who join with us here today.

Two months ago, when I accepted the final report of the Presidential Advisory Committee on Gulf War Illnesses, I pledged to the Committee and to all America's veterans that we would match their efforts with action. Today I am announcing three important steps to meet that pledge and our debt to our veterans.

First, I have approved Secretary Brown's recommendation for the new regulations to extend the eligibility period for compensation for Persian Gulf veterans with undiagnosed illnesses. We aim to raise significantly the window for Gulf veterans to claim the compensation they have earned. Under current regulations, veterans with undiagnosed illnesses must prove their disabilities emerged within 2 years of their return from the Gulf in order to be eligible for benefits. Experience has shown that many disabled veterans have had their claims denied because they fall outside that 2 year timeframe. The proposed new regulations would extend the timeframe through the year 2001. That is 10 years after the cessation of hostilities in the Gulf war. Gulf war veterans who became ill as a result of their service should receive the compensation they deserve even if science cannot yet pinpoint the cause of their illnesses.

Second, I have accepted from the Secretaries of Defense, Health and Human Services, and Veterans Affairs a comprehensive action plan to implement the recommendations of the Presidential Advisory Committee's final report. I asked for this plan within 60 days, and they delivered. The plan addresses outreach, medical and clinical issues, research, coordination, investigations, and chemical and biological weapons. It will help us to do an even better job of caring for Gulf war veterans and finding out why they're sick.

Third and finally, as the Committee recommended, I have initiated a Presidential review directive process to make sure that in any future troop deployments we act on lessons learned in the Gulf to better protect the health of our service men and women and their families. We need to focus on better communication, better data, and better service.

The Committee's work and a massive, intensive, ongoing review of millions of pages of documents by the Department of Defense and the CIA continues to bring new information to light, including recently released documents about possible exposure of our troops to chemical agents. The scope of the efforts is substantial, and if there is additional information, it will be found and released. We will be asking two very important questions about any such new information. First, should it change the research or health care programs we have in place to care for our veterans? And second, how will it help us to make the policy changes we need to better protect our forces in future deployments?

What is most important is that we remain relentless in our search for the facts and that as we do get new information, we share it with our veterans, with Congress, and with the American people and that we act on any information we uncover. That is what we have done and what we must continue to do. I will not stop until we've done everything we can to provide the care and to find the answers for Gulf war veterans that they need and deserve.

And again let me say, I thank all of you for your work and for being with us here today.

Now I'll be glad to take your questions, and I think, Terry [Terence Hunt, Associated Press], you're the first.

The Vice President and Maggie Williams

Q. Yes, sir, Mr. President. We learned this week that the Vice President solicited campaign contributions in the White House and that the First Lady's Chief of Staff accepted a \$50,000 campaign contribution in the White House. This comes on the heels of news about White House sleepovers and White House coffees for big-money donors. You, sir, promised to have the most ethical administration in history. How does all of this square with that?

The President. Well, first of all, let's take them one by one. I don't believe that they undermine the case. But let me begin by saying, there were problems in the fundraising in 1996 which have been well-identified. And the Democratic Party commissioned its own audit, did a review, made the results public,

and took appropriate action. I think that is very important, and I'm proud of that.

The second thing I want to say is, I thought the Vice President did a good job of explaining what he did and why, and explaining exactly what he intended to do in the future.

With regard to Maggie Williams, I'd like to make a comment about that. She is an honorable person. She was put in a rather unusual circumstance, and as a courtesy, she agreed to do what the relevant regulation plainly provides for, which is to forward the check on to the Democratic National Committee.

Now, in retrospect, with all of the publicity that's attended the whole contribution issue, would it have been better if Maggie Williams had said, "Look, I can do this under the regulations, but I decided I shouldn't do it. And I want you to go mail it in yourself or take it over there yourself"—that would have been a better thing to do. And in the future, I expect that the White House will follow that course should such an occasion ever arise again.

But finally, I want to make the point I have been trying to make to the American people. We had to work hard within the law to raise a lot of money, to be competitive. We did work hard, and I'm glad we did, because the stakes were high and the divisions between us in Washington at that time were very great. We still fell over \$200 million short of the money raised by the committees of the Republican Party.

The real problem and the reason you have some of the questions you have, I think—unless you just believe that all transactions between contributors and politicians are inherently suspect, which I don't believe and I think is wrong for either party—the real problem is these campaigns cost too much money, they take too much time, and they will continue to do so until we pass campaign finance reform. If we pass campaign finance reform, as I've asked, by July 4th, then the situation will get better. If we don't, we will still be raising too much money, and it will take too much time and effort on the part of everyone involved. So I'm hopeful that we can.

But I believe that both the Vice President and Maggie Williams are highly ethical peo-

ple, and I do not believe that either one would knowingly do anything wrong.

This business of raising money takes a lot of time, and if you have to do too much of it, it will take too much time and raise too many questions. But I do not agree with the inherent premise that some have advanced that there is somehow something intrinsically wrong with a person that wants to give money to a person running for office and that if you accept it, that something bad has happened. I don't agree with that. I don't think there is something intrinsically bad. But the system is out of whack, and I think we all know it and we all know it's not going to get better until and unless we pass a reasonable campaign finance reform law.

Helen [Helen Thomas, United Press International].

Q. Mr. President, Governor Romer said that Maggie Williams was wrong to accept the check, and you obviously seem to agree in retrospect. But—

The President. No, no, I'm not going to say Maggie Williams did anything wrong. And I don't want to be—you all will have to deal with this as best you can, but I want to be clear. She is an honorable person. There is a regulation that deals with this which explicitly says that when something—if you receive a contribution and all you do is just pass it on and you've been involved in no way in any solicitation on public property and you're just passing it through, that that is what the regulation provides for. It is explicit and clear.

What I said was, I think that she would say in retrospect and I would say, given the extreme sensitivity now everyone has to all these contribution issues, that she should have said to the gentleman in question, "Look, I can do this legally, but I don't want to do it because I think we should remove all question, all doubt. I think you ought to go mail it yourself. Go take it down there yourself." And that's what I think the White House should do in the future if someone physically is present in the White House and attempts to do that.

Q. Mr. President, in your zeal for funds during the last campaign, didn't you put the Vice President and Maggie and all the others

in your administration topside in a very vulnerable position?

The President. I disagree with that. How are we vulnerable, because—only vulnerable if you think it is inherently bad to raise funds and you believe that these transactions are between people who are almost craven. I mean, that's how—I don't agree with that. Maggie Williams, in this case, was completely passive. She didn't ask someone to come in and give her a check. And she had no reason to believe there was anything wrong with it, with the check involved. She just simply did what the regulation explicitly provides for, which is to pass it on.

Now, in the case of the Vice President, he can speak for himself, but I have to tell you, we knew what we were facing. We knew no matter what happened we would be badly outspent. We believed in what we stood for. And we were, frankly—from time to time, we were surprised we had as many folks who were willing to stick with us as there were. But we are proud of the fact that, within the limits of the law, we worked hard to raise money so that we could get our message out there and we would not be buried, literally buried, by the amount of money that the other side had at their disposal.

There were the problems that we identified, which we've been very forthright about. We got an external auditor to come into the Democratic Party. They have taken the steps to correct them. But it was—we had never faced anything like that before in American politics. And we did the very best we could with it. And I don't think we were compromised by fighting for what we believed in within the limits of the law.

I do believe that this system is not good now. It is so expensive. It requires too much time, too much energy. And the more effort you put into it, the more opportunity you have for some sort of—something going wrong. So what I think has to be done is we have to reform the law. But until we get some energy behind an effort to reform the law, you know, if it's just me and Senator McCain and Senator Feingold and a few others who support us for it, we can't pass it, and you will be left with the same system next time and the time after that and the time after that. And because of the expo-

stantial rise in the cost of buying air time and other means of communication, we'll have all these questions all over again, time and time and time again.

Go ahead—Rita [Rita Braver, CBS News] first, and then Wolf [Wolf Blitzer, Cable News Network]. I'll just do it that way.

White House Access

Q. I'm going to ask your forbearance, because this question is a little bit long. But this is about Johnny Chung, the person who gave the check to Maggie Williams. In April of '95, about a month after he gave that check, he came in here to the White House; he brought in five Chinese officials. Someone on your staff sent a memo to the National Security Council saying that you were not certain you'd want photos of you with these people floating around. I wanted to ask you why you were worried about that, and also why, after a highly knowledgeable NSC official wrote back that he was a hustler who will continue to make efforts to bring in his friends into contact with the President and First Lady and whose clients might not always be in favor of business ventures the President would support—why did he keep getting back in here? What was your relationship to him? And he now says that it was at least implicit, if not explicit, that he would get this access for the money he gave.

The President. Well, first of all, you asked me two questions really.

Q. Four. [Laughter]

The President. Why did I—well, I'll answer the two I can remember, then if I don't suit you, you can ask again. [Laughter]

I just had—as I have said before on this question of White House access, we did not have an adequate system here. I assumed, wrongly as it turned out, that there were kind of established procedures which were sort of handed on from administration to administration that had nothing to do with whoever happened to be here about the control and developed access. And I was wrong about that. So that's what I assumed generally was in place until we became aware that they weren't.

But on this particular day, I just had an instinct that maybe whatever the rules were, that we didn't maybe know enough about

these folks to know whether there should be a picture there. I didn't assume anything negative about them; I just thought that we just didn't know.

Now, with regard to the memo about Mr. Chung, I can't answer that question because I never saw it, and no one ever told me it had been written, and I don't know who did see it. So I really can't answer that whole cluster of questions because the first I ever knew such a memo had been written was when it was discussed in the public domain. I did not know that. I had no reason to believe that there was any problem there.

Q. And what was your relationship with Mr. Chung? How did you come to know him? How did he get into your office and write you letters that you replied to? There is lots of record of that.

The President. Well, I like to think we're pretty good about replying to our letters, and I don't think there is anything wrong with that. I don't remember how I met him, but I think I met him at some Democratic Party event. I'm sure that's where I met him. I didn't have a relationship with him prior to my becoming President, to the best of my knowledge.

Wolf.

Decision on an Independent Counsel

Q. Mr. President, early in your administration, when you were faced with a similar round of pressure for a special prosecutor to investigate Whitewater, you made it easy on Janet Reno by preempting her and saying, "Yes, it's time for a special prosecutor"—Robert Fiske, in that particular case—"to go forward." And ever since—you know, the history of Whitewater. Why not make it easy for Janet Reno this time and similarly preempt her and say, "Yes, there's enough of a threshold, enough of the law has been met to go forward and get to the bottom of this"?

The President. For one thing, there was no law at the time. And I might point out that if there had been a law, either the previous law or this law, there would have been no special prosecutor because the threshold of the law was not met. And you know, the American people will have to make a judgment about whether all of this has been worth it when the facts come out. But the

threshold of the law was not met, and I doubt very seriously if one ever would have been called if any law had been in place.

Now there is a law in place. It is a legal question. I do not think it should become a political question. And I have been very rigorous in dealing with this and saying it in just that way, and I'm going to stick with my position.

Peter [Peter Maer, NBC Mutual Radio].

Appearance of Impropriety

Q. Mr. President, you again today, Vice President Gore the other day, and your staffs have repeatedly told us that no laws were broken in the Lincoln Bedroom issue, in the phone calls for donations, in Maggie Williams accepting and then passing along the donation to the DNC. But cumulatively, Mr. President, what are your thoughts on the propriety and the appearance of all of these various actions?

The President. Well, let's take them one at a time. The Vice President has said that he believes he should—if he makes further fundraising calls as opposed to attending fundraising events, he should not make them from his office even if it is paid for with a political credit card.

I have said that I believe Maggie Williams thinks, in view of the environment in which we now are, that even though there is an explicit regulation on this—right on point on this—that what she probably wishes she had said and what I expect future employees to say is, "Look, I can take this; it is legal. But we're not going to do it this way. You have to mail it in, or you have to take it in yourself."

On the third thing, I just have a different view of this than you do. We have—I have done something no President has ever done. I have—I mean, I gave you a list of the people that spent the night in the White House. And it shows that a relatively small percentage of them, about one in nine, were people that I met in the course of running for President, who supported me for President, who either gave me contributions or also helped to raise money for me.

The people that did that, I'm grateful to them for doing that. I appreciate the fact that they helped me in the campaign in '92. And

the document which was released, which most of you reported on, which showed the note I had sent back to Nancy Hernreich makes it clear that I wanted to get back in touch with those people. I appreciated what they had done. I didn't want them to feel estranged from me. And I don't think there is anything wrong with a President—me or anyone else—reaching out to his supporters.

And some of them, including—let me just give you—I mean, I can give you lots of examples, but there have been a lot of different kinds of people who spent the night here. But one of the newspapers made an issue of B. Rapoport from Texas. Well, he was my friend 25 years ago. When I was a defeated candidate for Congress with a campaign debt that was almost twice my annual salary, he was my friend. When I was the youngest former Governor in the history of the Republic and nobody felt I had any political future, he was my personal friend. I don't think there is anything wrong with having people like that spend the night with you.

So you can make your own judgments about this. But I have tried to be very forthright with you about this. I've given you all of this information, and you can make your own judgments. But I just simply disagree that it is wrong for a President to ask his friends and supporters to spend time with him.

And let me remind you of one problem. A lot of you who have to travel around with me are acutely aware of this. This job, even when you're traveling, can be a very isolating job. Usually when you travel someplace, you go someplace; you stay a little while; you turn around and leave. If you go to these fundraiser—on the coffees, for example, I'm the one that's most responsible—or for the dinners out, the fundraising dinners—I get frustrated going to meetings and going where all you do is shake hands with somebody or you take a picture, no words ever change. You never know what somebody's got on their mind, or they never get a chance to talk to you. You never have any real human contact. I look for ways to have genuine conversations with people. I learn things when I listen to people.

But I can tell you this: I don't believe you can find any evidence of the fact that I have

changed Government policy solely because of a contribution. It's just that I don't think I should refuse to listen to people who supported me or refuse to be around them or tell people, "Well, you contributed to the campaign. Therefore, even though I'd love to have you come see me at the White House, I can't do it anymore." And you will just have to sort through that and evaluate whether you agree with that or not. But that's how I feel.

Q. Are those who question the propriety off base? Is that what you're saying?

The President. Well, no, I'm saying that I do not believe that inviting people to spend the night with me at the White House, the overwhelming majority of whom were personal friends of mine of long standing, family members, friends of family members, friends of my daughter's, dignitaries, public officials, former public officials—some of whose connection with me really did begin in 1991 when I started running for President and that involved their willingness to give me money or to raise money for me—I don't think that that is a bad thing.

What I think is a bad thing is to say—and again, this may not be illegal either, and you know the documents also show that I stopped this—I don't think a political party should say, "If you give this amount of money, we'll guarantee you this specific access. If you give that amount of money, we'll guarantee you that specific access." I don't think that a political party should say or a President should say, "If you want access to us, you have to contribute. And if you want access to us, you not only have to contribute to us, you can't contribute to them." I never did any of that.

As I have said before, one of the most important meetings I had about China policy was one organized by Republicans; as far as I know, none of them had ever done anything in my behalf before. But it was important.

I just don't think you should eliminate contacts with your supporters. And I don't think that anyone else—if you really think about it, I don't think you will think that, either.

John [John Donvan, ABC News].

Q. Mr. President, in listening to many of your supporters and aides respond to these questions over the last several weeks, one

note that I think I hear is one of frustration, a sense that these questions are unfair and the focus on the Democrats is unfair. But I also find something unsatisfactory in that response, and my question to you as somebody who has enormous power to lead by example, is it good enough to say that everybody else does it?

The President. No. No, and I'm not trying to say that. I'm going to try to get through this whole press conference and never talk about the practices of the Republicans. [Laughter] I'm going to do my best to get all the way—I don't think that's a good example.

And I also don't think it's good enough to say it is legal. I think we should be held to a higher standard than just, "It is legal." But what I do want you to know is, when it is obvious that we have a disagreement—when I read reports or see them on television and I think, you see this in a certain way, and I just honestly see it in a different way—I think it's helpful to the American people and to you and to me for me to tell you how I see it, that's all.

But I think there are things that when we see them in the light of day, even if we've been given guidance about what the limits of what the law are, it seems that it's not a prudent thing to do. I was—I thought the Vice President gave a very up-front and forthright statement about that the other day. So I don't believe it's enough to say everybody does it.

On the other hand, I don't believe either that we can afford to run the risk of having one party just kind of disappear from the scene because they don't do what—they're unwilling to do what is necessary to be competitive in raising funds in the system that exists, which is why I say to you, in the end, we should set a high standard. But if I honestly disagree with you about what's right and wrong, I should be free to say that. But in the end, the answer to this is to pass a reasonable campaign finance reform bill this year. That's what I really believe.

Yes, go ahead.

Telephone Solicitations From the White House

Q. Mr. President, you have—you and your officials have given us a number of explanations over the past several months about what you thought was legal. You said you got clear legal advice and gave us the impression that the dividing line on solicitations for contributions—that the dividing line between right and wrong was whether or not that solicitation took place at the White House. But when we learned that the Vice President did just that, then we were told that that wasn't the standard after all. Which is right?

The President. Well, let me just say on the—I think that's one the Vice President—first of all, I think they're both right, and let me explain why. Because it's clear that what the law is on this, going back a long time, is that it's as if he'd written a letter to somebody from the White House. Did the solicitation occur when he wrote the letter or when the letter is received? And the law is clearly that the solicitation is consummated, if you will, when the person is solicited and where the person is solicited.

But the—and the Vice President thought that as long as he was not using taxpayer money to make the call, that it was legal. I think he was right about that. He also thought about it and said, "If I ever do this again"—in terms of calls—"I'm not going to do it in my office because it doesn't look right. We ought to have a higher standard." And I was proud of him for saying that.

But I think that's what—that goes back to the question that John said. There is a difference between—sometimes there is a difference between what is legal and what ought to be done, and this is a place where I think there is a difference, and I think we've made that clear. And I was proud of the statement that he made.

Q. Mr. President, your Press Secretary this week left open the possibility that you, too, had made calls like the Vice President did. Did you ever make those calls?

The President. I told him to leave that possibility open because I'm not sure, frankly. I don't like to raise funds in that way. I never have liked it very much. I prefer to

meet with people face to face, talk to them, deal with them in that way. And I also, frankly, was very busy most of the times that it's been raised with me. But I can't say, over all the hundreds and hundreds and maybe thousands of phone calls I've made in the last 4 years, that I never said to anybody while I was talking to them, "Well, we need your help," or "I hope you'll help us."

So I told him not to flat out say that I'd never done it because I simply can't say that I've never done it. But it's not what I like to do, and it wasn't a practice of mine. And once I remember in particular, I was asked to do it, and I just never got around to doing it.

But I don't believe the Vice President did anything wrong in making the calls. I know some people have advanced the proposition that the Vice President should not ever ask anybody for funds, at least unless he's looking at them face to face as opposed to on the telephone. I just disagree with that. I do think he made the right decision about not doing it in the office.

So I asked that that be—that Mike McCurry do it in that way, not to mislead you or to be cute but just simply because I don't want to flat out say I never did something that I might, in fact, have done, just because I don't remember it.

Susan [Susan Feeney, Dallas Morning News].

White House Coffees

Q. You said that you've operated within the parameter of the laws, but in retrospect, do you have any regret about the quantity of campaign activity that happened in the White House?

The President. You mean—I do not regret the friends that I have asked to come and stay with me here. And in terms of the coffees, based on what I knew the facts to be and what I still believe they were, that no one was going to be solicited at the meeting and that there was no specific price tag on coming to the coffees, which is what my understanding was, I don't regret doing that.

As I said—again, this is a matter of perception. I really was—I mean, I think I was more upset maybe than some of you were when I found out that my party was not checking

the checks that were coming in. I was livid and stunned that in 1996, after all we'd been through in the last 20 years, that could have happened. It took my breath away. I was upset when I saw a proposed brochure that says, "This is the access you get to the President in the White House if you have this amount of money. If you give that amount of money you get guaranteed a certain amount of other access." I thought that was wrong.

But on the other hand, I have a different take on some of this than you do. I am, as I said—I want to take personal responsibility for this. If you find the coffees offensive—I can't say if somebody did something around the coffees they shouldn't have done, but if you find the fact of the President having coffee at the White House with people who either have supported him in the past or who he hopes will support him in the future—I am personally responsible for that, and I take full responsibility for it, because I enjoyed them enormously. I found them interesting. I found them valuable. I found that all these people, many of whom had been active in elections for years and they'd done all kinds of different things with their lives, were given the first chance they'd ever had to just sort of say, "Here's my idea, and I hope you'll consider it," or "Here's what I think you should do," or "Here's where I think you're wrong." And I genuinely enjoyed them, and I did not believe they were improper.

And I still believe as long as there was no specific price tag put on those coffees, just the fact that they would later be asked to help the President or the party does not render them improper. That's what I believe.

Mara [Mara Liasson, National Public Radio].

Q. My question really was, if you had it to do all over again, would you have moved these things outside of the White House or had stricter standards about what political things would be done in the White House?

The President. Well, if I had it to do all over again, we would fix what we have now fixed. We would have stricter standards about admission to the White House. And the answer to your other question—I hesitate to give you a general answer because there may

be some facts about a particular coffee or another that I don't know. All I'm saying is that based on what I thought the facts were, which is these were people that we hoped would help us, some of whom had helped us in the past, some of whom had never helped us, and they were going to be invited here, and I was going to have coffee with them, and we're going to talk about things, after which some or all of them—not all of them, as it turned out, but many of them would be solicited to help in the campaign—I do not believe that was wrong, and I feel comfortable about what I did there.

I wish—I've said this a million times—I almost wish that one of you had been in all of these coffees, because they were, frankly, fairly pedestrian events in the sense that nothing very juicy was discussed but people got to come out with their ideas, state their convictions. And maybe there ought to be some way of dealing with that. Maybe at least you ought to have some assurance that, if these sort of things were done like this on a regular basis, at least, that you ought to have some knowledge of what goes on in them, and that might make you feel better about it.

Mr. Cannon [Carl Cannon, Baltimore Sun].

Participation by Contributors

Q. Mr. President, you said a moment ago that no decision or policy made here was solely because of a contributor. But should that be a factor at all in U.S. foreign policy and who gets Government contracts and who goes on trade missions? Should that even be considered at all?

The President. Well, what I think should—let me just say this. This is the nub; this is the difficulty. Every public official—this is a problem or an issue that the President, Members of Congress, Governors, mayors all face. People who help you, people who try to help you put your program in, you try to stay in touch with them, so you're more likely to know if they want to do something than you are people who didn't help you and people who weren't involved in it. The instructions that I gave were, if someone who helped us wants to be considered for an appointment, they ought to be considered

for the appointment, but they shouldn't get it unless they're qualified for it. They shouldn't be disqualified because they have been a supporter of ours.

That's the way I felt about the trade missions. If someone wanted to go on a trade mission and was qualified and could make a contribution, then they ought to get to go. But if they would never get to go in a thousand years, that no one would think they should have any business on the trade mission and the only reason they were going to get to go was because they contributed to us, I didn't think they should go.

But I think it's disingenuous for anybody in public life to say that it doesn't help you to be considered for these things if you help the person who happens to win an election, because you have to stay in touch with the people that helped you. And it is a good thing to do. That's the way the political system works. That's the way—I would expect that of a Republican or a Democrat or an independent who got elected to any office, that people that helped you and people that you know, people you have confidence in, you ought to listen to them. But you should never make a decision and do something solely because they have helped you before or solely in anticipation of something they might do for you in the future.

And what we have to do is to have our decisions open enough and transparent enough that the American people can see that that is being done. And I can tell you, people come to you in all different kinds of ways. For example—let me just give you one example. It's not a trade mission, but I'll just give you one example. There was a huge amount of money at stake in the private sector in the legislation involving the telecommunications reform. It was the first time we had reformed telecommunications in 60 years. You all are in it. You know better than I do how much it's changing—all the competition issues, massive amounts of money.

The Vice President has been interested in this issue forever. We spent—in our weekly lunches, we spent endless amounts of time talking about the telecommunications act, what it should look like, and we took a position. We then found we had all these people who came to us and supported us, many of

whom had been Republicans their whole lives, who were independent long distance telephone operators. And they came to us because the majority party had decided to take a position favored by the larger telephone companies.

We had a clear public position beforehand. Should we not have accepted their contribution? Should we not have accepted their support and help? I think we did the right thing. Now, flip it around. If they had been helping us all along, but we agreed with them, should we have weakened in our advocacy just because they were supporting us?

In other words, I think the whole reason for the first round of campaign reform—let's go back to that—is that all these contributions should be made public and you should be free to evaluate them and you should be free to determine and to speculate and to probe about whether the money we received from such and such a group has affected a decision we made and does it undermine or support the public interest. You should be free to do that. That's why full disclosure is important. But I think that unless we're going to a completely publicly financed system, contributors will always have access to public officials, then other kinds of people will who helped them. That's the way it is.

Mara, go ahead.

Access and Economic Interests

Q. Mr. President, you say that there is no evidence that you've ever changed a policy because of someone you met with. But what does appear to have occurred is that certain people traded on their access. In other words, access to you became a valuable business commodity to get new clients or impress their current clients. Do you think that that meets the higher standard that you want the White House to adhere to?

The President. Well, what I think about that is that we need to evaluate whether we did anything which would give the impression that we were trying to help someone get business. In other words, I can't say who, beyond the reach of our personal contacts, would be impressed with people who had their picture taken with me. After today, it may be that everybody will go broke unless

they take the pictures off the wall. I don't know. But I can't say that.

What I can say is that the White House should not knowingly permit the White House or the Presidency or the Vice Presidency to be used to advance some private economic interest. And that—you've put your finger on something that is troubling to me, and we have to evaluate that more. And it's one of the reasons that I wanted to make sure that we had a system in place on access and on all of these things that will meet that standard in the future, and I believe we've done that. But I think that's a legitimate problem.

Jim [Jim Miklaszewski, NBC News].

Q. Mr. President—

The President. Just a minute, I'll come back to you.

Maggie Williams

Q. Mr. President, when you vetoed the ban on partial birth abortion, you said you did so to protect the lives of the mothers and because they were fairly rare. Well, it's since been revealed that there are approximately 5,000 of these so-called partial birth abortions performed every year, 90 percent of them in the 5th and 6th month. Would you now support a ban if it included provisions to protect the mother but would ban the procedure also in the 5th and 6th month?

And one second unrelated question, did the White House discover if there were any other checks or money passed besides the \$50,000 to Maggie Williams? [Laughter]

The President. That's fair. No, that's a fair question. As far as I know, that did not happen. As far as I know, any other checks that came in, we really didn't—were things that came in the mail and were just routinely referred. And I don't even know if there were any of those or how many there were. But as far as I know, there was no other instance like the one involving Maggie.

Partial Birth Abortion

Now, let me answer the other question as clearly as I can. The admission by the gentleman in question, that, you know, he thought he was misrepresenting the facts to the Congress in the last debate, has caused a lot of stir here. But I believe—and I tried

to be clear about this at the time—I was under the impression that the facts are just as we all said they were, more or less what you've said. I don't know that we have exact numbers.

What I said before was, and let me restate it, I sought to get a bill I could sign that would ban this procedure when it was inappropriate, because there would be other avenues available if an abortion was otherwise legal. What I was concerned about again—and you said 500, I think, so let's just take your number. We don't really know.

Q. Actually, I think it's 5,000.

The President. Five thousand total, of whom a small proportion, maybe 10 percent or so, are like those five women that I had in the White House. I will say again, they are my concern. They are my only concern. And I would remind you that three of those five women identified themselves to me as pro-life voters. And they were told that unless they had a procedure which would be banned under the law that I vetoed, after it was over, the babies they would be carrying would be dead and their bodies would never be able to have another baby. That is my only concern. I have made that as clear as I can.

So I can't answer the question that you asked me any clearer than that because I want to see the language of any proposed bill. I think you can make a very compelling case that for the small number of people I'm trying to protect, this is the biggest issue in their entire lives and that for them my position is the pro-life position. And I believe that it would be a mistake for us to pass this bill one more time without taking care of those folks. When—because, as you just pointed out Mr. Miklaszewski, because anybody that's in the first two trimesters that has an elective procedure will still have access to another one in a different way after the bill passes.

So, in a funny way, this might not work to reduce the overall number of abortions at all. But in the end, what it could do is every year to take a few hundred women and wreck their lives and wreck the possibility that they could have further children. That's why I was working on this. And if we can solve that problem, I will happily sign this

bill. This thing is a real—it has hurt the American people, dealing with this. And I don't mean it's harmed physically; I mean, this has been a great emotional trauma for the American people trying to come to grips with this issue and deal with it. It's a deep thing out there around the country, and it goes way beyond the traditional pro-life/pro-choice fight or disagreement.

I would like to see us bring some harmony to this and put it behind us. But every time anybody mentions this, I remember so vividly the faces of those five women and their life stories and what happened to them afterward. And a few hundred people a year, they don't have much votes or influence, but they're the people I'm concerned about, and they're the people I'm going to try to protect right down to the end.

Let's take one from Sarah [Sarah McClendon, McClendon News Service]. And then I've got to take one from Jill Dougherty [Cable News Network] because she's about to go to Moscow, and she needs to have her parting shot. Go ahead.

American Sovereignty

Q. Sir, this is on another subject. We have a very great problem in this country today, and I wonder if you would use your leadership to counteract the rumormongers that are abroad in the land who are spreading all these rumors that are scaring people to death—large segments of our citizens believe that the United Nations is taking over whole blocks of counties in Kentucky and Tennessee. [Laughter]

The President. Yes.

Q. And some of them, they believe that—

The President. Now, you all are laughing, but—

Q. —you're going to put us in a concentration camp and you're going to give our Army to Russia and all that baloney. Could you do something about this, because it's hurting the unity of the United States.

The President. I don't know, because the people who believe that think I'm the problem. [Laughter] We're all laughing about it, but there is not an insubstantial number of people who believe that there is a plan out there for world domination and I'm trying

to give American sovereignty over to the U.N. There was a—I read in our local Arkansas newspaper, one of them the other day had a letter to the editor saying that, there I go again; there's Clinton out there trying to give American sovereignty over to the United Nations.

Let me just say this: For people that are worried about it, I would say, there is a serious issue here that every American has to come to grips with—including Americans that don't much think about foreign policy until some great problem occurs—and that is, how can we be an independent, sovereign nation leading the world in a world that is increasingly interdependent, that requires us to cooperate with other people and then to deal with very difficult circumstances in trying to determine how best to cooperate?

That's the issue that you will all be reporting on for the next week in the Mexico certification issue. Did I do the right thing to certify Mexico? Are the Members of Congress who disagree with me right when they say we should have decertified Mexico and then given a national interest waiver so we could continue to cooperate economically and in others ways?

I strongly believe I was right. But we don't—if you want to go into that, we can later, but the issue is, we live in an interdependent world. We have to cooperate with people. We're better off when we do. We're better off with NATO. We're better off with the United Nations. We're better off when these countries can work together. So I just think for folks that are worried about this out in the country, they need to be thinking about how—we're not going to give up our freedom, our independence, but we're not going to go it alone into the 21st century either. We're going to work together, and we have to.

Jill?

Russia and NATO Expansion

Q. Thank you very much, Mr. President. Speaking of Russia and NATO, yesterday we heard President Boris Yeltsin saying that the purpose of the motivation by the West for NATO expansion is to squeeze Russia out of Europe and politically marginalize it. And in a couple of weeks, you'll be sitting down

with Mr. Yeltsin again. We've heard similar things from the Russians many times. Are you making any progress in changing the Russians' position on this?

The President. Well, I hope so. Let me answer the—I'd like to make two points about it. First of all, this meeting that we're going to have in Helsinki, President Yeltsin and I, it will be very important. And yet it's important to recognize that it's part of a regular pattern of meetings over the last several years which have changed the nature of U.S.-Russian relations forever, I hope, so that it will be a meeting that will be extremely candid, extremely straightforward, and I hope it will deal with not only the question of Russia's relationship to Europe but also what we can do with the Russians to continue to reduce the nuclear threat and what we can do with the Russians to help them to build their economy, because I'm convinced that they have the capacity, if they can make certain changes, to enjoy a phenomenal amount of economic growth in a relatively short time, which I think would help a lot of things in their country.

Now, on the merits, I have said since 1993 that one of my dreams for the 21st century world is a Europe that for the first time is united, democratic, and free. Since the dawn of nation-states, about the beginning of the last millennium in Europe, it has never been so. There has never been a single time when Europe was united, democratic, and free. The final capstone to that, I think, is working out a security relationship with NATO, a European Union that is expanding and still tied—a Europe still tied to the United States and to Canada, to North America, not only economically and politically but also in terms of our security alliance but also has a special relationship with Russia and does not rule out our even Russian membership in a common security alliance.

The best answer I can give to President Yeltsin is, what are we doing with NATO today and with whom are we doing it? What we are doing today is Bosnia. We together ended the bloodiest war in Europe since World War II, and we are doing it with Russia. And there are lots of other things we can do with Russia.

The final point I want to make is, among the great questions—there are five or six great questions which will determine what the world will look like 30 or 40 years from now. One of those great questions is, how will Russia and China, the two great former Communist powers, define their greatness in the next century? Will they define their greatness as we try to do, in terms of the achievements of our people, our ability to protect ourselves, and our ability to relate to other people? Or will they define—and I think that's a more modern definition, if you will—or will they define their greatness in terms of their ability to influence, if not outright dominate, the people that live around them as well as to control the political debate of people who live within their borders to a degree that I think is not helpful?

If that debate is resolved in the proper way, the 21st century is going to be a very good time for the American people. And I think when you hear all this stuff about NATO, you have to understand that there's two things going on. The Russians want to know, are we aggressive in NATO expansion or defensive, and looking at other targets like Bosnia? Then they're having to define in themselves, "Where do we want to be 25 or 30 years from now?"

And when they say things that we find offensive, I would ask the American people to understand their sensitivities. We were never invaded by Napoleon or Hitler, and they were. So they're a little sensitive about the prospects of their borders. And we're trying to work together for a better, brighter world.

I think that we're going to get there. I expect that the Helsinki meeting will be positive. But you should understand, this is a tough debate and that they have reasons in their own psyche and circumstances that make it a difficult one.

Thank you.

NOTE: The President's 137th news conference began at 2:02 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Nancy Hrenreich, Deputy Assistant to the President and Director of Oval Office Operations, and Bernard Rapoport, member, Advisory Committee for Trade Policy and Negotiations.

Statement on the National Economy

March 7, 1997

Today we learned that the economy is continuing to generate good jobs, almost 600,000 jobs in the first 2 months of this year alone. That's good news for American workers and their families. The American economy has now created nearly 12 million new jobs since I took office. Now it's time to keep this American job engine on the move by passing a balanced budget plan that invests in education and our future.

Our 1993 economic plan has helped spur this strong job growth, while cutting the deficit by 63 percent, from \$290 billion in 1992 to \$107 billion in 1996. Now we must cut the deficit to zero while investing in our people. My budget will do just that. I look forward to working with the Congress to get the job done by passing a balanced budget plan.

Proclamation 6978—National Older Workers Employment Week, 1997

March 7, 1997

*By the President of the United States
of America*

A Proclamation

American workers age 55 and older represent one of our country's richest resources, and the value of their potential contribution to our society is immense. An estimated 70 percent of all Americans age 55 and older already actively contribute to our common good—by working, by volunteering, and by caring for sick and disabled relatives, friends, and neighbors.

Despite their qualifications, however, many of these Americans experience serious difficulty finding work if they lose a job or desire new employment. Their search for employment can become increasingly challenging as they grow older.

Our laws and government agencies can—and do—offer protections, programs, and services for older workers. The Age Discrimination Act, the Older Americans Act, and the Age Discrimination in Employment Act all recognize the unique rights of such employees, and the Department of Labor alone