

The President. I feel fine. Every day I'm getting a little more mobile, and I'm getting able to, you know, do a little more. I'll tell you one thing, I wouldn't wish this on anyone. But it's been a very enlightening experience, a very humbling experience. And the respect that I feel now for people who spend all day every day in a wheelchair or people who spend all day every day in braces and on crutches is enormous.

The dignity and the strength of character that it takes to kind of organize your life and carry it out if you're always subject to some sort of significant physical disability is enormous. These are things that we all sometimes see, but when you've felt just a little taste of it, when you realize what it means to be able to just navigate and do the basic things in life—just to dress yourself for the first time when you couldn't do it, for example—it just makes you understand that the rest of us in society who have been fortunate enough to have full use of our physical facilities owe an enormous amount of respect and sensitivity to people who don't.

It's just been a stunning experience for me. I mean, I will never again see a person who has to deal with a disability in the same light again. I mean, it's just—it's had a profound impact. It's nothing I didn't know before, but feeling it and knowing it are two different things.

Q. Thank you, Mr. President.

The President. Thank you.

Q. Like your doctor after you all the time?

The President. Yes. She just wants to make sure I don't blow it.

Q. I see her—we see her right here.

The President. There she is.

Q. She's watching.

The President. These crutches are quite good. This way you can walk by putting your bad leg down and keeping the weight here. Otherwise, you have to just do this and then kind of do that. But if you can walk, it's a lot easier; the chances of falling are less.

Q. They're better than the traditional crutches.

The President. Yes, much better.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:17 p.m., in the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Gov. Roy Romer of Colorado, general chair, Democratic National Committee.

Remarks Honoring the NCAA Football Champion University of Florida Gators

March 27, 1997

The President. Thank you very much. Please be seated. President and Mrs. Lombardi, Athletic Director Foley, Mayor Jennings, Congresswoman Thurman—I know what a happy day this is for you. Senator Breaux, we're glad to see you here. Senator Breaux thinks he represents anyplace that's perpetually warm. [Laughter] We're honored to have you here.

Let me say, when Coach Spurrier and Danny and I walked in I was hoping, when I hobbled in, that one of you might mistake me for a member of the team who just had a rough time in the bowl game. [Laughter] But I remembered that a few years ago, Danny had a little knee injury, and if I come back from mine as well as he did from his, my future is secure, I think.

I am delighted to be here with you. I look forward to these occasions every year, but I especially want to congratulate you on a wonderful season and an astonishing championship game. The 32-point margin of victory, I'm sure all of you know, against the number one ranked team is the largest in bowl history and something that the University of Florida can always be very proud of.

I'd also note—it's somewhat difficult for me to note this, being from Arkansas, but every year I've been President, Florida has won the Southeastern Conference championship. [Laughter] I was impressed not only by the stars on the team—by Danny Wuerffel and Ike Hilliard, and by the fact that Terry Jackson joined his brother, Willy, in Sugar Bowl history by rushing for over 100 yards—I was impressed by the teamwork of this team.

And I have followed college football very closely for nearly 40 years now, and I really believe that the University of Florida, in the last 5 or 6 years, has written a whole new chapter in college football in much the way that Oklahoma did a few decades ago with the wishbone. You have changed football forever and for the better. It is more exciting than it has ever been before, and you do it better than anyone else.

I know that this national championship was a special triumph for Steve Spurrier because when he played for the Gators, he won the Heisman Trophy. He came back as a coach to have many successes, but there is no success like winning the national championship and doing it for your alma mater after so many efforts and so many fine performances and, frankly, when it doesn't come so easily, when you have to keep fighting for it, even sometimes when you think it's not quite fair, must make it all the sweeter.

I've also been in a position of having to try to defeat someone who once beat me for something I cared a great deal about, and that makes it a little better, too. [Laughter] So again, let me say it's a great honor to have you in the White House. I know I'm too old to play for this team, but don't hold my injury against me.

Coach Spurrier, the floor is yours.

Thank you.

[At this point, head coach Steve Spurrier and quarterback Danny Wuerffel made brief remarks and presented the President with a jersey.]

Coach Spurrier. I don't know if you can wear that jogging or not.

The President. Yes, I can. Thank you. Move that out of here so we can take a good picture of this.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 5:55 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to John V. Lombardi, president, University of Florida, and his wife, Cathryn; Jeremy Foley, Athletic Director, University of Florida; and Mayor Edward Jennings of Gainesville, FL.

Letter to Congressional Leaders Reporting on the Situation in Zaire March 27, 1997

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

The Republic of Zaire has been embroiled in an internal conflict for several months. Rebels seeking to oust ailing President Mobutu Sese Seko have captured more than one-fifth of the country. While there is no evidence that Americans are being directly targeted, the potential for civil disorder and

general unrest in Kinshasa may subject American citizens and property to a range of risks, including those from criminal acts and random violence.

On March 25, 1997, a standby evacuation force of U.S. military personnel from the U.S. European Command and the United States deployed to Congo and Gabon to provide enhanced security for the more than 300 American private citizens, government employees, and selected third country nationals in Kinshasa, should their evacuation become necessary. We do not anticipate that the more than 200 remaining American citizens outside Kinshasa will be at risk. These forces augment the noncombat-equipped enabling forces that deployed to Congo on March 21, 1997, to prepare for a possible evacuation operation.

The enabling and evacuation forces based in Brazzaville, Congo and Libreville, Gabon are prepared for a possible evacuation. These forces include a forward deployed Joint Task Force Headquarters, fixed-wing and rotary aircraft, airport control and support equipment, and medical and security personnel and equipment. In addition, USS *Nassau*, with a Marine Battalion Landing Team and a helicopter squadron reinforced with fixed-wing AV-8 Harrier aircraft embarked, is moving into the area.

Although U.S. forces are equipped for combat, this movement is being undertaken solely for the purpose of preparing to protect American citizens and property. United States forces will redeploy as soon as it is determined that an evacuation is not necessary or, if necessary, is completed.

I have taken this action pursuant to my constitutional authority to conduct U.S. foreign relations and as Commander in Chief and Chief Executive.

I am providing this report as part of my efforts to keep the Congress fully informed, consistent with the War Powers Resolution. I appreciate the support of the Congress in this action to prepare to protect American citizens in Zaire.

Sincerely,

William J. Clinton

NOTE: Identical letters were sent to Newt Gingrich, Speaker of the House of Representatives,