

Exchange With Reporters Following the Unveiling of the Design for the William J. Clinton Presidential Library

December 9, 2000

Florida Supreme Court Decision

Q. Mr. President, can you comment on the Florida Supreme Court decision?

The President. Well, it appears to me that they basically said we ought to get an accurate count, and we have time to get one. I think that's what all the American people want, and I think that the more people feel there was an accurate count, the more legitimacy will be conferred on whoever the eventual winner is. So I think this is a positive development.

Q. Do you think it gives Gore the advantage for the first time?

The President. Well, I think—I honestly don't know. I don't know the answer to that. I think it shows that what the Supreme Court, in their first decision, is what they meant. People voted and their vote—and it can be determined for whom they voted; their votes ought to be counted so that the count will be accurate. And I think that's a positive thing.

But it's not clear to me—I've got to go back; I've got to look at the decision. I don't know—are they going to go back through Palm Beach again, because there are still a lot of undervotes there? I don't know a lot of the questions. I just know that the thrust was to get the most accurate possible count, and I think that is something the American people feel good about. And when it's done, I think it will help the eventual winner, whether it's Governor Bush or Vice President Gore, to settle things down and get on with the business of America.

So I think it will be positive.

Q. Do you think all of this is going to deliver the people a weakened Presidency?

The President. Not necessarily. I said before, I think that we have had—we had two Presidencies that went into the House of Representatives: One produced John Quincy Adams, who only served one term; one produced Thomas Jefferson, who started a dynasty that lasted 24 years. We had two Presidencies that were decided where a majority

of the votes went to one candidate and the majority of the electoral votes went to another. One was quite controversial, in 1876; the other just happened in the course of things. So I don't think you can draw any conclusions. I think that the American people will be inclined to give a spirit of good will in supporting it and a grace period to the incoming President. The country could hardly be in better shape, if we have to go through this level of uncertainty. And if the Members of the Congress will work in good spirit, I think we can have 4 very good years.

So I wouldn't be very worried about it. I think that, truthfully, if this whole process leads people to believe that every reasonable effort was made to get an accurate count, then I think that will help the incoming President. Then I think the country will rally behind the new President, and we'll go on with our business, the way we always do.

Edmond Pope Pardon

Q. [Inaudible]—Mr. Putin—

The President. Well, I talked to him yesterday, and he told me he was going to do it, and we've had several conversations about this. I'm very appreciative of his action. Mr. Pope is not in good health, and we need to get him—

Q. Does the U.S. have to give back anything?

The President. There was no deal. We just had a discussion about it.

Press Secretary Jake Siewert. Thank you.

William J. Clinton Presidential Library

Q. [Inaudible]—favorite building is?

The President. [Inaudible]—coming here by the tens of thousands all the time, and look at all these exhibits and everything and kind of being caught up in it—unless there was a lot of light in the building. But I didn't want it to be a total energy guzzler and one that would be an environmental nightmare. So we really worked hard on this, and I think we've got a good balance here. I think it's going to be a very good building.

Florida Supreme Court Decision

Q. Do you think the Vice President was thrown a lifeline yesterday?

The President. I think the Supreme Court decision, as I understand it, just said we ought to have an accurate count. And I think that's how the American people feel. And I know that's how the people in Florida must feel. I mean, if you went to vote, you would want your vote counted.

So I think that's all. I don't know how it's going to come out; I don't think anybody does. But I think when it's over, if we believe we've done everything we could do to get an accurate count, that will confer greater legitimacy on the result, whichever one of them wins. And when there is a final winner, then the rest of us ought to say, "Okay, let's give this new President a chance to do the job." That's what I'll do, and I'll do whatever I can to facilitate it.

Thank you.

NOTE: The exchange began at 12:50 p.m. in the Roosevelt Room at the White House. In his remarks, the President referred to President Vladimir Putin of Russia and American businessman Edmond Pope, who had been found guilty of espionage in Russia. A tape was not available for verification of the content of this exchange.

Statement on Russian President Vladimir Putin's Decision To Pardon Edmond Pope

December 9, 2000

I welcome President Putin's statement of his intent to pardon and release Edmond Pope. It will be a great relief to all Americans when Mr. Pope is finally freed and reunited with his family. We want to see him home and safe as soon as possible.

Proclamation 7386—Human Rights Day, Bill of Rights Day, and Human Rights Week, 2000

December 9, 2000

By the President of the United States of America

A Proclamation

On December 15, 1791, the Bill of Rights was ratified. A century and a half later, on December 10, 1948, the United Nations

General Assembly adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Though separated by more than 150 years, these two documents are not dusty relics of a distant past—the ideas they so powerfully express continue to shape the destiny of individuals and nations across the globe.

Because the rights guaranteed by these documents, such as freedom of conscience, freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, and freedom from arbitrary arrest, are such an inherent part of America's history and national character, we at times may take them for granted. We sometimes forget that people elsewhere in the world are suffering, struggling, and even dying because these rights are denied them by oppressive governments. In countries such as Afghanistan, Burma, and the Sudan, men and women are harassed, arrested, and executed for worshipping according to their conscience. In many corners of the world, modern-day slavery still exists, with criminals trafficking in women and children and profiting from their servitude.

But there is hope for the future. Globalization and the revolution in information technology are helping to break down the former barriers of geography and official censorship. People fighting for human rights in disparate places around the world can talk to one another, learn from one another, and shine the light of public scrutiny on the dark corners of the world. Free nations can work in concert to combat human rights abuses, as the United States did last spring when we joined with the Philippines and more than 20 other Asian and Pacific nations to develop a regional action plan to combat trafficking in persons and protect trafficking victims.

The Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr., once said that the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice. We have seen the truth of that statement in the history of America, where each generation has strived to live up to our founders' vision of human dignity: that we are all created equal and that we all have the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. But that statement holds true for the world's history as well; in our own lifetime, we have seen the fall of the Berlin Wall and the triumph of democracy in the Cold War. More people