

JOSE CERDA

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Secretary

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PRESS BRIEFING BY
JOE LOCKHART

The Briefing Room

12:41 P.M. EDT

MR. LOCKHART: Everybody out there getting familiar with each other again? (Laughter.) The name tags aren't ready yet. They'll be ready tomorrow, because I think they'll be much more helpful for all of you. I know you all, but -- let me start with a brief statement concerning action on the Senate floor last night.

Last night, Senate Republicans attempted to force a floor vote on Ted Stewart, a District Court nominee from Utah. Senate Democrats prevented the vote, not in order to defeat Stewart, but in an effort to compel the Republican leadership to allow a floor vote on other judicial nominees, including Richard Paez and Marsha Berzon of the 9th Circuit, who have been waiting far longer for an up or down vote on the floor. Paez has been waiting for almost four years, and Berzon has been waiting for 18 months, to receive their votes on the floor.

We at the White House want to work through this impasse expeditiously and hope that the Senate will provide for votes on all of our judicial nominees, including Stewart, Berzon, and Paez. As Chief Justice Rehnquist has stated, the Senate is by no means required to confirm our candidates, but it does have an obligation to vote judicial candidates up and down. We hope the Senate will take his advice to heart and move forward on all of our judicial nominees.

Questions.

Q Do you support the action last night then?

MR. LOCKHART: We support the action that the Senate Democrats are taking to make sure that there's an up or down vote on people who have been waiting for as long as four years for a

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vote. The Senate does have within their power to vote people down if they object to them, and not provide preferential treatment for one candidate that they have a particular interest in.

Q Joe, a retired --

MR. LOCKHART: April. You can wait. (Laughter.)

Q Thank you.

Q I don't want to hate anybody from Baltimore.
(Laughter.)

Q I yield.

Q Joe, this GOA report is citing some problems with this Africa trip, saying it was \$43 million and that the entourage was so lavish and it was a large entourage. Do you find -- does the White House find that this GAO report is wrong and could you give us a reason to why it was wrong?

MR. LOCKHART: I haven't read through the report, so I don't know whether their methodology accurately accounts for all of the funding. I mean, I think I addressed this yesterday in talking about the reasons that the foreign travel is expensive and the reasons why going to a place like Africa adds additional expense, because of infrastructure issues.

You know, I think what stands out, though, from the comments that were made about that report, where some of the comments characterizing the trip by some of the Republican senators. And I think, put very bluntly, the comments are just ignorant. They're ignorant of what the trip was about, they display ignorance of the importance of Africa in the global economy and what goes on there. And it's ignorant in relation to how important a part of the world Africa is to sort of glibly label an important and historic trip like that as some sort of apology tour or something like that is just -- there's just no other word for it but ignorant.

Q Joe, the President -- there's word that the President may be considering strongly about going back to Africa next year. Would this GAO report change his opinion --

MR. LOCKHART: I'm not ready to make any announcements on travel, but the President does have an enduring interest in promoting democracy, trade, market development in Africa, and I

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certainly wouldn't rule out him making another trip there.

Q Joe, a retired New York police officer who was blinded and maimed by an FALN bomb said yesterday on Capitol Hill -- and this is a quote -- "Who cares about us? Certainly President Clinton doesn't." What's your comment, Joe, and I have a follow-up.

MR. LOCKHART: I think the President cares very deeply about law enforcement officials in this country, particularly police that are out on the street. But I think as his letter that he sent to Congressman Waxman indicates, he balanced many different people's beliefs, passionate beliefs in coming to the decision he came to.

Q Joe, I recalled you were saying right there that among the clergy supporting the commutation of the FALNers, which Cardinal O'Connor, whose spokesman, Joseph Swilling (phonetic), emphatically denied this.

MR. LOCKHART: I don't have this with me, but I'd be glad to provide to you both quotes that he said about the importance of dealing with mercy in the situation and the letter that he wrote, urging the Attorney General to consider clemency for them.

Q Well, the ruling said you were wrong, but I'm wondering if the President --

MR. LOCKHART: Let me put this a little more clearly and maybe you'll get it. I'll be glad to provide to you the letter he wrote to the Attorney General that indicates he's requesting --

Q Why would his own spokesman saying that you're wrong, Joe? Is the spokesman uninformed, or what?

MR. LOCKHART: I'm not going to get into --

Q One last --

MR. LOCKHART: Well, before you get to your last question, let me finish my answer. I'm not going to get into a war of words with anyone's spokesman, at least not today. But if -- I mean, if there could be a benefit here, I'd be willing to chip in on paying for your flight up there to ask him yourself as long as you'll stay for a while. (Laughter.)

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Q Joe, I have just one follow-up, I promise. I'm wondering if the President was aware that one of the clergy who did support commutation, was retired Episcopal Bishop Paul Moore, who supported Maria Cuato (phonetic), was a national Episcopal Church staffer who sent over \$90,000 Episcopal to her boyfriend's apartment where the police discovered 200 sticks of dynamite?

Q I'll pay, too, Joe. (Laughter.)

Q Is he aware of that? Is he aware of that?

MR. LOCKHART: Listen, I'm not going to take checks, guys. If you want to give me cash, that's fine. (Laughter.) I sincerely doubt it.

Q Let me ask about this GAO report again. In addition to the trip to Africa, the essential complaint that the Republican senators were making was that these trips are, a, too costly and, b, he's spending too much time out of the country.

MR. LOCKHART: Let me address that, because you can't have an argument in a vacuum. They said he traveled more than President Bush did, and the facts don't bear that out. And if you look at when President Bush -- fortunately, given the results of this administration, I think the American people spoke clearly that they wanted a change, and President Clinton won the election. He only served four years. In his first four years, the only legitimate way to compare this, he traveled more than President Clinton. Not by much, but about the same.

And I think you also need something to compare the trips to. I mean, I think those of you who have been around for a while will remember President Reagan took a trip in the middle of his term that one of the people who has been here for a while was telling about yesterday that, if you're looking at in 1999 dollars, was \$5 million or \$6 million for a four-hour trip to Grenada, a place that had no infrastructure, a place where they had to go in and do things.

I think there are important national interests here that the President pursues. I think there's been a consensus that it's important for the President to personally represent our interests around the world. And the arguments made by some yesterday ring a little hollow as they didn't try to compare it to anything and they offered no solution beyond sound bites of saying don't travel so much. That doesn't strike me as thoughtful, constructive criticism.

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Q Joe, when the President travels, many people just see this ceremonial thing, when he comes in they greet and this that and the other. What is the breakdown, the ratio of serious work versus this ceremonial --

MR. LOCKHART: Oh, please. All of you -- I think all of you know from traveling, which is -- and I've heard the complaints that at 3:00 a.m. in the morning, why can't he take more time down, or why can't he just -- this is a President who maintains a very vigorous schedule, whether it's at home or abroad. And I think you just take a day out of the Africa trip, when he met with all the leaders at the Entebbe summit, that meeting has an impact, an impact on peace in Africa. The process that we put in place has saved lives. And for people to glibly criticize the trip without knowing about it just is why I used the word I did.

Q Joe, you used the word "ignorant," which is often used as sort of a synonym for people who are racially intolerant. Do you think there was a racist element to anything that any of these Republicans said about --

MR. LOCKHART: I wouldn't go that way. I don't think that -- I think what it showed was a lack of knowledge, lack of thought, and it should be seen as such. Others will make up their own minds on this, but I don't view it that way.

Q On the tobacco lawsuit, some of the representatives of industry have said that this is a bid to achieve through lawsuits what you can't achieve through Congress, which is a greater regulation of tobacco. And I was wondering if you could respond to that. And also, former Labor Secretary Reich also made this point that he thinks that sometimes you're trying to achieve regulatory results through lawsuits.

MR. LOCKHART: I think we approach trying to make -- pursuing our public health agenda through a variety of ways, and there are a variety issues, both legislative, regulatory and judicial, that are available to us, and we use all of them in a manner consistent with pursuing our public policy agenda.

Q Joe, if I could follow up, Rahm Emanuel, who used to work here, obviously, said at one point --

MR. LOCKHART: Who? Did he used to yell at you guys as much as he yelled at me?

Q He said the Justice Department would not have

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considered this nearly as seriously or as early without a real push from the White House. Can you talk a little bit about the interaction between the White House and Justice?

MR. LOCKHART: You know, I think you all watched the President's State of the Union address. This is something that he believes strongly in. But this -- it was the Justice Department that looked at the legal issues, developed the litigation plan and made the announcement that they made today.

Q Since you've filed suit, doesn't this mean that for practical purposes, you've just given up on the idea of getting anything out of Congress in terms of regulating big tobacco?

MR. LOCKHART: I think we're going to continue to work with them. We're going to continue pushing, for instance, as this is a public health issue, continue to push for increasing the price of cigarettes as both a good and sound fiscal issue and also a public health issue.

Q While you were waiting to get \$20 million from Congress for this suit --

MR. LOCKHART: I know that there is money available in FY'99 to go forward and we are pushing for money for FY 2000.

Q My question is, I mean, this is a lawsuit that will take many, many years and will cost --

MR. LOCKHART: Presumably.

Q -- millions of dollars more than you have in your budget. I mean, I think if I remember correctly, you were asking for \$20 million over a long period of time. I'm just wondering, what confidence do you have that this will be continued by a future administration? Because it will have to be. It won't be finished by the time you guys leave.

MR. LOCKHART: I mean, the case will be filed. I can't imagine somebody in the middle of the case trying to withdraw. And I also equally can't imagine Congress trying to withhold funds on such an important public health issue.

Q Is it possible to say that seeking the monetary penalties against the industry is more important than the public health issue, which is regulation?

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MR. LOCKHART: No, I wouldn't rank them. Like most public policy issues, this is complex and we pursue our agenda through all available avenues.

Q Joe, the point was made at the Justice Department announcement that the suit was being filed under the RICO statute to recoup money that was gained by the tobacco companies under deceptive and corrupt practices, and limited only to that. But if what has been said is true over the years that all of the sales of tobacco were based on those deceptive and corrupt practices, that would include all the monies that the tobacco industry has made through the sale of cigarettes. And recouping that money, would that not put them into a position of bankruptcy, and does the White House support the idea of trying to bankrupt the tobacco industry?

MR. LOCKHART: I don't think there's anyone trying to bankrupt anyone here. I think the Attorney General clearly stated what the basis for this suit is and I think what's important now is this is going to get out of the arena of people like me talking about it and people who represent the industry, and it's going to go into a court and we're going to decide this on the law.

Q Joe, you said this is something he believes strongly in. I was wondering if you could tell me why he continues to use cigars. Doesn't that send a mixed message to young people. Even if he doesn't like cigars, isn't that sort of a --

MR. LOCKHART: I think the President believes that's a bad habit, but it's a habit he hasn't broken.

Q Joe, you've said before that a tobacco tax increase could help solve some of the spending limit problem. What are you planning to do to push for tobacco --

MR. LOCKHART: We're going to continue to push it. I think you'll hear more about it in the days to come. I think as you watch the process now and you look at how the numbers are getting added up, the Republicans are moving quickly towards spending the Social Security surplus and we think there's a better way to do that.

Q Is he going to talk about that when he vetoes the tax --

MR. LOCKHART: It's possible.

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Q And when is he going to do that?

Q Has he broken his other bad habit?

MR. LOCKHART: Bill, if you want to sit there and articulate them, I'll take them one at a time.

Q Oooh.

MR. LOCKHART: Go ahead. We want to descend further and mark a new low. Not impossible.

Q The federal government in the past has encouraged tobacco smoking, for instance, in the military during the second world war. Do you see any responsibility from the federal government for the problem that you face today?

MR. LOCKHART: I think we certainly -- the federal government has shouldered the burden of the health care costs of that. But I think -- I'm just not going to get into how this case is going to get litigated. It's now ongoing litigation and I think all sides would be best to confine their arguments to the court room where it matters.

Q When will he veto --

MR. LOCKHART: I expect he may do that tomorrow. I don't have a time, though.

Q Did the President review the final suit, or at what point did he last have an input on --

MR. LOCKHART: I don't -- I know that we were given a heads up last evening that they were planning to move forward. There had been some stories in the paper. I think those of you who called me in the last couple of days asked, but I demonstrated my ignorance of this quite clearly by not knowing what was going on. But this is something that has been in the hands of the Justice Department for quite some time. They made the judgment on the legal basis for going forward. They developed the litigation plan and they will prosecute this case.

Q Has the President talked to anybody on the Hill about what to do after the bill is vetoed about which way he wants to go, what he thinks they can get?

MR. LOCKHART: He's had ongoing conversations with

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Democratic leaders up there, periodic conversations with some of the Republican leaders. But I'm going to leave it until tomorrow for just what the veto message will be.

Q As a practical matter, does he believe that in vetoing this, it effectively kills any chance of a tax cut this year?

MR. LOCKHART: The President believes that it should not. The President has put forward middle-class tax relief. If you look at the Republican plan, it's hard to find, but there's middle class tax relief in there, and the President is open to working with them on providing it. What he's not open to work on, which he'll make imminently clear, is a large, risky tax cut that can't be paid for and would be paid for on the back of Social Security and Medicare.

Q Is the President going to veto the defense bill because it contains the Energy Department reorganization that Secretary Richardson opposes?

MR. LOCKHART: I think we continue to have concerns about some of the accountability provisions of DOE reorganization. There's obviously things in the bill that we like -- pay raise, some readiness things. So we're going to look at this and when we have a decision, we'll let you know.

Q Joe, has the President turned down the offer to give the annual Jefferson lecture?

MR. LOCKHART: Yes. I mean, contrary to some belief, I don't think we ever accepted it, right? But the offer had been made; we had not accepted it as was reported, but he will not be attending. I think the President believes that -- yes, that he didn't want the important work that they do to be called into question.

Q Did he give -- the impression that he would, because he certainly thought he was --

MR. LOCKHART: Not that I know of, but I'm not aware of every conversation.

Q Did he think it was inappropriate for a politician to give a lecture you would reserve for scholars?

MR. LOCKHART: No. I think he felt that he didn't want the work they do to be called into question.

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Q You mean, he wanted to do that, but was afraid it would somehow cause the -- problems?

MR. LOCKHART: I'm not aware of any forum that he's not interested in speaking to, so -- (laughter) -- I think there is a legitimate issue. I think any continuing of debate might have the effect of calling what they do into question, and that the President wanted no part of that.

Q Joe, back to budget matters. We're just over a week away from the fiscal year. Are we about to have the proverbial train wreck?

MR. LOCKHART: Oh, no, I think there's been discussion of a CR to move forward, so I don't think there is any danger that the last day of the fiscal year that, somehow, the government will shut down. I think we are getting to the end of the game that I've been talking about here now for some time of shuffling the cards around on the table and using gimmicks which Senator Specter proudly talked about blue smoke and mirrors, how smoky is it, how blue are the mirrors. You know, I think the numbers all have to be added up eventually, and we ought to -- we're going to need to move forward and make sure that we fund our priorities, but we do it in a responsible way.

You know, again, it brings us back to tobacco, I think. When faced with what we think is a win-win, good fiscal policy allowing for investment in our priorities and as a part of our public health agenda, on teen smoking. It's much more attractive than some of the other alternatives that have been put forward by the Republicans.

Q Joe, you don't expect the President to give Republicans any trouble with the CR, no threat to veto that --

MR. LOCKHART: You know, it depends on what comes down here. There's a big difference between a clean CR and something that seeks to pursue other agendas. So I'm not going to give up any blanket statements here, but I want to be clear that we don't see any reason to head into October 1st with the anticipation of a train wreck.

Q Joe, do you anticipate any vetoes of the appropriations bill because of environmental riders on some --

MR. LOCKHART: Oh, there's a series of senior advisor, Cabinet officer veto threats on environmental issues that I can get you the SAPs on that.

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Q The meeting with the President in New York yesterday -- the Venezuelan President Chavez is making the rounds here in Washington. The State Department has at various times raised concerns about the concentration of power in his hands. Did the President raise that yesterday? Can you give us a sense of what issues the President did raise with him?

MR. LOCKHART: Yes. I think that the transition that's going on there was very much on the agenda, and I think the President stressed the importance of successful democratic political change in the context of the constitutional reform that's going on there. And for President Chavez's part, he reaffirmed his commitment to democracy and the democratic process.

Q Joe, can you give us the outline for the CR as you see it at this point? I mean, would it just continue spending at Fiscal '99 levels?

MR. LOCKHART: This is something that's being worked out up on the Hill. I don't know -- I don't have a briefing on what it's going to look like.

Q -- FBI official testified yesterday that he viewed the FALN people who accept clemency as terrorists who continue to pose a threat to the U.S. What was the President able to weigh against the view by the FBI that these people still pose a threat?

MR. LOCKHART: I think the President made the judgment that with the renunciation of violence as a condition of the people's parole, and given the humanitarian pleas from many quarters, that on balance they did not pose that threat.

Q Congress also got a draft of the letter from Louis Freeh, saying that the FBI was "unequivocally opposed" to the clemency offer. Was that not covered by your claims for executive privilege?

MR. LOCKHART: I don't know what the circumstances of that draft letter going to Capitol Hill are. I don't -- again it's a draft letter, so I don't know how to -- what weight to give it. But it has been acknowledged and has been spoken privately and now publicly that law enforcement officials did not agree with this decision.

Q So what is it that executive privilege is intended

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to protect if this squabble between the White House and law enforcement agencies --

MR. LOCKHART: Again, I don't know the -- what I said is I don't know the circumstances for that being transmitted to Congress. But the internal deliberations are covered under executive privilege, and you just have to ask the Justice Department.

Q So conversations within the White House --

MR. LOCKHART: Let me repeat one more time to be clear. I don't know the circumstances for that document being transmitted to Congress. I can tell you what our executive privilege argument is, but you'd have to ask the Justice Department for why that particular document was transmitted and others weren't.

Q But I was asking you, you're just saying that the privilege applies to deliberations inside the White House, as opposed to things that may or may not have --

MR. LOCKHART: No, not necessarily. I mean, the President has the right and the ability to get confidential advice from people within the administration, which goes beyond the people just generally on the staff here.

Q Do you think perhaps the President and the FBI Director don't see eye to eye on what's covered by executive privilege?

MR. LOCKHART: I don't know the circumstances for the transmittal of that document to Congress.

Q Joe, in 1996 in Oklahoma City --

MR. LOCKHART: Can we let Mara finish?

Q Is there a legal definition of what things are confidential and what things he can't claim executive privilege on, or can he decide -- can he pick and choose among the documents that he wants to claim privilege on or not? This seems like confidential advice --

MR. LOCKHART: Again, this isn't a decision made here, so I can't either explain it, defend it, criticize it. I don't have a particular view. I think within the agencies, they understand what constitutes internal deliberations and what

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doesn't. So why this one, as you -- using your words, suggests internal deliberations, was transmitted, I don't know the circumstances.

Q Joe, in 1996, in Oklahoma City, you'll recall the Vice President said, "If you plot terror against American citizens we'll hunt you down and stop you cold." And later he said, "President Clinton and I have pledged to the families of victims of terrorism we're going to take the strongest measures possible." But now Mr. Gore refuses to comment on the FALN commutations, which so many fellow Democrats have opposed. And my question is, since the Vice President said that the President's conduct with Ms. Lewinsky was inexcusable -- quote, quote -- does the President want him to suggest by silence that commuting terrorist gang members is not as inexcusable as oral sex in the Oval Office?

MR. LOCKHART: I'm not even sure where to start there. Let me answer that very briefly by --

Q Well, why don't you start anywhere. Why is the Vice President silent on this?

MR. LOCKHART: -- by saying I reject many of the characterizations in the questions, some because they're wrong, some because I think they're not relevant to what we're discussing here and questions you should rightfully put to me. But what I will say is that the record that this President has put together on fighting terrorism at home, around the world, through all -- whether it be chemical weapons, biological weapons, cyber-terrorism -- I think is unmatched by any other President, and it's something to be very proud of.

Q You've indicated before that even the tobacco tax alone wouldn't fill in the revenue gap. So what else would be needed to make all the numbers add up?

MR. LOCKHART: Oh, I don't have -- I mean, I can't do the calculations here, but what I can tell you is that we can solve many of the investment problems that we have with revenue that would be generated by increasing the price of a cigarette, a pack of cigarettes. And it's certainly a preferable way to go than to raid the Social Security surplus.

Q Joe, Majority Leader Armey said yesterday that he didn't think there would be a vote on China's accession to the WTO in Congress this year, and I think he indicated that there shouldn't be one. Do you have any response to that?

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MR. LOCKHART: You know, this is an interesting case, where I think some of the comments that come out of Congress on the issue of WTO have been quite irresponsible. Congress will have a chance to move forward and decide on an up or down basis whether they think that China entering WTO is in the interests of American workers, American families, America's business.

We believe that it manifestly is. We think it will open up markets, and create jobs, and be a very positive force. But you can disagree with that. You can make other arguments, as some have.

But to publicly undermine the U.S. negotiators, by Senator Lott saying there's no chance of passing, "we won't have time for that this year," and Representative Armey making his statements at a critical time as negotiations have just restarted just doesn't strike me as responsible leadership.

Q WTO, that has to be an initiative of Congress, unlike MFN, where they merely block it.

MR. LOCKHART: Right. There's some Jackson-Vanik waivers, I think, that have to be --

Q That's permanent MFN --

MR. LOCKHART: Well, at a minimum, I think they have to deal with some Jackson-Vanik issues for China to be allowed into WTO. So we can't just decide we want to do this.

Q Joe, are you saying that there is sufficient time?

MR. LOCKHART: I'm saying that if our negotiators, through tough negotiations, cut a good deal for America -- for our workers, for our business -- then Congress ought to find the time to consider it.

Q Well, why are they obligated to remain silent on the issue of negotiations that they don't support?

MR. LOCKHART: No, I think what -- it would be fine if they said, we don't think this is in the interests of American business. It's hard to understand why the Republican leader of the Senate and the Republican leader of the House would oppose the Chamber of Commerce, and oppose every business group around, and say we shouldn't have China in WTO.

But opposition is a perfectly legitimate position, if

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they look at a deal and say, that isn't in America's interests. But to send the message publicly, to the Chinese, that even if you find a way to make the concessions we're seeking, and make a deal that's in the U.S. national interest, we're just not going to look at it this year. That's wrong.

Q But their point is, they don't like the behavior of the Chinese government. So they're not looking at it on economic grounds, they're looking at it on moral grounds. What's wrong with that?

MR. LOCKHART: They should say -- then they should make an argument that we shouldn't deal with the Chinese, that we should cut off relations. But to try to undermine the negotiations, as they've done here, I don't think serves America's interests.

Q Joe, on that question, can we look at it a different way? I mean, when would you -- given that Congress will be out of session sometime in November, one presumes, I mean, when is a sort of drop-dead date, when you could reasonably expect Congress to --

MR. LOCKHART: You know, given the pace of appropriations, I can't predict when Congress will be out. But what I can say is that I think it's wrong to make a blanket statement four to six weeks before they know they're going to go out, that they're just not going to find the time no matter what the deal is. And that's what they've said.

Q Joe, what about Vieques Island, and the --

MR. LOCKHART: What about it?

Q The Puerto Rican -- they say there's going to be a mass rally in Puerto Rico with these people that he commuted, have said they're going to meet together, which will violate the terms of the --

MR. LOCKHART: You're doing two different issues here. Which one do you want to ask me about?

Q They're protesting the fact that the Navy uses it for gunnery practice.

MR. LOCKHART: Correct. Correct.

Q Now, how does the President stand on that?

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MR. LOCKHART: There is a commission that the Secretary of Defense has put together that's taking an independent look at this, and we await their recommendation.

Q And if these commuted people do get together for this mass rally in Puerto Rico, they will be arrested, won't they, Joe?

MR. LOCKHART: Well, these people have very specific obligations under their parole, and if they violate them, they'll find themselves back in jail.

Q Joe, when the President was in North Carolina, he suggested that he would find money if it was necessary, both to repair roads and also to help farmers. You've got senators down there saying that it may cost another \$1 billion to help farmers just in North Carolina, and the President talked about adding to the emergency funding. Is he going to propose that additional money be added to the emergency funding for farmers?

MR. LOCKHART: We don't have a proposal, given the -- this is something that just happened last week. Obviously, we're going to have to look at what the damage is. I mean, there is a good bit of FEMA contingency money that was released last week. We'll have to look at the adequacy of that, compared to what the needs are. You know, again, without speculating on what we will do, there is a difference when it comes to emergency spending between Hurricane Floyd and the Census. The Census we've been doing since 1790, I believe, every 10 years; you can set your watch up by it. Hurricane Floyd, it's just not the kind of thing you know is coming along. I think the President committed to doing what we need to do, we'll do that, and as the situation develops we'll probably have more to say.

Q Who will make the determination about how much aid is necessary for farmers in North Carolina?

MR. LOCKHART: Any aid -- we'll be working with the OMB, we'll be working with the relevant agencies and the relevant state and local officials.

Q Joe, when the President appears on Friday before the DNC's annual fall meeting, what will be his aim? Will it be to rally the party-faithful around the Vice President, or will he sort of just unite the folks around issues that Democrats are united about?

MR. LOCKHART: Let me look at that. To tell you the

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truth, I haven't looked that far again, and I'll -- ask me again tomorrow, and I'll have a well-crafted and thoughtful answer. So ask me later today, and I'll look into it.

Q Joe, did you ever find out if the President worked on the book of race while he was --

MR. LOCKHART: I know that he did some work on it. I know he's got a new draft that the staff who have been helping him with it completed. He's taking a look at that, and we'll just see where we go from here.

Q Major changes?

MR. LOCKHART: I haven't read it. I just know there's a new draft.

Q There's a new draft away from Chris Edley's --

MR. LOCKHART: There's a new draft. I'm not going to characterize it in terms of --

Q Who wrote the new draft?

MR. LOCKHART: We've got staff here who have been working on it, so I'm not going --

Q Like who?

MR. LOCKHART: I'm not going to get into who's writing what.

Q Joe, Osama bin Laden now wanted by the --

MR. LOCKHART: That's the Globe you were holding up, right?

Q Right. Yes, that's right -- \$5 million reward is there. And now he has called on Jihad against India and the United States, and also he has asked the Pakistan-based militants to join him, which they have already, are now joined hand-in-hand with him against the United States and India. If the President has spoken about this issue with any world leaders in New York at the U.N., and what is the future now of this --

MR. LOCKHART: Well, I think the President takes the opportunity with most world leaders he speaks to, to raise the important agenda item of fighting terrorism, particularly

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#117-09/22

terrorists like Osama bin Laden. And I think it is a subject that does take up a good bit of the President's time when he's meeting with leaders around the world.

Q I'm sorry, to follow -- just any words by the Secretary of State or the President with the Pakistani Foreign Minister on this particular issue, that Pakistani militants are ready to join bin Laden against the U.S. and India?

MR. LOCKHART: I don't have any words in particular to transmit.

Yes?

Q Joe, when is the timetable now, if there's a new draft for this book?

MR. LOCKHART: The timetable is, as we've said before, the President will look at this, and if he's satisfied with it, we'll move forward with the release of it. If he believes there's more work to be done, we'll go back and do more work.

Q It was supposed to be out -- if I'm correct, you said from that podium around the summertime. So it wasn't --

MR. LOCKHART: But I think what I also said is the President wants to get it right. And he'll take as much time as he thinks he needs to get it right.

Q Is he prepared to release it, perhaps, after he leaves office, rather than while he's here?

MR. LOCKHART: No, I suspect it will be done before he leaves office.

Q Joe, there's also talk among the Republican leadership about setting up a special panel to investigate Justice Department handling of Waco, campaign finance, and so forth. Would that be a good idea?

MR. LOCKHART: I'd just say, there they go again.

Q Thank you. (Laughter.)

MR. LOCKHART: Thank you, Terry.

END

1:15 P.M. EDT

THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary

For Immediate Release

September 22, 1999

REMARKS BY THE PRESIDENT
AT RECEPTION FOR REGINA MONTTOYA-COGGINS

September 21, 1999

Private Residence
Washington, D.C.

8:14 P.M. EDT

THE PRESIDENT: I was hoping Regina would speak, since I'm so hoarse. (Laughter.)

I've spent all day at the United Nations, and I'm delighted to see all of you -- Texans, Washingtonians, Michigans -- Michiganders -- (laughter) --

Q New Hampshires. (Laughter.)

THE PRESIDENT: -- and whoever came from New Hampshire --

Q I did.

THE PRESIDENT: -- we can give you one night off between now and -- (laughter.)

Let me say, first of all, I am delighted that Lloyd and Libby have opened their beautiful home, and let me come in through the kitchen. (Laughter.) I'm delighted that Regina is running for Congress. Most of you know that she was the first assistant to the President for Intergovernmental Affairs. She's had a distinguished career in the non-profit sector, as a lawyer, and she did great in the White House. And she's been my friend a long time. Her husband has been a distinguished United States Attorney in Texas. So she is supremely well-qualified to go to Congress. We are just a few seats away from being in the majority, and this should be one of them.

I just want to make three brief points. I have to take care of my voice a little bit, but I think it's worth your saying this to people all over America as the election season begins.

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When we started in 1992, we made an argument to the American people. We said, look, the country's in the worst recession since the Great Depression. The social divisions in this country are deepening. The basically anti-government philosophy that had dominated the last 12 years masked a growth in the federal government and a profligate explosion in the federal debt. And we were in trouble.

So we said, give us a chance, and we'll cut the deficit until we get rid of it. That'll drive down interest rates and bring jobs. We will expand trade, because we're only 4 percent of the world's people and we've got 22 percent of the world's income, so we have to sell something to somebody else.

And we will find a way to do this and continue to invest in the education of our children, and the other things that bring us together. That's why we say it was an argument. We said, we believe it'll work. And enough people agreed with us that the Vice President and I were elected.

None of what has happened in the last six and a half years-plus would have been possible without the support of the Democrats in the Congress, because we have lived through the most partisan era in my lifetime -- even more, I think, if you go back and look at the division of votes and the rhetoric, than the McCarthy Era, probably.

But now it's not an argument anymore. We don't have to argue with anybody. It is an established fact that the policies we implemented have given us the longest peacetime expansion in history; millions more jobs than were created during the Reagan boom, which was fueled by massive deficit spending; the biggest surplus we've ever had; lowest minority unemployment in history; the lowest unemployment in 29 years; the lowest welfare rolls in 32 years; and the lowest crime rates in 26 years.

We had some other arguments. We said, we believed that we ought to do more to help balance work and family. So unlike the previous President, I won't veto the Family and Medical Leave law; I will sign it. (Applause.)

And they said, oh, if you do that, you will raise the cost of employing people. Small business will go under. It'll cut jobs.

Well, we've got 19.4 million jobs, and for six years in a row we've set records every year for new small businesses getting started. It's not an argument now; it's a fact.

MORE

We said, we ought to -- unlike the previous administration, I would sign, not veto, the Brady bill. And I thought we ought to ban assault weapons.

They told all the hunters and sportsmen they'd lose their guns, and everything would be miserable. And nobody who shouldn't have a gun would have any difficulty getting one.

Now we know 400,000 people didn't get guns because of the Brady bill. We know that nobody's hunting or sport shooting has been interrupted. And we know we've got the lowest crime rate in 26 years. So it's not an argument anymore; it's an established fact. (Applause.)

I say that because every election is always about change, and it should be. This country should never stand pat, even when it's working. The question will be not whether the election is about change -- whether it's a presidential election, a Senate election, or an election for the House of Representatives. The question will be: what kind of change are we for, and are we going to build on what works, or take it down?

That is the issue. Therefore, every single race for the House of Representatives is a race that matters enormously to the people who live in that district, and also will have huge implications for the United States as a whole.

So now we're having a new debate, where we say, look, before we squander this surplus it took us 30 years to get back -- last one we had was 30 years ago, and we never had one this big -- shouldn't we take account of the fact that the number of people over 65 is going to double in the next 30 years? That there'll only be two people working for every one person drawing Social Security and Medicare?

Shouldn't we take account of the fact that Social Security is supposed to go broke in a little over 30 years, and Medicare in 15 years? Shouldn't we fix Social Security and Medicare? Shouldn't we give the elderly people of this country access to prescription drugs -- since, if we were starting Medicare today, we'd certainly cover drugs, because it substitutes for so many medical procedures?

Before we give all this surplus away, shouldn't we figure out what we've got to invest in education, and health care, and the environment, and medical research, and science and technology -- the things that will keep us strong in hope? And shouldn't we -- since we know lower debt leads to lower interest rates, higher growth and higher incomes -- shouldn't we get this country out of

MORE

debt, over the next 15 years, for the first time since Andrew Jackson was President? (Applause.)

Now, in the 5th Congressional District in Texas, if what we're fighting for comes to pass, the elderly will be better off. The children will be better off. The poor will be better off. The middle class will be better off. And the Republicans will have more money to give to their candidates in the 2002 election. (Laughter.)

You know, when I see how much money they're raising, it's just testimony to how successful our economic policy is. (Laughter.)

And so I say that, because this is -- it's something that's very important for people to realize. And we haven't done all this work, to get the country up to the point where it's working, to go into reverse. We need to continue to change, but we need to change from the base of what is working.

There's still a lot of poor people in this country; there's still too many poor children in this country. There's still places, from the Indian reservations to the Mississippi Delta, to the inner cities, to the rural farming communities, and the little towns that have lost their industries, that haven't felt this recovery.

There are still too many working people who don't have any insurance for their children. There are still significant environmental challenges. There are still enormous opportunities out there. We're trying to get funding for the next generation of the Internet, because it's becoming so clogged. The fastest growing instrument of human communication in history. Everyone knows we need a next generation; everyone knows we need some government money to fund basic investment. Their party's against funding it; our party's for it.

We want to rehabilitate 6,000 schools. They want to rehabilitate 600 schools. We want to put 100,000 teachers out there to make classes smaller so our children will learn more. They don't want to do that.

There are significant differences. They are huge. And they will affect the lives of every family in America.

So what I want you to say is that every race is important. This one's really important, and she is superbly qualified. That we now are not making an argument to the American people; we are taking the evidence to them. And we have to remind them of what it

MORE

was like before, so they can remember the difference.

It really matters who's in the Congress, and what decisions are made on any given issue. And as someone who -- probably I'm the only person in this room that can't run for office again, or for the first time -- (laughter) -- my interest is seeing my country do well. That's what I want.

Yes, I think the world of Regina. And yes, I feel very loyal to my party. But we have delivered for this country. And there is so much more to do. There are still vulnerable people; there are still unseized opportunities. And there's still a lot of change to make, but it needs to be the right kind. And if you want it made, you need to send her to Congress.

Thank you very much. (Applause.)

END

8:25 P.M. EDT

THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary

For Immediate Release

September 22, 1999

REMARKS BY THE PRESIDENT
AT GORE 2000 MIX AND MINGLE

Hay Adams Hotel
Washington. D.C.

7:16 P.M. EDT

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you, Peter. A lot of you know I've been hoarse, so for me, less will be more, too. (Laughter.) I wrote out this very elaborate speech here, you can see.

Let me say the most important thing I can say to you tonight is thank you -- thank you for being here; thank you for your commitment; thank you for your friendship to me and to the Vice President, to Hillary, to Tipper, to our administration over these last years. And thank you for your commitment in this election.

I want to make some very brief points that I hope you won't be shy about repeating around the country. I think it's important that people remember what this country was like when Al Gore and I went out to the people in 1992 and asked them to give a chance to put people first. We had the largest, the deepest recession since the Great Depression. We had increasing social division which was aggravated by the previous administration's vetoes of things like the Family and Medical Leave law and the Brady Bill.

We asked the American people to give us a chance, and they did. And the results are clear. It's not even really an argument anymore. We've got the lowest unemployment, crime and welfare rates in a generation, and the longest peacetime expansion in history.

Now, election time is coming. What is the Vice President's great challenge? People think at election time they're supposed to vote for change -- and I agree with them. The American people always want change. The issue is what kind of change are we going to vote for. Are we going to build on all the good things that are going on in America to meet the big challenges still out there, or are we going to go back to the

MORE

approach that got us in so much trouble in the first place? That is the central question.

Now, all of you know this, but the Vice President has played a more pivotal role in the good things this administration's been able to do than any Vice President in history. He cast a deciding vote on the economic plan in 1993, and just a few weeks ago he cast the deciding vote in the Senate on the plan to close the gun show loophole in the Brady Bill, the background check law, a law that has, in spite of what its critics said would happen, result in 400,000 people who shouldn't have gotten guns, not getting them, and no inconvenience to hunters and sportspeople.

So along the way, he's played the critical role in our efforts to hook up all the schools in this country to the Internet and giving the American people the smallest government since John Kennedy was President, in dealing with a whole host of foreign policy and national security issues, in managing a lot of our environmental policy, in helping us to generate the Technology Telecommunications Act, which has already generated about 300,000 jobs, high-paying jobs for our country, and I could go on and on.

Even more importantly, he's told the American people how he would change things -- with an education plan, with a health care plan, with an anticrime plan, with a plan to save Social Security and Medicare. And in every critical respect, it is markedly different from the approach taken by all of the candidates running for the Republican nomination.

Now, it seems to me that if we go out to the American people and tell them those things, and tell them what he stands for -- which he can speak for himself better than me -- and what kind of person he is, and what kind of record we've made, and what the real choice is -- the question is not whether we're going to change; it's how we're going to change.

He needs you. Everything we have worked for all these years requires your continued efforts. And I am profoundly grateful that you are here in support of him. He has not only been the finest Vice President in our history; he would be a magnificent President of the United States.

Mr. Vice President. (Applause.)

END

7:22 P.M. EDT

THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary

For Immediate Release

September 22, 1999

STATEMENT BY THE PRESIDENT

West Portico

5:45 P.M. EDT

THE PRESIDENT: Good afternoon. Last January, in my State of the Union address, I announced that the Justice Department was preparing a litigation plan to cover the costs of smoking-related illnesses. Over the years, smoking-related illnesses have cost taxpayers billions of dollars, through Medicare, veterans' health, and other federal health programs.

Today, the Justice Department declared that the United States is, in fact, filing suit against the major tobacco companies to recover the costs borne by taxpayers. I believe it's the right thing to do. The tobacco companies should answer to the taxpayers for their actions. The taxpayers of our country should have their day in court.

Thank you very much.

Q Mr. President, the tobacco companies say this lawsuit is pure politics, sir. What do you say to them?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, if you look at the record of this administration, we've been out there on this issue a very long time. No one else ever tried to do that. We did our best to work with them and with the Congress to resolve many of these matters, legislatively, and they declined. And I believe this is the appropriate thing to do.

Q Do you think the North Koreans, sir, are going to stick to their moratorium on missile testing now, after the lifting of sanctions?

THE PRESIDENT: I do. And, of course, if the future proves otherwise, then there are always other options open to us. But former Defense Secretary Bill Perry, and others who worked with him, worked very hard on this, and then our negotiator in

MORE

Berlin did a very good job. We worked very closely with the Japanese and with the South Koreans on this approach. They are agreed with it. And it offers the most promising opportunity to lift the cloud of uncertainty and insecurity and danger that otherwise would hang over that whole region, including the American servicemen and women who are there.

So I'm very, very hopeful about it. If it works, it does; if it doesn't, then there will be other options open to us.

Thank you.

END

5:48 P.M. EDT

THE WHITE HOUSE
Office of the Press Secretary

For Immediate Release

September 21, 1999

READ OUT TO THE POOL
BY
SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL

Aboard Air Force One
En route Washington, D.C.

7:12 P.M. EDT

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: As you know, the President met with President Chavez of Venezuela this afternoon in a bilateral meeting that has been scheduled now for some time. This is not something that came up at the last minute; this was something that had been agreed to among the two Presidents. They had a telephone conversation back in June. They had met when President Chavez had first been elected and they talked about getting together again. And when they had this telephone conversation they agreed that they would meet at UNGA.

The issues that were discussed, President Chavez explained to President Clinton the efforts that he's making to try to reform Venezuela. As you know, he came to office with a huge mandate from the Venezuelan people. As an outside candidate who does not pertain to the tradition political parties, his platform is one of change. He's trying to transform the constitution. He was able to get a constitutional assembly elected. He described to the President the efforts that he's making in order to try to get that constitution changed.

The President responded by saying that he was, you know, pleased to hear what was going on in Venezuela and what the President, what Chavez was trying to do. He emphasized the importance of making sure that these changes took place within the framework of constitutional, democratic and legal procedures. As you know, there's been a controversy recently between the constituent assembly and the Congress in Venezuela, which many critics of Chavez have argued, have suggested that he was deviating from the constitutional path.

Chavez mentioned this and mentioned that the agreement that

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had been worked out between the Congress and the assembly, and reiterated at the end of the meeting that he had every intention of trying to keep the process of change within the democratic framework in Venezuela.

The two Presidents also talked about the economic challenges that Chavez faces. Chavez mentioned that inflation has come down during the last period; that he has, in fact, succeeded in reducing the fiscal deficit, but that he recognizes that he has a lot of work to do. He mentioned at one point that the middle class in Venezuela had been pulverized, had basically disappeared and that a lot had to be done in that regard.

And then, finally, the two Presidents talked about cooperation on various fronts, particularly on the narcotics front, where they both stressed the importance of trying to deal with the issue of narcotics.

And I guess there is one other issue that was mentioned, and that had to do with Colombia. President Chavez noted that the guerilla activities in Colombia affect the Venezuelan border significantly and that he's concerned about the situation in Colombia. President Clinton noted that whatever efforts are made to help the Colombians need to be done in close coordination with President Pastrana. And President Chavez recognized that and asserted that, in fact, that he was working with President Pastrana, that he went to see him; and that, in fact, thanks to President Pastrana's say-so, okay, there had been some meetings this past week between one of the guerilla groups and some elements of the Colombian society, including some government officials in Caracas. He was referring to the talks with the ELN.

But, essentially, that was the upshot of the meeting. So they covered constitutional reform issues; they covered economic questions; they covered the conflict in Colombia; then they covered narcotics cooperation.

Q How long was the meeting and was the President reassured by Mr. Chavez's assurances on staying within the democratic framework?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: The meeting was approximately a half hour. It was a fairly lively meeting. Others who participated were Madeleine Albright, the Secretary of State; Sandy Berger; Ambassador Holbrooke; Governor MacKay; the U.S. Ambassador to Venezuela, John Maisto; Assistant Secretary Pete Romero.

And, yes, I think that Chavez went out of his way to

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emphasize that he needed to be patient and that it wasn't easy because, you know, the expectations on him are very, very high. But he went out of his way to assert that he understood that the only way he could really accomplish what he needed to accomplish in Venezuela was to do so within the framework of democratic institutions.

Q Did either the President or Albright say to him that they had concerns, that it appeared that he had departed from a democratic framework, or that that was the way the world community had viewed it?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: It wasn't stated explicitly, but it was understood. And Chavez's responses suggested that he understood that people have expressed concern over this issue. For example, at one particular point he said, look, as an illustration of the fact that we need to be very patient about this, he referred to an incident when he was present with the equivalent of what would be the State of the Union -- I mean, actually, it was the National Day in the Congress. He went and the Congress, which is controlled by the opposition, had selected a speaker who was extremely, extremely vocal in his criticisms of Chavez; and that he hunkered down and just simply, you know, he took that because he understood that we need to be patient.

And it was -- this was really a very significant incident, because the criticism of Chavez were very, very aggressive.

Q Are you saying that he understood -- or he was saying that he understood that he needed to be patient, or that the rest of the world needed to be patient with his reforms?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: He understood -- I think it's quite clear from President Chavez's responses that he understands that the process in Colombia needs to -- and at one point he made allusions to the fact, you know my background. You know what his background is, of course, that he was somebody who became notorious for having tried to overthrow the government of President Carlos Andreas Perez and spent some time in prison. In fact, the United States revoked his visa. And then he was elected President.

He mentioned -- he started out one comment by saying, as you know, you know my background, but I can assure you that we're working to -- change can only come about successfully in Venezuela through democratic channels and procedures.

Q Did you say that it was inherent in his answers that he knew that people were concerned about his commitment to

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democratic reform? Or did the President specifically make that clear?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: The President specifically said to him, no, Mr. President, you know, it's in my judgement that these kinds of changes can best be carried out through democratic procedures. And Chavez agreed. Something to that effect, I don't have my notes in front of me.

Q Right, but do you mean by that that Clinton made it clear to him that there are concerns?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Yes. He made it clear to him that there are concerns. I think it would be inappropriate to say that he tried to put some kind of warning in front of him. What he made clear that this kind of process can only take place within the framework of democratic institutions -- essentially saying what a lot of people have been saying about Chavez, he understands this because he's been criticized in Venezuela by many of his detractors and others. And his response was to very, very strongly reaffirm.

I was impressed by the fact that at the end of the conversation, without President Clinton bringing this up again, he reiterated once again his commitment to trying to carry out his reform agenda within the framework of democratic institutions.

Q Was the President reassured by that?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: I think the President was reassured by that.

END

7:22 P.M. EDT

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Politics Headlines

Tuesday September 21 8:16 PM ET

Senators Skirmish Over Bankruptcy

By DAVID ESPO Associated Press Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) - The Senate deadlocked Tuesday - not once but twice - as lawmakers clashed over legislation to overhaul the nation's bankruptcy laws and the confirmation of several judicial nominations.

First, Democrats blocked action on the bankruptcy bill, saying they wanted an agreement from Republicans to permit a debate and vote on an amendment for a \$1-an-hour increase in the minimum wage over two years.

Republicans countered that they were willing to permit that debate but that Democrats had also demanded votes on unrelated issues ranging from farm programs to gun control.

The vote was 53-45, with one senator voting present, seven short of the 60 votes needed to move the measure toward passage.

Moments later, in an ironic twist to the usual debate over judges, Democrats blocked efforts to force a speedy vote on one of President Clinton's nominees for the federal bench.

The nominee, Ted Stewart of Utah, is backed by Sen. Orrin Hatch, the Utah Republican who chairs the Judiciary Committee. Democrats complained that while Republicans were eager to speed Stewart's nomination toward passage, they were unwilling to agree to quick votes on several other nominees proposed by the president. Thus, they held ranks and the Senate voted 55-44, five short of the 60 needed, to advance his nomination to a final vote.

In a rare move moments later, Democratic leader Tom Daschle of South Dakota sought to force a vote on two judicial nominees, District Judge Richard Paez and an attorney, Marsha Berzon, both of whom have been named to the appeals court.

It was the Republicans' turn to block action, and they did by margins of 45-54 on Berzon and 45-53 on Paez, both well short of the 60 needed.

It is customarily the prerogative of the majority leader to make such motions, and Daschle's decision to do so had the effect of elevating the importance of the long-running controversy over judicial nominations.

Daschle accused Republicans of seeking to choke off debate on the bankruptcy bill prematurely. He also said that dozens of Clinton's judicial nominations are awaiting action, including Paez, who was appointed more than three years ago. "We've got to have these votes," he said. "We've got to confirm" these judges.

Hatch, whose committee has jurisdiction over both the nominations and the bankruptcy measure, countered that, "It's a matter of breaking through the procedural morass, and I'm going to break through it."

Despite the skirmishing, the nominations of Stewart, Paez and Berzon remain alive. So, too, do the bankruptcy bill.



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