

During this review process, I will work with the Congress. And I believe the compromise announced today by the Senators and by me shows that we can work together to end the gridlock that has plagued our city for too long.

This compromise is not everything I would have hoped for or everything that I have stood for, but it is plainly a substantial step in the right direction. And it will allow us to move forward on other terribly important issues affecting far more Americans.

My administration came to this city with a mission to bring critical issues of reform and renewal and economic revitalization to the public debate, issues that are central to the lives of all Americans. We are working on an economic reform agenda that will begin with an address to the joint session of Congress on February 17th. In the coming months the White House Task Force on Health Care, chaired by the First Lady, will complete work on a comprehensive health care reform proposal to be submitted to Congress within 100 days of the commencement of this administration. We will be designing a system of national service to begin a season of service in which our Nation's unmet needs are addressed and we provide more young people the opportunity to go to college. We will be proposing comprehensive welfare reform legislation and other important initiatives.

I applaud the work that has been done in the last 2 or 3 days by Senator Nunn, Senator Mitchell, and others to enable us to move forward on a principle that is important to me without shutting the Government down and running the risk of not even addressing the family and medical leave issue, which is so important to America's families, before Congress goes into its recess. I am looking forward to getting on with this issue over the next 6 months and with these other issues which were so central to the campaign and, far more importantly, are so important to the lives of all the American people.

Q. Mr. President, yesterday a Federal court in California said that the military ban on homosexuals was unconstitutional. Will you direct the Navy and the Justice Department not to appeal that decision? And how does that ruling strengthen your hand in this case?

*The President.* Well, it makes one point. I think it strengthens my hand, if you will, in two ways. One, I agree with the principle embodied in the case. I have not read the opinion,

but as I understand it, the opinion draws the distinction that I seek to draw between conduct and status. And secondly, it makes the practical point I have been making all along, which is that there is not insignificant chance that this matter would ultimately be resolved in the courts in a way that would open admission into the military without the opportunity to deal with this whole range of practical issues, which everyone who has ever thought about it or talked it through concedes are there. So I think it can—it strengthens my hand on the principle as well as on the process.

Q. Mr. President, there's a glass of water there, by the way, while I ask the question. Do you think, since you promised during the campaign—your literature put out a very clear statement: lift the ban on homosexuals in the military immediately—do you think you didn't think through these practical problems? What have you learned from this experience in dealing with powerful members of the Senate and the Joint Chiefs? And how much of a problem is this for you to accept a compromise which doesn't meet your real goals?

*The President.* Well, I haven't given up on my real goals. I think this is a dramatic step forward. Normally, in the history of civil rights advancements, Presidents have not necessarily been in the forefront in the beginning. So I think the fact that we actually have the Joint Chiefs of Staff agreeing that it's time to take this question off the enlistment form, that there ought to be a serious examination of how this would be done, even though they haven't agreed that it should be done; that the Senate, if they vote for the motion advocated by Senators Nunn and Mitchell, will agree; Senators who don't agree that the policy should be changed are agreeing that we ought to have a chance to work through this for 6 months and persuade them of that, I think, is very, very significant.

Now, I would remind you that any President's Executive order can be overturned by an act of Congress. The President can then veto the act of Congress and try to have his veto sustained if the act stands on its own as a simple issue that could always be vetoed. But I always knew that there was a chance that Congress would disagree with my position. I can only tell you that I still think I'm right; I feel comfortable about the way we have done this; and I'm going to maintain the commitment that I have.