

*Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich*

Q. Mr. President, at the height of one of the earlier phases of the budget negotiations you made a comment about the tail wagging the dog in the House of Representatives. You didn't mention any names that day. So I'd like to ask you, what is your assessment of Mr. Gingrich's leadership of his troops during the budget fight and, for that matter, for the past year of his speakership overall?

*The President.* Well, first of all, you have to look and say that they've held together pretty well. And you have to give him credit for that. He's held them together pretty well on a course that I have often disagreed with, but you must give him credit for that.

The only time that they had a significant breaking of ranks that moved toward the Democrats was on some environmental issues that I—and of course, I agreed with those who broke because I think we should have a stronger environmental policy in the United States than most of them do. But otherwise, they've pretty well stayed together.

Now, on the Government reopening, there were 17 that were, if you will, to Mr. Gingrich's right; they wanted to leave the Government closed and continue to play out this strategy, which I think was wrong. But I think he did the right thing there, just as I believe Senator Dole did in abandoning the strategy first. I think that when Speaker Gingrich saw that we had a plan that the Congressional Budget Office had scored, that I was continuing to work hard with him to reach an agreement, and it was wrong to keep the people out of work or have people working and not be paid—you know, you never—I say, "never"—you often don't get 100 percent.

So I think he's still clearly the Speaker and clearly the leader of that House group. And I think he has a strong hand there.

Q. Do you think he should be more cautious about comments that affect the market like the comment that he made yesterday?

*The President.* Well, you know, this is one of those areas where I think we all have to take responsibility for ourselves. I don't think I should be characterizing that.

Yes, Mara [Mara Liasson, National Public Radio].

*Whitewater Investigation*

Q. You made a point about being open and cooperative with the Special Counsel and the investigating committees, and you've turned over tens of thousands of documents. The documents that were recently turned over, however, weren't turned over for a very long period of time. I'm wondering if you're concerned enough about that delay to look into why they weren't turned over, and if you found that any of your staff hadn't been cooperative with the committees, what would you recommend to do about it?

*The President.* Well, first of all, I have no reason to believe that anybody on our staff has not been cooperative. And I think that everyone who's commented on this from the other side has basically supported that.

Now, on these last two matters, the people who—and let me remind you, these documents were not leaked, they were not found by investigators. These documents were found by people in the White House who turned them over. And the people who are on the committees will have every opportunity to ask them what the circumstances were in which they were found.

But we've told everybody that we're in the cooperation business. That's what we want to do. We want to get this over with. If I had known about these documents at the time they existed, I would have been glad to put them in an envelope myself and send them down there, because I think to just keep dragging this out is not good and not necessary. So I'm—the more the merrier, the quicker the better.

Q. Mr. President.

*The President.* Yes.

Q. If I could follow up, do you, though, feel you've gotten a satisfactory explanation from whatever staff was involved on why they were not found, and what was that explanation?

*The President.* Well, I have no reason to believe that there was any intentional failure to turn them over. I do not know. I want to wait and see what happens. They are all going to be given the opportunity to explain what the circumstances were. But our rules are clear, and our record is clear. I mean, we have literally pushed, I think, over 50,000 pieces of paper to the committees now and to all the relevant other bodies. And we are clearly trying to cooperate.

Yes, ma'am.