

of Boston; Lisa Holmes, detective, and Paul F. Evans, commissioner, Boston Police Department; Gerald Flynn, alternate national vice president, International Brotherhood of Police Officers;

Thomas J. Nee, executive vice president, National Association of Police Organizations; and Lynn Jackson, director, Orchard Gardens Community Center.

## Interview With Francine Kiefer and Skip Thurman of the Christian Science Monitor in Boston

January 18, 2000

*Elian Gonzalez*

Q. Mr. President, I know your time is valuable. Let me start my recorder here. The first thing I wanted to ask you, there have only been a couple of times in this century that Congress has come together, got their heads together enough, both sides of the Congress, to come together and pass legislation to give somebody citizenship. It happened with Winston Churchill, a few other people. I wanted to know if Congress does—it looks like the first thing they're going to do when they come back into town is work on the Elian Gonzalez case. If they did pass a private bill in both Houses and they feel like politically they've got enough backing to do that, what would you do with that bill if it got to your desk?

*The President.* I don't know. I haven't thought about it. I think it would be—this is not Winston Churchill, for one thing. You know, I don't think that Congress should put it—unless they know more about the facts than I do, I don't think they should put themselves in the position of making a decision that runs contrary to what the people who have had to do all the investigation have done.

I think that, obviously, if they believe the INS made a mistake, their decision is subject to challenge in Federal court. And the Congress—even Members of Congress can petition to be heard there. But I think that we're setting a—I think that it would irrevocably lead people to the conclusion that this was much more about politics than it was whether that little boy ought to be taken away from his father.

They're basically taking a position that if you live in Cuba, if we can take you away from your father, you're better off—your parents. And I think that's—the INS reached a different decision, having exhaustively looked at what was best for that child.

As you all know, I have no sympathy for the Castro regime. I signed the present bill. I think it is tragic how they have blown every conceivable opportunity to get closer to the United States. Just as we were making progress, they murdered those pilots. So I'm not sympathetic there. But I think that we need to think long and hard whether we're going to take the position that any person who comes to our shores who is a minor, any minor child who loses his or her parents should never be sent home to another parent, even if that parent is capable of doing a very good job, if we don't like the Government of the country where the people lived.

And again, I say I am not—I have no brief for the Castro government or for many of their policies. I think the way he has attempted to politicize this is also terrible. It's not just the Cuban-Americans that have attempted to politicize it. He has responded by attempting to politicize it. So this poor little boy is 6 years old. He has scars from his mother's death of which he can only be dimly aware. And making a judgment about what is in his best interest and what is most likely to give him a stable, healthy, whole childhood and allow him to grow into an adult as a solid person, I'm sure, may not be free of difficulty. And I just think that the decision ought to be made, insofar as possible, independent of countervailing political pressures.

### *State of the Union Address*

Q. Mr. President, the State of the Union is right around the corner, so I guess is the State of the Union part of the interview. In the previews that you all have made available of what's coming up, it seems like most of it is beefing up programs that you already have, like today's announcement, and returning to—