

THE WHITE HOUSE
Office of the Press Secretary

PRESS CONFERENCE OF ROBERT BENNETT

The Law Firm of Robert Bennett

May 6, 1994

(in progress) -- allegations in this complaint. Quite simply, the incident did not occur. Let me make a few general observations about this complaint, copies of which were distributed before filing and were passed around Little Rock.

The single term of this complaint is tabloid trash with a legal caption on it. If it was a serious lawsuit it would not read like a made-for-TV lawsuit. The language in the lawsuit misunderstood the fact that it's not about the serious subject of sex harassment or civil rights. Indeed, it even trivializes these areas of the law.

Further, the language in the suit underscores that this suit is about publicity, is about talk shows, it's about money. And I understand from reading -- (inaudible) -- report, potential book contract profits have been divvied up. I mean, this is -- which has been -- under the guidance of the lawsuit. It has been shopped around for months to political enemies of the President. Indeed, it was first made public at a highly partisan political event.

What is really tragic about what is occurring here is nothing is off limits anymore; is we're engaged in the politics of paralysis and the politics of political destruction. This lawsuit and the circumstances under which it was shopped around is really about trying to rewrite the election results. It's designed to damage the President in the future. An attempt, a cynical attempt under a different guise to derail his legislative agenda. And it is distracting, purposely distracting to keep him from solving the problems that he was elected to do.

While we are sorry, of course, that this trash was filed today, I suppose it is better today than yesterday. But had it been filed yesterday, it might have detracted from the tremendous victory of the President on assault weapons.

I should just say as far as the legal aspects of the complaint, we will, at the appropriate time, be filing appropriate pleadings with the court. It's a very defective complaint. Normally, a complaint does not have the lurid detail -- serious complaints, anyway -- that is contained here. But on a fundamental legal basis, the really appropriate forum for a sexual harassment case is an EEOC complaint, which is based on Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act. And as some of you know, such actions are required to be filed within 180 days of the incident.

There's a long-legged sort of history behind that. That's because everyone recognizes that there's certain fundamental damage in filing stale allegations of sexual harassment. This, of course, was not done, and this sexual harassment claim has been twisted and distorted into something else.

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I don't want to use this occasion to get into all of the details, but we will be filing appropriate motions. I'll certainly be happy to take questions.

Q (Inaudible.)

MR. BENNETT: The question asked is what -- is this relevant to character. And the answer is, look, this President has withstood and held his head high under the most vicious attacks, vicious personal attacks that I've seen. But I would just ask the public to keep in mind character is about taking on tough issues. Character was displayed yesterday in the victory on the assault weapons. Character is about getting through a health care plan. Character is about a lot of things.

Q (Inaudible) -- what was the incident --
(inaudible.)

MR. BENNETT: Well, I'm not a -- (inaudible) -- but let me just make a few observations. Your question combined a couple of things. Even if this were not the President of the United States, there are many legal decisions with the complaint. So if this were filed against Joe Jones, we would be filing, I'm sure, pleadings which attack the legal decision between the clients. But you raise a very good question, and that is it is unprecedented for a President of the United States to be sued for conduct which occurred prior to the presidency. And that raises a real credibility issue. Why was this suit not filed when he was governor? Why is it now filed when he is President?

And this gets to the point I made earlier of paralysis. If you permit the President of the United States to be sued, and permit the case to go forward -- not just the filing of a lawsuit -- think of the consequences. There could be thousands of lawsuits. I suppose every prisoner in an Arkansas jail who has been denied a pardon could file a suit against the President. And when a lawyer tries to throw it out he could say, well, I want to have some pretrial discovery. Let's take some depositions, let's have the -- I mean, your President would be tied down for 365 days of being asked questions by lawyers. And there's just something wrong with that.

Now, in those instances where Presidents have gotten involved in legal proceedings, the courts have shown a great sensitivity to the importance of the President's role and the importance of the President's time. In fact, the law says you can't sue the President while President for official acts. The reason for that is the fundamental recognition that you can't paralyze the presidency by filing actions against the President.

It would seem to me while unprecedented, those principles would be all the more important and applicable in this situation where you have such a meritless complaint which has been filed years after it should have been brought, if it were to be brought at all.

Q Are you denying every particular in this lawsuit? Are you saying -- approached by a state trooper, there was no meeting in a hotel room at the Excelsior, no discussion between President Clinton and this woman at the hotel?

MR. BENNETT: What we are saying -- we will certainly be filing an answer at the appropriate time. I received a copy of this complaint long after most you have, although I have read it. Let me make it absolutely clear so there is no question about it: We absolutely deny, without any question, that this incident occurred. This President did not engage in any inappropriate or sexual conduct with this woman.

Q (Inaudible.)

MR. BENNETT: Would you let me finish. The President has no recollection of ever meeting this woman. When the President goes to a conference, it is commonplace and typical for him to meet lots of people. It is commonplace and typical for there to be a room and facility available to him to make phone calls. It is very commonplace when the President goes and speaks at a conference for individuals on his staff and others to introduce people to him. But he has no recollection of ever meeting this woman. He does not deny that that is possible that he met her, but he absolutely denies the allegations -- the thrust and the core of this complaint.

Q (Inaudible.)

MR. BENNETT: I've really addressed that point generally and for obvious -- we're obviously researching this issue further.

Q Can I just follow up on that? (Inaudible.)

MR. BENNETT: On a very generic level, sexual harassment claims can under certain circumstances be brought on a 1983 action, but we do not think that they can do that in this case. But this is very premature. I have a lot more to do before I'm prepared to put in stone what legal --

Q -- any negotiations with this woman -- any discussions or negotiations with her attorney?

MR. BENNETT: The answer to that is no. But I think, in full candor, there should be some explanation to that. I normally would not engage in any discussions publicly or discussions with other counsel, but since those discussions have at least been alluded to by someone representing her to the press, I don't feel obligated to stand by that.

There have been absolutely no negotiations, if what is meant by that, was there any attempt to settle this case by the payment of money. From the very beginning, we absolutely refused to pay any money or to apologize for conduct which did not occur.

Last night when the plaintiff obtained -- I guess it was last night -- a new lawyer, Mr. Davis, Mr. Davis and I had a number of discussions regarding the possibility of holding* the statue of limitations.

This morning, Mr. Davis indicated that at the time I received a copy of the complaint that they would like to hold a statute of limitations. Since it was our position that no money would ever be paid and no apology would ever be given for conduct which did not occur, that did not occur.

Now, I want to be fair to Mr. Davis -- at no time in my discussions with Mr. Davis did he ever raise the subject of money. This was raised indirectly by the prior lawyer, Mr. Trayler, and I think that its well-known affidavit to that effect, that essentially a Mr. Cook was advised that if the President wanted to avoid public embarrassment, he could do so by the payment of money. And that was absolutely rejected.

Q Mr. Bennett, is this a blackmail or extortion incident and should there be an investigation of --

MR. BENNETT: I'm not going to respond to that. This is all a matter of public record now. And if the investigating authorities wish to investigate it, I'd be happy to cooperate with them, but I've got a civil lawsuit I have to --

Q Mr. Bennett, could you also comment on the Rostenkowski report -- (inaudible) --

MR. BENNETT: No, this is about this case, and we'll have --

Q Well, in relationship --

MR. BENNETT: Go ahead -- we're talking about this --

Q Do you see any conflict with you representing the President at the same time you're trying to get --

MR. BENNETT: These are two entirely -- two entirely separate cases. The defense of the President on this civil action is totally different from my representation of the Chairman. I am irrelevant to the process. As you know, the President and the Chairman are friends, but this decision is going to be made by Mr. Holder and the U.S. Attorneys Office. And this was thoroughly looked into and discussed. And I'm satisfied as well as others that there's absolutely no conflict.

Q You mentioned -- (inaudible) --

MR. BENNETT: Well, one of the problems with any civil discovery is that -- and this gets to the point of paralysis -- is that there are very few -- it opens up a Pandora's Box. It's not that we're concerned that there's anything there to question him about or any of the responses he would give, but, I mean, let's be practical and reasonable. I mean, do the American people really want the President of the United States of America to be spending his time with lawyers rather than solving the problems of the times? I mean, this is just an absurd result in a democracy. And, frankly, foreign countries laugh at us, at the suggestion that somebody can spin a yarn and file a complaint and be off to the races, tying down the President of the United States of America.

Q Is one of the purposes of this lawsuit in trying to gain disclosure -- (inaudible.)

MR. BENNETT: I think -- I don't really know that. I think that -- (inaudible) -- much more efficient way to do it in terms of a lawsuit.

Q In the question about civil rights -- (inaudible.)

MR. BENNETT: Well, I think it's been well publicized where the statements were initially made.

Q Are you going to go into the character of the woman --

MR. BENNETT: It's been well-publicized that a very extreme conservative organization where Mr. Clifford Jackson's involvement -- and I think as you ladies and gentlemen of the press look into it, you'll see that there have been fundraisers and things of that kind and a number of talk shows recently where allegations in the complaint were put on --

Q The folks at the White House are saying that they're going to go after the woman's reputation and character.

MR. BENNETT: I think to some extent this woman has been used, but that remains to be seen. I feel sorry for her at this point, and that's not really my style --

Q Did you say that you discussed the possibility of some form of apology with the President --

MR. BENNETT: The President of the United States -- he didn't discuss anything. And I discussed with him the possible holding* agreement. And there was some discussion about whether any statements at all could be made to resolve the litigation. It is our position that, while we obviously didn't look forward to two years of litigation, that under no circumstances would any money be paid, and under no circumstances would the President of the United States apologize for something which he did not do.

Q What about a more general apology?

MR. BENNETT: Beverly, I think you've had your fifth question, so let's --

Q (Inaudible.)

MR. BENNETT: This is about money and publicity.

Q (Inaudible.)

MR. BENNETT: That's a very premature question. But I don't think it's going to happen.

Q You mentioned that if this were an EEOC suit, the limit would have been 180 days --

MR. BENNETT: Within which to file.

Q -- within which to file. What makes this case different that a suit can be filed after that time?

MR. BENNETT: Well, under some cases you can -- I don't want to get into all the technicalities -- you can bring 1983 actions, but I don't think this really fits. I don't think there's any real --

Q Is this grounds for getting this dismissed?

MR. BENNETT: I think it certainly is.

Q How soon will you file your --

MR. BENNETT: I don't know how --

Q Are you going to countersue?

MR. BENNETT: One question which I think you should ask, and I'm going to close on this -- I thought it was quite interesting when I heard this morning's press statement accompanying the filing, that the plaintiff was going to donate any of the proceeds that were collected from the legal suit I believe it was to a charity in Arkansas. And I was asked just as I was coming in about that, didn't that undercut the point that I was making. And -- just asked me that. I want to respond to that, because I think it's important.

It's not too much to give away what you don't ever expect to get. And I think the question you members of the press should ask, is will she give to charity what she gets from radio shows and TV appearances and book contracts, and the anticipating made-for-TV -- I think that's a question you should ask and insist upon an answer.

Thank you very much.

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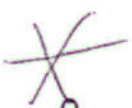
For Immediate Release

May 6, 1994

REMARKS BY THE PRESIDENT
IN PHOTO OPPORTUNITY WITH
PRIME MINISTER MAHATHIR OF MALAYSIA

The Oval Office

2:55 P.M. EDT

 Q Mr. President, do you have any comment on the lawsuit filed against you today?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, I thought Mr. Bennett did a fine job. I don't have anything to add to what he said.

Q Are you going to argue that all the charges are false?

THE PRESIDENT: I don't have anything to add to what Mr. Bennett said. I'm going back to work.

Q Do you categorically deny the charges?

THE PRESIDENT: Bob Bennett spoke for me, and I'm going back to work. I'm not going to dignify this by commenting on it.

Q Can you tell us whether you're thinking of changing your Haiti policy regarding the return of the refugees given the escalation of violence?

THE PRESIDENT: We've had our Haiti policy under review, as you know, for the last three or four weeks. And we had a meeting about it today; we're going to meet again tomorrow. And I think we may have some announcements to make after that.

Q About changing the policy on the refugees, sir?

Q Have you tasked the Defense Department to do some military options just in case these sanctions cut today don't work?

THE PRESIDENT: I don't want to discuss that. As I have said, I do not favor that option. I just don't think we can rule it out. I think it would be irresponsible to rule it out.

Q You do not favor that option?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, I've never favored -- you know what I favor. What I've been trying to do is to get Governors Island followed. I'm trying -- I think the people down there ought to keep their word. But we certainly can't afford to rule it out.

Q Do you think you might have announcements regarding the refugee policy, was that what you were referring to?

THE PRESIDENT: I don't have -- I'll make an announcement when I have something to say about Haiti policy. But I don't have anything else to say.

Q Are you referring to the refugee policy?

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THE PRESIDENT: I have nothing else to say about it.

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Q Mr. President, you missed Dr. Mahathir in Seattle. Now that you have met him personally, how do you feel about it?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, we haven't had a chance to visit yet, but I have been looking forward to this for a long time. I admire his leadership very much, and I admire the incredible accomplishments of his nation under his leadership over the last several years. And I look forward to establishing a good relationship with him and continuing our partnership.

I'm also very grateful for the security partnership we have had, and for the contributions that have been made by Malaysia to the operation in Bosnia, to the operation in Somalia, and to being a responsible leader in world affairs.

So we've got a lot to talk about and I'm looking forward to it.

THE PRESS: Thank you.

END

2:59 P.M. EDT

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PRESERVATION