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THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary

For Immediate Release

December 20, 1996

REMARKS BY THE PRESIDENT
IN ANNOUNCING DOMESTIC POLICY CABINET STAFF

Room 450
Old Executive Office Building

12:32 P.M. EST

THE PRESIDENT: I thought the era of big government was over, and then I saw all of these people here. (Laughter.)

Let me say as we move into my second term, we have the obligation to continue the progress we have made and to build on it to prepare America for the 21st century with a government that is smaller but works hard not to abandon people, but instead, to give them the tools they need to make the most of their own lives and to build strong families and strong communities and a strong America.

Today I want to announce the members of my domestic policy team who will make this happen. Today, the Labor Department is more critical than ever, as we work to make job training available to all who need it, and to make sure that employee rights are secure and our workplaces are safe.

I am very sorry to lose the services of my old friend, Secretary Reich, who has truly made this a department of the American work force. But I am proud to nominate as Secretary of Labor one of

my closest advisors, a talented leader, Alexis Herman, who got her start as a social worker for Catholic Charities on the Mississippi Delta. I first met her in the 1970s, when she was Director of the Women's Bureau at the Department of Labor, pioneering efforts to give women training and economic opportunity.

She has been a successful businesswoman and a leader in efforts to bring minorities into the economic mainstream. And for the past four years, as Director of the White House Office of Public Liaison, she has been my eyes and ears, working to connect the American people, business and labor, individuals and communities with their government.

I said throughout the campaign that we have to help parents succeed at home and at work, and give working people the training they need to succeed in the new economy. For years now, I have been trying to prevail upon the Congress to consolidate training programs and pass the G.I. Bill for America's workers. All these things we must do in the next four years. As Secretary of Labor, Alexis Herman will be a true national leader in this mission on behalf of working families.

Let me also say that I considered a number of superbly qualified people for this position. I'd like to mention two in particular and thank them for their willingness to be considered -- first, to Congressman Esteban Torres and second the Director of the Corporation for National Service Harris Wofford, who has done a wonderful job in heading AmeriCorps, which has not now enabled 70,000 young people to serve in their communities all across America and which will play a vital role in the next four years.

Over the last four years, Henry Cisneros led a revolution of ideas at the Department of Housing and Urban Development. He and his team have spent every day questioning old approaches and searching for new answers. He is my friend, my advisor, someone who has poured his heart into making the American Dream of owning a home a reality for all people. Today a smaller and smarter HUD brings more hope and greater opportunities to American communities than ever before, not only in housing, but in developing economic opportunities in ways that had not before even been imagined. I think it is not too much to say that he is clearly the finest HUD Secretary who has ever held the position. I will miss him greatly and will continue to rely upon him for his advice and counsel.

I believe that the best person in this country who is today suited to lead HUD into the 21st century is Andrew Cuomo. He has lived and breathed housing and economic development for more than a decade, first at the grass roots as a community housing developer, and then as our Assistant Secretary for Community Planning and Development. (A baby cries.) Relax, this is a pro-family administration. (Laughter.)

He is a passionate believer in doing what's right, and he is a determined leader who gets it done. His test is never soft sentiments, but hard results.

The empowerment zones effort he has led so well is a perfect example of the new HUD. Instead of big solutions imposed by Washington, it creates a partnership between government, business, and private citizens to help communities lift themselves up. This is Andrew Cuomo's vision, and it is why I expect him to be a very strong voice for America's cities and a great HUD Secretary.

The Department of Energy has many missions, ranging from producing nuclear fuels and managing nuclear wastes to widening the frontiers of science at our national laboratories, to promoting energy efficiently and environmental technology. Hazel O'Leary has made huge strides with that Department and has done this while bringing unprecedented openness to the agency. I mention obviously the reports that the Energy Department has done on radiation experiments and the groundbreaking work that the Energy Department did to lead us to the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty.

To manage this diverse and sprawling operation, a Secretary of Energy must be an experienced leader and manager who understands the demands of a large government agency, who will demand peak performance from government contractors, who knows why we must reinvent government and how to do it.

As Secretary of Transportation, Federico Pena has proven himself a talented leader of a large and complex government agency. He found ways to encourage new technologies, promote safety, protect the environment. I am happy to announce today that I will nominate him to be our new Secretary of Energy. He will continue to streamline and reinvent the Energy Department. He will build on its unprecedented commitment to openness. He will oversee the urgent cleanup of our nuclear stockpiles and he will work with the energy industry to create economic opportunity by using energy in a way that does not hurt our environment.

I am very happy that he has agreed to remain in the Cabinet in this new and ever-changing role, and very grateful for the service he rendered at the Department of Transportation.

To replace him, I am proud to nominate the Federal Highway Administrator, Rodney Slater. First, as the Chair of the State Highway Commission in our home state, and then as Federal Highway Administrator, Rodney Slater has managed large programs with skill and high standards. He has rebuilt and expanded our nation's highways and linked isolated communities to jobs and opportunities. He has built bridges both of steel and of goodwill to bring people closer together.

When the North Ridge earthquake struck California with such deadly force, Rodney led our effort to rebuild vital highways in

record time. He is the right person to help us meet the many transportation needs and challenges we face as we enter the 21st century. He has been my friend and advisor for many years. Along with his own family, I have watched with pride as he has built his own road to success.

I can say that he was recommended by more people from more places in more ways for this job than any person for any position I have ever seen. (Laughter.) And in spite of that -- (laughter) -- I am confident that he will be a superb and successful Secretary of Transportation.

Over the past four years, first with Erskine Bowles' leadership and then Phil Lader's, we have worked hard to revitalize and broaden the mission and increase the impact of the Small Business Administration. SBA has doubled the number of loans to small businesses, tripled the loans to women-owned businesses, even as its staff has been cut by 25 percent. Phil Lader told me several months ago that he wanted to return to private life after the election. However, I have asked him to serve in another senior role in my administration, and he will be considering this over the holidays. I hope he and his family agree to accept my offer. I can only stand so many of these people leaving. (Laughter.)

To replace Phil Lader, I will nominate Aida Alvarez. She has been an award-winning journalist and investment banker. For the past three and a half years she has been the Director of the Office of Federal Housing Enterprise Oversight, responsible for the safety and soundness of \$1.4 trillion in housing finance institutions. She combines business savvy with a dedication to public service. I have known her for many years and have been very proud to have her as a part of this administration. I am also proud that this is the first time a person born in Puerto Rico has been appointed to a President's Cabinet.

To complete our economic team, I will nominate Janet Yellen to be Chair of the Council of Economic Advisors. Since it was created by President Truman 50 years ago, the CEA has provided objective and rigorous economic advice to the President. Under Laura Tyson and then Joe Stiglitz, the CEA has been unflinchingly honest, and our economic policy has had hard work -- hard-won credibility.

As we work together to balance the budget in a way that reflects our values and will continue to grow our economy, the CEA's role will be more important than ever. Janet Yellen will provide the leadership and experience to get the job done. She is currently a member of the Federal Reserve Board of Directors. She had been a professor of economics at the University of California Berkeley and at Harvard, where she taught, among others, the Deputy Secretary of the Treasury Larry Summers -- (laughter) -- who said that his grade was sufficiently high for her to be recommended for the job. (Laughter.) She is an esteemed writer and thinker who will serve our country well.

The Domestic Policy Council coordinates the work of our domestic policy agendas -- agencies. It finds innovative ways to use our most enduring values to meet our newest challenges. Today, I am proud to appoint Bruce Reed as Assistant to the President for Domestic Policy and Director of the Domestic Policy Council, replacing Carol Rasco about whom I will say more in a moment.

Bruce is an original thinker, someone who long ago rejected the easy answers from any part of the political spectrum, and no one has a greater impact on the thinking of the administration or the President. He combines a unique practical knowledge with a real powerful concern for the welfare of ordinary Americans.

He has been at my side from the day I announced my candidacy for President in 1991. He was an architect of welfare reform. He has been a driving force behind our efforts to shrink government, expand educational opportunity and fight crime.

For the past year, as Assistant to the President for Policy Planning, he has worked to hone our goals for the next four years, and now he will have a chance to make that agenda happen. He is the intellectual core of the vital center. Under his leadership, the Domestic Policy Council will be a place where dynamic ideas are turned into actions that will make a difference in the lives of our people. He is a person of the highest integrity, a good friend, and I am proud that he will be by my side as we complete the work of preparing our country for the next century.

Finally, I have prevailed upon my friend of longstanding, Mack McLarty, to stay on for a second term as Counsel to the President, remaining as a member of the National Economic Council. In addition, Mack will take on new responsibilities as Special Envoy to the President and the Secretary of State for Latin America. With this new role, I expect him to deepen and broaden his portfolio as he helps to coordinate and strengthen our policies towards Latin America. He is well suited to carry out this important role because of his business experience and his broad understanding of the new global economy.

This prospective was clear when he served as one of the principal architects of our economic strategy and played a key role in passing our deficit reduction plan in 1993. Throughout this administration he has been central to our efforts to build our relationships with our neighbors in our hemisphere. His leadership was instrumental in passing NAFTA and he led our efforts, along with Vice President Gore, to host the Summit of the Americas in Miami and the 1996 Atlanta Olympics.

The 1994 summit was an historic meeting and will require significant follow-up as we move forward to the second Summit of the Americas in Santiago. He will head the United States delegation to the signing of the Guatemala Peace Accords later this month, and this

new assignment for Mack should underscore the importance that we in this administration and I personally place upon Latin America as we move forward.

The other members of my domestic policy team are here with us today. Attorney General Reno has led our crusade to put police on our streets and take guns off our streets. Donna Shalala has worked tirelessly and well to give our people quality health care, to move millions from welfare to work, to care for our children and their future. Dick Riley has succeeded in reforming the student loan program and lowering its costs and making it more available to millions of people. He has challenged our schools to reach even higher standards. We have expanded educational opportunity, enhanced reform, and we will do much, much more of this in the next four years.

As I said in the campaign this year, education must now be our highest priority, and I am pleased that Secretary Riley will continue to lead our efforts.

Earlier this week, I announced that one of my oldest and closest advisors, Domestic Policy Advisor Carol Rasco, will join the Education Department as Senior Advisor to the Secretary and Director of the America Reads Challenge. The importance of this initiative to me should be underscored by my asking someone this close to me to act on my behalf.

If you will remember in the campaign, I talked a lot about the importance of mobilizing one million volunteer tutors all across America to work with parents and teachers, to make sure that by the year 2000 every 8-year-old in this country can read independently. If every 3rd-grader can read independently, when 40 percent of them are not reading at grade level today, it will dramatically alter the future of America's landscape for the better.

Secretary of Veterans Affairs Jesse Brown has been a strong and effective voice for our veterans. He will continue that they have the health care and the services they deserve. Federal Emergency Management Administrator James Lee Witt has transformed that agency into a model for disaster assistance and helped communities all across our country to rebuild. In community after community, from the southeast to the middle west to the west, he has made the term "federal bureaucrat" a positive, not a negative appellation.

General Barry McCaffrey will stay on as the Director of the Office of National Drug Control Policy. We need his vigorous leadership, and he is in the process of doing something that Presidents for more than 30 years have wanted to do, but never succeeded in doing -- actually developing a coordinated, disciplined, long-term approach to dealing with the drug problems, and reducing drug abuse in America, particularly among our youth.

Secretary Babbitt has been a wise steward for our

precious natural resources and has helped us to solve some of the thorniest challenges facing America in this regard. He sent me a letter right after the election saying that in one way or another we have protected over 20 million acres of America's precious land in the last four years, a legacy of conservation equaled only in the two Roosevelt's administrations, and I thank him for that.

Secretary Glickman has worked to keep our food the safest and most plentiful in the world, as we have overhauled our food safety standards for the first time in decades and decades. And I thank him also for finding ways to promote agriculture and protect the environment.

As EPA Administrator, Carol Browner has cut red tape and curbed pollution. She has brought common sense back to the task of protecting our environment, enlisted more allies and will lead the way in the next four years to making sure we do close those hundreds of toxic waste dumps that keep our children from growing up next to parks, not poison.

All these leaders have done a remarkable job. I am delighted they have agreed to stay in their positions. And now I'd like to ask the new appointees to come up and make some statements, beginning with the next Secretary of Labor Alexis Herman.

MS. HERMAN: Thank you, Mr. President. As you have noted, we first met when I served at the Labor Department as Director of the Women's Bureau, where we began a conversation about how to meet the challenges facing working people. That conversation has lasted off and on over the last 15 years.

I join you today in thanking Secretary Bob Reich. As you know, no one has better articulated the broad challenges facing the American work force or fought harder against obstacles that workers face than Secretary Reich. It will be an honor to build on all that he has accomplished.

I eagerly, though prayerfully, accept the President's nomination to be Secretary of Labor. From my early days to open up nontraditional jobs for workers in the shipyards in Pascagoula, Mississippi, and building on the strong work ethic that my family instilled in me in Mobile, Alabama, I have always worked hard to find practical solutions to the issues and challenges that American workers face. I understand work, and I understand the workers.

I want you to know that I have continued to believe that we must have a growing, innovative and entrepreneurial economy if the living standards of working men and women are to rise, especially in this era of global and technological change. Workers must be prepared for their jobs, rewarded for their work, secure in their retirement and able to freely organize.

The success of every American who works hard and plays by the rules is central to the American Dream. I look forward to working with you, Mr. President, the Vice President, the Congress, our friends in the trade union movement and the business community -- indeed, all who have a stake in the American workplace to make sure that we continue to create a strong and secure future for all of America's working families. Thank you very much. (Applause.)

MR. CUOMO: Thank you. Thank you, Mr. President, for the truly great honor you have given me with this nomination. And thank you, Mr. Vice President, for your support and your guidance over these past four years. Also, I'd like to take the opportunity to thank Secretary Henry Cisneros, who has been to me a friend and he has been a mentor, but more, as you heard from the President, he has no doubt been the greatest HUD Secretary in the history of the Department. And, Mr. Secretary, we are all going to miss you very, very much.

I'd also like to take the opportunity to thank my wife, Kerry and my two girls, Kara and Mariah. That was Kara who was crying before, Mr. President. (Laughter.) I hope that's not an omen. (Laughter.)

Under the leadership of President Bill Clinton and Vice President Al Gore we have witnessed the strongest commitment to our nation's cities in a generation. The President and the Vice President know that for our cities to thrive, we must empower people with both the opportunity and the responsibility to create stronger, safer, more liveable communities. It has been a privilege for me to serve with the dedicated public servants at the Department of Housing and Urban development under the leadership of Secretary Cisneros, and to be part of this administration's truly innovative efforts working with mayors and local partners and the Congress to create jobs, increase homeownership, and rebuild public housing this country.

And let me assure you, Mr. President, that we at HUD stand ready to go with you as you lead this country in the last great transition of this millennium to the promise of a stronger and sweeter tomorrow. We at HUD share your vision for a new era of opportunity and your commitment to create a future in which no one is left behind, a future in which the bright sun of opportunity will reach those who have lived too long in the shadows.

I congratulate all of the people who have been selected today to serve in your administration. I look forward to being part of the team. And once again, Mr. President, let me express my deep, deep appreciation to you for giving me this opportunity. Thank you. (Applause.)

SECRETARY PENA: Thank you very much, Mr. President. I think perhaps the first thing I will be doing is taking down the for sale sign that is in front of our home. (Laughter.) And we were ready to offer a great price. (Laughter.) My two girls and Eleanor are clapping right now that we're not going to have to sell the

house. Seriously.

Mr. President, Mr. Vice President, I have been proud to serve you and my country as Transportation Secretary and to serve in an administration dedicated to safety and global competitiveness for American transportation.

I am proud of our record at Transportation. We built up our nation's investment in our infrastructure to new levels with better roads and transit systems, airports and new technology. We overhauled and upgraded Federal Aviation Administration's safety regulations. And we worked to revitalize America's airlines by opening more markets than ever before around the world.

I leave my current position knowing that my successor, Rodney Slater, will build and expand on the progress that he helped to achieve. Rodney, congratulations.

The Department of Transportation is a smaller, but more effective organization now, and I hope to bring that same kind of efficiency to the Department of Energy. I am very honored that the President has asked me to take on a new challenge. I will be following a very tough act.

Secretary O'Leary ushered in a new era at the Department of Energy. She pulled back the shroud of secrecy and made the government take responsibility for its actions. Through her bold and courageous actions she earned the public trust. She promoted innovation and research and acted to protect the environment, while making energy safe and reliable and cost effective. She fostered an economic partnership and helped to create more jobs. And on her watch we achieved a comprehensive test ban treaty on nuclear weapons. She was an energetic Secretary of Energy, and I just hope that my shoes can not only fill her heels, but also move as quickly and effectively forward.

I will miss my colleagues at Transportation. But if I am fortunate enough to be confirmed, I hope to see all the wonderful people at Energy very soon.

Again, Mr. President, thank you very much for your confidence, your trust, and this honor. And most of all to my partners, my wife and two children, God bless you and thank you very much. (Applause.)

MR. SLATER: Mr. President, Mr. Vice President, thank you for providing me this rare opportunity to serve the American people as a member of your Cabinet. I am once deeply moved and again honored and privileged and humbled by being asked to join such a distinguished team. Congratulations to all my colleagues as well.

President Clinton's leadership has resulted in record-level transportation infrastructure investment over the last four years because this is a President who understands that as you

cut the deficit, you must also invest in America's future. He knows that a safe and efficient transportation system represents a strategic investment in our strong and growing economy.

Our transportation network is the envy of the world, and it makes us the most mobile society in the world. I pledge if the Senate so honors me with confirmation to continue to work together with the Congress and with our partners all across this great land to meet the transportation challenges of the 21st century.

I have been privileged to know our President for a long time -- long enough to know that he understands that transportation is about more than concrete, asphalt and steel. It's about people: how they get to work, how they visit friends, how they travel the far reaches of our great land to see America the beautiful. It is about how they pursue happiness.

I commit to you, the American people, whether you live in rural or suburban or urban America, to work every day in every way to improve your access to opportunity. And I am also very, very pleased to follow a most distinguished individual who served as Secretary of Transportation and continues to do so until he assumes the responsibility of Energy Secretary. And I commit myself to continue to hold forth the importance of safety as the top priority of our Department, and also to work to continue the reinvention effort of the Department of Transportation to ensure that in the future it is truly a visionary and vigilant Department for the 21st century.

I would also like to say to my family, Cassandra and our lovely daughter, Bridgette Josette, and to our parents in Arkansas and to George Haley and other many friends -- Ernie and others -- that it is a very special thing to have an opportunity like this, but more special to have friends like all of you gathered this day on this very special occasion. Thank you. (Applause.)

MS. ALVAREZ: Thank you, Mr. President. I am deeply honored by the confidence that you have placed in me as your nominee to head up the Small Business Administration. I am also excited to be stepping into one of the most meaningful and challenging jobs in the government.

Small business is the heart and soul of the American economy. It has always been and it will always be. Small companies are suppliers, employers, manufacturers and retailers on every main street in America. As Alexis Herman said when she talked about the entrepreneurial spirit, small business is also the incubator of America's entrepreneurial spirit -- a spirit that is the envy of the world. The can-do approach of America's small business community is alive and well and it is providing on a daily basis new opportunities for men, women and minority business owners -- Americans with ideas and a willingness to put those ideas to the test in the marketplace. As lender, educator and counselor, the SBA continues to play an enormous role in America's small business success story.

Mr. President, you have shown an extraordinary commitment to small business and the SBA. Following Erskine Bowles and Phil Lader will be a challenge. They have raised the bar as SBA Administrators to new heights.

I would also like to thank Vice President Gore for his confidence in me. And thanks most especially to Secretary Cisneros. As we know, his exceptional leadership at HUD has been a hallmark of your administration. For Henry Cisneros, I have the utmost respect and admiration.

(Speaks in Spanish.)

Finally, I want to thank my father Hector, my mother Aurelia, my husband Ray Baxter, my daughter Aurora -- both of whom are here, Brooke for allowing me to wholeheartedly accept the challenge that you have offered. Thank you very much. (Applause.)

MR. REED: Thank you, Mr. President. I'm the luckiest man in America to have spent the last 11 years working for you and for the Vice President. I knew from the moment that I met each of you that you both would end up in the White House some day, and thank you very much for letting me come along.

Over the last four years, you've shown that when we put politics aside and work together, we can solve the toughest problems that come our way. Our agenda for the next four years is just as ambitious -- preparing students for a new century with world-class standards and diplomas that means something, moving a million people from welfare to work, finishing the job of putting 100,000 new police officers on the street, and challenging all Americans to take responsibility for their communities and their country by adopting the ethic of service as a daily part of their lives.

On all of these issues, I hope your domestic policy team can serve as a source of new ideas based on old values, and a force for bold action in a new era. With the strong Cabinet that you've put together, I'm confident that we can keep making progress, because no President has ever known more, cared more or done more about domestic policy than you have.

I want to thank my friend, Carol Rasco, and all my colleagues in the administration who have worked so hard on the President's agenda. And, in particular, I'd like to thank my wife, Bonnie LePard, who has been part of the Clinton-Gore team from the very beginning; and our two young children, Julia and Nelson, who are my own proudest domestic accomplishments of this administration. (Laughter.)

Mr. President, as you've heard this morning between us, Rodney, Andrew and I have been blessed with five children in the last four years. And, while I can't promise that we'll be able to maintain that pace in the second term, our kids will make sure that

we never lose sight of what matters most. Thank you. (Applause.)

MS. YELLEN: Thank you very much, Mr. President. I'm extremely honored to be nominated as Chair of the Council of Economic Advisors. If I'm confirmed it will be a great privilege to serve you and the American people as your administration crafts policies to promote prosperity into the next century.

I'm very fortunate to be joining your administration at a time when the economy is in extraordinarily good health, with strong job creation and low inflation. Your administration has contributed to these successes by bringing the federal budget deficit down substantially. I relish the opportunity to work with you and your economic team to build on these successes going forward.

Nineteen ninety-six is the 50th anniversary of the Employment Act which created the Council of Economic Advisors. In both Democratic and Republican administrations, the CEA has served as a credible and tenacious voice for policies that facilitate the workings of the market and emphasized the importance of incentives, efficiency and long-term growth.

As Chair of the Council, I hope that I can do at least half as well as my two distinguished predecessors. The current chair, Joe Stiglitz, has contributed to the solution of a wide range of economic problems from budget issues to pension simplification, to regulatory reform. His predecessor, Laura Tyson, is famous for her ability to translate complicated economic principles into sound economic policy. Both our brilliant and creative thinkers. I look forward to carrying on the proud tradition they and others before them have built.

Finally, Mr. President, I can say it's a special honor for an economist to serve in your administration since you made economic policy and strengthening our nation's economy such a top priority. You have assembled a superb team, and if I am confirmed I will be very proud to serve on that team. Thank you, Mr. President. (Applause.)

MR. MCLARTY: Mr. President, Mr. Vice President, muchas gracias, abrogado, buenas tardes. (Laughter.) You didn't think I could or work do that. (Laughter.) And I certainly did so with considerable trepidation after Aida's wonderful comments, and with Secretary Cisneros, Secretary Pena, General McCaffrey, Ambassador Babbitt, and others.

Thank you for your comments. I look forward to serving in your second term as Counselor to the President and in my new role as Special Envoy to the Americas. I look forward to participating in the National Economic Council, working with Gene Sperling and Chief of Staff Erskine Bowles and others, and building on the record that we have built to date in terms of reducing the deficit in the right way and really seeing the strongest economic recovery that we have probably seen in 30 years.

That solid economic growth has really been powered by exports. And as Secretary Reich and others have spoken about so eloquently, it is a reflection of the efficiency of our companies and the productivity of the working men and women of this country.

Exports have been a key factor in that solid economic growth, and Latin America and the Caribbean are a natural market and natural partners in that regard. That is why you, Mr. President, and the Vice President convened the Summit of the Americas in 1994, and I was proud to participate in that historic meeting. Exports to the region now are over \$100 billion, and by the year 2010 they are anticipated to exceed our combined exports to the European Union and Japan. And as Secretary-designate Pena and I were speaking earlier, Venezuela has now replaced Saudi Arabia as our number one supplier of oil.

But the summit agenda is much broader than just economic integration. It is about supporting the democratization that has taken place in the region; that has been a remarkable transformation in the past 10 years. It is also about supporting and developing sustainable development not only in terms of environmental stewardship, but also in terms of health and education.

Mr. President, thank you for this opportunity. I look forward to working to develop a true partnership in the Americas, a partnership based on mutual respect and trust and dignity.

I want to thank my wonderful wife, Donna, who has traveled to the regions a number of times both with me and on her own; and our two sons, Mark and Franklin -- Mark who has both studied and worked there for several years prior to his current endeavors. I look forward to continuing my role as Counselor and serving as Special Envoy to the Americas. Thank you. (Applause.)

MS. RASCO: Forty-three years ago this fall, I skipped a couple of blocks to elementary school in De Witt, Arkansas. I entered Miss Kelly's 1st-grade classroom where my friends and myself were very eager to learn to read grownup books. Well, I was very fortunate because I had had loving parents who provided me with all those experiences you need in the preschool years, I'd had good health care and I was in a community that cared. But there were a number of children that joined my best friends and myself in that class who dropped out along the way because they didn't have all those factors in their favor.

A little over 21 years ago, I entered a 6th-grade classroom for the first time as a certified teacher, and I had children that could not read the grownup books I learned to read in the 1st and 2nd grade. And their faces and their names have haunted me since.

And so with thanks to those parents who gave me those experiences in the early years, and with thanks to my children, Hamp

and Mary Margaret, who have taught me so much, and thanks to Governor and now President Clinton for the support he has shown me, I now pledge all my energies toward wiping away those haunting faces that are before me constantly. And I pledge my energies so that all of us might help every child realize their full potential. Thank you very much. (Applause.)

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you. Who is first? I'll take a couple of questions. It's almost Christmas. (Laughter.)

Q Mr. President, as you move forward into your new term, questions continue to be asked about the first four years, especially in the area of campaign fundraising. Last February at the request of a friend of yours in Little Rock and the Democratic National Committee, an arms dealer from China was invited to a private event with you inside your residence -- four months later, this man's company was implicated in U.S. gun-smuggling. What do you remember about your contact with this man at this meeting? Does it concern you that he was perhaps not adequately screened in order to gain access to the White House? And do you feel in any respect that in situations like this you were taken advantage of?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, first of all, I'm disappointed that it happened. It was clearly inappropriate. And I think what is obviously called for and what I have instructed to be done is to establish some sort of better screening provisions that are tighter to minimize this. Thousands of people come in and out of the larger White House office complex all the time, but we have to develop some way of screening them. I am disappointed. It was inappropriate. We must have a better screening system -- we will have.

I remember literally nothing about it. I'm not sure that the gentleman ever said anything at this coffee. I asked my staff to let me see the records of it when this story broke, and there were disparate people from different walks of life from all over the country there, and normally what would happen in one of those conversations is I would talk for five or ten minutes and then we would either go around the table and let people say whatever they wanted to say. And as I said there were all different kinds of people from all different walks of life always. I'm not sure that -- I have no recollection of meeting him. I'm not sure he ever said anything. And I can tell you for sure nothing inappropriate came from it in terms of any governmental action on my part.

But we have to do a better job of screening people who come in and out of here.

Helen, go ahead.

Q Mr. President, do you have a sense of deja vu all over again -- four years of Whitewater, now new investigations --

THE PRESIDENT: No.

Q -- on the Hill, Justice Department?

THE PRESIDENT: No.

Q What does this bode for the next administration and how do you cope?

THE PRESIDENT: I show up for work every day. The American people ought to feel good about me. They spent \$30 million or something and there has been not a single solitary shred of evidence of any wrongdoing on my part. I feel good about it.

I think it's unfortunate for democracy, and I think, as I said, this special counsel thing ought to be reviewed in light of what Archibald Cox and others have said, because the costs outweigh the benefits.

But on the other issue, any questions that are raised about contributions ought to be answered and any records that are needed ought to be provided. That's not different than what happened in Senator Dole's campaign when one of his officials was charged with money laundering and had to plead guilty and pay the biggest fine in FEC history. That didn't reflect on everybody else in the campaign. Those things happen. So if any -- if there's any question about what happened, the evidence, the information should be provided and we ought to determine whether anyone did anything wrong.

Q Well, how are you coping?

THE PRESIDENT: That's not a -- how am I coping? (Laughter.) It's not a problem. If you haven't done anything wrong and a problem comes up, you fix it and you go on. I cope by thinking about the 11 million jobs we created and the millions more we have to create. I think about the millions of people that have a better deal going to college and the millions of more that will have. I cope by thinking about what the American people hired me to do and the question they ask me when I see them.

Q Mr. President, your spokesman said earlier today that you've been very displeased with these events of the last couple days. I wonder if you could characterize your displeasure? And also, four years ago when you appointed your first Cabinet, you said very much up front that you wanted a Cabinet that looked like America. It took some juggling and you weren't as public about it this time, but it looks like you've assembled that. Did you feel like you were under any special pressure from special interest groups?

THE PRESIDENT: No, the pressure was pressure I put on myself. I believe that one of my jobs at this moment in history is to demonstrate by the team I put together that no group of people should be excluded from service to our country and that all people are capable of serving. So I have striven to achieve both excellence and diversity. The same thing is true about the federal judges I've

appointed. It's the most diverse federal bench of appointees in history. It also has the highest rating from the American Bar Association since the Bar started rating judges.

So I'm very proud of the first Cabinet that I appointed. I am very proud of this Cabinet. I am proud that they are diverse, but I would not have appointed a single one of them because of their gender or their racial or ethnic background had I not thought that they could succeed. And if you look at the comparative record in department after department after department of the people who served in the first four years and compare the results they achieved, the work they did, I think that the evidence will indicate that.

And it goes back to something you asked me. You know, what we do, we all show up for work every day and we create a team and work like crazy for the American people, we have goals, we have objectives, we hold ourselves to timetables, and we keep score about what we're doing for other people. And if that is your focus, which is what people hire us to do, that's what you worry about and that's what you do. So I feel good about it.

Now, this is --

Q -- feel pressure --

PRESIDENT CLINTON: Well, my feelings are that, in the areas where we had more direct control -- our campaign and the legal defense fund -- as far as I know, the proper decisions were made because the proper scrutiny was applied. The Democratic Party officials have already admitted that they did not apply the proper review, and I am very displeased about it because 99 percent-plus of all the contributors did not do anything wrong and over 98 percent of the money appears to perfectly in order, and the other 1 percent got all the publicity and, thereby, disserving the Democrats around the country, the people who gave, and everything else. That is wrong.

And all they have to do is to institute a simple review system. Now, from time to time, mistakes may be made. If you have over a million contributors as both parties do now, that may happen from time to time -- but common sense and strict review are the order of the day.

I feel the same way about this. I realize that Secret Service and others are reluctant to be too burdensome with all the thousands and tens of thousands of people that come in the White House complex every year, but I'm confident that if they put their minds to it they can come up with a better screening procedure so that things like this don't happen.

It's not a press conference. We've been here a long time. We'll have another press conference early next year. Merry Christmas. I'll see you early next year. (Applause.)

END

1:21 P.M. EST

AMH Remarks Honoring Secretary of Labor Robert Reich: 1/8/97

'97 JAN 8 PM3:40

It is a great privilege and pleasure to be back home here at Labor to say a few words about a man who has done so much to help this Department, our President, and the American worker. I am very happy to stand with the Vice President, Senator Kennedy, his Cabinet colleagues, President Sweeney and all of you who have gathered here to honor Secretary Reich.

The emotion and spirit in this room is evidence of his leadership. For four years, no one has better articulated the broad challenges facing the workforce or fought harder against the individual obstacles confronted by working America than Bob Reich. From raising the minimum wage to protecting the pensions of retiring workers, he's brought an active mind, a compassionate heart, and a restless energy to this office. If confirmed by the Senate, it will be an honor to follow him.

Bob, you've done so well as Secretary of Labor that I've decided to start emulating you even now. As many of you

know, the Secretary instituted a policy of making sure that he had the phone numbers of everyone he depended on and might need to contact over the weekend – using a card system. Well, I want to keep the same system, but make one key change. Under your system, Bob, you knew how to get in touch with everyone, but your own numbers were never on the card. As you head back to Boston, could you please just fill out this card for me – there'll be times we need to reach out and touch.

Ladies and gentleman, we all have a lot to do to keep the serious progress Bob Reich has made here on track. I look forward to having a chance to work with you on creating jobs to move people from welfare to work, on enhancing health and pension security for working people, on extending education and training for all Americans, on promoting safe workplaces – in short, on strengthening the American economy so that it works better for working families.

Bob Reich has shown us the way – its up to us to keep going, to keep pushing, to keep achieving. To keep making progress for the American worker.

That's the way we can really honor this exceptional man.

Thank you, Bob.

American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations



815 Sixteenth Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C 20006
(202) 637-5000

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For information:
Deborah Dion 202/637-5036

Statement by AFL-CIO John J. Sweeney on the Nomination of Alexis Herman to be U.S. Secretary of Labor

Alexis Herman is a wonderful choice for secretary of labor. She knows and understands working families' concerns, and we look forward to working closely with her to put their interests at the top of the national agenda. At a time when so many working men and women are struggling against declining pay and growing disrespect from corporate America, we believe Alexis' experience -- growing up in the rural South, advancing the interests of working women and minorities, and dealing with the issues of a changing workforce -- will be a tremendous asset. Few are as skilled at organizing public support for the causes she champions. Over the years, she has had an excellent relationship with me and other union leaders. In recent weeks, I have met and talked with her a number of times, and I know she is committed to putting together a strong team to fight for good jobs, justice and dignity for America's working families.

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Date: 12/20/96 Time: 17:07
STo: National Desk, Labor Writer

To: National Desk, Labor Writer
Contact: Carl Fillichio of the U.S. Department of Labor,
202-219-8211

WASHINGTON, Dec. 20 /U.S. Newswire/ -- Following is a statement by Labor Secretary Robert B. Reich regarding the appointment of Alexis Herman as the new labor secretary:

Alexis Herman's unique blend of experience -- from social worker to White House assistant to the president -- equips her with the skills and resolve to be a strong and articulate voice for working families. She brings to the department an insider's view, having served as director of the Women's Bureau under President Carter. Her hands-on experience managing human resources in the private sector adds to her ability to hit the ground running. I know she will work tirelessly on behalf of America's workers.

She will find a cadre of dilligent, intelligent and highly-motivated people at the Labor Department. The 16,000 employees with whom I have had the privilege of working during the past four years are among the finest public servants in any government. Protecting all workers' health and safety, pensions, wages and family leave, as well as providing new opportunities for workers through education and training, is not just a job for these people. It is their life's work. Under the able direction of Alexis Herman, they will continue to play a critical role in moving our nation into the 21st century.

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NEWS



Office of Congressman Sonny Callahan

2418 Rayburn Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Jo Robins Bonner
Chief of Staff & Press Secretary
Phone: (202) 225-4931
Fax: (202) 225-0562

Statement by Congressman Sonny Callahan on the President's nomination of Alexis Herman for Secretary of Labor

"President Clinton has made a very wise decision in his selection of Alexis Herman as the new Secretary of Labor.

Alexis is extremely well qualified for this cabinet post. She has previous experience at the Department of Labor during the Carter Administration and furthermore, she has proven to be a valuable and loyal assistant to President Clinton during his first Administration. In my opinion, the President could not have picked a finer or more deserving person for this important position.

I know the entire State of Alabama, and especially Mobile, will be extremely proud of this latest accomplishment of Ms. Herman. I have already informed both the President and Ms. Herman that they can count on my full support during the Senate confirmation process."



News Release

TOM HARKIN OF IOWA

U.S. Senator

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
December 20, 1996

Contact: Patrick Dorton
(202)224-3254

STATEMENT OF U.S. SENATOR TOM HARKIN ON NOMINATION OF ALEXIS HERMAN TO BE U.S. SECRETARY OF LABOR

"President Clinton has made an excellent choice in nominating Alexis Herman to be next U.S. Secretary of Labor. Alexis Herman has spent a lifetime fighting on behalf of working families and particularly working women. Her work on the front lines of job training efforts, in the Carter Administration as a top Labor Department official, and more recently at the White House, will serve her well in this important position."

"The U.S. Department of Labor has enjoyed exceptional leadership under Secretary Reich over the last four years. I am confident that Secretary-designate Herman will also bring this kind of energetic and vigorous leadership to the job. I look forward to working closely with her on issues like expanding pension coverage, ensuring fair pay for women, and fighting to end abusive child labor in the coming year."