

THE WHITE HOUSE

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THE WHITE HOUSE

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Richardson is in New England today, holding a summit with refiners, distributors, and major users of home heating oil to determine how the government and industry can work together to better meet the needs of consumers in the Mid-Atlantic States and New England.

Today, I am announcing additional steps to help families struggling to pay their heating bills. I have directed my budget office and the Department of Health and Human Services to release – right now – the remainder of this year’s funding for emergency heating assistance.

Before I take your questions, there's one more issue I want to address – the impact of rising oil prices on American families.

In the Northeast – from the Mid-Atlantic states to New England – many families still rely upon home heating oil, a source of heating that is no longer used in the rest of the country. These families have been especially hard hit by the rise in oil prices. And that is a serious concern during these cold winter months.

Over the last month, we have released \$175 million to help lower-income families pay their heating



Terry Edmonds
02/16/2000 01:49:51 PM

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To: See the distribution list at the bottom of this message

cc:

Subject: final press conf remarks

13

Final 2/16/00 1:45pm

Terry Edmonds

PRESIDENT WILLIAM J. CLINTON

OPENING REMARKS

WHITE HOUSE PRESS CONFERENCE

FEBRUARY 16, 2000

Good afternoon. It is clear: with nearly 21 million new jobs, unemployment at 4.0 percent, and solid income growth across all groups of American workers since 1993, we are now in the midst of the longest and strongest economic expansion in our nation's history. We have built a new economy.

One of the biggest mistakes we can make in this time of unprecedented peace and prosperity is to be lulled into complacency. There is important work to be done this year. And there is no better time to do it.

That means first and foremost, staying on the path of fiscal discipline that got us here. In 1993, we put in place a new economic plan focused on paying down the deficit while making targeted investments in our people and our future. When deficits fell, so did interest rates, mortgage payments, and car and student loan payments. Business investments took off, resulting in more jobs and more economic growth. Our commitment to fiscal discipline took us from record budget deficits and high unemployment to record budget surpluses and unimagined economic strength. If we stay on that path we can make America debt-free in just 13 years for the first time since 1835.

We can then use the benefits of debt reduction to preserve two of the most important guarantees we have made to the American people – Social Security and Medicare. Specifically, we can make a bipartisan down-payment on Social Security reform by crediting the interest savings from debt reduction to the Social Security Trust Fund. That will keep it strong and sound for 50 years, beyond the life-span of all but the most fortunate Baby Boomers. But, as a first step toward a comprehensive solution, we should do something that I called for in my 1999 State of the Union address -- we should end the earnings limit for Social Security retirees between the ages of 65 and 69.

If they are willing and able to work, we shouldn't

penalize them for staying active and productive.

And to strengthen and modernize Medicare, I have proposed to dedicate more than half of the non-Social Security surplus to Medicare – over \$400 billion to keep Medicare solvent for at least a decade, past 2025, and to add a voluntary prescription drug benefit. I am pleased that Congress is beginning to take up this issue and I urge them to move quickly to incorporate these long overdue Medicare reforms.

As we work together on the budget, we simply must resist

the temptation to spend large portions of the nation's surplus before we have lived up to our commitment to prepare for the undeniable health and financing challenges facing Medicare.

We ought to also begin to complete the unfinished business of the 106th Congress. We need to pass a real patients bill of rights, campaign finance reform, hate crimes legislation, a raise in the minimum wage and common-sense gun safety legislation.

Unfortunately, hardly a day goes by without another

grim reminder of why this is so important. Guns in the wrong hands continue to claim too many of our young people's lives. We saw it in Washington, DC last week with the deaths of Andre Wallace and Natasha Marsh, two 17-year-old high school students who were gunned down in front of Natasha's home and were buried yesterday. We saw it in Littleton again just a few days ago with the shooting deaths of two teenage students from Columbine High School.

Today, HUD Secretary Andrew Cuomo, who is with us this afternoon, released the first-ever comprehensive analysis of gun-related violence in public housing.

This reports shows that while crime in public housing is

declining, just like crime in other neighborhoods, gun-related crime in public housing remains a serious problem. In fact, residents of public housing are more than twice as likely to be the victims of gun violence as other members of society. This poses a direct and unacceptable threat to more than one million children and 360,000 seniors who live in public housing in this country. They deserve to be as safe as the rest of us.

We are determined to do everything in our power to keep guns out of the wrong hands by demanding more resources to fight gun crime, cracking down on suspect gun dealers, and calling on responsible gun manufacturers to work with us to change the way guns are marketed, distributed and designed.

Ten months after the tragedy at Columbine, it is way past time for Congress to pass common sense gun-safety legislation.

This money will be targeted toward the hardest hit states – those with the highest usage of home heating oil. I will be meeting with Governors and Members of Congress from those states – to ask them to use all their authority to expand the pool of people who receive those funds, making sure that as many people who need this help can get it.

We will also be requesting at least \$600 million in emergency supplemental funding for LIHEAP to help more families through this current crisis as well as others who may suffer during the rest of the year – whether in the chill of winter or the heat of summer.

We will send that legislation to Congress in the next ten days; and we look forward to fast action by the Congress.

Meanwhile, we will continue our work toward a longer-term solution. I have asked Secretary Richardson to conduct a 60-day study on converting factories and major users from oil to other fuels – which will free up future oil supplies for use in heating homes.

Americans have always pulled together to help their neighbors and fellow citizens in need.

Over the past seven years, we have stood together to help the victims of earthquakes in California, of the farm crisis in the Midwest, and, as we have seen again this week, of violent storms in the Southeast. Now, the families of the Northeast need our help, and it is time to act.

As I said in the State of the Union, our chance to do good has never been so great. I call on the Congress to seize this moment. Let's make this a year of progress for the American people. If we work together, we can build a future that is even brighter than our past. Thank you.

Message Sent To: _____

WHITE HOUSE OFFICE OF SPEECHWRITING
SPEECH ASSIGNMENTS
February 19 – March 9, 2000

Fri 2/19	Tape Radio Address – Black History Month	Heather
Tues 2/22	Medical Errors	Lowell
Tues 2/22	Fundraisers	Josh
Wed 2/23	Food Stamp Announcement	Paul
Thur 2/24	Business Council (print reporter)	NSC/JS
Thur 2/24	Granoff Lecture, UPENN (New Economy)	Lowell
Thur 2/24	Fundraisers	Josh
Fri 2/25	Dep Statement (T: Native Americans)	Josh
Fri 2/25	Tape Radio Address (Early school)	Sam
Fri 2/25	Baldrige Awards	Heather
Fri 2/25	Fundraisers	Josh
Sun 2/27	NGA Annual Dinner	Paul
Mon 2/28	NGA Roundtable - home testing oil	Terry
Mon 2/28	DGA Annual Dinner (8th US Steer)	TBD
Tues 2/29	Departure Statement (Medicare #s)	Jeff
Tues 2/29	Fundraisers, FL	Josh
Wed 3/01	Message Event	Sam
Wed 3/01	Congressional Meeting (topper – China)	TBD/H H
Thur 3/02	FL State NCAA Champs	Josh
Thur 3/02	Vaccines Meeting – possible topper	NSC
Fri 3/03	T: Message Event, CA (cyber terrorism)	NSC/JS
Fri 3/03	Tape Radio Address	Lowell
Fri 3/03	Fundraisers, CA	Josh
Sat 3/04	Fundraisers, CA	Josh
Sun 3/05	Selma Event	Terry
Mon 3/06	Message Event	TBD
Tues 3/07	Message Event (Medicare)	TBD
Wed 3/08	Message Event (foreign relations council)	NSC/JS
Thur 3/09	Videos	Josh
Thur 3/09	One America Event (→ rely leaders →)	TBD

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Information on Amtrak

Highlighting the Amtrak Budget: The President could showcase his FY2001 budget proposal, which would nearly double the budget for Amtrak. \$521 million would be spent on general capital improvements including investments in safety equipment, track improvements, and overall maintenance. An additional \$468 million would be appropriated to DOT to expand inter-city rail passenger service and build the foundation for high-speed rail corridors. [This is separate from the Amtrak initiative to become self-sufficient.]

\$989M $\approx$ \$1B

Background: National Railroad Passenger Corporation (Amtrak) was created by the federal government to takeover the nation's intercity passenger rail services and initiated operations on May 1, 1971. Amtrak trains serve more than 500 stations in 45 states. Amtrak is the nation's largest provider of contract-commuter service for state and regional authorities and operates commuter services for a number of metropolitan areas. Amtrak's Fiscal Year 1999 has just been completed, and for the second straight year, the Corporation's bottom line met or exceeded its business plan. Ridership grew by two percent, and overall revenues were a record \$1.83 billion with core revenue growth of 8.2 percent. Passenger-related revenues grew by 5.8 percent, led by a strong performance in the Northeast Corridor. West Coast service revenues grew by 11.3 percent, but fell short of plan due to the delayed start-up of new service. Intercity service continues to be challenging.

- ✓ **Governor Tommy G. Thompson**
Chairman of the Amtrak Reform Board
- Governor Michael S. Dukakis**
Vice-Chairman of the Amtrak Reform Board
- ✓ **Governor Thomas R. Carper**
Former Amtrak Board Member
National Governor's Association (NGA) Chairman
- Governor Parris N. Glendening**

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Dear Governor:

The Northeast has been severely affected by this winter's fuel oil and propane price increases which, in some cases, have doubled since last year. On February 16, the President took steps to respond to critical needs by announcing the release of all remaining Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) funds for this year, bringing the total heating assistance funds released this winter to \$295 million. The President will submit an emergency supplemental request to Congress for an additional \$600 million for the LIHEAP program **soon??**. It is essential that Congress act quickly on this request to help to relieve the burden of rising fuel bills.

As we work with the Congress to secure additional LIHEAP funds, we urge you to do everything possible to ease the hardship in your State. In addition to these Federal actions listed above, we would encourage you to make use of all options available to you to help ease the hardship of low and moderate income families in XXX, including applying the highest income guidelines available to your State under Federal law to reach the greatest number of families who qualify for heating assistance.

As you and your staff prepare to distribute your State's LIHEAP allocation, we recommend that you raise your state income eligibility standards to reach all of the families who qualify for heating assistance under maximum income limits set by Federal law. As you know, the formula for determining state income eligibility is flexible. Federal law allows States to set income eligibility limits based either on the poverty level (150% of the poverty level) or state median income (60% of state median income).

In most cases, using the State median income measure can raise the income threshold, extending heating assistance benefits to additional families. For example, most Northeastern States currently choose to determine eligibility level by relying on the poverty level, generally limiting LIHEAP assistance to families of four with incomes of approximately \$26,000 or less. However, by choosing state median income levels to determine LIHEAP eligibility, these same States can raise eligibility for heating assistance to more than \$30,000 for a family of four and in some cases, even as high as approximately \$40,000 a year. Furthermore, Federal law also stipulates that households with the highest energy burdens can receive priority for assistance and higher benefits, meaning that families who have experienced marked increases in their energy costs during this period can be receive priority treatment by the State.

[IF POSSIBLE] Given that the LIHEAP statute allows States to set income eligibility at a lower level than the Federal maximum, and our records show your State currently is using **** as your income limit for heating assistance. While this limit is permissible under law, you also have the option to raise income eligibility standards quickly and without the approval of the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS).

As an additional measure to make your LIHEAP funds available as quickly as possible, we will also consider waiver requests so that you can immediately receive the full portion of the year's non-emergency allocation of your LIHEAP block grant funds. These funds are normally allocated on a quarterly basis with limitations on the pace of full allocations over the course of the year. If your State would like to speed up the allocation schedule to allow immediate access to all your non-emergency funds, please submit a waiver request from HHS.

To further address the hardships imposed by fuel price increases, Federal law also permits States to use Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TAIF) funds to provide emergency heating assistance to very low income households with children. A change in a State's TAIF plan can be made quickly and you should contact HAS to begin this process.

Again, we would urge you to make sure that all eligible families will receive the heating assistance they are qualified for under the LIHEAP program which is essential to low and moderate income families who are suffering in this winter of hardship. We will continue to monitor closely the energy price situation and look forward to working closely with you to facilitate your actions to help meet this hardship. Please feel free to contact us if you have any questions.