

RECORD TYPE: PRESIDENTIAL (NOTES MAIL)

CREATOR: Sarah A. Bianchi (CN=Sarah A. Bianchi/O=OVP [UNKNOWN])

CREATION DATE/TIME:20-JUL-1999 09:23:10.00

SUBJECT: AIDS Hearing Witnesses

TO: Paul Thornell (CN=Paul Thornell/O=OVP@OVP [UNKNOWN])

READ:UNKNOWN

TO: Thomas M. Rosshirt (CN=Thomas M. Rosshirt/O=OVP@OVP [UNKNOWN])

READ:UNKNOWN

TEXT:

are we doing a meeting on this today?

sb

----- Forwarded by Sarah A. Bianchi/OVP on 07/20/99 09:22
AM -----

Paul Thornell

07/19/99 06:02:06 PM

Record Type: Record

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

cc:

Subject:AIDS Hearing Witnesses

The following people are invited to testify at the House hearing on the
U.S. Role in the AIDS Epidemic. There may be one or two others.

Rep. Jesse Jackson, Jr.

Rep. Marion Berry

Eric Sawyer, HIV/Human Rights

Jamie Love, Act-Up

Alan Herman, Medical University of South Africa

Sandy Thurman

Charlene Barshefsky

Message Sent

To:

Ron Klain/OVP@OVP

Laura M. Quinn/OVP@OVP

Kay Casstevens/OVP@OVP

Thomas M. Rosshirt/OVP@OVP

Sarah A. Bianchi/OVP@OVP

Sandra Thurman/OPD/EOP@EOP

RECORD TYPE: PRESIDENTIAL (NOTES MAIL)

CREATOR: Brooke B. Livingston (CN=Brooke B. Livingston/OU=WHO/O=EOP [WHO])

CREATION DATE/TIME:20-JUL-1999 09:17:42.00

SUBJECT: house nightly 7/20/99

TO: Angela C. Mizeur (CN=Angela C. Mizeur/OU=WHO/O=EOP@EOP [WHO])
READ:UNKNOWN

TO: Miles M. Lackey (CN=Miles M. Lackey/OU=NSC/O=EOP@EOP [NSC])
READ:UNKNOWN

TO: William T. Glunz (CN=William T. Glunz/O=OVP@OVP [UNKNOWN])
READ:UNKNOWN

TO: Kay Casstevens (CN=Kay Casstevens/O=OVP@OVP [UNKNOWN])
READ:UNKNOWN

TO: Joel K. Wiginton (CN=Joel K. Wiginton/OU=WHO/O=EOP@EOP [WHO])
READ:UNKNOWN

TO: Lawrence J. Stein (CN=Lawrence J. Stein/OU=WHO/O=EOP@EOP [WHO])
READ:UNKNOWN

TO: Mindy E. Myers (CN=Mindy E. Myers/OU=WHO/O=EOP@EOP [WHO])
READ:UNKNOWN

TO: Erica R. Morris (CN=Erica R. Morris/OU=WHO/O=EOP@EOP [WHO])
READ:UNKNOWN

TO: Hildy Kuryk (CN=Hildy Kuryk/OU=WHO/O=EOP@EOP [WHO])
READ:UNKNOWN

TO: Broderick Johnson (CN=Broderick Johnson/OU=WHO/O=EOP@EOP [WHO])
READ:UNKNOWN

TO: Dario J. Gomez (CN=Dario J. Gomez/OU=WHO/O=EOP@EOP [WHO])
READ:UNKNOWN

TO: Martha Foley (CN=Martha Foley/OU=WHO/O=EOP@EOP [WHO])
READ:UNKNOWN

TO: Courtney C. Crouch (CN=Courtney C. Crouch/OU=WHO/O=EOP@EOP [WHO])
READ:UNKNOWN

TO: Matthew J. Bianco (CN=Matthew J. Bianco/OU=WHO/O=EOP [WHO])
READ:UNKNOWN

TO: Roger S. Ballentine (CN=Roger S. Ballentine/OU=WHO/O=EOP@EOP [WHO])
READ:UNKNOWN

TO: Devanshu Patel (CN=Devanshu Patel/OU=WHO/O=EOP@EOP [WHO])
READ:UNKNOWN

TO: David R Thomas (CN=David R Thomas/O=OVP@OVP [UNKNOWN])
READ:UNKNOWN

TO: Paul Thornell (CN=Paul Thornell/O=OVP@OVP [UNKNOWN])
READ:UNKNOWN

TO: Brooke B. Livingston (CN=Brooke B. Livingston/OU=WHO/O=EOP@EOP [WHO])
READ:UNKNOWN

TO: Tracey E. Thornton (CN=Tracey E. Thornton/OU=WHO/O=EOP@EOP [WHO])
READ:UNKNOWN

TO: Virginia N. Rustique (CN=Virginia N. Rustique/OU=WHO/O=EOP@EOP [WHO])
READ:UNKNOWN

TO: Janet Murguia (CN=Janet Murguia/OU=WHO/O=EOP@EOP [WHO])
READ:UNKNOWN

TO: Alphonse J. Maldon (CN=Alphonse J. Maldon/OU=WHO/O=EOP@EOP [WHO])
READ:UNKNOWN

TO: Lisa M. Kountoupes (CN=Lisa M. Kountoupes/OU=WHO/O=EOP@EOP [WHO])
READ:UNKNOWN

TO: Marty J. Hoffmann (CN=Marty J. Hoffmann/OU=WHO/O=EOP@EOP [WHO])
READ:UNKNOWN

TO: Caroline R. Fredrickson (CN=Caroline R. Fredrickson/OU=WHO/O=EOP@EOP [WHO])
READ:UNKNOWN

TO: Janelle E. Erickson (CN=Janelle E. Erickson/OU=WHO/O=EOP@EOP [WHO])
READ:UNKNOWN

TO: Charles M. Brain (CN=Charles M. Brain/OU=WHO/O=EOP@EOP [WHO])
READ:UNKNOWN

TO: Joshua J. Ackil (CN=Joshua J. Ackil/OU=WHO/O=EOP@EOP [WHO])
READ:UNKNOWN

TEXT:

===== ATTACHMENT 1 =====
ATT CREATION TIME/DATE: 0 00:00:00.00

TEXT:

> efdhc eI,,,,,,@@@@@\\4@1X.,VZ,,,71U@,,,,HOUSE NIGHTLY REPORT
Monday, July
19, 1999

The House convened at 12:30 for morning hour and at 2:00 pm for legislative business to consider

A series of bill under Suspension of the Rules:

PASSED (381 1) H.R. 1033 to establish the Lewis and Clark Expedition Bicentennial Commemorative Coin.

PASSED (voice) H.R. 31 to establish the Leif Ericson Millennium Commemorative Coin Act.

PASSED (381-0) H.Con.Res. 121 to express the Sense of the Congress Regarding the Victory of the United States in the Cold War and the Fall of the Berlin Wall.

PASSED (voice) H.Res. 25 to congratulate the Government of Peru and the Government of Ecuador for Signing a Peace Agreement Ending a Border Dispute Which Has Resulted in Several Military Clashes Over the Past 50 Years.

PASSED (383-1) H.R. 1477, Iran Nuclear Proliferation Prevention Act of 1999 to withhold voluntary proportional assistance for programs and projects of the International Atomic Energy Agency relating to the development and completion of the Bushehr nuclear power plant in Iran, and for other purposes (SAP sent 7/19: oppose)

Resumed consideration of HR 2415, The American Embassy Security Act to enhance security of United States missions and personnel overseas, to authorize appropriations for the Department of State for fiscal year 2000, and for other purposes. (structured rule passed 7/16) (SAP sent 7/19: senior advisors will not recommend that the President sign the bill unless objectionable provisions are resolved)

PASSED (voice) Gilman (R-NY) Amendment to allocate \$110 million for UNICEF and \$15 million for the Asia foundation; spec

ify that personnel transfers will not adversely affect women and minorities; insure the inclusion of democracy advocates in exchange programs; and require a report on Cambodian grenade attack.

POSTPONED until 7/20 Smith(R-NJ) Amendment
to prohibit contributions to the United Nations Population fund unless it ceases all its activities in China or the President certifies that there are no forced abortions associated with the Chinese population control program.

POSTPONED

until 7/20 (passed by voice) Campbell (R-CA) substitute to the Smith (R-NJ) Amendment to prohibit any funding provided to the United Nations Population Fund to be used for abortion or for a country program in China and further reduces, dollar for dollar, the United States contribution for any U.N. funding for a Chinese government population control program.

PASSED (voice) Kucinich Amendment

(D-OH) to require the Secretary of State to submit a report, written by an independent panel of experts, evaluating the role of diplomacy in ending the conflict in Kosovo.

□
HOUSE COMMITTEE SCHEDULE
July 20-23, 1999

Markups

FISCAL

2000 LABOR, HEALTH EDUCATION APPROPRIATIONS Subcommittee Markup

Labor, Health and

Human Services, and Education Subcommittee (Chairman Porter, R-Ill.) of House Appropriations Committee will mark up fiscal 2000 appropriations for programs under its jurisdiction.

Where and When: Time TBA 2358 Rayburn Bldg. Week of July 19

FISCAL 2000 APPROPRIATIONS Full Committee Markup

House Appropriations Committee

(Chairman Young, R-Fla.) will mark up fiscal 2000 appropriations bills.

Where and When: July 20, 28, 30 Time and room TBA Tentative Time and room TBA Tentative

Agenda: July 20 HR - - Fiscal 2000 Foreign Operations Appropriations

HR --- - Fiscal 2000 Energy and Water Appropriations

HR -- - - Fiscal 2000 District

of Columbia Appropriations

AID FOR REPAIRING WATERSHED STRUCTURES Subcommittee

Markup

General Farm Commodities, Resource Conservation and Credit Subcommittee

(Chairman Barrett, R-Neb.) of House Agriculture Committee will mark up pending legislation.

Where and When: July 20 10:00 am 1300 Longworth

Agenda: HR72

8 - A bill to amend the Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Act to authorize the secretary of Agriculture to provide cost share assistance for the rehabilitation of structural measures constructed as part of water resource projects previously funded by the secretary under such actor related laws.

Note: This markup

was originally scheduled for July 13.

JUDICIARY BILLS * Revised * Full Committee

Markup

House Judiciary Committee (Chairman Hyde, R-Ill.) will mark up

pending legislation.

Where and When: July 20 10:00 am 2141 Rayburn Bldg.

Agenda

a: HR 2031 - A bill to provide for injunctive relief in federal district court to enforce state laws relating to the interstate transportation of intoxicating

liquor.

HR1752 - A bill to make improvements in the operation and administration of the federal courts, and for other purposes

HR2112 - A bill to amend title

28, U.S. Code, to allow a judge to whom a case is transferred to retain jurisdiction over certain multidistrict litigation cases for trial, and to provide for federal jurisdiction of certain multiparty, multiforum civil actions.

HR2336

- A bill to amend title 28, U.S. Code, to provide for appointment of U.S. marshals by the attorney general.

HR456 - A bill for the relief of the survivors of the 14 members of the armed forces and the one U.S. civilian federal employee who were killed on April 14, 1994, when U.S. fighter aircraft mistakenly shot down 2 U.S. helicopters over Iraq.

HR1788 - A bill to deny federal public benefits to individuals who participated in Nazi persecution.

FEDERAL CROP INSURANCE

PROGRAM Subcommittee Markup

Risk Management, Research and Specialty Crops Subcommittee (Chairman Ewing, R-Ill.) of House Agriculture Committee will markup legislation to improve the Federal Crop Insurance Program.

Where and When: July 2

1 10:00 am 1300 Longworth

NAZI BENEFITS DENIAL GOVERNMENT AGENCY AUDITS * New

* Subcommittee Markup

Government Management, Information and Technology Subcommittee (Chairman Horn, R-Calif.) of House Government Reform Committee will markup pending legislation.

Where and When: July 21 10:30 am 2247 Rayburn Bldg.

A

Agenda: HR1827 - A bill to improve the economy and efficiency of government operations by requiring the use of recovery audits by federal agencies.

HR1788 - A

bill to deny federal public benefits to individuals who participated in Nazi persecution.

INVESTOR ACCESS TO INFORMATION ELECTRONIC SIGNATURES * New * Subcommittee Markup

Finance and Hazardous Materials Subcommittee (Chairman Oxley, R-Ohio) of House Commerce Committee will markup pending legislation.

Where and When:

July 21 10:00 am 2123 Rayburn Bldg.

Agenda: HR1858 - A bill to promote electronic commerce through improved access for consumers to electronic databases, including securities market information databases.

HR1714 - A bill to facilitate

the use of electronic records and signatures in interstate or foreign commerce.

RESOURCES BILLS * New * Full Committee Markup

House Resources Committee (Chairman Young, R-Alaska) will markup pending legislation.

Where and When: July

21 11:00 am 1324 Longworth Bldg.

Agenda: HCONRes 63 - A concurrent resolution

expressing the sense of the Congress opposing removal of dams on the Columbia and Snake rivers for fishery restoration purposes.

S323 - A bill to redesignate

the Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Monument as a national park and establish the Gunnison Gorge National Conservation Area, and for other purposes.

H

R795 - A bill to provide for the settlement of the water rights claims of the Chippewa Cree Tribe of the Rocky Boy's Reservation, and for other purposes.

HR94

0 - A bill to establish the Lackawanna Heritage Valley American Heritage Area.

HR970 - A bill to authorize the secretary of the Interior to provide assistance to the Perkins County Rural Water System, Inc., for the construction of water

supply facilities in Perkins
County, S.D.

HR1231 - A bill to direct the secretary of Agriculture to convey certain National Forest lands to Elko County, Nev., for continued use as a cemetery.

HR1444 - A bill to authorize the secretary of the Army to develop and implement projects for associated with irrigation system water diversions by local governmental entities in the states of Oregon, Washington, Montana and Idaho.

HR1619 - A bill to amend the Quinebaug and Shetucket Rivers Valley National Heritage Corridor Act of 1994 to expand the boundaries of the corridor.

HR2368 - A bill to assist in the resettlement and relocation of the people of Bikini Atoll by amending the terms of the trust fund established during the U.S. administration of the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands.

HR2435 - A bill to expand the boundaries of the Gettysburg National Military Park to include the Wills House, and for other purposes.

HR2454 - A bill to assure the long-term conservation of mid-continent light geese and the biological diversity of the ecosystem upon which many North American migratory birds depend, by directing the secretary of the Interior to implement rules to reduce the overabundant population of mid-continent light geese.

FISCAL 2000 VA-HUD APPROPRIATIONS Subcommittee Markup

Veterans Affairs, Housing and Urban Development and Independent Agencies Subcommittee (Chairman Walsh, R-N.Y.) of House Appropriations Committee will mark up fiscal 2000 appropriations for programs under its jurisdiction.

Where and When: Time and room TBA Tentative Week of July 26

Hearings

ADOPTION REVISION BILLS * Revised *

Human Resources Subcommittee (Chairman Johnson, R-Conn.) of House Ways and Means Committee will hold a hearing on adoption and foster care laws and whether states will focus on legislative proposals for caring for children outside of adoption or foster care, and what long-term living arrangements states are making for children not in foster care and for whom adoption is not planned.

Where and When: July 20 10:00 am B-318 Rayburn Bldg.

Witnesses scheduled:

PANEL: Rep. Thomas J. Bliley Jr., R-Va.; Rep. Ron Lewis, R-Ky.; Rep. James L. Oberstar, D-Minn.; Rep. Christopher H. Smith, R-N.J.; Rep. Deborah Pryce, R-Ohio

PANEL: Karen Spar - Domestic Social Policy Division, Congressional Research Service, Library of Congress; Heidi Goldsmith - executive director, International Center for Residential Education; Richard Mc

Kenzie - Walter B. Gerken Professor of Enterprise and Society, Graduate School of Management University of California, Irvine; Joe Kroll - executive director, North American Council on Adoptable Children, St. Paul, Minn.; Nan Dale - president and CEO, Children's Village, Dobbs Ferry, N.Y.; Rev. John P. Smyth - executive director, Maryville Academy, Des Plaines, Ill.

CORPORATION FOR PUBLIC BROADCASTING AUTHORIZATION

Telecommunications, Trade and Consumer Protection Subcommittee (Chairman Tauzin, R-La.) of House Commerce Committee will hold a hearing on pending legislation that would authorize funding for the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. The hearing will focus on reports that a Boston public television station shared its mailing list with the Democratic National Committee.

Where and When: July 20 10:00 am 2123 Rayburn Bldg.

Agenda: HR2384 - A bill to amend the Communications Act of 1934 to authorize appropriations for the Corporation for Public Broadcasting.

FINANCIAL PRIVACY * Revised *

Financial Institu

tions and Consumer Credit Subcommittee (Chairman Roukema, R-N.J.) of House Banking and Financial Services Committee will hold hearings on financial privacy issues.

Where and When: July 20, 21 10:00 am 2128 Rayburn Bldg.

PARKS AND SCENIC

C RIVERS

National Parks and Public Lands Subcommittee (Chairman Hansen, R-Utah) of House Resources Committee will hold a hearing on pending legislation.

Where

and When: July 20 10:00 am 1334 Longworth Bldg.

Agenda: HR1665 - A bill to a

llow the National Park Service to acquire certain land for addition to the Wilderness Battlefield in Virginia, as previously authorized by law, by purchase or exchange as well as by donation.

HR1615 - A bill to amend the Wild and Scenic

Rivers Act to extend the designation of a portion of the Lamprey River in New Hampshire as a recreational river to include an additional river segment.

HR2140

- A bill to improve protection and management of the Chattahoochee River National Recreation Area in the state of Georgia.

DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY SECURITY

Ove

rsight and Investigations Subcommittee (Chairman Upton, R-Mich.) of House Commerce Committee will hold a hearing on the results of security inspections at the DOE's Lawrence Livermore National Security Laboratory.

Where and When: July 20

10:00 am 2322 Rayburn Bldg. Open/May Close

RULES FOR FLOOR DEBATE * New *

Hou

se Rules Committee (Chairman Dreier, R-Calif.) will consider rules for floor debate for pending legislation.

Where and When: July 20 1:00 pm H-313 Capitol Bld

g.

Agenda: HR2488 - A bill to amend the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to reduce individual income tax rates, to provide marriage penalty relief, to reduce taxes on savings and investments, to provide estate and gift tax relief, to provide incentives for education savings and health care, and for other purposes.

E

EDUCATION PROGRAMS FOR NATIVE AMERICANS

Early Childhood, Youth and Families Subc

ommittee (Chairman Castle, R-Del.) of House Education and the Workforce Committee will hold a hearing on educational programs for native American children.

W

here and When: July 20 1:30 pm 2175 Rayburn Bldg.

PATIENT CONFIDENTIALITY

Heal

th Subcommittee (Chairman Thomas, R-Calif.) of House Ways and Means Committee will hold a hearing on proposals to protect the confidentiality of patients' health care information. The hearing will focus on confidentiality issues raised by Secretary of Health and Human Services Donna Shalala's recommendations to Congress, and will receive testimony from public agency representatives and private sector witnesses.

Where and When: July 20 2:00 pm 1100 Longworth Bldg.

ADVERSE

REACTIONS TO ANTHRAX VACCINE

National Security, Veterans Affairs and Interna

tional Relations Subcommittee (Chairman Shays, R-Conn.) of House Government Reform Committee will hold a hearing on possible adverse health consequences of anthrax vaccines, which are mandatory for members of the military.

Where and When

: July 21 10:00 am 2154 Rayburn Bldg.

Witnesses scheduled: PANEL: Capt. Michel
e F. Piel - U.S. Air Force, Stevensville, Md.; Lieut. Richard Rovet - U.S. Air
Force, Dover, Del.; Sgt. Robert H. Soska - U.S. Air Force, Fort Stewart, Ga.; C
apt. John Richter - U.S. Army, Annapolis, Md.
PANEL: Kwai Chan - director, Spe
cial Studies and Evaluation, National Security and International Affairs Divisi
on, General Accounting Office; Robert Claypool deputy assistant secretary of D
efense for health operations policy; Susan Ellenburg - director, Division of Bi
ostatistics and Epidemiology, Center for Biologics Evaluation and Research, Foo
d and Drug Administration.

ENCRYPTION EXPORT CONTROLS Full Committee Markup
Ho
use Armed Services Committee (Chairman Spence, R-S.C.) will mark up pending leg
islation.
Where and When: July 21 11:30 am 2118 Rayburn Bldg.
Agenda:
HR850 -
A bill to amend title 18, U.S. Code, to affirm the rights of U.S. persons to us
e and sell encryption and to relax export controls on encryption.

PROTECTING U
NBORN CHILDREN
Constitution Subcommittee (Chairman Canady, R-Fla.) of House Jud
iciary Committee will hold a hearing on pending legislation.
Where and When: Ju
ly 21 1:30 pm 2237 Rayburn Bldg.
Agenda: HR2436 - A bill to amend title 18, U.
S. Code, and the Uniform Code of Military Justice to protect unborn children fr
om assault and murder, and for other purposes.

NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION A
UTHORIZATION
Energy and Power Subcommittee (Chairman Barton, R-Texas) of House
Commerce Committee will hold a hearing on legislation that would authorize fund
ing for the Nuclear Regulatory Commission.
Where and When: July 21 2:00 pm 2322
Rayburn Bldg.
Agenda: HR -- - - The Nuclear Regulatory Commission Authorizati
on Act for fiscal year 2000.

FISCAL 2000 COMMERCE, STATE JUSTICE APPROPRIATION
S
Commerce, Justice, State and Judiciary Subcommittee (Chairman Rogers, R-K
y.) of House Appropriations Committee will mark up fiscal 2000 appropriations f
or programs under its jurisdiction.
Where and When: July 22 Time and room TBA T
entative

SEVERE WEATHER FLIGHT OPERATIONS
Aviation Subcommittee (Chairman Dunc
an, R-Tenn.) of House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee will hold a h
earing on current aviation operations during severe weather conditions, focusin
g on commercial aircraft. The hearing seeks to address questions raised after t
he June 1, American Airlines crash in Arkansas which killed 11 people. Members
will discuss issues such as who decides when a plane will land in severe condit
ions, how information is communicated or transmitted from the National Weather
Service or other sources to airplanes and what types of
weather-detection equip
ment and technology is currently available.
Where and When: July 22 9:30 am 216
7 Rayburn Bldg.

EXTERNAL REGULATION OF DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY
Energy and Environ
ment Subcommittee (Chairman Calvert, R-Calif.) of House Science Committee will
hold a hearing on external regulation of Department of Energy facilities and rela
ted reports issued by the DOE on several pilot projects conducted in coordinati
on with the Occupational Safety and Health Administration and the Nuclear Regul
atory Commission. The hearing will focus on funding issues.

Where and When: July 22 10:00 am 2318 Rayburn Bldg.
Witnesses scheduled:

PANEL: David M. Michaels

- assistant secretary for Environment, Safety and Health, U.S. Department of Energy; Greta Joy Dicus - chairman, U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission; Jerold Mande - deputy assistant secretary of labor for Occupational Safety and Health, U.S. Department of Labor; Victor S. Rezendes - director, Energy, Natural Resources and Science Issues, U.S. General Accounting Office

INTERNAL REVENUE SERVICE RESTRUCTURING

Oversight Subcommittee (Chairman Houghton, R-N.Y.) of House Ways and Means Committee will hold a hearing to review the progress of the implementation of the "Internal Revenue Service Restructuring and Reform Act of 1998," a year after its enactment. The law mandated certain changes in the structure and management of the IRS.

Where and When: July 22 10:00 am 1100 Longworth Bldg

U.S. ROLE IN COMBATING HIV/AIDS * New *

Criminal Justice, Drug Policy and Human Resources Subcommittee (Chairman Mica, R-Fla.) of House Government Reform Committee will hold a hearing on the role of the United States in helping to combat the HIV/AIDS epidemic abroad.

Where and When: July 22 10:00 am 2154 Rayburn Bldg.

Witnesses scheduled: Rep. Jesse Jackson Jr., D-Ill.; Thomas Bombelles - PHARMA; James Love - Consumer Project on Technology; Chatinka Nkhoma - African AIDS victim; Eric Sawyer - Act Up New York; Alan Herman - Medical University of South Africa; Jeffrey Kaplan - Center for Disease Control; representatives from the National Institute of Health, the U.S. Trade Representative's Office and the Office of the White House Czar on AIDS.

CONSERVATION RESERVE PROGRAM General

General Farm Commodities, Resource Conservation and Credit Subcommittee (Chairman Barrett, R-Neb.) of House Agriculture Committee will hold a hearing on the administration of the Conservation Reserve Program which encourages voluntary land resource conservation efforts. The program, which is administered by the Farm Service Agency (FSA) of the Department of Agriculture with the assistance of the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), provides some rental payments and cost-sharing assistance. Enrolled lands remain in the program for ten to fifteen years.

Where and When: July 22 10:30 am 1300 Longworth

ENERGY AND POWER BILL ILLIS * New *

Energy and Power Subcommittee (Chairman Barton, R-Texas) of House Commerce Committee will hold a hearing on pending energy and power legislation.

Where and When: July 22 11:00 am 2123 Rayburn Bldg.

Agenda: HR667 - A bill to

remove federal impediments to retail competition in the electric power industry, thereby providing opportunities within electricity restructuring.

HR971 - A

bill to amend the Public Utility Regulatory Policies Act of 1978 to protect the nation's electricity ratepayers by ensuring that rates charged by qualifying small power producers and qualifying cogenerators do not exceed the incremental cost to the purchasing utility of alternative electric energy at the time of delivery, and for other purposes.

HR1138 - A bill to prospectively repeal section

210 of the Public Utility Regulatory Policies Act of 1978.

HR1486 - A bill to

provide for a transition to market-based rates for power sold by the Federal Power Marketing Administrations and the Tennessee Valley Authority, and for other purposes.

HR1587 - A bill to encourage states to establish competitive retail

markets for electricity, to clarify the roles of the federal government and the

e states in retail electricity markets, to remove certain federal barriers to competition, and for other purposes.
HR1828 - A bill to provide for a more competitive electric power industry, and for other purposes.
HR2050 - A bill to provide consumers with a reliable source of electricity and a choice of electric providers, and for other purposes.
HR2363 - A bill to repeal the Public Utility Holding Company Act of 1935, to enact the Public Utility Holding Company Act of 1999, and for other purposes.

FISHERY CONSERVATION

Fisheries Conservation, Wildlife and Oceans Subcommittee (Chairman Saxton, R-N.J.) of House Resources Committee will hold an oversight hearing on the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act.

Where and When: July 22 11:00 am 1334 Longworth Bldg.

Witnesses scheduled: Penelope Dalton - assistant administrator, Fisheries, National Marine Fisheries Service; Joseph M. Brancalone - chairman, New England Fishery Management Council

INTERNET DOMAIN NAME SYSTEM * Revised * Oversight and

Investigations Subcommittee (Chairman Upton, R-Mich.) of House Commerce Committee will hold a hearing on privatizing the domain name system, which provides for the translation between Internet host names and addresses. The hearing will focus on ICANN, the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers formed to oversee the system's management, and will review governing and operating issues.

Where and When: July 22 11:00 am 2322 Rayburn Bldg.

OSHA DRAFT SAFETY AND

HEALTH PROGRAM RULE * Revised *

House Small Business Committee (Chairman Talbot, R-Mo.) will hold a hearing on the Occupational Safety and Health Administration's (OSHA) draft safety and health programs rule, which may be proposed later in the year. The rule would require all businesses in private industry - with the exception of agriculture and construction -- to implement safety and health programs on their worksites. The programs would have to meet six specific criteria

enumerated in the rule.

Where and When: July 22 11:00 am 2360 Rayburn Bldg.

Witnesses scheduled:

Charles Jeffress - assistant secretary of Labor for safety and health; Baruch A. Fellner - partner, Gibson, Dunn and Crutcher; Lawrence P. Halprin - partner, Keller and Heckman; Henry Beale - principal economist, Microeconomic Applications, Inc.; Jasbinder Singh - president, Policy Planning and Evaluation, Inc.

Note: This hearing was originally scheduled for June 17

U.S.-LIBYAN RELATIONS * Revised *

Africa Subcommittee (Chairman Royce, R-Calif.) of House International Relations Committee will hold a hearing on U.S.-Libyan relations.

Where and When: July 22 2:00 pm 2172 Rayburn Bldg.

Witnesses scheduled:

PANEL: Ronald E. Neumann - deputy assistant secretary of State for Near Eastern affairs

PANEL: Ray Takeyh - Sorof research fellow, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy; Joshua Sinai - senior security analyst, International Security Division, ANSER; Omar Turbi - Libyan-American human rights activist; Mansour Omar El-Kikhia - political science professor, University of Texas-San Antonio

Note: This hearing was originally scheduled for June 24.

OIL AND GAS

LEASES * Revised *

Energy and Mineral Resources Subcommittee (Chairman Cubin, R-Wyo.) of House Resources Committee will hold a hearing on pending legislation.

Where and When: July 29 9:30 am SD-366 Dirksen Bldg.

Agenda: S1049 - A bill

to improve the administration of oil and gas leases on federal land, and for other purposes.

HR1985 - A bill to improve the administration of oil and gas leases on federal land, and for other purposes.

Note: This hearing was originally scheduled for June 24.

TRANSITION OF PRIIBILOF ISLANDS TO PRIVATE OWNERSHIP

Fish

eries Conservation, Wildlife and Oceans Subcommittee (Chairman Saxton, R-N.J.) of House Resources Committee will hold a hearing on the transition of the Pribilof Islands, located off the coast of Alaska, from federal to private ownership as required by a bill (PL 104-91) signed into law in 1996.

Where and When: July

29 11:00 am 1334 Longworth Bldg.

Agenda: HR -- - Pribilof Islands Transition

Act

Note: This hearing was originally scheduled for June 22.

□

House Notes

From

om Congress Daily 7/19/99

Tax Bill Action Grows Uncertain As GOP Splits Over Cuts

Strong opposition from different sectors of the Republican Party could put off this week's scheduled floor consideration of an \$864 billion tax relief bill, GOP aides said today. A score of GOP moderates told their leadership last week they could not support a bill of that size. One aide who was in that meeting said the opponents were "genuinely angry" and not "posturing." Generally, moderates oppose surrendering such massive amounts of revenue based only on budget projections, but there is no unity on what an appropriate alternative bill would look

like. Rep. Fred Upton, R-Mich., for example, wants to pay down the public debt. Others acknowledged that current budget caps would not likely accommodate needed growth in some programs or future emergency expenditures. On the other end of the spectrum, there are conservative members who would have preferred a more immediate assault on the marriage penalty than what was offered in Ways and Means Chairman Archer's bill. Christian conservatives have embraced this position with such ardor that they declined to support the phased-in proposal put forward by the House Conservative Action Team.

With jarring

tugs from both sides, Archer is struggling to come up with an alternative that can attract enough votes for passage. For example, Rep. Nancy Johnson, R-Conn., and other moderates wanted to use the substantial corporate gains tax cut Archer proposed to pay for amendments they offered, but they were rebuffed. But Archer and leaders in the business community feel strongly that capital gains tax cuts are essential for continued economic growth. Other moderates have recommended scaling back the repeal of estate taxes, but an aide to Rep. Jennifer Dunn, R-Wash., said Dunn "would have serious concerns about the bill without it." Almost three dozen Democrats from across the spectrum have supported Dunn's bill to wipe out the so-called death tax. In fact, Ways and Means panel Democrats could include a modified version of this item in a \$250 billion, alternative tax cut measure they will likely offer. Phasing in or reducing the 10 percent, across-the-board income tax cut Archer wants could also be an option. But aides said a 7 percent or 8 percent cut lacks luster. That item alone would cost over \$400 billion.

A spokesman for House Majority Leader Armey said leaders still plan on bringing the bill to the floor Wednesday. On Tuesday, the Rules Committee, in close consultation with Archer, could allow a manager's amendment to make needed changes. That would be a less embarrassing and more orderly alternative to sending the bill back to the Ways and Means panel for redrafting. One

source off Capitol Hill said the most likely scenario would be to slow the phase-in for some items rather than to sacrifice completely any particular provision. by Stephen Norton

Nuclear Waste Plan Faces More Delays As Leaders Meet

Senate Majority Leader Lott and House Speaker Hastert are holding meetings to discuss strategy for passing a nuclear waste storage bill that has languished in some form or another for years on Capitol Hill. Senate sources said Lott and Hastert discussed the nuclear waste bill as recently as Friday, when they met to determine a floor strategy for appropriations bills and other matters. The two canceled a meeting scheduled for Tuesday that would have focused on the nuclear waste bill. But congressional sources in both houses doubt either body will bring the legislation to the floor before the August recess. That means the bills would have to wait for action until October or November after Congress has enacted its 13 must-pass annual spending bills. Sources said momentum built last week for bringing the Senate version to the floor this coming week but that the opportunity was squeezed out by the debate over healthcare reform.

The leadership meetings have focused on figuring out when to bring the bills to the floor and how to work out a few key differences in the measures.

The Republican leadership has determined the Senate should proceed first with its version of the bill. The two pieces of legislation were largely similar until a Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee markup in mid-June in which Chairman Murkowski acceded to the requests of ranking member Jeff Bingaman, D-N.M., and the Clinton administration by dropping a controversial interim storage provision. That provision would have required the Energy Department to move nuclear waste from power plants to a central storage facility in Nevada until the permanent storage site at Nevada's Yucca Mountain is constructed. During the committee markup, Murkowski replaced that language with a provision allowing the DOE to pay utilities to continue to store the waste on-site until the permanent site is prepared. However, the House version of the bill still contains the interim provision. The House measure also revamps the way the program is funded.

Sources said the leadership needs to determine which bill they are going to push and decide if further changes are needed to secure broader support. The House bill passed the Commerce Committee with broad support earlier this year, but there has since been grumbling from members outside the committee about its new funding mechanism and interim storage provision. But the main obstacle to enacting the nuclear waste storage legislation has always resided in the Senate, where Murkowski has twice failed to pass the bill by a margin big enough to override a White House veto. The Republican leadership will have to determine if the political climate warrants pushing the old contentious bill through each House, or whether the legislation should move more in the direction of the White House. by Brody Mullins

Democrats Seeking To Keep Forbes On Approps Panel ...

With the House Appropriations Committee scheduled to mark up three FY2000 spending bills Tuesday, House Democratic and GOP leaders are grappling with the impact of Appropriations member Michael Forbes' switch this week from the Republican to the Democratic Party. Forbes, who represents a district on Long Island, N.Y., has not yet officially resigned from the House Republican Conference thereby forfeiting his coveted spot on the Appropriations panel nor has he indicated whether he plans to attend Tuesday's markup. Because of personal staff resignations in the wake of Forbes' Saturday announcement that he is leaving the GOP, phone calls to his district and Capitol Hill offices today went unanswered.

While the jockeying has begun among House Republicans to take Forbes' seat on the Appropriations panel where he has served on the Energy and Water, Foreign Operations and Treasury-Postal subpanels the Democratic leadership is pledging to keep Forbes on the powerful panel. A spokeswoman for Appropriations ranking member David Obey, D-Wis., said, "I am confident, based on what I've heard, that Mr. Forbes will be well taken care of, because we know there are others in the GOP who want to switch parties, and we want to make sure they know they will be well provided for if they decide to make that move." A Democratic leadership aide confirmed the leadership wants to keep Forbes on the panel, but said because there are no vacancies on the Democratic roster at this time, "We have to create an opening. We're trying to figure out a way to do that ... to find people willing to make the sacrifice" and step aside to make

ake room for him.

Democratic leaders might not have eager volunteers to give up a seat on Appropriations, but GOP leaders are likely to face the opposite problem, as several members lobby their leadership to get onto the committee. GOP members mentioned to take the slot include Reps. Rick Hill of Montana, Robert Ney of Ohio and Don Sherwood of Pennsylvania all of whom face tough re-election bids and Rep. Peter King of New York. A spokesman for Speaker Hastert said the leadership "will try to move quickly on filling the vacancy," but could not say when that would be.

Meanwhile, angry Forbes aides resigned en masse today, the Associated Press reported. Nearly a dozen members of his staff entered the legislator's locked office in the Cannon House Office Building and dropped off their keys, identification tags and letters of resignation. Reporters were notified of the event by the National Republican Congressional Committee. One staff member, Brian Fauls, served as Forbes' legislative director and had worked for Forbes since his arrival in 1995. Fauls and others said six aides and four interns were resigning from Forbes' Washington office. Only Chief of Staff Jan Friis was considering remaining, they said. Forbes' entire six-person staff in his Shirley, N.Y., office was also quitting, aides said. by Lisa Caruso

... As Forbes Likely To Face Democratic Primary Next Year
New

York Rep. Michael Forbes a third-term House member whose Saturday announcement that he was abandoning the GOP to become a Democrat has confounded local politicians must prove his credentials to win the Democratic nomination in the eastern Long Island district next year, say local Democratic officials. Suffolk County Chairman Dominic Baranello said the race for the party nomination is "wide open" and will take shape after this year's local elections. "The fact that he has changed his [party] enrollment doesn't make him a Democrat. What makes him a Democrat is his position on the issues," Baranello said. By local accounts, Tony Bullock, chief of staff to retiring Sen. Daniel Patrick Moynihan, D-N.Y., is in the best position to challenge Forbes for the Democratic nomination. Bullock criticized Forbes' votes to impeach President Clinton, his opposition to abortion rights and his support from the gun lobby a record Bullock said the Democratic rank and file would not soon dismiss. "They're not going to accept his transition overnight," Bullock said. "The problem in politics is your record is not amendable." However, state Assemblywoman Debra Mazzearelli, a former moderate Republican who became a Democrat in 1997, said she would not challenge Forbes for the Democratic nomination. Mazzearelli said she told House Minority Leader Gephardt in a weekend phone call that she would back the Forbes campaign, and would work to persuade Forbes to drop his opposition to abortion. "I don't have any interest in 'primarying' Michael and I have every hope that Michael will come around to the Democratic philosophy," Mazzearelli said.

Suffolk County Republican Chairman Howard DeMartini called Forbes a "temporary aberration" and said the 2000 general election would produce a "stronger incumbent than [Forbes] was." Suffolk County Clerk Ed Romaine, who almost defeated then-Democratic Rep. George Hochbrueckner in 1988 and 1992 as the GOP nominee, is almost certain to seek the GOP nod. "I am looking at this and I will probably be announcing shortly," Romaine said. Assemblyman Fred Thiele, mentioned as a candidate for the GOP nomination, said the contest is "intriguing" and that he would have to make a decision by the end of the year at the latest. A spokesman for Suffolk County Executive Robert Gaffney, also mentioned as a GOP House contender, said Gaffney "has absolutely no interest in seeking the nomination. "Other potential candidates for the Republican nomination against Forbes include state Assemblywoman Patricia Acampora and state Sen. Kenneth LaValle, while Brookhaven Town Supervisor Felix Grucci and John LaMura, a former Brookhaven Town supervisor, have also been mentioned. by Mark Wegner

PBS Flap Reveals Tauzin, Oxley Chairmanship Jockeying

With just 16 months to go until House Commerce Chairman Bliley is term limited out of his chairmanship, the two leading contenders to replace him Reps. W.J. (Billy) Tauzin, R-La., and Michael Oxley, R-Ohio are out of the gate and working to secure the support of their Republican colleagues. Commerce lobbyists said last week's nasty intraparty fight over a public television reauthorization bill is merely the opening salvo in a marathon succession race that could become grueling. On the eve of last Wednesday's planned Telecommunications, Trade and Consumer Protection Subcommittee vote on a generous

bill authored by Tauzin the subcommittee's chairman Oxley and other panel Republicans began circulating an amendment to slash the increases proposed by Tauzin. The intramural feud coupled with a request by Rep. Christopher Cox, R-Calif., for another hearing and revelations that a Boston public television station swapped parts of its donor list with the Democratic National Committee caused Tauzin to abruptly postpone the vote; it was later rescheduled for Tuesday of this week. "List swap or no list swap, there still would have been an Oxley amendment to bring the funding down to reasonable levels," an Oxley spokeswoman said.

Hours later, Tauzin critics were on the phone bashing Tauzin's leadership skills and claiming that Oxley as chairman would never allow such a public squabble. "If Tauzin can't get a public broadcasting bill through his subcommittee," one Tauzin critic asked, "how can he pass significant legislation?" The faultfinders who are more opponents of Tauzin than supporters of Oxley were particularly harsh toward the authorization levels proposed by Tauzin, saying they are reminiscent of levels proposed by Democrats. "Tauzin has not changed from his Democrat ways," one industry source complained. Tauzin, a former Democrat, became a Republican in 1995. "The reason this is important," another lobbyist said, "is because it shows the distinction between the two and how they would legislate."

The same sources believe Tauzin allies will highlight similar tactical errors made by Oxley, now the chairman of the Finance and Hazardous Materials Subcommittee. "These guys are running hard for the chairmanship and they are looking for ways to demonstrate that they are the right choice," one lobbyist said. "Any time either member steps away from the conservative principles held by most Republicans, the other one will try to exploit it." by Brady Mullins

Hill Briefs

Hoping to goad the Clinton administration to act on its own, House Ways and Means Health Subcommittee Chairman Bill Thomas, R-Calif., today announced plans to move soon on new legislation to shorten the appeal times on Medicare complaints. Thomas told a news conference that he intends to soon mark up the bill he and ranking member Fortney (Pete) Stark, D-Calif., introduced in late June to shrink the time it takes to appeal Health Care Financing Administration decisions from two years to a maximum of 90 days. Administrators who testified at a recent hearing were "not supportive of streamlining the process," Thomas said, adding he did not know precisely what the administration's position is on the bill. "I'm hoping that once the administration examines the consequences of failure [to speed up] the process, they will support the legislation," Thomas said. At the least, Thomas said the administration should be neutral. Cost of the legislation would range between \$1 billion and \$2 billion over five years, he said.

House Republican Conference Chairman J.C.

Watts of Oklahoma will brief Republicans Tuesday on the "Securing America's Future Project," a new communications strategy intended to build GOP unity around common themes. According to a briefing packet prepared by the GOP Conference and obtained by CongressDaily, the project intends to mobilize leaders, members and committees in the communications endeavor, "to foster discipline and focus among Republicans" and "to win the issue debate in 2000." The action plan calls on leaders to make policy, timing and resource decisions for the project; calls on committees to design, launch and sustain the agenda; and calls on individual members to appoint a member of their personal staff to organize town meetings, op-eds and mailings on the project. The Conference bills the project as "the most aggressive attempt to unify and coordinate the Conference since the 'Contract With America,'" describing it as a "theme-driven strategic communication" plan built on benchmarks that can be measured for progress.

Rep. John Peterson

, R-Pa., underwent surgery Friday to clear the blockage of a single artery in his heart, the Associated Press reported. The surgery at the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center was deemed a "complete success" by his doctors. The problem was discovered during a routine medical exam. Peterson is to be released today from the hospital and plans to recuperate at home, resuming his official duties as physicians allow him to do so.

Now that he has dropped out of the 2000 presidential race, will retiring House Budget Chairman Kasich become a lobbyist

? Officially, Kasich's plans are undecided. But in an interview on CNN's Crossfire last week, hosts Bill Press and Tucker Carlson grilled about his next career move, and during the exchange, Kasich could not quite give a definitive "no" to a lobbying career. Asked point blank about the possibility, Kasich said, "The answer to that question is I don't intend to come up here and be involved in lobbying for legislation but if a lobbyist means that I'm going to be out promoting my ideas, I'm clearly going to keep to that." When Kasich noted his intention to return to live in central Ohio, Carlson pointed out he could lobby in Washington while still being able to return home on an hour-long flight. Kasich responded, "No, no, no," but added, "I hope to combine a series of activities ... I talked to our good friend Bob Novak about this, and he said, 'Well, do you just want to be in business or do you want to be in politics?' I said, 'Well, you know, I'd like to have a mix.'"

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RECORD TYPE: PRESIDENTIAL (NOTES MAIL)

CREATOR: Paul Thornell (CN=Paul Thornell/O=OVP [UNKNOWN])

CREATION DATE/TIME:20-JUL-1999 09:40:01.00

SUBJECT: Re: AIDS Hearing Witnesses

TO: Sarah A. Bianchi (CN=Sarah A. Bianchi/O=OVP @ OVP [UNKNOWN])

READ:UNKNOWN

TEXT:

I'm for that, I think Tom's schedule will be the one we need to work around. Who do we need in this discussion? Laura Q., Sandy (or designee), Tom R. Anyone else? Why don't you and I speak with each of these people and let them know we want to get something together later today. I'll track down Tom and Laura Q., can you take Sandy and whoever else you think of? I think if we can get everyone on the phone this afternoon that would work best, but a meeting may work better.

Sarah A. Bianchi

07/20/99 09:31:42 AM

Record Type: Record

To: Paul Thornell/OVP

cc:

bcc:

Subject: Re: AIDS Hearing Witnesses

I can do tomorrow at 10am but I think we really need an internal conversation first with our communications folks and Sandy Thurman who has been requested to testify (as has USTR) I think we need strategy session

sb

Paul Thornell

07/20/99 09:27:30 AM

Record Type: Record

To: Sarah A. Bianchi/OVP@OVP

cc: Thomas M. Rosshirt/OVP@OVP, Kay Casstevens/OVP@OVP

bcc:

Subject: Re: AIDS Hearing Witnesses

I know Tom is jammed with Barak stuff today, but we spoke about his coming to the Hill tomorrow (Weds) at 10:00am to meet with me and Rep. Patsy Mink's staff and other Members offices on this to get them materials and brief them. Does that work for you? I think the three of us and whoever else should talk toward the end of the day today to be sure we coordinate on info, etc.

Sarah A. Bianchi
07/20/99 09:23:05 AM
Record Type: Record

To: Thomas M. Rosshirt/OVP, Paul Thornell/OVP
cc:
Subject: AIDS Hearing Witnesses

are we doing a meeting on this today?

sb

----- Forwarded by Sarah A. Bianchi/OVP on 07/20/99 09:22
AM -----

Paul Thornell
07/19/99 06:02:06 PM
Record Type: Record

To: See the distribution list at the bottom of this message
cc:
Subject: AIDS Hearing Witnesses

The following people are invited to testify at the House hearing on the
U.S. Role in the AIDS Epidemic. There may be one or two others.

Rep. Jesse Jackson, Jr.
Rep. Marion Berry
Eric Sawyer, HIV/Human Rights
Jamie Love, Act-Up
Alan Herman, Medical University of South Africa
Sandy Thurman
Charlene Barshefsky

Message Sent

To: _____
Ron Klain/OVP@OVP
Laura M. Quinn/OVP@OVP
Kay Casstevens/OVP@OVP
Thomas M. Rosshirt/OVP@OVP
Sarah A. Bianchi/OVP@OVP
Sandra Thurman/OPD/EOP@EOP

RECORD TYPE: PRESIDENTIAL (NOTES MAIL)

CREATOR: Brian A. Reich (CN=Brian A. Reich/O=OVP [UNKNOWN])

CREATION DATE/TIME:20-JUL-1999 10:29:43.00

SUBJECT: hotline/ baltimore sun

TO: Thomas M. Rosshirt (CN=Thomas M. Rosshirt/O=OVP@OVP [UNKNOWN])

READ:UNKNOWN

TEXT:

I'm sure you saw this...

Gore-ing Those AIDS Protestors

his White "Determined to end noisy AIDS protests against
said House campaign," Vice President Gore on Monday
the administration will seek to double -- to
\$100 million -- U.S. funding to combat AIDS in Africa, the
Baltimore Sun reports.

Gore unveils request to double funding to
fight AIDS in Africa
Activists who pester vice president call \$100 million
not enough

By Jonathan Weisman
Sun National Staff

WASHINGTON -- Determined to end noisy AIDS protests
against his White House campaign, Vice President Al Gore
announced yesterday that the administration will seek to double
U.S. funding to combat AIDS in Africa.

Flanked by South African Archbishop Desmond Tutu and
an AIDS orphan from Uganda, Gore unveiled a request for \$100
million in additional funding to combat AIDS worldwide, bringing
the total request to \$225 million. Funds earmarked for Africa
would double from \$74 million to about \$150 million.

The vice president declared that the announcement
"marks a real turning point" for "an epidemic that is galloping
onward, gaining speed and momentum."

Gore's presidential campaign has been dogged for more

than a month
vice president
South African
into its fight

by a handful of brash protesters who maintain that the
has sided with pharmaceutical firms to thwart the
government's efforts to introduce cheap AIDS drugs
against the disease.

would not allow
intellectual property rights
patented drugs such as

Even yesterday, administration officials said they
African governments to violate international
regulations with the unilateral manufacture of
AZT.

show that he is
leading cause of death,
5,500 a day.

But by combating AIDS in other ways, Gore hoped to
sensitive to the crisis that has become Africa's
killing 12 million in sub-Saharan Africa at a rate of

and education,
million to care for
million to
through disease
groups.

Of the total, \$48 million would go for AIDS prevention
\$23 million for health care and home treatment, \$10
children orphaned by the raging AIDS epidemic, and \$19
help countries strengthen their anti-AIDS programs,
surveillance, prevention and community-based AIDS

with a
humankind and the
died when she

Yesterday's announcement was tailor-made to the cause,
passionate sermon from Tutu on the compassion of
tragic tale of Olivia Nantong, whose Ugandan father
was an infant and who was orphaned at 12.

House AIDS
encouraged her to
who had been
painful death. The

As Nantong spoke through sobs and tears, first White
czar Sandra Thurman and then Gore comforted and
tell how she had skipped school to care for a mother
shunned by society and was dying an inexplicable,
audience sat in rapt attention.

a hug.

When the 20-year-old finished, she turned to Gore for

gives us a
"What you have

"When we are good, we know it inside ourselves. It
satisfaction that nothing else can," Tutu declared.

'Aha, [human beings] really are something, aren't they?'"

Daniel Zingale, executive director of the AIDS Action Council, the nation's largest lobby on AIDS issues, hailed the announcement as a "historic breakthrough," saying Gore can win over the wider AIDS community if he stays with it.

"I think the vice president should keep his eye on making a real impact on AIDS in the developing world," Zingale said. "I think today was an impressive start."

But if an African Nobel laureate's blessing was supposed to immunize Gore from the charges of the more strident AIDS activists, it failed.

Those activists declared that more money would do nothing to answer their demands that the United States allow governments to manufacture cheap AIDS drugs, despite claims from pharmaceutical companies that those plans would grossly violate their patent rights.

James Love, a vocal Gore critic and head of the Consumer Project on Technology, called the announcement "a big damage control effort" amounting to \$4.50 each for 22 million Africans infected with HIV.

"One hundred million dollars is fine," said activist Wayne Turner of the AIDS group ACT-UP, "but it doesn't address the issue of allowing South Africa to produce its own cheap, generic version of AIDS drugs or to shop around and get the cheapest price for drugs on the world market."

Two dozen AIDS protesters ambushed Tipper Gore at a fund-raiser Thursday, and organizers from ACT-UP say demonstrations will continue.

Congress will provide a new forum for activists this week, when a House Government Reform subcommittee holds a hearing on the issue, featuring some of Gore's most strident critics.

Republicans could find themselves in a strange coalition with radical AIDS and gay rights groups in a verbal assault on the Democratic front-runner for the White House.

Frustrated administration officials said the AIDS activists simply do not understand the situation in southern Africa, where AIDS remains misunderstood and simply talking about sexually transmitted diseases is largely taboo.

"If you had all the free drugs available in the world, you could not get them to the people," Thurman said. "Drugs don't help us at this point very much."

John Keith, a 29-year-old Peace Corps volunteer just back from South Africa, agreed. Drugs seem beyond the point when it is still extremely difficult to get people to come to terms with how AIDS is spread, much less whether they have it, he said.

As people die, their families insist they were killed by a cold or a long illness. Moreover, Keith said, it is still widely believed that men can cure themselves of the AIDS virus by raping a virgin.

"It's bad," he said. "People in the cities and villages are sort of dropping left and right."

As for drugs and treatment, "the dialogue never gets that far," Keith said.

"No one is even talking about what to do once you get it."

Originally published on Jul 20 1999

RECORD TYPE: PRESIDENTIAL (NOTES MAIL)

CREATOR: Sarah A. Bianchi (CN=Sarah A. Bianchi/O=OVP [UNKNOWN])

CREATION DATE/TIME:20-JUL-1999 09:31:47.00

SUBJECT: Re: AIDS Hearing Witnesses

TO: Paul Thornell (CN=Paul Thornell/O=OVP@OVP [UNKNOWN])

READ:UNKNOWN

TEXT:

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Paul Thornell

07/20/99 09:27:30 AM

Record Type: Record

To: Sarah A. Bianchi/OVP@OVP

cc: Thomas M. Rosshirt/OVP@OVP, Kay Casstevens/OVP@OVP

bcc:

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Record Type: Record

To: Thomas M. Rosshirt/OVP, Paul Thornell/OVP

cc:

Subject:AIDS Hearing Witnesses

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----- Forwarded by Sarah A. Bianchi/OVP on 07/20/99 09:22 AM -----

Paul Thornell

07/19/99 06:02:06 PM
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To: See the distribution list at the bottom of this message
cc:
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Jamie Love, Act-Up
Alan Herman, Medical University of South Africa
Sandy Thurman
Charlene Barshefsky

Message Sent

To: _____
Ron Klain/OVP@OVP
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Kay Casstevens/OVP@OVP
Thomas M. Rosshirt/OVP@OVP
Sarah A. Bianchi/OVP@OVP
Sandra Thurman/OPD/EOP@EOP

RECORD TYPE: PRESIDENTIAL (NOTES MAIL)

CREATOR: Richard Socarides (CN=Richard Socarides/OU=WHO/O=EOP [WHO])

CREATION DATE/TIME:20-JUL-1999 18:36:40.00

SUBJECT: Gore's AIDS Problem

TO: Paul Thornell (CN=Paul Thornell/O=OVP@OVP [UNKNOWN])

READ:UNKNOWN

TEXT:

You should include this in the packet. It has good quotes from Love and Sawyer.

----- Forwarded by Richard Socarides/WHO/EOP on 07/20/99
06:35 PM -----

Doug.Case@sdsu.edu

07/13/99 01:21:00 AM

Record Type: Record

To: Richard Socarides@EOP

cc:

Subject: Gore's AIDS Problem

FRONTIERS NEWSMAGAZINE

Vol. 18, Issue 6 - July 9, 1999

www.frontiersweb.com

Gore's AIDS Problem

ACT UP Says VP's Kowtowing to Drug Companies Worsens African AIDS Crisis

From San Francisco to Johannesburg, where this July 5 demonstration took place, Al Gore (left with HRC's Elizabeth Birch, and wife, Tipper) is taking the heat for U.S. trade policy in Africa. Unlike stops in San Francisco, New York and Philadelphia, AIDS activists were nowhere to be found during Vice President Al Gore's official visit to the Los Angeles Gay & Lesbian Center on June 24. The protesters from ACT UP and other groups, with signs bearing such messages as "Gore's Greed Kills: African Needs AIDS Drugs," have become a permanent fixture on the Gore campaign trail, disrupting his appearances and accusing him of siding with pharmaceutical companies in a trade dispute that threatens to block South Africa's access to cheap, generic AIDS drugs.

The ACT UP protests have been a distraction for Gore at a time when he has been shown trailing GOP front runner Texas Gov. George W. Bush distantly in several national polls and desperately needs to shore up his political base. The protests have even prompted the Human Rights Campaign to issue a press release expressing concern about Gore's South Africa policy, a frustrating development for Gore aides, who say the vice president has been actively working behind the scenes to resolve the issue and get help to the devastated continent.

"I think the vice president's been badly misunderstood and misrepresented, even by some in government," said Richard Socarides, the White House gay liaison and an advisor to Gore, who met with ACT UP representatives in late June. "I don't think the protesters treated him unfairly, but now we can move forward. I can confirm for you that his views are now the views of the

government and those views are aligned with the protesters."

But Julie Davids of ACT UP/Philadelphia isn't so sure they've got the vice president on board. "What we need is action, not rhetoric," she said. "We need to see tangible results."

According to current World Health Organization estimates, 22.5 million Africans are HIV-positive, including up to 26 percent of young adults. The continent counts for two-thirds of the world's HIV population, according to those estimates.

The trade issue is a complicated one, made more so by presidential politics, the profit motives of the pharmaceutical industry and a simmering dispute between American AIDS activists and African diplomats on the best strategy for solving the continent's AIDS crisis.

The issue over Africa's access to AIDS drugs erupted in 1997 when the South African government passed the Medicine Act allowing local companies to use "compulsory licensing" to manufacture, market and sell generic versions of pharmaceutical drugs in response to their health emergency. Out of 43 million South Africans, about 4 million are HIV positive. To counter patent problems, the government said they would pay royalties to the affected companies. But at least 40 companies launched a lawsuit against the government, which is still being weighed by the South African court.

In addition to its ability to effect world trade policy, the U.S. government plays an important role in the debate because it holds patents or retains rights on drugs for which it substantially funded research or investment. "Drugs such as ddI, d4T or 3TC were researched and developed primarily with U.S. tax dollars and could be turned over to the World Health Organization legally right now, so that drugs could be made available at-cost in developing nations," argues economist Carl Priskel. Activists estimate that compulsory licensing could reduce the cost of AIDS medications in South Africa by as much as 90 percent.

The government also advocated "parallel-importing," which permits the purchase of drugs at marked discounts through third parties. On the world market, for instance, AZT can be purchased for 42 cents for 300 mg; in the U.S. it retails for nearly \$6 a pill. The average income for South Africans is \$2,600 while the annual average HIV drug costs more than \$10,000 a year. Activists charge that the pharmaceutical industry fears that South Africa's Medicines Act might encourage other Third World countries to follow suit, thereby undercutting profits.

On Feb. 5, 1999, the State Department issued a report to Congress about the U.S. government's problems with the Medicines Act and specifically named the Office of the Vice President as an agency that "[has] been engaging in an assiduous, concerted campaign to persuade the government of South Africa to withdraw or modify" the provision of the Medicines Act that would permit compulsory licensing. According to Jamie Love, director of the Ralph Nader Consumer Project on Technology (CPTech), the report goes on to say that "since the passage of the offending amendments - a U.S. government agencies have been engaged in a full court press with South African officials from the Departments of Trade and Industry, Foreign Affairs, and Health, to convince the South African government to withdraw or amend the offending provisions of the law."

As a result of the patent and intellectual properties dispute, on April 30, 1999, the United States Trade Representative once again put South Africa on a "trade watch" list, prompting activists to believe the U.S. government is

using tariff restrictions on some South African imports as trade sanction leverage. Spokespersons for Gore, who is the chairman of the US/South Africa Binational Commission, say the U.S. government is simply trying to make South Africa abide by international law and the World Trade Organization accord on intellectual property. But activists say the accord makes policies on parallel imports a matter of national discretion; parallel imports of pharmaceuticals are common in many European countries and compulsory licensing is also common in the United States and Europe.

"U.S. government officials often misrepresent the status of international law or use highly misleading rhetoric, in order to obfuscate the fact that the U.S. government is bullying South Africa to abandon cost saving measures that are completely legal and accepted in international trade agreements," Love writes on the CPTech Web site.

Meanwhile, activists are concerned about pharmaceutical's lobbying efforts. In 1997, the pharmaceutical and health product industry spent nearly \$75 million on lobbying and contributed nearly \$8 million to the Democratic and Republican parties, according to ACT UP/Philadelphia and the Center for Responsive Politics. ACT UP also points out that Gore is strongly linked to the drug industry through his chief campaign advisors which include: Tony Podesta, one of PhRMA's top lobbyists, also retained by biotech Genentech; former Congressman Tom Downy, a lobbyist for Merck; fund-raiser Peter Knight, who lobbied for Schering-Plough; and Gore domestic policy advisor David Beier lobbied for Genentech. In addition, Gore 2000 has thus far received \$11,000 from pharmaceutical lobbyists.

Gore, for his part, has repeatedly offered to meet with the protesters. On his demo-free June 24 trip to Los Angeles, Gore aides released a statement saying, "We respect the good intentions of those concerned about the problems of AIDS in Africa." They also noted that Gore has been working with newly inaugurated South African President Thabo Mbeki to find better ways to address the South African AIDS crisis.

"The vice president also believes we need to use all available means to deliver high-quality, affordable medicines to those who need them," the statement said. "That's why he has been encouraging the efforts of the U.S. Trade Representative, the South African government, and the pharmaceutical industry to explore solutions to end the dispute over patient rights."

That same day Gore's office received a letter from Rep. James Clyburn, chairman of the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC), asking for an explanation of the protesters' allegations, describing the charges as "characterizations that are entirely out of line with your record." In a detailed letter to the CBC, Gore replied that the U.S. Trade Representative had, as Gore had urged him to do, rejected heightening South Africa's trade "watch" status, an action that could have undercut efforts to resolve the problem. "I support South Africa's efforts to provide AIDS drugs at reduced prices through compulsory licensing and parallel importing, so long as they are carried out in a way that is consistent with international agreements," Gore wrote.

CBC member Rep. Donald Payne, D-N.J., the ranking Democrat on the House International Relations Committee's subcommittee on Africa, told the Associated Press that ACT UP is "wrong" in the way it is attacking Gore. "If there are some legal questions about development of generic medications and the whole patent question, they're beyond the vice president," Payne said.

The Nader project's Love, in his own June 29 letter to Clyburn, said Gore's

letter appeared "to signal a welcome and important change in U.S. policy [but] our enthusiasm is restrained by the way that support is qualified. Specifically, the words 'in a way consistent with international trade agreements' has been subject to highly controversial interpretations."

The ACT UP protesters did succeed in getting a two-hour meeting with AIDS Czar Sandra Thurman and Socarides-both top advisors to Gore-as well as foreign policy staff.

"It was a very good and productive meeting," Socarides told Frontiers July 1. "We learned a lot from them and what they learned from us is that the vice president had been working behind the scenes for many months advocating a position that was very much aligned with theirs. Having said that, we realize that the AIDS crisis in South Africa is a horrible epidemic which is escalating exponentially and this issue dealing with parallel importing and compulsory licensing is but a very small piece of a complicated situation."

According to Socarides, Thurman had already been working with AIDS activists on an "African Plan," which they expect to make public in the next few weeks. "You will see a substantial commitment of energy and resources to the problem," Socarides said.

Eric Sawyer of ACT UP/New York, agreed that the meeting was productive. He called it "a good indication that the administration is truly concerned about AIDS in Africa and the trade issues that we're trying to publicize." Sawyer, who met separately with Tipper Gore in New York, said she told him that Thurman is creating an inter-governmental task force to come up with recommendations. "That's a good sign and the letter to the CBC was a good step towards progress," Sawyer said. "It's the first time we've seen in black and white a statement affirming support for important policies."

But Davids of ACT UP/Philadelphia said there's already a solution on the table: Rep. Jesse Jackson Jr.'s Human Rights, Opportunity, Partnership and Empowerment (HOPE) for Africa Act, which is being offered as an alternative over the Clinton-Gore favored African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA). "There's a bad bill and a good bill and the vice president's response is to push the bad bill and threaten trade sanctions against countries trying to do the right thing without violating international law," Davids said.

The African Diplomatic Corps in Washington, D.C., appears to disagree with Davids. H.E. Roble Olhaye, ambassador of Djibouti and dean of the African Diplomatic Corps, issued a press release June 29 saying that African ambassadors are "highly skeptical about the motives of the opponents" of the Clinton-Gore bill, which he called "the critical centerpiece" of a productive U.S.-African economic partnership.

"[We] vehemently reject the hollow arguments promoted by a small cadre of self-promoting advocates for Africa, that the bill advances U.S. corporate interests at the expense of the interests and needs of Africa," Olhaye said. "Unfortunately, opponents of the bill seem to dismiss African elected governments and their representatives as incapable of deciding for themselves."

-Karen Ocamb

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RECORD TYPE: PRESIDENTIAL (NOTES MAIL)

CREATOR: Paul Thornell (CN=Paul Thornell/O=OVP [UNKNOWN])

CREATION DATE/TIME:20-JUL-1999 09:27:39.00

SUBJECT: Re: AIDS Hearing Witnesses

TO: Sarah A. Bianchi (CN=Sarah A. Bianchi/O=OVP @ OVP [UNKNOWN])

READ:UNKNOWN

CC: Kay Casstevens (CN=Kay Casstevens/O=OVP @ OVP [UNKNOWN])

READ:UNKNOWN

CC: Thomas M. Rosshirt (CN=Thomas M. Rosshirt/O=OVP @ OVP [UNKNOWN])

READ:UNKNOWN

TEXT:

I know Tom is jammed with Barak stuff today, but we spoke about his coming to the Hill tomorrow (Weds) at 10:00am to meet with me and Rep. Patsy Mink's staff and other Members offices on this to get them materials and brief them. Does that work for you? I think the three of us and whoever else should talk toward the end of the day today to be sure we coordinate on info, etc.

Sarah A. Bianchi

07/20/99 09:23:05 AM

Record Type: Record

To: Thomas M. Rosshirt/OVP, Paul Thornell/OVP

cc:

Subject:AIDS Hearing Witnesses

are we doing a meeting on this today?

sb

----- Forwarded by Sarah A. Bianchi/OVP on 07/20/99 09:22 AM -----

Paul Thornell

07/19/99 06:02:06 PM

Record Type: Record

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

cc:

Subject:AIDS Hearing Witnesses

The following people are invited to testify at the House hearing on the U.S. Role in the AIDS Epidemic. There may be one or two others.

Rep. Jesse Jackson, Jr.

Rep. Marion Berry

Eric Sawyer, HIV/Human Rights

Jamie Love, Act-Up
Alan Herman, Medical University of South Africa
Sandy Thurman
Charlene Barshefsky

Message Sent

To: _____

Ron Klain/OVP@OVP
Laura M. Quinn/OVP@OVP
Kay Casstevens/OVP@OVP
Thomas M. Rosshirt/OVP@OVP
Sarah A. Bianchi/OVP@OVP
Sandra Thurman/OPD/EOP@EOP

RECORD TYPE: PRESIDENTIAL (NOTES MAIL)

CREATOR: Richard Socarides (CN=Richard Socarides/OU=WHO/O=EOP [WHO])

CREATION DATE/TIME:21-JUL-1999 08:41:18.00

SUBJECT: another AIDS story

TO: Christopher S. Lehane (CN=Christopher S. Lehane/O=OVP@OVP [UNKNOWN])
READ:UNKNOWN

TO: Thomas M. Rosshirt (CN=Thomas M. Rosshirt/O=OVP@OVP [UNKNOWN])
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TO: Laura M. Quinn (CN=Laura M. Quinn/O=OVP@OVP [UNKNOWN])
READ:UNKNOWN

TO: Alejandro G. Cabrera (CN=Alejandro G. Cabrera/O=OVP@OVP [UNKNOWN])
READ:UNKNOWN

TO: Philip G Dufour (CN=Philip G Dufour/O=OVP@OVP [UNKNOWN])
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TO: Michael B. Feldman (CN=Michael B. Feldman/O=OVP@OVP [UNKNOWN])
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TO: Monica M. Dixon (CN=Monica M. Dixon/O=OVP@OVP [UNKNOWN])
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TO: Elizabeth J. Potter (CN=Elizabeth J. Potter/O=OVP@OVP [UNKNOWN])
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TO: Ansley Jones (CN=Ansley Jones/O=OVP@OVP [UNKNOWN])
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TO: Eli G. Attie (CN=Eli G. Attie/O=OVP@OVP [UNKNOWN])
READ:UNKNOWN

TO: Ron Klain (CN=Ron Klain/O=OVP@OVP [UNKNOWN])
READ:UNKNOWN

TEXT:

----- Forwarded by Richard Socarides/WHO/EOP on 07/21/99
08:40 AM -----

Richard Socarides 07/21/99 08:40:43 AM

Record Type: Record

To:

cc:

Subject:another AIDS story

Gore Proposes SA AIDS

Funds

NewsPlanet Staff

Tuesday, July 20, 1999 / 06:31 PM

SUMMARY: AIDS Drugs for Africa protesters weren't looking for cash when they took the U.S. Vice President to task over rumored trade sanctions, and his new proposal satisfies some activists, but not all.

The Clinton administration pleased some and not others with an announcement July 19 of plans to request an additional \$100-million beyond its budget to work on AIDS problems in sub-Saharan Africa. Vice President -- and Presidential hopeful -- Al Gore was given the glory of making the announcement, with Nobel Prizewinner and retired South African Episcopal Archbishop Desmond Tutu at his side. However, while several important AIDS and people of color groups applauded the action, it did not respond directly to the concerns of the AIDS Drugs for Africa protesters who have embarrassed Gore on the campaign trail or those who have demonstrated outside U.S. embassies in South Africa. And after an orgy of political posturing in the U.S. Senate last week on health care at home, it seems the best to be hoped from lawmakers is not passage of a Clinton-Gore proposal but passage of a parallel Republican proposal. Indeed a spokesperson for the House Appropriations Committee indicated that Congressional Republicans were developing their own plan at \$127-million for AIDS in Africa -- the same amount earmarked in the budget for AIDS in the U.S.

Director of the Office of National AIDS Policy ("AIDS Czar") Sandra Thurman reported the horrifying facts of AIDS in sub-Saharan Africa: twelve million dead in the last decade, with 5,500 more dying each day and a projected 13,000 per day by 2005; some countrys' life expectancy down by 20 years because of AIDS, the leading cause of death; and 40 million children expected to lose a parent in the next ten years. Gore called it "the worst infectious disease catastrophe in the history of modern medicine," and Thurman called the proportions "Biblical."

The administration's plan would put \$48-million towards education -- including the Department of Defense sharing training and materials with African militaries, community organizing, counseling, testing, blood donation screening, and treatments to reduce mother-to-child transmission. Another

\$23-million would deliver counseling and basic medical care including treatment for infections such as tuberculosis, with training and technical assistance provided to local clinics in the process. Another \$10-million would help families and communities care for orphaned children. The last \$19-million would assist governments in surveillance, planning and coordination with community services. The funds would come through the U.S. Agency for International Development (\$55-million), the Department of Defense (\$10-million) and the Department of Health and Human Services (\$35-million). In addition, the government will work with international bodies, social services and private industry to encourage others to invest resources in Africa, including a major conference on World AIDS Day, December 1.

Tutu called the proposal "fantastic." Among others applauding the announcement was the national umbrella organization AIDS Action, which has supported Gore throughout the AIDS Drugs for Africa controversy (executive director Daniel Zingale told "Newsweek" that blaming Gore for the drug situation "is like blaming Roosevelt for the Holocaust" when "drug overpricing is the real culprit."). The National Minority AIDS Council commended the administration, while noting that such action was needed long since, and that the administration's own estimate suggested that sub-Saharan Africa needs at least \$600-million annually for prevention alone.

Less impressed was Dr. Peter Lurie of Public Citizen, who told the Associated Press that, "Certainly, some money is better than none. But the fact is that for not a penny the American government could stop supporting trade restrictions that are an important reason people with AIDS can't get access to drugs."

And that's the point the demonstrators at Gore appearances have been trying to make, that South Africa should be allowed to go ahead under its controversial 1997 Medicine and Related Substances Control Amendment Act to manufacture cheap generic AIDS drugs and import them from nations not bound by international intellectual property rights agreements. While drug companies, including the South African affiliates of multinationals based elsewhere, have opposed the law to avoid having their pricing undercut, a month's course of treatment at the rates in industrialized countries can represent a year's income for an average African. The upshot is

that the region with 70% of the world's new HIV cases has less than 1% of the world's AIDS drugs. Protesters have insisted that in many cases the research and development costs -- cited by drug manufacturers as the basis for their pricing -- have actually been paid by U.S. taxpayers.

While protesters have accused Gore of representing pharmaceutical interests on the U.S.-South Africa Binational Commission and threatening trade sanctions against South Africa on their behalf, Gore's staff maintains that he has actually worked to prevent trade sanctions. He has even indicated (in a June 25 letter to the Congressional Black Caucus) his support for South Africa manufacturing and importing cheap generics if it does not infringe on international agreements -- although it's not clear how both those things might be true at once.

RECORD TYPE: PRESIDENTIAL (EXTERNAL MAIL)

CREATOR: Margaret_M._Suntum@lmgate2.eop.gov@INET@EOPMRX

CREATION DATE/TIME:21-JUL-1999 17:11:00.00

SUBJECT: press conference of the President

TO: SUNTUM_M (SUNTUM_M@A1@CD) (WHO)
READ:NOT READ

TO: backup (backup@wilson.ai.mit.edu@INET@EOPMRX)
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TO: wh-outbox-distr (wh-outbox-distr@pub.pub.whitehouse.gov@INET@EOPMRX)
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TO: Lori_E._Abrams (Lori_E._Abrams@lmgate2.eop.gov@INET@EOPMRX)
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TO: GRAY_W (GRAY_W@A1@CD) (NSC)
READ:21-JUL-1999 17:13:20.73

TO: John_A._Gribben (John_A._Gribben@lmgate2.eop.gov@INET@EOPMRX)
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TEXT:

THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary

For Immediate Release
1999

July 21,

PRESS CONFERENCE BY THE PRESIDENT

The East Room

2:35 P.M. EDT

THE PRESIDENT: Good afternoon.

Q Mr. President, you don't know it, but there is such a bright light on you -- we can't see you for the light. (Laughter.)

THE PRESIDENT: I've been waiting a long time for the halo to appear. (Laughter.)

Let me say, ladies and gentlemen, I have a brief opening statement, but before I make that and take questions, I'd like to say that, as you might imagine, I have been briefed on this morning's developments in the search off Martha's Vineyard. Again, let me commend the Coast Guard and all the officials at the local, state and national level for the fine work they have done under extremely difficult circumstances.

Again, I think we should keep our thoughts with the families as events unfold, and my thoughts and prayers are with them.

Today I want to make a brief statement about the choice we face here in Washington and in our country about how best to move forward into the new century and what to do with the surplus. When we look toward the future, it is helpful to remember at least the recent past. Six and a half years ago, the budget deficit was \$290 billion and rising. Wages were stagnant, inequality was growing, social conditions were worsening.

In the 12 years before I took office, unemployment averaged more than 7 percent. It's almost difficult to remember what it was like. No one really thought we could turn it around, let alone bring unemployment to a 29-year low, or turn decades of deficits, during which time the debt of our country was quadrupled in only 12 years, into a surplus of \$99 billion.

Our nation has made a seismic shift in the last six years, face a critical choice -- whether to move forward with the fiscal discipline that got us to where we are today, or return to the kind of risk-taking that got us into recessions and deficits before.

We must decide whether to invest the surplus, to strengthen America over the long-term, or to squander it for the short-term. I think the right course is clear. And a bigger surplus only means that the mistake could be bigger, and the missed opportunity greater if we take the wrong course.

I have proposed a balanced budget that puts first things first. I believe we must maintain our sound economic strategy, and invest the surplus in long-term goals -- saving Social Security, saving and strengthening Medicare, modernizing it by providing a long overdue drug benefit, and continuing to meet our basic responsibilities in education,

defense, the environment, biomedical research.

Tomorrow I will release a report that shows a great and growing need for prescription drug coverage. What the study shows is that 75 percent of our older Americans lack decent, dependable private-sector coverage of prescription drugs. That's three out of every four seniors. Clearly, America needs a prescription drug plan that is simple, universal and voluntary. Anyone who says we don't I believe is out of date and out of touch.

As I've described, my plan meets these national priorities, while paying off the debt by 2015; while investing in America's new markets, the places that have not yet felt our prosperity; and while providing substantial tax relief -- \$250 billion of it targeted to help families save for retirement, pay for child care, long-term care, for modern schools.

So let's be clear about something. We're not debating whether to have tax cuts or not -- we should have tax cuts, but tax cuts that provide for us first to save Social Security and Medicare, not undermine them; tax cuts we can afford, not ones that would demand drastic cuts in defense, education, agriculture, the environment; tax cuts in the national interest, not special interest.

Now, these are the risks that are posed by the Republican tax plan that the House is about to vote on. Let me tell you what their plan would do. It would pile up \$3 trillion in debt over the next two decades, right when the baby boomers start to retire -- that's what it costs -- right when Social Security and Medicare feel the crunch.

Because of the cost of the tax plan over the next two decades, I should say what it doesn't do. It doesn't do anything to extend the solvency of Social Security, to extend the solvency of Medicare, to provide the prescription drug benefits and it would require significant -- significant -- cuts from where we are today in education, defense, biomedical research, the environment and other critical areas.

If we don't save Social Security it's not because we can't. If we don't strengthen Medicare and add the prescription drug benefit, it's not because we can't. If we don't meet these clear national needs, it's because we choose not to do so. It will be because, instead, we choose to reward ourselves today by risking our prosperity tomorrow.

I hope Congress will make the right choice. When members cast their ballots on the Republican tax plan, they're really voting also on whether to save Social Security and Medicare. They're voting on whether to pay off the national debt for the first time in over 150 years -- something that would guarantee us lower interest rates, higher investment, more jobs, higher incomes, and for average citizens, lower home mortgage payments, car payments, credit card payments, college loan payments.

They're voting whether to meet our most pressing national priorities in education, defense, nearly every other domain in our people's lives. I think the choice is clear between the plan the Republican leadership has outlined and the national priorities of the American people. I hope we can still work together across party lines to save Social Security and Medicare, to safeguard our priorities and have the right kind of tax cut.

If Congress passes the wrong kind, of course, I will not sign it. I will not allow a risky plan to become law. And as I said, we now have six and a half years of evidence. This is not really a debate that's just about ideas without any evidence. We clearly know what works now, and we ought to stay with it.

As I said, I will work with any member of any party willing to put first things first. We can have a tax cut and do the right thing for the long-term in America. That is my commitment, and I hope that together we can fulfill it for our people.

Thank you very much. Helen.

Q Mr. President, in U.S. treaty relations, is it obligated to defend Taiwan militarily if it abandons the one China policy? And would the U.S. continue military aid if it pursues separatism?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, let me say, first of all, a lot of those questions are governed by the Taiwan Relations Act, which we intend to honor. Our policy is clear: We favor the one China policy; we favor the cross-strait dialogues. The understanding we have had all along with both China and Taiwan is that the differences between them would be resolved peacefully. If that were not to be the case, under the Taiwan Relations Act we would be required to view it with the gravest concern.

But I believe that both China and Taiwan understand this. I believe that they want to stay on a path to prosperity and dialogue. And we have dispatched people today, as the morning press reports, to do what we can to press that case to all sides. This is something that we don't want to see escalate, and I believe that what Mr. Lee said yesterday was trying to move in that direction. We all understand how difficult this is, but I think that the pillars of the policy are still the right ones. The one China policy is right; the cross-strait dialogue is right; the peaceful approach is right. And neither side, in my judgment, should depart from any of those elements.

Q So we would still have to go to war with China if it decided to break away?

THE PRESIDENT: I will say what I've already said -- the Taiwan Relations Act governs our policy. We made it clear. And I have -- as you remember, a few years ago we had a physical expression of that, that we don't believe there should be any violent attempts to resolve this, and we would view it very seriously. But I don't believe there will be. I think that both sides understands what needs to be done.

Terry?

Q Mr. President, do you think that President Lee was unnecessarily provocative in trying to redefine the nature of the Taiwan-Chinese relationship? And is the United States trying to send a signal by delaying a Pentagon mission which was going to Taiwan to assess its air defense needs? And, further, finally, you said that you still believe in a one China policy. How do you address Senator Helms' criticism that that policy is "a puzzling fiction"?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, I don't think it's a puzzling fiction. But if Senator Helms means that today they're not, in fact, unified, then that's true. But the Chinese tend to take a long view of these things and have made clear a sensitivity to the different system that exists on Taiwan, and a willingness to find ways to accommodate it, as they did in working with Hong Kong, and, perhaps, even going beyond that.

So I think the important thing is to let -- they need to take the time necessary to work this out between themselves in a peaceful way. That is clearly in both their interests. And I'm still not entirely sure, because I have read things which seem to resonate both ways on this, exactly what the Lee statements were entitled -- trying to convey.

But I think that both sides are now quite aware of the fact that they need to find a way to pursue their destinies within the framework that we have followed these last several years, which I might add, has allowed both places to prosper and to grow, to do better and to have more contacts, more investment, and underneath the rhetoric, quite a bit more reconciliation. So I would hope that we would stay with what is working and not depart from it.

Q Is that the meaning of the delay of the Pentagon mission to assess the --

THE PRESIDENT: I didn't think this was the best time to do something which might excite either one side or the other and imply that a military solution is an acceptable alternative. If you really think about what's at stake here, it would be unthinkable. And I want -- I don't want to depart from any of the three pillars. I think we need to stay with one China; I think we need to stay with the dialogue; and I think that no one should contemplate force here.

Randy.

Q Economists have been calling on you to indicate now whether you intend to reappoint Alan Greenspan in order to avoid having the issue to become mired in election year politics and upsetting financial markets next year. Would you like to see the Chairman stay on, and has he given you any indication of his plans?

THE PRESIDENT: I have, as you know, enjoyed a very good relationship, both personally and professionally, with Mr. Greenspan. I think he has done a terrific job. I have no idea whether he would even be willing to serve another term. I will make the decision in a timely fashion. I do not expect it to become embroiled in election year politics; there's no evidence of that.

You heard -- I think the Vice President said yesterday or the day before that he thought he was doing an excellent job. So we believe that as long as the United States is fiscally responsible, then the Fed will respond to developments in our own economy and in the world economy in a way that is clear, transparent, and I think designed to keep our growth going. So I'm not concerned about it.

Peter, go ahead.

Q -- I think the Vice President indicated he was sending a signal by saying that Chairman Greenspan had been doing an excellent job. Do you endorse that interpretation?

THE PRESIDENT: I don't know, all I know is he said he was doing a great job, and I agree with him.

Go ahead.

Q Mr. President, you mentioned the Kennedy tragedy at the beginning of the news conference. Could you please give us a better understanding of what the White House role has been in the conduct of the recovery operation and the decision-making on the release of information about it?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, I think that -- I am unaware of any role we have played in the decision-making of the release of information, except, let me say that today a lot of things are breaking in a hurry, and I believe there are some decisions that ought to be announced by the Kennedy family, and others that ought to be properly announced by either the Coast Guard or the NTSB.

So we have not tried -- to the best of my knowledge, had any role in the timing or substance of release of information. And we have had no role in the conduct of the operation except that I did talk to Admiral Larrabee, I think it was the day before yesterday, at a time when the operation might normally have ceased, and he said, I think we have a chance to find something else because of the equipment we have here, even though it's difficult and I'm inclined to believe because of the circumstances here and because who's involved that we ought to go on a little more. And I said that I would support it and defend it. And I think it was the right decision.

Q Mr. President, if you'll allow me to ask about two different topics. On the Kennedy search, sir, there have been conflicting reports about whether or not Mr. Kennedy's body has, in fact, been recovered. I understand that based upon the answer you just gave, that might not be a

question that you'd want to address, but, perhaps, given the fact that there is this conflicting information you could answer that question.

And, secondly, sir, on this notion of a drug benefit, prescription drug benefit, you chided the Republicans about targeting tax cuts at the wealthy, saying that they're too steered in that direction. How do you reconcile that philosophically with allowing rich Americans, rich older Americans, to get a prescription drug benefit which even you just said this new study will show one in four don't need?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, first of all, it's voluntary. And most wealthy Americans are well taken care of under the present program they have and won't exercise it. So that's the first point I want to make.

The second thing I would like to say is I don't think most people know this, even some of you may have forgotten, but in the 11th hour of the deficit reduction package negotiations in 1993, in order to get up to \$500 billion in cuts in the deficit projected over five years -- we did much better, as all of you know -- the cap was taken off. The income cap was taken off of the Medicare tax, which means virtually every single upper-income person in America will pay far more into the Medicare program than they will ever draw out in health care or benefits.

They are making a net significant contribution today because, unlike Social Security taxes where there is still an earnings cap, there is no longer an earnings cap on Medicare. And I think a lot of folks have forgotten that -- so that in that sense, this is the most progressive program we have. The upper-income people, particularly once you get over about \$250,000 in income, they're paying far more into this program over the course of their life than they could ever draw out if they were sick every day from the time they're 65 on.

Q Sir, a question --

THE PRESIDENT: I just don't think I should make an announcement about that. I am aware of what the Coast Guard has done and what they have found as of five minutes before I came out here. But I simply -- I just don't think it's appropriate for me -- I'll be glad to comment on whatever they want to say, but I think I should leave it for them to talk.

Q Sir, you talk about how expensive the Republican tax cuts would be. But the Congressional Budget Office has now just come out with a report saying that even with their tax cuts, almost \$800 billion in tax cuts, they would save about \$277 billion over a 10-year period, whereby your program would save only about \$50 billion. That's about \$227 billion difference. How do you reconcile that? And, you know, people on the Hill listen to the CBO.

THE PRESIDENT: They listen to the CBO except where it's inconvenient for them, like the patients' bill of rights. The Republicans have freed us all now to question the CBO, since they ignored the CBO in the patients' bill of rights; they have discredited their own CBO.

Let me say, I haven't seen that CBO accounting. All I can tell you is that all of our budget people were rolling their eyes and saying that it was a very creative study.

Let me just say this: You have six and a half years of experience with the numbers we have given you and the estimates we have made. And every single year, our numbers have not only been accurate, but we have done better than we said we would do -- every single year, for six and a half years now.

Our studies show that their tax cut over the next two decades will cost, first, a trillion dollars and then \$3 trillion in the second decade, and that -- then an enormous loss to the American people in interest savings. That is, we'll have to keep spending more and more of our tax money paying interest on the debt, and it will require huge cuts in education and defense and other things.

You cannot -- they simply cannot credibly make that statement. And they don't put any new money into the Medicare program. And they don't have a Medicare reform package out there. So unless they just simply propose to bankrupt all the teaching hospitals and a lot of the other hospitals in the country, and let the Medicare program wither away, as one of the previous leaders so eloquently put it -- they can't possibly finance this tax program without doing serious damage. I can't comment on the CBO study, but it doesn't make any sense to anybody I've talked to about it.

Q May I just follow up --

THE PRESIDENT: Yes.

Q The CBO estimates the cost of your Medicare reforms are more than twice what you say they are.

THE PRESIDENT: Well, again you have evidence. Let me just say this: In the 1997 Balanced Budget Agreement -- okay? -- and this is the reason all these teaching hospitals are in trouble today -- we agreed to a Medicare savings figure. And we said, okay, here is our health information -- this is what we do in the Executive Branch, we deal with these hospitals -- here are the changes you need to make in the Medicare program to achieve the savings that the Republicans and the Democrats in Congress and the White House agreed on.

And the CBO said, no, no, no, no, that won't come close; you need these changes plus these changes. And we said, okay, we're following the CBO, we put it in there. What happened? And that's one of the reasons the surplus is somewhat bigger than it otherwise would be -- the cuts in Medicare were far more severe, our numbers were right, their numbers were wrong and that's why you've got all these hospitals all over America, every place I go, talking about how they're threatened with bankruptcy.

So when it comes to estimating Medicare costs, again, we have evidence. And whenever there's been a difference between us and the CBO, we've been right and they've been wrong. That's all I can tell you. No serious person -- so what are they going to do about Medicare? They say our drug program will cost more -- they don't put a red cent into it. What are they going to do about it? Even if you don't have a drug program, if you adopt their tax cut program they won't be able to do anything to extend the solvency of Medicare and they will have to have huge cuts.

For them to produce those savings they are going to -- they can't even fund my defense budget, much less the one they say they want. They're going to have cuts in defense, cuts in education, cuts in the environment. That's all their savings assumed that they're going to stay with the present budget levels, which they, themselves, are trying to get out of even as we speak here today. So this is -- the American people are not -- I mean, this is not rocket science, this is arithmetic.

And we've been dealing with -- we went from creative supply-side mathematics to elemental arithmetic in 1993. And it has served us very well. And all I'm trying to do is stick with basic arithmetic and get this country out of debt, save Social Security and Medicare, provide this prescription drug benefit, keep us moving forward.

Q Mr. President?

THE PRESIDENT: Next. Let me take John's first, then I'll take you, Sarah.

Q Sir, in your conversation with Chairman Arafat this morning, did you ask him to take any specific steps to advance what you believe is new momentum toward peace, and did you discuss with him his complaints yesterday that he found Prime Minister Barak's 15-month timetable unacceptable?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, I told him only this. I said that -- I

generally described my meetings with Prime Minister Barak to him. I told him that he was committed to working in partnership with Chairman Arafat and honoring any agreements that had been made to this point, and that any modifications they made going forward to the benefit of either or both sides would have to be done by mutual agreement; that I thought he was completely committed to resolve all the issues outstanding in the peace process in an expeditious manner. And what I urged him to do was to have this one-on-one meeting, hear him out, think it through, and if he wanted to talk to me again after the meeting occurred, that I would be happy to talk to him.

So I went out of my way not to describe Prime Minister Barak's proposals or to advocate or not advocate, but simply to say that I was convinced they were being made in complete good faith, and that the peace process would be revitalized, and whatever they did from here on out is something that they would do together. And I think he felt good about that. And I did say, after you have the meeting, if you want to talk again about this -- I'll be glad to talk to you. And he said he did. So that's where we are.

Sarah. Go ahead, Sarah.

Q Sir, your microphone is not working apparently; it seems like you're talking very low, we can barely hear you. But in the meantime, don't you think it would be a good idea if we announced for the country's sake the list of conferences to be held at the White House each day, and the list of the people whom the President has appointments with?

THE PRESIDENT: I don't know. I never thought about it. Don't you have a list of the conferences we have every day here?

Q No, indeed. We do -- and what if we find out you haven't any?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, I think I ought to talk to our folks about it, but I will consider that.

Go ahead.

Q Will you be taking any concrete contributions with you to the Balkan summit on investment next week? And you've said that you would give only humanitarian aid to Yugoslavia as long as Milosevic is in power. Will you have any trouble defining that? Will that cause any problems in distinguishing between humanitarian and other aid?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, let me say that I hope very much that there will be some positive, concrete commitments that come out of the meeting that we're going to have. I do not believe -- I do not believe we can achieve the future we want in the Balkans and avoid future ethnic conflicts unless there is a unifying vision which both brings the Balkan states closer together in their economic and political self-interests, and then brings the region as a whole closer to Europe.

And so I think that we have to have some incentives to move in that direction. And there are direct -- there are also indirect things the United States can do to help to contribute to that goal. And because of all the other things that have been going on -- you know it's been a very busy two or three weeks -- we haven't actually had an opportunity to sit down and go through what our options are, so I can't give you a more specific answer.

But I will say this -- if what we have done in Bosnia, and what we have done in Kosovo, is to have lasting benefits, we have got to find a way to create closer unity among the Balkan states themselves, and then with the region and Europe. And that is what I am working on.

And what was the second question you asked?

Q On the humanitarian aid, how will you define it?

THE PRESIDENT: Oh, yes. There may be -- frankly, there may be some differences of opinion. As you know, I tend to take a rather narrow view of it because I don't think that we should, in effect, reward Mr. Milosevic's political control by doing things which are not humanitarian in nature. But based on the virtual daily reports I get about where we all are on this and where we are operating in Kosovo, I now no longer expect them to be big debates. I don't expect there will be a big difference of opinion.

Yes, go ahead, John.

Q Mr. President, the House of Representatives appears to be on the verge of terminating funding for the F-22 fighter. Will the White House fight hard for full funding for that program, even if it means sacrificing other Pentagon airplane programs or even pay for servicemen?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, I don't think we should sacrifice the pay for our service personnel because we now are getting back in the ball game in recruitment. You know, we've really been -- the good economy and the increased deployments and the low pay all combined we're making it hard for us to both recruit and retain people. And the people are still the most important part of our military -- their quality and their training and their morale and their commitment and the condition of their families. So I don't think that.

Now, the Congress every year puts other things into the defense budget which are not priorities for the Pentagon, and are priorities for the Congress. We can fund the F-22, we can fund the plane without compromising the basic priorities of our national defense within the funds set aside, and that is what I will fight to do. I think it would be a mistake to abandon the project. I think it has real potential to add to our national defense. I have always supported it and I hope that it can be preserved.

Q Thank you, Mr. President. You had some fun, recently, with George W. Bush and his slogan of "compassionate conservatism." But you went beyond the notion that he's not offering many details as policy, and seemed to ridicule his slogan and even question his sincerity. Were you just trying to help Mr. Gore's candidacy or were you taking the opportunity maybe to just needle the leading Republican candidate?

THE PRESIDENT: No, I was just having a little fun. (Laughter.) You know, that's a long time -- if we don't have any laughs it's going to be a very tedious struggle between now and November of 2000.

Let me say this. I think that every person struggles to find a phrase or something that will sort of stand for what he or she is trying to do. So I was really just having a little fun.

I think the most important thing is that all the candidates make their positions clear on the great debates going on now, and make their positions clear on what they would do if they got the job. To me, that's the most important thing. You know, I am not involved in this campaign as a candidate, and I have a full-time job, so I'm not involved in any sort of full-time consulting role. (Laughter.) So I look at this -- I look at this more from the point of view of the average American voter -- what will change the lives of America.

For example, every candidate should tell us, are you for the patients' bill of rights are you for closing the gun show loophole; are you for raising the minimum wage; are you for the House Republican tax plan, or do you favor our plan on Social Security and saving Social Security and Medicare and making America debt-free and having a smaller tax cut that enables us to continue to fund education and defense and these other things? What are you going to do if you get elected?

To me, the best thing the Vice President has done is to talk about dramatically intensifying the war on cancer, making pre-school universal, increasing access to college by helping people save without tax

consequences; what he would do to make America a safer country, what he would do in communities to have faith-based organizations cooperate with governments more. I think these are interesting ideas about how you build on the progress the country has made the last six and a half years.

So I would say to everyone -- you know, use whatever slogans you want, but tell us where you stand. I think that's the most important thing.

Susan?

Q Mr. President --

THE PRESIDENT: Yes, I'll come over here. I know I'm left leaning, but I will give you -- (laughter) --

Q Mr. President, the economy is going great. In a new USA Today-CNN poll this week, your approval rating was at a very healthy 58 percent. But that same poll showed that by 50 percent to 38 percent, Americans said they wanted to see a change from Clinton administration policies -- not a continuation of them. What do you think accounts for that sentiment for change, and do you think it means that you present something of a mixed blessing to Mrs. Clinton and Vice President Gore in their campaigns next year?

THE PRESIDENT: I think what that means people think things are going well, but they want a change in policy. I think that's right. If you asked me that question, and you worded it in that way, I'd be in the 50 percent, because I think that -- my own view is that, particularly in a dynamic time, where things are changing, you should want continued change. But is change -- the question is, should we change in a way that builds on what has been done and goes beyond it -- which is what I would argue -- or should you change and go back to the policies we were following when we had \$290-billion deficits and we averaged over 7 percent unemployment for 12 years. I mean, I think that's really the question the American people have to ask themselves.

I think change is good. The great thing about this country is that it works best when it's sort of in a perpetual stage of renewal. So I would, myself, as a citizen, I would vote against somebody who said, vote for me and I'll keep it just like it is; everything that Bill Clinton did is exactly what I'll do. I would vote against that candidate, because I do not believe that is the right thing to do.

But what I think we should do is we should build on the progress of the last six years and go beyond it, and not adopt a completely different approach which has been proven not to work. So all I want the American people to do is to remember what it was like before, think what

it's like now, recognize that ideas and policies have consequences. And the American people usually get it right; that's why we're all still around here after more than 200 years.

Q -- (inaudible.)

THE PRESIDENT: No.

Q -- for Mrs. Clinton and Mr. Gore?

THE PRESIDENT: No, because I -- no, he has done -- look at what the Vice President's done. He's staked out new issues here. He said, here's how I'm going to change what we're doing in cancer research; here's how I'm going to change what we're doing in education; here's how I'm going to change what we're doing in crime -- but not to reverse what we've done, but to build on it and go beyond it. So I think that's very, very -- that's the sort of thing that's worthy of debate. That's not the same; that is change.

What the American people have to decide is what kind of change do they want. Do they want to build on what has worked for the last six and a half years, or do they want to abandon it and go back to what failed them

for 12 years before. That will be the decision they have to make.

Yes, go ahead.

Q In your last press conference, sir, with Prime Minister Ehud Barak, you mentioned you wanted better, normalized relations with Syria. Now, have you received any response, positive response or indication from Syria towards that? And, on Iran, can you share with us the administration's views of -- events and administrations in Iran? Thank you.

THE PRESIDENT: Well, on Syria let me say, the only thing I can tell you is that the statements, at least, that have been coming out of Syria have been quite encouraging in terms of the regard that President Assad seems to have for Prime Minister Barak, and the willingness, the openness that there is to negotiating and moving toward peace. So I'm encouraged by that.

And on Iran, frankly, I'm reluctant to say anything for fear that it will be used in a way that's not helpful to the forces of openness and reform. I think that people everywhere, particularly younger people, hope that they will be able to pursue their religious convictions and their personal dreams in an atmosphere of greater freedom, that still allows them to be deeply loyal to their nation. And I think the Iranian people obviously love their country and are proud of its history and have enormous potential. And I just hope they find a way to work through all this, and I believe they will.

Q You mentioned the patients' bill of rights. It seems like that was an argument by both parties over providing more for people who already are lucky enough to have health insurance. And, in fact, neither party dealt with some very fundamental issues that energized you and the First Lady five and six years ago. The question is, with such a robust economy and the budget surpluses, if not now, when, and if not you, who, would provide the leadership to provide for those folks?

THE PRESIDENT: Yes, but I think the bigger question is how. That is, it is true that just as we've predicted in 1993 and 1994, that the percentage of people who have health insurance on the job is going down, just as we said it would, if nothing was done. So what we have tried to do is to isolate discrete populations that seem to be most in need and try to offer them help.

In the Balanced Budget Act of 1997, we reached bipartisan agreement on a proposal that would fund providing health insurance for up to 5 million more children through state-designed programs. Now, I've been a little disappointed -- and I'm not being critical of any of the states, either, here -- but I've been a little disappointed that the uptake on the program has been a little slow. That is, I would have thought by now we'd have almost 3 million of those 5 million children enrolled already, because we've got the money there, and we're well behind that.

So we are looking at whether there are things that we can do at the national level to work with the states to simplify access to the children's health insurance programs that the states have set up. But -- and I also had a talk with Senator Kennedy, the other day who believes that for little or no more extra money, we could actually adjust the program and take in several million more children. So the children are the biggest group.

Then, I have a proposal, as you know, that's part of my Medicare reform proposal that I didn't mention today, but I want to reiterate it, that would allow the most vulnerable group of people without health insurance, people between the ages of 55 and 65, to buy into the Medicare system in a way that would not compromise the integrity of the system. So I think that is quite important.

In addition to that, there are a lot of states -- there are some states -- Tennessee was the first state to do this under the former

governor -- they started it -- which are allowing lower-income working families to buy into their Medicaid programs on a sliding scale.

So if all these things were done, we would dramatically reduce the number of people without health insurance and we'll eventually probably get down to, if we keep pushing in this direction, get down to the point where the largest group of people without health insurance are young, single people who believe that they're going to live forever and be healthy forever and don't want to bear the cost. And we'll have to think about, then, what to do.

But I think the best thing to do is try to get as many kids as we can covered, and then try to get these people who are out of the work force who are older, but they're not old enough to get Medicare, to get them at least where they can all afford on a sliding scale to buy into the Medicare program.

Go ahead, Scott.

Q Thank you, Mr. President. On the Kennedy tragedy, sir, will you authorize the Navy to participate in a burial at sea ceremony? Why do you believe it's justified to spend so many federal resources on this tragedy? And, finally, sir, I wonder if you would give us your thoughts on Mr. Kennedy's last visit here to the White House. I understand you and the First Lady took him on a tour.

THE PRESIDENT: Well, we have received -- I have received no official word, personal word from the family what burial arrangements they want. Until they make a statement about it, I just don't feel that I can say anything.

Secondly, I will say that until just a couple of days ago the recovery efforts -- the rescue, then the recovery efforts that were undertaken were consistent with what would have been done in any other case. Because the Coast Guard felt that they had the capacity to succeed in this if they had a few more days, and because of the role of the Kennedy family in our national lives, and because of the enormous losses that they have sustained in our lifetimes, I thought it was appropriate to give them a few more days. And if anyone believes that was wrong, the Coast Guard is not at fault; I am. It was because I thought it was the right thing to do under the circumstances.

Now, you asked about -- John Kennedy had actually not been back to the White House since his father was killed, until I became President. First, he was on an advisory committee that made a report to me and he came back to the Oval Office, where he saw the desk that he took the famous picture in, coming through the gate, for the first time since he was a little boy.

And then last year -- maybe you would have a better memory than I would, but it seems to me it was last May, when we had the event at the White House celebrating the series that HBO did on the Apollo program. Do you remember they did a series on the space program that was done after the movie came out? And Tom Hanks came, a lot of people came. And he was invited because of his father's role in starting the space program. And he and Carolyn came. And afterward I asked them if they would like to go upstairs, and he said he would. So I took him upstairs and showed him the residence, which he'd not seen since he was a tiny boy.

And I showed him some of my -- the memorabilia that I had from his father's service. I have a picture of his father speaking to the Irish Parliament, and a number of other things which he thought were very interesting. And we took a -- we had a very nice evening. And I sent him the pictures from it. And then, in return, he sent me a signed copy of his favorite picture of his father, which is now upstairs. It's John Kennedy campaigning in Virginia, in Charlottesville in 1960. It's quite a lovely picture -- interesting picture.

But it was a nice night. I think that he really wanted to kind

of come to terms with all of it. And I think he and Carolyn, they were delightful young people, and they had a great time here that night. And Hillary and I loved having them here. It was quite a great night.

Q To just follow on that, sir, just one question, if I may. Is there anything that Mr. Kennedy said to you that night that particularly struck you?

THE PRESIDENT: We just had a friendly conversation. You know, I knew him pretty well by then. We'd been -- I met him years ago when he was a law student, doing a summer internship with Mickey Kantor's law firm out in Los Angeles, long before I ever thought I'd be here and before I ever thought we'd have any other contacts. He just happened to be -- Mickey asked me if I'd speak to his law clerks, because I was in LA to give an education speech, and I went by and visited with them and he was there. And we had been together on many occasions since then.

The thing that struck me was I thought he was -- he said he was glad to be back. And I think he -- he was a very deliberate person, as many people have noticed, about when he would be publicly exposed and all of that. He had his mother's care for having a private life. And I think that he had not -- I'm not sure he had really felt he wanted to come back to the White House before he did. But especially in light of everything that's happened, I'm glad he had the chance to come back here one more time and see the residence and know where he was when he was a little boy. I'm glad he did that. I'm grateful that that happened.

Yes, go ahead. Yes, yes, please.

Q On Colombia, the Pastrana administration are asking the United States for \$500 million to support the military against the guerrillas. Is your administration ready to respond to that request? And, also, the Colombians are asking for more direct intervention from the United States. Are you considering this possibility? And, also, Mexico, you're going to meet with President Zedillo in October. And the Mexican government is still rejecting the extraditions of major drug lords. What are you going to ask him -- you're going to get assurance from him to extradite these big narcotic traffickers to the United States?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, you know, we had no extraditions between Mexico and the United States for a long time, and we've actually had some now. So we're moving in the right direction. And President Zedillo and I have been pretty successful in continuing to move our relationship in the right direction, so we'll work on that.

On Colombia, I'm not prepared to make any kind of dollar commitment today. But let me say, I have stayed in close touch with President Pastrana, and I admire the fact that he has really thrown himself into trying to end the civil conflicts in Colombia, to stop the insurgency. The people in the United States have a real interest in that because I think that until the civil discord in Colombia is brought to an end, it is going to be much, much harder for us to restrain the activities of the narco-traffickers there, and their reach.

So, in addition to wanting a neighbor and a democracy in Latin America to be free of the kind of violence and heartbreak that the Colombian people have undergone because of this, it is also very much in our national security interest to do what we can, if we can be helpful in ending the civil conflict so that Colombia can be about the business of freeing itself of the influence of the narco-traffickers in ways that would be good for Colombians and good for us as well.

Q Another question about the presidential race. Aside from asking George W. Bush to come forward and give specifics on the issues that you mentioned, could you tell us what you find objectionable about his trying to present a new moderate face for his party, just like you did for the Democrats? And could you tell us whether you're worried whether he will figure out how the Republicans can occupy the center of American politics?

THE PRESIDENT: No.

Q You don't think he can?

THE PRESIDENT: No, no, I don't think I'll answer those questions. (Laughter.) I will say -- no, look, let me say again, I wouldn't even agree with the characterization you gave of my first answer.

When I ran for President, in 1991, the first thing I did was tell the American people what I thought was going on in our country and what I would do. And if you remember, the late Senator Paul Tsongas and I were actually almost ridiculed at the time because we both put out these very detailed plans of what we would do. If you go back and get one of those plans now, you'll see that virtually everything we said we'd do we did do, except for the things we tried to do and were defeated on.

And my view is that there are a lot of things that count in a presidential election toward a successful presidency, but it is -- that go beyond specific issues, and judgment plays a role in it, and crises will always come up and things can be learned and all that. But it really matters where you stand on the big issues that everybody knows about that are going on right now, and it matters where we're going in the future.

So that's the only point I want to make. And I think any -- I would say that applies to every candidate. I don't want to answer the questions you ask me because that's not my job. My job is not to handicap this horse race, not to comment on it, not to comment on the candidates. My job is to work for the American people. But I'm going to answer these questions from the point of view of Joe Citizen. That's -- every political question you asked me from now on, I'm going to pretend that I'm living back in Little Rock already and I'm working on my presidential library and I'm sitting here as a voter saying, where do they stand, what will they do -- all of them. And I do believe the Vice President has done the best job of telling the American people what he would do and -- to go back to Susan's formulation -- how he would change the country in a positive way.

George.

Q Mr. President, as the nation has celebrated the 30th anniversary of the moon landing, a lot of the former astronauts have lamented that no President after Kennedy set a kind of national goal like President Kennedy did of landing on the moon. Do you think that -- in your view, is the country not receptive today to that kind of goal-setting by a President, or is it something a President should do, set a goal of landing on Mars?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, we are planning to land on Mars. But I think -- for one thing, when I became President, the space program was actually in peril. And we -- the space station was certainly at risk. And I have fought for it and I believe in it. And one of the things I talked to -- Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin and Michael Collins were in to see me yesterday, and we talked about where we could go with this. And Dan Goldin was there, the NASA Administrator; and Dr. Neal Lane, my Science Advisor. And we talked about how we could use the coming of the millennium as -- you know, the First Lady sponsored all these other lectures here. And I told him about Stephen Hawking's lecture and what he said. And we talked yesterday about how we could set some goals for the space program, capture the imagination of the American people and broaden the support for it.

And one of the things that I suggested that I think would be quite helpful that we're going to work on now is what we can do to dramatize for the American people -- you mentioned Mars, but I think what is more likely to capture the imagination of the American people are the benefits to us here on Earth of continued advances in space. And some of them, particularly in the health field, are likely to be breath-taking. They're principally in the area of the environment and health.

So I asked our people to start working on that and they said they

would be willing to help us. I have to tell you that it was a great day for me yesterday to have them come by the White House. They also gave me a moon rock, by the way -- but only on loan. (Laughter.) And the moon rock is 3.6 billion years old. So when I feel very tired, I'll look at it and feel young again. (Laughter.)

Yes, go ahead. We had an Irish question first, I promised. Go ahead, what's the Irish question?

Q Thank you, sir. Given the --

THE PRESIDENT: You want to ask one, too?

Q We both have a -- given the various meetings underway with Mo Mowlam here, and George Mitchell there, has any progress been made on the Irish situation? And is one side more to blame than the other on it?

THE PRESIDENT: Okay. Why don't we take both Irish questions at once. What's your Irish question?

Q Last week, you seemed to kind of get fired up when you were talking to the teenagers from Colorado. You said that the politicians in Northern Ireland were behaving akin to school children. Do you feel, after all the work that you've done on this project, that perhaps it was misplaced and you should have perhaps pushed in a place more like Africa, where they have thousands of people dying from ethnic strife, instead of 3,500 over 30 years?

Q And if I can have a third Irish question, what role, if any, do you expect to play, Mr. President, in breaking the deadlock?

THE PRESIDENT: Okay, let me answer the Irish questions, then I'll come back to the "should we have done something else."

I've talked to Senator Mitchell, and he is willing to spend some time -- he can't go back full-time for another year or two, but I'd like to put this in some -- at least I'd like to tell you how I look at it.

Obviously, I am very disappointed at the breakdown of the process here. But I do think it's important to note that neither side wants to abandon the Good Friday Agreement. And that's very important. It's also important to note that everybody agrees on what their responsibilities are and what the other side's responsibilities are, and everybody agrees that it all has to be done by a date certain.

So they have agreed to break out the two areas causing problems, the decommissioning and the standing up to the executive, and try to figure out how they can unlock that, and Mo Mowlam, as you pointed out, is working hard on it, and they've asked Senator Mitchell to come back and do some work on it, and my instinct is that it will be resolved.

Now, let me say in terms of your characterization, here's the problem. To the outsiders -- I told the parties that to the outsiders -- no one, none of us outside, even somebody like me that's been so involved in this, no one will understand if this thing breaks down over who goes first; that that did sound like the kind of argument that young people have, you know -- who goes first.

Underneath that, there's something deeper: The Protestants are afraid that they IRA will never disarm if they let the Sinn Fein go into the executive branch, and the IRA do not believe -- since the agreement did not require decommissioning as a condition of getting into the executive branch, they don't want to have to spend the rest of their lives being told that it wasn't the vote of the people, it wasn't the Good Friday Accord, it was what the Unionists and Great Britain did to force them to give up their arms that got them to disarm. They believe that would, in effect, require them to disavow what they've done for 30 years.

And what they're saying is, when we surrender our arms, we're surrendering to our people. Our people voted for this. We are

surrendering to the will of the people that we represent. So when you put it in that textured way on both sides, it makes it clear why it becomes a difficult issue. And I can't think of anybody better to try to work through it than George Mitchell, because he's got it all in his head and he's put three years into it. But my instinct is that we will get this worked out.

Now, you asked about did I think we had misplaced our energies. I don't think so. We have -- for one thing, we don't have a stronger partner in the world than Great Britain, and for another, we don't have a bigger ethnic group in America than the Irish, and we're tied by blood and emotion to the Irish struggle.

I also think that it has enormous symbolism, beyond the size of the country and the number who have died. And if it can be resolved, I think it will give great impetus to the forces of peace throughout the world. So I don't believe for a moment we made a mistake.

But let me also say I think we should be more involved in Africa and I've tried to involve us more in Africa. I did everything I could to head off that civil war between Ethiopia and Eritrea. It's not a civil war, they are two separate countries, but they once were together and they're basically now arguing over the divorce settlement. And I don't mean to trivialize it in that characterization. And we are still actively involved in trying to stop that.

Reverend Jackson played a significant role in trying to end the awful carnage in Sierra Leone, and I'm very grateful for that. We're now working, and we're able to work with Nigeria to try to stabilize the region. We are training African militaries and the Africa Crisis Response Corps, so that we can, hopefully, prevent further carnage. So I believe the United States should be more involved in Africa.

And, of course, the announcement that the Vice President made on our behalf the other day of our new AIDS initiative in some ways may be the most important thing we can do to save lives there.

So I agree that we should be more involved. But I don't agree that we misplaced our energies in Ireland. I'm proud of every late-night phone call and every frustrating hour I've spent on it.

THE PRESIDENT: Yes, go ahead.

Q -- can I ask about you --

THE PRESIDENT: Well, I don't want to talk about me.

Q Oh, come on.

THE PRESIDENT: I'm not a candidate for anything.

Go ahead, what? Go ahead. All right, one more.

Q Listen, Mr. President, with due respect, in another development, I know that you are for Africa, and you know that I support -- Africa, my friend, the President of the Dominican Republic -- we are Afro-Latino. But I am not concerned at this moment about Mars. I am concerned about place where I have been for 20 years, the White House, that is going to celebrate 200 year next year. I wonder if you would tell the people of the United States what you are going to plan for that big celebration?

And another thing, Mr. President -- I am disgusted with you -- you have been hiding something extraordinary -- the performance -- or the trade promotional coordinating committee that has been carried out in the last year -- are the participants in the prospective of this economy. Why don't you speak about the success of that initiative? It's a sin that you -- you talk about a lot of things that is -- another thing that is good for America and the world.

THE PRESIDENT: Well, a lot of the things that are good for America don't make good news for them, you see.

Q And I have a follow-up. (Laughter.)

THE PRESIDENT: No, let me just say -- (laughter) -- a follow-up? (Laughter.) Now, that's really good. That is really -- Oh, God, is that good.

Let me just say that we will have a lot of celebrations of the 200th birthday of the White House next year, and it's neat that coincides with the first year of the new century and the millennium. So we'll have -- I'm not prepared to announce them yet, because I want others who deserve more credit than I do to be able to do that. But it will be a signal honor for us to be living here in that year, and we'll be able to do a lot -- and I hope we'll have even more American citizens coming to the White House next year to be a part of it.

Go ahead. Just that follow up -- that showed a lot of guts. (Laughter.) If this is a follow up, I'll give you another question. (Laughter.)

Q Sir, you've stressed that you have plenty to do, and yet for some time, your political career has enjoyed the benefits of support from two people in particular -- the Vice President and the First Lady -- two people who are now in a position to expect some support from you. I'm wondering what you feel you owe those two people in terms of political support, and as you plan your schedule in the weeks and months ahead, how you'll balance that assistance against your job as President, and finally, how you personally are adjusting to what people might think is an interesting shift in role.

Q I have a follow-up to his question. (Laughter.)

THE PRESIDENT: Now, I believe that. (Laughter.)

Well, I will do whatever I'm asked to do, basically. I'll try to be helpful. And if I can be helpful, I will be. But I think the best thing I can do for anyone who generally shares our ideas, is part of our party, trying to move the country forward, is to continue to be a good President and take care of our country.

But I don't mind hard work and I don't mind long hours, and I find myself, apparently unlike some of my predecessors -- but just read what you all say about it -- but I don't feel myself winding down, I feel myself keying up. I want to do more. I want to try to make sure that I give the American people as much as I can every day. So I've got plenty of energy and I'll do whatever I'm asked to do.

I owe them a great deal. I think Al Gore -- everybody in this room knows that he's had far more responsibility and gotten more done than any Vice President in history. Nobody's ever had a role that even approximates that. I don't think the American people know that yet, but I know that. And he deserves a lot of credit for what he's done and he has my friendship and my support. But I also think that it's a mixed blessing, as you say, because people want to see any Vice President out there on his own. If you go back and look at where Richard Nixon was in 1959, you will see the same sort of thing. So I think I see this as a rhythmic process.

I think he'll do fine. But the reason I think that has nothing to do with the questions you ask me. The reasons I think that are, A, he's a good man with a good record, but most importantly, he's out there telling the American people how he would change the country for the better. And I think that's important.

I did an interview and I talked about Hillary and this -- if she decides to do this I will do whatever I can do. And if she's successful I will happily go to the Senate spouses meeting if that's part of the job. I

have never known anybody who didn't run for office who was a more effective, more consistently committed, completely passionate public citizen than her. So if she decides to do it, and if the people of New York decide that they want her to do it, that's a decision for them to make and they have to deal with that, and she's trying to deal with that, you know, the whole question of moving there.

It is true that shortly after we came here I said, you get to decide where we live from now on for the rest of our lives. And she said, I want to go to New York -- in, like, '93. This is just something that happened later. So I'll be dividing my time between home -- I'm going to go home and build my library and build my center -- I'll divide my time between there and New York, whatever she does about this Senate race.

But if I can help her in any way, I will, because I think it would be a great thing for the country -- not only because of what I owe her, because she just -- what she knows and how she's lived and what she's done. I mean, it's very unusual to find somebody like that who has that much knowledge and background and passion all packed into one place. I mean, I know that you think I'm a biased observer, but I think I could support it with evidence.

Go ahead, Bill.

Q In that same vein, sir -- (laughter) -- as the spotlight shifts from you to your Vice President and to your wife, are you likely to be content, drifting slowly offstage, or do you think that someday you will want to run for office, some office again? Or are you willing to tell us this afternoon, sir, that you will never again run for elective office?

THE PRESIDENT: I don't have any idea. (Laughter.) Really, I don't know. Let me just say this. I love this job. I love it. Even on the bad days -- you can do something good for the country, you can do something good for the future. I have loved doing this. And I have given it every ounce of my energy and ability and judgment. And I feel very fortunate. But we have a system that I, frankly, agree with, even though I'm in pretty good shape -- we have a system that says a President gets two terms and then the President has to go find something else to do with his life. And there are lots of other worthy things to do.

And I was a very happy person before I became President. I never have had any trouble finding something interesting to do that I believed in. And I will do my best to use the opportunity and the gift the American people gave me to serve in this position to be a useful citizen of my country and the world for the rest of my life, and I have no doubt that there will be some way I can do that. And I'm, frankly, kind of excited about it. I mean, it's a new challenge. I'll have to think in a different way and do a different way.

Will I miss a lot of the things about this job? Yes. I'll even miss all of you, believe it or not. But I'm just grateful that I've had the chance to serve and that the results have been good for our people and for our country and I think for the world.

And, you know, that's part of life. Life has its rhythms. And the people that are most satisfied and most happy in life take the rhythms of life and make the most of them, instead of sitting around moping and wishing the rhythms were something other than they are. That's just not the way the life works. And, listen, I'm way ahead and I'm very grateful.

Thank you very much.

END

3:45 P.M. EDT

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TEXT:

THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary

For Immediate Release
1999

July 21,

PRESS CONFERENCE BY THE PRESIDENT

The East Room

2:35 P.M. EDT

THE PRESIDENT: Good afternoon.

Q Mr. President, you don't know it, but there is such a bright light on you -- we can't see you for the light. (Laughter.)

THE PRESIDENT: I've been waiting a long time for the halo to appear. (Laughter.)

Let me say, ladies and gentlemen, I have a brief opening statement, but before I make that and take questions, I'd like to say that, as you might imagine, I have been briefed on this morning's developments in the search off Martha's Vineyard. Again, let me commend the Coast Guard and all the officials at the local, state and national level for the fine work they have done under extremely difficult circumstances.

Again, I think we should keep our thoughts with the families as events unfold, and my thoughts and prayers are with them.

Today I want to make a brief statement about the choice we face here in Washington and in our country about how best to move forward into the new century and what to do with the surplus. When we look toward the future, it is helpful to remember at least the recent past. Six and a half years ago, the budget deficit was \$290 billion and rising. Wages were stagnant, inequality was growing, social conditions were worsening.

In the 12 years before I took office, unemployment averaged more than 7 percent. It's almost difficult to remember what it was like. No one really thought we could turn it around, let alone bring unemployment to a 29-year low, or turn decades of deficits, during which time the debt of our country was quadrupled in only 12 years, into a surplus of \$99 billion.

Our nation has made a seismic shift in the last six years, from recession to recovery, from a crisis of confidence to a renewal of resolve, from economic disorder to a fiscal house finally in order. Now as we debate what to do with our prosperity, we face a critical choice -- whether to move forward with the fiscal discipline that got us to where we are today, or return to the kind of risk-taking that got us into recessions and deficits before.

We must decide whether to invest the surplus, to strengthen America over the long-term, or to squander it for the short-term. I think the right course is clear. And a bigger surplus only means that the mistake could be bigger, and the missed opportunity greater if we take the wrong course.

I have proposed a balanced budget that puts first things first.

I believe we must maintain our sound economic strategy, and invest the surplus in long-term goals -- saving Social Security, saving and strengthening Medicare, modernizing it by providing a long overdue drug benefit, and continuing to meet our basic responsibilities in education, defense, the environment, biomedical research.

Tomorrow I will release a report that shows a great and growing need for prescription drug coverage. What the study shows is that 75 percent of our older Americans lack decent, dependable private-sector coverage of prescription drugs. That's three out of every four seniors. Clearly, America needs a prescription drug plan that is simple, universal and voluntary. Anyone who says we don't I believe is out of date and out of touch.

As I've described, my plan meets these national priorities, while paying off the debt by 2015; while investing in America's new markets, the places that have not yet felt our prosperity; and while providing substantial tax relief -- \$250 billion of it targeted to help families save for retirement, pay for child care, long-term care, for modern schools.

So let's be clear about something. We're not debating whether to have tax cuts or not -- we should have tax cuts, but tax cuts that provide for us first to save Social Security and Medicare, not undermine them; tax cuts we can afford, not ones that would demand drastic cuts in defense, education, agriculture, the environment; tax cuts in the national interest, not special interest.

Now, these are the risks that are posed by the Republican tax plan that the House is about to vote on. Let me tell you what their plan would do. It would pile up \$3 trillion in debt over the next two decades, right when the baby boomers start to retire -- that's what it costs -- right when Social Security and Medicare feel the crunch.

Because of the cost of the tax plan over the next two decades, I should say what it doesn't do. It doesn't do anything to extend the solvency of Social Security, to extend the solvequire significant -- significant -- cuts from where we are today in education, defense, biomedical research, the environment and other critical areas.

If we don't save Social Security it's not because we can't. If we don't strengthen Medicare and add the prescription drug benefit, it's not because we can't. If we don't meet these clear national needs, it's because we choose not to do so. It will be because, instead, we choose to reward ourselves today by risking our prosperity tomorrow.

I hope Congress will make the right choice. When members cast their ballots on the Republican tax plan, they're really voting also on whether to save Social Security and Medicare. They're voting on whether to pay off the national debt for the first time in over 150 years -- something that would guarantee us lower interest rates, higher investment, more jobs, higher incomes, and for average citizens, lower home mortgage payments, car payments, credit card payments, college loan payments.

They're voting whether to meet our most pressing national priorities in education, defense, nearly every other domain in our people's lives. I think the choice is clear between the plan the Republican leadership has outlined and the national priorities of the American people. I hope we can still work together across party lines to save Social Security and Medicare, to safeguard our priorities and have the right kind of tax cut.

If Congress passes the wrong kind, of course, I will not sign it. I will not allow a risky plan to become law. And as I said, we now have six and a half years of evidence. This is not really a debate that's just about ideas without any evidence. We clearly know what works now, and we ought to stay with it.

As I said, I will work with any member of any party willing to put first things first. We can have a tax cut and do the right thing for

the long-term in America. That is my commitment, and I hope that together we can fulfill it for our people.

Thank you very much. Helen.

Q Mr. President, in U.S. treaty relations, is it obligated to defend Taiwan militarily if it abandons the one China policy? And would the U.S. continue military aid if it pursues separatism?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, let me say, first of all, a lot of those questions are governed by the Taiwan Relations Act, which we intend to honor. Our policy is clear: We favor the one China policy; we favor the cross-strait dialogues. The understanding we have had all along with both China and Taiwan is that the differences between them would be resolved peacefully. If that were not to be the case, under the Taiwan Relations Act we would be required to view it with the gravest concern.

But I believe that both China and Taiwan understand this. I believe that they want to stay on a path to prosperity and dialogue. And we have dispatched people today, as the morning press reports, to do what we can to press that case to all sides. This is something that we don't want to see escalate, and I believe that what Mr. Lee said yesterday was trying to move in that direction. We all understand how difficult this is, but I think that the pillars of the policy are still the right ones. The one China policy is right; the cross-strait dialogue is right; the peaceful approach is right. And neither side, in my judgment, should depart from any of those elements.

Q So we would still have to go to war with China if it decided to break away?

THE PRESIDENT: I will say what I've already said -- the Taiwan Relations Act governs our policy. We made it clear. And I have -- as you remember, a few years ago we had a physical expression of that, that we don't believe there should be any violent attempts to resolve this, and we would view it very seriously. But I don't believe there will be. I think that both sides understands what needs to be done.

Terry?

Q Mr. President, do you think that President Lee was unnecessarily provocative in trying to redefine the nature of the Taiwan-Chinese relationship? And is the United States trying to send a signal by delaying a Pentagon mission which was going to Taiwan to assess its air defense needs? And, further, finally, you said that you still believe in a one China policy. How do you address Senator Helms' criticism that that policy is "a puzzling fiction"?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, I don't think it's a puzzling fiction. But if Senator Helms means that today they're not, in fact, unified, then that's true. But the Chinese tend to take a long view of these things and have made clear a sensitivity to the different system that exists on Taiwan, and a willingness to find ways to accommodate it, as they did in working with Hong Kong, and, perhaps, even going beyond that.

So I think the important thing is to let -- they need to take the time necessary to work this out between themselves in a peaceful way. That is clearly in both their interests. And I'm still not entirely sure, because I have read things which seem to resonate both ways on this, exactly what the Lee statements were entitled -- trying to convey.

But I think that both sides are now quite aware of the fact that they need to find a way to pursue their destinies within the framework that we have followed these last several years, which I might add, has allowed both places to prosper and to grow, to do better and to have more contacts, more investment, and underneath the rhetoric, quite a bit more reconciliation. So I would hope that we would stay with what is working and not depart from it.

Q Is that the meaning of the delay of the Pentagon mission to assess the --

THE PRESIDENT: I didn't think this was the best time to do something which might excite either one side or the other and imply that a military solution is an acceptable alternative. If you really think about what's at stake here, it would be unthinkable. And I want -- I don't want to depart from any of the three pillars. I think we need to stay with one China; I think we need to stay with the dialogue; and I think that no one should contemplate force here.

Randy.

Q Economists have been calling on you to indicate now whether you intend to reappoint Alan Greenspan in order to avoid having the issue to become mired in election year politics and upsetting financial markets next year. Would you like to see the Chairman stay on, and has he given you any indication of his plans?

THE PRESIDENT: I have, as you know, enjoyed a very good relationship, both personally and professionally, with Mr. Greenspan. I think he has done a terrific job. I have no idea whether he would even be willing to serve another term. I will make the decision in a timely fashion. I do not expect it to become embroiled in election year politics; there's no evidence of that.

You heard -- I think the Vice President said yesterday or the day before that he thought he was doing an excellent job. So we believe that as long as the United States is fiscally responsible, then the Fed will respond to developments in our own economy and in the world economy in a way that is clear, transparent, and I think designed to keep our growth going. So I'm not concerned about it.

Peter, go ahead.

Q -- I think the Vice President indicated he was sending a signal by saying that Chairman Greenspan had been doing an excellent job. Do you endorse that interpretation?

THE PRESIDENT: I don't know, all I know is he said he was doing a great job, and I agree with him.

Go ahead.

Q Mr. President, you mentioned the Kennedy tragedy at the beginning of the news conference. Could you please give us a better understanding of what the White House role has been in the conduct of the recovery operation and the decision-making on the release of information about it?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, I think that -- I am unaware of any role we have played in the decision-making of the release of information, except, let me say that today a lot of things are breaking in a hurry, and I believe there are some decisions that ought to be announced by the Kennedy family, and others that ought to be properly announced by either the Coast Guard or the NTSB.

So we have not tried -- to the best of my knowledge, had any role in the timing or substance of release of information. And we have had no role in the conduct of the operation except that I did talk to Admiral Larrabee, I think it was the day before yesterday, at a time when the operation might normally have ceased, and he said, I think we have a chance to find something else because of the equipment we have here, even though it's difficult and I'm inclined to believe because of the circumstances here and because who's involved that we ought to go on a little more. And I said that I would support it and defend it. And I think it was the right decision.

Q Mr. President, if you'll allow me to ask about two different

topics. On the Kennedy search, sir, there have been conflicting reports about whether or not Mr. Kennedy's body has, in fact, been recovered. I understand that based upon the answer you just gave, that might not be a question that you'd want to address, but, perhaps, given the fact that there is this conflicting information you could answer that question.

And, secondly, sir, on this notion of a drug benefit, prescription drug benefit, you chided the Republicans about targeting tax cuts at the wealthy, saying that they're too steered in that direction. How do you reconcile that philosophically with allowing rich Americans, rich older Americans, to get a prescription drug benefit which even you just said this new study will show one in four don't need?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, first of all, it's voluntary. And most wealthy Americans are well taken care of under the present program they have and won't exercise it. So that's the first point I want to make.

The second thing I would like to say is I don't think most people know this, even some of you may have forgotten, but in the 11th hour of the deficit reduction package negotiations in 1993, in order to get up to \$500 billion in cuts in the deficit projected over five years -- we did much better, as all of you know -- the cap was taken off. The income cap was taken off of the Medicare tax, which means virtually every single upper-income person in America will pay far more into the Medicare program than they will ever draw out in health care or benefits.

They are making a net significant contribution today because, unlike Social Security taxes where there is still an earnings cap, there is no longer an earnings cap on Medicare. And I think a lot of folks have forgotten that -- so that in that sense, this is the most progressive program we have. The upper-income people, particularly once you get over about \$250,000 in income, they're paying far more into this program over the course of their life than they could ever draw out if they were sick every day from the time they're 65 on.

Q Sir, a question --

THE PRESIDENT: I just don't think I should make an announcement about that. I am aware of what the Coast Guard has done and what they have found as of five minutes before I came out here. But I simply -- I just don't think it's appropriate for me -- I'll be glad to comment on whatever they want to say, but I think I should leave it for them to talk.

Q Sir, you talk about how expensive the Republican tax cuts would be. But the Congressional Budget Office has now just come out with a report saying that even with their tax cuts, almost \$800 billion in tax cuts, they would save about \$277 billion over a 10-year period, whereby your program would save only about \$50 billion. That's about \$227 billion difference. How do you reconcile that? And, you know, people on the Hill listen to the CBO.

THE PRESIDENT: They listen to the CBO except where it's inconvenient for them, like the patients' bill of rights. The Republicans have freed us all now to question the CBO, since they ignored the CBO in the patients' bill of rights; they have discredited their own CBO.

Let me say, I haven't seen that CBO accounting. All I can tell you is that all of our budget people were rolling their eyes and saying that it was a very creative study.

Let me just say this: You have six and a half years of experience with the numbers we have given you and the estimates we have made. And every single year, our numbers have not only been accurate, but we have done better than we said we would do -- every single year, for six and a half years now.

Our studies show that their tax cut over the next two decades will cost, first, a trillion dollars and then \$3 trillion in the second decade, and that -- then an enormous loss to the American people in

interest savings. That is, we'll have to keep spending more and more of our tax money paying interest on the debt, and it will require huge cuts in education and defense and other things.

You cannot -- they simply cannot credibly make that statement. And they don't put any new money into the Medicare program. And they don't have a Medicare reform package out there. So unless they just simply propose to bankrupt all the teaching hospitals and a lot of the other hospitals in the country, and let the Medicare program wither away, as one of the previous leaders so eloquently put it -- they can't possibly finance this tax program without doing serious damage. I can't comment on the CBO study, but it doesn't make any sense to anybody I've talked to about it.

Q May I just follow up --

THE PRESIDENT: Yes.

Q The CBO estimates the cost of your Medicare reforms are more than twice what you say they are.

THE PRESIDENT: Well, again you have evidence. Let me just say this: In the 1997 Balanced Budget Agreement -- okay? -- and this is the reason all these teaching hospitals are in trouble today -- we agreed to a Medicare savings figure. And we said, okay, here is our health information -- this is what we do in the Executive Branch, we deal with these hospitals -- here are the changes you need to make in the Medicare program to achieve the savings that the Republicans and the Democrats in Congress and the White House agreed on.

And the CBO said, no, no, no, no, that won't come close; you need these changes plus these changes. And we said, okay, we're following the CBO, we put it in there. What happened? And that's one of the reasons the surplus is somewhat bigger than it otherwise would be -- the cuts in Medicare were far more severe, our numbers were right, their numbers were wrong and that's why you've got all these hospitals all over America, every place I go, talking about how they're threatened with bankruptcy.

So when it comes to estimating Medicare costs, again, we have evidence. And whenever there's been a difference between us and the CBO, we've been right and they've been wrong. That's all I can tell you. No serious person -- so what are they going to do about Medicare? They say our drug program will cost more -- they don't put a red cent into it. What are they going to do about it? Even if you don't have a drug program, if you adopt their tax cut program they won't be able to do anything to extend the solvency of Medicare and they will have to have huge cuts.

For them to produce those savings they are going to -- they can't even fund my defense budget, much less the one they say they want. They're going to have cuts in defense, cuts in education, cuts in the environment. That's all their savings assumed that they're going to stay with the present budget levels, which they, themselves, are trying to get out of even as we speak here today. So this is -- the American people are not -- I mean, this is not rocket science, this is arithmetic.

And we've been dealing with -- we went from creative supply-side mathematics to elemental arithmetic in 1993. And it has served us very well. And all I'm trying to do is stick with basic arithmetic and get this country out of debt, save Social Security and Medicare, provide this prescription drug benefit, keep us moving forward.

Q Mr. President?

THE PRESIDENT: Next. Let me take John's first, then I'll take you, Sarah.

Q Sir, in your conversation with Chairman Arafat this morning, did you ask him to take any specific steps to advance what you believe is new momentum toward peace, and did you discuss with him his complaints yesterday that he found Prime Minister Barak's 15-month timetable

unacceptable?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, I told him only this. I said that -- I generally described my meetings with Prime Minister Barak to him. I told him that he was committed to working in partnership with Chairman Arafat and honoring any agreements that had been made to this point, and that any modifications they made going forward to the benefit of either or both sides would have to be done by mutual agreement; that I thought he was completely committed to resolve all the issues outstanding in the peace process in an expeditious manner. And what I urged him to do was to have this one-on-one meeting, hear him out, think it through, and if he wanted to talk to me again after the meeting occurred, that I would be happy to talk to him.

So I went out of my way not to describe Prime Minister Barak's proposals or to advocate or not advocate, but simply to say that I was convinced they were being made in complete good faith, and that the peace process would be revitalized, and whatever they did from here on out is something that they would do together. And I think he felt good about that. And I did say, after you have the meeting, if you want to talk again about this -- I'll be glad to talk to you. And he said he did. So that's where we are.

Sarah. Go ahead, Sarah.

Q Sir, your microphone is not working apparently; it seems like you're talking very low, we can barely hear you. But in the meantime, don't you think it would be a good idea if we announced for the country's sake the list of conferences to be held at the White House each day, and the list of the people whom the President has appointments with?

THE PRESIDENT: I don't know. I never thought about it. Don't you have a list of the conferences we have every day here?

Q No, indeed. We do -- and what if we find out you haven't any?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, I think I ought to talk to our folks about it, but I will consider that.

Go ahead.

Q Will you be taking any concrete contributions with you to the Balkan summit on investment next week? And you've said that you would give only humanitarian aid to Yugoslavia as long as Milosevic is in power. Will you have any trouble defining that? Will that cause any problems in distinguishing between humanitarian and other aid?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, let me say that I hope very much that there will be some positive, concrete commitments that come out of the meeting that we're going to have. I do not believe -- I do not believe we can achieve the future we want in the Balkans and avoid future ethnic conflicts unless there is a unifying vision which both brings the Balkan states closer together in their economic and political self-interests, and then brings the region as a whole closer to Europe.

And so I think that we have to have some incentives to move in that direction. And there are direct -- there are also indirect things the United States can do to help to contribute to that goal. And because of all the other things that have been going on -- you know it's been a very busy two or three weeks -- we haven't actually had an opportunity to sit down and go through what our options are, so I can't give you a more specific answer.

But I will say this -- if what we have done in Bosnia, and what we have done in Kosovo, is to have lasting benefits, we have got to find a way to create closer unity among the Balkan states themselves, and then with the region and Europe. And that is what I am working on.

And what was the second question you asked?

Q On the humanitarian aid, how will you define it?

THE PRESIDENT: Oh, yes. There may be -- frankly, there may be some differences of opinion. As you know, I tend to take a rather narrow view of it because I don't think that we should, in effect, reward Mr. Milosevic's political control by doing things which are not humanitarian in nature. But based on the virtual daily reports I get about where we all are on this and where we are operating in Kosovo, I now no longer expect them to be big debates. I don't expect there will be a big difference of opinion.

Yes, go ahead, John.

Q Mr. President, the House of Representatives appears to be on the verge of terminating funding for the F-22 fighter. Will the White House fight hard for full funding for that program, even if it means sacrificing other Pentagon airplane programs or even pay for servicemen?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, I don't think we should sacrifice the pay for our service personnel because we now are getting back in the ball game in recruitment. You know, we've really been -- the good economy and the increased deployments and the low pay all combined we're making it hard for us to both recruit and retain people. And the people are still the most important part of our military -- their quality and their training and their morale and their commitment and the condition of their families. So I don't think that.

Now, the Congress every year puts other things into the defense budget which are not priorities for the Pentagon, and are priorities for the Congress. We can fund the F-22, we can fund the plane without compromising the basic priorities of our national defense within the funds set aside, and that is what I will fight to do. I think it would be a mistake to abandon the project. I think it has real potential to add to our national defense. I have always supported it and I hope that it can be preserved.

Q Thank you, Mr. President. You had some fun, recently, with George W. Bush and his slogan of "compassionate conservatism." But you went beyond the notion that he's not offering many details as policy, and seemed to ridicule his slogan and even question his sincerity. Were you just trying to help Mr. Gore's candidacy or were you taking the opportunity maybe to just needle the leading Republican candidate?

THE PRESIDENT: No, I was just having a little fun. (Laughter.) You know, that's a long time -- if we don't have any laughs it's going to be a very tedious struggle between now and November of 2000.

Let me say this. I think that every person struggles to find a phrase or something that will sort of stand for what he or she is trying to do. So I was really just having a little fun.

I think the most important thing is that all the candidates make their positions clear on the great debates going on now, and make their positions clear on what they would do if they got the job. To me, that's the most important thing. You know, I am not involved in this campaign as a candidate, and I have a full-time job, so I'm not involved in any sort of full-time consulting role. (Laughter.) So I look at this -- I look at this more from the point of view of the average American voter -- what will change the lives of America.

For example, every candidate should tell us, are you for the patients' bill of rights are you for closing the gun show loophole; are you for raising the minimum wage; are you for the House Republican tax plan, or do you favor our plan on Social Security and saving Social Security and Medicare and making America debt-free and having a smaller tax cut that enables us to continue to fund education and defense and these other things? What are you going to do if you get elected?

To me, the best thing the Vice President has done is to talk about dramatically intensifying the war on cancer, making pre-school universal, increasing access to college by helping people save without tax consequences; what he would do to make America a safer country, what he would do in communities to have faith-based organizations cooperate with governments more. I think these are interesting ideas about how you build on the progress the country has made the last six and a half years.

So I would say to everyone -- you know, use whatever slogans you want, but tell us where you stand. I think that's the most important thing.

Susan?

Q Mr. President --

THE PRESIDENT: Yes, I'll come over here. I know I'm left leaning, but I will give you -- (laughter) --

Q Mr. President, the economy is going great. In a new USA Today-CNN poll this week, your approval rating was at a very healthy 58 percent. But that same poll showed that by 50 percent to 38 percent, Americans said they wanted to see a change from Clinton administration policies -- not a continuation of them. What do you think accounts for that sentiment for change, and do you think it means that you present something of a mixed blessing to Mrs. Clinton and Vice President Gore in their campaigns next year?

THE PRESIDENT: I think what that means people think things are going well, but they want a change in policy. I think that's right. If you asked me that question, and you worded it in that way, I'd be in the 50 percent, because I think that -- my own view is that, particularly in a dynamic time, where things are changing, you should want continued change. But is change -- the question is, should we change in a way that builds on what has been done and goes beyond it -- which is what I would argue -- or should you change and go back to the policies we were following when we had \$290-billion deficits and we averaged over 7 percent unemployment for 12 years. I mean, I think that's really the question the American people have to ask themselves.

I think change is good. The great thing about this country is that it works best when it's sort of in a perpetual stage of renewal. So I would, myself, as a citizen, I would vote against somebody who said, vote for me and I'll keep it just like it is; everything that Bill Clinton did is exactly what I'll do. I would vote against that candidate, because I do not believe that is the right thing to do.

But what I think we should do is we should build on the progress of the last six years and go beyond it, and not adopt a completely

different approach which has been proven not to work. So all I want the American people to do is to remember what it was like before, think what it's like now, recognize that ideas and policies have consequences. And the American people usually get it right; that's why we're all still around here after more than 200 years.

Q -- (inaudible.)

THE PRESIDENT: No.

Q -- for Mrs. Clinton and Mr. Gore?

THE PRESIDENT: No, because I -- no, he has done -- look at what the Vice President's done. He's staked out new issues here. He said, here's how I'm going to change what we're doing in cancer research; here's how I'm going to change what we're doing in education; here's how I'm going to change what we're doing in crime -- but not to reverse what we've done, but to build on it and go beyond it. So I think that's very, very -- that's the sort of thing that's worthy of debate. That's not the same; that is change.

What the American people have to decide is what kind of change do they want. Do they want to build on what has worked for the last six and a half years, or do they want to abandon it and go back to what failed them for 12 years before. That will be the decision they have to make.

Yes, go ahead.

Q In your last press conference, sir, with Prime Minister Ehud Barak, you mentioned you wanted better, normalized relations with Syria. Now, have you received any response, positive response or indication from Syria towards that? And, on Iran, can you share with us the administration's views of -- events and administrations in Iran? Thank you.

THE PRESIDENT: Well, on Syria let me say, the only thing I can tell you is that the statements, at least, that have been coming out of Syria have been quite encouraging in terms of the regard that President Assad seems to have for Prime Minister Barak, and the willingness, the openness that there is to negotiating and moving toward peace. So I'm encouraged by that.

And on Iran, frankly, I'm reluctant to say anything for fear that it will be used in a way that's not helpful to the forces of openness and reform. I think that people everywhere, particularly younger people, hope that they will be able to pursue their religious convictions and their personal dreams in an atmosphere of greater freedom, that still allows them to be deeply loyal to their nation. And I think the Iranian people obviously love their country and are proud of its history and have enormous potential. And I just hope they find a way to work through all this, and I believe they will.

Q You mentioned the patients' bill of rights. It seems like that was an argument by both parties over providing more for people who already are lucky enough to have health insurance. And, in fact, neither party dealt with some very fundamental issues that energized you and the First Lady five and six years ago. The question is, with such a robust economy and the budget surpluses, if not now, when, and if not you, who, would provide the leadership to provide for those folks?

THE PRESIDENT: Yes, but I think the bigger question is how. That is, it is true that just as we've predicted in 1993 and 1994, that the percentage of people who have health insurance on the job is going down, just as we said it would, if nothing was done. So what we have tried to do is to isolate discrete populations that seem to be most in need and try to offer them help.

In the Balanced Budget Act of 1997, we reached bipartisan agreement on a proposal that would fund providing health insurance for up to 5 million more children through state-designed programs. Now, I've been a little disappointed -- and I'm not being critical of any of the states, either, here -- but I've been a little disappointed that the uptake on the program has been a little slow. That is, I would have thought by now we'd have almost 3 million of those 5 million children enrolled already, because we've got the money there, and we're well behind that.

So we are looking at whether there are things that we can do at the national level to work with the states to simplify access to the children's health insurance programs that the states have set up. But -- and I also had a talk with Senator Kennedy, the other day who believes that for little or no more extra money, we could actually adjust the program and take in several million more children. So the children are the biggest group.

Then, I have a proposal, as you know, that's part of my Medicare reform proposal that I didn't mention today, but I want to reiterate it, that would allow the most vulnerable group of people without health insurance, people between the ages of 55 and 65, to buy into the Medicare system in a way that would not compromise the integrity of the system. So I think that is quite important.

In addition to that, there are a lot of states -- there are some states -- Tennessee was the first state to do this under the former governor -- they started it -- which are allowing lower-income working families to buy into their Medicaid programs on a sliding scale.

So if all these things were done, we would dramatically reduce the number of people without health insurance and we'll eventually probably get down to, if we keep pushing in this direction, get down to the point where the largest group of people without health insurance are young, single people who believe that they're going to live forever and be healthy forever and don't want to bear the cost. And we'll have to think about, then, what to do.

But I think the best thing to do is try to get as many kids as we can covered, and then try to get these people who are out of the work force who are older, but they're not old enough to get Medicare, to get them at least where they can all afford on a sliding scale to buy into the Medicare program.

Go ahead, Scott.

Q Thank you, Mr. President. On the Kennedy tragedy, sir, will you authorize the Navy to participate in a burial at sea ceremony? Why do you believe it's justified to spend so many federal resources on this tragedy? And, finally, sir, I wonder if you would give us your thoughts on Mr. Kennedy's last visit here to the White House. I understand you and the First Lady took him on a tour.

THE PRESIDENT: Well, we have received -- I have received no official word, personal word from the family what burial arrangements they want. Until they make a statement about it, I just don't feel that I can say anything.

Secondly, I will say that until just a couple of days ago the recovery efforts -- the rescue, then the recovery efforts that were undertaken were consistent with what would have been done in any other case. Because the Coast Guard felt that they had the capacity to succeed in this if they had a few more days, and because of the role of the Kennedy family in our national lives, and because of the enormous losses that they have sustained in our lifetimes, I thought it was appropriate to give them a few more days. And if anyone believes that was wrong, the Coast Guard is not at fault; I am. It was because I thought it was the right thing to do under the circumstances.

Now, you asked about -- John Kennedy had actually not been back to the White House since his father was killed, until I became President. First, he was on an advisory committee that made a report to me and he came back to the Oval Office, where he saw the desk that he took the famous picture in, coming through the gate, for the first time since he was a little boy.

And then last year -- maybe you would have a better memory than I would, but it seems to me it was last May, when we had the event at the White House celebrating the series that HBO did on the Apollo program. Do you remember they did a series on the space program that was done after the movie came out? And Tom Hanks came, a lot of people came. And he was invited because of his father's role in starting the space program. And he and Carolyn came. And afterward I asked them if they would like to go upstairs, and he said he would. So I took him upstairs and showed him the residence, which he'd not seen since he was a tiny boy.

And I showed him some of my -- the memorabilia that I had from his father's service. I have a picture of his father speaking to the Irish Parliament, and a number of other things which he thought were very interesting. And we took a -- we had a very nice evening. And I sent him the pictures from it. And then, in return, he sent me a signed copy of his favorite picture of his father, which is now upstairs. It's John Kennedy campaigning in Virginia, in Charlottesville in 1960. It's quite a lovely picture -- interesting picture.

But it was a nice night. I think that he really wanted to kind of come to terms with all of it. And I think he and Carolyn, they were delightful young people, and they had a great time here that night. And Hillary and I loved having them here. It was quite a great night.

Q To just follow on that, sir, just one question, if I may. Is there anything that Mr. Kennedy said to you that night that particularly struck you?

THE PRESIDENT: We just had a friendly conversation. You know, I knew him pretty well by then. We'd been -- I met him years ago when he was a law student, doing a summer internship with Mickey Kantor's law firm out in Los Angeles, long before I ever thought I'd be here and before I ever thought we'd have any other contacts. He just happened to be -- Mickey asked me if I'd speak to his law clerks, because I was in LA to give an education speech, and I went by and visited with them and he was there. And we had been together on many occasions since then.

The thing that struck me was I thought he was -- he said he was glad to be back. And I think he -- he was a very deliberate person, as many people have noticed, about when he would be publicly exposed and all of that. He had his mother's care for having a private life. And I think that he had not -- I'm not sure he had really felt he wanted to come back to the White House before he did. But especially in light of everything that's happened, I'm glad he had the chance to come back here one more time and see the residence and know where he was when he was a little boy. I'm glad he did that. I'm grateful that that happened.

Yes, go ahead. Yes, yes, please.

Q On Colombia, the Pastrana administration are asking the United States for \$500 million to support the military against the guerrillas. Is your administration ready to respond to that request? And, also, the Colombians are asking for more direct intervention from the United States. Are you considering this possibility? And, also, Mexico, you're going to meet with President Zedillo in October. And the Mexican government is still rejecting the extraditions of major drug lords. What are you going to ask him -- you're going to get assurance from him to extradite these big narcotic traffickers to the United States?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, you know, we had no extraditions between Mexico and the United States for a long time, and we've actually had some now. So we're moving in the right direction. And President Zedillo and I have been pretty successful in continuing to move our relationship in the right direction, so we'll work on that.

On Colombia, I'm not prepared to make any kind of dollar commitment today. But let me say, I have stayed in close touch with President Pastrana, and I admire the fact that he has really thrown himself into trying to end the civil conflicts in Colombia, to stop the insurgency. The people in the United States have a real interest in that because I think that until the civil discord in Colombia is brought to an end, it is going to be much, much harder for us to restrain the activities of the narco-traffickers there, and their reach.

So, in addition to wanting a neighbor and a democracy in Latin America to be free of the kind of violence and heartbreak that the Colombian people have undergone because of this, it is also very much in our national security interest to do what we can, if we can be helpful in ending the civil conflict so that Colombia can be about the business of freeing itself of the influence of the narco-traffickers in ways that would be good for Colombians and good for us as well.

Q Another question about the presidential race. Aside from asking George W. Bush to come forward and give specifics on the issues that you mentioned, could you tell us what you find objectionable about his trying to present a new moderate face for his party, just like you did for the Democrats? And could you tell us whether you're worried whether he

will figure out how the Republicans can occupy the center of American politics?

THE PRESIDENT: No.

Q You don't think he can?

THE PRESIDENT: No, no, I don't think I'll answer those questions. (Laughter.) I will say -- no, look, let me say again, I wouldn't even agree with the characterization you gave of my first answer.

When I ran for President, in 1991, the first thing I did was tell the American people what I thought was going on in our country and what I would do. And if you remember, the late Senator Paul Tsongas and I were actually almost ridiculed at the time because we both put out these very detailed plans of what we would do. If you go back and get one of those plans now, you'll see that virtually everything we said we'd do we did do, except for the things we tried to do and were defeated on.

And my view is that there are a lot of things that count in a presidential election toward a successful presidency, but it is -- that go beyond specific issues, and judgment plays a role in it, and crises will always come up and things can be learned and all that. But it really matters where you stand on the big issues that everybody knows about that are going on right now, and it matters where we're going in the future.

So that's the only point I want to make. And I think any -- I would say that applies to every candidate. I don't want to answer the questions you ask me because that's not my job. My job is not to handicap this horse race, not to comment on it, not to comment on the candidates. My job is to work for the American people. But I'm going to answer these questions from the point of view of Joe Citizen. That's -- every political question you asked me from now on, I'm going to pretend that I'm living back in Little Rock already and I'm working on my presidential library and I'm sitting here as a voter saying, where do they stand, what will they do -- all of them. And I do believe the Vice President has done the best job of telling the American people what he would do and -- to go back to Susan's formulation -- how he would change the country in a positive way.

George.

Q Mr. President, as the nation has celebrated the 30th anniversary of the moon landing, a lot of the former astronauts have lamented that no President after Kennedy set a kind of national goal like President Kennedy did of landing on the moon. Do you think that -- in your view, is the country not receptive today to that kind of goal-setting by a President, or is it something a President should do, set a goal of landing on Mars?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, we are planning to land on Mars. But I think -- for one thing, when I became President, the space program was actually in peril. And we -- the space station was certainly at risk. And I have fought for it and I believe in it. And one of the things I talked to -- Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin and Michael Collins were in to see me yesterday, and we talked about where we could go with this. And Dan Goldin was there, the NASA Administrator; and Dr. Neal Lane, my Science Advisor. And we talked about how we could use the coming of the millennium as -- you know, the First Lady sponsored all these other lectures here. And I told him about Stephen Hawking's lecture and what he said. And we talked yesterday about how we could set some goals for the space program, capture the imagination of the American people and broaden the support for it.

And one of the things that I suggested that I think would be quite helpful that we're going to work on now is what we can do to dramatize for the American people -- you mentioned Mars, but I think what is more likely to capture the imagination of the American people are the benefits to us here on Earth of continued advances in space. And some of them, particularly in the health field, are likely to be breath-taking. They're principally in the area of the environment and health.

So I asked our people to start working on that and they said they would be willing to help us. I have to tell you that it was a great day for me yesterday to have them come by the White House. They also gave me a moon rock, by the way -- but only on loan. (Laughter.) And the moon rock is 3.6 billion years old. So when I feel very tired, I'll look at it and feel young again. (Laughter.)

Yes, go ahead. We had an Irish question first, I promised. Go ahead, what's the Irish question?

Q Thank you, sir. Given the --

THE PRESIDENT: You want to ask one, too?

Q We both have a -- given the various meetings underway with Mo Mowlam here, and George Mitchell there, has any progress been made on the Irish situation? And is one side more to blame than the other on it?

THE PRESIDENT: Okay. Why don't we take both Irish questions at once. What's your Irish question?

Q Last week, you seemed to kind of get fired up when you were talking to the teenagers from Colorado. You said that the politicians in Northern Ireland were behaving akin to school children. Do you feel, after all the work that you've done on this project, that perhaps it was misplaced and you should have perhaps pushed in a place more like Africa, where they have thousands of people dying from ethnic strife, instead of 3,500 over 30 years?

Q And if I can have a third Irish question, what role, if any, do you expect to play, Mr. President, in breaking the deadlock?

THE PRESIDENT: Okay, let me answer the Irish questions, then I'll come back to the "should we have done something else."

I've talked to Senator Mitchell, and he is willing to spend some time -- he can't go back full-time for another year or two, but I'd like to put this in some -- at least I'd like to tell you how I look at it.

Obviously, I am very disappointed at the breakdown of the process here. But I do think it's important to note that neither side wants to abandon the Good Friday Agreement. And that's very important. It's also important to note that everybody agrees on what their responsibilities are and what the other side's responsibilities are, and everybody agrees that it all has to be done by a date certain.

So they have agreed to break out the two areas causing problems, the decommissioning and the standing up to the executive, and try to figure out how they can unlock that, and Mo Mowlam, as you pointed out, is working hard on it, and they've asked Senator Mitchell to come back and do some work on it, and my instinct is that it will be resolved.

Now, let me say in terms of your characterization, here's the problem. To the outsiders -- I told the parties that to the outsiders -- no one, none of us outside, even somebody like me that's been so involved in this, no one will understand if this thing breaks down over who goes first; that that did sound like the kind of argument that young people have, you know -- who goes first.

Underneath that, there's something deeper: The Protestants are afraid that they IRA will never disarm if they let the Sinn Fein go into the executive branch, and the IRA do not believe -- since the agreement did not require decommissioning as a condition of getting into the executive branch, they don't want to have to spend the rest of their lives being told that it wasn't the vote of the people, it wasn't the Good Friday Accord, it was what the Unionists and Great Britain did to force them to give up their arms that got them to disarm. They believe that would, in effect, require them to disavow what they've done for 30 years.

And what they're saying is, when we surrender our arms, we're surrendering to our people. Our people voted for this. We are surrendering to the will of the people that we represent. So when you put it in that textured way on both sides, it makes it clear why it becomes a difficult issue. And I can't think of anybody better to try to work through it than George Mitchell, because he's got it all in his head and he's put three years into it. But my instinct is that we will get this worked out.

Now, you asked about did I think we had misplaced our energies. I don't think so. We have -- for one thing, we don't have a stronger partner in the world than Great Britain, and for another, we don't have a bigger ethnic group in America than the Irish, and we're tied by blood and emotion to the Irish struggle.

I also think that it has enormous symbolism, beyond the size of the country and the number who have died. And if it can be resolved, I think it will give great impetus to the forces of peace throughout the world. So I don't believe for a moment we made a mistake.

But let me also say I think we should be more involved in Africa and I've tried to involve us more in Africa. I did everything I could to head off that civil war between Ethiopia and Eritrea. It's not a civil war, they are two separate countries, but they once were together and they're basically now arguing over the divorce settlement. And I don't mean to trivialize it in that characterization. And we are still actively involved in trying to stop that.

Reverend Jackson played a significant role in trying to end the awful carnage in Sierra Leone, and I'm very grateful for that. We're now working, and we're able to work with Nigeria to try to stabilize the region. We are training African militaries and the Africa Crisis Response Corps, so that we can, hopefully, prevent further carnage. So I believe the United States should be more involved in Africa.

And, of course, the announcement that the Vice President made on our behalf the other day of our new AIDS initiative in some ways may be the most important thing we can do to save lives there.

So I agree that we should be more involved. But I don't agree that we misplaced our energies in Ireland. I'm proud of every late-night phone call and every frustrating hour I've spent on it.

THE PRESIDENT: Yes, go ahead.

Q -- can I ask about you --

THE PRESIDENT: Well, I don't want to talk about me.

Q Oh, come on.

THE PRESIDENT: I'm not a candidate for anything.

Go ahead, what? Go ahead. All right, one more.

Q Listen, Mr. President, with due respect, in another development, I know that you are for Africa, and you know that I support -- Africa, my friend, the President of the Dominican Republic -- we are Afro-Latino. But I am not concerned at this moment about Mars. I am concerned about place where I have been for 20 years, the White House, that is going to celebrate 200 year next year. I wonder if you would tell the people of the United States what you are going to plan for that big celebration?

And another thing, Mr. President -- I am disgusted with you -- you have been hiding something extraordinary -- the performance -- or the trade promotional coordinating committee that has been carried out in the last year -- are the participants in the prospective of this economy. Why don't you speak about the success of that initiative? It's a sin that you

-- you talk about a lot of things that is -- another thing that is good for America and the world.

THE PRESIDENT: Well, a lot of the things that are good for America don't make good news for them, you see.

Q And I have a follow-up. (Laughter.)

THE PRESIDENT: No, let me just say -- (laughter) -- a follow-up? (Laughter.) Now, that's really good. That is really -- Oh, God, is that good.

Let me just say that we will have a lot of celebrations of the 200th birthday of the White House next year, and it's neat that coincides with the first year of the new century and the millennium. So we'll have -- I'm not prepared to announce them yet, because I want others who deserve more credit than I do to be able to do that. But it will be a signal honor for us to be living here in that year, and we'll be able to do a lot -- and I hope we'll have even more American citizens coming to the White House next year to be a part of it.

Go ahead. Just that follow up -- that showed a lot of guts. (Laughter.) If this is a follow up, I'll give you another question. (Laughter.)

Q Sir, you've stressed that you have plenty to do, and yet for some time, your political career has enjoyed the benefits of support from two people in particular -- the Vice President and the First Lady -- two people who are now in a position to expect some support from you. I'm wondering what you feel you owe those two people in terms of political support, and as you plan your schedule in the weeks and months ahead, how you'll balance that assistance against your job as President, and finally, how you personally are adjusting to what people might think is an interesting shift in role.

Q I have a follow-up to his question. (Laughter.)

THE PRESIDENT: Now, I believe that. (Laughter.)

Well, I will do whatever I'm asked to do, basically. I'll try to be helpful. And if I can be helpful, I will be. But I think the best thing I can do for anyone who generally shares our ideas, is part of our party, trying to move the country forward, is to continue to be a good President and take care of our country.

But I don't mind hard work and I don't mind long hours, and I find myself, apparently unlike some of my predecessors -- but just read what you all say about it -- but I don't feel myself winding down, I feel myself keying up. I want to do more. I want to try to make sure that I give the American people as much as I can every day. So I've got plenty of energy and I'll do whatever I'm asked to do.

I owe them a great deal. I think Al Gore -- everybody in this room knows that he's had far more responsibility and gotten more done than any Vice President in history. Nobody's ever had a role that even approximates that. I don't think the American people know that yet, but I know that. And he deserves a lot of credit for what he's done and he has my friendship and my support. But I also think that it's a mixed blessing, as you say, because people want to see any Vice President out there on his own. If you go back and look at where Richard Nixon was in 1959, you will see the same sort of thing. So I think I see this as a rhythmic process.

I think he'll do fine. But the reason I think that has nothing to do with the questions you ask me. The reasons I think that are, A, he's a good man with a good record, but most importantly, he's out there telling the American people how he would change the country for the better. And I think that's important.

I did an interview and I talked about Hillary and this -- if she

decides to do this I will do whatever I can do. And if she's successful I will happily go to the Senate spouses meeting if that's part of the job. I have never known anybody who didn't run for office who was a more effective, more consistently committed, completely passionate public citizen than her. So if she decides to do it, and if the people of New York decide that they want her to do it, that's a decision for them to make and they have to deal with that, and she's trying to deal with that, you know, the whole question of moving there.

It is true that shortly after we came here I said, you get to decide where we live from now on for the rest of our lives. And she said, I want to go to New York -- in, like, '93. This is just something that happened later. So I'll be dividing my time between home -- I'm going to go home and build my library and build my center -- I'll divide my time between there and New York, whatever she does about this Senate race.

But if I can help her in any way, I will, because I think it would be a great thing for the country -- not only because of what I owe her, because she just -- what she knows and how she's lived and what she's done. I mean, it's very unusual to find somebody like that who has that much knowledge and background and passion all packed into one place. I mean, I know that you think I'm a biased observer, but I think I could support it with evidence.

Go ahead, Bill.

Q In that same vein, sir -- (laughter) -- as the spotlight shifts from you to your Vice President and to your wife, are you likely to be content, drifting slowly offstage, or do you think that someday you will want to run for office, some office again? Or are you willing to tell us this afternoon, sir, that you will never again run for elective office?

THE PRESIDENT: I don't have any idea. (Laughter.) Really, I don't know. Let me just say this. I love this job. I love it. Even on the bad days -- you can do something good for the country, you can do something good for the future. I have loved doing this. And I have given it every ounce of my energy and ability and judgment. And I feel very fortunate. But we have a system that I, frankly, agree with, even though I'm in pretty good shape -- we have a system that says a President gets two terms and then the President has to go find something else to do with his life. And there are lots of other worthy things to do.

And I was a very happy person before I became President. I never have had any trouble finding something interesting to do that I believed in. And I will do my best to use the opportunity and the gift the American people gave me to serve in this position to be a useful citizen of my country and the world for the rest of my life, and I have no doubt that there will be some way I can do that. And I'm, frankly, kind of excited about it. I mean, it's a new challenge. I'll have to think in a different way and do a different way.

Will I miss a lot of the things about this job? Yes. I'll even miss all of you, believe it or not. But I'm just grateful that I've had the chance to serve and that the results have been good for our people and for our country and I think for the world.

And, you know, that's part of life. Life has its rhythms. And the people that are most satisfied and most happy in life take the rhythms of life and make the most of them, instead of sitting around moping and wishing the rhythms were something other than they are. That's just not the way the life works. And, listen, I'm way ahead and I'm very grateful.

Thank you very much.

END

3:45 P.M. EDT

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TEXT:

THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary

For Immediate Release
1999

July 21,

PRESS CONFERENCE BY THE PRESIDENT

The East Room

2:35 P.M. EDT

THE PRESIDENT: Good afternoon.

Q Mr. President, you don't know it, but there is such a bright light on you -- we can't see you for the light. (Laughter.)

THE PRESIDENT: I've been waiting a long time for the halo to appear. (Laughter.)

Let me say, ladies and gentlemen, I have a brief opening statement, but before I make that and take questions, I'd like to say that, as you might imagine, I have been briefed on this morning's developments in the search off Martha's Vineyard. Again, let me commend the Coast Guard and all the officials at the local, state and national level for the fine work they have done under extremely difficult circumstances.

Again, I think we should keep our thoughts with the families as events unfold, and my thoughts and prayers are with them.

Today I want to make a brief statement about the choice we face here in Washington and in our country about how best to move forward into the new century and what to do with the surplus. When we look toward the future, it is helpful to remember at least the recent past. Six and a half years ago, the budget deficit was \$290 billion and rising. Wages were stagnant, inequality was growing, social conditions were worsening.

In the 12 years before I took office, unemployment averaged more than 7 percent. It's almost difficult to remember what it was like. No one really thought we could turn it around, let alone bring unemployment to a 29-year low, or turn decades of deficits, during which time the debt of our country was quadrupled in only 12 years, into a surplus of \$99 billion.

Our nation has made a seismic shift in the last six years, face a critical choice -- whether to move forward with the fiscal discipline that got us to where we are today, or return to the kind of risk-taking that got us into recessions and deficits before.

We must decide whether to invest the surplus, to strengthen America over the long-term, or to squander it for the short-term. I think the right course is clear. And a bigger surplus only means that the mistake could be bigger, and the missed opportunity greater if we take the wrong course.

I have proposed a balanced budget that puts first things first. I believe we must maintain our sound economic strategy, and invest the surplus in long-term goals -- saving Social Security, saving and strengthening Medicare, modernizing it by providing a long overdue drug benefit, and continuing to meet our basic responsibilities in education,

defense, the environment, biomedical research.

Tomorrow I will release a report that shows a great and growing need for prescription drug coverage. What the study shows is that 75 percent of our older Americans lack decent, dependable private-sector coverage of prescription drugs. That's three out of every four seniors. Clearly, America needs a prescription drug plan that is simple, universal and voluntary. Anyone who says we don't I believe is out of date and out of touch.

As I've described, my plan meets these national priorities, while paying off the debt by 2015; while investing in America's new markets, the places that have not yet felt our prosperity; and while providing substantial tax relief -- \$250 billion of it targeted to help families save for retirement, pay for child care, long-term care, for modern schools.

So let's be clear about something. We're not debating whether to have tax cuts or not -- we should have tax cuts, but tax cuts that provide for us first to save Social Security and Medicare, not undermine them; tax cuts we can afford, not ones that would demand drastic cuts in defense, education, agriculture, the environment; tax cuts in the national interest, not special interest.

Now, these are the risks that are posed by the Republican tax plan that the House is about to vote on. Let me tell you what their plan would do. It would pile up \$3 trillion in debt over the next two decades, right when the baby boomers start to retire -- that's what it costs -- right when Social Security and Medicare feel the crunch.

Because of the cost of the tax plan over the next two decades, I should say what it doesn't do. It doesn't do anything to extend the solvency of Social Security, to extend the solvency of Medicare, to provide the prescription drug benefits and it would require significant -- significant -- cuts from where we are today in education, defense, biomedical research, the environment and other critical areas.

If we don't save Social Security it's not because we can't. If we don't strengthen Medicare and add the prescription drug benefit, it's not because we can't. If we don't meet these clear national needs, it's because we choose not to do so. It will be because, instead, we choose to reward ourselves today by risking our prosperity tomorrow.

I hope Congress will make the right choice. When members cast their ballots on the Republican tax plan, they're really voting also on whether to save Social Security and Medicare. They're voting on whether to pay off the national debt for the first time in over 150 years -- something that would guarantee us lower interest rates, higher investment, more jobs, higher incomes, and for average citizens, lower home mortgage payments, car payments, credit card payments, college loan payments.

They're voting whether to meet our most pressing national priorities in education, defense, nearly every other domain in our people's lives. I think the choice is clear between the plan the Republican leadership has outlined and the national priorities of the American people. I hope we can still work together across party lines to save Social Security and Medicare, to safeguard our priorities and have the right kind of tax cut.

If Congress passes the wrong kind, of course, I will not sign it. I will not allow a risky plan to become law. And as I said, we now have six and a half years of evidence. This is not really a debate that's just about ideas without any evidence. We clearly know what works now, and we ought to stay with it.

As I said, I will work with any member of any party willing to put first things first. We can have a tax cut and do the right thing for the long-term in America. That is my commitment, and I hope that together we can fulfill it for our people.

Thank you very much. Helen.

Q Mr. President, in U.S. treaty relations, is it obligated to defend Taiwan militarily if it abandons the one China policy? And would the U.S. continue military aid if it pursues separatism?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, let me say, first of all, a lot of those questions are governed by the Taiwan Relations Act, which we intend to honor. Our policy is clear: We favor the one China policy; we favor the cross-strait dialogues. The understanding we have had all along with both China and Taiwan is that the differences between them would be resolved peacefully. If that were not to be the case, under the Taiwan Relations Act we would be required to view it with the gravest concern.

But I believe that both China and Taiwan understand this. I believe that they want to stay on a path to prosperity and dialogue. And we have dispatched people today, as the morning press reports, to do what we can to press that case to all sides. This is something that we don't want to see escalate, and I believe that what Mr. Lee said yesterday was trying to move in that direction. We all understand how difficult this is, but I think that the pillars of the policy are still the right ones. The one China policy is right; the cross-strait dialogue is right; the peaceful approach is right. And neither side, in my judgment, should depart from any of those elements.

Q So we would still have to go to war with China if it decided to break away?

THE PRESIDENT: I will say what I've already said -- the Taiwan Relations Act governs our policy. We made it clear. And I have -- as you remember, a few years ago we had a physical expression of that, that we don't believe there should be any violent attempts to resolve this, and we would view it very seriously. But I don't believe there will be. I think that both sides understands what needs to be done.

Terry?

Q Mr. President, do you think that President Lee was unnecessarily provocative in trying to redefine the nature of the Taiwan-Chinese relationship? And is the United States trying to send a signal by delaying a Pentagon mission which was going to Taiwan to assess its air defense needs? And, further, finally, you said that you still believe in a one China policy. How do you address Senator Helms' criticism that that policy is "a puzzling fiction"?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, I don't think it's a puzzling fiction. But if Senator Helms means that today they're not, in fact, unified, then that's true. But the Chinese tend to take a long view of these things and have made clear a sensitivity to the different system that exists on Taiwan, and a willingness to find ways to accommodate it, as they did in working with Hong Kong, and, perhaps, even going beyond that.

So I think the important thing is to let -- they need to take the time necessary to work this out between themselves in a peaceful way. That is clearly in both their interests. And I'm still not entirely sure, because I have read things which seem to resonate both ways on this, exactly what the Lee statements were entitled -- trying to convey.

But I think that both sides are now quite aware of the fact that they need to find a way to pursue their destinies within the framework that we have followed these last several years, which I might add, has allowed both places to prosper and to grow, to do better and to have more contacts, more investment, and underneath the rhetoric, quite a bit more reconciliation. So I would hope that we would stay with what is working and not depart from it.

Q Is that the meaning of the delay of the Pentagon mission to assess the --

THE PRESIDENT: I didn't think this was the best time to do something which might excite either one side or the other and imply that a military solution is an acceptable alternative. If you really think about what's at stake here, it would be unthinkable. And I want -- I don't want to depart from any of the three pillars. I think we need to stay with one China; I think we need to stay with the dialogue; and I think that no one should contemplate force here.

Randy.

Q Economists have been calling on you to indicate now whether you intend to reappoint Alan Greenspan in order to avoid having the issue to become mired in election year politics and upsetting financial markets next year. Would you like to see the Chairman stay on, and has he given you any indication of his plans?

THE PRESIDENT: I have, as you know, enjoyed a very good relationship, both personally and professionally, with Mr. Greenspan. I think he has done a terrific job. I have no idea whether he would even be willing to serve another term. I will make the decision in a timely fashion. I do not expect it to become embroiled in election year politics; there's no evidence of that.

You heard -- I think the Vice President said yesterday or the day before that he thought he was doing an excellent job. So we believe that as long as the United States is fiscally responsible, then the Fed will respond to developments in our own economy and in the world economy in a way that is clear, transparent, and I think designed to keep our growth going. So I'm not concerned about it.

Peter, go ahead.

Q -- I think the Vice President indicated he was sending a signal by saying that Chairman Greenspan had been doing an excellent job. Do you endorse that interpretation?

THE PRESIDENT: I don't know, all I know is he said he was doing a great job, and I agree with him.

Go ahead.

Q Mr. President, you mentioned the Kennedy tragedy at the beginning of the news conference. Could you please give us a better understanding of what the White House role has been in the conduct of the recovery operation and the decision-making on the release of information about it?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, I think that -- I am unaware of any role we have played in the decision-making of the release of information, except, let me say that today a lot of things are breaking in a hurry, and I believe there are some decisions that ought to be announced by the Kennedy family, and others that ought to be properly announced by either the Coast Guard or the NTSB.

So we have not tried -- to the best of my knowledge, had any role in the timing or substance of release of information. And we have had no role in the conduct of the operation except that I did talk to Admiral Larrabee, I think it was the day before yesterday, at a time when the operation might normally have ceased, and he said, I think we have a chance to find something else because of the equipment we have here, even though it's difficult and I'm inclined to believe because of the circumstances here and because who's involved that we ought to go on a little more. And I said that I would support it and defend it. And I think it was the right decision.

Q Mr. President, if you'll allow me to ask about two different topics. On the Kennedy search, sir, there have been conflicting reports about whether or not Mr. Kennedy's body has, in fact, been recovered. I understand that based upon the answer you just gave, that might not be a

question that you'd want to address, but, perhaps, given the fact that there is this conflicting information you could answer that question.

And, secondly, sir, on this notion of a drug benefit, prescription drug benefit, you chided the Republicans about targeting tax cuts at the wealthy, saying that they're too steered in that direction. How do you reconcile that philosophically with allowing rich Americans, rich older Americans, to get a prescription drug benefit which even you just said this new study will show one in four don't need?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, first of all, it's voluntary. And most wealthy Americans are well taken care of under the present program they have and won't exercise it. So that's the first point I want to make.

The second thing I would like to say is I don't think most people know this, even some of you may have forgotten, but in the 11th hour of the deficit reduction package negotiations in 1993, in order to get up to \$500 billion in cuts in the deficit projected over five years -- we did much better, as all of you know -- the cap was taken off. The income cap was taken off of the Medicare tax, which means virtually every single upper-income person in America will pay far more into the Medicare program than they will ever draw out in health care or benefits.

They are making a net significant contribution today because, unlike Social Security taxes where there is still an earnings cap, there is no longer an earnings cap on Medicare. And I think a lot of folks have forgotten that -- so that in that sense, this is the most progressive program we have. The upper-income people, particularly once you get over about \$250,000 in income, they're paying far more into this program over the course of their life than they could ever draw out if they were sick every day from the time they're 65 on.

Q Sir, a question --

THE PRESIDENT: I just don't think I should make an announcement about that. I am aware of what the Coast Guard has done and what they have found as of five minutes before I came out here. But I simply -- I just don't think it's appropriate for me -- I'll be glad to comment on whatever they want to say, but I think I should leave it for them to talk.

Q Sir, you talk about how expensive the Republican tax cuts would be. But the Congressional Budget Office has now just come out with a report saying that even with their tax cuts, almost \$800 billion in tax cuts, they would save about \$277 billion over a 10-year period, whereby your program would save only about \$50 billion. That's about \$227 billion difference. How do you reconcile that? And, you know, people on the Hill listen to the CBO.

THE PRESIDENT: They listen to the CBO except where it's inconvenient for them, like the patients' bill of rights. The Republicans have freed us all now to question the CBO, since they ignored the CBO in the patients' bill of rights; they have discredited their own CBO.

Let me say, I haven't seen that CBO accounting. All I can tell you is that all of our budget people were rolling their eyes and saying that it was a very creative study.

Let me just say this: You have six and a half years of experience with the numbers we have given you and the estimates we have made. And every single year, our numbers have not only been accurate, but we have done better than we said we would do -- every single year, for six and a half years now.

Our studies show that their tax cut over the next two decades will cost, first, a trillion dollars and then \$3 trillion in the second decade, and that -- then an enormous loss to the American people in interest savings. That is, we'll have to keep spending more and more of our tax money paying interest on the debt, and it will require huge cuts in education and defense and other things.

You cannot -- they simply cannot credibly make that statement. And they don't put any new money into the Medicare program. And they don't have a Medicare reform package out there. So unless they just simply propose to bankrupt all the teaching hospitals and a lot of the other hospitals in the country, and let the Medicare program wither away, as one of the previous leaders so eloquently put it -- they can't possibly finance this tax program without doing serious damage. I can't comment on the CBO study, but it doesn't make any sense to anybody I've talked to about it.

Q May I just follow up --

THE PRESIDENT: Yes.

Q The CBO estimates the cost of your Medicare reforms are more than twice what you say they are.

THE PRESIDENT: Well, again you have evidence. Let me just say this: In the 1997 Balanced Budget Agreement -- okay? -- and this is the reason all these teaching hospitals are in trouble today -- we agreed to a Medicare savings figure. And we said, okay, here is our health information -- this is what we do in the Executive Branch, we deal with these hospitals -- here are the changes you need to make in the Medicare program to achieve the savings that the Republicans and the Democrats in Congress and the White House agreed on.

And the CBO said, no, no, no, no, that won't come close; you need these changes plus these changes. And we said, okay, we're following the CBO, we put it in there. What happened? And that's one of the reasons the surplus is somewhat bigger than it otherwise would be -- the cuts in Medicare were far more severe, our numbers were right, their numbers were wrong and that's why you've got all these hospitals all over America, every place I go, talking about how they're threatened with bankruptcy.

So when it comes to estimating Medicare costs, again, we have evidence. And whenever there's been a difference between us and the CBO, we've been right and they've been wrong. That's all I can tell you. No serious person -- so what are they going to do about Medicare? They say our drug program will cost more -- they don't put a red cent into it. What are they going to do about it? Even if you don't have a drug program, if you adopt their tax cut program they won't be able to do anything to extend the solvency of Medicare and they will have to have huge cuts.

For them to produce those savings they are going to -- they can't even fund my defense budget, much less the one they say they want. They're going to have cuts in defense, cuts in education, cuts in the environment. That's all their savings assumed that they're going to stay with the present budget levels, which they, themselves, are trying to get out of even as we speak here today. So this is -- the American people are not -- I mean, this is not rocket science, this is arithmetic.

And we've been dealing with -- we went from creative supply-side mathematics to elemental arithmetic in 1993. And it has served us very well. And all I'm trying to do is stick with basic arithmetic and get this country out of debt, save Social Security and Medicare, provide this prescription drug benefit, keep us moving forward.

Q Mr. President?

THE PRESIDENT: Next. Let me take John's first, then I'll take you, Sarah.

Q Sir, in your conversation with Chairman Arafat this morning, did you ask him to take any specific steps to advance what you believe is new momentum toward peace, and did you discuss with him his complaints yesterday that he found Prime Minister Barak's 15-month timetable unacceptable?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, I told him only this. I said that -- I

generally described my meetings with Prime Minister Barak to him. I told him that he was committed to working in partnership with Chairman Arafat and honoring any agreements that had been made to this point, and that any modifications they made going forward to the benefit of either or both sides would have to be done by mutual agreement; that I thought he was completely committed to resolve all the issues outstanding in the peace process in an expeditious manner. And what I urged him to do was to have this one-on-one meeting, hear him out, think it through, and if he wanted to talk to me again after the meeting occurred, that I would be happy to talk to him.

So I went out of my way not to describe Prime Minister Barak's proposals or to advocate or not advocate, but simply to say that I was convinced they were being made in complete good faith, and that the peace process would be revitalized, and whatever they did from here on out is something that they would do together. And I think he felt good about that. And I did say, after you have the meeting, if you want to talk again about this -- I'll be glad to talk to you. And he said he did. So that's where we are.

Sarah. Go ahead, Sarah.

Q Sir, your microphone is not working apparently; it seems like you're talking very low, we can barely hear you. But in the meantime, don't you think it would be a good idea if we announced for the country's sake the list of conferences to be held at the White House each day, and the list of the people whom the President has appointments with?

THE PRESIDENT: I don't know. I never thought about it. Don't you have a list of the conferences we have every day here?

Q No, indeed. We do -- and what if we find out you haven't any?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, I think I ought to talk to our folks about it, but I will consider that.

Go ahead.

Q Will you be taking any concrete contributions with you to the Balkan summit on investment next week? And you've said that you would give only humanitarian aid to Yugoslavia as long as Milosevic is in power. Will you have any trouble defining that? Will that cause any problems in distinguishing between humanitarian and other aid?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, let me say that I hope very much that there will be some positive, concrete commitments that come out of the meeting that we're going to have. I do not believe -- I do not believe we can achieve the future we want in the Balkans and avoid future ethnic conflicts unless there is a unifying vision which both brings the Balkan states closer together in their economic and political self-interests, and then brings the region as a whole closer to Europe.

And so I think that we have to have some incentives to move in that direction. And there are direct -- there are also indirect things the United States can do to help to contribute to that goal. And because of all the other things that have been going on -- you know it's been a very busy two or three weeks -- we haven't actually had an opportunity to sit down and go through what our options are, so I can't give you a more specific answer.

But I will say this -- if what we have done in Bosnia, and what we have done in Kosovo, is to have lasting benefits, we have got to find a way to create closer unity among the Balkan states themselves, and then with the region and Europe. And that is what I am working on.

And what was the second question you asked?

Q On the humanitarian aid, how will you define it?

THE PRESIDENT: Oh, yes. There may be -- frankly, there may be some differences of opinion. As you know, I tend to take a rather narrow view of it because I don't think that we should, in effect, reward Mr. Milosevic's political control by doing things which are not humanitarian in nature. But based on the virtual daily reports I get about where we all are on this and where we are operating in Kosovo, I now no longer expect them to be big debates. I don't expect there will be a big difference of opinion.

Yes, go ahead, John.

Q Mr. President, the House of Representatives appears to be on the verge of terminating funding for the F-22 fighter. Will the White House fight hard for full funding for that program, even if it means sacrificing other Pentagon airplane programs or even pay for servicemen?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, I don't think we should sacrifice the pay for our service personnel because we now are getting back in the ball game in recruitment. You know, we've really been -- the good economy and the increased deployments and the low pay all combined we're making it hard for us to both recruit and retain people. And the people are still the most important part of our military -- their quality and their training and their morale and their commitment and the condition of their families. So I don't think that.

Now, the Congress every year puts other things into the defense budget which are not priorities for the Pentagon, and are priorities for the Congress. We can fund the F-22, we can fund the plane without compromising the basic priorities of our national defense within the funds set aside, and that is what I will fight to do. I think it would be a mistake to abandon the project. I think it has real potential to add to our national defense. I have always supported it and I hope that it can be preserved.

Q Thank you, Mr. President. You had some fun, recently, with George W. Bush and his slogan of "compassionate conservatism." But you went beyond the notion that he's not offering many details as policy, and seemed to ridicule his slogan and even question his sincerity. Were you just trying to help Mr. Gore's candidacy or were you taking the opportunity maybe to just needle the leading Republican candidate?

THE PRESIDENT: No, I was just having a little fun. (Laughter.) You know, that's a long time -- if we don't have any laughs it's going to be a very tedious struggle between now and November of 2000.

Let me say this. I think that every person struggles to find a phrase or something that will sort of stand for what he or she is trying to do. So I was really just having a little fun.

I think the most important thing is that all the candidates make their positions clear on the great debates going on now, and make their positions clear on what they would do if they got the job. To me, that's the most important thing. You know, I am not involved in this campaign as a candidate, and I have a full-time job, so I'm not involved in any sort of full-time consulting role. (Laughter.) So I look at this -- I look at this more from the point of view of the average American voter -- what will change the lives of America.

For example, every candidate should tell us, are you for the patients' bill of rights are you for closing the gun show loophole; are you for raising the minimum wage; are you for the House Republican tax plan, or do you favor our plan on Social Security and saving Social Security and Medicare and making America debt-free and having a smaller tax cut that enables us to continue to fund education and defense and these other things? What are you going to do if you get elected?

To me, the best thing the Vice President has done is to talk about dramatically intensifying the war on cancer, making pre-school universal, increasing access to college by helping people save without tax

consequences; what he would do to make America a safer country, what he would do in communities to have faith-based organizations cooperate with governments more. I think these are interesting ideas about how you build on the progress the country has made the last six and a half years.

So I would say to everyone -- you know, use whatever slogans you want, but tell us where you stand. I think that's the most important thing.

Susan?

Q Mr. President --

THE PRESIDENT: Yes, I'll come over here. I know I'm left leaning, but I will give you -- (laughter) --

Q Mr. President, the economy is going great. In a new USA Today-CNN poll this week, your approval rating was at a very healthy 58 percent. But that same poll showed that by 50 percent to 38 percent, Americans said they wanted to see a change from Clinton administration policies -- not a continuation of them. What do you think accounts for that sentiment for change, and do you think it means that you present something of a mixed blessing to Mrs. Clinton and Vice President Gore in their campaigns next year?

THE PRESIDENT: I think what that means people think things are going well, but they want a change in policy. I think that's right. If you asked me that question, and you worded it in that way, I'd be in the 50 percent, because I think that -- my own view is that, particularly in a dynamic time, where things are changing, you should want continued change. But is change -- the question is, should we change in a way that builds on what has been done and goes beyond it -- which is what I would argue -- or should you change and go back to the policies we were following when we had \$290-billion deficits and we averaged over 7 percent unemployment for 12 years. I mean, I think that's really the question the American people have to ask themselves.

I think change is good. The great thing about this country is that it works best when it's sort of in a perpetual stage of renewal. So I would, myself, as a citizen, I would vote against somebody who said, vote for me and I'll keep it just like it is; everything that Bill Clinton did is exactly what I'll do. I would vote against that candidate, because I do not believe that is the right thing to do.

But what I think we should do is we should build on the progress of the last six years and go beyond it, and not adopt a completely different approach which has been proven not to work. So all I want the American people to do is to remember what it was like before, think what

it's like now, recognize that ideas and policies have consequences. And the American people usually get it right; that's why we're all still around here after more than 200 years.

Q -- (inaudible.)

THE PRESIDENT: No.

Q -- for Mrs. Clinton and Mr. Gore?

THE PRESIDENT: No, because I -- no, he has done -- look at what the Vice President's done. He's staked out new issues here. He said, here's how I'm going to change what we're doing in cancer research; here's how I'm going to change what we're doing in education; here's how I'm going to change what we're doing in crime -- but not to reverse what we've done, but to build on it and go beyond it. So I think that's very, very -- that's the sort of thing that's worthy of debate. That's not the same; that is change.

What the American people have to decide is what kind of change do they want. Do they want to build on what has worked for the last six and a half years, or do they want to abandon it and go back to what failed them

for 12 years before. That will be the decision they have to make.

Yes, go ahead.

Q In your last press conference, sir, with Prime Minister Ehud Barak, you mentioned you wanted better, normalized relations with Syria. Now, have you received any response, positive response or indication from Syria towards that? And, on Iran, can you share with us the administration's views of -- events and administrations in Iran? Thank you.

THE PRESIDENT: Well, on Syria let me say, the only thing I can tell you is that the statements, at least, that have been coming out of Syria have been quite encouraging in terms of the regard that President Assad seems to have for Prime Minister Barak, and the willingness, the openness that there is to negotiating and moving toward peace. So I'm encouraged by that.

And on Iran, frankly, I'm reluctant to say anything for fear that it will be used in a way that's not helpful to the forces of openness and reform. I think that people everywhere, particularly younger people, hope that they will be able to pursue their religious convictions and their personal dreams in an atmosphere of greater freedom, that still allows them to be deeply loyal to their nation. And I think the Iranian people obviously love their country and are proud of its history and have enormous potential. And I just hope they find a way to work through all this, and I believe they will.

Q You mentioned the patients' bill of rights. It seems like that was an argument by both parties over providing more for people who already are lucky enough to have health insurance. And, in fact, neither party dealt with some very fundamental issues that energized you and the First Lady five and six years ago. The question is, with such a robust economy and the budget surpluses, if not now, when, and if not you, who, would provide the leadership to provide for those folks?

THE PRESIDENT: Yes, but I think the bigger question is how. That is, it is true that just as we've predicted in 1993 and 1994, that the percentage of people who have health insurance on the job is going down, just as we said it would, if nothing was done. So what we have tried to do is to isolate discrete populations that seem to be most in need and try to offer them help.

In the Balanced Budget Act of 1997, we reached bipartisan agreement on a proposal that would fund providing health insurance for up to 5 million more children through state-designed programs. Now, I've been a little disappointed -- and I'm not being critical of any of the states, either, here -- but I've been a little disappointed that the uptake on the program has been a little slow. That is, I would have thought by now we'd have almost 3 million of those 5 million children enrolled already, because we've got the money there, and we're well behind that.

So we are looking at whether there are things that we can do at the national level to work with the states to simplify access to the children's health insurance programs that the states have set up. But -- and I also had a talk with Senator Kennedy, the other day who believes that for little or no more extra money, we could actually adjust the program and take in several million more children. So the children are the biggest group.

Then, I have a proposal, as you know, that's part of my Medicare reform proposal that I didn't mention today, but I want to reiterate it, that would allow the most vulnerable group of people without health insurance, people between the ages of 55 and 65, to buy into the Medicare system in a way that would not compromise the integrity of the system. So I think that is quite important.

In addition to that, there are a lot of states -- there are some states -- Tennessee was the first state to do this under the former

governor -- they started it -- which are allowing lower-income working families to buy into their Medicaid programs on a sliding scale.

So if all these things were done, we would dramatically reduce the number of people without health insurance and we'll eventually probably get down to, if we keep pushing in this direction, get down to the point where the largest group of people without health insurance are young, single people who believe that they're going to live forever and be healthy forever and don't want to bear the cost. And we'll have to think about, then, what to do.

But I think the best thing to do is try to get as many kids as we can covered, and then try to get these people who are out of the work force who are older, but they're not old enough to get Medicare, to get them at least where they can all afford on a sliding scale to buy into the Medicare program.

Go ahead, Scott.

Q Thank you, Mr. President. On the Kennedy tragedy, sir, will you authorize the Navy to participate in a burial at sea ceremony? Why do you believe it's justified to spend so many federal resources on this tragedy? And, finally, sir, I wonder if you would give us your thoughts on Mr. Kennedy's last visit here to the White House. I understand you and the First Lady took him on a tour.

THE PRESIDENT: Well, we have received -- I have received no official word, personal word from the family what burial arrangements they want. Until they make a statement about it, I just don't feel that I can say anything.

Secondly, I will say that until just a couple of days ago the recovery efforts -- the rescue, then the recovery efforts that were undertaken were consistent with what would have been done in any other case. Because the Coast Guard felt that they had the capacity to succeed in this if they had a few more days, and because of the role of the Kennedy family in our national lives, and because of the enormous losses that they have sustained in our lifetimes, I thought it was appropriate to give them a few more days. And if anyone believes that was wrong, the Coast Guard is not at fault; I am. It was because I thought it was the right thing to do under the circumstances.

Now, you asked about -- John Kennedy had actually not been back to the White House since his father was killed, until I became President. First, he was on an advisory committee that made a report to me and he came back to the Oval Office, where he saw the desk that he took the famous picture in, coming through the gate, for the first time since he was a little boy.

And then last year -- maybe you would have a better memory than I would, but it seems to me it was last May, when we had the event at the White House celebrating the series that HBO did on the Apollo program. Do you remember they did a series on the space program that was done after the movie came out? And Tom Hanks came, a lot of people came. And he was invited because of his father's role in starting the space program. And he and Carolyn came. And afterward I asked them if they would like to go upstairs, and he said he would. So I took him upstairs and showed him the residence, which he'd not seen since he was a tiny boy.

And I showed him some of my -- the memorabilia that I had from his father's service. I have a picture of his father speaking to the Irish Parliament, and a number of other things which he thought were very interesting. And we took a -- we had a very nice evening. And I sent him the pictures from it. And then, in return, he sent me a signed copy of his favorite picture of his father, which is now upstairs. It's John Kennedy campaigning in Virginia, in Charlottesville in 1960. It's quite a lovely picture -- interesting picture.

But it was a nice night. I think that he really wanted to kind

of come to terms with all of it. And I think he and Carolyn, they were delightful young people, and they had a great time here that night. And Hillary and I loved having them here. It was quite a great night.

Q To just follow on that, sir, just one question, if I may. Is there anything that Mr. Kennedy said to you that night that particularly struck you?

THE PRESIDENT: We just had a friendly conversation. You know, I knew him pretty well by then. We'd been -- I met him years ago when he was a law student, doing a summer internship with Mickey Kantor's law firm out in Los Angeles, long before I ever thought I'd be here and before I ever thought we'd have any other contacts. He just happened to be -- Mickey asked me if I'd speak to his law clerks, because I was in LA to give an education speech, and I went by and visited with them and he was there. And we had been together on many occasions since then.

The thing that struck me was I thought he was -- he said he was glad to be back. And I think he -- he was a very deliberate person, as many people have noticed, about when he would be publicly exposed and all of that. He had his mother's care for having a private life. And I think that he had not -- I'm not sure he had really felt he wanted to come back to the White House before he did. But especially in light of everything that's happened, I'm glad he had the chance to come back here one more time and see the residence and know where he was when he was a little boy. I'm glad he did that. I'm grateful that that happened.

Yes, go ahead. Yes, yes, please.

Q On Colombia, the Pastrana administration are asking the United States for \$500 million to support the military against the guerrillas. Is your administration ready to respond to that request? And, also, the Colombians are asking for more direct intervention from the United States. Are you considering this possibility? And, also, Mexico, you're going to meet with President Zedillo in October. And the Mexican government is still rejecting the extraditions of major drug lords. What are you going to ask him -- you're going to get assurance from him to extradite these big narcotic traffickers to the United States?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, you know, we had no extraditions between Mexico and the United States for a long time, and we've actually had some now. So we're moving in the right direction. And President Zedillo and I have been pretty successful in continuing to move our relationship in the right direction, so we'll work on that.

On Colombia, I'm not prepared to make any kind of dollar commitment today. But let me say, I have stayed in close touch with President Pastrana, and I admire the fact that he has really thrown himself into trying to end the civil conflicts in Colombia, to stop the insurgency. The people in the United States have a real interest in that because I think that until the civil discord in Colombia is brought to an end, it is going to be much, much harder for us to restrain the activities of the narco-traffickers there, and their reach.

So, in addition to wanting a neighbor and a democracy in Latin America to be free of the kind of violence and heartbreak that the Colombian people have undergone because of this, it is also very much in our national security interest to do what we can, if we can be helpful in ending the civil conflict so that Colombia can be about the business of freeing itself of the influence of the narco-traffickers in ways that would be good for Colombians and good for us as well.

Q Another question about the presidential race. Aside from asking George W. Bush to come forward and give specifics on the issues that you mentioned, could you tell us what you find objectionable about his trying to present a new moderate face for his party, just like you did for the Democrats? And could you tell us whether you're worried whether he will figure out how the Republicans can occupy the center of American politics?

THE PRESIDENT: No.

Q You don't think he can?

THE PRESIDENT: No, no, I don't think I'll answer those questions. (Laughter.) I will say -- no, look, let me say again, I wouldn't even agree with the characterization you gave of my first answer.

When I ran for President, in 1991, the first thing I did was tell the American people what I thought was going on in our country and what I would do. And if you remember, the late Senator Paul Tsongas and I were actually almost ridiculed at the time because we both put out these very detailed plans of what we would do. If you go back and get one of those plans now, you'll see that virtually everything we said we'd do we did do, except for the things we tried to do and were defeated on.

And my view is that there are a lot of things that count in a presidential election toward a successful presidency, but it is -- that go beyond specific issues, and judgment plays a role in it, and crises will always come up and things can be learned and all that. But it really matters where you stand on the big issues that everybody knows about that are going on right now, and it matters where we're going in the future.

So that's the only point I want to make. And I think any -- I would say that applies to every candidate. I don't want to answer the questions you ask me because that's not my job. My job is not to handicap this horse race, not to comment on it, not to comment on the candidates. My job is to work for the American people. But I'm going to answer these questions from the point of view of Joe Citizen. That's -- every political question you asked me from now on, I'm going to pretend that I'm living back in Little Rock already and I'm working on my presidential library and I'm sitting here as a voter saying, where do they stand, what will they do -- all of them. And I do believe the Vice President has done the best job of telling the American people what he would do and -- to go back to Susan's formulation -- how he would change the country in a positive way.

George.

Q Mr. President, as the nation has celebrated the 30th anniversary of the moon landing, a lot of the former astronauts have lamented that no President after Kennedy set a kind of national goal like President Kennedy did of landing on the moon. Do you think that -- in your view, is the country not receptive today to that kind of goal-setting by a President, or is it something a President should do, set a goal of landing on Mars?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, we are planning to land on Mars. But I think -- for one thing, when I became President, the space program was actually in peril. And we -- the space station was certainly at risk. And I have fought for it and I believe in it. And one of the things I talked to -- Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin and Michael Collins were in to see me yesterday, and we talked about where we could go with this. And Dan Goldin was there, the NASA Administrator; and Dr. Neal Lane, my Science Advisor. And we talked about how we could use the coming of the millennium as -- you know, the First Lady sponsored all these other lectures here. And I told him about Stephen Hawking's lecture and what he said. And we talked yesterday about how we could set some goals for the space program, capture the imagination of the American people and broaden the support for it.

And one of the things that I suggested that I think would be quite helpful that we're going to work on now is what we can do to dramatize for the American people -- you mentioned Mars, but I think what is more likely to capture the imagination of the American people are the benefits to us here on Earth of continued advances in space. And some of them, particularly in the health field, are likely to be breath-taking. They're principally in the area of the environment and health.

So I asked our people to start working on that and they said they

would be willing to help us. I have to tell you that it was a great day for me yesterday to have them come by the White House. They also gave me a moon rock, by the way -- but only on loan. (Laughter.) And the moon rock is 3.6 billion years old. So when I feel very tired, I'll look at it and feel young again. (Laughter.)

Yes, go ahead. We had an Irish question first, I promised. Go ahead, what's the Irish question?

Q Thank you, sir. Given the --

THE PRESIDENT: You want to ask one, too?

Q We both have a -- given the various meetings underway with Mo Mowlam here, and George Mitchell there, has any progress been made on the Irish situation? And is one side more to blame than the other on it?

THE PRESIDENT: Okay. Why don't we take both Irish questions at once. What's your Irish question?

Q Last week, you seemed to kind of get fired up when you were talking to the teenagers from Colorado. You said that the politicians in Northern Ireland were behaving akin to school children. Do you feel, after all the work that you've done on this project, that perhaps it was misplaced and you should have perhaps pushed in a place more like Africa, where they have thousands of people dying from ethnic strife, instead of 3,500 over 30 years?

Q And if I can have a third Irish question, what role, if any, do you expect to play, Mr. President, in breaking the deadlock?

THE PRESIDENT: Okay, let me answer the Irish questions, then I'll come back to the "should we have done something else."

I've talked to Senator Mitchell, and he is willing to spend some time -- he can't go back full-time for another year or two, but I'd like to put this in some -- at least I'd like to tell you how I look at it.

Obviously, I am very disappointed at the breakdown of the process here. But I do think it's important to note that neither side wants to abandon the Good Friday Agreement. And that's very important. It's also important to note that everybody agrees on what their responsibilities are and what the other side's responsibilities are, and everybody agrees that it all has to be done by a date certain.

So they have agreed to break out the two areas causing problems, the decommissioning and the standing up to the executive, and try to figure out how they can unlock that, and Mo Mowlam, as you pointed out, is working hard on it, and they've asked Senator Mitchell to come back and do some work on it, and my instinct is that it will be resolved.

Now, let me say in terms of your characterization, here's the problem. To the outsiders -- I told the parties that to the outsiders -- no one, none of us outside, even somebody like me that's been so involved in this, no one will understand if this thing breaks down over who goes first; that that did sound like the kind of argument that young people have, you know -- who goes first.

Underneath that, there's something deeper: The Protestants are afraid that they IRA will never disarm if they let the Sinn Fein go into the executive branch, and the IRA do not believe -- since the agreement did not require decommissioning as a condition of getting into the executive branch, they don't want to have to spend the rest of their lives being told that it wasn't the vote of the people, it wasn't the Good Friday Accord, it was what the Unionists and Great Britain did to force them to give up their arms that got them to disarm. They believe that would, in effect, require them to disavow what they've done for 30 years.

And what they're saying is, when we surrender our arms, we're surrendering to our people. Our people voted for this. We are

surrendering to the will of the people that we represent. So when you put it in that textured way on both sides, it makes it clear why it becomes a difficult issue. And I can't think of anybody better to try to work through it than George Mitchell, because he's got it all in his head and he's put three years into it. But my instinct is that we will get this worked out.

Now, you asked about did I think we had misplaced our energies. I don't think so. We have -- for one thing, we don't have a stronger partner in the world than Great Britain, and for another, we don't have a bigger ethnic group in America than the Irish, and we're tied by blood and emotion to the Irish struggle.

I also think that it has enormous symbolism, beyond the size of the country and the number who have died. And if it can be resolved, I think it will give great impetus to the forces of peace throughout the world. So I don't believe for a moment we made a mistake.

But let me also say I think we should be more involved in Africa and I've tried to involve us more in Africa. I did everything I could to head off that civil war between Ethiopia and Eritrea. It's not a civil war, they are two separate countries, but they once were together and they're basically now arguing over the divorce settlement. And I don't mean to trivialize it in that characterization. And we are still actively involved in trying to stop that.

Reverend Jackson played a significant role in trying to end the awful carnage in Sierra Leone, and I'm very grateful for that. We're now working, and we're able to work with Nigeria to try to stabilize the region. We are training African militaries and the Africa Crisis Response Corps, so that we can, hopefully, prevent further carnage. So I believe the United States should be more involved in Africa.

And, of course, the announcement that the Vice President made on our behalf the other day of our new AIDS initiative in some ways may be the most important thing we can do to save lives there.

So I agree that we should be more involved. But I don't agree that we misplaced our energies in Ireland. I'm proud of every late-night phone call and every frustrating hour I've spent on it.

THE PRESIDENT: Yes, go ahead.

Q -- can I ask about you --

THE PRESIDENT: Well, I don't want to talk about me.

Q Oh, come on.

THE PRESIDENT: I'm not a candidate for anything.

Go ahead, what? Go ahead. All right, one more.

Q Listen, Mr. President, with due respect, in another development, I know that you are for Africa, and you know that I support -- Africa, my friend, the President of the Dominican Republic -- we are Afro-Latino. But I am not concerned at this moment about Mars. I am concerned about place where I have been for 20 years, the White House, that is going to celebrate 200 year next year. I wonder if you would tell the people of the United States what you are going to plan for that big celebration?

And another thing, Mr. President -- I am disgusted with you -- you have been hiding something extraordinary -- the performance -- or the trade promotional coordinating committee that has been carried out in the last year -- are the participants in the prospective of this economy. Why don't you speak about the success of that initiative? It's a sin that you -- you talk about a lot of things that is -- another thing that is good for America and the world.

THE PRESIDENT: Well, a lot of the things that are good for America don't make good news for them, you see.

Q And I have a follow-up. (Laughter.)

THE PRESIDENT: No, let me just say -- (laughter) -- a follow-up? (Laughter.) Now, that's really good. That is really -- Oh, God, is that good.

Let me just say that we will have a lot of celebrations of the 200th birthday of the White House next year, and it's neat that coincides with the first year of the new century and the millennium. So we'll have -- I'm not prepared to announce them yet, because I want others who deserve more credit than I do to be able to do that. But it will be a signal honor for us to be living here in that year, and we'll be able to do a lot -- and I hope we'll have even more American citizens coming to the White House next year to be a part of it.

Go ahead. Just that follow up -- that showed a lot of guts. (Laughter.) If this is a follow up, I'll give you another question. (Laughter.)

Q Sir, you've stressed that you have plenty to do, and yet for some time, your political career has enjoyed the benefits of support from two people in particular -- the Vice President and the First Lady -- two people who are now in a position to expect some support from you. I'm wondering what you feel you owe those two people in terms of political support, and as you plan your schedule in the weeks and months ahead, how you'll balance that assistance against your job as President, and finally, how you personally are adjusting to what people might think is an interesting shift in role.

Q I have a follow-up to his question. (Laughter.)

THE PRESIDENT: Now, I believe that. (Laughter.)

Well, I will do whatever I'm asked to do, basically. I'll try to be helpful. And if I can be helpful, I will be. But I think the best thing I can do for anyone who generally shares our ideas, is part of our party, trying to move the country forward, is to continue to be a good President and take care of our country.

But I don't mind hard work and I don't mind long hours, and I find myself, apparently unlike some of my predecessors -- but just read what you all say about it -- but I don't feel myself winding down, I feel myself keying up. I want to do more. I want to try to make sure that I give the American people as much as I can every day. So I've got plenty of energy and I'll do whatever I'm asked to do.

I owe them a great deal. I think Al Gore -- everybody in this room knows that he's had far more responsibility and gotten more done than any Vice President in history. Nobody's ever had a role that even approximates that. I don't think the American people know that yet, but I know that. And he deserves a lot of credit for what he's done and he has my friendship and my support. But I also think that it's a mixed blessing, as you say, because people want to see any Vice President out there on his own. If you go back and look at where Richard Nixon was in 1959, you will see the same sort of thing. So I think I see this as a rhythmic process.

I think he'll do fine. But the reason I think that has nothing to do with the questions you ask me. The reasons I think that are, A, he's a good man with a good record, but most importantly, he's out there telling the American people how he would change the country for the better. And I think that's important.

I did an interview and I talked about Hillary and this -- if she decides to do this I will do whatever I can do. And if she's successful I will happily go to the Senate spouses meeting if that's part of the job. I

have never known anybody who didn't run for office who was a more effective, more consistently committed, completely passionate public citizen than her. So if she decides to do it, and if the people of New York decide that they want her to do it, that's a decision for them to make and they have to deal with that, and she's trying to deal with that, you know, the whole question of moving there.

It is true that shortly after we came here I said, you get to decide where we live from now on for the rest of our lives. And she said, I want to go to New York -- in, like, '93. This is just something that happened later. So I'll be dividing my time between home -- I'm going to go home and build my library and build my center -- I'll divide my time between there and New York, whatever she does about this Senate race.

But if I can help her in any way, I will, because I think it would be a great thing for the country -- not only because of what I owe her, because she just -- what she knows and how she's lived and what she's done. I mean, it's very unusual to find somebody like that who has that much knowledge and background and passion all packed into one place. I mean, I know that you think I'm a biased observer, but I think I could support it with evidence.

Go ahead, Bill.

Q In that same vein, sir -- (laughter) -- as the spotlight shifts from you to your Vice President and to your wife, are you likely to be content, drifting slowly offstage, or do you think that someday you will want to run for office, some office again? Or are you willing to tell us this afternoon, sir, that you will never again run for elective office?

THE PRESIDENT: I don't have any idea. (Laughter.) Really, I don't know. Let me just say this. I love this job. I love it. Even on the bad days -- you can do something good for the country, you can do something good for the future. I have loved doing this. And I have given it every ounce of my energy and ability and judgment. And I feel very fortunate. But we have a system that I, frankly, agree with, even though I'm in pretty good shape -- we have a system that says a President gets two terms and then the President has to go find something else to do with his life. And there are lots of other worthy things to do.

And I was a very happy person before I became President. I never have had any trouble finding something interesting to do that I believed in. And I will do my best to use the opportunity and the gift the American people gave me to serve in this position to be a useful citizen of my country and the world for the rest of my life, and I have no doubt that there will be some way I can do that. And I'm, frankly, kind of excited about it. I mean, it's a new challenge. I'll have to think in a different way and do a different way.

Will I miss a lot of the things about this job? Yes. I'll even miss all of you, believe it or not. But I'm just grateful that I've had the chance to serve and that the results have been good for our people and for our country and I think for the world.

And, you know, that's part of life. Life has its rhythms. And the people that are most satisfied and most happy in life take the rhythms of life and make the most of them, instead of sitting around moping and wishing the rhythms were something other than they are. That's just not the way the life works. And, listen, I'm way ahead and I'm very grateful.

Thank you very much.

END

3:45 P.M. EDT

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THE WHITE HOUSE
Office of the Press Secretary

For Immediate Release
1999

July 21,

PRESS CONFERENCE BY THE PRESIDENT
The East Room

2:35 P.M. EDT

THE PRESIDENT: Good afternoon.

Q Mr. President, you don't know it, but there is such a bright light on you -- we can't see you for the light. (Laughter.)

THE PRESIDENT: I've been waiting a long time for the halo to appear. (Laughter.)

Let me say, ladies and gentlemen, I have a brief opening statement, but before I make that and take questions, I'd like to say that, as you might imagine, I have been briefed on this morning's developments in the search off Martha's Vineyard. Again, let me commend the Coast Guard and all the officials at the local, state and national level for the fine work they have done under extremely difficult circumstances.

Again, I think we should keep our thoughts with the families as events unfold, and my thoughts and prayers are with them.

Today I want to make a brief statement about the choice we face here in Washington and in our country about how best to move forward into the new century and what to do with the surplus. When we look toward the future, it is helpful to remember at least the recent past. Six and a half years ago, the budget deficit was \$290 billion and rising. Wages were stagnant, inequality was growing, social conditions were worsening.

In the 12 years before I took office, unemployment averaged more than 7 percent. It's almost difficult to remember what it was like. No one really thought we could turn it around, let alone bring unemployment to a 29-year low, or turn decades of deficits, during which time the debt of our country was quadrupled in only 12 years, into a surplus of \$99 billion.

Our nation has made a seismic shift in the last six years, from recession to recovery, from a crisis of confidence to a renewal of resolve, from economic disorder to a fiscal house finally in order. Now as we debate what to do with our prosperity, we face a critical choice -- whether to move forward with the fiscal discipline that got us to where we are today, or return to the kind of risk-taking that got us into recessions and deficits before.

We must decide whether to invest the surplus, to strengthen America over the long-term, or to squander it for the short-term. I think the right course is clear. And a bigger surplus only means that the mistake could be bigger, and the missed opportunity greater if we take the wrong course.

I have proposed a balanced budget that puts first things first. I believe we must maintain our sound economic strategy, and invest the surplus in long-term goals -- saving Social Security, saving and strengthening Medicare, modernizing it by providing a long overdue drug benefit, and continuing to meet our basic responsibilities in education, defense, the environment, biomedical research.

Tomorrow I will release a report that shows a great and growing need for prescription drug coverage. What the study shows is that 75 percent of our older Americans lack decent, dependable private-sector coverage of prescription drugs. That's three out of every four seniors. Clearly, America needs a prescription drug plan that is simple, universal and voluntary. Anyone who says we don't I believe is out of date and out of touch.

As I've described, my plan meets these national priorities, while paying off the debt by 2015; while investing in America's new markets, the places that have not yet felt our prosperity; and while providing substantial tax relief -- \$250 billion of it targeted to help families save for retirement, pay for child care, long-term care, for modern schools.

So let's be clear about something. We're not debating whether to have tax cuts or not -- we should have tax cuts, but tax cuts that provide for us first to save Social Security and Medicare, not undermine them; tax cuts we can afford, not ones that would demand drastic cuts in defense, education, agriculture, the environment; tax cuts in the national interest, not special interest.

Now, these are the risks that are posed by the Republican tax

plan that the House is about to vote on. Let me tell you what their plan would do. It would pile up \$3 trillion in debt over the next two decades, right when the baby boomers start to retire -- that's what it costs -- right when Social Security and Medicare feel the crunch.

Because of the cost of the tax plan over the next two decades, I should say what it doesn't do. It doesn't do anything to extend the solvency of Social Security, to extend the solvency significant -- significant -- cuts from where we are today in education, defense, biomedical research, the environment and other critical areas.

If we don't save Social Security it's not because we can't. If we don't strengthen Medicare and add the prescription drug benefit, it's not because we can't. If we don't meet these clear national needs, it's because we choose not to do so. It will be because, instead, we choose to reward ourselves today by risking our prosperity tomorrow.

I hope Congress will make the right choice. When members cast their ballots on the Republican tax plan, they're really voting also on whether to save Social Security and Medicare. They're voting on whether to

pay off the national debt for the first time in over 150 years -- something that would guarantee us lower interest rates, higher investment, more jobs, higher incomes, and for average citizens, lower home mortgage payments, car payments, credit card payments, college loan payments.

They're voting whether to meet our most pressing national priorities in education, defense, nearly every other domain in our people's lives. I think the choice is clear between the plan the Republican leadership has outlined and the national priorities of the American people. I hope we can still work together across party lines to save Social Security and Medicare, to safeguard our priorities and have the right kind of tax cut.

If Congress passes the wrong kind, of course, I will not sign it. I will not allow a risky plan to become law. And as I said, we now have six and a half years of evidence. This is not really a debate that's just about ideas without any evidence. We clearly know what works now, and we ought to stay with it.

As I said, I will work with any member of any party willing to put first things first. We can have a tax cut and do the right thing for the long-term in America. That is my commitment, and I hope that together we can fulfill it for our people.

Thank you very much. Helen.

Q Mr. President, in U.S. treaty relations, is it obligated to defend Taiwan militarily if it abandons the one China policy? And would the U.S. continue military aid if it pursues separatism?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, let me say, first of all, a lot of those questions are governed by the Taiwan Relations Act, which we intend to honor. Our policy is clear: We favor the one China policy; we favor the cross-strait dialogues. The understanding we have had all along with both China and Taiwan is that the differences between them would be resolved peacefully. If that were not to be the case, under the Taiwan Relations Act we would be required to view it with the gravest concern.

But I believe that both China and Taiwan understand this. I believe that they want to stay on a path to prosperity and dialogue. And we have dispatched people today, as the morning press reports, to do what we can to press that case to all sides. This is something that we don't want to see escalate, and I believe that what Mr. Lee said yesterday was trying to move in that direction. We all understand how difficult this is, but I think that the pillars of the policy are still the right ones. The one China policy is right; the cross-strait dialogue is right; the peaceful approach is right. And neither side, in my judgment, should depart from any of those elements.

Q So we would still have to go to war with China if it decided to break away?

THE PRESIDENT: I will say what I've already said -- the Taiwan Relations Act governs our policy. We made it clear. And I have -- as you remember, a few years ago we had a physical expression of that, that we don't believe there should be any violent attempts to resolve this, and we would view it very seriously. But I don't believe there will be. I think that both sides understand what needs to be done.

Terry?

Q Mr. President, do you think that President Lee was unnecessarily provocative in trying to redefine the nature of the Taiwan-Chinese relationship? And is the United States trying to send a signal by delaying a Pentagon mission which was going to Taiwan to assess its air defense needs? And, further, finally, you said that you still believe in a one China policy. How do you address Senator Helms' criticism that that policy is "a puzzling fiction"?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, I don't think it's a puzzling fiction. But if Senator Helms means that today they're not, in fact, unified, then that's true. But the Chinese tend to take a long view of these things and have made clear a sensitivity to the different system that exists on Taiwan, and a willingness to find ways to accommodate it, as they did in working with Hong Kong, and, perhaps, even going beyond that.

So I think the important thing is to let -- they need to take the time necessary to work this out between themselves in a peaceful way. That is clearly in both their interests. And I'm still not entirely sure,

because I have read things which seem to resonate both ways on this, exactly what the Lee statements were entitled -- trying to convey.

But I think that both sides are now quite aware of the fact that they need to find a way to pursue their destinies within the framework that we have followed these last several years, which I might add, has allowed both places to prosper and to grow, to do better and to have more contacts, more investment, and underneath the rhetoric, quite a bit more reconciliation. So I would hope that we would stay with what is working and not depart from it.

Q Is that the meaning of the delay of the Pentagon mission to assess the --

THE PRESIDENT: I didn't think this was the best time to do something which might excite either one side or the other and imply that a military solution is an acceptable alternative. If you really think about what's at stake here, it would be unthinkable. And I want -- I don't want to depart from any of the three pillars. I think we need to stay with one China; I think we need to stay with the dialogue; and I think that no one should contemplate force here.

Randy.

Q Economists have been calling on you to indicate now whether you intend to reappoint Alan Greenspan in order to avoid having the issue to become mired in election year politics and upsetting financial markets next year. Would you like to see the Chairman stay on, and has he given you any indication of his plans?

THE PRESIDENT: I have, as you know, enjoyed a very good relationship, both personally and professionally, with Mr. Greenspan. I think he has done a terrific job. I have no idea whether he would even be willing to serve another term. I will make the decision in a timely fashion. I do not expect it to become embroiled in election year politics; there's no evidence of that.

You heard -- I think the Vice President said yesterday or the day before that he thought he was doing an excellent job. So we believe that as long as the United States is fiscally responsible, then the Fed will respond to developments in our own economy and in the world economy in a way that is clear, transparent, and I think designed to keep our growth going. So I'm not concerned about it.

Peter, go ahead.

Q -- I think the Vice President indicated he was sending a signal by saying that Chairman Greenspan had been doing an excellent job. Do you endorse that interpretation?

THE PRESIDENT: I don't know, all I know is he said he was doing a great job, and I agree with him.

Go ahead.

Q Mr. President, you mentioned the Kennedy tragedy at the beginning of the news conference. Could you please give us a better understanding of what the White House role has been in the conduct of the recovery operation and the decision-making on the release of information about it?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, I think that -- I am unaware of any role we have played in the decision-making of the release of information, except, let me say that today a lot of things are breaking in a hurry, and I believe there are some decisions that ought to be announced by the Kennedy family, and others that ought to be properly announced by either the Coast Guard or the NTSB.

So we have not tried -- to the best of my knowledge, had any role in the timing or substance of release of information. And we have had no role in the conduct of the operation except that I did talk to Admiral Larrabee, I think it was the day before yesterday, at a time when the operation might normally have ceased, and he said, I think we have a chance to find something else because of the equipment we have here, even though it's difficult and I'm inclined to believe because of the circumstances here and because who's involved that we ought to go on a little more. And I said that I would support it and defend it. And I think it was the right decision.

Q Mr. President, if you'll allow me to ask about two different

topics. On the Kennedy search, sir, there have been conflicting reports about whether or not Mr. Kennedy's body has, in fact, been recovered. I understand that based upon the answer you just gave, that might not be a question that you'd want to address, but, perhaps, given the fact that there is this conflicting information you could answer that question.

And, secondly, sir, on this notion of a drug benefit, prescription drug benefit, you chided the Republicans about targeting tax cuts at the wealthy, saying that they're too steered in that direction. How do you reconcile that philosophically with allowing rich Americans, rich older Americans, to get a prescription drug benefit which even you just said this new study will show one in four don't need?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, first of all, it's voluntary. And most wealthy Americans are well taken care of under the present program they have and won't exercise it. So that's the first point I want to make.

The second thing I would like to say is I don't think most people know this, even some of you may have forgotten, but in the 11th hour of the

deficit reduction package negotiations in 1993, in order to get up to \$500 billion in cuts in the deficit projected over five years -- we did much better, as all of you know -- the cap was taken off. The income cap was taken off of the Medicare tax, which means virtually every single upper-income person in America will pay far more into the Medicare program than they will ever draw out in health care or benefits.

They are making a net significant contribution today because, unlike Social Security taxes where there is still an earnings cap, there is no longer an earnings cap on Medicare. And I think a lot of folks have forgotten that -- so that in that sense, this is the most progressive program we have. The upper-income people, particularly once you get over about \$250,000 in income, they're paying far more into this program over the course of their life than they could ever draw out if they were sick every day from the time they're 65 on.

Q Sir, a question --

THE PRESIDENT: I just don't think I should make an announcement about that. I am aware of what the Coast Guard has done and what they have found as of five minutes before I came out here. But I simply -- I just don't think it's appropriate for me -- I'll be glad to comment on whatever they want to say, but I think I should leave it for them to talk.

Q Sir, you talk about how expensive the Republican tax cuts would be. But the Congressional Budget Office has now just come out with a report saying that even with their tax cuts, almost \$800 billion in tax cuts, they would save about \$277 billion over a 10-year period, whereby your program would save only about \$50 billion. That's about \$227 billion difference. How do you reconcile that? And, you know, people on the Hill listen to the CBO.

THE PRESIDENT: They listen to the CBO except where it's inconvenient for them, like the patients' bill of rights. The Republicans have freed us all now to question the CBO, since they ignored the CBO in the patients' bill of rights; they have discredited their own CBO.

Let me say, I haven't seen that CBO accounting. All I can tell you is that all of our budget people were rolling their eyes and saying that it was a very creative study.

Let me just say this: You have six and a half years of experience with the numbers we have given you and the estimates we have made. And every single year, our numbers have not only been accurate, but we have done better than we said we would do -- every single year, for six and a half years now.

Our studies show that their tax cut over the next two decades will cost, first, a trillion dollars and then \$3 trillion in the second decade, and that -- then an enormous loss to the American people in interest savings. That is, we'll have to keep spending more and more of our tax money paying interest on the debt, and it will require huge cuts in education and defense and other things.

You cannot -- they simply cannot credibly make that statement. And they don't put any new money into the Medicare program. And they don't have a Medicare reform package out there. So unless they just simply propose to bankrupt all the teaching hospitals and a lot of the other hospitals in the country, and let the Medicare program wither away, as one of the previous leaders so eloquently put it -- they can't possibly finance this tax program without doing serious damage. I can't comment on the CBO study, but it doesn't make any sense to anybody I've talked to about it.

Q May I just follow up --

THE PRESIDENT: Yes.

Q The CBO estimates the cost of your Medicare reforms are more than twice what you say they are.

THE PRESIDENT: Well, again you have evidence. Let me just say this: In the 1997 Balanced Budget Agreement -- okay? -- and this is the reason all these teaching hospitals are in trouble today -- we agreed to a Medicare savings figure. And we said, okay, here is our health information -- this is what we do in the Executive Branch, we deal with these hospitals

-- here are the changes you need to make in the Medicare program to achieve the savings that the Republicans and the Democrats in Congress and the White House agreed on.

And the CBO said, no, no, no, no, that won't come close; you need these changes plus these changes. And we said, okay, we're following the CBO, we put it in there. What happened? And that's one of the reasons the surplus is somewhat bigger than it otherwise would be -- the cuts in Medicare were far more severe, our numbers were right, their numbers were wrong and that's why you've got all these hospitals all over America, every place I go, talking about how they're threatened with bankruptcy.

So when it comes to estimating Medicare costs, again, we have evidence. And whenever there's been a difference between us and the CBO, we've been right and they've been wrong. That's all I can tell you. No serious person -- so what are they going to do about Medicare? They say our drug program will cost more -- they don't put a red cent into it. What are they going to do about it? Even if you don't have a drug program, if you adopt their tax cut program they won't be able to do anything to extend the solvency of Medicare and they will have to have huge cuts.

For them to produce those savings they are going to -- they can't even fund my defense budget, much less the one they say they want. They're going to have cuts in defense, cuts in education, cuts in the environment. That's all their savings assumed that they're going to stay with the

present budget levels, which they, themselves, are trying to get out of even as we speak here today. So this is -- the American people are not -- I mean, this is not rocket science, this is arithmetic.

And we've been dealing with -- we went from creative supply-side mathematics to elemental arithmetic in 1993. And it has served us very well. And all I'm trying to do is stick with basic arithmetic and get this country out of debt, save Social Security and Medicare, provide this prescription drug benefit, keep us moving forward.

Q Mr. President?

THE PRESIDENT: Next. Let me take John's first, then I'll take you, Sarah.

Q Sir, in your conversation with Chairman Arafat this morning, did you ask him to take any specific steps to advance what you believe is new momentum toward peace, and did you discuss with him his complaints yesterday that he found Prime Minister Barak's 15-month timetable unacceptable?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, I told him only this. I said that -- I generally described my meetings with Prime Minister Barak to him. I told him that he was committed to working in partnership with Chairman Arafat and honoring any agreements that had been made to this point, and that any modifications they made going forward to the benefit of either or both sides would have to be done by mutual agreement; that I thought he was completely committed to resolve all the issues outstanding in the peace process in an expeditious manner. And what I urged him to do was to have this one-on-one meeting, hear him out, think it through, and if he wanted to talk to me again after the meeting occurred, that I would be happy to talk to him.

So I went out of my way not to describe Prime Minister Barak's proposals or to advocate or not advocate, but simply to say that I was convinced they were being made in complete good faith, and that the peace process would be revitalized, and whatever they did from here on out is something that they would do together. And I think he felt good about that. And I did say, after you have the meeting, if you want to talk again about this -- I'll be glad to talk to you. And he said he did. So that's where we are.

Sarah. Go ahead, Sarah.

Q Sir, your microphone is not working apparently; it seems like you're talking very low, we can barely hear you. But in the meantime, don't you think it would be a good idea if we announced for the country's sake the list of conferences to be held at the White House each day, and the list of the people whom the President has appointments with?

THE PRESIDENT: I don't know. I never thought about it. Don't you have a list of the conferences we have every day here?

Q No, indeed. We do -- and what if we find out you haven't any?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, I think I ought to talk to our folks about it, but I will consider that.

Go ahead.

Q Will you be taking any concrete contributions with you to the Balkan summit on investment next week? And you've said that you would give only humanitarian aid to Yugoslavia as long as Milosevic is in power. Will you have any trouble defining that? Will that cause any problems in distinguishing between humanitarian and other aid?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, let me say that I hope very much that there will be some positive, concrete commitments that come out of the meeting that we're going to have. I do not believe -- I do not believe we can achieve the future we want in the Balkans and avoid future ethnic conflicts unless there is a unifying vision which both brings the Balkan states closer together in their economic and political self-interests, and then brings the region as a whole closer to Europe.

And so I think that we have to have some incentives to move in that direction. And there are direct -- there are also indirect things the United States can do to help to contribute to that goal. And because of all the other things that have been going on -- you know it's been a very busy two or three weeks -- we haven't actually had an opportunity to sit down and go through what our options are, so I can't give you a more specific answer.

But I will say this -- if what we have done in Bosnia, and what we have done in Kosovo, is to have lasting benefits, we have got to find a way to create closer unity among the Balkan states themselves, and then with the region and Europe. And that is what I am working on.

And what was the second question you asked?

Q On the humanitarian aid, how will you define it?

THE PRESIDENT: Oh, yes. There may be -- frankly, there may be some differences of opinion. As you know, I tend to take a rather narrow view of it because I don't think that we should, in effect, reward Mr. Milosevic's political control by doing things which are not humanitarian in nature. But based on the virtual daily reports I get about where we all are on this and where we are operating in Kosovo, I now no longer expect them to be big debates. I don't expect there will be a big difference of opinion.

Yes, go ahead, John.

Q Mr. President, the House of Representatives appears to be on the verge of terminating funding for the F-22 fighter. Will the White House fight hard for full funding for that program, even if it means

sacrificing other Pentagon airplane programs or even pay for servicemen?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, I don't think we should sacrifice the pay for our service personnel because we now are getting back in the ball game in recruitment. You know, we've really been -- the good economy and the increased deployments and the low pay all combined we're making it hard for us to both recruit and retain people. And the people are still the most important part of our military -- their quality and their training and their morale and their commitment and the condition of their families. So I don't think that.

Now, the Congress every year puts other things into the defense budget which are not priorities for the Pentagon, and are priorities for the Congress. We can fund the F-22, we can fund the plane without compromising the basic priorities of our national defense within the funds set aside, and that is what I will fight to do. I think it would be a mistake to abandon the project. I think it has real potential to add to our national defense. I have always supported it and I hope that it can be preserved.

Q Thank you, Mr. President. You had some fun, recently, with George W. Bush and his slogan of "compassionate conservatism." But you went beyond the notion that he's not offering many details as policy, and seemed to ridicule his slogan and even question his sincerity. Were you just trying to help Mr. Gore's candidacy or were you taking the opportunity maybe to just needle the leading Republican candidate?

THE PRESIDENT: No, I was just having a little fun. (Laughter.) You know, that's a long time -- if we don't have any laughs it's going to be a very tedious struggle between now and November of 2000.

Let me say this. I think that every person struggles to find a phrase or something that will sort of stand for what he or she is trying to do. So I was really just having a little fun.

I think the most important thing is that all the candidates make their positions clear on the great debates going on now, and make their positions clear on what they would do if they got the job. To me, that's the most important thing. You know, I am not involved in this campaign as a candidate, and I have a full-time job, so I'm not involved in any sort of full-time consulting role. (Laughter.) So I look at this -- I look at this more from the point of view of the average American voter -- what will change the lives of America.

For example, every candidate should tell us, are you for the patients' bill of rights are you for closing the gun show loophole; are you for raising the minimum wage; are you for the House Republican tax plan, or do you favor our plan on Social Security and saving Social Security and Medicare and making America debt-free and having a smaller tax cut that enables us to continue to fund education and defense and these other things? What are you going to do if you get elected?

To me, the best thing the Vice President has done is to talk about dramatically intensifying the war on cancer, making pre-school universal, increasing access to college by helping people save without tax consequences; what he would do to make America a safer country, what he would do in communities to have faith-based organizations cooperate with governments more. I think these are interesting ideas about how you build on the progress the country has made the last six and a half years.

So I would say to everyone -- you know, use whatever slogans you want, but tell us where you stand. I think that's the most important thing.

Susan?

Q Mr. President --

THE PRESIDENT: Yes, I'll come over here. I know I'm left leaning, but I will give you -- (laughter) --

Q Mr. President, the economy is going great. In a new USA Today-CNN poll this week, your approval rating was at a very healthy 58 percent. But that same poll showed that by 50 percent to 38 percent, Americans said they wanted to see a change from Clinton administration policies -- not a continuation of them. What do you think accounts for that sentiment for change, and do you think it means that you present something of a mixed blessing to Mrs. Clinton and Vice President Gore in their campaigns next year?

THE PRESIDENT: I think what that means people think things are going well, but they want a change in policy. I think that's right. If you asked me that question, and you worded it in that way, I'd be in the 50 percent, because I think that -- my own view is that, particularly in a dynamic time, where things are changing, you should want continued change. But is change -- the question is, should we change in a way that builds on what has been done and goes beyond it -- which is what I would argue -- or should you change and go back to the policies we were following when we had \$290-billion deficits and we averaged over 7 percent unemployment for 12 years. I mean, I think that's really the question the American people have to ask themselves.

I think change is good. The great thing about this country is that it works best when it's sort of in a perpetual stage of renewal. So I would, myself, as a citizen, I would vote against somebody who said, vote for me and I'll keep it just like it is; everything that Bill Clinton did is exactly what I'll do. I would vote against that candidate, because I do not believe that is the right thing to do.

But what I think we should do is we should build on the progress of the last six years and go beyond it, and not adopt a completely different approach which has been proven not to work. So all I want the American people to do is to remember what it was like before, think what it's like now, recognize that ideas and policies have consequences. And

the American people usually get it right; that's why we're all still around here after more than 200 years.

Q -- (inaudible.)

THE PRESIDENT: No.

Q -- for Mrs. Clinton and Mr. Gore?

THE PRESIDENT: No, because I -- no, he has done -- look at what the Vice President's done. He's staked out new issues here. He said, here's how I'm going to change what we're doing in cancer research; here's how I'm going to change what we're doing in education; here's how I'm going to change what we're doing in crime -- but not to reverse what we've done, but to build on it and go beyond it. So I think that's very, very -- that's the sort of thing that's worthy of debate. That's not the same; that is change.

What the American people have to decide is what kind of change do they want. Do they want to build on what has worked for the last six and a half years, or do they want to abandon it and go back to what failed them for 12 years before. That will be the decision they have to make.

Yes, go ahead.

Q In your last press conference, sir, with Prime Minister Ehud Barak, you mentioned you wanted better, normalized relations with Syria. Now, have you received any response, positive response or indication from Syria towards that? And, on Iran, can you share with us the administration's views of -- events and administrations in Iran? Thank you.

THE PRESIDENT: Well, on Syria let me say, the only thing I can tell you is that the statements, at least, that have been coming out of Syria have been quite encouraging in terms of the regard that President Assad seems to have for Prime Minister Barak, and the willingness, the openness that there is to negotiating and moving toward peace. So I'm encouraged by that.

And on Iran, frankly, I'm reluctant to say anything for fear that it will be used in a way that's not helpful to the forces of openness and reform. I think that people everywhere, particularly younger people, hope that they will be able to pursue their religious convictions and their personal dreams in an atmosphere of greater freedom, that still allows them to be deeply loyal to their nation. And I think the Iranian people obviously love their country and are proud of its history and have enormous potential. And I just hope they find a way to work through all this, and I believe they will.

Q You mentioned the patients' bill of rights. It seems like that was an argument by both parties over providing more for people who already are lucky enough to have health insurance. And, in fact, neither party dealt with some very fundamental issues that energized you and the First Lady five and six years ago. The question is, with such a robust economy and the budget surpluses, if not now, when, and if not you, who, would provide the leadership to provide for those folks?

THE PRESIDENT: Yes, but I think the bigger question is how. That is, it is true that just as we've predicted in 1993 and 1994, that the percentage of people who have health insurance on the job is going down, just as we said it would, if nothing was done. So what we have tried to do is to isolate discrete populations that seem to be most in need and try to offer them help.

In the Balanced Budget Act of 1997, we reached bipartisan agreement on a proposal that would fund providing health insurance for up to 5 million more children through state-designed programs. Now, I've been a little disappointed -- and I'm not being critical of any of the states, either, here -- but I've been a little disappointed that the uptake on the program has been a little slow. That is, I would have thought by now we'd have almost 3 million of those 5 million children enrolled already, because we've got the money there, and we're well behind that.

So we are looking at whether there are things that we can do at the national level to work with the states to simplify access to the children's health insurance programs that the states have set up. But -- and I also had a talk with Senator Kennedy, the other day who believes that for little or no more extra money, we could actually adjust the program and take in several million more children. So the children are the biggest group.

Then, I have a proposal, as you know, that's part of my Medicare reform proposal that I didn't mention today, but I want to reiterate it, that would allow the most vulnerable group of people without health insurance, people between the ages of 55 and 65, to buy into the Medicare system in a way that would not compromise the integrity of the system. So I think that is quite important.

In addition to that, there are a lot of states -- there are some states -- Tennessee was the first state to do this under the former governor -- they started it -- which are allowing lower-income working families to buy into their Medicaid programs on a sliding scale.

So if all these things were done, we would dramatically reduce the number of people without health insurance and we'll eventually probably get down to, if we keep pushing in this direction, get down to the point where the largest group of people without health insurance are young, single people who believe that they're going to live forever and be healthy forever and don't want to bear the cost. And we'll have to think about, then, what to do.

But I think the best thing to do is try to get as many kids as we can covered, and then try to get these people who are out of the work force who are older, but they're not old enough to get Medicare, to get them at least where they can all afford on a sliding scale to buy into the Medicare program.

Go ahead, Scott.

Q Thank you, Mr. President. On the Kennedy tragedy, sir, will you authorize the Navy to participate in a burial at sea ceremony? Why do you believe it's justified to spend so many federal resources on this tragedy? And, finally, sir, I wonder if you would give us your thoughts on Mr. Kennedy's last visit here to the White House. I understand you and the First Lady took him on a tour.

THE PRESIDENT: Well, we have received -- I have received no official word, personal word from the family what burial arrangements they want. Until they make a statement about it, I just don't feel that I can say anything.

Secondly, I will say that until just a couple of days ago the recovery efforts -- the rescue, then the recovery efforts that were undertaken were consistent with what would have been done in any other case. Because the Coast Guard felt that they had the capacity to succeed in this if they had a few more days, and because of the role of the Kennedy family in our national lives, and because of the enormous losses that they have sustained in our lifetimes, I thought it was appropriate to give them a few more days. And if anyone believes that was wrong, the Coast Guard is not at fault; I am. It was because I thought it was the right thing to do under the circumstances.

Now, you asked about -- John Kennedy had actually not been back to the White House since his father was killed, until I became President. First, he was on an advisory committee that made a report to me and he came back to the Oval Office, where he saw the desk that he took the famous picture in, coming through the gate, for the first time since he was a little boy.

And then last year -- maybe you would have a better memory than I would, but it seems to me it was last May, when we had the event at the White House celebrating the series that HBO did on the Apollo program. Do you remember they did a series on the space program that was done after the movie came out? And Tom Hanks came, a lot of people came. And he was invited because of his father's role in starting the space program. And he and Carolyn came. And afterward I asked them if they would like to go upstairs, and he said he would. So I took him upstairs and showed him the residence, which he'd not seen since he was a tiny boy.

And I showed him some of my -- the memorabilia that I had from his father's service. I have a picture of his father speaking to the Irish Parliament, and a number of other things which he thought were very interesting. And we took a -- we had a very nice evening. And I sent him the pictures from it. And then, in return, he sent me a signed copy of his favorite picture of his father, which is now upstairs. It's John Kennedy campaigning in Virginia, in Charlottesville in 1960. It's quite a lovely picture -- interesting picture.

But it was a nice night. I think that he really wanted to kind of come to terms with all of it. And I think he and Carolyn, they were delightful young people, and they had a great time here that night. And Hillary and I loved having them here. It was quite a great night.

Q To just follow on that, sir, just one question, if I may. Is there anything that Mr. Kennedy said to you that night that particularly struck you?

THE PRESIDENT: We just had a friendly conversation. You know, I knew him pretty well by then. We'd been -- I met him years ago when he was a law student, doing a summer internship with Mickey Kantor's law firm out in Los Angeles, long before I ever thought I'd be here and before I ever thought we'd have any other contacts. He just happened to be -- Mickey asked me if I'd speak to his law clerks, because I was in LA to give an education speech, and I went by and visited with them and he was there. And we had been together on many occasions since then.

The thing that struck me was I thought he was -- he said he was glad to be back. And I think he -- he was a very deliberate person, as many people have noticed, about when he would be publicly exposed and all of that. He had his mother's care for having a private life. And I think that he had not -- I'm not sure he had really felt he wanted to come back to the White House before he did. But especially in light of everything that's happened, I'm glad he had the chance to come back here one more time and see the residence and know where he was when he was a little boy. I'm glad he did that. I'm grateful that that happened.

Yes, go ahead. Yes, yes, please.

Q On Colombia, the Pastrana administration are asking the United States for \$500 million to support the military against the guerrillas. Is your administration ready to respond to that request? And,

also, the Colombians are asking for more direct intervention from the United States. Are you considering this possibility? And, also, Mexico, you're going to meet with President Zedillo in October. And the Mexican government is still rejecting the extraditions of major drug lords. What are you going to ask him -- you're going to get assurance from him to extradite these big narcotic traffickers to the United States?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, you know, we had no extraditions between Mexico and the United States for a long time, and we've actually had some now. So we're moving in the right direction. And President Zedillo and I have been pretty successful in continuing to move our relationship in the right direction, so we'll work on that.

On Colombia, I'm not prepared to make any kind of dollar commitment today. But let me say, I have stayed in close touch with President Pastrana, and I admire the fact that he has really thrown himself

into trying to end the civil conflicts in Colombia, to stop the insurgency. The people in the United States have a real interest in that because I think that until the civil discord in Colombia is brought to an end, it is going to be much, much harder for us to restrain the activities of the narco-traffickers there, and their reach.

So, in addition to wanting a neighbor and a democracy in Latin America to be free of the kind of violence and heartbreak that the Colombian people have undergone because of this, it is also very much in our national security interest to do what we can, if we can be helpful in ending the civil conflict so that Colombia can be about the business of freeing itself of the influence of the narco-traffickers in ways that would be good for Colombians and good for us as well.

Q Another question about the presidential race. Aside from asking George W. Bush to come forward and give specifics on the issues that you mentioned, could you tell us what you find objectionable about his trying to present a new moderate face for his party, just like you did for the Democrats? And could you tell us whether you're worried whether he will figure out how the Republicans can occupy the center of American politics?

THE PRESIDENT: No.

Q You don't think he can?

THE PRESIDENT: No, no, I don't think I'll answer those questions. (Laughter.) I will say -- no, look, let me say again, I wouldn't even agree with the characterization you gave of my first answer.

When I ran for President, in 1991, the first thing I did was tell the American people what I thought was going on in our country and what I would do. And if you remember, the late Senator Paul Tsongas and I were actually almost ridiculed at the time because we both put out these very detailed plans of what we would do. If you go back and get one of those plans now, you'll see that virtually everything we said we'd do we did do, except for the things we tried to do and were defeated on.

And my view is that there are a lot of things that count in a presidential election toward a successful presidency, but it is -- that go beyond specific issues, and judgment plays a role in it, and crises will always come up and things can be learned and all that. But it really matters where you stand on the big issues that everybody knows about that are going on right now, and it matters where we're going in the future.

So that's the only point I want to make. And I think any -- I would say that applies to every candidate. I don't want to answer the questions you ask me because that's not my job. My job is not to handicap this horse race, not to comment on it, not to comment on the candidates. My job is to work for the American people. But I'm going to answer these questions from the point of view of Joe Citizen. That's -- every political question you asked me from now on, I'm going to pretend that I'm living back in Little Rock already and I'm working on my presidential library and I'm sitting here as a voter saying, where do they stand, what will they do -- all of them. And I do believe the Vice President has done the best job of telling the American people what he would do and -- to go back to Susan's formulation -- how he would change the country in a positive way. George.

Q Mr. President, as the nation has celebrated the 30th anniversary of the moon landing, a lot of the former astronauts have lamented that no President after Kennedy set a kind of national goal like President Kennedy did of landing on the moon. Do you think that -- in your view, is the country not receptive today to that kind of goal-setting by a President, or is it something a President should do, set a goal of landing on Mars?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, we are planning to land on Mars. But I think -- for one thing, when I became President, the space program was actually in peril. And we -- the space station was certainly at risk. And I have fought for it and I believe in it. And one of the things I talked to -- Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin and Michael Collins were in to see me yesterday, and we talked about where we could go with this. And Dan Goldin was there, the NASA Administrator; and Dr. Neal Lane, my Science Advisor. And we talked about how we could use the coming of the millennium as -- you know, the First Lady sponsored all these other lectures here. And I told him about Stephen Hawking's lecture and what he said. And we talked yesterday about how we could set some goals for the space program, capture the imagination of the American people and broaden the support for it.

And one of the things that I suggested that I think would be

quite helpful that we're going to work on now is what we can do to dramatize for the American people -- you mentioned Mars, but I think what is more likely to capture the imagination of the American people are the benefits to us here on Earth of continued advances in space. And some of them, particularly in the health field, are likely to be breath-taking. They're principally in the area of the environment and health.

So I asked our people to start working on that and they said they would be willing to help us. I have to tell you that it was a great day for me yesterday to have them come by the White House. They also gave me a moon rock, by the way -- but only on loan. (Laughter.) And the moon rock is 3.6 billion years old. So when I feel very tired, I'll look at it and feel young again. (Laughter.)

Yes, go ahead. We had an Irish question first, I promised. Go ahead, what's the Irish question?

Q Thank you, sir. Given the --

THE PRESIDENT: You want to ask one, too?

Q We both have a -- given the various meetings underway with Mo Mowlam here, and George Mitchell there, has any progress been made on the Irish situation? And is one side more to blame than the other on it?

THE PRESIDENT: Okay. Why don't we take both Irish questions at once. What's your Irish question?

Q Last week, you seemed to kind of get fired up when you were talking to the teenagers from Colorado. You said that the politicians in Northern Ireland were behaving akin to school children. Do you feel, after all the work that you've done on this project, that perhaps it was misplaced and you should have perhaps pushed in a place more like Africa, where they have thousands of people dying from ethnic strife, instead of 3,500 over 30 years?

Q And if I can have a third Irish question, what role, if any, do you expect to play, Mr. President, in breaking the deadlock?

THE PRESIDENT: Okay, let me answer the Irish questions, then I'll come back to the "should we have done something else."

I've talked to Senator Mitchell, and he is willing to spend some time -- he can't go back full-time for another year or two, but I'd like to put this in some -- at least I'd like to tell you how I look at it.

Obviously, I am very disappointed at the breakdown of the process here. But I do think it's important to note that neither side wants to abandon the Good Friday Agreement. And that's very important. It's also important to note that everybody agrees on what their responsibilities are and what the other side's responsibilities are, and everybody agrees that it all has to be done by a date certain.

So they have agreed to break out the two areas causing problems, the decommissioning and the standing up to the executive, and try to figure out how they can unlock that, and Mo Mowlam, as you pointed out, is working hard on it, and they've asked Senator Mitchell to come back and do some work on it, and my instinct is that it will be resolved.

Now, let me say in terms of your characterization, here's the problem. To the outsiders -- I told the parties that to the outsiders -- no one, none of us outside, even somebody like me that's been so involved in this, no one will understand if this thing breaks down over who goes first; that that did sound like the kind of argument that young people have, you know -- who goes first.

Underneath that, there's something deeper: The Protestants are afraid that they IRA will never disarm if they let the Sinn Fein go into the executive branch, and the IRA do not believe -- since the agreement did not require decommissioning as a condition of getting into the executive branch, they don't want to have to spend the rest of their lives being told that it wasn't the vote of the people, it wasn't the Good Friday Accord, it was what the Unionists and Great Britain did to force them to give up their arms that got them to disarm. They believe that would, in effect, require them to disavow what they've done for 30 years.

And what they're saying is, when we surrender our arms, we're surrendering to our people. Our people voted for this. We are surrendering to the will of the people that we represent. So when you put it in that textured way on both sides, it makes it clear why it becomes a difficult issue. And I can't think of anybody better to try to work through it than George Mitchell, because he's got it all in his head and he's put three years into it. But my instinct is that we will get this worked out.

Now, you asked about did I think we had misplaced our energies. I don't think so. We have -- for one thing, we don't have a stronger partner in the world than Great Britain, and for another, we don't have a bigger ethnic group in America than the Irish, and we're tied by blood and emotion to the Irish struggle.

I also think that it has enormous symbolism, beyond the size of the country and the number who have died. And if it can be resolved, I think it will give great impetus to the forces of peace throughout the world. So I don't believe for a moment we made a mistake.

But let me also say I think we should be more involved in Africa and I've tried to involve us more in Africa. I did everything I could to head off that civil war between Ethiopia and Eritrea. It's not a civil war, they are two separate countries, but they once were together and

they're basically now arguing over the divorce settlement. And I don't mean to trivialize it in that characterization. And we are still actively involved in trying to stop that.

Reverend Jackson played a significant role in trying to end the awful carnage in Sierra Leone, and I'm very grateful for that. We're now working, and we're able to work with Nigeria to try to stabilize the region. We are training African militaries and the Africa Crisis Response Corps, so that we can, hopefully, prevent further carnage. So I believe the United States should be more involved in Africa.

And, of course, the announcement that the Vice President made on our behalf the other day of our new AIDS initiative in some ways may be the most important thing we can do to save lives there.

So I agree that we should be more involved. But I don't agree that we misplaced our energies in Ireland. I'm proud of every late-night phone call and every frustrating hour I've spent on it.

THE PRESIDENT: Yes, go ahead.

Q -- can I ask about you --

THE PRESIDENT: Well, I don't want to talk about me.

Q Oh, come on.

THE PRESIDENT: I'm not a candidate for anything.

Go ahead, what? Go ahead. All right, one more.

Q Listen, Mr. President, with due respect, in another development, I know that you are for Africa, and you know that I support -- Africa, my friend, the President of the Dominican Republic -- we are Afro-Latino. But I am not concerned at this moment about Mars. I am concerned about place where I have been for 20 years, the White House, that is going to celebrate 200 year next year. I wonder if you would tell the people of the United States what you are going to plan for that big celebration?

And another thing, Mr. President -- I am disgusted with you -- you have been hiding something extraordinary -- the performance -- or the trade promotional coordinating committee that has been carried out in the last year -- are the participants in the prospective of this economy. Why don't you speak about the success of that initiative? It's a sin that you -- you talk about a lot of things that is -- another thing that is good for America and the world.

THE PRESIDENT: Well, a lot of the things that are good for America don't make good news for them, you see.

Q And I have a follow-up. (Laughter.)

THE PRESIDENT: No, let me just say -- (laughter) -- a follow-up? (Laughter.) Now, that's really good. That is really -- Oh, God, is that good.

Let me just say that we will have a lot of celebrations of the 200th birthday of the White House next year, and it's neat that coincides with the first year of the new century and the millennium. So we'll have -- I'm not prepared to announce them yet, because I want others who deserve more credit than I do to be able to do that. But it will be a signal honor for us to be living here in that year, and we'll be able to do a lot -- and I hope we'll have even more American citizens coming to the White House next year to be a part of it.

Go ahead. Just that follow up -- that showed a lot of guts.

(Laughter.) If this is a follow up, I'll give you another question. (Laughter.)

Q Sir, you've stressed that you have plenty to do, and yet for some time, your political career has enjoyed the benefits of support from two people in particular -- the Vice President and the First Lady -- two people who are now in a position to expect some support from you. I'm wondering what you feel you owe those two people in terms of political support, and as you plan your schedule in the weeks and months ahead, how you'll balance that assistance against your job as President, and finally, how you personally are adjusting to what people might think is an interesting shift in role.

Q I have a follow-up to his question. (Laughter.)

THE PRESIDENT: Now, I believe that. (Laughter.)

Well, I will do whatever I'm asked to do, basically. I'll try to be helpful. And if I can be helpful, I will be. But I think the best thing I can do for anyone who generally shares our ideas, is part of our party, trying to move the country forward, is to continue to be a good President and take care of our country.

But I don't mind hard work and I don't mind long hours, and I find myself, apparently unlike some of my predecessors -- but just read what you all say about it -- but I don't feel myself winding down, I feel myself keying up. I want to do more. I want to try to make sure that I give the American people as much as I can every day. So I've got plenty of energy and I'll do whatever I'm asked to do.

I owe them a great deal. I think Al Gore -- everybody in this room knows that he's had far more responsibility and gotten more done than any Vice President in history. Nobody's ever had a role that even approximates that. I don't think the American people know that yet, but I know that. And he deserves a lot of credit for what he's done and he has my friendship and my support. But I also think that it's a mixed blessing,

as you say, because people want to see any Vice President out there on his own. If you go back and look at where Richard Nixon was in 1959, you will

see the same sort of thing. So I think I see this as a rhythmic process.

I think he'll do fine. But the reason I think that has nothing to do with the questions you ask me. The reasons I think that are, A, he's a good man with a good record, but most importantly, he's out there telling the American people how he would change the country for the better. And I think that's important.

I did an interview and I talked about Hillary and this -- if she decides to do this I will do whatever I can do. And if she's successful I will happily go to the Senate spouses meeting if that's part of the job. I have never known anybody who didn't run for office who was a more effective, more consistently committed, completely passionate public citizen than her. So if she decides to do it, and if the people of New York decide that they want her to do it, that's a decision for them to make and they have to deal with that, and she's trying to deal with that, you know, the whole question of moving there.

It is true that shortly after we came here I said, you get to decide where we live from now on for the rest of our lives. And she said, I want to go to New York -- in, like, '93. This is just something that happened later. So I'll be dividing my time between home -- I'm going to go home and build my library and build my center -- I'll divide my time between there and New York, whatever she does about this Senate race.

But if I can help her in any way, I will, because I think it would be a great thing for the country -- not only because of what I owe her, because she just -- what she knows and how she's lived and what she's done. I mean, it's very unusual to find somebody like that who has that much knowledge and background and passion all packed into one place. I mean, I know that you think I'm a biased observer, but I think I could support it with evidence.

Go ahead, Bill.

Q In that same vein, sir -- (laughter) -- as the spotlight shifts from you to your Vice President and to your wife, are you likely to be content, drifting slowly offstage, or do you think that someday you will want to run for office, some office again? Or are you willing to tell us this afternoon, sir, that you will never again run for elective office?

THE PRESIDENT: I don't have any idea. (Laughter.) Really, I don't know. Let me just say this. I love this job. I love it. Even on the bad days -- you can do something good for the country, you can do something good for the future. I have loved doing this. And I have given it every ounce of my energy and ability and judgment. And I feel very fortunate. But we have a system that I, frankly, agree with, even though I'm in pretty good shape -- we have a system that says a President gets two terms and then the President has to go find something else to do with his life. And there are lots of other worthy things to do.

And I was a very happy person before I became President. I never have had any trouble finding something interesting to do that I believed in. And I will do my best to use the opportunity and the gift the American people gave me to serve in this position to be a useful citizen of my country and the world for the rest of my life, and I have no doubt that there will be some way I can do that. And I'm, frankly, kind of excited about it. I mean, it's a new challenge. I'll have to think in a different way and do a different way.

Will I miss a lot of the things about this job? Yes. I'll even miss all of you, believe it or not. But I'm just grateful that I've had the chance to serve and that the results have been good for our people and for our country and I think for the world.

And, you know, that's part of life. Life has its rhythms. And the people that are most satisfied and most happy in life take the rhythms of life and make the most of them, instead of sitting around moping and wishing the rhythms were something other than they are. That's just not the way the life works. And, listen, I'm way ahead and I'm very grateful.

Thank you very much.

END

3:45 P.M. EDT

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THE WHITE HOUSE
Office of the Press Secretary

For Immediate Release
1999

July 21,

PRESS CONFERENCE BY THE PRESIDENT
The East Room

2:35 P.M. EDT

THE PRESIDENT: Good afternoon.

Q Mr. President, you don't know it, but there is such a bright light on you -- we can't see you for the light. (Laughter.)

THE PRESIDENT: I've been waiting a long time for the halo to appear. (Laughter.)

Let me say, ladies and gentlemen, I have a brief opening statement, but before I make that and take questions, I'd like to say that, as you might imagine, I have been briefed on this morning's developments in the search off Martha's Vineyard. Again, let me commend the Coast Guard and all the officials at the local, state and national level for the fine work they have done under extremely difficult circumstances.

Again, I think we should keep our thoughts with the families as events unfold, and my thoughts and prayers are with them.

Today I want to make a brief statement about the choice we face here in Washington and in our country about how best to move forward into the new century and what to do with the surplus. When we look toward the future, it is helpful to remember at least the recent past. Six and a half years ago, the budget deficit was \$290 billion and rising. Wages were stagnant, inequality was growing, social conditions were worsening.

In the 12 years before I took office, unemployment averaged more than 7 percent. It's almost difficult to remember what it was like. No one really thought we could turn it around, let alone bring unemployment to a 29-year low, or turn decades of deficits, during which time the debt of our country was quadrupled in only 12 years, into a surplus of \$99 billion.

Our nation has made a seismic shift in the last six years, face a critical choice -- whether to move forward with the fiscal discipline that got us to where we are today, or return to the kind of risk-taking that got us into recessions and deficits before.

We must decide whether to invest the surplus, to strengthen America over the long-term, or to squander it for the short-term. I think the right course is clear. And a bigger surplus only means that the mistake could be bigger, and the missed opportunity greater if we take the wrong course.

I have proposed a balanced budget that puts first things first. I believe we must maintain our sound economic strategy, and invest the surplus in long-term goals -- saving Social Security, saving and strengthening Medicare, modernizing it by providing a long overdue drug benefit, and continuing to meet our basic responsibilities in education, defense, the environment, biomedical research.

Tomorrow I will release a report that shows a great and growing need for prescription drug coverage. What the study shows is that 75 percent of our older Americans lack decent, dependable private-sector coverage of prescription drugs. That's three out of every four seniors. Clearly, America needs a prescription drug plan that is simple, universal and voluntary. Anyone who says we don't I believe is out of date and out of touch.

As I've described, my plan meets these national priorities, while paying off the debt by 2015; while investing in America's new markets, the places that have not yet felt our prosperity; and while providing substantial tax relief -- \$250 billion of it targeted to help families save for retirement, pay for child care, long-term care, for modern schools.

So let's be clear about something. We're not debating whether to have tax cuts or not -- we should have tax cuts, but tax cuts that provide for us first to save Social Security and Medicare, not undermine them; tax cuts we can afford, not ones that would demand drastic cuts in defense, education, agriculture, the environment; tax cuts in the national interest, not special interest.

Now, these are the risks that are posed by the Republican tax plan that the House is about to vote on. Let me tell you what their plan would do. It would pile up \$3 trillion in debt over the next two decades, right when the baby boomers start to retire -- that's what it costs -- right when Social Security and Medicare feel the crunch.

Because of the cost of the tax plan over the next two decades, I should say what it doesn't do. It doesn't do anything to extend the solvency of Social Security, to extend the solvency of Medicare, to provide the prescription drug benefits and it would require significant -- significant -- cuts from where we are today in education, defense, biomedical research, the environment and other critical areas.

If we don't save Social Security it's not because we can't. If we don't strengthen Medicare and add the prescription drug benefit, it's not because we can't. If we don't meet these clear national needs, it's because we choose not to do so. It will be because, instead, we choose to reward ourselves today by risking our prosperity tomorrow.

I hope Congress will make the right choice. When members cast their ballots on the Republican tax plan, they're really voting also on whether to save Social Security and Medicare. They're voting on whether to pay off the national debt for the first time in over 150 years -- something that would guarantee us lower interest rates, higher investment, more jobs, higher incomes, and for average citizens, lower home mortgage payments, car payments, credit card payments, college loan payments.

They're voting whether to meet our most pressing national priorities in education, defense, nearly every other domain in our people's lives. I think the choice is clear between the plan the Republican leadership has outlined and the national priorities of the American people. I hope we can still work together across party lines to save Social Security and Medicare, to safeguard our priorities and have the right kind of tax cut.

If Congress passes the wrong kind, of course, I will not sign it. I will not allow a risky plan to become law. And as I said, we now have six and a half years of evidence. This is not really a debate that's just about ideas without any evidence. We clearly know what works now, and we ought to stay with it.

As I said, I will work with any member of any party willing to put first things first. We can have a tax cut and do the right thing for the long-term in America. That is my commitment, and I hope that together we can fulfill it for our people.

Thank you very much. Helen.

Q Mr. President, in U.S. treaty relations, is it obligated to defend Taiwan militarily if it abandons the one China policy? And would the U.S. continue military aid if it pursues separatism?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, let me say, first of all, a lot of those questions are governed by the Taiwan Relations Act, which we intend to honor. Our policy is clear: We favor the one China policy; we favor the cross-strait dialogues. The understanding we have had all along with both China and Taiwan is that the differences between them would be resolved peacefully. If that were not to be the case, under the Taiwan Relations Act we would be required to view it with the gravest concern.

But I believe that both China and Taiwan understand this. I believe that they want to stay on a path to prosperity and dialogue. And we have dispatched people today, as the morning press reports, to do what we can to press that case to all sides. This is something that we don't want to see escalate, and I believe that what Mr. Lee said yesterday was trying to move in that direction. We all understand how difficult this is, but I think that the pillars of the policy are still the right ones. The one China policy is right; the cross-strait dialogue is right; the peaceful approach is right. And neither side, in my judgment, should depart from any of those elements.

Q So we would still have to go to war with China if it decided to break away?

THE PRESIDENT: I will say what I've already said -- the Taiwan Relations Act governs our policy. We made it clear. And I have -- as you remember, a few years ago we had a physical expression of that, that we don't believe there should be any violent attempts to resolve this, and we would view it very seriously. But I don't believe there will be. I think that both sides understands what needs to be done.

Terry?

Q Mr. President, do you think that President Lee was unnecessarily provocative in trying to redefine the nature of the Taiwan-Chinese relationship? And is the United States trying to send a signal by delaying a Pentagon mission which was going to Taiwan to assess its air defense needs? And, further, finally, you said that you still believe in a one China policy. How do you address Senator Helms' criticism that that policy is "a puzzling fiction"?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, I don't think it's a puzzling fiction. But if Senator Helms means that today they're not, in fact, unified, then that's true. But the Chinese tend to take a long view of these things and have made clear a sensitivity to the different system that exists on Taiwan, and a willingness to find ways to accommodate it, as they did in working with Hong Kong, and, perhaps, even going beyond that.

So I think the important thing is to let -- they need to take the time necessary to work this out between themselves in a peaceful way. That is clearly in both their interests. And I'm still not entirely sure, because I have read things which seem to resonate both ways on this, exactly what the Lee statements were entitled -- trying to convey.

But I think that both sides are now quite aware of the fact that they need to find a way to pursue their destinies within the framework that

we have followed these last several years, which I might add, has allowed both places to prosper and to grow, to do better and to have more contacts, more investment, and underneath the rhetoric, quite a bit more reconciliation. So I would hope that we would stay with what is working and not depart from it.

Q Is that the meaning of the delay of the Pentagon mission to assess the --

THE PRESIDENT: I didn't think this was the best time to do something which might excite either one side or the other and imply that a military solution is an acceptable alternative. If you really think about what's at stake here, it would be unthinkable. And I want -- I don't want to depart from any of the three pillars. I think we need to stay with one China; I think we need to stay with the dialogue; and I think that no one should contemplate force here.

Randy.

Q Economists have been calling on you to indicate now whether you intend to reappoint Alan Greenspan in order to avoid having the issue to become mired in election year politics and upsetting financial markets next year. Would you like to see the Chairman stay on, and has he given you any indication of his plans?

THE PRESIDENT: I have, as you know, enjoyed a very good relationship, both personally and professionally, with Mr. Greenspan. I think he has done a terrific job. I have no idea whether he would even be willing to serve another term. I will make the decision in a timely fashion. I do not expect it to become embroiled in election year politics; there's no evidence of that.

You heard -- I think the Vice President said yesterday or the day before that he thought he was doing an excellent job. So we believe that as long as the United States is fiscally responsible, then the Fed will respond to developments in our own economy and in the world economy in a way that is clear, transparent, and I think designed to keep our growth going. So I'm not concerned about it.

Peter, go ahead.

Q -- I think the Vice President indicated he was sending a signal by saying that Chairman Greenspan had been doing an excellent job. Do you endorse that interpretation?

THE PRESIDENT: I don't know, all I know is he said he was doing a great job, and I agree with him.

Go ahead.

Q Mr. President, you mentioned the Kennedy tragedy at the beginning of the news conference. Could you please give us a better understanding of what the White House role has been in the conduct of the recovery operation and the decision-making on the release of information about it?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, I think that -- I am unaware of any role we have played in the decision-making of the release of information, except, let me say that today a lot of things are breaking in a hurry, and I believe there are some decisions that ought to be announced by the Kennedy family, and others that ought to be properly announced by either the Coast Guard or the NTSB.

So we have not tried -- to the best of my knowledge, had any role in the timing or substance of release of information. And we have had no role in the conduct of the operation except that I did talk to Admiral Larrabee, I think it was the day before yesterday, at a time when the operation might normally have ceased, and he said, I think we have a chance to find something else because of the equipment we have here, even though it's difficult and I'm inclined to believe because of the circumstances here and because who's involved that we ought to go on a little more. And I said that I would support it and defend it. And I think it was the right decision.

Q Mr. President, if you'll allow me to ask about two different topics. On the Kennedy search, sir, there have been conflicting reports about whether or not Mr. Kennedy's body has, in fact, been recovered. I understand that based upon the answer you just gave, that might not be a question that you'd want to address, but, perhaps, given the fact that there is this conflicting information you could answer that question.

And, secondly, sir, on this notion of a drug benefit, prescription drug benefit, you chided the Republicans about targeting tax cuts at the wealthy, saying that they're too steered in that direction. How do you reconcile that philosophically with allowing rich Americans, rich older Americans, to get a prescription drug benefit which even you just said this new study will show one in four don't need?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, first of all, it's voluntary. And most wealthy Americans are well taken care of under the present program they have and won't exercise it. So that's the first point I want to make.

The second thing I would like to say is I don't think most people know this, even some of you may have forgotten, but in the 11th hour of the deficit reduction package negotiations in 1993, in order to get up to \$500 billion in cuts in the deficit projected over five years -- we did much better, as all of you know -- the cap was taken off. The income cap was taken off of the Medicare tax, which means virtually every single upper-income person in America will pay far more into the Medicare program than they will ever draw out in health care or benefits.

They are making a net significant contribution today because,

unlike Social Security taxes where there is still an earnings cap, there is no longer an earnings cap on Medicare. And I think a lot of folks have forgotten that -- so that in that sense, this is the most progressive program we have. The upper-income people, particularly once you get over about \$250,000 in income, they're paying far more into this program over the course of their life than they could ever draw out if they were sick every day from the time they're 65 on.

Q Sir, a question --

THE PRESIDENT: I just don't think I should make an announcement about that. I am aware of what the Coast Guard has done and what they have found as of five minutes before I came out here. But I simply -- I just don't think it's appropriate for me -- I'll be glad to comment on whatever they want to say, but I think I should leave it for them to talk.

Q Sir, you talk about how expensive the Republican tax cuts would be. But the Congressional Budget Office has now just come out with a report saying that even with their tax cuts, almost \$800 billion in tax cuts, they would save about \$277 billion over a 10-year period, whereby your program would save only about \$50 billion. That's about \$227 billion difference. How do you reconcile that? And, you know, people on the Hill listen to the CBO.

THE PRESIDENT: They listen to the CBO except where it's inconvenient for them, like the patients' bill of rights. The Republicans have freed us all now to question the CBO, since they ignored the CBO in the patients' bill of rights; they have discredited their own CBO.

Let me say, I haven't seen that CBO accounting. All I can tell you is that all of our budget people were rolling their eyes and saying that it was a very creative study.

Let me just say this: You have six and a half years of experience with the numbers we have given you and the estimates we have made. And every single year, our numbers have not only been accurate, but we have done better than we said we would do -- every single year, for six and a half years now.

Our studies show that their tax cut over the next two decades will cost, first, a trillion dollars and then \$3 trillion in the second decade, and that -- then an enormous loss to the American people in interest savings. That is, we'll have to keep spending more and more of our tax money paying interest on the debt, and it will require huge cuts in education and defense and other things.

You cannot -- they simply cannot credibly make that statement. And they don't put any new money into the Medicare program. And they don't have a Medicare reform package out there. So unless they just simply propose to bankrupt all the teaching hospitals and a lot of the other hospitals in the country, and let the Medicare program wither away, as one of the previous leaders so eloquently put it -- they can't possibly finance this tax program without doing serious damage. I can't comment on the CBO study, but it doesn't make any sense to anybody I've talked to about it.

Q May I just follow up --

THE PRESIDENT: Yes.

Q The CBO estimates the cost of your Medicare reforms are more than twice what you say they are.

THE PRESIDENT: Well, again you have evidence. Let me just say this: In the 1997 Balanced Budget Agreement -- okay? -- and this is the reason all these teaching hospitals are in trouble today -- we agreed to a Medicare savings figure. And we said, okay, here is our health information

-- this is what we do in the Executive Branch, we deal with these hospitals -- here are the changes you need to make in the Medicare program to achieve the savings that the Republicans and the Democrats in Congress and the White House agreed on.

And the CBO said, no, no, no, no, that won't come close; you need these changes plus these changes. And we said, okay, we're following the CBO, we put it in there. What happened? And that's one of the reasons the surplus is somewhat bigger than it otherwise would be -- the cuts in Medicare were far more severe, our numbers were right, their numbers were wrong and that's why you've got all these hospitals all over America, every place I go, talking about how they're threatened with bankruptcy.

So when it comes to estimating Medicare costs, again, we have evidence. And whenever there's been a difference between us and the CBO, we've been right and they've been wrong. That's all I can tell you. No serious person -- so what are they going to do about Medicare? They say our drug program will cost more -- they don't put a red cent into it. What are they going to do about it? Even if you don't have a drug program, if you adopt their tax cut program they won't be able to do anything to extend the solvency of Medicare and they will have to have huge cuts.

For them to produce those savings they are going to -- they can't even fund my defense budget, much less the one they say they want. They're going to have cuts in defense, cuts in education, cuts in the environment. That's all their savings assumed that they're going to stay with the present budget levels, which they, themselves, are trying to get out of even as we speak here today. So this is -- the American people are not -- I mean, this is not rocket science, this is arithmetic.

And we've been dealing with -- we went from creative supply-side mathematics to elemental arithmetic in 1993. And it has served us very well. And all I'm trying to do is stick with basic arithmetic and get this country out of debt, save Social Security and Medicare, provide this

prescription drug benefit, keep us moving forward.

Q Mr. President?

THE PRESIDENT: Next. Let me take John's first, then I'll take you, Sarah.

Q Sir, in your conversation with Chairman Arafat this morning, did you ask him to take any specific steps to advance what you believe is new momentum toward peace, and did you discuss with him his complaints yesterday that he found Prime Minister Barak's 15-month timetable unacceptable?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, I told him only this. I said that -- I generally described my meetings with Prime Minister Barak to him. I told him that he was committed to working in partnership with Chairman Arafat and honoring any agreements that had been made to this point, and that any modifications they were made going forward to the benefit of either or both sides would have to be done by mutual agreement; that I thought he was completely committed to resolve all the issues outstanding in the peace process in an expeditious manner. And what I urged him to do was to have this one-on-one meeting, hear him out, think it through, and if he wanted to talk to me again after the meeting occurred, that I would be happy to talk to him.

So I went out of my way not to describe Prime Minister Barak's proposals or to advocate or not advocate, but simply to say that I was convinced they were being made in complete good faith, and that the peace process would be revitalized, and whatever they did from here on out is something that they would do together. And I think he felt good about that. And I did say, after you have the meeting, if you want to talk again about this -- I'll be glad to talk to you. And he said he did. So that's where we are.

Sarah. Go ahead, Sarah.

Q Sir, your microphone is not working apparently; it seems like you're talking very low, we can barely hear you. But in the meantime, don't you think it would be a good idea if we announced for the country's sake the list of conferences to be held at the White House each day, and the list of the people whom the President has appointments with?

THE PRESIDENT: I don't know. I never thought about it. Don't you have a list of the conferences we have every day here?

Q No, indeed. We do -- and what if we find out you haven't any?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, I think I ought to talk to our folks about it, but I will consider that.

Go ahead.

Q Will you be taking any concrete contributions with you to the Balkan summit on investment next week? And you've said that you would give only humanitarian aid to Yugoslavia as long as Milosevic is in power. Will you have any trouble defining that? Will that cause any problems in distinguishing between humanitarian and other aid?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, let me say that I hope very much that there will be some positive, concrete commitments that come out of the meeting that we're going to have. I do not believe -- I do not believe we can achieve the future we want in the Balkans and avoid future ethnic conflicts unless there is a unifying vision which both brings the Balkan states closer together in their economic and political self-interests, and then brings the region as a whole closer to Europe.

And so I think that we have to have some incentives to move in that direction. And there are direct -- there are also indirect things the United States can do to help to contribute to that goal. And because of all the other things that have been going on -- you know it's been a very busy two or three weeks -- we haven't actually had an opportunity to sit down and go through what our options are, so I can't give you a more specific answer.

But I will say this -- if what we have done in Bosnia, and what we have done in Kosovo, is to have lasting benefits, we have got to find a way to create closer unity among the Balkan states themselves, and then with the region and Europe. And that is what I am working on.

And what was the second question you asked?

Q On the humanitarian aid, how will you define it?

THE PRESIDENT: Oh, yes. There may be -- frankly, there may be some differences of opinion. As you know, I tend to take a rather narrow view of it because I don't think that we should, in effect, reward Mr. Milosevic's political control by doing things which are not humanitarian in nature. But based on the virtual daily reports I get about where we all are on this and where we are operating in Kosovo, I now no longer expect them to be big debates. I don't expect there will be a big difference of opinion.

Yes, go ahead, John.

Q Mr. President, the House of Representatives appears to be on the verge of terminating funding for the F-22 fighter. Will the White House fight hard for full funding for that program, even if it means sacrificing other Pentagon airplane programs or even pay for servicemen?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, I don't think we should sacrifice the pay for our service personnel because we now are getting back in the ball game in recruitment. You know, we've really been -- the good economy and the increased deployments and the low pay all combined we're making it hard for us to both recruit and retain people. And the people are still the most

important part of our military -- their quality and their training and their morale and their commitment and the condition of their families. So I don't think that.

Now, the Congress every year puts other things into the defense budget which are not priorities for the Pentagon, and are priorities for the Congress. We can fund the F-22, we can fund the plane without compromising the basic priorities of our national defense within the funds set aside, and that is what I will fight to do. I think it would be a mistake to abandon the project. I think it has real potential to add to our national defense. I have always supported it and I hope that it can be preserved.

Q Thank you, Mr. President. You had some fun, recently, with George W. Bush and his slogan of "compassionate conservatism." But you went beyond the notion that he's not offering many details as policy, and seemed to ridicule his slogan and even question his sincerity. Were you just trying to help Mr. Gore's candidacy or were you taking the opportunity maybe to just needle the leading Republican candidate?

THE PRESIDENT: No, I was just having a little fun. (Laughter.) You know, that's a long time -- if we don't have any laughs it's going to be a very tedious struggle between now and November of 2000.

Let me say this. I think that every person struggles to find a phrase or something that will sort of stand for what he or she is trying to do. So I was really just having a little fun.

I think the most important thing is that all the candidates make their positions clear on the great debates going on now, and make their positions clear on what they would do if they got the job. To me, that's the most important thing. You know, I am not involved in this campaign as a candidate, and I have a full-time job, so I'm not involved in any sort of full-time consulting role. (Laughter.) So I look at this -- I look at this more from the point of view of the average American voter -- what will change the lives of America.

For example, every candidate should tell us, are you for the patients' bill of rights are you for closing the gun show loophole; are you for raising the minimum wage; are you for the House Republican tax plan, or do you favor our plan on Social Security and saving Social Security and Medicare and making America debt-free and having a smaller tax cut that enables us to continue to fund education and defense and these other things? What are you going to do if you get elected?

To me, the best thing the Vice President has done is to talk about dramatically intensifying the war on cancer, making pre-school universal, increasing access to college by helping people save without tax consequences; what he would do to make America a safer country, what he would do in communities to have faith-based organizations cooperate with governments more. I think these are interesting ideas about how you build on the progress the country has made the last six and a half years.

So I would say to everyone -- you know, use whatever slogans you want, but tell us where you stand. I think that's the most important thing.

Susan?

Q Mr. President --

THE PRESIDENT: Yes, I'll come over here. I know I'm left leaning, but I will give you -- (laughter) --

Q Mr. President, the economy is going great. In a new USA Today-CNN poll this week, your approval rating was at a very healthy 58 percent. But that same poll showed that by 50 percent to 38 percent, Americans said they wanted to see a change from Clinton administration policies -- not a continuation of them. What do you think accounts for that sentiment for change, and do you think it means that you present something of a mixed blessing to Mrs. Clinton and Vice President Gore in their campaigns next year?

THE PRESIDENT: I think what that means people think things are going well, but they want a change in policy. I think that's right. If you asked me that question, and you worded it in that way, I'd be in the 50 percent, because I think that -- my own view is that, particularly in a dynamic time, where things are changing, you should want continued change. But is change -- the question is, should we change in a way that builds on what has been done and goes beyond it -- which is what I would argue -- or should you change and go back to the policies we were following when we had \$290-billion deficits and we averaged over 7 percent unemployment for 12 years. I mean, I think that's really the question the American people have to ask themselves.

I think change is good. The great thing about this country is that it works best when it's sort of in a perpetual stage of renewal. So I would, myself, as a citizen, I would vote against somebody who said, vote for me and I'll keep it just like it is; everything that Bill Clinton did is exactly what I'll do. I would vote against that candidate, because I do not believe that is the right thing to do.

But what I think we should do is we should build on the progress of the last six years and go beyond it, and not adopt a completely different approach which has been proven not to work. So all I want the American people to do is to remember what it was like before, think what it's like now, recognize that ideas and policies have consequences. And the American people usually get it right; that's why we're all still around here after more than 200 years.

Q -- (inaudible.)

THE PRESIDENT: No.

Q -- for Mrs. Clinton and Mr. Gore?

THE PRESIDENT: No, because I -- no, he has done -- look at what the Vice President's done. He's staked out new issues here. He said, here's how I'm going to change what we're doing in cancer research; here's how I'm going to change what we're doing in education; here's how I'm going to change what we're doing in crime -- but not to reverse what we've done, but to build on it and go beyond it. So I think that's very, very -- that's the sort of thing that's worthy of debate. That's not the same; that is change.

What the American people have to decide is what kind of change do they want. Do they want to build on what has worked for the last six and a half years, or do they want to abandon it and go back to what failed them for 12 years before. That will be the decision they have to make.

Yes, go ahead.

Q In your last press conference, sir, with Prime Minister

Ehud

Barak, you mentioned you wanted better, normalized relations with Syria. Now, have you received any response, positive response or indication from Syria towards that? And, on Iran, can you share with us the administration's views of -- events and administrations in Iran? Thank you.

THE PRESIDENT: Well, on Syria let me say, the only thing I can tell you is that the statements, at least, that have been coming out of Syria have been quite encouraging in terms of the regard that President Assad seems to have for Prime Minister Barak, and the willingness, the openness that there is to negotiating and moving toward peace. So I'm encouraged by that.

And on Iran, frankly, I'm reluctant to say anything for fear that it will be used in a way that's not helpful to the forces of openness and reform. I think that people everywhere, particularly younger people, hope that they will be able to pursue their religious convictions and their personal dreams in an atmosphere of greater freedom, that still allows them

to be deeply loyal to their nation. And I think the Iranian people obviously love their country and are proud of its history and have enormous potential. And I just hope they find a way to work through all this, and I believe they will.

Q You mentioned the patients' bill of rights. It seems like that was an argument by both parties over providing more for people who already are lucky enough to have health insurance. And, in fact, neither party dealt with some very fundamental issues that energized you and the First Lady five and six years ago. The question is, with such a robust economy and the budget surpluses, if not now, when, and if not you, who, would provide the leadership to provide for those folks?

THE PRESIDENT: Yes, but I think the bigger question is how. That is, it is true that just as we've predicted in 1993 and 1994, that the percentage of people who have health insurance on the job is going down, just as we said it would, if nothing was done. So what we have tried to do is to isolate discrete populations that seem to be most in need and try to offer them help.

In the Balanced Budget Act of 1997, we reached bipartisan agreement on a proposal that would fund providing health insurance for up to 5 million more children through state-designed programs. Now, I've been a little disappointed -- and I'm not being critical of any of the states, either, here -- but I've been a little disappointed that the uptake on the program has been a little slow. That is, I would have thought by now we'd have almost 3 million of those 5 million children enrolled already, because we've got the money there, and we're well behind that.

So we are looking at whether there are things that we can do at the national level to work with the states to simplify access to the children's health insurance programs that the states have set up. But -- and I also had a talk with Senator Kennedy, the other day who believes that for little or no more extra money, we could actually adjust the program and take in several million more children. So the children are the biggest group.

Then, I have a proposal, as you know, that's part of my Medicare reform proposal that I didn't mention today, but I want to reiterate it, that would allow the most vulnerable group of people without health insurance, people between the ages of 55 and 65, to buy into the Medicare system in a way that would not compromise the integrity of the system. So I think that is quite important.

In addition to that, there are a lot of states -- there are some states -- Tennessee was the first state to do this under the former governor -- they started it -- which are allowing lower-income working families to buy into their Medicaid programs on a sliding scale.

So if all these things were done, we would dramatically reduce the number of people without health insurance and we'll eventually probably get down to, if we keep pushing in this direction, get down to the point where the largest group of people without health insurance are young, single people who believe that they're going to live forever and be healthy

forever and don't want to bear the cost. And we'll have to think about, then, what to do.

But I think the best thing to do is try to get as many kids as we can covered, and then try to get these people who are out of the work force who are older, but they're not old enough to get Medicare, to get them at least where they can all afford on a sliding scale to buy into the Medicare program.

Go ahead, Scott.

Q Thank you, Mr. President. On the Kennedy tragedy, sir, will you authorize the Navy to participate in a burial at sea ceremony? Why do you believe it's justified to spend so many federal resources on this tragedy? And, finally, sir, I wonder if you would give us your thoughts on Mr. Kennedy's last visit here to the White House. I understand you and the First Lady took him on a tour.

THE PRESIDENT: Well, we have received -- I have received no official word, personal word from the family what burial arrangements they want. Until they make a statement about it, I just don't feel that I can say anything.

Secondly, I will say that until just a couple of days ago the recovery efforts -- the rescue, then the recovery efforts that were undertaken were consistent with what would have been done in any other case. Because the Coast Guard felt that they had the capacity to succeed in this if they had a few more days, and because of the role of the Kennedy family in our national lives, and because of the enormous losses that they have sustained in our lifetimes, I thought it was appropriate to give them a few more days. And if anyone believes that was wrong, the Coast Guard is not at fault; I am. It was because I thought it was the right thing to do under the circumstances.

Now, you asked about -- John Kennedy had actually not been back to the White House since his father was killed, until I became President. First, he was on an advisory committee that made a report to me and he came back to the Oval Office, where he saw the desk that he took the famous picture in, coming through the gate, for the first time since he was a little boy.

And then last year -- maybe you would have a better memory than I would, but it seems to me it was last May, when we had the event at the White House celebrating the series that HBO did on the Apollo program. Do you remember they did a series on the space program that was done after the movie came out? And Tom Hanks came, a lot of people came. And he was invited because of his father's role in starting the space program. And he and Carolyn came. And afterward I asked them if they would like to go upstairs, and he said he would. So I took him upstairs and showed him the residence, which he'd not seen since he was a tiny boy.

And I showed him some of my -- the memorabilia that I had from his father's service. I have a picture of his father speaking to the Irish Parliament, and a number of other things which he thought were very interesting. And we took a -- we had a very nice evening. And I sent him the pictures from it. And then, in return, he sent me a signed copy of his favorite picture of his father, which is now upstairs. It's John Kennedy campaigning in Virginia, in Charlottesville in 1960. It's quite a lovely picture -- interesting picture.

But it was a nice night. I think that he really wanted to kind of come to terms with all of it. And I think he and Carolyn, they were delightful young people, and they had a great time here that night. And Hillary and I loved having them here. It was quite a great night.

Q To just follow on that, sir, just one question, if I may. Is there anything that Mr. Kennedy said to you that night that particularly struck you?

THE PRESIDENT: We just had a friendly conversation. You know, I knew him pretty well by then. We'd been -- I met him years ago when he was a law student, doing a summer internship with Mickey Kantor's law firm out in Los Angeles, long before I ever thought I'd be here and before I ever thought we'd have any other contacts. He just happened to be -- Mickey asked me if I'd speak to his law clerks, because I was in LA to give an education speech, and I went by and visited with them and he was there. And we had been together on many occasions since then.

The thing that struck me was I thought he was -- he said he was glad to be back. And I think he -- he was a very deliberate person, as many people have noticed, about when he would be publicly exposed and all of that. He had his mother's care for having a private life. And I think that he had not -- I'm not sure he had really felt he wanted to come back to the White House before he did. But especially in light of everything that's happened, I'm glad he had the chance to come back here one more time and see the residence and know where he was when he was a little boy. I'm glad he did that. I'm grateful that that happened.

Yes, go ahead. Yes, yes, please.

Q On Colombia, the Pastrana administration are asking the United States for \$500 million to support the military against the guerrillas. Is your administration ready to respond to that request? And,

also, the Colombians are asking for more direct intervention from the United States. Are you considering this possibility? And, also, Mexico, you're going to meet with President Zedillo in October. And the Mexican

government is still rejecting the extraditions of major drug lords. What are you going to ask him -- you're going to get assurance from him to extradite these big narcotic traffickers to the United States?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, you know, we had no extraditions between Mexico and the United States for a long time, and we've actually had some now. So we're moving in the right direction. And President Zedillo and I have been pretty successful in continuing to move our relationship in the right direction, so we'll work on that.

On Colombia, I'm not prepared to make any kind of dollar commitment today. But let me say, I have stayed in close touch with President Pastrana, and I admire the fact that he has really thrown himself into trying to end the civil conflicts in Colombia, to stop the insurgency.

The people in the United States have a real interest in that because I think that until the civil discord in Colombia is brought to an end, it is going to be much, much harder for us to restrain the activities of the narco-traffickers there, and their reach.

So, in addition to wanting a neighbor and a democracy in Latin America to be free of the kind of violence and heartbreak that the Colombian people have undergone because of this, it is also very much in our national security interest to do what we can, if we can be helpful in ending the civil conflict so that Colombia can be about the business of freeing itself of the influence of the narco-traffickers in ways that would be good for Colombians and good for us as well.

Q Another question about the presidential race. Aside from asking George W. Bush to come forward and give specifics on the issues that you mentioned, could you tell us what you find objectionable about his trying to present a new moderate face for his party, just like you did for the Democrats? And could you tell us whether you're worried whether he will figure out how the Republicans can occupy the center of American politics?

THE PRESIDENT: No.

Q You don't think he can?

THE PRESIDENT: No, no, I don't think I'll answer those questions. (Laughter.) I will say -- no, look, let me say again, I wouldn't even agree with the characterization you gave of my first answer.

When I ran for President, in 1991, the first thing I did was tell the American people what I thought was going on in our country and what I would do. And if you remember, the late Senator Paul Tsongas and I were actually almost ridiculed at the time because we both put out these very detailed plans of what we would do. If you go back and get one of those plans now, you'll see that virtually everything we said we'd do we did do, except for the things we tried to do and were defeated on.

And my view is that there are a lot of things that count in a presidential election toward a successful presidency, but it is -- that go beyond specific issues, and judgment plays a role in it, and crises will always come up and things can be learned and all that. But it really matters where you stand on the big issues that everybody knows about that are going on right now, and it matters where we're going in the future.

So that's the only point I want to make. And I think any -- I would say that applies to every candidate. I don't want to answer the questions you ask me because that's not my job. My job is not to handicap this horse race, not to comment on it, not to comment on the candidates. My job is to work for the American people. But I'm going to answer these questions from the point of view of Joe Citizen. That's -- every political question you asked me from now on, I'm going to pretend that I'm living back in Little Rock already and I'm working on my presidential library and I'm sitting here as a voter saying, where do they stand, what will they do -- all of them. And I do believe the Vice President has done the best job of telling the American people what he would do and -- to go back to Susan's formulation -- how he would change the country in a positive way.

George.

Q Mr. President, as the nation has celebrated the 30th anniversary of the moon landing, a lot of the former astronauts have lamented that no President after Kennedy set a kind of national goal like President Kennedy did of landing on the moon. Do you think that -- in your view, is the country not receptive today to that kind of goal-setting by a President, or is it something a President should do, set a goal of landing on Mars?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, we are planning to land on Mars. But I think -- for one thing, when I became President, the space program was actually in peril. And we -- the space station was certainly at risk. And I have fought for it and I believe in it. And one of the things I talked to -- Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin and Michael Collins were in to see me yesterday, and we talked about where we could go with this. And Dan Goldin was there, the NASA Administrator; and Dr. Neal Lane, my Science Advisor. And we talked about how we could use the coming of the millennium as --

you know, the First Lady sponsored all these other lectures here. And I told him about Stephen Hawking's lecture and what he said. And we talked yesterday about how we could set some goals for the space program, capture the imagination of the American people and broaden the support for it.

And one of the things that I suggested that I think would be quite helpful that we're going to work on now is what we can do to

dramatize for the American people -- you mentioned Mars, but I think what is more likely to capture the imagination of the American people are the benefits to us here on Earth of continued advances in space. And some of them, particularly in the health field, are likely to be breath-taking. They're principally in the area of the environment and health.

So I asked our people to start working on that and they said they would be willing to help us. I have to tell you that it was a great day for me yesterday to have them come by the White House. They also gave me a moon rock, by the way -- but only on loan. (Laughter.) And the moon rock is 3.6 billion years old. So when I feel very tired, I'll look at it and feel young again. (Laughter.)

Yes, go ahead. We had an Irish question first, I promised. Go ahead, what's the Irish question?

Q Thank you, sir. Given the --

THE PRESIDENT: You want to ask one, too?

Q We both have a -- given the various meetings underway with Mo Mowlam here, and George Mitchell there, has any progress been made on the Irish situation? And is one side more to blame than the other on it?

THE PRESIDENT: Okay. Why don't we take both Irish questions at once. What's your Irish question?

Q Last week, you seemed to kind of get fired up when you were talking to the teenagers from Colorado. You said that the politicians in Northern Ireland were behaving akin to school children. Do you feel, after all the work that you've done on this project, that perhaps it was misplaced and you should have perhaps pushed in a place more like Africa, where they have thousands of people dying from ethnic strife, instead of 3,500 over 30 years?

Q And if I can have a third Irish question, what role, if any, do you expect to play, Mr. President, in breaking the deadlock?

THE PRESIDENT: Okay, let me answer the Irish questions, then I'll come back to the "should we have done something else."

I've talked to Senator Mitchell, and he is willing to spend some time -- he can't go back full-time for another year or two, but I'd like to put this in some -- at least I'd like to tell you how I look at it.

Obviously, I am very disappointed at the breakdown of the process here. But I do think it's important to note that neither side wants to abandon the Good Friday Agreement. And that's very important. It's also important to note that everybody agrees on what their responsibilities are and what the other side's responsibilities are, and everybody agrees that it all has to be done by a date certain.

So they have agreed to break out the two areas causing problems, the decommissioning and the standing up to the executive, and try to figure

out how they can unlock that, and Mo Mowlam, as you pointed out, is working hard on it, and they've asked Senator Mitchell to come back and do some work on it, and my instinct is that it will be resolved.

Now, let me say in terms of your characterization, here's the problem. To the outsiders -- I told the parties that to the outsiders -- no one, none of us outside, even somebody like me that's been so involved in this, no one will understand if this thing breaks down over who goes first; that that did sound like the kind of argument that young people have, you know -- who goes first.

Underneath that, there's something deeper: The Protestants are afraid that they IRA will never disarm if they let the Sinn Fein go into the executive branch, and the IRA do not believe -- since the agreement did not require decommissioning as a condition of getting into the executive branch, they don't want to have to spend the rest of their lives being told that it wasn't the vote of the people, it wasn't the Good Friday Accord, it

was what the Unionists and Great Britain did to force them to give up their arms that got them to disarm. They believe that would, in effect, require them to disavow what they've done for 30 years.

And what they're saying is, when we surrender our arms, we're surrendering to our people. Our people voted for this. We are surrendering to the will of the people that we represent. So when you put it in that textured way on both sides, it makes it clear why it becomes a difficult issue. And I can't think of anybody better to try to work through it than George Mitchell, because he's got it all in his head and he's put three years into it. But my instinct is that we will get this worked out.

Now, you asked about did I think we had misplaced our energies. I don't think so. We have -- for one thing, we don't have a stronger partner in the world than Great Britain, and for another, we don't have a bigger ethnic group in America than the Irish, and we're tied by blood and emotion to the Irish struggle.

I also think that it has enormous symbolism, beyond the size of the country and the number who have died. And if it can be resolved, I think it will give great impetus to the forces of peace throughout the world. So I don't believe for a moment we made a mistake.

But let me also say I think we should be more involved in Africa and I've tried to involve us more in Africa. I did everything I could to head off that civil war between Ethiopia and Eritrea. It's not a civil war, they are two separate countries, but they once were together and they're basically now arguing over the divorce settlement. And I don't mean to trivialize it in that characterization. And we are still actively

involved in trying to stop that.

Reverend Jackson played a significant role in trying to end the awful carnage in Sierra Leone, and I'm very grateful for that. We're now working, and we're able to work with Nigeria to try to stabilize the region. We are training African militaries and the Africa Crisis Response Corps, so that we can, hopefully, prevent further carnage. So I believe the United States should be more involved in Africa.

And, of course, the announcement that the Vice President made on our behalf the other day of our new AIDS initiative in some ways may be the most important thing we can do to save lives there.

So I agree that we should be more involved. But I don't agree that we misplaced our energies in Ireland. I'm proud of every late-night phone call and every frustrating hour I've spent on it.

THE PRESIDENT: Yes, go ahead.

Q -- can I ask about you --

THE PRESIDENT: Well, I don't want to talk about me.

Q Oh, come on.

THE PRESIDENT: I'm not a candidate for anything.

Go ahead, what? Go ahead. All right, one more.

Q Listen, Mr. President, with due respect, in another development, I know that you are for Africa, and you know that I support -- Africa, my friend, the President of the Dominican Republic -- we are Afro-Latino. But I am not concerned at this moment about Mars. I am concerned about place where I have been for 20 years, the White House, that is going to celebrate 200 year next year. I wonder if you would tell the people of the United States what you are going to plan for that big celebration?

And another thing, Mr. President -- I am disgusted with you -- you have been hiding something extraordinary -- the performance -- or the trade promotional coordinating committee that has been carried out in the last year -- are the participants in the prospective of this economy. Why don't you speak about the success of that initiative? It's a sin that you -- you talk about a lot of things that is -- another thing that is good for America and the world.

THE PRESIDENT: Well, a lot of the things that are good for America don't make good news for them, you see.

Q And I have a follow-up. (Laughter.)

THE PRESIDENT: No, let me just say -- (laughter) -- a follow-up? (Laughter.) Now, that's really good. That is really -- Oh, God, is that good.

Let me just say that we will have a lot of celebrations of the 200th birthday of the White House next year, and it's neat that coincides with the first year of the new century and the millennium. So we'll have -- I'm not prepared to announce them yet, because I want others who deserve more credit than I do to be able to do that. But it will be a signal honor for us to be living here in that year, and we'll be able to do a lot -- and I hope we'll have even more American citizens coming to the White House next year to be a part of it.

Go ahead. Just that follow up -- that showed a lot of guts.

(Laughter.) If this is a follow up, I'll give you another question.

(Laughter.)

Q Sir, you've stressed that you have plenty to do, and yet for some time, your political career has enjoyed the benefits of support from two people in particular -- the Vice President and the First Lady -- two people who are now in a position to expect some support from you. I'm wondering what you feel you owe those two people in terms of political support, and as you plan your schedule in the weeks and months ahead, how you'll balance that assistance against your job as President, and finally, how you personally are adjusting to what people might think is an interesting shift in role.

Q I have a follow-up to his question. (Laughter.)

THE PRESIDENT: Now, I believe that. (Laughter.)

Well, I will do whatever I'm asked to do, basically. I'll try to be helpful. And if I can be helpful, I will be. But I think the best thing I can do for anyone who generally shares our ideas, is part of our party, trying to move the country forward, is to continue to be a good President and take care of our country.

But I don't mind hard work and I don't mind long hours, and I find myself, apparently unlike some of my predecessors -- but just read what you all say about it -- but I don't feel myself winding down, I feel myself keying up. I want to do more. I want to try to make sure that I give the American people as much as I can every day. So I've got plenty of energy and I'll do whatever I'm asked to do.

I owe them a great deal. I think Al Gore -- everybody in this room knows that he's had far more responsibility and gotten more done than any Vice President in history. Nobody's ever had a role that even approximates that. I don't think the American people know that yet, but I know that. And he deserves a lot of credit for what he's done and he has my friendship and my support. But I also think that it's a mixed blessing, as you say, because people want to see any Vice President out there on his own. If you go back and look at where Richard Nixon was in 1959, you will see the same sort of thing. So I think I see this as a rhythmic process.

I think he'll do fine. But the reason I think that has nothing

to do with the questions you ask me. The reasons I think that are, A, he's a good man with a good record, but most importantly, he's out there telling the American people how he would change the country for the better. And I think that's important.

I did an interview and I talked about Hillary and this -- if she decides to do this I will do whatever I can do. And if she's successful I will happily go to the Senate spouses meeting if that's part of the job. I have never known anybody who didn't run for office who was a more effective, more consistently committed, completely passionate public citizen than her. So if she decides to do it, and if the people of New York decide that they want her to do it, that's a decision for them to make and they have to deal with that, and she's trying to deal with that, you know, the whole question of moving there.

It is true that shortly after we came here I said, you get to decide where we live from now on for the rest of our lives. And she said, I want to go to New York -- in, like, '93. This is just something that happened later. So I'll be dividing my time between home -- I'm going to go home and build my library and build my center -- I'll divide my time between there and New York, whatever she does about this Senate race.

But if I can help her in any way, I will, because I think it would be a great thing for the country -- not only because of what I owe her, because she just -- what she knows and how she's lived and what she's done. I mean, it's very unusual to find somebody like that who has that much knowledge and background and passion all packed into one place. I mean, I know that you think I'm a biased observer, but I think I could support it with evidence.

Go ahead, Bill.

Q In that same vein, sir -- (laughter) -- as the spotlight shifts from you to your Vice President and to your wife, are you likely to be content, drifting slowly offstage, or do you think that someday you will want to run for office, some office again? Or are you willing to tell us this afternoon, sir, that you will never again run for elective office?

THE PRESIDENT: I don't have any idea. (Laughter.) Really, I don't know. Let me just say this. I love this job. I love it. Even on the bad days -- you can do something good for the country, you can do something good for the future. I have loved doing this. And I have given it every ounce of my energy and ability and judgment. And I feel very fortunate. But we have a system that I, frankly, agree with, even though I'm in pretty good shape -- we have a system that says a President gets two terms and then the President has to go find something else to do with his life. And there are lots of other worthy things to do.

And I was a very happy person before I became President. I never have had any trouble finding something interesting to do that I believed in. And I will do my best to use the opportunity and the gift the American people gave me to serve in this position to be a useful citizen of my country and the world for the rest of my life, and I have no doubt that there will be some way I can do that. And I'm, frankly, kind of excited about it. I mean, it's a new challenge. I'll have to think in a different way and do a different way.

Will I miss a lot of the things about this job? Yes. I'll even miss all of you, believe it or not. But I'm just grateful that I've had the chance to serve and that the results have been good for our people and for our country and I think for the world.

And, you know, that's part of life. Life has its rhythms. And the people that are most satisfied and most happy in life take the rhythms of life and make the most of them, instead of sitting around moping and wishing the rhythms were something other than they are. That's just not the way the life works. And, listen, I'm way ahead and I'm very grateful.

Thank you very much.

END

3:45 P.M. EDT

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TO: Denver R. Peacock (CN=Denver R. Peacock/OU=WHO/O=EOP @ EOP [WHO])
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TO: Sean P. O'Shea (CN=Sean P. O'Shea/OU=WHO/O=EOP @ EOP [WHO])
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TO: "Gina N. Dennis ("Gina N. Dennis/WHO/EOP" @ EOP.eop.gov [UNKNOWN])
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TO: GRAY_W (GRAY_W @ al.eop.gov [UNKNOWN]) (NSC)
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TO: Nanda Chitre (CN=Nanda Chitre/OU=WHO/O=EOP @ EOP [WHO])
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TO: pcaplan (pcaplan @ fbr.com [UNKNOWN])
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TO: Mary E. Cahill (CN=Mary E. Cahill/OU=WHO/O=EOP @ EOP [WHO])
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TO: "Brian A. Reich" ("Brian A. Reich" @ OVP.eop.gov [UNKNOWN])
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TO: Barbara D. Woolley (CN=Barbara D. Woolley/OU=WHO/O=EOP @ EOP [WHO])
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TO: Katharine Button (CN=Katharine Button/OU=WHO/O=EOP @ EOP [WHO])
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TO: Leslie Bernstein (CN=Leslie Bernstein/OU=WHO/O=EOP @ EOP [WHO])
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TO: Mark H. Bartholomew (CN=Mark H. Bartholomew/OU=OA/O=EOP @ EOP [OA])

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TO: Brenda M. Anders (CN=Brenda M. Anders/OU=WHO/O=EOP @ EOP [WHO])
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TO: Jeannetta P. Allen (CN=Jeannetta P. Allen/OU=OA/O=EOP @ EOP [OA])
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TO: Kathleen K. Ahn (CN=Kathleen K. Ahn/OU=WHO/O=EOP @ EOP [WHO])
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TO: SUNTUM_M (SUNTUM_M @ a1.eop.gov [UNKNOWN]) (WHO)
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TEXT:

THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary

For Immediate Release
21, 1999

July

PRESS CONFERENCE BY THE PRESIDENT

The East Room

2:35 P.M. EDT

THE PRESIDENT: Good afternoon.

Q Mr. President, you don't know it, but there is such a bright light on you -- we can't see you for the light. (Laughter.)

THE PRESIDENT: I've been waiting a long time for the halo to appear. (Laughter.)

Let me say, ladies and gentlemen, I have a brief opening statement, but before I make that and take questions, I'd like to say that, as you might imagine, I have been briefed on this morning's developments in the search off Martha's Vineyard. Again, let me commend the Coast Guard and all the officials at the local, state and national level for the fine work they have done under extremely difficult circumstances.

Again, I think we should keep our thoughts with the families as events unfold, and my thoughts and prayers are with them.

Today I want to make a brief statement about the choice we face here in Washington and in our country about how best to move forward into the new century and what to do with the surplus. When we look toward the future, it is helpful to remember at least the recent past. Six and a half years ago, the budget deficit was \$290 billion and rising. Wages were stagnant, inequality was growing, social conditions were worsening.

In the 12 years before I took office, unemployment averaged more than 7 percent. It's almost difficult to remember what it was like. No one really thought we could turn it around, let alone bring unemployment to a 29-year low, or turn decades of deficits, during which time the debt of our country was quadrupled in only 12 years, into a surplus of \$99

billion.

Our nation has made a seismic shift in the last six years, facing a critical choice -- whether to move forward with the fiscal discipline that got us to where we are today, or return to the kind of risk-taking that got us into recessions and deficits before.

We must decide whether to invest the surplus, to strengthen America over the long-term, or to squander it for the short-term. I think the right course is clear. And a bigger surplus only means that the mistake could be bigger, and the missed opportunity greater if we take the wrong course.

I have proposed a balanced budget that puts first things first. I believe we must maintain our sound economic strategy, and invest the surplus in long-term goals -- saving Social Security, saving and strengthening Medicare, modernizing it by providing a long overdue drug benefit, and continuing to meet our basic responsibilities in education, defense, the environment, biomedical research.

Tomorrow I will release a report that shows a great and growing need for prescription drug coverage. What the study shows is that 75 percent of our older Americans lack decent, dependable private-sector coverage of prescription drugs. That's three out of every four seniors. Clearly, America needs a prescription drug plan that is simple, universal and voluntary. Anyone who says we don't I believe is out of date and out of touch.

As I've described, my plan meets these national priorities, while paying off the debt by 2015; while investing in America's new markets, the places that have not yet felt our prosperity; and while providing substantial tax relief -- \$250 billion of it targeted to help families save for retirement, pay for child care, long-term care, for modern schools.

So let's be clear about something. We're not debating whether to have tax cuts or not -- we should have tax cuts, but tax cuts that provide for us first to save Social Security and Medicare, not undermine them; tax cuts we can afford, not ones that would demand drastic cuts in defense, education, agriculture, the environment; tax cuts in the national interest, not special interest.

Now, these are the risks that are posed by the Republican tax plan that the House is about to vote on. Let me tell you what their plan would do. It would pile up \$3 trillion in debt over the next two decades, right when the baby boomers start to retire -- that's what it costs -- right when Social Security and Medicare feel the crunch.

Because of the cost of the tax plan over the next two decades, I should say what it doesn't do. It doesn't do anything to extend the solvency of Social Security, to extend the solvency of Medicare, to provide the prescription drug benefits and it would require significant -- significant -- cuts from where we are today in education, defense, biomedical research, the environment and other critical areas.

If we don't save Social Security it's not because we can't. If we don't strengthen Medicare and add the prescription drug benefit, it's not because we can't. If we don't meet these clear national needs, it's because we choose not to do so. It will be because, instead, we choose to reward ourselves today by risking our prosperity tomorrow.

I hope Congress will make the right choice. When members cast their ballots on the Republican tax plan, they're really voting also on whether to save Social Security and Medicare. They're voting on whether to pay off the national debt for the first time in over 150 years -- something that would guarantee us lower interest rates, higher investment, more jobs, higher incomes, and for average citizens, lower home mortgage payments, car payments, credit card payments, college loan payments.

They're voting whether to meet our most pressing national priorities in education, defense, nearly every other domain in our people's lives. I think the choice is clear between the plan the Republican leadership has outlined and the national priorities of the American people. I hope we can still work together across party lines to save Social Security and Medicare, to safeguard our priorities and have the right kind of tax cut.

If Congress passes the wrong kind, of course, I will not sign it. I will not allow a risky plan to become law. And as I said, we now have six and a half years of evidence. This is not really a debate that's just about ideas without any evidence. We clearly know what works now, and we ought to stay with it.

As I said, I will work with any member of any party willing to put first things first. We can have a tax cut and do the right thing for the long-term in America. That is my commitment, and I hope that together we can fulfill it for our people.

Thank you very much. Helen.

Q Mr. President, in U.S. treaty relations, is it obligated to defend Taiwan militarily if it abandons the one China policy? And would the U.S. continue military aid if it pursues separatism?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, let me say, first of all, a lot of those questions are governed by the Taiwan Relations Act, which we intend to honor. Our policy is clear: We favor the one China policy; we favor the cross-strait dialogues. The understanding we have had all along with both China and Taiwan is that the differences between them would be resolved peacefully. If that were not to be the case, under the Taiwan Relations Act we would be required to view it with the gravest concern.

But I believe that both China and Taiwan understand this. I believe that they want to stay on a path to prosperity and dialogue. And we have dispatched people today, as the morning press reports, to do what we can to press that case to all sides. This is something that we don't want to see escalate, and I believe that what Mr. Lee said yesterday was trying to move in that direction. We all understand how difficult this is, but I think that the pillars of the policy are still the right ones. The one China policy is right; the cross-strait dialogue is right; the peaceful approach is right. And neither side, in my judgment, should depart from any of those elements.

Q So we would still have to go to war with China if it decided to break away?

THE PRESIDENT: I will say what I've already said -- the Taiwan Relations Act governs our policy. We made it clear. And I have -- as you remember, a few years ago we had a physical expression of that, that we don't believe there should be any violent attempts to resolve this, and we would view it very seriously. But I don't believe there will be. I think that both sides understands what needs to be done.

Terry?

Q Mr. President, do you think that President Lee was unnecessarily provocative in trying to redefine the nature of the Taiwan-Chinese relationship? And is the United States trying to send a signal by delaying a Pentagon mission which was going to Taiwan to assess its air defense needs? And, further, finally, you said that you still believe in a one China policy. How do you address Senator Helms' criticism that that policy is "a puzzling fiction"?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, I don't think it's a puzzling fiction. But if Senator Helms means that today they're not, in fact, unified, then that's true. But the Chinese tend to take a long view of these things and

have made clear a sensitivity to the different system that exists on Taiwan, and a willingness to find ways to accommodate it, as they did in working with Hong Kong, and, perhaps, even going beyond that.

So I think the important thing is to let -- they need to take the time necessary to work this out between themselves in a peaceful way. That is clearly in both their interests. And I'm still not entirely sure, because I have read things which seem to resonate both ways on this, exactly what the Lee statements were entitled -- trying to convey.

But I think that both sides are now quite aware of the fact that they need to find a way to pursue their destinies within the framework that we have followed these last several years, which I might add, has allowed both places to prosper and to grow, to do better and to have more contacts, more investment, and underneath the rhetoric, quite a bit more reconciliation. So I would hope that we would stay with what is working and not depart from it.

Q Is that the meaning of the delay of the Pentagon mission to assess the --

THE PRESIDENT: I didn't think this was the best time to do something which might excite either one side or the other and imply that a military solution is an acceptable alternative. If you really think about what's at stake here, it would be unthinkable. And I want -- I don't want to depart from any of the three pillars. I think we need to stay with one China; I think we need to stay with the dialogue; and I think that no one should contemplate force here.

Randy.

Q Economists have been calling on you to indicate now whether you intend to reappoint Alan Greenspan in order to avoid having the issue to become mired in election year politics and upsetting financial markets next year. Would you like to see the Chairman stay on, and has he given you any indication of his plans?

THE PRESIDENT: I have, as you know, enjoyed a very good relationship, both personally and professionally, with Mr. Greenspan. I think he has done a terrific job. I have no idea whether he would even be willing to serve another term. I will make the decision in a timely fashion. I do not expect it to become embroiled in election year politics; there's no evidence of that.

You heard -- I think the Vice President said yesterday or the day before that he thought he was doing an excellent job. So we believe that as long as the United States is fiscally responsible, then the Fed will respond to developments in our own economy and in the world economy in a way that is clear, transparent, and I think designed to keep our growth going. So I'm not concerned about it.

Peter, go ahead.

Q -- I think the Vice President indicated he was sending a signal by saying that Chairman Greenspan had been doing an excellent job. Do you endorse that interpretation?

THE PRESIDENT: I don't know, all I know is he said he was doing a great job, and I agree with him.

Go ahead.

Q Mr. President, you mentioned the Kennedy tragedy at the beginning of the news conference. Could you please give us a better understanding of what the White House role has been in the conduct of the recovery operation and the decision-making on the release of information about it?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, I think that -- I am unaware of any role we have played in the decision-making of the release of information, except, let me say that today a lot of things are breaking in a hurry, and I believe there are some decisions that ought to be announced by the Kennedy family, and others that ought to be properly announced by either the Coast Guard or the NTSB.

So we have not tried -- to the best of my knowledge, had any role in the timing or substance of release of information. And we have had no role in the conduct of the operation except that I did talk to Admiral Larrabee, I think it was the day before yesterday, at a time when the operation might normally have ceased, and he said, I think we have a chance to find something else because of the equipment we have here, even though it's difficult and I'm inclined to believe because of the circumstances here and because who's involved that we ought to go on a little more. And I said that I would support it and defend it. And I think it was the right decision.

Q Mr. President, if you'll allow me to ask about two different topics. On the Kennedy search, sir, there have been conflicting reports about whether or not Mr. Kennedy's body has, in fact, been recovered. I understand that based upon the answer you just gave, that might not be a question that you'd want to address, but, perhaps, given the fact that there is this conflicting information you could answer that question.

And, secondly, sir, on this notion of a drug benefit, prescription drug benefit, you chided the Republicans about targeting tax cuts at the wealthy, saying that they're too steered in that direction. How do you reconcile that philosophically with allowing rich Americans, rich older Americans, to get a prescription drug benefit which even you just said this new study will show one in four don't need?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, first of all, it's voluntary. And most wealthy Americans are well taken care of under the present program they have and won't exercise it. So that's the first point I want to make.

The second thing I would like to say is I don't think most people know this, even some of you may have forgotten, but in the 11th hour of the deficit reduction package negotiations in 1993, in order to get up to \$500 billion in cuts in the deficit projected over five years -- we did much better, as all of you know -- the cap was taken off. The income cap was taken off of the Medicare tax, which means virtually every single upper-income person in America will pay far more into the Medicare program than they will ever draw out in health care or benefits.

They are making a net significant contribution today because, unlike Social Security taxes where there is still an earnings cap, there is no longer an earnings cap on Medicare. And I think a lot of folks have forgotten that -- so that in that sense, this is the most progressive program we have. The upper-income people, particularly once you get over about \$250,000 in income, they're paying far more into this program over the course of their life than they could ever draw out if they were sick every day from the time they're 65 on.

Q Sir, a question --

THE PRESIDENT: I just don't think I should make an announcement about that. I am aware of what the Coast Guard has done and what they have found as of five minutes before I came out here. But I simply -- I just don't think it's appropriate for me -- I'll be glad to comment on whatever they want to say, but I think I should leave it for them to talk.

Q Sir, you talk about how expensive the Republican tax cuts would be. But the Congressional Budget Office has now just come out with a report saying that even with their tax cuts, almost \$800 billion in tax cuts, they would save about \$277 billion over a 10-year period, whereby your program would save only about \$50 billion. That's about \$227 billion

difference. How do you reconcile that? And, you know, people on the Hill listen to the CBO.

THE PRESIDENT: They listen to the CBO except where it's inconvenient for them, like the patients' bill of rights. The Republicans have freed us all now to question the CBO, since they ignored the CBO in the patients' bill of rights; they have discredited their own CBO.

Let me say, I haven't seen that CBO accounting. All I can tell you is that all of our budget people were rolling their eyes and saying that it was a very creative study.

Let me just say this: You have six and a half years of experience with the numbers we have given you and the estimates we have made. And every single year, our numbers have not only been accurate, but we have done better than we said we would do -- every single year, for six and a half years now.

Our studies show that their tax cut over the next two decades will cost, first, a trillion dollars and then \$3 trillion in the second decade, and that -- then an enormous loss to the American people in interest savings. That is, we'll have to keep spending more and more of our tax money paying interest on the debt, and it will require huge cuts in education and defense and other things.

You cannot -- they simply cannot credibly make that statement. And they don't put any new money into the Medicare program. And they don't have a Medicare reform package out there. So unless they just simply propose to bankrupt all the teaching hospitals and a lot of the other hospitals in the country, and let the Medicare program wither away, as one of the previous leaders so eloquently put it -- they can't possibly finance this tax program without doing serious damage. I can't comment on the CBO study, but it doesn't make any sense to anybody I've talked to about it.

Q May I just follow up --

THE PRESIDENT: Yes.

Q The CBO estimates the cost of your Medicare reforms are more than twice what you say they are.

THE PRESIDENT: Well, again you have evidence. Let me just say this: In the 1997 Balanced Budget Agreement -- okay? -- and this is the reason all these teaching hospitals are in trouble today -- we agreed to a Medicare savings figure. And we said, okay, here is our health information -- this is what we do in the Executive Branch, we deal with these hospitals -- here are the changes you need to make in the Medicare program to achieve the savings that the Republicans and the Democrats in Congress and the White House agreed on.

And the CBO said, no, no, no, no, that won't come close; you need these changes plus these changes. And we said, okay, we're following the CBO, we put it in there. What happened? And that's one of the reasons the surplus is somewhat bigger than it otherwise would be -- the cuts in Medicare were far more severe, our numbers were right, their numbers were wrong and that's why you've got all these hospitals all over America, every place I go, talking about how they're threatened with bankruptcy.

So when it comes to estimating Medicare costs, again, we have evidence. And whenever there's been a difference between us and the CBO, we've been right and they've been wrong. That's all I can tell you. No serious person -- so what are they going to do about Medicare? They say our drug program will cost more -- they don't put a red cent into it. What are they going to do about it? Even if you don't have a drug program, if you adopt their tax cut program they won't be able to do anything to extend the solvency of Medicare and they will have to have huge cuts.

For them to produce those savings they are going to -- they can't even fund my defense budget, much less the one they say they want. They're going to have cuts in defense, cuts in education, cuts in the environment. That's all their savings assumed that they're going to stay with the present budget levels, which they, themselves, are trying to get out of even as we speak here today. So this is -- the American people are not -- I mean, this is not rocket science, this is arithmetic.

And we've been dealing with -- we went from creative supply-side mathematics to elemental arithmetic in 1993. And it has served us very well. And all I'm trying to do is stick with basic arithmetic and get this country out of debt, save Social Security and Medicare, provide this prescription drug benefit, keep us moving forward.

Q Mr. President?

THE PRESIDENT: Next. Let me take John's first, then I'll take you, Sarah.

Q Sir, in your conversation with Chairman Arafat this morning, did you ask him to take any specific steps to advance what you believe is new momentum toward peace, and did you discuss with him his complaints yesterday that he found Prime Minister Barak's 15-month timetable unacceptable?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, I told him only this. I said that -- I generally described my meetings with Prime Minister Barak to him. I told him that he was committed to working in partnership with Chairman Arafat and honoring any agreements that had been made to this point, and that any modifications they made going forward to the benefit of either or both sides would have to be done by mutual agreement; that I thought he was completely committed to resolve all the issues outstanding in the peace process in an expeditious manner. And what I urged him to do was to have this one-on-one meeting, hear him out, think it through, and if he wanted to talk to me again after the meeting occurred, that I would be happy to talk to him.

So I went out of my way not to describe Prime Minister Barak's proposals or to advocate or not advocate, but simply to say that I was convinced they were being made in complete good faith, and that the peace process would be revitalized, and whatever they did from here on out is something that they would do together. And I think he felt good about that. And I did say, after you have the meeting, if you want to talk again about this -- I'll be glad to talk to you. And he said he did. So that's where we are.

Sarah. Go ahead, Sarah.

Q Sir, your microphone is not working apparently; it seems like you're talking very low, we can barely hear you. But in the meantime, don't you think it would be a good idea if we announced for the country's sake the list of conferences to be held at the White House each day, and the list of the people whom the President has appointments with?

THE PRESIDENT: I don't know. I never thought about it. Don't you have a list of the conferences we have every day here?

Q No, indeed. We do -- and what if we find out you haven't any?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, I think I ought to talk to our folks about it, but I will consider that.

Go ahead.

Q Will you be taking any concrete contributions with you to the Balkan summit on investment next week? And you've said that you would

give only humanitarian aid to Yugoslavia as long as Milosevic is in power. Will you have any trouble defining that? Will that cause any problems in distinguishing between humanitarian and other aid?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, let me say that I hope very much that there will be some positive, concrete commitments that come out of the meeting that we're going to have. I do not believe -- I do not believe we can achieve the future we want in the Balkans and avoid future ethnic conflicts unless there is a unifying vision which both brings the Balkan states closer together in their economic and political self-interests, and then brings the region as a whole closer to Europe.

And so I think that we have to have some incentives to move in that direction. And there are direct -- there are also indirect things the United States can do to help to contribute to that goal. And because of all the other things that have been going on -- you know it's been a very busy two or three weeks -- we haven't actually had an opportunity to sit down and go through what our options are, so I can't give you a more specific answer.

But I will say this -- if what we have done in Bosnia, and what we have done in Kosovo, is to have lasting benefits, we have got to find a way to create closer unity among the Balkan states themselves, and then with the region and Europe. And that is what I am working on.

And what was the second question you asked?

Q On the humanitarian aid, how will you define it?

THE PRESIDENT: Oh, yes. There may be -- frankly, there may be some differences of opinion. As you know, I tend to take a rather narrow view of it because I don't think that we should, in effect, reward Mr. Milosevic's political control by doing things which are not humanitarian in nature. But based on the virtual daily reports I get about where we all are on this and where we are operating in Kosovo, I now no longer expect them to be big debates. I don't expect there will be a big difference of opinion.

Yes, go ahead, John.

Q Mr. President, the House of Representatives appears to be on the verge of terminating funding for the F-22 fighter. Will the White House fight hard for full funding for that program, even if it means sacrificing other Pentagon airplane programs or even pay for servicemen?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, I don't think we should sacrifice the pay for our service personnel because we now are getting back in the ball game in recruitment. You know, we've really been -- the good economy and the increased deployments and the low pay all combined we're making it hard for us to both recruit and retain people. And the people are still the most important part of our military -- their quality and their training and their morale and their commitment and the condition of their families. So I don't think that.

Now, the Congress every year puts other things into the defense budget which are not priorities for the Pentagon, and are priorities for the Congress. We can fund the F-22, we can fund the plane without compromising the basic priorities of our national defense within the funds set aside, and that is what I will fight to do. I think it would be a mistake to abandon the project. I think it has real potential to add to our national defense. I have always supported it and I hope that it can be preserved.

Q Thank you, Mr. President. You had some fun, recently, with George W. Bush and his slogan of "compassionate conservatism." But you went beyond the notion that he's not offering many details as policy, and seemed to ridicule his slogan and even question his sincerity. Were you just trying to help Mr. Gore's candidacy or were you taking the opportunity maybe to just needle the leading Republican candidate?

THE PRESIDENT: No, I was just having a little fun. (Laughter.) You know, that's a long time -- if we don't have any laughs it's going to be a very tedious struggle between now and November of 2000.

Let me say this. I think that every person struggles to find a phrase or something that will sort of stand for what he or she is trying to do. So I was really just having a little fun.

I think the most important thing is that all the candidates make their positions clear on the great debates going on now, and make their positions clear on what they would do if they got the job. To me, that's the most important thing. You know, I am not involved in this campaign as a candidate, and I have a full-time job, so I'm not involved in any sort of full-time consulting role. (Laughter.) So I look at this -- I look at this more from the point of view of the average American voter -- what will change the lives of America.

For example, every candidate should tell us, are you for the patients' bill of rights are you for closing the gun show loophole; are you for raising the minimum wage; are you for the House Republican tax plan, or do you favor our plan on Social Security and saving Social Security and Medicare and making America debt-free and having a smaller tax cut that enables us to continue to fund education and defense and these other things? What are you going to do if you get elected?

To me, the best thing the Vice President has done is to talk about dramatically intensifying the war on cancer, making pre-school universal, increasing access to college by helping people save without tax consequences; what he would do to make America a safer country, what he would do in communities to have faith-based organizations cooperate with governments more. I think these are interesting ideas about how you build on the progress the country has made the last six and a half years.

So I would say to everyone -- you know, use whatever slogans you want, but tell us where you stand. I think that's the most important thing.

Susan?

Q Mr. President --

THE PRESIDENT: Yes, I'll come over here. I know I'm left leaning, but I will give you -- (laughter) --

Q Mr. President, the economy is going great. In a new USA Today-CNN poll this week, your approval rating was at a very healthy 58 percent. But that same poll showed that by 50 percent to 38 percent, Americans said they wanted to see a change from Clinton administration policies -- not a continuation of them. What do you think accounts for that sentiment for change, and do you think it means that you present something of a mixed blessing to Mrs. Clinton and Vice President Gore in their campaigns next year?

THE PRESIDENT: I think what that means people think things are going well, but they want a change in policy. I think that's right. If you asked me that question, and you worded it in that way, I'd be in the 50 percent, because I think that -- my own view is that, particularly in a dynamic time, where things are changing, you should want continued change. But is change -- the question is, should we change in a way that builds on what has been done and goes beyond it -- which is what I would argue -- or should you change and go back to the policies we were following when we had \$290-billion deficits and we averaged over 7 percent unemployment for 12 years. I mean, I think that's really the question the American people have to ask themselves.

I think change is good. The great thing about this country is that it works best when it's sort of in a perpetual stage of renewal. So I would, myself, as a citizen, I would vote against somebody who said,

vote for me and I'll keep it just like it is; everything that Bill Clinton did is exactly what I'll do. I would vote against that candidate, because I do not believe that is the right thing to do.

But what I think we should do is we should build on the progress of the last six years and go beyond it, and not adopt a completely different approach which has been proven not to work. So all I want the American people to do is to remember what it was like before, think what it's like now, recognize that ideas and policies have consequences. And the American people usually get it right; that's why we're all still around here after more than 200 years.

Q -- (inaudible.)

THE PRESIDENT: No.

Q -- for Mrs. Clinton and Mr. Gore?

THE PRESIDENT: No, because I -- no, he has done -- look at what the Vice President's done. He's staked out new issues here. He said, here's how I'm going to change what we're doing in cancer research; here's how I'm going to change what we're doing in education; here's how I'm going to change what we're doing in crime -- but not to reverse what we've done, but to build on it and go beyond it. So I think that's very, very -- that's the sort of thing that's worthy of debate. That's not the same; that is change.

What the American people have to decide is what kind of change do they want. Do they want to build on what has worked for the last six and a half years, or do they want to abandon it and go back to what failed them for 12 years before. That will be the decision they have to make.

Yes, go ahead.

Q In your last press conference, sir, with Prime Minister Ehud Barak, you mentioned you wanted better, normalized relations with Syria. Now, have you received any response, positive response or indication from Syria towards that? And, on Iran, can you share with us the administration's views of -- events and administrations in Iran? Thank you.

THE PRESIDENT: Well, on Syria let me say, the only thing I can tell you is that the statements, at least, that have been coming out of Syria have been quite encouraging in terms of the regard that President Assad seems to have for Prime Minister Barak, and the willingness, the openness that there is to negotiating and moving toward peace. So I'm encouraged by that.

And on Iran, frankly, I'm reluctant to say anything for fear that it will be used in a way that's not helpful to the forces of openness and reform. I think that people everywhere, particularly younger people, hope that they will be able to pursue their religious convictions and their personal dreams in an atmosphere of greater freedom, that still allows them to be deeply loyal to their nation. And I think the Iranian people obviously love their country and are proud of its history and have enormous potential. And I just hope they find a way to work through all this, and I believe they will.

Q You mentioned the patients' bill of rights. It seems like that was an argument by both parties over providing more for people who already are lucky enough to have health insurance. And, in fact, neither party dealt with some very fundamental issues that energized you and the First Lady five and six years ago. The question is, with such a robust economy and the budget surpluses, if not now, when, and if not you, who, would provide the leadership to provide for those folks?

THE PRESIDENT: Yes, but I think the bigger question is how. That is, it is true that just as we've predicted in 1993 and 1994, that the percentage of people who have health insurance on the job is going down,

just as we said it would, if nothing was done. So what we have tried to do is to isolate discrete populations that seem to be most in need and try to offer them help.

In the Balanced Budget Act of 1997, we reached bipartisan agreement on a proposal that would fund providing health insurance for up to 5 million more children through state-designed programs. Now, I've been a little disappointed -- and I'm not being critical of any of the states, either, here -- but I've been a little disappointed that the uptake on the program has been a little slow. That is, I would have thought by now we'd have almost 3 million of those 5 million children enrolled already, because we've got the money there, and we're well behind that.

So we are looking at whether there are things that we can do at the national level to work with the states to simplify access to the children's health insurance programs that the states have set up. But -- and I also had a talk with Senator Kennedy, the other day who believes that for little or no more extra money, we could actually adjust the program and take in several million more children. So the children are the biggest group.

Then, I have a proposal, as you know, that's part of my Medicare reform proposal that I didn't mention today, but I want to reiterate it, that would allow the most vulnerable group of people without health insurance, people between the ages of 55 and 65, to buy into the Medicare system in a way that would not compromise the integrity of the system. So I think that is quite important.

In addition to that, there are a lot of states -- there are some states -- Tennessee was the first state to do this under the former governor -- they started it -- which are allowing lower-income working families to buy into their Medicaid programs on a sliding scale.

So if all these things were done, we would dramatically reduce the number of people without health insurance and we'll eventually probably get down to, if we keep pushing in this direction, get down to the point where the largest group of people without health insurance are young, single people who believe that they're going to live forever and be healthy forever and don't want to bear the cost. And we'll have to think about, then, what to do.

But I think the best thing to do is try to get as many kids as we can covered, and then try to get these people who are out of the work force who are older, but they're not old enough to get Medicare, to get them at least where they can all afford on a sliding scale to buy into the Medicare program.

Go ahead, Scott.

Q Thank you, Mr. President. On the Kennedy tragedy, sir, will you authorize the Navy to participate in a burial at sea ceremony? Why do you believe it's justified to spend so many federal resources on this tragedy? And, finally, sir, I wonder if you would give us your thoughts on Mr. Kennedy's last visit here to the White House. I understand you and the First Lady took him on a tour.

THE PRESIDENT: Well, we have received -- I have received no official word, personal word from the family what burial arrangements they want. Until they make a statement about it, I just don't feel that I can say anything.

Secondly, I will say that until just a couple of days ago the recovery efforts -- the rescue, then the recovery efforts that were undertaken were consistent with what would have been done in any other case. Because the Coast Guard felt that they had the capacity to succeed in this if they had a few more days, and because of the role of the Kennedy family in our national lives, and because of the enormous losses

that they have sustained in our lifetimes, I thought it was appropriate to give them a few more days. And if anyone believes that was wrong, the Cost Guard is not at fault; I am. It was because I thought it was the right thing to do under the circumstances.

Now, you asked about -- John Kennedy had actually not been back to the White House since his father was killed, until I became President. First, he was on an advisory committee that made a report to me and he came back to the Oval Office, where he saw the desk that he took the famous picture in, coming through the gate, for the first time since he was a little boy.

And then last year -- maybe you would have a better memory than I would, but it seems to me it was last May, when we had the event at the White House celebrating the series that HBO did on the Apollo program. Do you remember they did a series on the space program that was done after the movie came out? And Tom Hanks came, a lot of people came. And he was invited because of his father's role in starting the space program. And he and Carolyn came. And afterward I asked them if they would like to go upstairs, and he said he would. So I took him upstairs and showed him the residence, which he'd not seen since he was a tiny boy.

And I showed him some of my -- the memorabilia that I had from his father's service. I have a picture of his father speaking to the Irish Parliament, and a number of other things which he thought were very interesting. And we took a -- we had a very nice evening. And I sent him the pictures from it. And then, in return, he sent me a signed copy of his favorite picture of his father, which is now upstairs. It's John Kennedy campaigning in Virginia, in Charlottesville in 1960. It's quite a lovely picture -- interesting picture.

But it was a nice night. I think that he really wanted to kind of come to terms with all of it. And I think he and Carolyn, they were delightful young people, and they had a great time here that night. And Hillary and I loved having them here. It was quite a great night.

Q To just follow on that, sir, just one question, if I may. Is there anything that Mr. Kennedy said to you that night that particularly struck you?

THE PRESIDENT: We just had a friendly conversation. You know, I knew him pretty well by then. We'd been -- I met him years ago when he was a law student, doing a summer internship with Mickey Kantor's law firm out in Los Angeles, long before I ever thought I'd be here and before I ever thought we'd have any other contacts. He just happened to be -- Mickey asked me if I'd speak to his law clerks, because I was in LA to give an education speech, and I went by and visited with them and he was there. And we had been together on many occasions since then.

The thing that struck me was I thought he was -- he said he was glad to be back. And I think he -- he was a very deliberate person, as many people have noticed, about when he would be publicly exposed and all of that. He had his mother's care for having a private life. And I think that he had not -- I'm not sure he had really felt he wanted to come back to the White House before he did. But especially in light of everything that's happened, I'm glad he had the chance to come back here one more time and see the residence and know where he was when he was a little boy. I'm glad he did that. I'm grateful that that happened.

Yes, go ahead. Yes, yes, please.

Q On Colombia, the Pastrana administration are asking the United States for \$500 million to support the military against the guerrillas. Is your administration ready to respond to that request? And, also, the Colombians are asking for more direct intervention from the United States. Are you considering this possibility? And, also, Mexico, you're going to meet with President Zedillo in October. And the Mexican government is still rejecting the extraditions of major drug lords. What

are you going to ask him -- you're going to get assurance from him to extradite these big narcotic traffickers to the United States?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, you know, we had no extraditions between Mexico and the United States for a long time, and we've actually had some now. So we're moving in the right direction. And President Zedillo and I have been pretty successful in continuing to move our relationship in the right direction, so we'll work on that.

On Colombia, I'm not prepared to make any kind of dollar commitment today. But let me say, I have stayed in close touch with President Pastrana, and I admire the fact that he has really thrown himself into trying to end the civil conflicts in Colombia, to stop the insurgency. The people in the United States have a real interest in that because I think that until the civil discord in Colombia is brought to an end, it is going to be much, much harder for us to restrain the activities of the narco-traffickers there, and their reach.

So, in addition to wanting a neighbor and a democracy in Latin America to be free of the kind of violence and heartbreak that the Colombian people have undergone because of this, it is also very much in our national security interest to do what we can, if we can be helpful in ending the civil conflict so that Colombia can be about the business of freeing itself of the influence of the narco-traffickers in ways that would be good for Colombians and good for us as well.

Q Another question about the presidential race. Aside from asking George W. Bush to come forward and give specifics on the issues that you mentioned, could you tell us what you find objectionable about his trying to present a new moderate face for his party, just like you did for the Democrats? And could you tell us whether you're worried whether he will figure out how the Republicans can occupy the center of American politics?

THE PRESIDENT: No.

Q You don't think he can?

THE PRESIDENT: No, no, I don't think I'll answer those questions. (Laughter.) I will say -- no, look, let me say again, I wouldn't even agree with the characterization you gave of my first answer.

When I ran for President, in 1991, the first thing I did was tell the American people what I thought was going on in our country and what I would do. And if you remember, the late Senator Paul Tsongas and I were actually almost ridiculed at the time because we both put out these very detailed plans of what we would do. If you go back and get one of those plans now, you'll see that virtually everything we said we'd do we did do, except for the things we tried to do and were defeated on.

And my view is that there are a lot of things that count in a presidential election toward a successful presidency, but it is -- that go beyond specific issues, and judgment plays a role in it, and crises will always come up and things can be learned and all that. But it really matters where you stand on the big issues that everybody knows about that are going on right now, and it matters where we're going in the future.

So that's the only point I want to make. And I think any -- I would say that applies to every candidate. I don't want to answer the questions you ask me because that's not my job. My job is not to handicap this horse race, not to comment on it, not to comment on the candidates. My job is to work for the American people. But I'm going to answer these questions from the point of view of Joe Citizen. That's -- every political question you asked me from now on, I'm going to pretend that I'm living back in Little Rock already and I'm working on my presidential library and I'm sitting here as a voter saying, where do they stand, what will they do -- all of them. And I do believe the Vice President has done

the best job of telling the American people what he would do and -- to go back to Susan's formulation -- how he would change the country in a positive way.

George.

Q Mr. President, as the nation has celebrated the 30th anniversary of the moon landing, a lot of the former astronauts have lamented that no President after Kennedy set a kind of national goal like President Kennedy did of landing on the moon. Do you think that -- in your view, is the country not receptive today to that kind of goal-setting by a President, or is it something a President should do, set a goal of landing on Mars?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, we are planning to land on Mars. But I think -- for one thing, when I became President, the space program was actually in peril. And we -- the space station was certainly at risk. And I have fought for it and I believe in it. And one of the things I talked to -- Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin and Michael Collins were in to see me yesterday, and we talked about where we could go with this. And Dan Goldin was there, the NASA Administrator; and Dr. Neal Lane, my Science Advisor. And we talked about how we could use the coming of the millennium as -- you know, the First Lady sponsored all these other lectures here. And I told him about Stephen Hawking's lecture and what he said. And we talked yesterday about how we could set some goals for the space program, capture the imagination of the American people and broaden the support for it.

And one of the things that I suggested that I think would be quite helpful that we're going to work on now is what we can do to dramatize for the American people -- you mentioned Mars, but I think what is more likely to capture the imagination of the American people are the benefits to us here on Earth of continued advances in space. And some of them, particularly in the health field, are likely to be breath-taking. They're principally in the area of the environment and health.

So I asked our people to start working on that and they said they would be willing to help us. I have to tell you that it was a great day for me yesterday to have them come by the White House. They also gave me a moon rock, by the way -- but only on loan. (Laughter.) And the moon rock is 3.6 billion years old. So when I feel very tired, I'll look at it and feel young again. (Laughter.)

Yes, go ahead. We had an Irish question first, I promised. Go ahead, what's the Irish question?

Q Thank you, sir. Given the --

THE PRESIDENT: You want to ask one, too?

Q We both have a -- given the various meetings underway with Mo Mowlam here, and George Mitchell there, has any progress been made on the Irish situation? And is one side more to blame than the other on it?

THE PRESIDENT: Okay. Why don't we take both Irish questions at once. What's your Irish question?

Q Last week, you seemed to kind of get fired up when you were talking to the teenagers from Colorado. You said that the politicians in Northern Ireland were behaving akin to school children. Do you feel, after all the work that you've done on this project, that perhaps it was misplaced and you should have perhaps pushed in a place more like Africa, where they have thousands of people dying from ethnic strife, instead of 3,500 over 30 years?

Q And if I can have a third Irish question, what role, if any, do you expect to play, Mr. President, in breaking the deadlock?

THE PRESIDENT: Okay, let me answer the Irish questions, then I'll come back to the "should we have done something else."

I've talked to Senator Mitchell, and he is willing to spend some time -- he can't go back full-time for another year or two, but I'd like to put this in some -- at least I'd like to tell you how I look at it.

Obviously, I am very disappointed at the breakdown of the process here. But I do think it's important to note that neither side wants to abandon the Good Friday Agreement. And that's very important. It's also important to note that everybody agrees on what their responsibilities are and what the other side's responsibilities are, and everybody agrees that it all has to be done by a date certain.

So they have agreed to break out the two areas causing problems, the decommissioning and the standing up to the executive, and try to figure out how they can unlock that, and Mo Mowlam, as you pointed out, is working hard on it, and they've asked Senator Mitchell to come back and do some work on it, and my instinct is that it will be resolved.

Now, let me say in terms of your characterization, here's the problem. To the outsiders -- I told the parties that to the outsiders -- no one, none of us outside, even somebody like me that's been so involved in this, no one will understand if this thing breaks down over who goes first; that that did sound like the kind of argument that young people have, you know -- who goes first.

Underneath that, there's something deeper: The Protestants are afraid that they IRA will never disarm if they let the Sinn Fein go into the executive branch, and the IRA do not believe -- since the agreement did not require decommissioning as a condition of getting into the executive branch, they don't want to have to spend the rest of their lives being told that it wasn't the vote of the people, it wasn't the Good Friday Accord, it was what the Unionists and Great Britain did to force them to give up their arms that got them to disarm. They believe that would, in effect, require them to disavow what they've done for 30 years.

And what they're saying is, when we surrender our arms, we're surrendering to our people. Our people voted for this. We are surrendering to the will of the people that we represent. So when you put it in that textured way on both sides, it makes it clear why it becomes a difficult issue. And I can't think of anybody better to try to work through it than George Mitchell, because he's got it all in his head and he's put three years into it. But my instinct is that we will get this worked out.

Now, you asked about did I think we had misplaced our energies. I don't think so. We have -- for one thing, we don't have a stronger partner in the world than Great Britain, and for another, we don't have a bigger ethnic group in America than the Irish, and we're tied by blood and emotion to the Irish struggle.

I also think that it has enormous symbolism, beyond the size of the country and the number who have died. And if it can be resolved, I think it will give great impetus to the forces of peace throughout the world. So I don't believe for a moment we made a mistake.

But let me also say I think we should be more involved in Africa and I've tried to involve us more in Africa. I did everything I could to head off that civil war between Ethiopia and Eritrea. It's not a civil war, they are two separate countries, but they once were together and they're basically now arguing over the divorce settlement. And I don't mean to trivialize it in that characterization. And we are still actively involved in trying to stop that.

Reverend Jackson played a significant role in trying to end the awful carnage in Sierra Leone, and I'm very grateful for that. We're now working, and we're able to work with Nigeria to try to stabilize the

region. We are training African militaries and the Africa Crisis Response Corps, so that we can, hopefully, prevent further carnage. So I believe the United States should be more involved in Africa.

And, of course, the announcement that the Vice President made on our behalf the other day of our new AIDS initiative in some ways may be the most important thing we can do to save lives there.

So I agree that we should be more involved. But I don't agree that we misplaced our energies in Ireland. I'm proud of every late-night phone call and every frustrating hour I've spent on it.

THE PRESIDENT: Yes, go ahead.

Q -- can I ask about you --

THE PRESIDENT: Well, I don't want to talk about me.

Q Oh, come on.

THE PRESIDENT: I'm not a candidate for anything.

Go ahead, what? Go ahead. All right, one more.

Q Listen, Mr. President, with due respect, in another development, I know that you are for Africa, and you know that I support -- Africa, my friend, the President of the Dominican Republic -- we are Afro-Latino. But I am not concerned at this moment about Mars. I am concerned about place where I have been for 20 years, the White House, that is going to celebrate 200 year next year. I wonder if you would tell the people of the United States what you are going to plan for that big celebration?

And another thing, Mr. President -- I am disgusted with you -- you have been hiding something extraordinary -- the performance -- or the trade promotional coordinating committee that has been carried out in the last year -- are the participants in the prospective of this economy. Why don't you speak about the success of that initiative? It's a sin that you -- you talk about a lot of things that is -- another thing that is good for America and the world.

THE PRESIDENT: Well, a lot of the things that are good for America don't make good news for them, you see.

Q And I have a follow-up. (Laughter.)

THE PRESIDENT: No, let me just say -- (laughter) -- a follow-up? (Laughter.) Now, that's really good. That is really -- Oh, God, is that good.

Let me just say that we will have a lot of celebrations of the 200th birthday of the White House next year, and it's neat that coincides with the first year of the new century and the millennium. So we'll have -- I'm not prepared to announce them yet, because I want others who deserve more credit than I do to be able to do that. But it will be a signal honor for us to be living here in that year, and we'll be able to do a lot -- and I hope we'll have even more American citizens coming to the White House next year to be a part of it.

Go ahead. Just that follow up -- that showed a lot of guts. (Laughter.) If this is a follow up, I'll give you another question. (Laughter.)

Q Sir, you've stressed that you have plenty to do, and yet for some time, your political career has enjoyed the benefits of support from two people in particular -- the Vice President and the First Lady -- two people who are now in a position to expect some support from you. I'm wondering what you feel you owe those two people in terms of political

support, and as you plan your schedule in the weeks and months ahead, how you'll balance that assistance against your job as President, and finally, how you personally are adjusting to what people might think is an interesting shift in role.

Q I have a follow-up to his question. (Laughter.)

THE PRESIDENT: Now, I believe that. (Laughter.)

Well, I will do whatever I'm asked to do, basically. I'll try to be helpful. And if I can be helpful, I will be. But I think the best thing I can do for anyone who generally shares our ideas, is part of our party, trying to move the country forward, is to continue to be a good President and take care of our country.

But I don't mind hard work and I don't mind long hours, and I find myself, apparently unlike some of my predecessors -- but just read what you all say about it -- but I don't feel myself winding down, I feel myself keying up. I want to do more. I want to try to make sure that I give the American people as much as I can every day. So I've got plenty of energy and I'll do whatever I'm asked to do.

I owe them a great deal. I think Al Gore -- everybody in this room knows that he's had far more responsibility and gotten more done than any Vice President in history. Nobody's ever had a role that even approximates that. I don't think the American people know that yet, but I know that. And he deserves a lot of credit for what he's done and he has my friendship and my support. But I also think that it's a mixed blessing, as you say, because people want to see any Vice President out there on his own. If you go back and look at where Richard Nixon was in 1959, you will see the same sort of thing. So I think I see this as a rhythmic process.

I think he'll do fine. But the reason I think that has nothing to do with the questions you ask me. The reasons I think that are, A, he's a good man with a good record, but most importantly, he's out there telling the American people how he would change the country for the better. And I think that's important.

I did an interview and I talked about Hillary and this -- if she decides to do this I will do whatever I can do. And if she's successful I will happily go to the Senate spouses meeting if that's part of the job. I have never known anybody who didn't run for office who was a more effective, more consistently committed, completely passionate public citizen than her. So if she decides to do it, and if the people of New York decide that they want her to do it, that's a decision for them to make and they have to deal with that, and she's trying to deal with that, you know, the whole question of moving there.

It is true that shortly after we came here I said, you get to decide where we live from now on for the rest of our lives. And she said, I want to go to New York -- in, like, '93. This is just something that happened later. So I'll be dividing my time between home -- I'm going to go home and build my library and build my center -- I'll divide my time between there and New York, whatever she does about this Senate race.

But if I can help her in any way, I will, because I think it would be a great thing for the country -- not only because of what I owe her, because she just -- what she knows and how she's lived and what she's done. I mean, it's very unusual to find somebody like that who has that much knowledge and background and passion all packed into one place. I mean, I know that you think I'm a biased observer, but I think I could support it with evidence.

Go ahead, Bill.

Q In that same vein, sir -- (laughter) -- as the spotlight shifts from you to your Vice President and to your wife, are you likely to

be content, drifting slowly offstage, or do you think that someday you will want to run for office, some office again? Or are you willing to tell us this afternoon, sir, that you will never again run for elective office?

THE PRESIDENT: I don't have any idea. (Laughter.) Really, I don't know. Let me just say this. I love this job. I love it. Even on the bad days -- you can do something good for the country, you can do something good for the future. I have loved doing this. And I have given it every ounce of my energy and ability and judgment. And I feel very fortunate. But we have a system that I, frankly, agree with, even though I'm in pretty good shape -- we have a system that says a President gets two terms and then the President has to go find something else to do with his life. And there are lots of other worthy things to do.

And I was a very happy person before I became President. I never have had any trouble finding something interesting to do that I believed in. And I will do my best to use the opportunity and the gift the American people gave me to serve in this position to be a useful citizen of my country and the world for the rest of my life, and I have no doubt that there will be some way I can do that. And I'm, frankly, kind of excited about it. I mean, it's a new challenge. I'll have to think in a different way and do a different way.

Will I miss a lot of the things about this job? Yes. I'll even miss all of you, believe it or not. But I'm just grateful that I've had the chance to serve and that the results have been good for our people and for our country and I think for the world.

And, you know, that's part of life. Life has its rhythms. And the people that are most satisfied and most happy in life take the rhythms of life and make the most of them, instead of sitting around moping and wishing the rhythms were something other than they are. That's just not the way the life works. And, listen, I'm way ahead and I'm very grateful.

Thank you very much.

END

3:45 P.M. EDT