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THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary

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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 of Medicare -- 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, free 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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TO: Joshua S. Gottheimer (CN=Joshua S. Gottheimer/OU=WHO/O=EOP @ EOP [WHO])
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TO: Dario J. Gomez (CN=Dario J. Gomez/OU=WHO/O=EOP @ EOP [WHO])
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TO: CUTLER_L (CUTLER_L @ a1.eop.gov [UNKNOWN]) (WHO)
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TO: Nanda Chitre (CN=Nanda Chitre/OU=WHO/O=EOP @ EOP [WHO])
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TO: Mary E. Cahill (CN=Mary E. Cahill/OU=WHO/O=EOP @ EOP [WHO])
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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: Jocelyn A. Bucaro (CN=Jocelyn A. Bucaro/OU=WHO/O=EOP @ EOP [WHO])
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TO: Marsha E. Berry (CN=Marsha E. Berry/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: 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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TEXT:
THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary

For Immediate Release
July 21, 1999

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 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

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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 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

RECORD TYPE: PRESIDENTIAL (NOTES MAIL)

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

CREATION DATE/TIME:21-JUL-1999 00:25:25.00

SUBJECT:

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

TEXT:

A. Positive assertions about VP's role.

B. Sharp rebuttals

Vice President Gore -- in effort to curry favor with the drug companies -- threatened severe trade sanctions against South Africa if it went forward with its legal plans to provide lower-cost AIDS medicines.

These reckless and irresponsible assertions have been put down by some very highly-placed authorities.

I have some news for this group. If you are trying to advocate in America for an issue affecting AIDS in South Africa, and your assertions are directly discredited by one of the top African American officials in the U.S (Chairman of the CBC), the top South African official in the U.S. (Ambassador Sisulu), and the top AIDS lobbyist in the U.S. (Daniel Zingale of AIDS Action) -- AND the Washington Post says you "manipulate the facts" AND a conservative weekly calls your charges "groundless and grotesque" it's pretty clear to me you've got a credibility problem.

The U.S. is stopping South Africans from getting the drugs that could save their lives.

When 15c was passed, South African and international pharmaceutical companies challenged the law in South African court, charging that the law -- as written -- violated South Africa's Constitution. Meanwhile, the South Africa government has decided that it will not proceed with compulsory licensing or parallel importing so long as the law is under litigation.

So it is the South Africa government that has decided not to go forward with its plan to produce cheaper generic drugs.

But the U.S. government is keeping South Africa from doing compulsory licensing and parallel importing because of the threat of sanctions.

Even if the USG had said nothing on this point -- still the pharmaceutical companies had challenged this law in Court, and South Africa decided it would not go forward with compulsory licensing or parallel importing until the litigation was resolved.

Gore has led an effort to bully South Africa into giving up efforts to make cheaper drugs.

The U.S. has not opposed efforts to provide medicines more cheaply; it has opposed efforts that undercut the patents the led to the development of

those medicines in the first place.

These protestors say they are concerned about AIDS in Africa. But the group driving the protests is founded to fight against intellectual property rights. There seems to be some evidence that this group is just using the emotional issue of AIDS to try to weaken intellectual property rights worldwide.

In fact, the head of this group dismissed the Administration's call for doubling funds devoted to AIDS in Africa -- calling it "damage control."

It seems this group doesn't want to find a way to both provide cheaper medicines and preserve international agreements -- they just want to break the international agreements.

The U.S. is trying to repeal a law that allows South Africa to pursue its legal rights under international agreements.

Simon Barber, a reporter for Business Day in South Africa, wrote last week: The problem with section 15c is that it grants the health minister sweeping authority to ignore South Africa's TRIPS obligations."

Isn't it reasonable to say that if someone supports such a law, that they are trying to weaken intellectual property rights.

The Vice President threatened trade sanctions against South Africa.

The South African Ambassador to the U.S. said July 2 : "I want to state categorically that Vice President Gore has not put pressure, has not given notice to put sanctions on South Africa on this matter."

If they presume to speak for the people of South Africa; they might first check their facts with someone who represents the people of South Africa.

The Vice President is serving the interests of the drug companies.

The Weekly Standard -- no friend of Mr. Gore -- has called these charges "groundless and grotesque." It has been widely reported that the Vice President strongly opposed drug company efforts to escalate trade sanctions against South Africa on this issue

The State Department report describes Gore's actions in bullying Mbeki.

The State Department report describes the Vice President and Mr. Mbeki "agreed on a basis for a mutually satisfactory, Government-to-Government negotiated solution to the impasse."

That State Department report was written -- by the way -- because a Republican Congressman did what the drug companies told him to. He sponsored legislation that cut off all U.S. aid to the Central Government of South Africa, until the State Department submitted a report saying what we were doing to force a change in the South African Medicines Act. The same Congressman has threatened to write a tougher provision into the law this year.

Tough questions for Love and Sawyer:

Mr. Love: You don't come to this dispute based on a longstanding commitment to fighting AIDS. Your experience seems to be more along the lines of fighting intellectual property rights. What would you say to the suggestion that you are using the emotional issue of AIDS to try to weaken intellectual property rights worldwide?

Mr. Love: Simon Barber of Business Day of South Africa has written that Section 15c "excuses the health minister from deference to existing South Africa patent law." He then says 15c "grants the health minister sweeping authority to ignore South Africa's TRIPS obligations." If you support such a law, isn't reasonable to assume you are opposed to intellectual property rights?

RECORD TYPE: PRESIDENTIAL (NOTES MAIL)

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

CREATION DATE/TIME:21-JUL-1999 09:41:48.00

SUBJECT:

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

READ:UNKNOWN

TEXT:

ú The Clinton-Gore Administration has worked harder than any previous Administration to build stronger U.S. ties with Africa. The President has taken the longest-ever Presidential trip to Africa. He has also sent a Presidential Mission on AIDS to sub-Saharan Africa to chronicle the scope of the crisis and propose a response. Just this week, Vice President Gore) on the basis of that report) announced the Administration ,s proposal for the largest-ever increase in funding for AIDS in Africa.

ú Vice President Gore) for his part -- has almost certainly invested more time and effort in Africa than any of his predecessors. As co-chair of the U.S.-South Africa Binational Commission, the Vice President has made a tremendous personal investment of time and effort working with South African leaders to improve health, expand trade, and build the economy of the new South Africa.

ú He has also helped South Africa confront the crisis of AIDS. He has worked through efforts of the committee to help track the spread of AIDS, expand awareness, and promote prevention. He has taken Secretary Shalala, Surgeon General David Satcher, and AIDS Policy Director Sandy Thurman with him on his trips to Cape Town to help give the South African government the benefit of some of America ,s best knowledge and ideas about fighting AIDS.

ú Following the discussion the Vice President and Deputy President had on AIDS in Cape Town in February of this year, Mr. Mbeki gave the Vice President an AIDS ribbon, done in ornate African beadwork, and the two of them both wore the ribbons before a national television audience in South Africa as they spoke about the importance of AIDS awareness. Clearly, the gift of an AIDS ribbon from Mr. Mbeki to Mr. Gore, is a clear sign of solidarity between the two in the fight against AIDS.

ú The Vice President has never threatened South Africa with trade sanctions. Ambassador Sisulu of South Africa said at a July 2 press conference at the National Press Club: &I want to state categorically that Vice President Gore has not put pressure, has not given notice to put sanctions, on South Africa on this matter. 8

ú The fact is -- the Vice President is on the right side of the issue. The Vice President has supported South Africa ,s efforts to make health care more affordable, and he believes we can do that without undercutting the patents that led to the development of those medicines in the first place.)

ú At the same time, the Vice President has blocked drug company efforts to escalate trade pressure on South Africa. As Susan Rice, our Assistant Secretary of State for Africa, has said: the Vice President and he led the way led the way in opposing trade sanctions pushed by the

pharmaceutical industry. He took the position that the health crisis in South Africa needed to be taken into account.

ú The fact of the matter is) the Vice President is a great friend of Africa and a bitter foe of AIDS, and it is unfortunate these people don , t recognize his leadership and give him the respect he deserves.
Rebuttals

Charge: Vice President Gore -- in effort to curry favor with the drug companies -- threatened severe trade sanctions against South Africa if it went forward with its legal plans to provide lower-cost AIDS medicines.

Response: The Philadelphia Inquirer wrote: &Vice President Gore would seem an unlikely target for AIDS activists. Under the Clinton administration, funding for AIDS research has soared, new AIDS medicines have dramatically reduced mortality rates, and the government is now pushing to get an AIDS vaccine by 2007. 8 Beyond that, as you know, the Vice President has been involved for years working with the South Africans to improve the health, expand trade, build the economy. That is not the usual role of U.S. Vice Presidents; he does it out of his own free will) for no political benefit, as we have seen. These groups claim Gore put pressure on South Africa and threatened sanctions against South Africa in an August 1998 meeting. The South African Ambassador to the U.S. has directly contradicted those claims, and the Assistant Secretary of State for Africa) who was in that meeting) said the Vice President has led the way in opposing trade sanctions on South Africa.

The fact is, this group is trying to advocate in America for an issue affecting AIDS in South Africa, and their assertions have been challenged by one of the top African American officials in the U.S (Chairman of the CBC), the top South African official in the U.S. (Ambassador Sisulu), and the top AIDS lobbyist in the U.S. (the executive director of AIDS Action). The Washington Post says they "manipulate the facts" AND a conservative weekly calls these charges "groundless and grotesque." If you ask me, the only way a group pushing for such a good cause could get such bad press is if their tactics were dishonest, underhanded, or unethical.

Charge: The U.S. is stopping South Africans from getting the drugs that could save their lives.

Response: When 15c was passed, South African and international pharmaceutical companies challenged the law in South African court, charging that the law -- as written -- violated South Africa's Constitution. Meanwhile, the South Africa government has decided that it will not proceed with compulsory licensing or parallel importing so long as the law is under litigation.

So it is the South Africa government that has decided not to go forward with its plan to produce cheaper generic drugs.

Charge: But the U.S. government is keeping South Africa from doing compulsory licensing and parallel importing because of the threat of sanctions.

Response: Even if the USG had said nothing on this point -- still the pharmaceutical companies had challenged this law in Court, and South Africa decided it would not go forward with compulsory licensing or parallel importing until the litigation was resolved.

Charge: Gore has led an effort to bully South Africa into giving up efforts to make cheaper drugs.

Response: Nonsense. The U.S. has not opposed efforts to provide medicines more cheaply; it has opposed efforts that undercut the patents the led to the development of those medicines in the first place.

These protestors say they are concerned about AIDS in Africa. But the group driving the protests is founded to fight against intellectual property rights. There seems to be some evidence that this group is just using the emotional issue of AIDS to try to weaken intellectual property rights worldwide.

In fact, the head of this group dismissed the Administration's call for doubling funds devoted to AIDS in Africa -- calling it "damage control." I don't know how someone who could claim to care about saving lives in Africa could sniff at the largest-ever funding increase to fight AIDS in Africa. The only way it makes sense is if this group doesn't really care about spreading awareness, preventing the disease, offering better home-based treatment, or caring for orphans. The only way it makes sense to mock a record funding increase is if you don't care about AIDS, you only care about fighting a worldwide battle against intellectual property rights.

It seems this group doesn't want to find a way to both provide cheaper medicines and preserve international agreements -- they just want to break the international agreements.

Charge: The U.S. is trying to repeal a law that allows South Africa to pursue its legal rights under international agreements.

Response: Simon Barber, a reporter for Business Day in South Africa, wrote last week: The problem with section 15c is that it grants the health minister sweeping authority to ignore South Africa's TRIPS obligations."

Isn't it reasonable to say that if someone supports such a law, that they are trying to weaken intellectual property rights.

Charge: The Vice President threatened trade sanctions against South Africa.

Response: The South African Ambassador to the U.S. said July 2 : "I want to state categorically that Vice President Gore has not put pressure, has not given notice to put sanctions on South Africa on this matter."

If they presume to speak for South Africa in the United States; they might first check their facts with someone who really does speak for South Africa in the United States.

Charge: The Vice President is serving the interests of the drug companies.

Response: The Weekly Standard -- no friend of Mr. Gore -- has called these charges "groundless and grotesque." Numerous other newspapers and commentators have pointed out that the Vice President fought the drug companies efforts to impose trade sanctions against South Africa.

Simon Barber wrote in South Africa ,s Business Day: &The accusation that Gore is in the pocket of the drug industry, which was starting to gain currency, now holds less water than it ever did. The industry wants a big fat stake driven through section 15c and the Vice President has not delivered. But he may have helped fostser something more important: (... a sane atmosphere for reasoning through why the protection of intellectual property is not necessarily incompatible with better, more affordable health care for South Africa ,s poor. 8

Charge: The State Department report describes Gore's actions in bullying Mbeki.

Response: The State Department report states explicitly that the Vice President and Mr. Mbeki [and I quote]: "agreed on a basis for a mutually satisfactory, Government-to-Government negotiated solution to the impasse."

That State Department report was written -- by the way -- because a Republican Congressman did what the drug companies told him to. He sponsored legislation that cut off all U.S. aid to the Central Government of South Africa, until the State Department submitted a report saying what we were doing to force a change in the South African Medicines Act. The same Congressman has threatened to write a tougher provision into the law this year.

I might like to ask members of this committee if they were aware of Congressman Frelinghuysen ,s move on behalf of the pharmaceutical companies to cut off aid to South Africa. Further, if they were aware of it) did they support it. If they had been aware of it, would they have fought it?

Tough questions for Love:

Mr. Love, You don't come to this dispute based on a longstanding commitment to fighting AIDS. Your experience seems to be more along the lines of fighting intellectual property rights. What would you say to the suggestion that you are trying to exploit the emotional issue of AIDS to gain a foothold for weakening intellectual property rights worldwide?

Mr. Love: Simon Barber of Business Day of South Africa has written that Section 15c "excuses the health minister from deference to existing South Africa patent law." He then says 15c "grants the health minister sweeping authority to ignore South Africa's TRIPS obligations." If you support such a law, isn't reasonable to assume you are opposed to intellectual property rights?

RECORD TYPE: PRESIDENTIAL (NOTES MAIL)

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

CREATION DATE/TIME:21-JUL-1999 08:38:40.00

SUBJECT: Gore Seeks \$100 Million To Fight AIDS In Africa

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])
READ:UNKNOWN

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

----- Forwarded by Richard Socarides/WHO/EOP on 07/21/99
08:38 AM -----

Doug.Case@sdsu.edu
07/20/99 07:59:00 PM

Record Type: Record

To: Richard Socarides@EOP

CC:

Subject: Gore Seeks \$100 Million To Fight AIDS In Africa

Tuesday July 20 12:57 AM ET

Gore Seeks \$100 Million To Fight AIDS In Africa

By Lisa Richwine

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - Vice President Al Gore, confronting an issue that has dogged him on the campaign trail, said Monday the White House would seek \$100 million to fight the growing AIDS epidemic in Africa. At a news conference with South African Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Gore released a report that called the spread of AIDS throughout sub-Saharan Africa ``one of the largest health crises in the history of the world.''

``We have the knowledge, the care, the compassion and the moral duty to make a difference,' ' Gore said. ``We will keep this promise to wage a wider war against this disease.''

The Clinton administration made the special budget request for the next fiscal year, which starts Oct. 1. The \$100 million would add to the \$127 million the White House had already requested and must be approved by the Republican Congress.

Gore won support from Tutu, who called the proposal ``fantastic,' ' and loud applause from an audience that included members of the Congressional Black Caucus and AIDS groups. The vice president, favored to win the Democratic nomination for president in 2000, has been hounded on the campaign trail by the AIDS group ACT-UP. Monday, the group said Gore was using his announcement to deflect criticism for his role in a dispute over South African access to AIDS drugs.

``Gore is hyping the president's mild budget request, a request that faces an uncertain future in Congress,' ' said ACT-UP member Asia Russell. ``The future of 22.5 million people with HIV in Africa is more certain -- little relief from this relentless wave of death.''

The protesters say Gore and the Clinton administration have pressured South Africa to abandon an obscure trade remedy that could allow local manufacturers to make cheaper AIDS drugs. The U.S. pharmaceutical industry says the trade power threatens patent protection, a key to funding research of new medicines.

Gore's office says the vice president only wants to make sure South Africa does not violate international trade rules.

AIDS Action, the nation's largest AIDS organization, has defended Gore. The initiative ``proves the U.S. is recognizing that global AIDS is now one of our most important foreign policy imperatives,' ' said executive director Daniel Zingale.

A House Appropriations Committee spokeswoman said members would consider the new request. House Republicans are seeking \$127 million to fight AIDS in Africa. ``We're glad the administration has joined our fight to combat HIV/AIDS in Africa and welcome their support of our efforts to increase this funding,' ' spokeswoman Elizabeth Morra said.

The White House said the proposal stems from President Clinton's order last December for White House AIDS policy director Sandra Thurman to make a full report on the extent of the disease's rampage across Africa.

After a fact-finding trip to the region, Thurman reported the disease was turning millions of children into orphans, reducing life expectancy by more than 20 years in some areas and undermining economic development.

More than 12 million people have died of AIDS in sub-Saharan Africa in the past decade, and the daily death toll is projected to hit 13,000 people in 2005, Thurman concluded.

Of the \$100 million proposed by the White House, \$48 million would be used for prevention programs, including education and reducing mother-to-child transmissions.

Another \$23 million would be earmarked for AIDS care at community-based clinics and through home-based care workers. Another \$10 million would help care for children whose parents died of AIDS,

and \$19 million would help countries plan and implement programs to fight and track the disease.

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RECORD TYPE: PRESIDENTIAL (NOTES MAIL)

CREATOR: Todd A. Bledsoe (CN=Todd A. Bledsoe/OU=WHO/O=EOP [WHO])

CREATION DATE/TIME:21-JUL-1999 17:20:10.00

SUBJECT: Today's Press Conference by the President

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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, from 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

RECORD TYPE: PRESIDENTIAL (NOTES MAIL)

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

CREATION DATE/TIME:21-JUL-1999 11:39:16.00

SUBJECT: could you have a look at this stuff

TO: Joseph Papovich <PAPOVICH_JOSEPH@ustr.gov> (Joseph Papovich <PAPOVICH_JOSEPH@ustr.gov> [UNKNOWN])
READ:UNKNOWN

TEXT:

ú The Clinton-Gore Administration has worked harder than any previous Administration to build stronger U.S. ties with Africa. The President has taken the longest-ever Presidential trip to Africa. He has also sent a Presidential Mission on AIDS to sub-Saharan Africa to chronicle the scope of the crisis and propose a response. Just this week, Vice President Gore) on the basis of that report) announced the Administration ,s proposal for the largest-ever increase in funding for AIDS in Africa.

ú Vice President Gore) for his part -- has almost certainly invested more time and effort in Africa than any of his predecessors. As co-chair of the U.S.-South Africa Binational Commission, the Vice President has made a tremendous personal investment of time and effort working with South African leaders to improve health, expand trade, and build the economy of the new South Africa.

ú He has also helped South Africa confront the crisis of AIDS. He has worked through efforts of the committee to help track the spread of AIDS, expand awareness, and promote prevention. He has taken Secretary Shalala, Surgeon General David Satcher with on his trips to Cape Town to work with the South African government on improving our common efforts to fighting AIDS.

ú Following the discussion the Vice President and Deputy President had on AIDS in Cape Town in February of this year, Mr. Mbeki gave the Vice President an AIDS ribbon, done in ornate African beadwork, and the two of them both wore the ribbons before a national television audience in South Africa as they spoke about the importance of AIDS awareness. Clearly, the gift of an AIDS ribbon from Mr. Mbeki to Mr. Gore, is a clear sign of solidarity between the two in the fight against AIDS.

ú The Vice President has never threatened South Africa with trade sanctions. Ambassador Sisulu of South Africa said at a July 2 press conference at the National Press Club: &I want to state categorically that Vice President Gore has not put pressure, has not given notice to put sanctions, on South Africa on this matter. 8

ú The fact is -- the Vice President is on the right side of the issue. The Vice President has supported South Africa ,s efforts to make health care more affordable, and he believes we can do that without undercutting the patents that led to the development of those medicines in the first place.)

ú At the same time, the Vice President has blocked drug company efforts to escalate trade pressure on South Africa. As Susan Rice, our Assistant Secretary of State for Africa, has said: the Vice President and he led the way led the way in opposing trade sanctions pushed by the pharmaceutical industry. He took the position that the health crisis in South Africa needed to be taken into account.

ú The fact of the matter is) the Vice President is a great friend of Africa and a bitter foe of AIDS, and his leadership is an important asset in the fight against this raging health crisis.

Rebuttals

Charge: Vice President Gore -- in effort to curry favor with the drug companies -- threatened severe trade sanctions against South Africa if it went forward with its legal plans to provide lower-cost AIDS medicines.

Response: The Philadelphia Inquirer wrote: &Vice President Gore would

seem an unlikely target for AIDS activists. Under the Clinton administration, funding for AIDS research has soared, new AIDS medicines have dramatically reduced mortality rates, and the government is now pushing to get an AIDS vaccine by 2007. 8 Beyond that, as you know, the Vice President has been involved for years working with the South Africans to improve the health, expand trade, build the economy. That is not the usual role of U.S. Vice Presidents; he does it out of his own free will) for no political benefit, as we have seen. These groups claim Gore put pressure on South Africa and threatened sanctions against South Africa in an August 1998 meeting. The South African Ambassador to the U.S. has directly contradicted those claims, and the Assistant Secretary of State for Africa) who was in that meeting) said the Vice President has led the way in opposing trade sanctions on South Africa.

The fact is, this group is trying to advocate in America for an issue affecting AIDS in South Africa, and their assertions have been challenged by one of the top African American officials in the U.S (Chairman of the CBC), the top South African official in the U.S. (Ambassador Sisulu), and the top AIDS lobbyist in the U.S. (the executive director of AIDS Action). The Washington Post says they "manipulate the facts" AND a conservative weekly calls these charges "groundless and grotesque." If you ask me, the only way a group pushing for such a good cause could get such bad press is if their tactics were dishonest, underhanded, or unethical.

Charge: The U.S. is stopping South Africans from getting the drugs that could save their lives.

Response: When 15c was passed, South African and international pharmaceutical companies challenged the law in South African court, charging that the law -- as written -- violated South Africa's Constitution. Meanwhile, the South Africa government has decided that it will not proceed with compulsory licensing or parallel importing so long as the law is under litigation.

So it is the South Africa government that has decided not to go forward with its plan to produce cheaper generic drugs.

Charge: But the U.S. government is keeping South Africa from doing compulsory licensing and parallel importing because of the threat of sanctions.

Response: Even if the USG had said nothing on this point -- still the pharmaceutical companies had challenged this law in Court, and South Africa decided it would not go forward with compulsory licensing or parallel importing until the litigation was resolved.

Charge: Gore has led an effort to bully South Africa into giving up efforts to make cheaper drugs.

Response: Nonsense. The U.S. has not opposed efforts to provide medicines more cheaply; it has opposed efforts that undercut the patents the led to the development of those medicines in the first place.

These protestors say they are concerned about AIDS in Africa. But the group driving the protests is founded to fight against intellectual property rights. There seems to be some evidence that this group is just using the emotional issue of AIDS to try to weaken intellectual property rights worldwide.

In fact, the head of this group dismissed the Administration's call for doubling funds devoted to AIDS in Africa -- calling it "damage control." I don't know how someone who could claim to care about saving lives in Africa could sniff at the largest-ever funding increase to fight AIDS in Africa. The only way it makes sense is if this group doesn't really care about spreading awareness, preventing the disease, offering better home-based treatment, or caring for orphans. The only way it makes sense to mock a record funding increase is if you don't care about AIDS, you only care about fighting a worldwide battle against intellectual property rights.

It seems this group doesn't want to find a way to both provide cheaper medicines and preserve international agreements -- they just want to break the international agreements.

Charge: The U.S. is trying to repeal a law that allows South Africa to pursue its legal rights under international agreements.

Response: Simon Barber, a reporter for Business Day in South Africa, wrote last week: The problem with section 15c is that it grants the health minister sweeping authority to ignore South Africa's TRIPS obligations."

Isn't it reasonable to say that if someone supports such a law, that they are trying to weaken intellectual property rights.

Charge: The Vice President threatened trade sanctions against South Africa.

Response: The South African Ambassador to the U.S. said July 2 : "I want to state categorically that Vice President Gore has not put pressure, has not given notice to put sanctions on South Africa on this matter."

If they presume to speak for South Africa in the United States; they might first check their facts with someone who really does speak for South Africa in the United States.

Charge: The Vice President is serving the interests of the drug companies.

Response: The Weekly Standard -- no friend of Mr. Gore -- has called these charges "groundless and grotesque." Numerous other newspapers and commentators have pointed out that the Vice President fought the drug companies efforts to impose trade sanctions against South Africa.

Simon Barber wrote in South Africa ,s Business Day: &The accusation that Gore is in the pocket of the drug industry, which was starting to gain currency, now holds less water than it ever did. The industry wants a big fat stake driven through section 15c and the Vice President has not delivered. But he may have helped foster something more important: (... a sane atmosphere for reasoning through why the protection of intellectual property is not necessarily incompatible with better, more affordable health care for South Africa ,s poor. 8

Charge: The State Department report describes Gore's actions in bullying Mbeki.

Response: The State Department report states explicitly that the Vice President and Mr. Mbeki [and I quote]: "agreed on a basis for a mutually satisfactory, Government-to-Government negotiated solution to the impasse."

That State Department report was written -- by the way -- because a Republican Congressman did what the drug companies told him to. He sponsored legislation that cut off all U.S. aid to the Central Government of South Africa, until the State Department submitted a report saying what we were doing to force a change in the South African Medicines Act. The same Congressman has threatened to write a tougher provision into the law this year.

I might like to ask members of this committee if they were aware of Congressman Frelinghuysen ,s move on behalf of the pharmaceutical companies to cut off aid to South Africa. Further, if they were aware of it) did they support it. If they had been aware of it, would they have fought it?

Tough questions for Love:

Mr. Love, You don't come to this dispute based on a longstanding commitment to fighting AIDS. Your experience seems to be more along the

lines of fighting intellectual property rights. What would you say to the suggestion that you are trying to exploit the emotional issue of AIDS to gain a foothold for weakening intellectual property rights worldwide?

Mr. Love: Simon Barber of Business Day of South Africa has written that Section 15c "excuses the health minister from deference to existing South Africa patent law." He then says 15c "grants the health minister sweeping authority to ignore South Africa's TRIPS obligations." If you support such a law, isn't reasonable to assume you are opposed to intellectual property rights?

RECORD TYPE: PRESIDENTIAL (NOTES MAIL)

CREATOR: Margaret_M._Suntum@lngate2.eop.gov@INET@LNGTWY (Margaret_M._Suntum@lngate2.eop.gov@INET@LNGTWY [UNKNOWN])

CREATION DATE/TIME:21-JUL-1999 17:17:04.00

SUBJECT: press conference of the President

TO: Alberto O. Feraren@eop (Alberto O. Feraren@eop [OA])

READ:UNKNOWN

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

RECORD TYPE: PRESIDENTIAL (NOTES MAIL)

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

CREATION DATE/TIME:22-JUL-1999 17:47:44.00

SUBJECT: AIDS Hearing

TO: Daniel B. Shapiro (CN=Daniel B. Shapiro/OU=NSC/O=EOP@EOP [NSC])
READ:UNKNOWN

TEXT:

----- Forwarded by Paul Thornell/OVP on 07/22/99 05:47 PM

Paul Thornell
07/22/99 05:29:04 PM
Record Type: Record

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

Today's House hearing on the AIDS epidemic went as well as anyone could have hoped, as far as the VP is concerned. Neither the witnesses nor the Republicans made any mention of the Vice President and his role in the South Africa AIDS matter. We had several Democrats in attendance who were ready to support the VP, but there was no point to raise it. Jamie Love's (Consumer Project on Technology) written testimony tries to score some points against the Vice President, but he did not raise those in his spoken remarks. Eric Sawyer from ACT-UP did not mention the VP. They seemed to make a determination to leave us out of it.

Rep. John Mica was the only Republican, except for a brief drop-by from Rep. Ben Gilman, to attend. He actually had somewhat supportive things to say about the Administration's proposed budget increase announced Monday. The following Democrats attended: Rep. Patsy Mink, Rep. Tom Lantos, Rep. Jan Schakowsky, Del. Eleanor Norton, Rep. Elijah Cummings, and Rep. Dennis Kucinich. Lantos, Cummings, Norton, Schakowsky, and Mink stuck it out until the final panel (ACT-UP, Love, etc.) were through. I think they were actually a little disappointed we asked them to hold their thunder.

Tom R./Sandy may have something to add. Thanks for your help, if nothing else, it was a good fire drill. -PT

Message Sent

To:

Ron Klain/OVP@OVP
Laura M. Quinn/OVP@OVP
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Sarah A. Bianchi/OVP@OVP

Melissa B. Ratcliff/OVP@OVP
Kay Casstevens/OVP@OVP
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William T. Glunz/OVP@OVP
Philip G Dufour/OVP@OVP
Monica M. Dixon/OVP@OVP

RECORD TYPE: PRESIDENTIAL (NOTES MAIL)

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

CREATION DATE/TIME:22-JUL-1999 17:29:15.00

SUBJECT: AIDS Hearing

TO: Monica M. Dixon (CN=Monica M. Dixon/O=OVP@OVP [UNKNOWN])
READ:UNKNOWN

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

TO: Sarah A. Bianchi (CN=Sarah A. Bianchi/O=OVP@OVP [UNKNOWN])
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TO: Thomas M. Rosshirt (CN=Thomas M. Rosshirt/O=OVP@OVP [UNKNOWN])
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TO: Sandra Thurman (CN=Sandra Thurman/OU=OPD/O=EOP@EOP [OPD])
READ:UNKNOWN

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

TO: Philip G Dufour (CN=Philip G Dufour/O=OVP@OVP [UNKNOWN])
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TO: David R Thomas (CN=David R Thomas/O=OVP@OVP [UNKNOWN])
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TO: Melissa B. Ratcliff (CN=Melissa B. Ratcliff/O=OVP@OVP [UNKNOWN])
READ:UNKNOWN

TO: David W. Beier (CN=David W. Beier/O=OVP@OVP [UNKNOWN])
READ:UNKNOWN

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

TO: Charles W. Burson (CN=Charles W. Burson/O=OVP@OVP [UNKNOWN])
READ:UNKNOWN

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

TEXT:

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RECORD TYPE: PRESIDENTIAL (NOTES MAIL)

CREATOR: Jonathan H. Schnur (CN=Jonathan H. Schnur/OU=OPD/O=EOP [OPD])

CREATION DATE/TIME: 22-JUL-1999 22:53:17.00

SUBJECT: press conference of the President

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

READ: UNKNOWN

TEXT:

----- Forwarded by Jonathan H. Schnur/OPD/EOP on 07/22/99
10:52 PM -----

Margaret M. Suntum

07/21/99 05:07:22 PM

Record Type: Record

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

cc:

Subject: press conference of the President

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 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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