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**POTUS Press Conference -
Q&A 3/7/97**

Pohus press conf Q+A
3/7/97

**GUIDANCE FOR PRESS CONFERENCE ON
MARCH 7, 1997
FOR
THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES**

1. One-way presentⁿ -

2. Q

GUIDANCE FOR PRESS CONFERENCE - FRIDAY, MARCH 7, 1997

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CAMPAIGN FINANCE REFORM

Q: Isn't hypocritical to keep calling for campaign finance reform when you continue to attend Democratic fundraisers?

A: We have challenged the Republican party to join with the Democratic party to voluntarily restrict soft money contributions. Already the Democratic National Committee has agreed to my request to unilaterally stop taking money from non-citizens and to limit large soft money contributions. However, I believe it is unfair for the Democratic party to go any further to unilaterally disarm in the face of the Republican party's absolute refusal to voluntarily restrict their fundraising in any way.

Q: Given that you have made campaign finance reform a top priority for your second term, why didn't you raise passage of reform legislation during the bipartisan leadership several weeks ago?

A: The fact is that I did raise campaign finance reform as one of my priorities during that meeting. We agreed during the meeting that the bipartisan priorities would include those issues, such as the balanced budget, juvenile justice reform and others, that should garner widespread bipartisan support and could move quickly.

Since the bipartisan meeting I have met with Senator Daschle and Congressman Gephardt to discuss this issue and how to generate support for its passage. Like me, the Democratic leadership would like to see quick passage of reform legislation but it has become clear to me that there is still a lot of debate on the Hill about the right way to reform the campaign finance system.

Q: What actions have you taken to insure that campaign finance reform is enacted by your July 4th deadline?

A: We are making every effort to insure that bipartisan reform passes by July 4. I have had meetings at the White House with the lead sponsors of bipartisan reform -- Senators McCain and Feingold and Representatives Shays and Meehan and I have also met with the House sponsors of the legislation. As I have done with other issues that I have designated as a priority, such as the crime bill and NAFTA, I have appointed several senior White House officials to lead our effort to pass McCain-Feingold/Shays-Meehan. They have met with many groups, Members of Congress and their staffs and campaign finance reform experts to insure that the legislation is enacted by July 4. In addition, we expect to make several announcements in the near future that should help generate grassroots support across the country for passage of real campaign finance reform.

OVERNIGHT GUESTS

Q: Mr. President, are you willing to release the dates that your guests spent in the White House?

A: That is being done on a case by case basis. As you know, we have made available the list of 938 people who were our personal guests in the White House. Most of them are old friends and people I have met along the way, people I have worked with and people who have been supporters and friends of our family. We made the list available because we are proud that we have brought so many Americans from different walks of life into the White House. At the same time, we are conscious that people who came as our personal friends should be entitled to some privacy.

Q: Mr. President, are you going to continue to invite big donors to stay overnight in the White House?

A: I will continue to invite my friends and family to be my guests. I also believe it entirely appropriate and natural to invite those who have supported me into my home to talk with them and express my appreciation for their help. I never invited people I considered strangers, and I will not in the future.

Q: Mr. President, you say that you never invited strangers to stay overnight, but the press has reported that at least one person who stayed overnight has said he did not know you well. What about that individual?

A: I believe I just answered that question. I have never invited people I considered strangers to stay with me in my home, and I will not in the future.

APPOINTMENT OF AN INDEPENDENT COUNSEL TO INVESTIGATE CAMPAIGN FINANCE

Q: Democratic Senators Moynihan and Feingold and Chairman Waxman are calling for an Independent Counsel. Do you now think that the Attorney General should appoint an Independent Counsel?

A: That is a decision for the Attorney General to make. This is a decision that should be based entirely on the law and it should not be politicized.

CAMPAIGN FINANCE

Q: Mr. President, these documents raise the possibility that Harold Ickes acted unethically if not illegally. Do you think he should continue to work on the G-7 Summit?

A: Harold has served this Administration with great distinction. I have no doubt he will help organize a very successful summit.

Q: Mr President, in a 1996 memo from Evelyn Lieberman, she recommended that your briefings be shortened in order for you to engage in political events. Did this White House put the campaign before the government's business?

A: Let me say two things. First, I am proud of all that we accomplished in 1996. All this was a product of tremendous effort and commitment. Second, I was a candidate and ran a successful campaign. We did a good job of balancing the two in a way that served this country. I will say, however, that this is the first time I ever heard someone complaining because a White House meeting may have been cut short.

Q: Mr. President, can you pledge today that you will give the American public unfettered access to all of the materials related to the campaign finance investigations and that you will direct the DNC and Clinton/Gore '96 to do the same?

A: As you know, I have instructed the White House Counsel not to withhold any information regarding campaign fundraising from the Congress on the grounds of Executive Privilege. I know the DNC is working with the Congress to meet the same goal.

COFFEES

Q: Mr. President, the documents released last week by Harold Ickes' lawyers refer to the coffees as fundraising events and even show projected contributions for various coffees. Don't they show that these coffees were fundraisers and don't they contradict your prior statements?

A: These coffees were started to thank my supporters and to motivate them to help me in the 1996 campaign -- I needed their support, both politically and financially. As you know, it was going to be a tough campaign. I certainly hoped when I talked with my supporters and others about where I stood on the issues and why this past election was so important to the direction of this country, they would want to help re-elect me. And yes, help me win by contributing the funds I needed to run a successful campaign and by creating a network of people who could lay the political groundwork in each state.

I will repeat: we never solicited contributions at these events and fundraisers were advised not to condition attendance at the coffees on contributions.

LEGAL DEFENSE FUND

Q: The Legal Defense Fund has reported that it has almost no money. Why do you think it is in such a poor financial condition?

A: A distinguished group of Americans serves as trustees of the Fund and they have done an excellent job managing the Trust. To ensure the integrity of the Trust, they established strict guidelines on how contributions may be received and what types of contributions can be received. The Fund, however, is unable to solicit donations. I am grateful to all of those who have contributed.

Q: Does it concern you that the Fund had to return such large contributions?

A: Not at all. That just reinforces the fact that the Trustees are managing the Trust according to the guidelines they established.

WHITEWATER

Q: Mr. President, Kenneth Starr has decided to stay on until he completes his investigation. Do you think that he is discredited and that any conclusion will be tainted?

A: I have no comment. We will continue to cooperate fully with his inquiry.

BALANCED BUDGET AMENDMENT

Q: Why are you forming a capital budget commission? Aren't you just buying votes on the balanced budget amendment?

A: Our country must continue to make critical investments in our schools, our transportation system, our environment, and a host of other areas. The purpose of the Capital Budget Commission is to consider how best to reflect and encourage such public investment in the federal budget, while maintaining the fiscal discipline that encourages private investment.

About three-quarters of states have some sort of capital budget, and many economists believe that the issue warrants further study at the federal level. The Commission will do just that.

Q: Isn't the democratic alternative of excluding social security in a balanced budget amendment inconsistent with the fact that you include social security in showing your balanced budget calculation?

A: This is an historic moment to balance the budget, and we don't need to change the Constitution to do so. Such an amendment is unnecessary, and I'm particularly worried that it could have damaging effects during economic downturns.

The unified budget deficit was \$290 billion in FY 1992, and has fallen 63 percent (to \$107 billion) in FY 1996. Getting to zero by 2002 would be an historic accomplishment -- the first time the budget would be balanced since 1969. Most experts would agree that it is right to measure getting to balance using the unified budget concept. Let's get that done now.

But I can certainly understand why those who care about Social Security would be concerned that if you had a Constitutional amendment that mandated exact balance each and every year regardless of circumstances, situations could arise in which judges could impound Social Security checks or reduce benefits to comply with this constitutional mandate. I can understand why people would want to provide protections against that.

MEDICARE

Q: YOUR MEDICARE PLAN SCORES \$82 BILLION INSTEAD OF \$100 BILLION OVER THE LAST FIVE YEARS. WILL YOU SUBMIT ADDITIONAL PROPOSALS TO ACHIEVE \$100 BILLION SCORING OFF OF THE CBO BASELINE?

A: We believe that the track record of our actuaries on estimates over the last five years validates our position that our Medicare plan will achieve \$100 billion in savings. Our estimates for the balanced budget are based on conservative, time-proven projections that have been more accurate than CBO for 4 straight years.

Q: HAVING SAID THAT, WILL YOU SUBMIT ADDITIONAL PROPOSALS TO ACHIEVE \$100 BILLION SO YOU CAN BACKUP YOUR CLAIM THAT YOU WILL MEET THE REPUBLICANS HALFWAY?

A: Again, we believe our numbers do that now. Our technical analysts will continue to work with CBO to see if further clarifications of our current policy will close the gap on scorable savings. It is premature to speculate about what, if any, revisions will be necessary until that process is complete.

Q: YOU HAVE INCLUDED A HOME HEALTH CARE TRANSFER GIMMICK IN THE BUDGET. HOW CAN YOU POSSIBLY DEFEND IT?

A: Let's be clear: our savings of \$138 billion in Medicare over 6 years (\$100 billion over 5 years) does *not* include the home health care transfer from Part A to Part B of the program. The \$138 billion is the net reduction of Medicare spending relative to the budget baseline -- and thus is the amount by which our Medicare changes contribute to deficit reduction. The transfer does not contribute to the \$252 net deficit reduction in our package.

The policy you mentioned was in our budget last year, and it was in the House Republican budget in 1995 that every Republican in the House voted for.

Shifting long-term home health visits (other than the first 100 visits following a hospitalization) away from Part A of the Medicare program makes sense because home health care has increasingly become a chronic care benefit not linked to hospitalization. It was also the established policy prior to the 1980s. And it protects the Medicare Trust Fund until 2007, while not imposing harmful cuts on hospitals or other priorities, or excessive burdens on beneficiaries.

[Background: Originally designed as a post-acute care benefit for beneficiaries who had been hospitalized, home health care has increasingly become a chronic care benefit, not linked to hospitalization. Our proposal restores the original split of home health care benefits so that the first 100 home health visits following a 3-day hospitalization would be reimbursed by Part A and all other visits -- including those not following hospitalization -- would be reimbursed by Part B.]

Q: FOLLOW: IF THE HOME HEALTH TRANSFER IS NOT A GIMMICK, THEN WHY DON'T YOU INCLUDE IT AS PART OF THE PART B PREMIUM?

A: We have always been concerned about out-of-pocket costs for Medicare beneficiaries. Older Americans spend, on average, 20 percent of their income on health care and three-fourths have incomes lower than \$25,000. We have to be careful that as we reform the Medicare program, we do not place undue burden on lower-income seniors.

Q. WHY ARE YOU MANAGED CARE CUTS SO DEEP? AREN'T THESE CUTS GOING TO DISCOURAGE BENEFICIARIES FROM GOING INTO MANAGED CARE AND FORCE PLANS TO CUT BACK ON BENEFITS?

A. There is no reason to believe that these modest cuts will cause managed care plans to have to cut back in benefits, nor will they hurt plans with large numbers of managed care enrollees. The Medicare Trust Fund is actually losing money on the increasing numbers of beneficiaries enrolling in managed care.

Every credible study has confirmed that we are significantly overpaying Medicare managed care (Congressional Budget Office analysis, the General Accounting Office, the Prospective Payment Review Commission study, and the Mathematica Research Study done for the Health Care Financing Administration). In fact, these experts claim that we overcompensate managed care far beyond what our proposal suggests.

Finally, our proposal does not even implement this reform until 2000, giving managed care plans more than enough time to prepare for this change.

Q. YOUR MEDICARE PROPOSAL CONTAINS MOSTLY CUTS ON PROVIDERS AND MANAGED CARE. DON'T YOU THINK WE NEED REAL STRUCTURAL MEDICARE REFORM?

A. Absolutely. My budget takes important steps to modernize Medicare and bring it into the 21st century through a number of structural reforms including

- **Establishing new private plans** -- including Preferred Provider Organizations and Provider Sponsored Organizations -- available to seniors and people with disabilities.
- **Establishing market-oriented purchasing for Medicare** including the new prospective payment systems for home health care, nursing home care, and outpatient hospital services, as well as competitive bidding authority and the use of centers of excellence to improve quality and cut back on costs.
- **Adding new Medigap protections** to make it possible for beneficiaries to switch back from a managed care plan to traditional Medicare without being underwritten by insurers for private supplemental insurance coverage. This should encourage more beneficiaries to opt for managed care because it addresses the fear that such a choice would lock them in forever.

MEDICARE COMMISSION

Q. DO YOU SUPPORT THE MEDICARE COMMISSION PROPOSED BY SENATORS ROTH AND MOYNIHAN?

- A. First, I want to praise Chairman Roth and Ranking Member Moynihan for working together -- on a bipartisan basis -- to propose the creation of a commission to address the long-term financing issues that face Medicare. Their efforts reflect a bipartisan spirit which we believe is critical to ensure the success of any process designed to address this important issue.

No one is more committed than I am to seeking a bipartisan process to find long term solutions to Medicare. But my more immediate focus is reaching a bipartisan agreement on a balanced budget that extends the life of the Medicare Trust Fund in the near term. We have an historic opportunity to balance the budget. We should not let it pass.

As I have repeatedly said, we will need a bipartisan process to address the long-term financing issues facing Medicare, and I look forward to working with both parties to develop the best possible process.

Q. DOESN'T YOUR BUDGET CREATE \$60 BILLION IN NEW ENTITLEMENTS?

- A. No. My budget actually *saves* \$121 billion in entitlement spending over the next 5 years.

We are proposing some new additions to our health care programs, but they are aimed at reducing the number of uninsured Americans and are *not* open-ended entitlements. For example:

-- Our program to provide health insurance for workers between jobs is capped. The program is structured as a grants program to States. While there are provisions to help States that have unanticipated increases in unemployment, there is an overall Federal cap on spending that cannot be breached. Moreover, the program is sunsetted after 4 years.

-- There are no new entitlements in children's health as well. The children's health initiative provides States with grants that, by law, will not exceed \$750 million in each year.

We are also proposing some changes to the welfare reform legislation that was enacted last year, but our purpose is to fix unnecessary and damaging provisions in that legislation -- involving legal immigrants and Food Stamp recipients. We do not view these changes as new spending or new entitlements.

It is ironic that we are sometimes criticized for phasing out new proposals -- such as school construction -- and simultaneously for creating permanent new mandatory spending

programs. Our phase-outs are designed to allow an evaluation of how well the new programs are working -- and we have been careful to avoid creating permanent new entitlements without knowing the effects.

Q. WHY ARE YOU CUTTING THE MEDICAID AND MEDICARE PROGRAMS IN ORDER TO MAKE INVESTMENTS IN CHILDREN'S HEALTH?

A. We believe that we can constrain Medicare and Medicaid growth while still preserving the guarantee of high quality care for the millions of Americans who depend on these programs. Cost-effective approaches to expanding coverage, in the context of a balanced budget, should be a high-priority investment for this nation.

Q. WHY IS THE ADMINISTRATION ACTING SO HAPHAZARDLY ON QUALITY ISSUES. FIRST IT WAS DRIVE-THROUGH-DELIVERIES, THEN MASTECTOMIES, NOW GAG RULES. DO YOU HAVE A STRATEGY IN THIS AREA?

A. Yes, we do have a strategy. We believe that we have taken some important steps in areas where there have been troubling reports about the lack of high-quality medicine. When there are egregious examples of bureaucratic interference with the practice of high-quality medicine, we will not hesitate to act. However, I have announced plans to create an Advisory Commission on Consumer Protection and Quality in the Health Care Industry. That panel, which will be named shortly, will help us to develop a broader framework on how we should address concerns about quality in a more comprehensive manner.

Q. WHAT IS THE STATUS OF YOUR QUALITY COMMISSION?

A. I expect to make an announcement about the members and charge of this commission sometime in March.

KENNEDY-DINGELL BILL

Q. DO YOU SUPPORT THE KENNEDY-DINGELL BILL ON CONSUMER RIGHTS?

A. We just received the bill and have not yet had time to review the details. However, we believe that Congressman Dingell and Senator Kennedy are making an important contribution to the discussion about quality. We look forward to working with them as well as other Democrats and Republicans on this important issue.

SUNSETTING OF PROGRAMS

Q: Why do you eliminate so many of your new programs before 2002?

- A.**
- Many of our proposals -- such as school construction, welfare to work, skill grants, and health insurance for the unemployed -- are new programs. They are untried. We want to see how they work before the government funds these initiatives permanently.
 - For example, our school construction initiative -- providing \$5 billion over 4 years -- is explicitly designed to jump-start \$20 billion in local projects. The Federal government has traditionally not been involved in school construction and renovation; our proposal is therefore not supposed to be a permanent Federal program.

TAX REFORM

Q. Recently, six Republicans, including Newt Gingrich and Trent Lott wrote to you requesting that you submit a comprehensive tax reform proposal to Congress by May 1. Do you plan to do that?

- A.**
- My main priority right now is achieving a bipartisan agreement to balance the budget by 2002. The budget I just proposed includes meaningful tax relief targeted at middle-income families and is properly focused on eliminating the deficit. That must be our top priority.
 - We're very interested in tax relief or tax reform, if you define tax reform as easing Americans' annual interaction with the tax system and making the tax code simpler and easier to understand in the day-to-day lives of Americans. We think we've done a lot with respect to that subject already. We've simplified the ways in which private-sector employers can bring on line retirement income programs, like 401K programs. We simplified a lot of the procedures that tax filers go through when they make their annual presentation to the IRS. Those are all important things to do. They help simplify the environment for tax collection in the country.
 - If Republicans can agree on ideas that meet our principles to make the tax code simpler, more progressive and don't increase the deficit, then we are happy to work with them.

GREENSPAN/STOCK MARKET

Q. Do you have any comments on Chairman Greenspan's comments and the reaction of the markets this week?

- A.**
- As you know, it has long been this Administration's policy not to comment on the day-to-day fluctuations in the market -- markets go up, and markets go down. I believe that markets follow fundamentals, and what we can do, in that context, is to pursue policies that keep the fundamentals of the American economy sound.
 - I have put forward a plan to build on our solid record of deficit reduction by balancing the budget in five years. Enacting a balanced budget by 2002 is our first priority to help continue the solid and sustainable economic growth America enjoys today.

COMP TIME

Q: The Senate Labor Committee is set to mark-up the Republicans' COMP Time and Team Act bills this week. What is your position on these two pieces of legislation?

A: I think the Vice President laid my position out very clearly last week in Los Angeles. First, on the issue of flex-time, I will not sign any legislation that effectively eliminates the 40 hour work week and that does not provide guarantees of employee choice. I think our most vulnerable workers have to be protected and, within reason, employees need to have greater control over when they use their comp time.

I would add here that I think my proposal to extend the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) for an additional 24 hours for purposes of routine medical care for children and elderly parents or school related activities should be linked to comp time legislation.

Q: Are you saying that you will veto any flex-time bill that does not include your FMLA proposal?

A: No. I am saying that the right thing to do would be for the Congress to pass a good flex-time bill that gives workers the expanded right to use leave on a recurring basis for family and medical needs. Working families value both time and money and as more and more workers juggle the demands of family and work, we need to create more flexible working conditions. Linking these two proposals would accomplish this.

Q: Do you support Senator Dodd's proposal to lower the threshold for private sector employers covered by FMLA from 50 to 25 employees?

A: I do think the proposal has merit and should be seriously considered. I think it is crucial to point out what we already know. The bipartisan Commission on Leave which studied the FMLA found that the new law significantly helped many working Americans during temporary family and medical emergencies while placing only minimal burdens on the vast majority of businesses. So the dire predictions made by the opponents of the new law when it was enacted indeed have not come true in terms of the law's anticipated adverse impact on business productivity, profitability or growth.

Q: What about the Team Act? Will you veto that as well?

A: I vetoed the legislation last year and I will veto the bill making its way through Congress now. I will not sign any measure that effectively undermines collective bargaining. I need to point out that, under current law, the NLRB can provide guidance in cases where there is uncertainty about the scope of permissible cooperation.

AIDS ISSUES

Q: Secretary Shalala recently sent Congress a report that seemed to endorse needle exchange programs to reduce the spread of AIDS. Do you support such programs or do you believe they will encourage drug use?

A: We have made a great deal of progress in our efforts to fight AIDS. I was pleased by last week's report showing a 13 percent decline in the number of people dying of AIDS in this country. But there is still too many people becoming infected in this country. Secretary Shalala's report does not advocate for needle exchange programs. We think it is for local communities to decide whether to use needle exchange programs. What the report does describe the research that has been done in this area. That research is crucial in helping communities to determine whether these programs can reduce the transmission of the AIDS virus without encouraging the use of illegal drugs.

Q: But don't needle exchange programs send the wrong message to young people on the issue of drugs?

A: There is only one message that we should send to young people about drugs: they are illegal, they are dangerous, and they can kill you. We have to be very careful not to send mixed messages. At the same time, we have to make sure that we examine these issues in a scientific manner. That is why we continue to support research in this area.

Q: Now that AIDS cases are going down, do we need to spend so much on AIDS programs?

A: There are still a great many Americans, and many others around the world, who are living with this disease. And an estimated 100 Americans become infected with the AIDS virus every day. We cannot, and we must not, cut back on our efforts here until we have a cure for those who are living with AIDS and a vaccine to protect everyone else.

Q: To what do you attribute this decline in AIDS deaths?

A: There are several things at work here. Our investment in research has provided us with powerful new treatments that are extending the length of life for people living with AIDS. Our investment in prevention has helped to reduce the number of people who are becoming infected. And our investment in treatment is helping to provide access to these treatments for those who could otherwise not afford it. We have increased funding for AIDS research, prevention, and treatment by more than 50 percent. We have accelerated drug approval by the FDA, we have created a powerful Office of AIDS Research at NIH, and we have set up an AIDS policy office right here in the White House. These things have contributed to the good news last week. Now it is our job to make sure these trends continue and that we work for a cure and a vaccine.

DON'T ASK, DON'T TELL

The Service-member Legal Defense Network issued a report last week which demonstrates that the "don't ask, don't tell" policy has resulted in more discharges of gays and lesbians than under the old policy. Additionally, they allege that gays are subjected to harassment and "witch hunts". What is your reaction and would you consider making changes to the policy?

As I have said consistently, our policy on gays in the military -- agreed to by Congress and the armed forces after lengthy discussion and debate -- seeks to give recognition to the fact that many gays and lesbians have served and continue to serve bravely and with distinction in the military.

The policy makes room for continued service for those willing to abide by it.

I have not seen this report, but I would find it troubling if it is determined by Secretary Cohen that the policy was not being carried out as was intended by me, the Congress and the Joint Chiefs.

I'm pleased that Secretary Cohen has said that he will look at the report carefully, and if there have been abuses, he will take appropriate action to correct them.

I don't think we need another new policy. What we may need is more careful, effective enforcement of the policy we already have.

ABORTION

Q: Ron Fitzsimmons, the executive director of the National Coalition of Abortion Providers, said this week that he lied about partial birth abortions -- that they're performed more frequently than pro-choice groups have acknowledged and that they're often performed on healthy women with healthy fetuses. In light of his statements, are you going to change your position?

A: No. My position remains what it has always been -- that so-called partial-birth abortions should be banned except when they are necessary to save the life of a woman or prevent serious harm to her health.

Nothing Mr. Fitzsimmons has said conflicts with that position. I've never claimed that partial-birth abortions are used only to prevent death or serious harm. What I've said is that when the procedure is necessary for these reasons -- in those few cases when there are tragic circumstances involving serious harm to the woman -- a doctor must be allowed to perform it. But when the procedure isn't necessary for these reasons, a doctor should not be allowed to perform it.

So I will say again what I've said before: that I will sign a bill banning partial-birth abortions, but only if it has an exception that will protect those women -- even if few in number -- who need this procedure to save their lives or prevent serious harm to their health.

Q: Didn't you base your veto of the partial-birth abortion bill on false information -- i.e., that this procedure is performed only on a few hundred women in desperate circumstances?

A: No. I based my veto on the fact that there are a small group of women in desperate circumstances who need this procedure in order to save their lives or prevent serious injury to their health. I've never said that these are the only circumstances in which the procedure is used. Indeed, I've acknowledged that there are cases where the procedure is not necessary for life or serious health reasons -- and I've made very clear that I would sign legislation banning the procedure in those cases.

Q: If Congress were to add a health exception to the partial birth bill you vetoed last year, that bill would prohibit all partial birth abortions -- including pre-viability partial birth abortions -- that aren't done for life or serious health reasons. Are you really saying that you would sign a bill of that kind -- a bill that prohibited a particular procedure (except if done for life or serious health reasons) in the pre-viability period?

A: I have made very clear my condition for signing the partial birth bill. I told Congress that I would sign the bill if it protected women who needed the procedure to save their lives or avert serious harm to their health. I implored Congress to send me such a bill. I continue to take that position. If Congress adds a provision to the bill that protects women who need the procedure for life or serious health reasons, I will sign that bill.

MAMMOGRAMS FOR WOMEN AGES 40-49

Q: Why should women wait two months for the National Cancer Advisory Board to come to a conclusion about the value of mammography for women ages 40-49?

A: Since 1993, the National Cancer Institute has said that women in their forties should decide, in consultation with their health care providers, when to begin mammography screening. That advice has not changed.

Now new information from Swedish studies may show a consistent benefit of mammography screening to women in their forties that had not been seen before. The National Cancer Advisory Board is reviewing this new data carefully, and has said it will make recommendations as quickly as it can to the National Cancer Institute so that the NCI, women and doctors have the best possible information available to them.

My Administration has done everything it can to be sure that women in America receive the best information and services to help them in the fight against breast cancer. In the last 4 years, we have *nearly doubled funding* for breast cancer research, prevention and treatment at HHS. And we have worked to ensure that mammograms are reliable by implementing quality standards that require mammography facilities to obtain an FDA "seal of approval."

BIPARTISAN WORKING GROUPS

Q: You and the bipartisan Congressional leadership announced with great flourish three weeks ago that you were prepared to move ahead on five issue areas where you believed bipartisan agreement could be reached. What is the status of these issues? Who will participate? When is the deadline for action?

A: As you note, the bipartisan leadership and I identified five issue areas where we think we can find early bipartisan cooperation. They are: welfare to work; education; juvenile justice; taxes and the District of Columbia.

Meetings are occurring on the staff level to determine how to structure our bipartisan efforts, including: the composition of the task forces, possible agendas and timing. All of the working groups will have representation from the five parties involved: House and Senate Republicans, House and Senate Democrats and the Administration. Once the principals for each working group have been selected they will then meet to discuss the agenda items they wish to be considered and the proposed timetable for consideration. When the agenda is agreed to, those issues where there is no bipartisan agreement on how to proceed will be acknowledged and laid aside and considered as part of the regular legislative process.

WELFARE REFORM: WELFARE TO WORK

Q: How are you going to move people from welfare to work when there are no jobs?

A: I believe jobs are available and I expect the welfare rolls to continue to decline. Minimum wage jobs have always been open, but the package of welfare benefits previously available offered more to recipients than a minimum wage job. Now, with increases in the Earned Income Tax Credit, child care subsidies, and other provisions that make work pay, welfare recipients can afford to take those available minimum wage jobs. Once working, former welfare recipients will gain the employment experience necessary to move up the ladder of work.

But, we will need more jobs -- and jobs that pay more than the minimum wage if we are to ensure the success of the new welfare law. I believe that a combination of private sector commitments, such as those made by the CEOs with whom I recently met, economic development, tax credits, additional welfare-to-work funds, and a focus on jobs in the growing technology industry will create the new, higher paying jobs we need.

Q: During your State of the Union address, you announced that five prominent CEOs have joined the effort to help move welfare recipients to work. However, recent press stories indicate that these companies have done little to date to actually hire welfare recipients. Can you comment?

A: During my State of the Union address, I was very pleased to announce that five of this country's major corporations have pledged to work with me in the effort to move welfare recipients permanently into the workforce. These five companies had pledged to take a leadership role in the welfare-to-work effort during a meeting I held earlier this year with a larger number of CEOs. These are not necessarily companies that have programs up and running; in fact, most of them don't. They are companies that have made a serious commitment -- and that I'm confident will live up to that commitment -- to develop programs and initiatives to get people off the welfare rolls and into real jobs.

Q: What has the White House done to hire welfare recipients since the new welfare law was signed?

A: Just last week, the Director of the U.S. Office for Personnel Management submitted a report to the White House outlining several options the Federal Government might pursue to hire welfare recipients. He and his staff came up with some very good ideas and I am currently reviewing those ideas. I hope to have something to announce very soon.

OPM's memo looked at the question of hiring welfare recipients in the federal government generally. We will also work hard, based on the steps we take in the federal government as a whole, to open up opportunities for welfare recipients at the White House.

WELFARE REFORM: FOOD STAMPS

Q: The new welfare law cuts off food stamps after three months for unemployed non-disabled adults, and allows the Department of Agriculture to exempt areas with high unemployment. Why does the Administration want to give food stamp benefits to men and women who refuse to work?

A: Enacting the welfare law was an historic accomplishment that represents a significant step forward in social policy for this country. However, as I said when I signed this bill, several provisions of the law have nothing to do with the goal of welfare reform -- putting people to work. Instead, they cut back on our vital food safety net and are unfair to immigrants who have entered this country legally.

I strongly support work requirements. But the welfare law's harsh and unreasonable time limit of 3 months in 36 cuts off people who want to work but can't find jobs. In my budget, I proposed an alternative: a real and tough work requirement without arbitrary cut-offs.

Under my proposal, those who refused to work or refused to take advantage of a work opportunity would face tough new penalties. We would limit food stamps to 6 months out of 12. This policy would encourage work while giving those out of work the transitory help they need to get back on their feet. We proposed new funding and a wage supplementation option to expand the number of work slots available to this group by nearly 400,000 over five years. I am looking forward to working with Congress to enact this sensible proposal.

Background:

- As of March 1, states will begin to cut off food stamp benefits for people who have not met the new work requirement in the welfare law.
- Under the law, able-bodied childless adults between the ages of 18-50 are not permitted to get food stamps for more than 3 months in a 3-year period, unless they are working at least 20 hours a week.
- USDA can waive the work requirement in cities or counties with high unemployment. To date, USDA has granted waivers to 23 states that exempt specified counties or cities with high unemployment.
- Despite these exemptions, 600,000 individuals will lose their food stamp eligibility in FY98 due to this provision. Under the Administration's proposal, approximately 35,000 individuals would lose eligibility in FY98. Unlike the welfare law, the Administration's proposal targets tough sanctions at those individuals who are unwilling to work and to play by the rules.

WELFARE REFORM: BENEFITS TO LEGAL IMMIGRANTS

Q: Immigrants shouldn't be coming to the U.S. to get on welfare. Why is the Administration making restoration of these benefits a priority?

A: I believe that legal immigrants should have the same opportunity, and bear the same responsibility, as other members of our society. The welfare law denies most legal immigrants access to fundamental safety net programs unless they become citizens -- even though they are in the U.S. legally, are working and paying taxes and are responsible members of our communities. My Administration has always supported making individuals who encourage their relatives to emigrate to the United States responsible for the immigrant's well being. However, as a nation, we should not turn our backs on anyone who has lost their ability to earn a living due to injury, disease, or illness.

Consequently, my budget proposes to make legal immigrants who become disabled after entering the United States eligible for SSI and Medicaid.

My budget would also provide poor immigrant children the same Medicaid health care coverage low-income citizen children receive.

The United States admits refugees and asylees into this country on a humanitarian basis. My budget proposes to lengthen the five-year exemption for refugees from the ban from five to seven years in order to give this group adequate time to naturalize.

Finally, the law denies food stamps to most legal immigrants. My budget would delay the cutoffs from April 1, 1997 to August, 1997 in order to give immigrants more time to naturalize.

WELFARE REFORM FIX LEGISLATIVE PROPOSALS

Q: You've said you're ready to work with Congress to fix the immigrant and food stamp parts of the welfare law, but some in the Republican leadership say the bill is fine as it is. Doesn't this mean your proposals will be dead on arrival?

A: I think it is very significant that the nation's governors are now on record as recognizing that the cuts in benefits to legal immigrants are too harsh and need to be addressed -- even though their formal resolution was softened at the last minute at the request of the Congressional leadership.

As the new welfare law is being implemented, the governors are gaining a new appreciation of some parts of the bill that I have had a problem with from the beginning -- those parts that are not related to putting people to work. This is particularly true of governors in states with large numbers of legal immigrants. They are now recognizing that many legal immigrants who are disabled, many in nursing homes, will lose their SSI and Medicaid over the summer. In addition to seeing that these provisions are unfair, they can see the potential costs to their own state budgets if they make the decision to ameliorate these cuts.

Also, I truly believe we are seeing some real changes in our relationship with the Congress. It appears that we have gotten past some of the unproductive ways of doing business we have had over the past two years, and that we are learning how to work with one another in a far more constructive fashion.

Q: Last summer when you said you would sign the welfare bill there were press reports that you wanted to restore about \$14 billion in cuts. Now we understand your budget includes \$18 billion in legislative restorations. Are you proposing to restore more in food stamps and benefits to immigrants that you were last year?

A: No, absolutely not. The budget includes \$18 billion in legislative proposals for Food Stamps and immigrants that correspond directly to the commitments I made at the time I signed the bill. Because of a number of technical reestimates, the budget estimate for these legislative proposals is now higher.

The commitment I made to a \$3 billion program to help the private sector, states, and cities move welfare recipients to work was always separate from that total, and was paid for separately elsewhere in my budget.

EDUCATION STANDARDS

Q: You proposed national tests in reading and math in your State of the Union address. Yet the tests are not required, and you proposed no new funding to help students pass these tests. Why do you think these tests will make a difference?

A: These tests reflect widely accepted national standards for 4th grade reading and 8th grade math. The standards are higher than those in many states, which means they will lead to higher expectations for our students. The tests exist already, but are only given to a small sample of students at any one time. My plan is to make those tests available for every state so they can be given to every 4th and 8th grade student.

My balanced budget plan provides significant increases for federal elementary and secondary school programs that will help prepare students to meet these tougher standards.

I am pleased at the response this testing proposal has already received. Two weeks ago I spoke in Maryland, and the President of the State Board of Education announced that Maryland would participate in these tests. Just yesterday, the Washington Post carried an endorsement of this plan from two former Republican assistant secretaries of education [Diane Ravitch and Checker Finn].

FAST TRACK

Q: Cong. Gephardt seems to be mounting an effort against fast track and sentiment against NAFTA is still strong. Is your request for fast track in trouble?

- A:**
- No. We know there will be a range of views on this subject, but I am confident we can build a consensus in favor of fast track legislation.
 - Every President since Ford has had fast track authority for key periods, and the reasons for it now are more compelling than ever. Trade now represents 30% of the U.S. economy, up from 13% in 1970. Over 11 million U.S. jobs now depend on exports, and these jobs pay 13-16% more than the average U.S. job. Today 95% of the world's consumer live outside the U.S., and the vast majority of those consumers live in the emerging and fastest growing markets of Latin America and Asia. We simply must continue to open these markets for U.S. exports if we are to succeed in the global economy.
 - We cannot afford inaction. If we are not seizing opportunities to break down trade barriers and open foreign markets, we can be sure other countries will act - to the benefit of their companies and their workers.
 - The United States has nothing to fear. We are the most competitive large economy in the world as judged by independent experts. But our ability to define the nature of our trade relationships will in significant measure determine our leadership role in the next century. Fast track authority is the most important factor determining these relationships.
 - I urge all members of Congress to work with us in fashioning an appropriate grant of authority that will help us continue to compete as we enter the next century.

FAST TRACK - LABOR & ENVIRONMENT

Q: Last week, the AFL-CIO passed a resolution stating they will vigorously oppose fast track unless labor and environment are included in future trade agreements -- not simply addressed in side agreements -- subject to the same dispute resolution procedures as trade issues. How will you address labor and the environment in your fast track request?

A: This Administration is deeply committed to addressing labor and environmental issues as we pursue our trade policy. I don't think we can retain public support for our activist trade policy unless we address the very real concerns about labor and the environment.

It is no secret that this is one of the most difficult issues we face in securing fast track authority. We will need to work with Congress and all interested parties to fashion a bipartisan consensus that remains true to our commitment.

I don't intend to negotiate these issues in public. That would not help advance the important goal of securing fast track authority.

NAFTA FAILURE

Q: With NAFTA under attack, why are you pressing for more free trade agreements in Latin America?

A: NAFTA has been a success in safeguarding America's prosperity: our exports to Mexico have surged by over 1/3 since NAFTA was signed -- despite Mexico's severe economic recession.

But whatever you think of NAFTA, one fact is clear: if we do not seize the initiative on market opening now -- if Congress does not grant me fast track negotiating authority -- other countries will move forward without us.

95 percent of the world's consumers live outside our borders. Our trade partners in Latin America and Asia will not sit idly by. If we are not prepared to move forward, they will expand trade without us, costing us jobs and our future prosperity.

Just one example: our exports to Chile already exceed our exports to the more populous markets of Russia, India, and Indonesia -- and they are up nearly 150 percent since 1990. But American companies and workers will lose their competitive advantage in Chile's market if -- as is currently planned -- Chile eliminates its tariffs on products from countries like Brazil and Argentina over the next decade but not from the United States.