

**NLWJC - Kagan**

**DPC - Box 036 - Folder 011**

**POTUS Press Conference -  
Q&A 10/10/97**

**Q&A for Presidential Initiative to Improve the Safety of Imported Fruits and Vegetables  
October 10, 1997**

**Q:** What did the Administration propose with regard to food safety?

**A:** I proposed legislative and executive actions that will further improve the safety of fresh fruits and vegetables, especially those imported into the U.S. The legislation will require the FDA to halt imports of fruits, vegetables, or other food from any foreign country whose food safety systems and standards are not on par with those of the U.S. I will back up this legislation by providing the necessary funds in my FY99 budget to enable FDA to expand dramatically its international food inspection force so that it can make good use of this new authority.

In addition, I directed the Secretaries of Health and Human Services and Agriculture to take additional steps to improve the safety of both imported and domestic fruits and vegetables. Specifically, I asked the Secretaries to issue within one year guidance on good agricultural practices and good manufacturing practices for fruits and vegetables. By providing the first-ever specific safety standards for fruits and vegetables, the guidance will improve the agricultural and manufacturing practices of all those, foreign and domestic, seeking to sell produce in the U.S. market.

**Q:** Why is your Administration proposing these actions?

**A:** There have been dramatic changes in the produce department of the grocery store. Thirty years ago, most produce sections only had around a dozen items year round, increasing to as many as 50 in the summer. Today, the chances are that there are 400 or more items in the produce section and they are there all year round. Last year, 38 percent of the fruit and 12 percent of the vegetables Americans ate were imported.

We have changed as well. Americans are eating more fresh fruits and vegetables than ever before, and our nation's health experts tell us we will live longer, better quality lives as a result. Our environment is also changing. We are finding "new" exotic bugs such as cyclospora and *E. coli O157:H7* on our food that once were not there.

We must ensure that these changes do not increase the risk to American consumers of foodborne illnesses. Although raw produce -- including that imported from foreign countries -- is now safe, experts have suggested ways to make further improvements, and my actions accord with their recommendations.

**Q:** Are you saying that imported produce is unsafe?

**A:** There is no data indicating that imported fruits and vegetables are more unsafe than domestic products. But some recent outbreaks of foodborne illness have been traced back to imports and it is important that foreign fruits and vegetables be held to the same safety standards as American products. The steps we are taking today are adding additional layers of protection. I am making sure that there are no gaps in our food safety system -- that high safety standards apply to imported as well as domestic food, and to fruits and vegetables as well as to meat, poultry, and seafood.

**Q:** Will foreign countries have to comply with Good Agricultural and Manufacturing Practices if they want to export fruits and vegetables to the U.S.?

**A:** We expect that exporting countries will develop similar practices that address potential food safety problems in their countries for one simple reason: they want to be able to sell food in our market, and they want that food to be safe.

We do not know whether a country that does not comply with the new guidance will be able to import fruits and vegetables into the United States. The answer to this question depends on the exact content of the guidance, as well as on intricate legal determinations regarding equivalency between different countries' food safety systems. What is clear is that the FDA will have to cut off imports from countries that do not comply with existing legal standards applicable to domestic produce.

**Q:** Doesn't this legislation impose trade barriers to food imports at a time when you are saying you want to lower them? Is this legislation consistent with free trade?

**A:** This legislation is consistent with free trade and all our treaty obligations. We have no obligation to open our borders to imports that pose a greater risk than domestic products to American consumers. As long as we are not imposing any greater requirements on foreign countries -- as long as we are only holding them to our standards -- we are acting consistently with our trade policy.

**Q:** Are these actions meant to provide political cover with respect to the food safety issue because it has become a part of the Fast Track trade debate?

**A:** No. This is a part of my broad food safety agenda -- my longstanding commitment to ensuring that Americans' food supply is the safest in the world. It does not relate to Fast Track.

**Q:** What makes you think this new legislation can be effective? Do you seriously think you are going to be able to put FDA inspectors in every country abroad?

**A:** My proposed legislation would give the FDA the same kind of responsibility that the USDA already has for meat and poultry. The USDA system has worked well to ensure that countries with inferior safety standards can't import their meat and poultry. The FDA should be able to run a similarly effective system that inspects food safety systems and standards abroad and prevents imports from countries that do not provide the protections that the U.S. does.

## **Questions and Answers on Bilingual Education**

### **October 10, 1997**

#### **Background**

The Administration has strongly supported the federal bilingual education program, which permits a variety of different approaches to helping students master English, including both bilingual and English immersion instruction. We proposed a 27% increase in bilingual education for FY 98, protected it in the balanced budget agreement, and secured it in the House and Senate-passed appropriations bills.

In June 1998, Californians may face a new ballot initiative to abolish bilingual instruction for public school children in the state, requiring that most instruction be conducted only in English. The idea has support from many conservatives and some in the Latino community, as well as other minority groups, who are frustrated with what they see as an ineffective approach to learning English. However, the ballot initiative is vehemently opposed by many other Latinos, who strongly support bilingual instruction and see the initiative as an attack cut from the same cloth as Propositions 187 and 209. The California GOP endorsed the initiative at the end of September. The measure has until October to gain sufficient signatures.

**Q.** What is your Administration's view of bilingual education?

**A.** My Administration strongly supports the federal bilingual education program, which funds programs in local school districts that are designed to help kids become proficient in English. The program permits a variety of different approaches to helping students master English, including both bilingual and English immersion instruction. To help ensure that resources are available to assist children to learn English well, we proposed a 27% increase in the program and successfully protected bilingual education in the budget and spending bill before the U.S. Congress.

**Q.** Will the national tests be made available in bilingual versions?

**A.** The voluntary national tests consists of a 4th grade test of reading in English and an 8th grade test of mathematics. There will be a bilingual (Spanish and English) version of the 8th grade math test -- because that test is destined to measure mathematics, not language skills. However, the purpose of the 4th grade test is to test student proficiency in reading *in English*, not general reading comprehension. Therefore, the national reading test will not be developed in other languages, although we will be making appropriate accommodations for students whose native language is not English.

By 4th grade, U.S. students need to have mastered basic English reading skills in order to begin to learn other subjects. I realize that there are students who have developed strong reading skills in their native language -- and that's great because those strong reading skills will transfer over to another language. However, the purpose of the voluntary national tests is to encourage all students to meet the same high standards of reading in

English -- so that is the skill that these tests will be designed to measure.

**Q.** Does the Administration plan to intervene in California or campaign on behalf of bilingual education?

The initiative measure has not yet qualified for the ballot so this question is premature. We will be getting more information on the initiative as events develop. However, the Administration supports the approach of the federal program, which permits a variety of different strategies for English language instruction.

**Questions and Answers on Welfare Caseloads**  
**October 10, 1997**

Caseload Numbers

**Q:** Why do you say that welfare reform has been a success?

**A:** As I announced on Thursday, welfare caseloads have fallen more than 3.6 million since I became President, a drop of 26 percent. They've dropped 1.7 million in the 10 months since I signed welfare reform into law (June 1997 are the latest numbers available.) This is the largest caseload decline in history.

The bipartisan welfare plan that I signed into law last year requires work and personal responsibility and has the toughest child support laws on record. In exchange, it provides child care and medical care -- and opportunity for a better future. I began reforming welfare even before signing this national legislation by granting waivers to 43 states to begin to reform their systems.

**Q:** Isn't the decline in caseloads due mainly to the good economy?

**A:** Welfare caseloads are the best measure we have right now of the success of welfare reform. According to a May report by the Council of Economic Advisors (CEA), over 40 percent of the reduction in the welfare rolls can be attributed to the strong economic growth during the Clinton Administration, nearly one-third can be attributed to waivers granted to states to test innovative strategies to move people from welfare to work, and the rest is attributed to other factors -- such as the Clinton Administration's decisions to increase the Earned Income Tax Credit, strengthen child support enforcement, and increase funding for child care.

**Q:** How can you use the decline in the welfare caseloads as a measure of success when we don't know what's happening to these former recipients?

**A:** Not enough time has passed for full-scale research studies to be completed, but we do know that almost all these people have left the rolls voluntarily, since very few time limits of any kind have gone into effect yet. The natural inference is that the people leaving welfare have found better opportunities and more self-sufficient lives. The preliminary studies we have support this conclusion. An analysis of the Massachusetts caseload found that about half those who left the rolls found jobs, nearly a third had other means of support or had left the state, 9 percent had children who had grown too old to qualify, and 6 percent were in the process of reapplying for welfare. A new Maryland study found that more than half were working and four-fifths were still off the rolls six months after they left. Also, a study by the San Francisco Federal Reserve found that since August, the labor force participation rate has increased among female heads of household, which suggests that the women coming off the welfare rolls are entering the labor market.

### Work Participation Rates

**Q:** Why are so many states not meeting the work rates? Does that mean welfare reform is a failure?

**A:** Almost all the states are meeting the work rates for one-parent families, which make up a full 93 percent of the caseload. The only work rates states are having trouble meeting are the much higher ones that apply to two-parent families, which account for only 7 percent of the caseload. [The law requires 25 percent of the total welfare caseload to work in 1997 and 75 percent of the two parent families to work.]

**Q:** How many states do you expect to fail the work rates?

**A:** We are not sure. States have until mid-November to report data. Informally, most states have told us they will meet the overall 25 percent work rate, but many have reported concerns about meeting the 75 percent two-parent rate. As you may know, the Associated Press surveyed states and found that 19 states expect to fail the two-parent work rates and seven states do not know.

**Q:** Will the Administration penalize states that fail the work rates?

**A:** We expect to impose penalties on states that do not meet work rates. We believe it is critical that states place a priority on putting welfare families to work. The law does give states a credit toward the work rates for success in reducing the caseload; because of that credit, some states that don't expect to meet the work rates may in fact do so. The law also allows HHS to accept a corrective action plan submitted by the state in lieu of imposing a penalty. We will evaluate these corrective action plans on a case by case basis.

### Fair Labor Standards Act and Worker Protections

**Q:** Why are you undermining welfare reform by insisting that participants in workfare programs get the protections of the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) and other employment laws?

**A:** I believe that worker protection laws, such as the Fair Labor Standards Act, should apply to workfare participants in the same way they apply to other workers. If a workfare participant counts as an "employee" under these laws, then she should get protection. No one doing real work should be paid a subminimum wage.

And I believe that paying working welfare recipients the minimum wage and giving them other worker protections will promote, not undermine, the goals of welfare reform, because it will give them the ability to support their families and break the cycle of dependency.

We will work with states to ensure that they can comply with this policy, without undue financial burden, while still meeting the welfare law's work requirements. Of course, if states place welfare recipients in private jobs, then the minimum wage already applies. And we are working to minimize costs associated with the application of employment laws to workfare participants in other ways.

### Child Support Computer Systems

- Q:** Haven't a lot of states failed to meet the October 1st deadline for putting state-wide child support computer systems in place? What is the Administration planning to do about this?
- A:** States have had nine years to develop these computer systems, and we don't intend to extend the deadline any further. We do, however, believe that the current law -- which requires us to withhold all federal child support funds when a state misses the deadline -- will undermine efforts to collect child support for needy families. Thus, we intend to work with members of Congress to devise an improved penalty structure that will ensure that states work hard to get their computer systems in place while not hurting overall child support collection efforts. [Note: 17 states and the District of Columbia did not meet the deadline.]

**Questions and Answers on Drug Prevention/Education**  
**October 10, 1997**

**Q.** What is the President doing to address the problem of increasing drug use by our kids?

**A.** The number one priority in the President's 1997 National Drug Control Strategy is to motivate our kids to reject illegal drugs. The President's Drug Strategy and Balanced Budget include substantial funds (\$175 million) for an unprecedented paid media campaign to teach our kids about the dangers of drugs. By signing the Treasury-Postal appropriations bill into law on Friday, the President officially launched his anti-drug media campaign. Working with Congress, the private sector, and others, the Office of National Drug Control Policy will now begin to shape specific drug-related messages to virtually all of our nation's youth.

The paid media campaign will allow us to target specific programs or time slots that attract the young viewers we need to reach. And it will allow us to use modern media-- such as the Internet -- to make sure our anti-drug message is reaching all of our youth.

**Q.** Why can't you rely on public service ads (PSAs) --used in public health awareness efforts for decades-- instead of paid advertisements for the campaign?

**A.** Public service ad time has been decreasing for several years. Within the currently available PSA time slots, it has become increasingly difficult to target specific drug-related messages to particular audiences. Virtually no PSAs appear in prime time.

Targeting 9-17 year olds through PSAs has always been difficult. A paid media campaign will allow us to target specific programs or times when we know young people are watching-- making our efforts more effective.

**Questions and Answers on Extension of 245(I) Adjustment of Status for Immigrants  
October 10, 1997**

- Q.** What is the Administration's position on 245(i) of the Immigration and Nationality Act-- which is set to expire in a couple of weeks-- that permits illegal immigrants to remain in the U.S. while they adjust their status?
- A.** The Administration firmly supports the extension of 245(i). Last week, the President signed a three-week extension of 245(i) into law in the continuing resolution, and he has urged Congress to pass a long-term extension. The provision mainly benefits those already on track for legal residency who overstay their visas while their residency applications are pending. If the provision expires, thousands of immigrants will have to choose between remaining in the U.S. illegally or leaving the country, probably for several years, until they can obtain visas or green cards at consulates abroad.

**Questions and Answers on Late Term Abortion**  
**October 10, 1997**

- Q:** Will you sign the Partial Birth Abortion Act now that it has twice passed the House and Senate with overwhelming majorities.
- A:** No, because I am still not convinced that this bill adequately protects women from grievous harm. I have said over and over that if Congress were to add a narrow exception covering the few cases where this procedure is needed to prevent women in dire circumstances from suffering serious injury, then I would gladly sign the bill. But until Congress does add that narrow exception, I will veto the bill -- no matter how many votes there are in favor of it, and no matter how many times Congress sends it to me -- to protect the health of women.
- Q:** Since you last received this bill, the AMA has endorsed it. Why hasn't that endorsement -- and the AMA's statement that the partial-birth procedure is not good medicine -- change your view of the legislation.
- A:** I reviewed the AMA's statement, and it did not persuade me that this bill fully protects women from grievous injury. Let me remind you that the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, which is the organization of doctors that knows the most about this issue, opposes this bill for the same reason I do -- because it prevents doctors from using a procedure that in a small group of cases best protects women from serious physical injury. The AMA endorsed this bill after bargaining for a change that protects doctors. I've implored Congress to make a narrow change in the bill to protect women -- to ensure that they don't suffer grievous injury because Congress has tied the hands of their doctors -- and I will not sign the bill until I get it.
- Q:** Didn't you base your prior veto of the bill on false information -- i.e., that this procedure is performed only a few hundred times each year and only when women are in great danger? Why haven't you changed your position in light of new information about when doctors use this procedure?
- A:** I vetoed the bill because 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. Let's be clear: I've never said that these are the only circumstances in which the procedure is used; I've just said that these few women need to be protected. If Congress does so, I will gladly sign the bill, because I think this kind of procedure should be banned except when necessary to save the life of a woman or prevent serious harm to her health.