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Presidential Remarks: Reinventing Government
at G.S.A. Center, Franconia, Virginia,
Sep 8 93

President William Jefferson Clinton
Remarks on Reinventing Government
at G.S.A. Center in Franconia, Virginia
September 8, 1993

THE PRESIDENT HAS SEEN

[Acknowledgements to be provided.]

Thank you, Vice President Gore. We can all be grateful for the hard work that you and the task force devoted to finding ways to make government work better and cost less. I applaud you for that.

Just looking at the examples of waste and inefficiency that we saw illustrated here today, it's like being in "The Twilight Zone." You can't make this stuff up... no one would believe it if you did.

Someone once said that common sense is being right without the rules. Well, one thing's for certain: Somewhere along the way, the government got itself a lot of rules at the expense of common sense.

Our government employs more than 142-thousand people in the procurement system and spends 200-Billion dollars a year on goods and services. Procurement agencies must live by 900 detailed procurement laws and more than 45-hundred pages of regulation.

It's a case of the forest overwhelming the trees. Even if a worker could wade through the thicket, too often the result is that we pay too much for goods and services that are delivered too late.

That makes no sense.

Is there any reason we have to have designer insect repellent? That's what it is... specially made to government specifications, even though the repellent anyone can buy in the drug store would do just fine. That makes no sense.

Roger Johnson knows that. That's why he's been trying new ways of doing business at the G-S-A. It's a great start, and our National Performance Review will go even farther.

And procurement isn't alone; the Vice President found a lot of bad rules in other government agencies, too.

For example, you know that diabetics can have trouble with circulation and sometimes that can result in amputation. It's shocking, but a veteran with diabetes, in some cases, can't qualify for a special shoe that would help his circulation and maybe even save his foot... but he would qualify for an artificial limb. That makes no sense at all and it's a travesty.

With our plan, we'll make some sense. We'll modernize the system, so workers can take advantage of the best of commercial products, technology and competitive pricing. What all of this means for those who work in procurement is: You won't go buggy when you need to order insect repellent... and you won't get a headache when you have to buy aspirin.

To our workers, we say: If a silly rule is making your job difficult, we'll get rid of it. If you're being strangled by red tape, we'll give you breathing room. And where there's waste and duplication, we'll cut and consolidate. In return, we'll expect results... holding all our workers to new standards of performance.

Let me say that we know the problem isn't our government workers... it's how our government works. Our workers have themselves been shackled and frustrated by the rules. The question is: Why has the government been asking its employees to do the absurd, like write a 10-page guide for the procurement of an ashtray?

With the changes we want, we'll bring government out of the dark age and into the information age... so we can untwist and detangle counter-productive regulations and Catch-22's. My wife once gave me a book that had one of the best lines I've read. It said: "Insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting a different result."

You know what I'm talking about. For too long, you've had to do the same thing over and over again, because of inflexible rules written long ago.

We need to do better by our people.

It's time we brought sensibility and responsibility into the business of government. We've seen how this kind of approach has innovated business in the private sector and in local and state governments.

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Now it's our turn. The task is huge, but no bigger than our determination to make government work better and cost less.

We will work aggressively to implement the executive actions the Vice President has recommended... and to press the Congress to move where legislative action is needed. If our recommendations are enacted, we'll begin saving Billions... and we'll have a government that is leaner, better managed, more responsive and more responsible.

We'll also be dusting off a central tenet in the compact of democracy: Trust. People will begin to trust their government to put them first and serve them well.

For six months the Vice President and his task force combed through mountains of government rule books... talked with countless government workers... took suggestions from citizens across the nation... and studied the successes of streamlined American businesses. They turned over every stone to find ways to fix the business of government.

I strongly urge each of you here today... and every American... to read this report. It is to the point... it pulls no punches... and it is geared toward producing results. In short... it is a model of the very thing we hope to achieve with reinvented government... high performance.

It is a sad fact that there has been a performance deficit in the federal government... and the examples you have seen today are a testimony to that. Is it any wonder that there has also been a trust deficit among the American people?

When so many of our people don't trust the government with their hard-earned tax dollars... something needs to be fixed. When our own government workers are forced to use individual ingenuity to bypass a ridiculous regulation... something needs to be fixed. When it costs fifty dollars and takes months to process a single procurement request... something needs to be fixed.

Fixing our government is important for all these reasons and more; it is part of a larger picture of change that is essential for the revival of our economy and the restoration of the American community. The framework for that picture is our economic plan, passed by the Congress last month, that will cut the budget deficit by almost 500-Billion dollars in five years.

In that picture, we see a health care system that is reformed to provide security to every American family. And in that same picture we see trade barriers coming down and export markets expanded to create new jobs for Americans here at home.

That picture is a scene of prosperity and growth and a brighter future for all Americans. Together, starting here with a government that works better and costs us all less, we can make the picture a reality.

Thank you.