

Remarks at a Town Meeting in Detroit February 10, 1993

The President. Thank you, thank you very much. Let me, first of all, thank all of you for being here in Michigan, and thank our audiences in Washington and Georgia and Florida for joining us, and all the people across this country who are watching this event.

I started doing these televised town meetings a year ago in New Hampshire. Between June and November I did nine that were televised alone, including one here at this station. And I wanted to come out of the White House 3 weeks to the day after I became President because I can see now, after only 3 weeks, how easy it is for a President to get out of touch, to be caught up in the trappings of Washington, and basically to be told by people that nothing needs to be changed or you can't change things.

Let me just briefly say, I want to take as much time as possible for questions, but I want to say one or two things real quickly. I believe I got elected on a commitment to change America, to create jobs, try to raise incomes, to face the health care crisis, to try to liberate the Government from special interests and turn it back to the people, and to try to reduce the deficit and put America on a path to long-term health and recovery, bringing the American people together.

There's been some good news and bad news since I won the election. The good news is that productivity of American firms is up. People are buying houses because interest rates are down. Consumer confidence is up since the election. I like that. People think things are going to be better.

There's been some bad news. With all these economic improvements, we aren't generating new jobs. And the deficit of this country is about \$50 billion a year bigger than I was told it was going to be before the election.

So we have to put together a plan that keeps my commitments to you, invest in you, in your jobs, in your education, your health care, and your future; that brings that debt down; that deals with the health care crisis; and that does it in a way that's fair to all Americans.

I've been working almost exclusively on the economic issues of the country since I became President. I've got another week to put it to-

gether. And I wanted to come up here tonight and just listen to your questions, answer them as candidly as I could, and share with you as much as I can my feelings about where we're going to go.

But I'll say this: All the hundreds of thousands and maybe a million miles that I've traveled, I never saw one person along the highway with a sign that said, "Things are just fine the way they are. Don't change anything." So I'm going to keep trying to change, and I'm going to try to stay in touch with you this whole 4 years so that you can honestly tell me what you think.

I'm really proud of the fact that the voter turnout was not only up, we not only had the biggest crowd for the Inauguration in history, but the mail and the phone calls in the White House are running at record levels, some good, some critical. But that's good. That's democracy. And it proves that people really feel, at least so far, that I'm going to listen and try to move forward. And that's what we're here to do tonight. So let's begin.

Bill Bonds. Thank you very much, Mr. President. You know, in reality there are several town meetings tonight besides our audience here at WXYZ. The President is going to be taking questions from people in three other major American cities. From the far northwest, we welcome the people at station KOMO in Seattle, Washington. Ken Schramm will be the moderator, bringing us questions from the people of that Evergreen State; Ann Bishop, our moderator from station WPLG in Miami, Florida; from our station in Atlanta, Georgia, Bill Nigut taking questions from the people visiting him at station WSB.

The response from the people in these American cities has been overwhelming. And we'll begin right now by taking a question from a member of the audience here at WXYZ in Detroit and see if this bird's going to fly tonight.

Our first question is from Susan Esser. Susan Esser was the political coordinator for the Ross Perot campaign for the Presidency in the State of Michigan. I suspect this is going to be about—well, it's "the economy, stupid," as we heard—the economy.

Balancing the Budget

Q. The American people, Mr. President, feel that Congress does not have the political will to balance the budget. If this is true, and as you say, if the economy is your priority, will you support a strong balanced budget amendment, one that is not watered down, and with us send a signal to Congress that we need them to face the issue? And when can we expect Washington to start to solve this enormous problem of ours?

The President. I think you can—first of all, I'm not for any version of the balanced budget amendment that I have seen because I think it is basically a gimmick and a way of putting the decision off that would give us 5 years to deal with it. Secondly, if we balanced the budget tomorrow, we'd drive unemployment up because it would require such terrible sacrifices.

I hate to say this again, but if you look at what the Japanese did, they had a huge deficit in the 1970's, about as big, even a little bigger than ours is now. And they brought it down over about a 10-year period until, in 1990, they were the only major industrial country with a balanced budget; one reason, they had low unemployment and high growth.

Let me just tell you what I'm going to do, and I wouldn't rule out other measures later. I'm going to try to get the Congress to pass the modified line-item veto bill that the House passed the last time and the Senate didn't. I strongly support it. I'm going to try to pass a strong campaign finance reform law and a lobby reform law to free the Congress of undue influence of special interests. I'm going to ask them to cut spending, and dramatically, across a broad range of areas, and to raise some more money to try to bring this deficit down in a dramatic way that will send a signal that we're in control of our own house again. And we're going to lower interest rates as a result of it and get this economy going again. I think that's what we want.

The important thing is not to balance the budget overnight but to put it on a steady and decided downward tack. If we don't do it—let me just say, there's no virtue in any of this unless it helps you.

Let me just answer this. A lot of people say to me, "Why do you want to balance the budget?" It's no fun cutting spending or raising more money to balance the budget or reduce the defi-

cit. If you reduce the deficit, the United States doesn't borrow so much money. We have more of your tax money to spend on the education of your children or on developing new jobs or on health care. We keep interest rates down, and it's easier for you to borrow money in the private sector. So you create more jobs. If the deficit gets bigger and bigger and bigger every year, it weakens the economy.

So we have to do two things at once that no Government in your country's history has ever done. We've got to increase investment in jobs and reduce the deficit, and we're going to do it. And I think we can start next week. Look at my plan. See how you like it and see if the Congress responds. I predict to you that they will respond in a bipartisan fashion and reduce the debt for the first time in a long time.

Mr. Bonds. Mr. President, we've kicked it off with that first question. Thank you, Susan. We're going to keep this moving right along. Let me throw it now and link up with Ann Bishop from station WPLG in Miami.

Ann Bishop. Thank you very much, Bill. And with me is Kelly Kaprin, an attorney, and she has a question for the President. Kelly.

Family Leave and Homosexuals in the Military

Q. Why did you choose to tackle the gays in the military and the family leave bill first versus getting right to the economy and the Federal deficit?

The President. I didn't—I did choose the family leave bill first. Let me answer the question separately. I chose to deal with the family leave bill because I knew there was a majority support in both Houses for it and because I thought it was a pro-family bill. I thought it was a bill that would be helpful to strengthen the American family with so many people forcibly in the work force. It contained an exemption for small business. It had been passed twice by the Congress before and vetoed. I thought it would help families and illustrate we had ended gridlock.

I tried to put off the gays in the military issue for 6 months. Senators in the other party wanted it dealt with now. They saw it as a way to delay family leave and to throw the whole Federal Government into debating that. I actually spent very little time on the issue myself. I met with the Joint Chiefs on a number of issues, including that; met with the Senate Democrats on the Armed Services Committee.

But I was, frankly, appalled that we spent so much time the first week talking about that instead of how to get the economy going again. It wasn't my idea. My agreement with the Joint Chiefs was to study the issue for 6 months, so we could focus immediately on the economy. Thank goodness that's what we're now doing.

Mr. Bonds. Some people say you probably would have been better off if you had sat down with Sam Nunn and maybe somebody like Admiral Crowe, a couple of the heavyweights in the U.S. Senate and say, "Look, how do I approach this thing with the Joint Chiefs of Staff?" and not get the mess that we got into.

The President. That's just what we did do. The Joint Chiefs wanted to meet with me on that and other issues. I met with them. Senator Nunn got into this because I asked him to. I hate that it was written, particularly in Georgia, that there was some conflict between us. I asked him to help me craft a resolution to do what the Joint Chiefs asked, which was to review it for 6 months and to put it off. We did our best, but there were others in the Senate, mostly Republicans, who just wanted to debate it to death because they thought it was hurting the other efforts we were making. And now we're on the economy, and that's where we ought to stay.

Mr. Bonds. Mr. President, we're going to switch now to Atlanta, a little bit closer to your hometown part of the country. Bill Nigut, WSB. Bill.

Tax Increases

Bill Nigut. Mr. President, we're glad that you could join us by satellite from Detroit. We're going to start with Katie Rapkin, who works here for the Atlanta Symphony and who is a bit concerned about at least one of the campaign promises that she believes you made and yet she feels—you're not quite sure he's going to follow through on it.

Q. I'm concerned about your campaign promise to not raise the taxes for the middle class, how you intend to keep that promise.

Mr. Nigut. Did you vote for President Clinton?

Q. Yes, I did.

Mr. Nigut. Was that one reason you did?

Q. Yes, I did.

The President. Well, first of all, I did put out a plan which didn't contain a middle class tax increase, but I also repeatedly said, and I

said in the debates in front of 100 million people, I refuse to say "read my lips." That's not responsible.

Now, what's happened since the election? We have been told since the election that the Federal debt every year is going to be \$50 billion bigger than we were told it was before the election. I wish I could promise you that I won't ask you to pay any more. But I can tell you this: Look what I'm doing. I'm doing my best to keep my campaign commitments.

I have, first of all, started by cutting the Government. I cut the White House staff by 25 percent yesterday. I bet that's never happened in the lifetime of anybody in this audience. And it's real cuts. Today I announce \$9 billion in cuts in the central administration of the Federal Government, \$9 billion. I have also said that before I ask the middle class to pay, I'm going to ask the wealthiest Americans and companies who made money in the eighties and had their taxes cut to pay their fair share. And I'm going to cut more Government spending. But I cannot tell you that I won't ask you to make any contribution to the changes we have to make.

We have got to do two things at the same time. We've got to bring the debt down for the reasons that the first questioner so clearly articulated. And secondly, we've got to invest more in creating new jobs, in educating people, and providing health care for all Americans and controlling cost.

I'm doing my best to do that in a way that is fairest to middle class America. But I have to be honest with you: The debt is \$50 billion a year bigger than we were told it was before the election. I'm doing my best. I have done nothing almost for 3 weeks but wrestle with this budget, try to cut costs, and find ways to finance what we have to do. But we've got to change what we're doing.

Let me say I do have an alternative. I could play the same kind of games with you that have been played for the last 10 or 12 years. And this is not a partisan comment. This happened out of Washington. I could give you a bunch of smoke and mirrors and pretend the deficit is not there, and then 3 or 4 years from now we'd be spending 20 cents of every tax dollar paying off the debt. And it's not right.

So I'm going to do the best I can. Listen to what I say next week. Decide whether you think it's fair, and tell me and your Senators and Congressmen whether you think I'm right

or wrong.

Crime and Gun Control

Mr. Bonds. Mr. President, there are a lot of people who are convinced that the Federal Government doesn't spend enough money battling crime. I don't have to tell you about the mean streets of America. This man is John Marbury. His son was killed in the city of Detroit for a leather jacket. Right, Mr. Marbury?

Q. Yes. I would like to ask Mr. Clinton what advice would he give to the administrations of these large urban areas of how to get rid of these illegal handguns and curbing the violence with an immediate impact?

The President. I wish I knew how to have an immediate impact. And I thank you for having the courage to come here tonight, with all the pain you must feel.

Let me tell you where I think we ought to begin. We ought to begin by passing the crime bill that nearly passed last year, which does two things: It gives the urban areas of this country more police officers for the streets. I have been in areas that were dominated by drugs, by weapons, and by murders, which are now virtually crime-free because they have enough policemen. They have neighborhood policemen walking the streets on every block, working with their neighbors. That's the first thing.

The second thing that bill has is the Brady bill that would require a waiting period before people could buy handguns.

And the third thing we probably ought to do is do what Governor Wilder in Virginia is trying to do. It takes a lot of guts to do that, but he's trying to pass a law which says that you can't buy a handgun more than once a month. Try to stop all these people that go to legal gun stores and buy guns and then turn around and just give them to kids like they're going out of style.

So those are three places that I think we ought to start. And if you've got any other ideas, I'd like to have them. I think the problem of violence among young people, particularly in our inner cities and not all big cities, is maybe the biggest problem we've got today in terms of their future and the future of our cities.

I'm now preparing a jobs package for the Congress that I want to try to boost the job-creating capacity of the economy for the next year or so while we bring the deficit down, because I don't want unemployment to go up.

And one of the things I want to do is give extra incentives for companies to invest in inner cities. But they're not going to do it if they think it's not safe. You can't have a job in a place where people can't walk to work safely.

Mr. Bonds. The most powerful lobby perhaps in the U.S. Congress is the NRA, and they don't want gun control. How are you going to overcome that?

The President. We're going to fight to change. All I can tell you is, that's what I hired on to do. I may not win every battle I fight, but that's one of the changes we ought to make. And let me say, I live in a State where more than half the people have a hunting or fishing license or both. I believe in the right to keep and bear arms. I believe in the right to hunt. I believe in all this. I do not believe that we're well served by having a bunch of 14- or 15-year-old kids out there with handguns shooting each other because of blood battles between gangs or because they're mad or because they're high on drugs. It's wrong. We've got to do something about it.

Mr. Bonds. We've had some difficulty linking up with our station out in Seattle. We switch there now to Ken Schramm, KOMO.

Aerospace Industry

Ken Schramm. Thanks, Bill. I'd like to introduce Larry Brown, who is a machinist with the Boeing Company. I'm going to go out on a limb here and suggest that perhaps you have a question concerning the economy.

Q. I certainly do. Good evening, Mr. President.

The President. Good evening, Larry.

Q. Yesterday the Boeing Company announced that there would be 16,000 layoffs here in Seattle. Recently, Pratt Whitney announced 10,000 layoffs, and over 200,000 aerospace workers have lost their jobs in southern California. At last report, the governments in Europe involved with the airbus consortium have subsidized their industry to a tune of \$26 billion. My question is, how can America meet the challenge of maintaining our leadership in the very important aerospace industry?

The President. The answer, I think, is twofold: First, a lot of those aerospace workers who lost their jobs, lost their jobs because of cutbacks in defense which had to come at the end of the cold war. That is, we couldn't keep spending so much more than all of our competitors in

these high-wage countries on defense without paying an economic price for it. But we shouldn't have cut defense as much as we did in terms of high-tech, high-wage employment without a plan to reinvest in other industries, in other technologies, to put those people to work. So the first thing we have to do is to invest more in converting these high-wage jobs to other technologies.

The second thing we need to do, frankly, is to take a serious look at the aerospace industry itself. The Congress passed a bill last year that was never enacted that we're now trying to get up and going, where I will appoint someone and they will appoint some people to a commission to focus on how to rebuild the aviation industry in our country in two ways: Number one, people who work for Boeing, McDonnell Douglas, and other subsidiary companies—how can we get more jobs in making these planes and selling them at home and around the world. And number two, how can we do something about the commercial airlines themselves to avoid further bankruptcies and massive layoffs like—we've got a Florida station here with us tonight. Miami has been devastated by layoffs at Eastern and Pan Am.

So we are going to work on that. And I assure you that I'm going to have a strategy to try to invest in commercial aviation. And we're also going to either have to—either the Europeans are going to have to quit subsidizing airbus and trying to deny us access to those contracts, which is something else that's going on now, or we're going to have to meet the competition. I am not going to roll over and play dead.

Seven, seven technologies are going to shape the high-wage jobs of the future. And one of the biggest is commercial aviation. The United States has a lead there. We are losing it because we have not fought to maintain it. And I assure you, as soon as I get this budget and this investment plan, this jobs program sent up to the Congress, we're going to start working on defense conversion and aerospace.

Mr. Bonds. We're going to switch now to Ann Bishop, WPLG, Miami.

Florida Disaster Assistance and Military Base Closings

Ms. Bishop. Thank you very much, Bill. And of course, we've not only had the devastation of the air industry but also Hurricane Andrew. And I want you to meet now the Reverend

Walter Richardson, who certainly lives in the area that was hardest hit.

Q. Good evening, Mr. President. On August 24th, many of the things that we had in the south Florida area were gone. One of the things that was gone because of Hurricane Andrew was Homestead Air Force Base. What plans do you have for the restoration of Homestead Air Force Base?

The President. Well, first of all, let me talk generally about the hurricane. There is a lot of aid left to go to south Florida which has been approved but not spent, that's tied up in various Government pipelines. Some of it was not pushed through under the previous administration. But I have to say, frankly, some of it was slowed down because of the transition, the change of governments. That happens. And I'm going to put someone on that next week because of something Governor Chiles said to me. I want to put one person in charge of making sure that all the assistance that's supposed to go to south Florida for Hurricane Andrew actually goes there as quickly as possible. We'll run through all those Departments and try to push it out.

On Homestead Air Force Base: In the campaign, President Bush said that he would just rebuild it while we were closing a lot of other air force bases. The Congress voted against that and said Homestead had to be considered along with all other bases. I agree with that; I think we have to consider Homestead along with all other air bases. There's a base commission, and they will evaluate the needs for it.

But let me say what I believe, based on having spent an enormous amount of time in south Florida and having talked to your congressional delegation about it and others. I think that is an invaluable asset. I think it is important to rebuild enough support systems so that all the retired military personnel, around the air base at least, don't lose the dependence they had on it and turn around and leave your community, which would be bad for you.

I think it's important to find a mission for Homestead. And I believe that there are a number of multiple use missions which are potential. We may even have joint use between military and commercial uses. I've given a good deal of thought to it, and it's one of the things that I want to talk to you folks about. Now, if it clears the base closing commission, it will just be rebuilt with its mission. If it doesn't, then

I think we need to look at whether there is a mixed use for it as both a military and commercial mission.

It's an incredible resource for south Florida, and it has to be used as a part of the rebuilding process. So if the base is not rebuilt because the base closing commission doesn't recommend it, then I'll help you do something else with it to generate an equal amount of jobs.

Q. Thank you, Mr. President.

Ms. Bishop. Thank you, Mr. President. We'll throw it back to you, Bill, now in Detroit.

Mr. Bonds. Okay, thank you very much Ann. We switch now to Bill Nigut, WSB, in Atlanta, Georgia. Bill.

Homosexuals in the Military

Mr. Nigut. Bill Bonds, as you know, the issue of lifting the ban on gays in the military has been a particularly heated one here in the South. Roger Turner wants to ask you, Mr. President, why you want to do it. Tell the President why you don't want him to lift the ban and see if he can respond to that.

Q. Having served in the United States Navy for 5 years aboard a guided missile destroyer and also doing isolated duty in Alaska and as a Christian and having the opportunity to minister to a number of men in the Navy, I believe it would just add continued undue pressure on the situation that's already pressure-packed to begin with. And I want to know, why do you want to lift the ban, and what impact do you see the ban having on the military?

Mr. Bonds. Mr. President, does it surprise you to hear a minister—we also have a minister standing here who very much wants the ban lifted. Does it surprise you to hear a minister say we should keep the ban in place or continue a discriminatory pattern?

The President. Absolutely not, because a lot of ministers of the gospel believe that homosexuality is morally wrong and, therefore, that ground alone is enough to justify the ban.

Let me tell you why I favor lifting it very briefly. We have now and everyone concedes we have always had homosexual men and women in the military service. I received a letter from a retired officer, a woman, the other day who told me she left the service because she could not be honest about her sexual orientation, even though she was a distinguished officer with a remarkable service record, one of many such letters I have received. Your Government

spent \$500 million to get rid of about 16,300 homosexuals from the service in the 1980's.

Now, here's my position. If there are homosexual men and women in the service anyway, if we know they have served with distinction and they have always been there, the issue is should you be able to say what you are and not be kicked out. This is not about conduct. This is about status. I believe there ought to be the strictest code of behavioral conduct applicable here. I also believe there ought to be an even stricter code applicable to sexual harassment, whether homosexual or heterosexual. The biggest sexual problem in the armed services, according to the men and women who talked to me, involves heterosexual harassment.

I think there ought to be a tough code of conduct. If people do wrong, they ought to be gotten out. But I think people should not be asked to lie if they're going to be allowed to serve, because the question is not whether they should be there or not. They are there. So the narrow question of this debate is should you be able to stay and admit it.

The military itself has admitted they should stop asking people when they join. That's the position of the Joint Chiefs. So the only question here is should you be able to say that you're a homosexual if you do nothing wrong. I say yes. Others say no. The military is studying the practical problems about duty assignments and other things, and we'll revisit this in about 6 months.

Mr. Bonds. I want to advise my stations along the link-up that it's time for us to take a break here. They'll be taking a break. Speaking about the military, we have military forces in the Persian Gulf. We have military forces still in the Kuwait area. Are we going over to Bosnia-Herzegovina? And we'll be back with that question for you, Mr. President, in just a moment.

[At this point, the television stations took a commercial break.]

Mr. Bonds. I appreciate your enthusiasm. I think we'd save a little time if we'd hold the applause to the end so that you could get more questions in, the President of the United States could get more answers in. So you do what you want to do, but we feel it would be better that way.

We have troops in the Middle East; we have troops in Somalia. Are we going to go into Yugoslavia? That's this young lady's question.

Bosnia

Q. Good evening, Mr. President. Serbian death camps and rape camps have shocked the world. And today we have heard Mr. Warren Christopher stating that he supports negotiated settlement in Bosnia. How does one negotiate with war criminals without a clear enforcement to let them know that they have to stop with the atrocity? And how does one ensure that the Serbs will not continue with their atrocities and that they will negotiate in good faith and that they will lay down the arms? Will you ask NATO for their enforcement of the terms of agreement and give them the authority to use force in this case? And will you also help Croatia regain its sovereignty on the territories it's lost so that 700,000 people can return to their homes? Thank you.

The President. I'm glad you asked the question in the way you did. I was afraid you were going to ask me why we agreed to get involved in this process today.

Just for the benefit of the people who don't know as much about it as you, let me tell you what happened today. Today the Secretary of State announced a new policy by our Government that we would agree to become more involved in what is going on in Bosnia, not in committing our ground troops now or anything like that but in trying to get involved in these negotiations to protect the rights and the integrity of the Bosnians, the Croatians, and others who have been basically subject to the assaults of the Serbs; that we would be in a position to say we're not going to enforce a peace agreement on the Croatians or the Bosnians that they don't believe in, but that if we could get an agreement, then the United States would participate, not alone but with the United Nations and with Europe, in guaranteeing that the agreement would protect the basic human rights of the people involved and the terms of the agreement.

Now, people say, "So we are not committing today to make war in the former Yugoslavia." We are committing to try to help get a peace and then to enforce it. Why is that? Because if we don't, number one, the terrible principle of ethnic cleansing will be validated, that one ethnic group can butcher another if they're strong enough to do it, at the end of the cold war; number two, that problem could spread to other republics and nations near there. Never forget, it's no accident that World War I started

in this area. There are ancient ethnic hatreds that have consumed people and led to horrible abuses. You know about it, the rapes of the women, the murders of the children, all these things you have read about. We've got to try to contain it.

And I think we have to be very much stronger standing up to aggression. We've got to get the heavy weapons out of utilization; you implied that. We've got to toughen the embargo against the Serbs. We ought to open a United Nations war crimes inquiry, and we ought to enforce the no-fly zone against Serbian aircraft, strongly. Those are the things that I think we should do.

I do not believe that the military of the United States should get involved unilaterally there now. We have to work with these other countries. And I might say that that's the position that General Powell and our foreign policy folks have taken. But this is a much more aggressive position than the United States has taken.

But I can tell you, folks: We're not going to make peace over there in a way that's fair to the minorities that are being abused unless we get involved. And if we don't get involved and the thing spreads all over creation over there, then we'll be pulled into it in horrible ways that could be very dangerous to our people. So we ought to do what is right now. It's also what is safest for the United States.

Mr. Bonds. But isn't it a reality, Mr. President, that if the United States doesn't get involved and doesn't lead, nothing is going to change?

The President. I think that it is reality that if we don't get involved, either nothing will change or the Bosnians will be wrecked and the Croatians will be hurt badly.

Mr. Bonds. And it could still spread after that.

The President. And it could go into Kosovo, which is next door; it could go into Macedonia. You could involve the Turks. You could involve the Greeks. We could have a serious problem.

Mr. Bonds. Then you've got a major policy decision to make.

The President. I just did it. *[Laughter]* We're going to get involved.

Mr. Bonds. I don't think she thinks you did make it.

The President. Let me just say, the United States has learned one thing: When we operate—look at the Gulf War. If we operate with

the support of the United Nations and with the support of Europe and with the support of our allies, we can do a lot of things at an acceptably low cost of life, and get something done. If we go off on our own and everybody else is over here, we can't get it done.

I have to deal with the fact that Europe believes today that negotiations are possible, that Russia wants negotiations from a different point of view. And even though they've been historically sympathetic to the Serbs, they have supported our position that we ought to toughen the embargo and stand up to aggression.

And if I go in there, the United States now takes a leadership role, I think there's a real chance we can stop some of the killing, stop the ethnic cleansing, and get a peace agreement. And then we'll have to help enforce it. She's absolutely right. If we don't have an enforcement mechanism, you won't be able to do it. But I believe this is the best thing to do for the Croats and for the Bosnians and for humanity at large in the former Yugoslavia. I think it's the right thing to do.

Health Care Reform and Meat Inspection

Mr. Bonds. Thank you, Mr. President. Ken Schramm, KOMO in Seattle.

Mr. Schramm. Thank you. Mr. President, my understanding is that while you were en route to tonight's program, while aboard Air Force One you called an area hospital because you were concerned and wanted to speak to some parents and some children who have been affected by the *E. coli* bacteria contamination in this area. I'd like to introduce Vicky and Darrin Detweiler, whose 16-month-old son remains in critical condition at Tacoma's Mary Bridge Hospital. And they have a question concerning health care.

Q. Mr. President, actually our child is at Children's Hospital in Seattle, but he is in intensive care, in critical condition. And only 2 days prior to him going in there with *E. coli* poisoning from tainted meat, my husband lost his job, and we were left without medical coverage.

I'm Canadian originally and always took comfort in the medical system there and in knowing that my children would be taken care of. My question to you now is: What are you prepared to do in regards to the tainted meat problem, and is there any hope in the near future of seeing universal health care so no one else has to go through what we've gone through?

The President. Let me, first of all, say I thank you for being on the program, and I hope your child will be well. I did call two other sets of parents who are in the hospital with their children, on the way out here, just to inquire about that and to get their ideas about what we should do.

Let me answer your second question first. As I'm sure you know, I've asked my wife to head a task force to come up with a bill within 100 days which will bring a new system of health care to America which offers us the chance to provide basic health coverage to everybody, to stop people from losing their health coverage when they lose a job, to stop people from their inability to change jobs because they've had someone in their family sick, and to bring the cost of health care in line with inflation. I think we can do that. And if we don't do it, we'll never balance the budget, and we'll never restore health to this economy. Fifty percent of the projected deficit growth between now and the year 2000 is all in health care costs. So it is a terrific human issue, but it's a big economic issue for Americans. And the answer to your question is: Within 100 days of my becoming President, we're going to have a bill to the Congress to do just what you've said.

Now, the second thing, this *E. coli* thing—have you all been following it up in Washington? I asked the Secretary of Agriculture, Mike Espy, who is responsible for the regulation of the slaughterhouses and the meat before it comes to a restaurant, to go up there and look into the situation. And we think there are two things that have to be done.

First of all, we've got to make it clear to people who are providing the fast food that they've got to do everything they can to comply with our cooking regulations. Some of these viruses would have clearly died had the heat been observed. On the other hand, we've got to find ways to do more inspections and to try to do them in a more effective way. And so we are reviewing now the possibility of not only hiring more inspectors, which I've already agreed to do, but secondly, seeing if there is some way we can do a better job of actually inspecting the meat, empowering the inspectors to do some more things.

We have got to do that. And I can tell you, if you have any more ideas, I'd like to have them. The parents that I talked to today had

some, actually, some quite good ideas that we're going to pursue. And I want to invite you and any others who are listening who have other ideas to let me know. But you can look forward to more inspectors, and we're looking for ways to inspect better as well.

Mr. Bonds. In that case, you're increasing Government.

The President. We are there. But that's a direct service to people. That's not a waste of bureaucracy. I think the American people want us to make sure they're safe if we can.

Job Retraining

Q. Mr. President, I'm a former Pan American Airline employee, and I'm still unemployed at this time. And I would like to know if you have any new provisions for people who suffer from big industries' traumas.

The President. Let me tell you, we're going to try to do two things. One is to provide a much more comprehensive program of retraining and job placement; and secondly is to try to have a strategy available when we know that major, major industries are going to shut down, to try to do conversion, to try to provide investment opportunities for new kinds of economic activities.

I said earlier something that I probably should have broadened. This is not just a problem in defense industries. It's also a problem in other big employers. As we're in Michigan tonight, as the people in Michigan know, the biggest companies in America did nothing but basically lay off people in the 1980's and the early nine-ties. Even when they were making more money, they restructured.

For the last 10 years, until 2 or 3 years ago, a lot of the jobs that were lost by big companies were made up by jobs that were created by small companies. About 2 or 3 years ago, that process slowed to a halt because of the cost of health care to small business, because of the general recession, because of the credit crunch.

So my answer to your question is: We're going to be much more aggressive than American governments have been in the past in trying to find ways to deal with these problems when we know in advance they're coming, and go in and give people the chance to restructure their lives, to rebuild them, and try to create other kinds of economic activities with new partnerships in the private sector.

We're also going to try to change the tax system to favor investment more. That is, we

want to raise the corporate tax rate some. But then we want to say, if you want to lower your taxes, invest more. And you can lower your taxes if you invest to create jobs. And I think that will help a lot. We're going to try to do that.

Q. I have a followup on Homestead and some of that training. We obviously have plenty of space down here to have it done. But what kind of training are you going to give someone who's middle-aged or even older but who still needs to work?

The President. Well, I think that is both the burden and the excitement of the time in which we live. That is, there is nothing I or any public official can do about the fact that the average 18-year-old American today will change jobs about eight times in a lifetime. Even if you keep working for the same company, if you're lucky enough never to be laid off, in order to keep a job, an 18-year-old today will have to be retrained to do eight different jobs. So whether we like it or not, middle-aged people will have to keep learning new things, developing new skills.

Now, that will be very exciting and interesting for people in their middle and later years if we can spare them of the gnawing insecurity of thinking they're going to be thrown onto the scrap heap of history, they're going to lose their job and never get another one, or they're going to lose their job and then getting another one making one-third of what they used to make. That's our great challenge. And we are working on it. That is something that I think America ought to be able to lead the world in, and now we're behind some of our other countries.

Health Care Reform

Q. Mr. President, is it possible to pay them and give them benefits as well, like health benefits, while they're learning?

The President. Oh, I think so. What we're going to try to do with this health care plan is to make sure that everybody, whether employed or unemployed, has access to a basic package of comprehensive benefits. Every other country in the world, advanced country, does this. Every industrialized country but South Africa does this, everybody. And yet we spend 30 percent more of our income on health care than anybody else.

Now, if you have access to health care in America it's the best in the world—and a lot

of good things about it. But there are ways to give people a choice of doctors, high quality care, and do it for lower cost if we're willing to take on the insurance cost, if we're willing to take on a lot of the other waste in this system, the phenomenal waste. The paperwork in the American health care system alone is enough to cover virtually everybody without health insurance.

Let me just give you an example. In most hospitals in America today for the last 5 years have hired clerical workers at 4 times the rate of health caregivers like nurses, even though there's been a national nursing shortage. Why? Because we're the only country in the world with 1,500 separate health insurance companies writing thousands of different policies, covering small, small groups with a blizzard of rules that would choke a horse. Plus the Government makes it worse by the way we run Medicare and Medicaid.

And we're going to try to fix it. It's the most complicated problem I've ever messed with. But if we don't fix it, we can't control the deficit, we can't restore health to the economy, and most important, we can't restore security to the lives of people like those who've asked these questions tonight.

Child Care

Mr. Bonds. Child care and the terrible dilemma that so many working parents have had finding competent child care has obviously been in the news a great deal recently, Mr. President. Hattie Henry lives in a community just north of Atlanta. She is a first-time mother with a 6-week-old baby. And you want to go back to your job as a nurse. You're struggling with that dilemma. Is there something that you think that the President can do to help ease this terrible child care crisis out there?

Q. That's what I want to know. I'm obviously going to be a working mother, and I'm very concerned about the child care crisis, which has finally been thrown into the spotlight with "Nannygate." And I would like to know what your first thing is that you're going to do to address the child care issue, to make it affordable and reasonable.

The President. Let me ask you—can you hear me?

Q. Yes, go ahead, Mr. President.

The President. Bill, I'd like to ask your questioner a question first. As you contemplate going

back to work, is your biggest concern the cost of child care or the availability of quality care?

Q. The quality of the care. The quality of what I can get for the affordability of what I can get; if it is even worth it to go back to work with what we have available. And what about working mothers who don't have any choice about going back to work? Where can they take their children and have it be affordable and quality care, where they're sure their children are safe and getting good care?

The President. Well, I think there are two or three things we can do that we're working on now. First is to work in partnerships with States to help them to develop high standards for child care but also quality care at affordable prices. And one of the things that we did in my State when I was Governor is to spend a good deal bit of our training money. For example, training people who are on welfare but who were quite intelligent and capable of—for taking care of their own children—to work in child care facilities and moving them from welfare to work in ways that took maximum advantage of money the taxpayers are spending already and lower the cost of child care. And we often put these child care facilities in and around job training facilities to help working mothers and working parents that were going back to school. Sometimes they were going to school and working at the same time. I think we can do that.

The second thing we can do is to increase the earned-income tax credit for working Americans, especially middle to lower middle income working Americans, so that they will have more disposable income to pay their child care expenses.

The third thing we can do is simply to increase the child care credit itself. We basically have got to make the economics of this work. And I think there are lots of other things that can be done, but they won't affect the population as a whole. The population as a whole needs to be helped by making sure you've got a steady stream of trained quality child care workers and then more income for middle-class people, either through the child care tax credit or through the general earned-income tax credit, which basically says if you work 40 hours a week and you've got kids in the house, you shouldn't be put into poverty because of your other expenses, including child care. The Government ought to reduce your tax burden, if necessary even give you money back, as long

as you're working hard and playing by the rules and you need to take care of your kids.

Kimba Wood

Mr. Bonds. Mr. President, as long as we're on the subject, let me come in the back door on it and ask you the same question that many Americans apparently have felt, and that is, Judge Kimba Wood certainly did everything she could legally to attain child care. Why was she penalized, punished by being eliminated as a candidate for Attorney General if, in fact, she dealt with this rather difficult problem in a perfectly legal way?

The President. Well, first of all, I never selected her to be Attorney General. There was a press report that she was, and I regret—I think she was treated quite unfairly in this whole thing. I have high regard for her, but she was one of three or four people I was considering.

Secondly, the facts of her case was that she did not violate the law, because in 1986 the law was changed to say if you knowingly hire an illegal alien, you're violating the law, but if you did it before the law became into effect, you're not violating the law. So a few months before the law was passed, she knowingly hired an illegal alien.

Now, I think—and she did not do anything illegal. She knew the person providing child care was doing something illegal, but she didn't. But the question there that you can ask or answer, that I would have had to answer had I decided to put her up for Attorney General, is whether the Attorney General, who runs the Immigration and Naturalization Service, has a special standard to meet in this area that other Cabinet members might not have to meet. And that's a question that I would have had to resolve, had I decided to nominate her.

One of the things that I think has been very good in this whole business is that we've now taken a lot of these issues out. They're now the subject of public debate, and I hope that we will be able to resolve some of them, including—you would be amazed how many people who come to my attention as potential candidates for various positions in Government honestly did not know that they had to take out withholding on anybody who worked for them if they spent more than \$50 on them every 3 months. They just didn't know. And that's something that I think has really been raised on the public agenda. I think people are so

much more aware of that than they were. You know, some people don't think that ought to be the law, but that's what the law is.

Health Care Reform

Mr. Bonds. Mr. President, a lot of people wonder if when your wife speaks on health care reform she is speaking directly for you and if that is the message that you're sending to the American people. Here's a young woman by the name of Marcie Hoffmaster; she's 17. She's going to be graduating soon. And you've got a tough future in front of you.

Q. Yes, I do. I suffer from a chronic illness called systemic lupus, and I've already discovered that it will be almost impossible for me to get health care. I'd like to know what you're going to do ensure that people with a preexisting condition can get health care. And also, if the Government decides to regulate health insurance and prioritize illnesses, where will long-term, incurable illnesses, such as lupus and cancer and AIDS, stand on that list of priorities?

The President. Let me answer your first question first. The reason so many people with pre-existing conditions can't get health insurance is because people are so often insured in very small pools. Like, look around here, suppose there are about 60 people in this room. Suppose all of us belong to a group health insurance, and suppose we have the standard array of illnesses and problems. And a couple of us have cancer, and you have lupus, and maybe one person has HIV, and all the rest of us are healthy as can be, right? It only takes one or two people in a group that small to bankrupt the pool.

But in most countries, and in a few States in America, insurance companies are required to rate people for insurance according to huge community pools with hundreds of thousands of people in them, so that the risk of your care is spread across large numbers of people. And insurance companies make money the way grocery stores do, a little bit of money on a lot of people, instead of a lot of money on a few people. So the short answer to your question is, the way to keep preexisting conditions from barring people from getting health insurance is, number one, to make it illegal and, number two, to make it possible for the insurance pools to be big enough so that they don't go broke taking people like you.

The second answer is, I believe, if you look

at how much money we're spending on health care, if we can redirect a lot of the money that would be saved from administrative costs and from insurance overcharges per person, because of the system we have, if we could do more preventive and primary health care, if we can, in short, maximize the money we're now spending and keep people like you in big pools, I believe there would be enough money to cover your care. If that is not true, what the Government will have to do is to develop a Government long-term care program, because you cannot abandon people who have AIDS or who have prolonged bouts with cancer. In fact, a lot of cancer survivors, as you know, are living now for 10, 15, 20 years and during most of that time, even when there's a recurrence, are serving quite productively. So I think we have to do that.

I just approved, by the way, a strategy to fully fund the Ryan White Act for the care of AIDS patients over the next couple of years, because I think that's an important issue. But we'll never do it, you won't be treated right until we have a national program that covers everybody.

Mr. Bonds. Mr. President, we're going to move into kind of a roundrobin here. We're going to throw it now to Seattle. Ken Schramm, KOMO.

Antidrug Program

Mr. Schramm. Thank you. I've got two quick questions for you here, Mr. President. The first one is from Rochelle Pinrod, who is 9 years old, has never spoken to a President before, but she has written you a letter.

Q. Mr. President, how will you help make a drug-free America so I can feel safe walking out on the streets, so that no one's going to come up and ask me, "Would you like to buy some drugs?"

The President. Good for you. There's no easy answer to your question. One thing I can do is to speak out. Another thing I can do is to hire a person to be our national drug czar, the developer of, the leader of our drug policy, who understands that you have to have a combination of things. You have to have a strong education program in the schools. You have to have a strong program in the communities to keep the streets safe and to protect the children and to give them something to do. And you have to have a strong enforcement program designed

to break those people who are bringing drugs into our country in large quantities. I went to college with a person who's done a lot of very serious prosecution of people involved in and around drug transactions. And he tells me one big mistake we've made, for example, over the years, is not to go after people who make big money at it by chasing the money instead of the drugs.

So all I can tell you is that drugs have affected my family. I hate what they are doing to America and to children's future. And I'm going to do what I can to fight it through education, through treatment, through opportunities for safety on the streets, and through trying to go after the people who are really causing the problems.

Who's next, Bill?

Mr. Bonds. Well, I have a young man here in the studio, but I think we're going to throw it to Miami. Ann Bishop, WPLG.

Ms. Bishop. Thank you very much, Bill. We have with us Marlene Bashin, who has a question for you. Marlene.

Haiti

Q. President Clinton, during the Presidential campaign, you severely criticized George Bush's policy on Haitian refugees, but now you're not only carrying that same policy, you also place a naval blockade against Haiti, giving these frightened people no chance to escape. How do you explain these actions, especially at a time when the situation in Haiti is as bad as possible?

The President. Well, for one thing, the situation in Haiti is getting better. But let me tell you, I explain the action in the following ways: My policy is not the same as President Bush's policy because I'm trying to bring democracy back, because I am committed to putting more resources there to process people who want to be political refugees and can meet the standards and bringing them safely to the United States.

And let me tell you why I did what I did. I did what I did because of the evidence that people in Haiti were taking the wood off the roofs of their houses to make boats that were of questionable safety, to pour in thousands of numbers to come to this country, when we knew for sure hundreds of them would die on the high seas coming here in a human tragedy of monumental proportions; and that if they came here, they would all come to south Florida, where the unemployment rate is high, the gov-

ernment is strapped, they don't have any money. And the Federal Government has constantly broken their commitment to the people of south Florida to help them deal with the immigrant problem.

I decided that the better course was to launch an aggressive effort to restore democracy to Haiti and to launch an aggressive effort to protect people who want to apply to be political refugees in this country, in Haiti, and to process their applications all over the island, which is what we are doing now. And I might say, the ultimate proof that my policy is different is that President Aristide himself asked the Haitians to stay home and work with him to restore democracy. And if you noticed, just in the last day, the present rump government in Haiti has agreed to let us send observers there. And I look forward to fully changing the policy and in restoring democracy in Haiti. But I could not, in good conscience, let hundreds of people die on the high seas and create an enormous problem simply because the United States has not used its muscle to restore democracy to Haiti. That's the problem, and that's the one I'm trying to tackle.

Mr. Bonds. But Mr. President, if you place or slap an embargo on Haiti, you don't hurt the people at the top, you hurt even more severely the people at the bottom.

The President. The embargo was there all along, and I support it.

Mr. Bonds. Yes, but I mean, it gets worse.

The President. Look, if we lift the embargo, then what incentive does the government have to change? That is an unelected government there. The man who was elected President, ev-

erybody down there concedes, if he were on the ballot again today would win overwhelmingly. And we have got to try to restore democracy there. I want to lift the embargo very badly. I want to do more than lift the embargo; I want to help rebuild the economy of Haiti. That would be good for America. They could be good partners for us. A lot of the Haitians who are in south Florida would dearly love to go home. But I am not going to lift the embargo as long as there is a government down there oppressing the people.

Media Relations

Mr. Bonds. You can't do a town meeting every month, Mr. President, and many people in the White House press corps are saying, "He's going to have to come and answer our questions." You've got about 50 seconds left to answer that question. How are your relationships with the White House press corps?

The President. I think they're all right.

Mr. Bonds. They'd like to talk to you.

The President. I answer their questions just about every day. They come in and ask me questions, and I answer them. We don't see the world the same way.

Mr. Bonds. Well, I think the point is, are there going to be many more of these?

The President. Oh, I hope there will be a lot of these.

Mr. Bonds. Thanks, Mr. President.

The President. I hope there will be a lot of these.

NOTE: The town meeting began at 8 p.m. at the WXYZ-TV studios in Southfield, MI.

Remarks to Business Leaders February 11, 1993

Thank you very much. I would like to thank all of you ladies and gentlemen for coming here to join me today. I would like to say a special word of thanks to the leaders of various organizations and sectors of our economy who came in a little earlier for a briefing. And thanks to the members of the administration who are here, who have been working so hard for the last 3 weeks on our economic program, and

to the Vice President who went all the way to California last night to do a town meeting and came in about 5 o'clock this morning. He's the only person here who's had less sleep than I have. That's what Vice Presidents are for. [Laughter]

I have asked you to come here today because we have to meet a challenge together. Many of you have been my friends for some time,