

cuts. There are still about \$10 billion Medicaid cuts over and above what the House put in, which was about \$50 billion.

So that will help, and that puts us three votes closer. And I just don't—I can't say for sure. We're going to have a whole series of amendments which go through today. And then at the end of the day we may find ourselves in a position where some Members want some things which can only come out of the conference, and they may have to just decide whether to let the bill go to conference or not. The House Members had to make the same sort of decision. But I'm hopeful. That's all I can tell you. I'm hopeful. We're working hard, and I'm hopeful.

Q. Does that bring it under \$500 billion, sir?

The President. No. Not to my knowledge. The last time I saw it, it didn't, Andrea [Andrea Mitchell, NBC News]. Now, I haven't seen the exact details of the last—the last time I heard about it, about an hour and a half ago, it did not.

Q. What kind of momentum do you want from this vote, and do you see this as a real turning point for your Presidency?

The President. There have been a lot of those lately. [Laughter] The vote in the House was, and this will be. We have to go on to conference. If it passes today, this will be a very loud statement. It will say that both Houses

of the Congress are committed to the largest deficit reduction program in history, to putting the taxes and the spending cuts in a trust fund, to spending cuts equal to and now greater than the tax increases, and to an extremely progressive program where those who can, best able to pay, are asked to pay. The Senate Finance Committee bill, according to the Congressional Budget Office, distributes 78 percent of the burden to people with incomes above \$200,000 whose taxes were lowered in the 1980's while their incomes went up.

So I think that this is a very, you know, it's a very important vote, and I hope we can prevail. But I never count my chickens before they're hatched.

Thank you.

Q. Are you counting any Republicans? Any Republicans, Hatfield or Jeffords?

The President. I've asked; that's all I know.

Q. Did you ask in phone calls?

Q. Mr. President, is the final arrangement on gays in the military going to require them to stay in the closet, sir?

The President. 'Bye, everybody; no more questions. I have to answer their questions.

Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:43 p.m. in the Indian Treaty Room of the Old Executive Office Building.

Exchange With Reporters Prior to a Meeting With the University of Arkansas Rollin' Razorbacks Wheelchair Athletes

June 24, 1993

Economic Program

Q. Mr. President, surrounded by all these winners, do you think you can be a winner tonight?

The President. Well, I hope so.

Q. What is your latest assessment?

The President. I feel just the way I did before the House vote. I'm just working. I'm working. We're picking up a few and—

Q. Have you called any Republicans?

The President. I think I should answer that question after the vote tonight.

Q. We don't want to blow their cover.

The President. I think I should answer that question—

Q. Mr. President, in retrospect, do you wish you had reached out more to Republicans early on? Some moderates say they'd be on board if you had.

The President. I don't know. I did call a number of them. And I tried to—after Senator Boren and Senator Danforth announced their little coalition—I don't mean little, I mean their coalition—I also reached out to some Republicans then. And I continue to reach out to some Republicans in the House. It's just rare in these first tough budget votes to get any votes from the other party. And I hope that

this will never happen again. I hope that it won't ever happen again.

But you have to understand, we're also trying to reverse 12 years of, basically, people being told the easy thing and letting the country just sort of slowly grind downhill. And we're trying to change it. And these changes are never easy. I never thought they'd be easy. I'm hopeful for tonight.

Q. What would be—in the conference committee, sir?

The President. I'll be glad to answer that question after we see if we're going to have

a conference. First, we have to prevail tonight. Let's try to make sure we win tonight, and then we'll be able to——

Q. Are you—[inaudible]

The President. I'm only concerned until there's a vote. We're working hard. I think we'll prevail, but let's wait and see what happens.

NOTE: The exchange began at 5:40 p.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. A tape was not available for verification of the content of this exchange.

Remarks to the United States Academic Decathlon Winners and an Exchange With Reporters

June 24, 1993

The President. I hope you enjoyed your tour of the White House. And I'm sorry we had to start a little late, but as I'm sure you know, a very important debate is now occurring in the United States Senate on the administration's economic plan, and I had to make a call or two.

Congressman Beilenson, it's good to see you. I bet you're glad you're not involved in that this afternoon and glad to be here with your folks.

It's a real honor for me to welcome to the White House a group of true student athletes: the gold, silver, and bronze medal-winning teams in the 1992–93 United States Academic Decathlon. The gold medalists are from Plano East High School of Plano, Texas; the silver medalists from Taft High of Los Angeles; the bronze medal winners of Mountain View High School of Mesa, Arizona.

These students have experienced the excitement of competition and the thrill of victory. And they should be a source of pride for young people all across our country. They've competed for medals in 10 different events, from math and science to language and literature, in an innovative and inclusive program which fosters competition, enhances self-image, and shows how truly exciting the pursuit of knowledge can be.

As I understand it, the team members also are required to give speeches, both prepared

and impromptu—that's a good preparation for being President—write essays and experience interviews. These young people are equipped not with javelins or shotputs but with intellect and knowledge and the ability to think creatively but with discipline.

The importance of this kind of pursuit of educational excellence cannot be overemphasized. We're at a moment in our history when we have to increase the educational ability of all Americans and in which it is not simply important how much our people know but what they are capable of learning and how quickly and well they are capable of thinking through complex problems that may face them tomorrow but are even unpredictable today. Because of these kinds of challenges, we cannot meet our educational excellence goals through Government mandates. We have to meet them through incentives and through environments which promote excellence and leadership from teachers and principals, the kind of group work that we see in this academic decathlon.

I applaud the academic decathlon, its president, John Foley, and its executive director, Ann Joynt. At this time, I want to say a special word of congratulations to the national champions, Plano Senior High School from Plano, Texas—Plano East. They're right behind me, right? In the center. When I was in high school, Plano had a great high school band. Do you still have a good band? It won a lot of national awards.