

Remarks and an Exchange With Reporters Prior to a Meeting With Members of Congress October 26, 1993

NAFTA

The President. Let me say, I'll take a few questions, but I intend to have the NAFTA legislation introduced next week, and we're hoping for a vote in November right before the, well, before the recess and before I go out to Washington State to the meeting of the Pacific leaders. We're pushing right ahead on it. I feel good about that.

I did have a conversation this morning with the Prime Minister-elect of Canada. I complimented him on his stunning victory and on the remarkable similarities between his campaign and the issues that he ran on and our campaign last year. And he said, "Yes," he said, "here they accuse me of copying you, but I told them that I had been in the Parliament longer than you've been around, so I figured you copied me." [Laughter] We had a great talk about it. We agree that we would see each other in Seattle. I'm looking forward to that. That will probably be our first opportunity to meet.

I understand that a lot of you have questions about what impact this election means on NAFTA. From my point of view, it will have no impact at all. I see no reason to renegotiate the agreement, or any grounds or basis for it. And I think we should just go ahead, and I think that all the countries involved have a lot at stake in proceeding. So that's what we plan to do.

Q. Mr. President, did he reassure you on that issue?

Q. Does the Prime Minister want to reopen—

The President. Why don't we take one question at a time.

Q. Did he reassure you on that issue? Does he want to reopen it?

The President. We didn't have any detailed conversation about it. I think that he didn't want to talk about it this morning. He's just, after all, come from a breathtaking victory. I don't want to characterize his position. That wouldn't be fair. But we had nothing occurred in the conversation which made me have any doubt that our course of proceeding is the right course.

Health Care Reform

Q. Mr. President, the National Association of Manufacturers has again today said that the health care plan is too cumbersome, too complicated, too expensive, should be scaled back. Are you going into some real headwinds on this as you unveil it tomorrow?

The President. No. I don't know what their position is. After their position was reported last time, the next day they called and apologized.

Q. But only for leaking the letter, not for their position. They repeated the position.

The President. No, they called and said that it overstated their position. All I know is that most manufacturers are going to save money under this. And if they want to look a gift horse in the mouth, that can be their decision.

Q. But have you—scale it back?

The President. No, absolutely not. If they don't want lower premiums, they can keep higher premiums and rising costs. It's their decision. But almost all manufacturers, nearly 100 percent of them, provide health insurance. And they will be the biggest gainers in the private sector under this. Now, if they want to walk away from having their retiree burdens alleviated and having their premiums costs go way down, that's their privilege. But I think when the constituency out there, if we can get people to look at the evidence, I think that they will want to do that. I think that all they're doing is—here, this organization is like everybody else—they're going to lobby for the best deal they can get. They're going to lobby for fewer extra services so their premiums will go down even more. But keep in mind, they're already among the big winners in this thing. And I think that they're just out there staking out a negotiating position like everybody else. We've just started this, and it will go on for several months. And you'll see a lot more of it. I'm not discouraged by that at all.

Canadian Prime Minister-Elect

Q. [Inaudible]—Mr. President, has the stunning victory made you take the pressure off the Prime Minister-elect—

The President. I would think it would be—

well, he certainly had a stunning victory. It was a real referendum in Canada. The way the press characterized it this morning, I think, is fairly accurate. People want a job-generating strategy, and they want the deficit dropped down, and those are the two things that he ran on. And obviously because he has a big parliamentary majority, he has some flexibility there. But I don't think it would be right for me to characterize, in any way, his attitude, position. It's just not the right thing to do. We had a really good conversation. Our two countries are as close probably as any two countries in the world. We have differences from time to time; we always will. But I feel very good about my conversation. And I think it's a good thing that now that he's been elected, he'll have the support he needs in the Parliament to govern. I think that's a good thing.

Spending Cuts

Q. Did you make your commitment to Senator Kerry this morning, Mr. President, with the spending cuts? Did you meet your commitment to Senator Kerry?

The President. They'll have another announcement about that. That was a whole different issue. The administration promised House Members; there weren't any Senators involved in that. There were House Members who wanted a chance to vote on at least \$10 billion more in spending reductions before the end of the calendar year, without regard to what we're going to be doing next year in trying to finish the implementation of the reinventing Government report. And so, that's what we did today. And we gave them more than that because we also would like to have some cuts to fund an expansion of the crime bill to pay for more police officers and to make sure that we fully implement that.

Q. Did he ask you about—

The President. We didn't talk about that.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:46 a.m. in the Cabinet Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Prime Minister-elect Jean Chretien of Canada. A tape was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

Message to the Congress Transmitting a Department of Transportation Report

October 26, 1993

To the Congress of the United States:

In accordance with section 308 of Public Law 97-449 (49 U.S.C. 308(a)), I transmit herewith the Twenty-fourth Annual Report of the Depart-

ment of Transportation, which covers fiscal year 1990.

WILLIAM J. CLINTON

The White House,
October 26, 1993.

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October 26, 1993

To the Congress of the United States:

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WILLIAM J. CLINTON

The White House,
October 26, 1993.