

perwork decisions that are driving the costs of this system through the roof.

And I ask you to remember that when you hear the million-dollar campaign ads of those who are going to tell you that we cannot have health security and comprehensive benefits for all at a price that will not break the American economy. I refuse to believe we can't do something everybody else has done. I think America can still do things that no one else has done. We can certainly do things that everybody else has done.

Let me say a special word about senior citizens. Our plan does not change Medicare at all. It preserves the benefits of Medicare and the integrity of the system. But our plan does cover prescription medicine for the elderly as well as for the nonelderly.

Now, let me tell you why that's important. If you look at the United States as compared with Germany, for example—two countries that have great pharmaceutical systems—we don't use as many prescription drugs as the Germans do. Why? Because they're not covered in our health care plans. Because they're not covered for elderly people on Medicare who aren't on Medicaid. What does that mean? It means people don't get the medicine they need. Eventually, they get sicker. They go to the hospital, and it costs more money. It is very important for the elderly, also important for a lot of these young people who might have asthma or some other condition that would require medication. Our plan covers it, and I think America should have it.

Under this plan we also move to cover long-term care for elderly people who aren't in nurs-

ing homes. This is a big deal, folks. The fastest growing group of Americans are people over 80. And more and more of our elderly people are going to need some help but want to maintain as much independence as possible. Our plan, over a period of time, as we can afford it, gives our older citizens the chance to maintain that independence. Nobody else does it. That's another good reason to support it, and I hope you will.

Finally, let me say to the students here, you will be more affected by this than any of the rest of us. You will live your whole life in an American economy hurtling toward the 21st century that will or won't escape economic stagnation, that will or won't bring us together as a family again and promote the values that made this community great, that will or won't have a political system that works through problems instead of just talks about them. The test of that, in large measure, will be this.

I say, this may not be perfect, but it is the only comprehensive plan that gives security to all Americans. It is the only one. I challenge the others to come forward with their ideas, send you their books, stand on their ideas. And I urge all of you to read this, ask the questions, and push ahead. America needs it. The next generation needs it. And you need it right here in this wonderful town.

Thank you, and God bless you all.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:21 p.m. in the gymnasium at Ambridge Area High School. In his remarks, he referred to Mayor Walter Panek of Ambridge and Samuel A. DePaul, superintendent of schools, Ambridge Area School District.

Remarks on the California Fires *November 3, 1993*

Good evening. For just a few moments, I want to speak to you good people in southern California who are enduring in an agonizing tragedy with the spread of the wildfires. Whenever natural disasters like this strike one region of our Nation, all the rest of us try to pull together as one community, a family, to help those in need. That's what Americans do. And that's why the prayers and good wishes of all

the citizens of our Nation are with the people of California. We're facing those fires together.

This has to be a terrifying experience for children awakened at night by their parents and carried away from their homes before they're lost; for property owners, some of whom have faced down a wall of fire with nothing more than a garden hose in their hands and a prayer in their hearts; and especially, for the gallant,

heroic men and women who are fighting these fires and risking their lives to save people and property from being consumed by the blaze.

I'm especially grateful for the work of the pilots, many of whom have flown after dark into strong winds to drop water on the fires to contain their fury. Their actions and the work of countless others define the word "courage," and we can never repay them for what they have done and what they are still prepared to do.

In the fires which struck the southland, we've moved quickly to speed Federal resources and a strong Federal response to those places where it could do the most good in helping the State and local efforts. After designating several counties as major disaster areas, we dispatched Forest Service air tankers and Federal firefighters to the scene. At my direction, Mr. McLarty, the White House Chief of Staff, has coordinated the Federal response. The Director of the Federal Emergency Management Agency, James Lee Witt, traveled immediately to the scene of the fires, along with Agriculture Secretary Mike Espy and our General Services Administrator, from Orange County, Roger Johnson. We worked with Governor Wilson and his emergency director, Dick Andrews, as well as the leaders in your congressional delegation, especially your Senators Boxer and Feinstein.

And until these fires are out, those in the inland empire, and the new ones tearing through the Santa Monica mountains, our work will continue, and we won't rest either. For these new fires, the Federal response has already begun. We're providing 37 air tankers, 100 fire crews amounting to 2,000 Federal firefighters, 86 fire engines, and 22 helicopters.

I've just spoken with FEMA Director Witt, and he assures me that the Federal efforts are well coordinated with the extraordinary work being done by private citizens and State and local government. I talked with Governor Wilson, and he said the same thing. Just a few moments ago, Director Witt announced my decision to provide \$15 million to the California

Office of Emergency Services to help pay for the State and local firefighting costs. This advance will be supplemented as further costs are identified in the coming weeks.

I know this is a big burden for California with all your other troubles, and we ought to do what we can to help. I know, too, from dealing with natural disasters in my home State of Arkansas that these problems put unbearable strains on the budgets of State and local government as well as on private citizens. We're going to try to help communities shoulder their extraordinary expenses that they're facing through no fault of their own. As we provide this help, we'll monitor the situation closely so that we can do more when more is needed to be done.

I know there are people who suffered losses who are upset and frightened about the future. I know there are families concerned about leaving their homes in the fire's path and moving to safety, perhaps spending the night in a shelter. I know there are public safety officers and firefighters who are exhausted from their exertions. And I know there are children who are frightened.

For them especially, but for all of you, I know words alone will not heal your hurt or make you whole. But I hope you will take some solace in knowing that your country is concerned about you and that I am closely following the work being done to protect you. I hope you are sustained by the knowledge that communities in California are pulling together and neighbors are helping each other. This is what our great country is all about.

Have faith, and take heart. Soon the tragedy will pass, and the recovery will begin. And as this happens, and you know that it will, you will be in the prayers and hearts of your fellow citizens. You are not facing these fires alone.

Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke via satellite at 8:45 p.m. from Room 459 of the Old Executive Office Building to the southern California community.