

Remarks Prior to a Meeting With Congressional Leaders and an Exchange With Reporters February 2, 1994

The President. Let me say just a word here. I can't speak very loud. This is our first but what will be the first of several bipartisan leadership meetings, and I'm looking forward to a productive year. We had a good year working together in 1993. We did a lot of things, and even though we have some differences to resolve, I'm convinced that we can resolve them and work together on crime and welfare reform and health care. And I'm looking forward to it.

Vietnam

Q. Mr. President, there seems to be a bipartisan majority, at least in the Senate, urging you to finally lift the trade embargo against Vietnam. Is this the moment that you're ready to move forward on that?

The President. Well, I've not made a final decision, but we are reviewing it and will be reviewing it over the next couple of days.

Q. —this week—have a decision this week?

The President. Well, I'll have a decision, I'd say, within the next several days.

Q. Is that decision harder, sir, because of your college-age protest against the war? Is it politically more tough?

The President. Not really. I mean, I think the fact that there are so many distinguished veterans who think that the embargo should be lifted and there are people on the other side who voted who were not veterans; this is an issue for the present day, and we just have to do what's right today.

Q. Is there any connection at all to the apparent exoneration of Commerce Secretary Ron Brown by the Justice Department and the grand jury, to this decision that could happen on Vietnam?

The President. No.

Health Care Reform

Q. The Business Roundtable today is supposed to support Cooper's bill. How will that affect you?

The President. They're trying to decide what their negotiating position would be. They told me yesterday, the representatives, that they had no thought that it would pass. They're trying to decide what their best negotiating position is. I made an argument that their best negotiating position ought to be to say what they thought was wrong with our bill, because almost all of them—not all of them, but almost all of them—favor guaranteed private insurance for everyone to stop the cost shifting to them. Most big businesses have paid higher premiums than they should have because of the cost shifting. And since they all cover their employees, most of them favor some form of universal coverage.

And so I argued that if that was really their position, their best policy ought to be to give a laundry list of everything they thought was wrong with our bill and that that was an appropriate thing, but they'll have to make their own decision about what they want to do.

Q. Can you convince them?

The President. I don't have any idea. I only talked to a handful of them, so I didn't have a shot at most of them.

President's Health

Q. How are you feeling?

The President. Good. It's getting better.

Q. Are you going to do mostly listening or talking?

The President. What do you think? I never learned anything talking in my life. [Laughter]

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:13 a.m. in the Cabinet Room at the White House. A tape was not available for verification of the content of this exchange.