

and the United States has great interest there. There are many jobs tied up in it, our whole strategy of promoting democracy and free markets throughout Latin America. I think we did the right thing, and I believe it very strongly, and I think that time will bear us out. And if it doesn't, then we have very good collateral

on this deal, so we have done the right thing by the American taxpayers and the American people as well.

Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 4:39 p.m. in the Briefing Room at the White House.

Remarks Following a Meeting With Congressional Leaders and an Exchange With Reporters February 22, 1995

The President. Good morning. Everyone here? I had an excellent meeting this morning with the House Democratic Caucus. We discussed a wide range of issues. I complimented them; I compliment them again on the work they are doing to remain unified in pursuit of the best interests of the people of this country.

I reaffirmed my willingness and desire to work with the Republican leadership in the Congress to advance the cause of the American people but that there are things which we simply disagree on and where we feel very strongly. I think it is ironic that here, on the 50th day of this 100-day effort that they are making to put in their contract, the single most important issue in the world to them seems to be to cut the School Lunch Program and end it.

An old conservative adage used to be, "If it ain't broke, don't fix it." Here's a program that isn't broke, that's done a world of good for millions and millions of children of all races and backgrounds all across our country, and I think it would be a terrible mistake to put an end to it, to gut it, to undermine it. And I hope that my party will stand against this. I do not agree with it. I do not think it is right, and it seems to me that this is one of the things that we hired on to do, to stick up for the interest of children, for the vast middle class, and for our future. And I intend to do that, and I believe the Congress will, as well—at least those in our party will, as well.

Mr. Leader.

[At this point, Representative Richard A. Gephardt made brief remarks.]

Tax Cuts

Q. Mr. President, as Republicans look at balancing the books now, support for a big tax cut is supposedly softening and may very well wither and die on the Senate vine. Do you still feel that it's responsible to have some kind of tax cut?

The President. Yes, I didn't—of course, I always thought their tax cuts were too big and couldn't be paid for. The one that I offered was, I think, roughly less than a third in aggregate costs of what theirs was. And of course, in the second 5 years, if theirs had passed, it would have been much greater. So I'm glad to see a sobering of attitudes about that.

But I do believe, again, that our main mission here has to be to try to advance the cause of the American people. And we have to continue to bring the deficit down, but we also have to recognize that there is out there in this country what Secretary Reich has called an anxious class, people who are working harder and for whom more jobs in the American economy have not meant more security.

If we allow a deduction of the cost of education after high school, especially if we couple that with a minimum wage increase, and continuing to increase the college loans and the investments in education, we will increase those folks' incomes in the short run in ways that will increase their incomes in the long run, increase their ability to pay taxes, and strengthen the American economy.

So I believe a carefully targeted tax relief to the middle class, tied to education in ways that will grow the economy and grow jobs, is

an appropriate thing to do. I'm glad to hear the talk of abandoning tax cuts of the size that were being proposed. I tried to tell the American people in the campaign there was no way in the wide world that could be done, and I welcome that talk.

Democratic Congressional Support

Q. Does this 50-day point mark some sort of turning point for you in terms of shoring up, taking a firm stand on things, trying to present the Democratic side as a unified side against the Republicans?

The President. Well, I think they've been doing a good job on that. There have been two or three issues here lately where the Democrats have really rallied: first, in the national security area, where they basically were responsible for not going back to Star Wars, which would have been a big mistake and, secondly, where they voted against abandoning our commitment to the American people to put 100,000 more police officers on the street. And I believe they will be even more unified against an attempt to destroy the School Lunch Program. So I feel good about that.

But I also think we have been willing to work with the Republicans. You know, the bill to

apply to Congress the laws that applies to the private sector passed overwhelmingly in the House of Representatives with the same level of Democratic support as Republicans support. The bill to reduce the burden of unfunded mandates on State and local governments received large Democratic support.

So we want to work with the Republicans. But we have no intention of abandoning the American people to unproven theories and extreme positions. We're the people party, and we're going to stick up for the people. And when we can do that in good conscience by working with them to reduce the burden of Government, we want to do that, and we should do that. But I'm excited by the opportunity that this new period offers us to stand up for what we believe in.

Q. Where will you draw the line?

Deputy Press Secretary Ginny Terzano. Thank you.

The President. What did you say? Thank you? You want me to quit? [*Laughter*]

Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:50 a.m. at the Capitol.

Statement on the Peace Process in Northern Ireland

February 22, 1995

I welcome today's announcement by Irish Prime Minister Bruton and British Prime Minister Major of the launching of a joint framework document outlining their shared proposals for inclusive talks on the future of Northern Ireland. The publication of this document marks another significant step forward in the peace process. I congratulate both Prime Ministers, former Irish Prime Minister Albert Reynolds, Irish Foreign Minister Dick Spring, and British Secretary of State for Northern Ireland Sir Patrick Mayhew, all of whom have worked hard and risked much in the search for a new path forward to reconciliation and lasting peace.

The framework document lays the foundation for all-party talks among the British and Irish Governments and the political parties in North-

ern Ireland. The talks are intended to be all-inclusive, with all issues on the table. As the Irish and British Governments have emphasized, the document is designed to assist discussion and negotiation on Northern Ireland and will not be imposed on any party. The clear wish of the people of Northern Ireland is for a lasting peace. We call upon all the parties to examine the document carefully and move forward on the basis of it.

The guns and bombs have been silent in Northern Ireland for almost 6 months. The benefits of peace are obvious to all, and I urge the parties to seize this opportunity. I will continue to strongly support the peace process in Northern Ireland and to work with the Governments of Ireland and the United Kingdom to