

July 22 / Administration of William J. Clinton, 1995

I'm very disappointed by what has happened since or, more accurately, what hasn't happened. The Speaker announced that he would send me his proposal, but he never has.

I think the people of this country want us to move forward with political reform. Speaker Gingrich and I shook hands on it. We have an obligation to get this done and not walk away. If we're going to restore a spirit of civility to American politics, a handshake has to mean in 1995 what it meant when I was growing up: We have to be as good as our word.

Today, to move this process forward, I'm announcing that two distinguished Americans have agreed to work with me to get the commission idea underway. They're the kind of people I will appoint as its members. John Gardner's name is synonymous with integrity. He's a Republican Cabinet Secretary to a Democratic President, the founder of the citizens' lobby Common Cause, a wise and effective man. Doris Kearns Goodwin is a political scientist and a Pulitzer Prize winning author. She understands through her knowledge of history and today's political situation how politics affects the lives of ordinary people.

I have asked John Gardner and Doris Kearns Goodwin to meet with Speaker Gingrich as soon as possible and the other congressional leaders, to get them going on this idea so that we can make this commission a reality and keep our commitment to the Frank McConnells and all the other Americans who want us to improve the way our political system works.

John Gardner and Doris Kearns Goodwin will help us to get this movement going. And now I call on Speaker Gingrich and the other congressional leaders to come forward and do their part. The Speaker and I made a deal, and it's time to keep it. There's no excuse for further delay.

We already have signs of bipartisan agreement. On Monday, the Senate begins to debate on legislation to require lobbyists to disclose who they are, what they're paid, and what bills they're trying to influence. And the Senate will vote on legislation to ban lobbyists from providing lawmakers meals or gifts or travel. If a judge took a paid vacation from a lawyer in his courtroom, he'd be disbarred. But if a lobbyist pays for a trip to a sunny climate, right now it's perfectly legal. And it happens all the time.

Congress should send me the strongest possible ban on lobbyist gifts, such as the bill introduced by Democratic Senators Carl Levin and Paul Wellstone and Republican Senator Bill Cohen. Congress should not send me a bill that's more loophole than law. I hope the action I'm taking today will help lead to real political reform. We have to do everything we can to show the American people that their Government works for them and not the special interests.

Thanks for listening.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:06 a.m. from the Oval Office at the White House.

Remarks to the American Legion Boys Nation

July 24, 1995

Thank you very much. To all the delegates of Boys Nation, I'm delighted to be here, as you know, with many members of our administration who are involved in the setting of economic policy for our country; delighted to see Mr. William Detweiler, the national commander of the American Legion, here; along with your other leaders, Ray Smith; Ron Engel; Jack Mercier, who has been with Boys Nation for 31 years and I believe was there—that would make 32 years—when I was there in 1963; George Blume and others.

Let me say, as I'm sure you know, I am especially delighted to welcome all of you here to the White House. I don't have to tell you what an important event this is for me every year and how much I look forward to it. But this is an especially important time for all of you to be here. The world in which you will live, the world which I am sure many of you will help to lead, can be America's greatest time. But it is a world being transformed to a degree seldom seen in all American history. Much of this change is good. But it's not all good.

If you look at what is happening in America, we have more new businesses being formed, more Americans becoming millionaires, more people finding success than at any period in our history. But most Americans are still working harder for the same or lower pay they were making a few years ago, with greater levels of personal insecurity about their ability to take care of their parents if they get sick, their ability to educate their children, their ability to hold on to their own health care.

If you look at what's going on, most of our social problems are being addressed very well in many places. In most major cities the crime rate is down, but the rate of random violence and crime among our youngest teenagers is going up, and there are still too many problems with crime and violence, with drugs and gangs.

If you look around the world, the cold war is over and peace and freedom and democracy and world trade are all increasing. But still there are serious problems with what I call the organized forces of destruction: ethnic, religious, racial hatreds leading to awful wars, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction in tiny amounts, as you saw when the terrible bomb exploded in Oklahoma City or the gas was released in the Japanese subway. So we have both a great deal of good and a great deal of troubling change going on in the world today and in our country.

In recent weeks I have addressed those challenges in the face here at home, first, to restore the American dream of opportunity and the American value of responsibility and, second, to bring our country together in a stronger community so that we can move forward together. I believe those two goals are inseparable. I believe the only way we can restore economic opportunity and solve our social problems is to unite our people more.

I can tell you that it would have been unthinkable when I was here in 1963—we had a lot of problems in 1963; we had severe racial problems still; the country was still largely segregated—but it would have been unthinkable if someone had told us in 1963 that 30 years from now the country would be as deeply divided as it is today and that people would have lost faith in their institutions and would have the level of cynicism and skepticism that they have today.

My vision for your future is a very positive one. I want this country to be a high-oppor-

tunity, smart-work country with good jobs and safe streets, with a clean environment and excellent education and health care, a country in which diverse people live and work together, in which communities and families can solve their own problems and in which people are given the chance as individuals to live up to the fullest of their God-given potential in a world that is steadily moving toward more peace and freedom.

When I say we have to restore the American dream of opportunity and the American value of responsibility, when I say we have to rebuild America's sense of community, that is simply a strategy to reach that vision, a strategy rooted in an obligation Americans have always accepted, the obligation to give each successive generation a better life than the preceding one had. That is an obligation from which I benefited and one from which millions of others have benefited as well.

Exactly 32 years ago, on July 24, 1963, I came here as a delegate to Boys Nation when John Kennedy was President. I would never have made it here and gone from that day to this one without the benefit of the shared beliefs and convictions and opportunities that made up the America of my youth. I lived in a family where everyone worked hard and where children were expected to study hard. I also had a lot of opportunity given to me by my community. I had good teachers, good schools, and when I needed them, scholarships and jobs to make my education possible.

I saw what happened, too, when good people had no opportunity. There were a lot of good people I grew up with who had no opportunity because they were of a different race or because they happened to be poor and white and isolated in poor communities in the hills and hollows of my State. I have lived my public life believing that everybody ought to have the chances that I had and that if everybody did and we all worked together, this country would be able to go on indefinitely as the world's best hope for freedom and opportunity. My philosophy is rooted in these beliefs, and the experience of the United States bears out that they are the right ones.

I imagine the same is true in your lives. I'm sure a lot of you have been amazed at how very different your backgrounds are and yet how much you seem to have in common. Our Nation's work must reflect what you have in com-

mon. And our Nation's budget, which we're debating here with such intensity now, must also reflect those common values and our shared vision for the future.

The priorities of American families and their household budgets aren't all that much different than the priorities of our larger American family and our Nation's budget. The way we spend our money as individuals, as a family, and as a nation says an awful lot about who we are, what our values are, and what our vision for the future really is. We are at an historic moment, as I have said. For the first time in a long time, the leaders of both major parties agree on one thing we have to do consistent with our values, and that is to balance the Federal budget and relieve our children and our grandchildren from the burden of a permanently increasing Federal debt.

You know, we never had a structural or permanent deficit in our country until about 1981. But from 1981 until the day I took office, the national debt was quadrupled. When I came here I was committed to getting that deficit off our backs. In the first 2 years of our administration, we cut the deficit by a third, and we are now reducing it for 3 years in a row for the first time since Harry Truman was President of the United States just after World War II.

But it is still such a problem, what happened in the previous 12 years, that the budget would be balanced today, today, except for the interest payments we make on the debt run up between 1981 and the day I became President. And this debt is so great that next year interest on the debt could be larger than the defense budget. This is a very significant problem, and there is more to do.

Therefore, it is good news that both the Congress and I have offered plans to balance the budget. Both plans involve significant spending cuts which will not be easy to meet. Both plans protect our ability to maintain a strong defense and the world's finest military. Beyond those similarities, however, there are profound differences, differences that go to the heart of our ability to find common ground, to rebuild the American community around the old-fashioned values that I talked about just a moment ago. The commitment to our future I believe that we all have must be defined in large measure today in how this budget contest is played out.

The congressional budget balances a budget in 7 years. My budget does it in 10. The con-

gressional budget cuts taxes by about \$250 billion over 7 years. Our budget cuts taxes but by slightly less than half that amount. Why? Because our budget, by making those changes, enables us to increase investment in education and training by about \$40 billion over the next 7 years, to help make sure all Americans have a chance to develop the fullest of their abilities and to compete and win in the global economy.

This is very important. About half of all the students in college today everywhere in America have some form of financial assistance. It is critically important to maintain it. It is critically important that everybody who wants to go to school has a chance to go and has a chance to finish. And it's a big part of what our national security will mean in the global economy.

Our budget strengthens health care coverage, especially for seniors through Medicare, and provides families some help in caring for their elderly parents who don't go into nursing homes. Our budget protects the food we eat, the air we breathe, the water we drink. It rewards work, concentrating tax policies on helping working families to raise their children and to educate both their children and themselves, because we know more and more adults will have to go back for job training over the course of their work lives. And it preserves our investments in science and technology, so that our workers and our businesses can compete the world over in a rapidly changing technological era.

Our budget achieves all the economic benefits of balancing the budget. It gives you lower interest rates, higher investment in private dollars. It reduces the amount we'll have to pay on the debt for interest in the years ahead. But it maintains these other priorities, which I believe are essential to rebuilding the American community and finding common ground.

These priorities are not Democratic or Republican priorities. They are commonsense, national decisions that have served us very, very well over the last generation. They have stood the test of time. They have marked our character as a nation, and they mark the road to the future we should take.

Now, some in Congress say we need to retreat from the common ground we have so carefully built on education, on Medicare, on the environment, on science and technology to balance the budget in 7 years with these big tax cuts. They say we need to slash Federal aid to the schools

and to increase the cost of student loans. They say it is all right to make the elderly pay up to thousands more for their Medicare benefits and to dramatically reduce our ability to protect the environment to meet the 7-year time period with the big tax cuts. They say all this is necessary to balance the budget. But many would use the balanced budget as an excuse to do these things which they wish to do anyway.

I have shown we can balance the budget without retreating from our common ground on education, on health care, on the environment. So I invite Senators and Members of Congress from both parties to join me in balancing the budget while protecting our common ground. I will work hard to get their support. But if they refuse, I must continue to act, alone if necessary, to protect the common ground that brought every single one of you into this White House today. I will do that. *[Applause]* Thank you very much.

Let me say again, there is no question that we have to balance the budget. And the majority in Congress deserve credit for proposing a plan to do that. But we do not have to do it in 7 years. We do not have to do it with massive tax cuts to people who don't really need it.

The haste of their schedule and the scope of their tax cuts are luxuries, and this is not a time for luxuries. Think again about your family's budget. If you can't afford luxuries right now, you don't sacrifice necessities to have them. Take education. I think it's a necessity. From the birth of the land-grant colleges during the Civil War to the creation of the GI bill 51 years ago this summer, we have understood that when we invest in the education of our people, it makes the whole country stronger.

We have understood that, regardless of party, right through the first 2 years of our administration. In 1993 and in 1994, we had bipartisan support for the most remarkable education agenda in the last 30 years. We had higher standards for our schools. We had more affordable college loans with better repayment terms. We had a national service initiative, AmeriCorps, that now gives 20,000 young people a chance to serve in their communities and earn money for their college educations.

We had a dramatic expansion of Head Start, a program that has enjoyed bipartisan support for decades now. We expanded the age at which children were eligible, improved the quality of the program, and increased the numbers of kids

in Head Start to make it more likely that more Americans will have a chance to be sitting where you're sitting today. But now, as a part of this balanced budget program, many in Congress are willing to cut 50,000 people out of the Head Start program and block its expansion.

Another example is the commitment to educate and train all Americans. We know the global economy demands more skills and information than ever before. We know—we know that the middle class in America today, including many of your parents, are either going up or going down economically, are either increasing their security or feeling more insecure, based directly on the level of skills they have. We know that. We know that is a reality for the lives of Americans all across this country.

So what did we propose? We proposed to do everything we could to increase the access of people to college and to increase the training available to adults. But again, many in Congress would cut the Pell grant program by 300,000 slots a year. That's 300,000 poor people who won't get college degrees to become middle class people, maybe even rich people, and pay back far more to the Treasury in taxes than they ever took out in the Pell grants.

And the job training in some ways is the most troubling of all. I have proposed that we consolidate all the Government's training programs into one big scholarship program for adult workers who are unemployed or are underemployed, giving them a voucher worth up to \$2,600 a year to go back for 2 years to get further training so they can increase their abilities to earn a good living. We should not reduce this. We should increase this. We shouldn't reduce it. People are in trouble out there today in this country because they don't have the education and skills they need to maintain family-wage jobs in a global economy. These are very important. We don't have to get rid of this to balance the budget.

The same is true about health care. Thirty years ago, we decided as a people that we would at least protect the elderly of this country from the fortunes of not having adequate health care. We did it with Medicare. We did this as an extension of the compassion we feel in our own families, for the elderly in our individual families.

Medicare has worked well. It has low administrative costs. It has covered all people over 65. I might add that we are the only advanced coun-

try in the world that doesn't have some form of universal health coverage for everybody. But at least we do it for senior citizens. It's a basic American value. We help take care of people who raised us up and took care of us.

Before Medicare, half of the elderly people in this country had no health insurance whatever. Now, 97 percent of the senior citizens in America have access to health care. Of course, we have to reduce the rate of inflation in the Medicare program. I have said that from the first speech I gave to the Congress as President. But we can do this by reforming Medicare, not by ruining it. We can still maintain protections for every senior citizen in America, instead of deciding that some will do fine and others will get the shaft.

Some in Congress want to cut \$270 billion from the Medicare program, about the same amount they want to cut taxes. Their proposal would require our seniors—maybe some of your grandparents—to pay as much as \$5,600 more a couple in out-of-pocket costs. So we cut spending in one way and offload the burden to others. That does not reflect the values of most American families. Maybe some people can afford to pay some more because they're upper income, but most seniors in this country hardly have enough to live on as it is.

If you look at the attack on the environment, you see another example. The environment has been a bipartisan issue in America. The Environmental Protection Agency was established under the Presidency of Richard Nixon, a Republican President. We have shared a common commitment to the environment. Perhaps our country's most outstanding environmental President was our first environmental President, Theodore Roosevelt, again, a Republican. This has never been a partisan issue.

We have agreed for a long time as a people that the stewardship of our natural environment is a big part of maintaining the American dream. With the first Earth Day, 25 years ago, Americans came together to say no to dirty air, toxic food, polluted water and say yes to leaving our children a nation as unspoiled as their dreams. We recognize together that our business in creating jobs was not undermined, and in fact could be enhanced, by protecting the environment.

We all know that in the last two decades there have been some rigid regulations and some unreasonable enforcement that have limited the effect of our laws and alienated people

from the whole cause of environmental protection. So we should change the way our regulators do their work. We have worked very hard to do that. Right now, we have in motion an initiative that will reduce by 25 percent the amount of time people in the business community spend complying with the environmental laws.

Right now we are putting in place a small business program that says to every small business person in America, if you're worried about violating an environmental law, if you will call us and ask for help, you cannot be fined for 6 months. We will work with you because you asked for help. We're not interested in fining people; we're interested in protecting the environment. But that is very different from just walking away from our commitment to protect the environment.

Some in Congress want to slash funding for enforcement by almost 50 percent. It could put at risk the safety of the water we drink. It would increase the chances of raw sewage washing up on our beaches. It would excuse some polluters from having to clean up their mess. That is not our vision.

Believe it or not, some of these restrictions would actually undermine the ability of the United States to enforce the Clean Air Act. The Clean Air Act was last signed by President Bush, my Republican predecessor, who said it was his proudest legislative achievement. This has always been a bipartisan thing. It is now being put at risk in this budget debate. And I believe it undermines our ability to find common ground.

Others say we should cut science and technology, the most powerful engine we have to boost our economy.

Finally, there are even proposals that would undermine our ability to make work more attractive than welfare. I have worked now for 15 years, long before I became President, to move people from welfare to work. I have learned that most people on welfare want to go to work and that one of the things that we permitted to happen over the years was to build in too many disincentives to work. So that's why I've supported welfare reform proposals that would move people from welfare to work. We have given 30 States permission to get out from under Federal rules and regulations, to come up with new and innovative ways to move people from welfare to work, including letting States

take welfare checks and give them to employers as income supplements so they would actually hire people to go to work.

One of the things we have to do is to make sure we don't tax people back into poverty. And when people are out there working on low wages, what we did in 1993 was to say, if you're out there working 40 hours a week and you have children in your house, you should not be in poverty. The tax system shouldn't put you in poverty. We will lower your taxes. If necessary, we will give you a tax refund so that if you'll work 40 hours a week, you can raise your kids outside of poverty. There are even some people who want to erode that tax cut so that we can cut taxes for people who don't really need it in this budget program.

There are a lot of things being done here which will violate and undermine our chances to achieve common ground. And they do not fall into the traditional partisan differences. Most of these things have been supported by Republicans and Democrats. The tax provision for working families was called by President Ronald Reagan the most important pro-family, anti-poverty initiative in the last 30 years. Now there are people in Congress who are trying to erode it. And it is wrong. And it undermines our ability to make common ground.

The 7-year timetable and the huge tax cut, these are luxuries. To make room for them, some in Congress would slash necessities. I say, let's take 10 years instead of 7; let's have a modest tax cut targeted toward what people really need, which is help in raising and educating their children and knowing they can always get new education and training themselves; and let's keep on investing in the things that are our necessities. These things will create millions more American dreams if we continue them.

We can cut taxes. We can balance the budget. But we have to do it in a way that maintains what has been for decades and what clearly is now the common ground on which we can go forward together.

Your parents recognized that it was unacceptable to destroy the environment and created the environmental movement. My parents saw the pain of their parents and insisted that we create Medicare. Every generation has done something to build up and create the fabric that is what we know as the American dream. We now have to create a system of lifetime education and training that all can have access

to, and we now have to deal with these social problems that have been too long ignored. We can do it in a way that permits us still to balance the budget and lift that burden from your future. So I say to the Congress, come back to common ground. We can do this.

The Congress has recently passed the so-called rescission bill. You may not know what that means, but basically it's a downpayment on our balanced budget. It cuts from the budget that we are presently spending in this year.

This rescission bill, when they first sent it to me, caused me to veto it because it had unacceptable cuts in education, training, and the environment. When we went back to the table to work together, Congress came up with a revised bill that reflects our shared values. It permits us to cut \$16 billion from this year's budget; to maintain our commitment to education, health care, and the environment; to invest in helping those people in California who still are suffering from the earthquake; to deal with the terrible tragedy in Oklahoma City; to keep our commitment to the Middle East peace process and a number of other things and still cut even more spending to continue our work toward balancing the budget.

Now we share, I hope and believe, a basic commitment that each generation must take account of the accumulated wisdom of generations that have gone before as well as our new ideas. When we ignore the evidence of what has plainly worked, in the attempt to fix what is plainly wrong, we pay a terrible price. We mustn't throw over, in a moment of partisan zeal, the common sense and bipartisan conclusions of our fathers and mothers, derived from lifetimes of experience with problems that we will only have to suffer through again if we ignore that experience.

So I ask you as you come together in this wonderful Boys Nation experience, and you debate these issues. Imagine what you want your country to look like. Ask yourself what your vision of the future is like. Write it down on a piece of paper. What do you want America to look like in 20 years? What is your vision, and how will we achieve it? And what things do we have to do together? What things ought we to be for, whether we're Republicans or Democrats, whether we live in the Northeast or the far West, whether we're men or women, and without regard to our racial or religious background? What are those things that we can

say, "This is what we want America to look like."?

That, my friends, is where we must find our common ground. And that is what I am determined to protect in this great debate to balance the budget.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:11 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Ray Smith, chairman, American Legion National Americanism Commission, and Ron Engel, director; Jack Mercier, director of activities; and George Blume, legislative director, Boys Nation.

Remarks at the Posthumous Commissioning Ceremony for Johnson C. Whittaker

July 24, 1995

To the members of the Whittaker family, Secretary West, General Davis, General Gorden, General Griffith, Senator Hollings, Senator Thurmond, Congressmen Spratt and Clyburn, ladies and gentlemen, welcome to all of you.

Today is a good day for the United States. Today we honor the memory of a great American, Johnson Chesnut Whittaker. Born into slavery, he was appointed to West Point in 1876 at the age of 17. Life at West Point was harsh for all cadets, but for the few African-Americans like Johnson Whittaker, it was doubly difficult. He was ostracized by his white peers. Few spoke to him except to issues orders and commands.

From the beginning, the odds were against him. Then in April of 1880, Johnson Whittaker was assaulted in his barracks. Three masked men tied him to his bed and left him battered, bleeding, and unconscious. His superiors charged that Whittaker had mutilated himself and faked unconsciousness to gain attention. After a lengthy court-martial, he was convicted and sentenced to dismissal from the Army.

The court-martial was overturned by President Chester Arthur. But on that very day, the Secretary of War dismissed Johnson Whittaker from West Point. The grounds for dismissal: He had allegedly failed an oral examination in philosophy.

Johnson Whittaker was a rare individual, a pathfinder, a man who through courage, example, and perseverance, paved the way for future generations of African-American military leaders: General Chappie James, Lieutenant General Benjamin O. Davis—who is with us today—General Colin Powell, and so many others. In part because Whittaker and others like him took those first brave steps, America's Armed Forces

today serve as a model for equal opportunity to our entire country and indeed to the world.

Johnson Whittaker did more than open doors in our military; he left to his descendants a remarkable legacy of determination and a sense of duty. Two of his sons served as Army officers during World War I. One returned home and served the citizens of his State as president of South Carolina State University. A grandson flew with the famed Tuskegee Airmen during the Second World War. His granddaughter, Cecil Whittaker Pequette, who is here with us today, gave voice to her community as a founder of the Detroit Tribune. And today his great-grandsons, one a lawyer, the other a surgeon, also carry on the Whittaker tradition.

During his 4 years at West Point, Cadet Whittaker found his greatest source of comfort and strength in the Bible. Today, fading words on the inside cover of that fragile volume reveal a young man whose essential goodness still offers a lesson to all of us: "Try never to injure another by word, by act, or by look even," he wrote in his second year at the academy. "Forgive as soon as you are injured, and forget as soon as you forgive." On the following New Year's Day, Johnson Whittaker resolved, and wrote in his Bible, "never to commit an act at which my kind mother would have to blush, to do right at all times, under whatever circumstances and at whatever cost."

We cannot undo history. But today, finally, we can pay tribute to a great American, and we can acknowledge a great injustice. I would like to do two things today: first, to present to Mrs. Cecil Whittaker Pequette what may have been her grandfather's most prized possession, that old Bible that soothed his loneliness and