

it would not be sufficient to stabilize the fund. Only by making this kind of commitment can we keep the program on firm financial ground well into the next century.

Every independent expert agrees that Medicare cannot provide for the baby boom generation without substantial new revenues. Beyond that, it is clear that it will also require us to make difficult political and policy choices. Devoting 15 percent of the surplus to Medicare would stabilize the program and improve our ability to modernize and improve its services and to make those hard choices.

I want to thank the members of the Medicare Commission for their hard work and for their recommendations. Today I am instructing my advisers to draft a plan to strengthen Medicare for the 21st century, which I will present to this Congress. I look forward to a good and healthy debate about how best to strengthen this essential program. We must find agreement this year. Medicare is too important to let partisan politics stand in the way of vital progress. I believe if we make the hard choices, if we

work together, if we act this year, we can secure Medicare into the future.

Thank you very much.

Q. Mr. President, your critics are suggesting that by not endorsing the Breaux plan you're simply assuring that there will be a campaign issue, something the Democrats can run on.

The President. I want an agreement this year. I have given my best assessment of where we are now, of what my objections are. I think it is now incumbent upon me to present an alternative proposal, and I will do that.

But I want to make it clear that I believe we owe it to the American people to make an agreement this year, and I'm going to do my dead-level-best to get it done.

Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 3:55 p.m. outside the Oval Office at the White House, prior to his departure for Palm Beach, FL. In his remarks, he referred to the derailment of Amtrak's City of New Orleans train in Bourbonnais, IL.

Statement on Proposed Child Care Legislation

March 16, 1999

Making child care better, safer, and more affordable is at the heart of my effort to help America's parents balance their responsibilities at home and at work. Today, more than ever, parents struggle to find high quality, affordable child care for their children. That is why I have proposed significant new investments in child care, expanding subsidies and providing greater tax relief for working families, increasing after-school opportunities for children, improving child care quality, and providing new tax relief for parents who choose to stay at home.

I am pleased that today key Members of the House of Representatives took steps to move us closer to enacting meaningful child care legislation. Representative Ben Cardin introduced important new legislation—the "Child Care Im-

provement Act of 1999"—that, like my proposal, addresses the critical child care needs of working families. And Representative Ellen Tauscher and numerous Democratic colleagues introduced a comprehensive child care package—the "Affordable Child Care, Education, and Security Act"—that incorporates many of my proposals and would go a long way to fully addressing the child care demands of working families. These bills would help Americans fulfill their responsibilities as workers and their even more important responsibilities as parents. I look forward to working with Representative Cardin, Representative Tauscher, and other Members of Congress on both sides of the aisle to meet the child care needs of America's families.