

modernize Medicare and provide voluntary prescription drug benefits and keep it solvent until 2027. Following a meeting with my advisers, the Chairman of the Senate Finance Committee, Bill Roth, has agreed to engage in serious discussion on meaningful Medicare reform.

I'm reaching out to the Republicans to engage with us on Medicare. I want to do the same on education, on Social Security, on paying down our debt. We owe it to the American people to give it our best efforts. The results

could make the 21st century America's best days.

Thanks for listening.

NOTE: The address was recorded at 5:27 p.m. on September 24 in the Oval Office at the White House for broadcast at 10:06 a.m. on September 25. The transcript was made available by the Office of the Press Secretary on September 24 but was embargoed for release until the broadcast.

## Remarks on the National Economy and an Exchange With Reporters *September 27, 1999*

*The President.* Good morning. In a few moments I will be leaving for Louisiana. But before I depart, I want to say a few words about the course we're charting for America's future.

Seven years ago, when I ran for President, it was a time of low growth, high interest rates, and high unemployment, a vicious cycle driven by deepening deficits. Irresponsible policies had quadrupled our national debt and risked our future. Vice President Gore and I took office determined to change all that. We put in place a new strategy for the new economy, one founded on fiscal discipline, expanded trade, and investment in our people and modern technology.

The success of that strategy now is clearer than ever. By balancing the budget, we put in motion a virtuous cycle of budget surpluses, low interest rates, and low unemployment. For business, this makes it easier to invest, to create jobs, wealth, and opportunity. And for working people, lower interest rates makes it easier to own a home, afford a car, send a child to college.

Today we received more good news that our strategy is working. According to the Office of Management and Budget, this year's budget surplus will be at least—I'm going to write this in; enjoy it—at least \$115 billion. This triple-digit surplus is larger than projected, larger than last year's, and larger, in fact, than any dollar surplus in the history of the United States. It is a landmark achievement for our economy. And when you consider where we were just 7 years ago, it's as great an American comeback

as the Ryder Cup was yesterday. It is further proof that we're on the right road to prosperity.

Our Nation has come a long way in a short time. In 1992 the budget deficit was \$290 billion, projected to rise above \$400 billion this year. Instead, as you can see, we have posted back-to-back surpluses for 2 years in a row, and believe it or not, that's the first time this has happened since 1957. Now, in 1957, well, that was the year John Lennon first met Paul McCartney, and the Braves won the World Series—not the Atlanta Braves, the Milwaukee Braves.

Our prosperity now gives us an unprecedented opportunity and an unprecedented responsibility to shape America's future by putting first things first, by moving forward with an economic strategy that is successful and sound, and by meeting America's long-term challenges. In that spirit, I have asked the Republicans in Congress not to throw in the towel but to work with me and congressional Democrats to do the work the people elected us to do: to save Social Security with a lockbox that extends in solvency until 2050, to strengthen and modernize Medicare with a long-overdue prescription drug benefit, to invest in world-class education for our children, and to protect important priorities, from national security to the environment and agriculture to medical research and modern technology to investment incentives for rural and urban areas that have not yet been touched by our prosperity.

We can do all that and still have an affordable tax cut for the middle class and pay down our

debt so that by 2015, we are debt-free for the first time since 1835 when Andrew Jackson was President. I will work with members of both parties to fulfill these fundamental obligations to our people and to our future. I hope they will work with me.

Thank you very much.

#### *Appropriations Legislation Veto*

Q. Mr. President—

Q. Will you veto Republican spending bills if they exceed the caps?

*The President.* Well, I gave them a budget, of course, that did not break the caps, but it would require them to raise some revenues from tobacco. But the main thing that I would say is, I want them to work with me to meet our fundamental priorities. We can give the American people an honest, credible budget that extends the life of Social Security and Medicare, meets our responsibilities in education and other important areas, and leaves us free to pay down that debt and to put America on a target to be debt-free in the next 15 years. I hope they will work with me in that spirit.

We have to come together and work together to get anything done, and we can do that. I cite these examples over and over again, but the Welfare Reform Act in 1996, coming on top of the initiatives we had taken in the previous 3 years, has now given us the lowest welfare rolls in 32 years; and the Balanced Budget Act completed the work of the economic package of 1993, and we now have this \$115 billion surplus. So the American people know we can do things together, and that's how we're going to have to do this.

#### *Social Security*

Q. Do you still plan to offer a plan to reform Social Security? The White House had promised more than a year ago that there would be one after the last election.

*The President.* We have met several times, as you probably know, at various levels with Members in the House, and we have tried to get close to an agreement on that. The reason I said what I said today is that if they would just agree to my plan on paying down the debt and then dedicating a few years of the interest savings by locking up the Social Security taxes, which would happen a few years in the future, but if they would agree to do that, then that, alone, would extend the life of Social Security

to 2050, which would take us out beyond the life expectancy of all but the most fortunate baby boomers. So I would hope that at least we could do that.

Obviously, I would like to do more, and we're still working on that. But at the minimum, we could do this.

#### *Working With Congress*

Q. Sir, there's every indication Republicans will not work with you. But in the meantime, where does the American taxpayer stand in this battle between your rock and their hard place?

*The President.* Oh, I think if the past is any measure, one way or the other, the taxpayers are going to be all right, because we can do pretty well by conflict, I suppose, and eventually drag this out to where we've at least got a decent education budget and we're still paying down the debt. But they have to work with me if we're going to extend the life of Medicare and Social Security and do some of these other very important things.

I'm not pessimistic; we've still got plenty of time. I know it's almost the end of the fiscal year, but they know how to extend that; they've done that several times by passing a continuing resolution, and there's still plenty of time to do this, and I hope they'll do it with me.

#### *Indonesia-U.S. Relations*

Q. Mr. President, will our relations with Indonesia remain the same while they're torturing the villages?

*The President.* Will their what?

Q. Will relations with Indonesia remain the same as the villages are being tortured—torched, torched, sorry.

*The President.* They've already been somewhat altered, as you know, by the cessation of military cooperation, and obviously our relationships with them will have to be dictated by the course of their conduct. As you know, they have a somewhat unusual system where they have elections. They had elections several weeks ago, but they still haven't settled on who the new leader of the country will be.

This is a time of great instability and uncertainty for them. We should stand against those actions which violate human rights and which are wrong, but we should also hope that both stability and humane policies will be returned to Indonesia as soon as possible. It is a very

large country with 200 million people, the largest Muslim country in the world and capable, as we have seen periodically over the last few years, of enormous progress and capable of playing an important, positive role in the future of Asia, and that's what I hope and pray will happen. But it will require responsible leader-

ship from Indonesia, as well as appropriate responses from the United States and others.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 8:11 a.m. in the Rose Garden at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to former Beatles Paul McCartney and the late John Lennon.

### Remarks at Sophie B. Wright Middle School in New Orleans, Louisiana *September 27, 1999*

Thank you. Thank you so very much. My good friend Congressman Jefferson—I want to say more about him in a minute—and to his wonderful wife, Dr. Andrea Jefferson. Senator Landrieu, thank you for your friendship and support. Mayor Morial, you were very kind to talk about the role that we play in helping to lower the crime rate in New Orleans, but it never could have happened if we hadn't had a visionary mayor down here who made the most of the policies that were there.

Colonel Davis, thank you for taking on the challenge of educating the children of this parish. To Gail Glapion, thank you very much for what you said. And Scott Shea, thank you. And Brenda Mitchell, the leader of our teachers, and especially to our principal, Charlotte Matthew, thank you for leading this school and for making me feel so welcome here.

And I want to say a special word of thanks to all the people of Louisiana. As Congressman Jefferson said, in 1992 and 1996 you gave your electoral votes to Bill Clinton and Al Gore, and we are profoundly grateful, and we've tried to be worthy of them.

I also want to thank the McDonogh High School Band. I want to thank them for being here. The rest of you are hot; they're in those band uniforms. I used to be in one, and I know how hot they are. And I want to thank them for being here.

One other thing I'd like to say about this school, I want to compliment this school on your school uniforms. I like them, and I'm glad so many schools in this parish have them. I've been trying to promote them all across America for years now, and I thank you for that.

You know, folks, I may have visited more schools than any President in history. I've certainly tried to. And I have never met a child that couldn't learn or a school that couldn't do better and be turned around. There is a student standing behind me—and I don't want to embarrass her, but I want her to raise her hand—named Nonya Grove, who scored at the 95th percentile on the science portion of the Iowa basic skills test. Good for you.

Let me tell you, too, I have been in schools in all kinds of places—I've been in schools—I went to a junior high school in Chicago in a neighborhood with the highest murder rate in the city, which was, therefore, the highest murder rate in the State. But there was no violence in the school; there were no weapons; there were no problems. Hundreds of parents came to the school every week, and there were no dropouts, and almost all the kids went on to college. Why? Because they had a good plan, and they worked it hard. And they believe that all kids could learn.

Now, the Federal Government does have an obligation to help you. And I want to thank Senator Landrieu and Congressman Jefferson and Senator Breaux and the others in your delegation and our party who have supported what we have tried to do to help the States, to help the States adopt higher academic standards in the Goals 2000 program, to help them crack down on drugs and gangs and violence. And last fall we fought to get a downpayment on 100,000 new highly trained teachers to lower those class sizes in the early grades, as Congressman Jefferson wants to do.

Already 108 more teachers have been hired in this parish, and your parish got \$12 million