

NOTE: The memorandum was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on April 7. It was not received for publication in the *Federal Register*.

## Remarks on Signing the Senior Citizens' Freedom to Work Act of 2000 April 7, 2000

Thank you. Let me say, first of all, to Flo Mallonee, I thought she did a great job. Her family must be very proud of her. And if you get tired of the job you're in, you might consider elected office. [*Laughter*]

I'd like to welcome all the former Social Security Commissioners here and say a special word of appreciation to our current Commissioner, Ken Apfel, and Deputy Commissioner Bill Halter. I'd also like to acknowledge the contributions of Jim Roosevelt, until recently the Associate Commissioner for Retirement Policy at the Social Security Administration, something that would have made his grandfather very proud of him; and former Representative Barbara Kennelly of Connecticut, who is the current Associate Commissioner for Retirement Policy.

There are many leaders of the aging community here today; I welcome them. But most of all, I want to welcome this very large delegation from the United States Congress, and at risk of—if I forget anybody, do not be shy. But my notes say that present here today are: Chairman Bill Archer; our minority whip, David Bonior; Representative Ben Cardin from Maryland; Representative Mac Collins from Georgia, who is here with his granddaughter who is happy that her grandfather can continue to work into his later years—[*laughter*—Representative Joe Crowley from New York; Representative Sam Johnson from Texas; Representative Sandy Levin from Michigan; Representative John Lewis from Georgia; Representative Ron Lewis from Kentucky; Representative Bob Matsui from California; Representative Jim Ramstad from Minnesota; our subcommittee chair, Representative Clay Shaw from Florida; Representative John Spratt from South Carolina; Representative Jerry Weller from Illinois. I don't think I've missed anybody. And you should give them all a big hand; they did a fabulous job. [*Applause*]

Over 7 years ago now, when I took office, the Vice President and I made a commitment to a 21st century vision of America, with oppor-

tunity and responsibility for all American citizens and a community of all American citizens. To do it we thought we would have to reward both work and family and create a Government that would borrow less and invest more. For 7 years, we've worked hard on that.

Today, the size of the Government is about what it was in 1960, 40 years ago, thanks in large measure to higher productivity from the Federal work force and the advent of new technologies. Thanks to strong cooperative efforts in the Congress, we have turned record deficits into surpluses, and we've enjoyed the longest economic expansion in history.

We've tried to find ways to reward work and family, doubling the earned-income tax credit for working families with modest means, passing the Family and Medical Leave Act, improving the college loan program, and providing tax credits for college costs that were never there before, and many other initiatives. But we know, increasingly, how we deal with Social Security will be a test of our commitment to family and, increasingly, to work.

In the 65 years since President Roosevelt signed it into law, Social Security has dramatically transformed the lives of older and disabled Americans. Seniors were once the poorest people in America. Today, thanks to Social Security, they are the least likely to live in poverty. In spite of the fact that many seniors enjoy other sources of income, if there were no Social Security in America, almost half the seniors in the country would be below the poverty line.

Thanks to Social Security, many of our seniors have a level of independence that few older Americans could even have dreamed of 65 years ago. And thanks to Social Security, we Americans continue to uphold the sacred compact between the generations.

But FDR himself said, and I quote, that "Social Security represents a cornerstone in a structure which is by no means complete," and that "new conditions impose new requirements upon

Government and those who conduct Government.” He would have been the first to agree, I believe, that Social Security must change to keep pace with changing times in America.

The system originally was designed to encourage older Americans to retire by withholding benefits from those 65 and older who worked. Keep in mind, 65 years ago, when Social Security was initiated, the life expectancy in this country was not 65. The so-called retirement earnings test made some sense in the Great Depression, when the Nation was desperate to find jobs for young workers with families and the unemployment rate in our Nation was 25 percent.

Conditions today could hardly be more different. The economy is booming, the unemployment rate at its lowest point in 30 years. Companies desperately need more workers. Older Americans have the skills and the experience that businesses need. Indeed, one of the most interesting things that was said to me today before we started is—Flo said it’s a good thing we did this, because she’d be hard to replace at her present position. *[Laughter]*

That’s true. Increasingly, older Americans want to work. Many of them for various reasons need to work. And we know, as a practical matter, that unless they’re in terrifically physically draining jobs, that continuing to work may well add not only to the length but to the quality of their lives.

Today, one in four Americans between 65 and 69 has at least a part-time job. Eighty percent of the baby boomers say they intend to keep working past age 65. And I’m the oldest of the baby boomers, so I can speak for our generation. One of the reasons I went to law school is so nobody could ever force me to retire. *[Laughter]* Although I spent the better part of my life trying to escape law practice—*[laughter]*—I still remember vividly how I felt about it, even as a young man, and I still have some solace in that.

Yet, because of the Social Security retirement earnings test, the system withholds benefits from over 800,000 older working Americans and discourages countless more—no one knows how many—from actually seeking work. It has long seemed senseless to me.

In the 1992 campaign, Vice President Gore and I campaigned on scrapping the retirement earnings test. When it became obvious that the work that we had all done together to balance

the budget and run a surplus and to stabilize the fund would make it possible to do so with no adverse impact, in my 1999 State of the Union Address, I proposed it.

But what has happened here is truly astonishing. I hope this will go out all across America today. All you ever hear is how much we fight up here. This bill passed unanimously. Nobody was against this. And it is a tribute to the people who work on these issues in the Congress and those who have listened to them, but also it shows that there is a keen awareness here of how the aging of America and the improved financial condition of our country and our Government has totally changed the landscape.

But I think it also reflects the understanding that this is a genuine human rights issue. We want people to have this right to choose the life they want or they need. The Senior Citizens’ Freedom to Work Act means that hundreds of thousands of older working Americans will get checks next month reimbursing them for all the Social Security benefits withheld this year.

Yesterday morning, in Chappaqua, New York, I went to get my morning cup of coffee in my new little village—*[laughter]*—and a lady came up to me and said, “You know, I’m a public school teacher, and my district needs me. But I’m 65 years old. Are you guys ever going to get around to lifting that earnings test?” And you know—it’s terrible—I’m embarrassed to tell you this, but I can hardly keep up with my schedule from one day to the next, and I didn’t remember that I was doing it the day after tomorrow. I said, “In just a few days I think you’ll be very happy.” *[Laughter]* So if you’re looking at me today—*[laughter]*—we did it.

This bill not only means that our seniors will be able to enjoy extra income and personal fulfillment that comes with work without being penalized. It means companies with labor shortages will have a fresh supply of experienced workers, increasing our ability to grow without inflation. In the future, it will mean more baby boomers working longer, contributing more to the tax base and to the Social Security Trust Fund at precisely the time when the percentage of younger workers paying into the system will be dropping.

This is a big deal. If present work rates continue and present birth rates and present immigration rates continue, when all the baby boomers get in here, there will only be two people working for every one person drawing

Social Security. This may also change that and help to further stabilize the Social Security Trust Fund itself.

The retirement earnings test means higher benefits for—ending it means higher benefits for working seniors with no negative effects—I say this again—no negative effects on the long-term fiscal health of the Social Security Trust Fund. So it's the right thing to do for seniors, but it's also a smart thing for our Nation.

I'm also pleased today to announce another important innovation to upgrade Social Security for the information age. Beginning today, Americans of any age can find out in seconds what their Social Security benefit levels will be in the future. All they have to do is to log on to the Social Security Administration's website, [www.ssa.gov](http://www.ssa.gov), and click on the new Social Security retirement planner. It provides estimates of future benefits based on your past, present, and estimated future income, and a new tool for the growing legion of Americans who are learning to use new technologies to make their own investment decisions and retirement plans.

Two days ago, at the White House Conference on the New Economy, I discussed with leading experts on technology how Government could use the Internet to empower individuals and strengthen civil society. This new retirement planner is just a small but powerful example of the kind of innovations that I believe have the potential to transform the relationship between the United States Government and the American people.

Let me, finally, just add one cautionary and hopeful note. These steps today are profoundly important, but I believe we should do more to strengthen Social Security. I think we should extend the life of the Trust Fund well into the middle of this century, while strengthening benefits for older women living alone, who are still much more likely to be in poverty than other seniors.

Last fall, I proposed legislation to pay down our debt for the first time since 1835 and use the benefits of debt reduction, which would now—if we took the benefits of debt reduction that we're getting because of the surplus in Social Security tax collections now, the benefits are manifested in lower interest payments for the United States on this debt as we pay the debt down. If we took those lower interest payments, that benefit, and we put it into the Social Security Trust Fund, we could extend the life

of the Trust Fund to 2054, which will be well beyond the life expectancy of all but the most fortunate baby boomers.

I hope we can work with Congress to pass that plan this year. It is a simple measure. Some of us would like to do more. We may not be able to do more in an election year, where there are genuine and honest differences between the two parties and even within the parties about how to proceed on this issue. But at least, if we could simply take the interest savings the American people have given us with their Social Security taxes, which are now in surplus over distribution, and pay the interest savings from paying down the debt into the Trust Fund, think of it: We'd have 54 years on the life of the Social Security Trust Fund. So I hope we can do that.

I also hope we can strengthen incentives for working families to save by passing the retirement savings plan that I recommended. And I hope we can expand high-quality pension coverage for millions of workers. I have proposed tax credits for small businesses to establish good pensions for their employees. It's harder for them, and I think we ought to give them more help to do it.

Again I say, conventional wisdom says that nothing important happens in Washington in an election year. Today we have proved the conventional wisdom wrong. This is an election year. This is important, and it happened by unanimous vote of the United States House of Representatives and Senate. So, so much for the conventional wisdom, and good for the seniors in America and those of us who hope to be part of the doubling of the senior population in the next 30 years.

Let me also say, I think it's important to point out that it's not just seniors who should be happy about this, and I'm glad Flo has got her whole family here. One of the most profound worries of the baby boom generation is that, because we are so large, when we retire, if we haven't made adequate provision for it, our retirement will impose a big burden on our children and their ability to raise our grandchildren. So this should be a happy day for Americans of all ages today, because a very good thing has been done for the future.

So I thank you all for being here. I look forward to working with you to further strengthen Social Security, to strengthen Medicare. I hope we can agree to add a prescription drug

benefit there. I hope we can reauthorize the Older Americans Act. I hope we can do a lot of other things this year. But the spirit—again, I want to thank the Members of Congress, the Republicans and the Democrats, for the spirit behind this action. This is how America is supposed to work. You have done a good thing today.

Thank you very much.

Now I'd like to invite the Members of Congress to come up here for the bill signing. And

I'd like to invite the seniors to go over this way and kind of stand behind me, too.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11 a.m. in Presidential Hall in the Dwight D. Eisenhower Executive Office Building. In his remarks, he referred to Florence Mallonee, Social Security recipient, who introduced the President, and Brittany Collins, granddaughter of Representative Mac Collins. H.R. 5, approved April 7, was assigned Public Law No. 106-182.

## Remarks on the Legislative Agenda for International Family Planning Assistance

*April 7, 2000*

Thank you very much. Please be seated. Good afternoon, and welcome to the White House on this beautiful day. I want to thank all of you who have joined us, particularly the Members of Congress who are here. Representatives Carolyn Maloney and Jim Greenwood will speak in a moment, but I also want to acknowledge the presence of Representatives Nita Lowey, Nancy Pelosi, Ellen Tauscher, Lois Capps, Connie Morella, Joe Crowley, and Barbara Lee. Thank you for being here.

I thank Secretary Shalala for being here and for her strong advocacy. And Secretary Albright and Dr. Ifenne of Nigeria will talk in a moment. We are joined today by the Ambassadors from Albania, Colombia, and Nigeria. We welcome them.

I want to thank the foundations and the non-profits who are here, who have stepped up their own support for women's health and family planning, and all the individual citizens who have also come here to take part in this endeavor.

This week Congress begins debate on a new budget. And we have a new chance to return America's support for family planning around the world to the level it ought to be, a new chance to lift the international family planning debate out of partisan politics and back to what it's really about, human potential and human lives. I have proposed an increase of \$169 million in USAID's international family planning assistance this year and \$25 million to support the U.N. Population Fund.

Members of the administration and I have made clear at every opportunity that we are ready to fight, and I know you are ready to help us win.

One person who is not here today, who wanted very much to be here, is Hillary, but she's out struggling to make sure I gain a place in the Senate spouses club. *[Laughter]* But I would like to quote something she said last year at the Hague forum: "We know that no nation can hope to succeed in the global economy of the 21st century when its women and children are trapped in endless cycles of poverty, when they have inadequate health care, poor access to family planning, limited education, or when they are constrained inside social or cultural customs that impoverish their spirits and limit their dreams."

Two weeks ago I was in a little village in India, a country with nearly a billion people and a per capita income of about \$450 a year. I met the women who, with the smallest amount of encouragement, have started the women's dairy cooperative and taken over the local milk business. I saw their community center's computer that any village woman, poor or nearly illiterate, can use to get the latest information on caring for a newborn child.

Think about how life in that one village is changing for the better because women have access to education and health care. Hillary and I have seen again and again around the world, in the smallest, poorest rural villages on every continent, how empowering women lifts the