

increase in the minimum wage, which you want, and a scaled-back school bond proposal, which you also support.

The President. A scaled-back what?

Q. A scaled-back school bond proposal. But they are also considering including the Medicare giveback, which you've threatened to veto. Would that veto still hold if the tax package includes these provisions which you support?

The President. Well, it depends what the Medicare thing looks like. The only thing that bothered me about the Medicare issue is that we were working along in a bipartisan way. We had some differences. They want to give what I think is too much money to the HMO's. They say they need to do it because the HMO's are dropping people, dropping Medicare folks from coverage in their HMO's. But if you look at the provision, the money goes to the HMO's without any guarantee of continued coverage for Medicare patients who may have serious problems.

So the thing that bothers me about it is, you have a lot of other—look, we all have acknowledged that in the Balanced Budget Act of 1997, to achieve the savings we targeted we had certain specific changes in the Medicare program which, number one, produced greater savings than we estimated, or than the Congressional Budget Office estimated, and did so at a cost to the health care providers which was unacceptable; and that there were substantial difficulties for urban hospitals, for rural hospitals, for the teaching hospitals, for nursing homes, home health providers, hospice services, the whole range of things.

And I have no objection to the HMO's being given consideration in this bill. The only point I tried to make is that if you give them as much money as the Republicans do, you severely short the urban and rural hospitals, the

teaching hospitals, and these other providers that I just mentioned.

So the question is, can we achieve some balance here? I hope we can. This is a very important thing. I sympathize with the Republican leadership in not wanting to let the cost of this bill balloon out of control. And I offered to work with them on that. That is something—a goal that we both share. But this should be a question that's decided strictly on the merits. This is not a political issue with me. You have all these folks; they have people they have to care for. We made a decision in '98 to sign a balanced budget bill, and they made a decision to pass it, which had specific changes in the Medicare program designed to produce an amount of savings. The savings were greater, and accordingly, the loss to the providers was greater, and the quality of health care is, therefore, strained.

So what we need to do is just take this on the merits. So I don't want to turn this into a big political fight. I just think this is one where the facts should get out, and we should do what the facts indicate is the best balanced thing to do with the money we have available for all the providers. And I simply don't think that their proposal does that or even comes close. So I hope we can reach agreement on it.

Thank you. I've got to run.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:55 a.m. on the South Lawn at the White House prior to departing for New York City. In his remarks, he referred to Chairman Yasser Arafat of the Palestinian Authority; Prime Minister Ehud Barak and former Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu of Israel; and Republican Presidential candidate Gov. George W. Bush of Texas.

Remarks at a Reception for Representative Gregory W. Meeks in New York City

October 25, 2000

Thank you very much. Thank you. Let me say, first of all, I am delighted to be here with Greg and Simone-Marie and their beautiful daughter. Chelsea and I were glad to come by,

remembering when Chelsea was that age. Didn't she do a good job of sitting through her daddy's speech? I thought it was fabulous. [Laughter] Right in the middle of the speech, she was

looking at him. She said, "Daddy." So your name recognition is high where it needs to be. [Laughter]

I am honored today by the presence of the Manhattan Borough president, Virginia Fields, and Assemblywoman Vivian Cook and Senator Malcolm Smith and our members of the council, Archie Spigner, Tom White, and Juanita Watkins. Let's give them all a big hand. [Applause] Thank you for being here.

I feel a great deal of gratitude today, and every day these days—I'm very grateful to the people of New York for being so good to me and Hillary and Al and Tipper Gore, for your support in 1992 and 1996. I'm very grateful for Greg Meeks. He is an outstanding Congressman. He has supported our economic initiatives, our education initiatives. He's been a real champion for building one America, and I think he has a brilliant and limitless future in the House of Representatives.

Let me say to all of you, I know whenever I do an event like this, in the parlance of my faith, I'm always preaching to the saved, or you wouldn't be here. But I think that it's important in the last 2 weeks of this election that we reach out to other people, to tell them how important it is to vote and what is at stake here.

I have, as you know, more than a passing interest in the elections in New York this year—[laughter]—because Hillary is running for the Senate and because we now have a home here, and I want it to be the leader of the country. New York kind of led the way for us over the last 8 years, and I hope it will continue to do so.

And I just would like to tell you that not only as President but as a soon-to-be citizen who has spent a lifetime looking at this country, studying it, hoping for the best, I think it's important that every American understand that there are really three great questions in this election. There may be a thousand questions, but there are three that override all others for me.

And if I were sitting alone with any of you in a room and we were just having a conversation and there was no press coverage and no particular political impact and you asked me what the election was about, I would tell you exactly the same thing. I think the first question is, how do we keep the prosperity going and extend it to people and places that have been

left behind? We have the longest economic expansion in our history, the highest homeownership in history, 22 million jobs, the lowest African-American and Latino unemployment ever recorded, the lowest female unemployment in 40 years, welfare rolls cut in half.

We have done a lot of important things. The Vice President has run our empowerment zone program, and thanks to Charlie Rangel, one of them is here in New York. And we've worked hard to increase lending to people who have been traditionally shut out of access to capital.

And I'm grateful for all that. But there's a lot more we can do. We can keep the economy going, and we can extend it to people and places left behind. But in order to do it, we have to, first of all, build on the strategy that got us to this point, fiscal responsibility, investing in our people and our future, and selling more of our products and services around the world. That's how we got here, and if we want to keep making progress, we have to do that.

Now, only Al Gore, Joe Lieberman, Hillary, and Greg Meeks, that team, will make America debt-free, will keep paying down the debt until we're debt-free in 2012, will keep investing more in education and science and technology, in solving the energy problem, in the environment, and all the things that we need to be investing for our future, and have a tax cut we can afford as opposed to one that might be more attractive at election time.

And this is very important, because on everything else rests our ability to continue to build our prosperity. I always say one of the things that I wish the American people knew is that if you pay down the debt and we keep doing it, we'll keep interest rates lower. One of the big reasons that the American economy turned around is, from the moment we announced our economic plan after the election in 1992, interest rates started to drop; the stock market was building; investment began to flow into America at record levels.

If you pay down the debt, as opposed to spend so much on a tax cut and privatization of Social Security and other spending that we'll be back in deficit, interest rates will be about a point lower a year for a decade. Do you know what that's worth to ordinary people and to people who are in high-income groups and to people who serve this lunch today? Three hundred ninety billion dollars in home mortgages savings

over a decade; \$30 billion in lower car payments; \$15 billion in lower college loan payments; lower credit card payments; lower business loans, which means more businesses, more jobs, and a better stock market.

I think it is quite interesting that in the financial capital of America, New York City, it's one of the strongest places in the country for the Gore/Lieberman ticket, because people understand here that keeping interest rates low is more important to prosperity and to wealth creation and to keeping the expansion going than having a large tax cut in the short run.

And so I hope you'll tell people that. We've got to keep the prosperity going. And if you want to do it, you've got to keep paying the debt down and then use what's left for investment in education and the future and for an affordable tax cut. And the people who are on that program are Al Gore, Joe Lieberman, Hillary, and Greg Meeks. That's the first thing.

The second thing I want to say is, this country is not just progressing economically; it's progressing in other ways as well. Just for example, the crime rate is at a 26-year low. We have a cleaner environment, cleaner air, cleaner water, safer drinking water, 3 times as many toxic waste dumps cleaned up in our 8 years than in the previous 12 years under two administrations of the other party. We have, for the first time in a dozen years, the number of people without health insurance is going down, thanks to the Children's Health Insurance Program, and New York has been one of the best States in the country in enrolling kids.

And the schools are getting better. The dropout rate is down. The reading and math scores are up. The college-going rate is at an all-time high. We have had, in the last 5 years, a 50 percent increase in children taking advanced placement classes, but a 300 percent increase in Latino kids and a 500 percent increase in African-American kids taking advanced placement classes in high school, so they can go on to college. This is a big deal.

Now, what should we do about this? I think we have to continue to invest in what works. And in every one of these areas—I won't go through it, but in every one of these areas, if you want to build on this progress, you've got to be for Gore/Lieberman, Hillary, and Greg, because there are differences between the two parties, and they would reverse the policies that

we've had in education and health care, the environment and crime.

So that's the second big question. I think it's a good thing that America's a safer country. I think we ought to have more police on the street, not fewer. I think we ought to have more teachers in the classroom. I think we ought to modernize our schools. I think we ought to have universal access to preschool, after-school, and summer school programs for the kids who need it. And I think now we know we can turn around failing schools, we ought to give out this Federal money in a way that every State has to identify its failing schools and turn them around or shut them down and reopen them under new management. That's what I think ought to be done.

You could find lots of exhibits here in New York. I was in Harlem the other day, in a grade school that 2 years ago—listen to this—2 years ago 80 percent of the kids were doing reading and math below grade level. Enter new management, new policies, high expectations, accountability. Two years later now, same school, same neighborhood, same kids, 74 percent of the kids are doing reading and math at or above grade level. We can do this. We can make all of our educational system work.

That's the second big question. The third big question, maybe most important of all, is whether we're going to continue to build one America and be heavily involved in a positive way in the rest of the world. What does that mean? To me, it means passing strong hate crimes legislation, being against racial profiling, passing employment nondiscrimination legislation, passing the immigrant fairness legislation that is so important that we're fighting for now in the Congress, continuing to support AmeriCorps, our national service program, preserving a woman's right to choose, and having a Supreme Court that will protect the rights of the American people, not restrict the right of Congress to advance our public interests.

Now, these are big, big issues. And if you believe that it's important to keep building one America—and there are differences between the parties from top to bottom on these issues—if you agree with us, your only choice is Gore/Lieberman, Hillary, and Greg.

So that's my pitch to you. There are three big issues in the election: Do you want to keep the prosperity going and build on it, give it to people and places left behind? Do you want

to keep the progress going in the environment, in crime, in education and health care, and build on it? Do you want America to continue to be a model for harmony, because we're living with each other in an increasingly diverse society? And I might say one other thing: Do you want us to continue to be involved in the rest of the world?

I've been working for the last 3 weeks to try to end the violence in the Middle East, stop the killing, and get the peace process going. We have worked successfully to end ethnic cleansing in the Balkans. And I think it's a good thing that we went there, and I think it's a good thing that we're there now. Even though we only have 15 percent of the troops in Kosovo and Bosnia, we're important to the preservation of liberty there.

I don't know how many ethnic groups there are in New York City that have known in the past people who tried to wipe them off the face of the Earth, just because of their religion or their ethnic background. And we have to be a force for this around the world.

Why is the United States, for example, historically so committed to the preservation of Israel? Because we learned in World War II and we learned from the Holocaust survivors and their children and people who have come here the terrible price we pay. We've learned from our own racial history. We've learned from our own history with the Native American tribes what happens when people can be denigrated, dehumanized, killed, and walked away from and ignored, just because of who they are.

So this is a big deal to me. I think building one America and standing for these values around the world is the most important thing, even more important than keeping our prosperity going, because Americans are smart and they're innovative. If they get in a tight, they'll always figure out how to solve their problems as long as we have the right value system and as long as we believe everyone counts, everyone deserves a chance, and we all do better when we help each other.

So if you want that kind of America, working for that kind of world, your choice is Gore/Lieberman, Hillary, and Greg. That's my pitch, and I hope you agree.

Let me just say one other thing. I know when the Vice President sometimes says, "You ain't seen nothing yet," people say, "Well, he's running for office. What do you expect?" But I'm not running for anything. For the first time in 26 years, I'm not on the ballot. And I can tell you, I believe that. It takes a long time to turn a country around. It takes a long time, after a certain order in the world goes away—in this case, the order imposed by the cold war—to kind of figure out how to make the most of the new set of arrangements. And I've done everything I could to turn our country around, to move us forward, and to pull us together and have the right approach toward the rest of the world, toward Africa and Latin America, as well as Europe and Asia, to really reach out and be involved as a force for peace and prosperity. And I believe the best stuff is still out there.

In my lifetime, our Nation has never before enjoyed at once so much economic prosperity, social progress, with the absence of domestic crisis or foreign threat. This is the chance of a lifetime to build the future of our dreams for our children. But in order to do it—none of us can imagine what the end results of all these scientific discoveries are going to be; none of us can see with absolute clarity what the big new problems of the next 10 years or 20 years will be. But we know one thing: If we keep the prosperity going, if we build on the social progress, if we keep building one America, if we keep reaching out to the rest of the world, America is going to do very well, indeed—the best chance you may ever have in your lifetime to build the future of our dreams for our children. And the answer is, I want you to tell everybody you know, Gore/Lieberman, Hillary, and Greg.

Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:37 p.m. at the Embassy Suites Battery Park. In his remarks, he referred to Representative Meeks' wife, Simone-Marie; State Senator Malcolm A. Smith; and New York City Councilmembers Archie Spigner, Thomas White, Jr., and Juanita E. Watkins. Representative Meeks was a candidate for reelection in New York's Sixth Congressional District.