

down—and not to buy new health care but just more for the same. We can't do it.

There may be other ideas than mine, but I'll tell you one thing: I hired on to solve problems. And I showed up for Richard Fisher tonight not because he will agree with me on every issue, he will disagree from time to time. He will vote for the people of Texas, not for me. But he will hire on to solve problems. He does not want to come up here and warm the seat or have empty rhetoric or just spout empty rhetoric. Public service should be about ideas and ideals and vision and what's good for ordinary people. That's how this country lasted 218 years.

And I believe he's got a chance to win that is better than average. And more importantly, I think he has that chance because he is right for the people of Texas, and that will be good for the United States of America. And I thank you for helping him.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 7:45 p.m. in the Chinese Room at the Mayflower Hotel. In his remarks, he referred to Robert Strauss, former chairman, Democratic National Committee.

Remarks and an Exchange With Reporters Prior to a Meeting With Congressional Leaders

July 20, 1994

Legislative Agenda

The President. Let me begin by thanking the Democratic leadership for coming today and saying we have a very active several weeks ahead of us in this session of Congress with action pending on health care, on the crime bill, on GATT, with bills pending on campaign finance reform and lobby reform and several other things. We're going to have a lot of work on our hands.

I would like to restate a few things about health care in light of the meeting with the Governors yesterday. First of all, my goal is universal coverage. It is the only goal that works for ordinary Americans. I have always said, from the time I presented my bill, that I was flexible on how to get universal coverage and would be willing to compromise on that. I was encouraged that the Senate Minority Leader said yesterday that he was

willing to work every day in August, September, and October if necessary to get a good health care bill.

But let me make the main point I was trying to make yesterday. Whatever we do must work for ordinary Americans. We now have a lot of evidence that if we tinker around with the system and don't try to do something comprehensive, we could actually make it worse for ordinary Americans. We could increase the cost to middle class Americans and decrease coverage.

I am very encouraged that today the American Medical Association and the AARP, the American Association of Retired Persons, joined the AFL-CIO in coming out for universal coverage and shared responsibility between the employers and the employees. That's a very good sign that they have analyzed this in the same way that we have. And I hope it will contribute to the debate. I believe it will. They joined, as you know, the heads of virtually every medical school in America, the Nurses Association and other doctors' associations, thousands of small business people.

So, we have to do something that works. That's going to be my bottom line. Let's don't do something that won't work.

Health Care Reform

Q. Mr. President, the confusion seems to be over how you define universal coverage.

The President. I don't think that's right. The only definitional issues that arose in the Congress were definitional issues that some people around this table were involved in on the so-called trigger mechanism, what level of coverage that you're making progress for universal coverage would trigger further action and what wouldn't. That's something that will be up to the congressional people to work out.

The point I was trying to make yesterday is that we have no way of knowing, we have no evidence that there is any available and affordable way to get close to 100 percent of coverage without some sort of requirement that involves everybody paying. That's the point I was attempting to make yesterday, but I'm willing to listen if somebody's got another idea that will work. We mustn't do something that doesn't work.

We have this Catholic Health Association study which shows conclusively that if you just try to do insurance reforms you could wind up with higher rates for middle class people at lower levels of coverage. That is the essence. But let's do something that works for ordinary Americans.

Q. But 95 percent would still leave millions of Americans uninsured, and don't you have the same problem then if they are uninsured that there will be the cost shifting that you —

The President. No one ever talked about a law. There's never been a suggestion that we have a law which would set that as a goal. That number only came up in the context of the so-called trigger bill. Nobody did that. And no one has yet found a way to do that without a law that says "universal coverage." The point I made yesterday is we have universal social security, but about 2 percent somehow don't get covered. We have universal school attendance laws in every State in the country, but there are always a couple of percent of the people that fall through the cracks. [*Inaudible*—write it into law to get this.

Q. Are you sorry —

The President. No. I'm sorry that after all my skills and efforts at communicating, the point I really made yesterday somehow didn't get through, which is that we now have the evidence of the States and another study which shows that the opposing bills, the alternative bills, will not work. That is the issue. We must do something that works.

Q. Are you considering working through August, September, October?

The Vice President. Why are you interested, Helen [Helen Thomas, United Press International]? [*Laughter*]

The President. Let me just say this. I'm sure—Senator Dole offered that yesterday, and I would gladly accept. Of course, I'm sure it's not just up to him and to me. But I think it's worth it for the American people to get a good health bill.

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:20 a.m. in the Cabinet Room at the White House. A tape was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

Remarks Prior to Discussions With President-Elect Ernesto Perez Balladares of Panama and an Exchange With Reporters

July 20, 1994

President Clinton. First, I'd like to welcome the President-elect of Panama and congratulate Mr. Perez Balladares on his election and on the successful democratic transition in Panama. I also want to thank him for his interest in the Summit of the Americas and his interest in exercising a leadership role in helping us to work on money laundering, drug trafficking, and a lot of the international criminal problems that we face together. And finally I'd like to thank him for his willingness to help us to establish some safe havens for people who are leaving Haiti. All these things, I think, augur well for his strong leadership not only within Panama but throughout the hemisphere, and I'm looking forward to this meeting.

Haiti

Q. Mr. President, Congressman Richardson is saying that General Cédras is not intransigent, that he's realistic, indeed, that he wants to talk; whereas William Gray is saying time for talking is over, there's nothing to talk about except "When are you going to leave?" Who do you agree with, if either of them? And should the U.S. be talking to Cédras?

President Clinton. You have to ask Mr. Gray about that. But the issue is, if he wants to talk about when he's going to leave, then I'm sure that somebody would talk to him. But they have usurped power. They agreed to go in the Governors Island Agreement, Mr. Cédras and the others; they have not gone, and they must go. That's our position.

Q. Is Panama now offering safe havens for Haitian refugees?

President-elect Perez Balladares. Well, as you know, in a democracy there is only one President at a time. We're willing to cooperate because we think it's a hemispheric duty to bring about democracy in Haiti and also because we think it's humanitarian. Therefore yes, we would be inclined after September 1st, when I start my term, to work