

Message on the Observance of Hanukkah

December 15, 1995

Warm greetings to all who are celebrating Hanukkah.

Each year, as the days grow shorter and the nights colder, we welcome the return of this Festival of Lights, and each year we find fresh meaning in its ageless story of the triumph of the Maccabees. We are reminded of God's powerful presence in our lives, strengthening and sustaining us in times of struggle. We are inspired to reflect upon the meaning of courage, commitment, and faith. We are encouraged to acknowledge our blessings—the love of family, the strength of community, the hope of peace. We rediscover the wisdom of pausing, in the rush and hurry of everyday life, to give joyful thanks for these blessings.

This year, especially, we need such reminders, for with the death of Yitzhak Rabin, a great man, a true friend, and a peacemaker was taken from our midst. But as families throughout our nation and around the world gather to rekindle the flames of the menorah, let us renew our faith that God will continue to guide our steps through adversity until we can all rejoice in the light of peace.

Hillary and I extend best wishes for a joyous Hanukkah and a wonderful holiday season.

William J. Clinton

NOTE: This item was not received in time for publication in the appropriate issue.

Statement on the Nomination of General Joseph W. Ralston to be Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff

December 15, 1995

I am pleased to announce that I have nominated Gen. Joseph W. Ralston, U.S. Air Force, for assignment as Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, succeeding Adm. William A. Owens, who is retiring.

General Ralston currently serves as the Commander, Air Combat Command. In this capacity, he is responsible for training and equipping all active Air Force, Air National

Guard, and Air Force Reserve combat wings and squadrons in the United States and Panama. During his distinguished career, General Ralston flew more than 2,500 flying hours, including 147 combat missions over Laos and North Vietnam. He also served as the Air Force's Director for Tactical Programs and its Director for Operational Requirements. In the latter capacity, his championing of the rapid transition of advanced technology to the battlefield was instrumental in determining the shape and force structure of tomorrow's Air Force. General Ralston brings to the job of Vice Chairman a wealth of experience in the development of military requirements and an in-depth knowledge of the defense acquisition process. These and other attributes provide General Ralston the requisite leadership and management necessary for the post of Vice Chairman at a critical time in the history of the Armed Forces.

I will depend upon General Ralston to continue the initiatives of Admiral Owens which are designed to ensure that our Armed Forces best determine their warfighting requirements and capabilities. I commend Admiral Owens for his exemplary service to his Nation. His sound military advice on the use of military power to back U.S. diplomacy, his crucial role in shaping our forces to fight as a joint team, and the superlative leadership he provided in harnessing the information and technological revolution to our current and future defense posture will ensure that our military will remain the best in the world as we enter the 21st century. Admiral Owens will truly be missed in the senior decision-making ranks of our national security structure. Hillary and I join in wishing him the very best as he begins a new phase of his life.

NOTE: This item was not received in time for publication in the appropriate issue.

The President's Radio Address

December 16, 1995

Good morning. At midnight last night, for the second time in a month, the Republican Congress shut down the Federal Government in an effort to force through their unac-

ceptable cuts in health care, education, and the environment.

For weeks, my administration and the Republicans in Congress have been in serious negotiations over how to reach common ground on balancing the budget. A week ago, I forwarded to them a plan that would protect our principles and balance the budget in 7 years. I had hoped that this time would be different, that we were past the Republican threats to shut down the Government just to get their way.

But yesterday, they broke off our talks. Unbelievably, they actually said that as a condition for our talks to continue, we had to agree right now to make deep and unconscionable cuts in Medicare and Medicaid. That is unacceptable.

The cuts they propose would deprive millions of people of health care: poor children, pregnant women, the disabled, seniors in nursing homes. They would let Medicare wither on the vine into a second-class system. Now, these things simply are not necessary to balance the budget.

Let me be clear: As I have said from the beginning, I very much want to work with Congress to get a balanced budget. After all, working with the previous Congress in my first 2 years as President, we cut the deficit I found when I became President in half. We reduced the size of the Federal Government by 200,000. We ought to finish the job. We shouldn't leave a legacy of debt to our children, but neither should we leave the next generation a legacy of neglect.

We've cut the deficit in half while continuing to invest in education, technology, research, the environment, Medicare, and Medicaid and cutting taxes on the most hard-pressed of our working people. That's what we ought to do in this budget plan.

Now as far as shutting the Government down goes, this is not a result of our lack of agreement on a balanced budget plan. The two things have no connection. The facts are plain. The Congress has failed to pass a budget for next year and the bills that would fund the agencies of Government on purpose. They have deliberately done this to force me to accept their long-term agenda of big cuts in Medicare, Medicaid, education, and the environment and a tax increase on working

people. That's what's in their balanced budget plan. But it's not necessary to balance the budget.

So for them to cause a shutdown, denying Americans the services their tax dollars support as a tactic in the budget debate is wrong. It's irresponsible. I won't give in to the threat. I didn't last time, and I can't now. Let me tell you why.

I know you've been told that the winners and losers of this budget battle are all in Washington and it's all politics. But that's not true. America's children would bear the most pain from the sharp cuts proposed by the Republican Congress. If the Republican plan becomes law, millions of children would be denied basics they need: health care they now have, schooling they can count on, school lunches, a safe place to live, or air and water we can be sure is safe to breathe and to drink.

Just consider what would happen to Medicaid. For three decades, Medicaid has been a legal guarantee for millions who need medical care. It has been the primary source of health care for nearly one in five American children. And more than half of the children on Medicaid live in families with working parents. It is not a welfare program. But the Republican plan repeals Medicaid's guarantees. And that spells disaster for families in the middle class who are caught unprepared. Medicaid helps millions of children who are disabled or who suffer from chronic illnesses or who have the AIDS virus. But the Republican plan could pull this lifeline from millions of children.

In education, the Republican plan eliminates Head Start for 180,000 preschoolers. It cuts our efforts to keep drugs and violence out of our schools. It undermines our efforts to help schools meet national standards of excellence for the first time. It kills the AmeriCorps national service program. It denies scholarships to more than 350,000 deserving college students and takes away the best student loan program available to young people. It lowers the cost and eases the terms of repayment.

The Republican plan would raise taxes for over 7 million of our hardest pressed working families. Their budget cuts would leave children exposed to hazardous waste. And we

know that pollution affects children more than it does adults. We want to clean up these sites, but the Republican cuts would limit what we can do.

The Republican budget cuts are aimed squarely at our children. They will face larger classes and fewer Head Start programs. Ten million will live near toxic waste sites that won't be cleaned. Fewer will be immunized. Millions will be denied adequate medical care. And more than one million will be forced into poverty.

That is no way to treat our children. Let them threaten to shut the Government down. It is not necessary to do this to balance the budget, and so I am not going to let them hurt our children and compromise their future.

Our budget proposal shows these cuts are not necessary. Our plan balances the budget in 7 years, reforms Medicare and Medicaid, keeps costs down. It protects education and gives working families with children a tax break, not a tax increase. It is wrong for the congressional Republicans to insist that I make deep cuts in Medicare and Medicaid just as a condition to talk. It is wrong for them to shut the Government down again just before Christmas. It would be wrong for me to accept that threat. I rejected it last month; I reject it now.

I know this shutdown will affect the lives of millions of Americans, especially at this holiday season. I'll do whatever I can to lessen the impact. Above all, the Republicans should come back to the table. Congress should immediately pass straightforward legislation to reopen the Government. That is the responsible thing to do. And we should be talking again with each other about how to balance the budget in the interest of the American people.

I'll continue to fight for our American principles in this budget battle, because that's the only way our children can come out the winners.

Thanks for listening.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:06 a.m. from the Oval Office at the White House.

Remarks Prior to a Meeting With Democratic Members of Congress

December 16, 1995

Let me, first of all, welcome all of you here. I thank you for being here. I imagine some of you have stayed here in an unplanned way over the weekend.

We are determined, as Democrats, to try to work together and to try to work with the Republicans to achieve a balanced budget but in a way that is consistent with our principles.

As all of you know, yesterday the Republican congressional leaders called the negotiations off unless we would first put much bigger Medicare and Medicaid cuts on the table. I thought that was wrong and unwarranted.

Virtually all of us don't agree with the large portions of their tax package and particularly a lot of the special interest provisions of it. But we didn't ask them to abandon it just to talk and begin negotiations.

So we hope that we can get back to a constructive dialog consistent with our values, our principles, and what's good for this country. And that's what we're going to be working on today.

We don't believe that decimating Medicare and Medicaid and undermining our investments in education and the environment, raising taxes on working families is a good prescription for America's future. And it is not necessary to balance the budget.

So we're going back to work today. We're going to keep working, trying to reach as much agreement among ourselves as possible, and then we'll keep reaching out to the Republicans in Congress in the hope of passing the right kind of balanced budget.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:40 p.m. at Blair House.