

Tobacco Lawsuit

Q. Mr. President, judges dismissed half of the Government's lawsuit against the tobacco industry. Is that a disappointing blow to the Government?

President Clinton. I'm going to have a Cabinet meeting later, and I'll answer all the domestic questions then. Thank you.

NOTE: The exchange began at 1:20 p.m. in the Rose Garden at the White House. In his remarks, the President referred to Yugoslav opposition candidate Vojislav Kostunica. Prime Minister Kok referred to President Slobodan Milosevic of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro). A tape was not available for verification of the content of this exchange.

Remarks Prior to a Meeting With Cabinet Members and an Exchange With Reporters

September 28, 2000

Budget Negotiations/Tobacco Lawsuit

The President. Is everyone in? Good. Well, as you can see, we're about to have a Cabinet meeting, the primary purpose of which is to discuss the budget negotiations that will be going on now until the end of Congress.

Two weeks ago I met with congressional leaders in this room, and we pledged to use the short time left in the fiscal year to do some important things for the American people, to resolve our differences on a host of issues, to put progress over partisanship.

Since then, the Senate has passed normal trade relations with China legislation, and I applaud that. But beyond that, nothing has been done to finally raise the minimum wage, pass hate crimes legislation and a real Patients' Bill of Rights, pass a Medicare prescription drug benefit for our seniors, to enact the new markets legislation. The leadership promised action, but so far the results don't show it.

Now there are just 2 days to go in the fiscal year, and only 2 of the 13 appropriations bills have passed that are so necessary to keep our Government running. Still the Congress hasn't provided the funds to help build and modernize our schools, to continue to hire 100,000 new qualified teachers for smaller

classes in the early grades, to improve teacher quality and strengthen accountability so that we can identify failing schools, turn them around, shut them down, or put them under new management. And nothing has been done to fund the largest gun enforcement initiative in history to keep guns out of the hands of criminals and children, something that Republicans have said that we ought to do more of.

Right now another important decision is pending in Congress, even as we meet here. The Congress is choosing whether or not to lower the national drunk driving standard to .08 percent blood alcohol content, a move that we know, from the experience of States that have already done it, could save hundreds of lives every single year in the United States. I know that Congress is, as always, under a lot of interest-group pressure not to do this, but I hope, for the sake of highway safety and human life, they will.

Later this week, Congress will send me a short-term budget resolution. I expect I'll sign it so that we can continue to meet our responsibilities to the American people, but I ask Congress to finish the work they were sent here to do. Let's sit down for serious negotiations on a budget that preserves fiscal discipline, invests in our people, and produces real results and real progress for America.

I'd also like to say a few words about our efforts to hold tobacco companies accountable. Today the court ruled that our case alleging the tobacco companies were engaged in fraud in marketing tobacco can go ahead, although not on the other counts. This remains a very important opportunity for the American people to have their day in court against big tobacco and its marketing practices. I urge Congress to provide the funding to allow the lawsuit to move forward and not to shield the tobacco industry from the consequences of its actions.

Thank you very much.

Minimum Wage Legislation

Q. Mr. President, the Republican leadership would like to attach certain provisions and amendments to the minimum wage bill, which are opposed by organized labor.

Would you sign the bill if it came to you with their additions to it?

The President. Well, I don't believe that we ought to lower the pay of many tens of thousands of Americans under present Federal law to raise the pay of people who plainly deserve a minimum wage. I do not believe the minimum wage should be a vehicle to wreck fair labor standards that have been well established in our law and that could not be repealed on their own.

I think some tax relief for small business is appropriate. The initial package was more than 3 times as high as the one that Congress attached when we raised the minimum wage in 1996. And if we're going to have that much tax relief, then I want to talk about what it's going to be and who is going to benefit.

But this Congress has some interesting priorities. It didn't take them any time to repeal the estate tax or to pass other big tax cuts that benefited people in very high income levels, but they can't seem to get around to raising the minimum wage. The last time we raised the minimum wage, they said that it would hurt unemployment, hurt the economy, hurt the small businesses of the country. We set a new record for small business starts every year since. We've got a 30-year low in unemployment. This is just a simple question of whether we're going to give 10 million hardworking Americans a chance to have a decent life and to take care of their children in a decent way. And I hope they'll pass it.

Yugoslav Elections

Q. Mr. President, if you're convinced, as you said a couple of minutes ago, that Yugoslav opposition has made a persuasive case that they've won the election outright, why have you not explicitly called for Mr. Milosevic to step down?

The President. Well, I thought we did say that. I think when the head of the Serb church says that he considers Mr. Milosevic's opponent to be the new President of Yugoslavia, I think it's—and when the commission that is totally under the thumb of the Government, without any outside observers, even they acknowledge that he won 49 to 39 or 38 percent, and when they have evidence that by no means all the votes for the opposi-

tion candidate were counted, I think that's a pretty good case that it's time for democracy and for the voices of the people of Serbia to be heard. And that's what I think should happen.

And as I said, when that happens, I would strongly support immediate moves to lift the sanctions.

RU-486

Q. Mr. President, the abortion drug RU-486 was approved for sale today. Is that fight finally over? And why did it take so long?

The President. Well, first of all, this administration treated that issue as purely one of science and medicine. And the decision to be made under our law is whether the drug should be approved by the FDA on the grounds of safety. And I think that they bent over backwards to do a lot of serious inquiries.

And Secretary Shalala can explain it in greater detail than me, but there's a long history here about why it took so long. But the FDA is basically doing its job. It's now done its job. And I regret that some members of the other party apparently have already tried to politicize it. I note Dr. Healey, who was the NIH commissioner under President Bush, said that she agreed with the decision of the FDA. And I think it ought to be treated as the scientific and medical decision it was, and we should respect the fact that it was a nonpolitical inquiry and that they took so long to try to make sure they were making a good decision.

Press Secretary Joe Lockhart. Thank you very much. Thank you; thank you.

Q. How do you think that affects the debate over abortion? And do you think a Bush administration will try to overturn it?

The President. Why don't you ask him that question? You should ask him that question, not me. I think that's for the people that are out there running to answer.

NOTE: The President spoke at 3:05 p.m. in the Cabinet Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to President Slobodan Milosevic of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro); Yugoslav opposition candidate Vojislav Kostunica; Serbian Patriarch Pavle, president of the Holy Synod of Bishops of

the Serbian Orthodox Church; and former National Institutes of Health Director Bernadine P. Healy. A tape was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

Statement on the Election in Yugoslavia

September 28, 2000

The people of Yugoslavia have spoken loud and clear in support of democratic change.

The opposition's claims to an absolute majority are backed up by certified results from the polling places. The Government's commission acted in secret and excluded the opposition. One of its top officials has resigned. The Serb Orthodox Church has recognized Mr. Kostunica as Yugoslavia's new President.

It is time for Mr. Milosevic to heed the call of the Serb people, step down, and allow a peaceful democratic transition to take place.

We have said before that as soon as a democratic government is in place, we will immediately take steps to remove economic sanctions and help Serbia with its transition.

NOTE: The statement referred to Yugoslav opposition candidate Vojislav Kostunica, and President Slobodan Milosevic of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro).

Statement on the Circuit Court Decision on Affirmative Action in Federal Transportation Construction Contracting

September 28, 2000

This week in *Adarand Constructors, Inc. v. Slater*, the tenth circuit upheld the constitutionality of a major affirmative action program dealing with Federal transportation construction contracting. I am very pleased with the court's decision. It strongly affirms what I have consistently stated: Federal affirmative action programs are still needed to remedy past and present discrimination and can be implemented in a constitutional manner. My administration has worked very hard to mend, but not end, Federal affirmative action programs, and we are gratified that the court has validated our efforts.

Statement on Progress in Providing Health Insurance Coverage

September 28, 2000

New data released today by the Census Bureau show that the number of Americans without health insurance dropped significantly last year—the first such decline in 12 years. The 1.7 million decline in the uninsured—including over 1 million children—is making a real difference in these Americans' lives. It means that they are likely to receive needed medical care, less likely to be hospitalized for avoidable conditions like pneumonia or uncontrolled diabetes, and less likely to rely on an emergency room as their primary source of care. Clearly, access to affordable, high-quality insurance makes a difference.

I am extremely pleased with today's announcement. I believe it validates our health care and economic policies, which have helped the country begin to reverse the unacceptable numbers of uninsured in this country. I am particularly proud that the enactment of the Children's Health Insurance Program and our success in maintaining a strong economy—which led to increases in employer-based coverage—have laid the foundation for this turnaround.

Although I am pleased with today's development, there is much work to be done. The data from this report well document that the States that most aggressively conducted outreach campaigns to eligible populations have been the most successful at enrolling children. We need to encourage States that are not doing as well to accelerate their activities in reaching out to uninsured children. And we need to provide targeted programs to build on our success.

Today I want to once again call on the Congress to pass my bipartisan health care coverage initiative, including the Vice President's proposal to expand coverage to parents, as well as our initiatives that would expand coverage to 55 to 65 year olds, workers between jobs, employees of small businesses, and legal immigrants. My balanced budget shows that we have the resources to do this while still paying down the debt by 2012. It's