

July 2 / Administration of George Bush, 1992

Remarks at a Meeting With the House Republican Conference on Health Care and an Exchange With Reporters

July 2, 1992

The President. Today I am sending to Congress the fourth piece of our comprehensive health care reform package, medical malpractice reform. Senate Republicans led by Bob Dole and John Chafee introduced a bill last November that includes many key elements similar to those in my plan. Here in the House, Republican Members led by Bob Michel and Newt Gingrich have recently finished months of work on a package that is very close to my own proposals, and we've been working intensively with the House Republican task force to hammer out differences.

We discussed the issue just now in our meeting, touched on it in our meeting with all House Republicans. And we now have legislation we can support and that represents a broad basis for agreement with all Republicans in the House and Senate.

A Republican health care package is ready to be passed now. It should be passed now. And it will make a difference in the quality and in the availability of health care and in the growth of our economy. Our proposal: It helps small businesses pool together to offer their employees affordable health insurance. It lets the self-employed deduct 100 percent of their health insurance premiums from their taxes. It makes it possible for workers to change jobs without the fear of losing their health insurance. And it curbs the runaway costs of medical malpractice litigation.

Just as important, our proposal does not saddle our businesses and workers with costly new mandates or taxes or allow Federal bureaucracies to regulate prices and to ration services. All of us who have had any experience with bureaucracies know that trying to let the Government operate our health care system would be an absolute nightmare, and we are not going to permit that.

The proposals on which we've all come together today would correct the most important weaknesses in our system and control costs without sacrificing this quality that

American medicine is known for, this high-quality health care that every American deserves and that really attracts people from overseas. Our Republicans are ready to move, and I urge the House to act swiftly.

Now I want to turn this over to our task force leader, Republican leader Bob Michel.

Representative Michel. Thank you, Mr. President. I certainly don't want to add or subtract to anything the President has said here other than, earlier in the year, when we recognized, obviously, that this would be one of the key issues in the country and we recruited members from significant committees that would be involved in health care on our side of the aisle, some of the best knowledgeable and informed people on our side worked the task force all year long.

Mr. President, we're most appreciative that you have seen fit to embrace the product of what our Members collectively have done in concert with the administration. Lou Sullivan is here and Gail Wilensky. And it's been a good team effort that we've put together.

I have something rather important, however, to give you. It's kind of a prescription of sorts to cure the gridlock around the Nation's health care system this year. The prescription, of course, is H.R. 5325, an action-now health care reform act. Congress should take this prescription as directed.

The President. Now, let's get this thing—this is a very important piece of paper here. Let's get it out here.

All right, well, thank you all. Well done. And thank all of you who had so much—including the Ways and Means leader, Bill Archer, for what they had to do with this, and Bill Gradison. Lou, thank you. Where's Gail? She needs a little—Gail Wilensky.

Q. Mr. President?

The President. Yes, this isn't a press conference, but maybe I've got time for one or two. What have you got?

The Economy

Q. Mr. President, I'd like to know your reaction to the unemployment rate going up to the highest level in 8 years. And secondarily, you've been saying that the economy is improving but just that it seemed like the American people psychologically just weren't accepting it. What do you have to say to these people now who apparently did believe you and went out and looked for jobs, and they weren't there?

The President. Well, I say that, one, it's not good news. Two, unemployment has always been a lagging indicator. Three, the economy grew in the first quarter, and we're confident that it will grow in the second quarter. But the main message that I get out of this is that the Congress ought to pass the economic growth stimulant package that we have up here and that these people surrounding me have been trying to get through. If you really want to help America get back to work and make this indicator be less of a lagger and more of a leader, pass the things to stimulate the economy. That's exactly what's needed.

I would say it just shows that the recovery which we're in is not as robust as I'd like to see it. I will say the good news is the Federal Reserve Board has dropped the rates by 50 basis points, and I'm told that a couple of banks have already followed, lowering the prime rate. And I think that is a good way to stimulate growth. I think that will be very well-received by the markets and by the businesses, large and small, across the country. It's something that I'd indicated a few days ago I would like to see happen, and I think it's a very good thing. And I think we've got to get this money supply up, and this is a good step toward that end.

So I would offset the news that I don't like by saying I think this will be very, very well-received, and it's fundamentally important to the economy.

Presidential Campaign

Q. Mr. President, Marlin Fitzwater this morning said that the opposition research, which is how the Democrats are describing it, was tantamount to a reliving of the plumbers' unit in the Nixon White House.

Do you think what they're doing is that scurrilous?

The President. Well, I'm not sure what they're doing. All I did was read one story saying they're investigating my family, and you know how I feel about that. But I almost would say: So what's new? I've been in public life a long time, and I think that kind of activity on their part has been going on for a long time. But that's not—

Q. But also on the Republicans' part, isn't it? Mr. Bond has said that there is opposition research.

The President. I thought you were asking about the story today.

Q. I am. But isn't this something both parties historically do?

The President. Opposition research? Absolutely. I think everybody does opposition research. I thought you were talking about investigating a personal side of one's family, which, of course, we're not doing. We're not doing that. We're not doing that.

Q. Are you opposed? You're not upset with it?

The President. Well, I'm not happy about it, Helen [Helen Thomas, United Press International]. But what can I do about what the Democratic National Committee does?

Q. Well, do you do it?

The President. I mean, they are not exactly the voice of the American people. Let them defend their own activities on that.

Q. Does this mean you feel free to do the same sort of research on the opposition?

The President. No, no. I have made very clear that we want to stay out of the sleaze business and stay on the issues. Now, we're going to continue to research on issues; of course we are. Maybe I misread the story, but I thought it was talking about investigating family and my sons and things of this nature which—

Q. They did mention personal finances in the morning Post—

The President. Well, look, let me tell you something. The personal finances—I've been in public life half my adult life, private life the other half, and I really believe that I have bent over backwards since the day I walked into that Chamber in terms of disclosure, trying to avoid conflict of inter-

est. So I think they're going to drill a dry hole on that one because I have really tried my very, very best to keep the public trust. I told these friends who are in the Congress, I think I view as part of my responsibility keeping the public trust, the decency and honor of the Presidency. I've tried to do that, and I've tried to conduct myself that way in the Congress.

So, let them muck around in my garbage can, but they aren't going to find anything in terms of this, if you're asking now about a business connection.

I got to get out of here. I've been accused of having too many press conferences. I think it's 295 since I've been President.

Unemployment Benefits

Q. Let's get back on the point. Let's get back on the point, sir. The House today will be taking up a Democratic version of the unemployment extension, benefits extension bill. Many of the men up here say that there is a possibility of a veto.

The President. Well, our position is, I have supported unemployment extensions, guarantee extensions in the past. Every once in a while we've got to beat down ones that go so far that they just exacerbate the deficit that every American is concerned about. Let's hope that we can get a bill down there fast that I can sign.

But I have a certain custodianship for trying to support reasonable expenditures. If they send me something that we view and this leadership here views as too expensive, we'll have to send it back and urge them to get one down there that we can support.

But I hope that because people need help, we can get out and give it to them right quick. I do remember a time or two in the past where I had to veto legislation that just would have gone wild in terms of spending, and I'm prepared to do that again if we have to. I hope that's not what they send to me.

Last one, right here.

The Economy

Q. Mr. President, has the Federal Reserve now cut interest rates enough? Is that enough, the Federal Reserve cut today?

The President. I think it's pretty good. I think many of the market experts were say-

ing it would be 25 basis points. I don't know. I mean, I am not an economist or a money supply expert. But all I know is, I think most people feel, and I certainly agree with this, that this would be stimulative and would be very well-received not just in the financial markets but by business, and particularly small business, that'll have a better shot now at creating something.

But it would be much better if we could pass these incentives that we have: the investment tax allowance, the first-time credit for homebuyers, \$5000 we've proposed. I still feel that a capital gains reduction, a broad one, would create new businesses, new small businesses. We had some suggestions up here that Bill Archer and others have been very supportive of, and they have some of their own, on IRA's. So we need something that targets economic growth. My answer to the unemployment figures is: Please, now, Congress, do what you should have done some time ago in terms of stimulating the economy. It's growing, but I want to see the growth more robust.

The unemployment, there are too many people out of work. The way to get them back to work is to stimulate so that you'll have creation of new jobs. The interest rates, again, will help in this regard because I think it'll encourage existing businesses to more briskly go forward. But the reviews are mixed, the economy is still growing, and this figure, as I say, normally I think most experts would say a lagging indicator. But I've always said unemployment for one person, that's 100 percent, and that's too much. So we've got to keep moving until we get it back the way I'd like to see it in terms of economic growth.

I really do; I've got to go to work.

Q. This figure means the recovery is stalled.

The President. You've already had a question, madam.

Q. Following on the economy for a second. There are so many people, though, who really question whether or not you get it in terms of—

The President. I get it.

Q. —these numbers are optimistic, and

yet, look at the numbers.

The President. I get it. I said these numbers are not good. But I've got an answer for it. The answer is that the Congress ought to pass these stimulants to the economy. And it is unarguable.

Representatives. Hear, hear!

The President. Everybody feels that it would help and get the economic growth more robust. The economy grew at 2.7 percent first quarter, and it's going to grow this time.

Q. So it's the Congress' fault?

The President. I'm not trying to assign blame. You asked me what I'd do about it, and I'm saying, stimulate the economy. It's the fault of the Democratic leadership that these economic growth provisions have not been enacted, yes, on that one. But hell, I'll take my share of the blame. Everybody should.

Q. Mr. President—

The President. —report the things that are just kind of negative out there. This economy is growing. And yet, Mr. Lichter says that 92 percent and says everything's bad. I mean, see, I'd like it a little more balanced. I'd like to see this thing moving on reality, not on misperception.

Q. Do you always bring your—with you? [Laughter]

The President. I told them to keep this thing secret. Extraterrestrial who met with

George Bush at Camp David—I told him, I said, if I'm going to meet with you—[laughter]—I told him it was for me all along. There he is. [Laughter]

Q. How do you stop blaming the media—every time you say people don't know that there is real recovery—I mean, they've seen it today.

The President. —2.7 percent growth.

Q. Yes, but now you see what the unemployment is.

The President. Well, I never said unemployment was perfect. I've been saying too many people are out of work. Let's get them back to work by stimulating the economy.

Q. —the deficit reduction bill that bipartisan House leaders—

The President. Deficit reduction? No, the first thing I'd like to see is have the Congress pass what I have just been proposing and have repropoed.

Note: The President spoke at 10:23 a.m. in the House Chamber at the Capitol. The following persons were referred to: Gail R. Wilensky, Deputy Assistant to the President for Policy Development; Rich Bond, chairman, Republican National Committee; and S. Robert Lichter, codirector, Center for Media and Public Affairs. Part of this exchange could not be verified because the tape was incomplete.

Message to the Congress Transmitting Proposed Legislation on Health Care

July 2, 1992

To the Congress of the United States:

I am pleased to transmit today for your immediate consideration and enactment the "Health Care Liability Reform and Quality of Care Improvement Act of 1992." Also transmitted is a section-by-section analysis.

This legislative proposal would assist in stemming the rising costs of health care caused by medical professional liability. During recent years, the costs of defensive medical practice and of litigation related to health care disputes have had a substantial

impact on the affordability and availability of quality medical care. The bill attacks these very serious problems.

The bill would establish incentives for States to adopt within 3 years quality assurance measures and tort reforms. In addition, the health care reforms would apply to medical care and treatment funded through specific Federal programs pertaining to health care and employee benefits and to claims under the Federal Tort Claims Act. The tort reforms include: (1) a reasonable