

Remarks on Preschool Immunization and an Exchange With Reporters April 12, 1993

The President. This is a proclamation in support of Preschool Immunization Week. I'd like to read a statement about it, and then I'll be glad to answer some questions, along with Secretary Shalala who also has a few remarks to make.

This proclamation in support of Preschool Immunization Week gives us all a chance to promote our best ideals in the Nation and to prove that we can make a difference in the lives of our children. In fact, the \$300 million in our stimulus program will help us to immunize one million children this summer and to show that this is a campaign of words and deeds.

Studies under all administrations have shown that vaccines are the most cost-effective way to prevent human suffering and to reduce the economic cost that result from vaccine-preventable diseases. But because we've gotten away from preventive care and because immunizations have become unaffordable or unavailable, millions of infants and toddlers are at risk of completely preventable diseases like polio, mumps, and measles; children like Rodney Miller, a 20-month-old in Miami who had meningitis that could have been prevented with a vaccine that costs \$21.48, instead had a hospital stay that cost in excess of \$46,000.

Through public investment and leadership we can do better. It's a miracle of our system and our ingenuity that we can prevent the worst infectious diseases of children with vaccines and save \$10 for every \$1 invested. But things started to go sour in the eighties. We had the third worst immunization rate in this hemisphere. Ten years ago, immunizations cost \$23. Now they cost \$200. We're the only industrialized nation that does not immunize all children, although we develop and produce a majority of the vaccines. As a result, we've had thousands of new cases of measles. Immunization rates have not improved, and in the case of some, diseases have actually gone down. We have seen and predict what this will mean in terms of suffering and human costs.

Our plan will allow us to purchase vaccine and conduct outreach programs in the appropriate language and at the appropriate neighborhood venues, to reach those who'd been shut

out of this part of our system. It will allow us to extend clinic hours, expand education efforts, create a national tracking system so that we know what's happening to our children. It will give us the resources to help those in the public health system and in advocacy groups who are already working heroically to bring this simple technology to all of our children.

Today we will begin what will become, with later legislation, a comprehensive program to support community based immunization projects and to lower vaccine costs with the goal of having the best, not the worst rate in the hemisphere. There are great coalitions working on making this effort successful and fun and a model of what we can do again to make this Government work.

I just want to say that today we're having the Easter egg roll on the White House lawn. You can look out there at those kids. They are the hostages of the Senate filibuster on the program. They are the hostages of the Senate filibuster on the stimulus program. All this hot air rhetoric about how this money is being wasted and that money is being wasted. These people, most of them have been here for the last 12 years while we have run immunization into the ground, while we have developed the third worst rate in the hemisphere. And they've always got some excuse, some of them, for not doing anything.

Now, what are we going to do for those children? That ought to be the question of the week. When I go out there on the lawn, and I think about those kids picking up Easter eggs, I want to be able to think about them all being immunized and all those children coming along behind them being immunized. There is no excuse for this. And it is time that we broke the gridlock and stopped making excuses for not doing anything.

Secretary Shalala.

[At this point, Secretary of Health and Human Services Donna E. Shalala spoke on the preschool immunization program.]

The President. Thank you.

Stimulus Package

Q. Mr. President, in order to save the \$300

million immunization program, are you prepared to compromise with the Republicans in the Senate to scale back the stimulus package to something a lot less than you had originally hoped for?

The President. Well, I think, I'd like to know how many more Americans they want to keep out of work. I mean, what is their position? That's basically what it amounts to. I mean, all this business about there being the potential for abuse in the community development block grant program, that is a smoke screen, and this is politics. So they're going to have to decide. I want to put as many people to work as I can. They're going to have to decide how many people they're determined to keep out of work. And I'll do everything I can to pass the best bill I can.

But let's not talk about compromise. Let's strip all this rhetoric away. This is about whether you want to reduce the unemployment rate in America by another half a percentage point for a very modest amount. And they don't. For whatever reason, they don't. They want more people to stay out of work. So they just have to decide, I guess, how many people we can put to work and what we can do. And I'm going to do the best I can to get the best program I can. I'll be discussing it this week.

Whenever we use the word compromise, let's talk about what's really at stake. The Republicans had 12 years in which unemployment went down only when they were exploding the deficit and increasing the defense budget. Now we're reducing the defense budget. What is it that we propose to replace it with? We must have some investment. We must have some jobs. We must have primarily the overall program that we've already passed. But I think we need to strike a match to the job engine in America,

and that's what I'm trying to do. And I'll do the best I can. I'm going to create as many jobs as I can.

Q. Well, Mr. President, what are you prepared to do to make sure that your program gets through Congress?

The President. We're working—look, we've got a majority in both Houses. The American people, I think, are astonished to find out that 41 Senators, 41 percent of the Senate can shut the whole place down. And they've just got to decide, as I said, how many people they want to keep out of work and how many people we want to put to work. And I think we can work something out. I'm hopeful that we can. I know that there are people in that Republican Senate bloc that want to vote for a good stimulus program. I know they do. I hope they'll be released to do it.

Bosnia

Q. Mr. President, have you rejected the recommendation of your commission that force be used in Bosnia?

The President. I saw that story. That commission has not made a report to me yet. We didn't ask anybody not to talk to the Congress. We just asked that policy recommendations not be made to the Congress before a commission that came out of the executive branch made final recommendations to me. We have not received a final report from them.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:07 a.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. The National Preschool Immunization Week proclamation of April 9 is listed in Appendix D at the end of this volume. A tape was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

Remarks at the White House Easter Egg Roll *April 12, 1993*

Good morning, everybody. I want to welcome all of you here to the White House for the Easter egg roll and the Easter egg hunt. I want to say a special word of thanks to the sponsors who made this possible and say how wonderful it is for all of us here to see the children, especially for me and for Hillary.

And I want now to introduce the First Lady, who is the hostess for this event, to say a few more words about it. But let me again say how very, very grateful we are to see all of you here. This is a children's day for America at