

The President. Well, I've already spent 2 hours on that today, and I expect I'll spend a couple more hours on it. I certainly—

Q. Can you wrap it up now the budget's over?

The President. Well, we're not done yet, but we worked hard on that today. We're going to keep working. We have a few more days. But the retraining issue is important because there have been a lot of news stories lately—many of you perhaps have run them—showing that people that either have high skill levels or are capable of getting them in a hurry have much shorter periods of unemployment and are much more likely to get good-paying jobs.

We still don't have the kind of retraining system we need. So that's going to be a big part of next year's initiative.

Haiti

Q. Prime Minister Malval is criticizing President Aristide openly for being an obstacle to some sort of reconciliation. Are you on board with Prime Minister Malval or President Aristide? Where are you trying to throw your support?

The President. I wouldn't say it's an either-or thing. Let me say, we have been working with this Friends of Haiti group, with our friends in Canada and France and Venezuela, to try to come up with a new approach that would restore democracy, would create the conditions where President Aristide could return, and would meet the fundamental objective we tried to meet in the Governors Island accord: to guarantee the security and the human rights and safety of all the parties in the previous disputes.

So we're going to take another run at it and see if we can do something on it. And it's going to require some flexibility on all sides. It just is. And we'll just have to see if we can get there. We're going to try, hard.

Q. Thank you.

The President. Thank you all very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11 a.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. The exchange portion of this item could not be verified because the tape was incomplete.

Remarks on Signing the National Child Protection Act of 1993 December 20, 1993

I'm delighted to see all of you here. And I want to especially recognize Secretary Shalala and my good friend Marian Wright Edelman. Senator Biden, thank you for being here, sir; Congresswoman Schroeder; Congressman Edwards; and my former colleague and longtime friend Governor Jim Thompson from Illinois; Oprah Winfrey; Lynn Swann; and Andrew Vachss. Thank you all very much for helping this day to come to pass.

The holiday season is a time for sharing the warmth of human contact with families and friends. And making this a joyous and safe time for children everywhere is important. That makes this legislation, the National Child Protection Act, especially significant. With it we can give a great gift, a much improved system for protecting our children from being abused or harmed by those to whom we have entrusted them.

Not unlike the Brady bill, this law creates a national data base network. This one can be

used by any child care provider in America to conduct a background check to determine if a job applicant can be trusted with our children, and if not, to prevent that person from ever working with children.

For the first time, we'll have a system in place to protect the many millions of American children who receive care and supervision in formal day care and in other settings from other organizations. This law will give us the tools we need to safeguard children from those who have perpetrated crimes of child abuse or sex abuse or drug use or those who have been convicted of felonies. It's very important that we give working parents peace of mind about child care.

A majority of mothers with young children now work outside the home. Six million children are placed in formal day care settings every day. Balancing work and family is hard, and parents

are worried about their personal security and the security of their children in an increasingly violent world.

Like the Brady bill and the crime bill, which I hope and believe will pass soon, this act will help us to take our streets, our neighborhoods, the institutions we rely on, back for American values and American children. There is nothing more important that our Government could be doing now.

Like all change, passing this important law has not been easy. And there are many to thank. First of all, I thank you, Oprah, for a lifetime of being committed to the well-being of our children and for giving child abuse issues such wonderful coverage on your show. You wrote the original blueprint for this law, and we're grateful, becoming a tireless advocate for its passage, lobbying Members of Congress of both parties for more than 2 years, and lobbying the President—people occasionally do that, too. All of us, but especially our children, owe you their gratitude.

Now we can help to prevent child abuse with this measure, not just to catch people who do it. It's a great cause and a remarkable achieve-

ment, and I want to thank all the rest of you who were involved in it.

Finally, let me say, especially for the benefit of the Members of Congress here, this is the last piece of legislation I will sign from this session of Congress. It wraps up a very productive session, a session that dealt with family leave and motor voter and a new economic plan that brought low interest rates and recovery, with the national service bill that I think will galvanize the imagination of a whole generation of young people, with new trade legislation, and with the Brady bill. But this is a good bill to end on, a bill that ends where all of us should begin, by putting our children first.

Thank you very much. I'd like to invite you all to come up here for the signing.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:54 a.m. in the Roosevelt Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Marian Wright Edelman, president and executive director, Children's Defense Fund; Oprah Winfrey and Lynn Swann, television hosts; and Andrew Vachss, originator of the concept of the legislation. H.R. 1237, approved December 20, was assigned Public Law No. 103-209.

Statement on Signing Persian Gulf War Veterans Health Care Legislation *December 20, 1993*

I am deeply concerned about the reports of health problems afflicting a number of our Persian Gulf veterans. The legislation I am signing today, H.R. 2535, addresses those problems by authorizing the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to treat them for any disease that may have resulted from their exposure to toxic substances or environmental hazards in the Gulf.

Since our troops returned home over 2 years ago, we have heard from many who are experiencing serious health problems for which modern medicine is having difficulty establishing a cause or a diagnosis.

With parades and a national outpouring of gratitude, we showed those brave men and women our appreciation for the sacrifices they made for all of us. Now we must stand by those who are suffering.

The symptoms these veterans experience have included, among other things, fatigue, painful

muscles and joints, bleeding gums, skin rashes, short-term memory loss, and hair loss. With this legislation, the VA will have the authority to provide to these veterans both inpatient and outpatient care on a priority basis. Thus, we can help make certain that these veterans' health care needs are met as fully as possible while important research into their problems goes forward.

This legislation also provides for reimbursement to these veterans for any copayments they may have made to the VA for care that might have been necessary because of their exposures in the Persian Gulf.

In addition, this legislation extends the VA's authority to:

- furnish Vietnam veterans with care that may be related to their exposure to agent