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pure food when I know good and well the American people never voted for that in 1994.

And I certainly have no intention of destroying Medicare under the guise of saving it when I know we can fix the Medicare Trust Fund, which does not have anything to do—the Medicare Trust Fund that the Republicans are always talking about is in some trouble, less trouble than when I took office. I pushed the insolvency date out 2 or 3 years already, and I know we can fix that and never touch the premiums, the copays, and the deductibles. And they know it, too. They know this has nothing to do with fixing the Medicare Trust Fund.

So we ought to get together like civilized human beings and good Americans and do what's best for the American people. The one time I thought we were going to do it was when I had the meeting with the Speaker up in New Hampshire and that fellow asked us a nice question, and we shook hands on it. We said, yes, we'd appoint a commission like a base closing commission to look into political reform. And 5 days after I got back I sent a letter to the Speaker suggesting that we ought to appoint this commission in the same way the base closing commission was appointed. Five weeks later I still hadn't gotten an answer to my letter. I still haven't gotten an answer to my letter. It's been 7 or 8 weeks now. So I appointed two distinguished Americans, John Gardner and Doris Kearns Goodwin, to go try to work this out. They haven't seen the Speaker either.

So this is a different world up here. The American people don't understand this. I think most Americans are still conservative and old-fashioned in the best sense. They think when you shake hands, especially when you do it in broad daylight in front of the whole country, you ought to do what you say you're going to do. And I intend to do it. That's just the way I am. It's the way I was brought up. I don't understand this. I don't understand people that don't talk to one another and don't try to see one another's point of view and that don't try to reach common accord. So that door over there is going to stay open all the way, but I will not be—I will not be blackmailed into selling the American people's future down the drain to avoid a train wreck. Better a train wreck for a day or 3 or 4, better political damage to Bill Clinton than damaging the future of millions and millions and millions of Americans. I'm just not going to do it.

Mr. Edwards. Thank you, Mr. President.

The President. Thank you.

China

Ms. Liasson. Mr. President, just one quick yes or no question. Should Mrs. Clinton go to China if Harry Wu is still held?

The President. Well, no decision has yet been made on that, and we're just going to follow events as they develop and try to make a good decision. It's an important conference. The United States will be represented, but no decision has been made yet about whether she will go.

NOTE: The interview began at 1:48 p.m. in the Oval Office at the White House, and it was recorded for broadcast on August 9. The final question referred to Harry Wu, human rights activist imprisoned in China.

Remarks on Environmental Protection in Baltimore, Maryland

August 8, 1995

Thank you very much. As you can tell, the Vice President really has no strong convictions about this issue. [*Laughter*] That's the darnedest stump speech I've heard in a long time. I thought for a minute he was a write-in candidate for mayor here. [*Laughter*] It was a great speech, and thank you for what you said.

Thank you, Doris McGuigan, and thank you to all of your allies here for reminding us what's really behind all these issues. One of the biggest problems we have in Washington, even though it's very close to Baltimore—one of the biggest problems we have is having people there remember that the decisions they make there affect how you live here and then making sure that people who live here understand the impact of the decisions that are made there. You have helped us, every one of you—Doris, for what

you've done and all of you, for coming out here today—you have helped us to reestablish that critical link between the American people and their Government, so you can decide what you're for and what you're against and how it's going to affect your children and your future. Thank you, Lieutenant Governor Kathleen Kennedy Townsend, for coming. Thank you, Congressman Gilchrest, for your outstanding support of the environment. And I want to thank all of my friends who are State officials and city officials. And Senator Miller, thank you for coming. And I want to say a special word of appreciation, too, to the first person who spoke, our EPA Administrator, Carol Browner, who has done a magnificent job in her work.

I want to deliver a pretty simple message today. Every office I have ever held of the public trust, from being attorney general of my State to being Governor to being President, required me to swear an oath to protect the people I was elected to serve, to give people the security they need to live up to the most of their God-given potential. Central to that security is the right to know that the air we breathe and the food we eat and the water we drink will be safe and the right to know if there's any risk to those things.

This basic security really is in jeopardy today. There are people who want to strip away decades of public health protection. I intend to fight them every step of the way. As I said, the battle over environmental protection is being fought in Washington, but here in communities like this one all across America, big and small, you see what is really at stake. Most hard-working families have enough on their minds without having to worry about an environmental hazard in their neighborhood.

Most people have enough trouble just trying to educate their kids and pay their bills and keep body and soul together and deal with all the changes in the global economy and how they bear down on community after community and business after business and job after job. Most people have enough to deal with without having to worry about their food, their air, and their water. But at least they have a right to know what is in it and whether something else is about to be put in it. That's what this Community Right-to-Know Act was all about. You heard the Vice President say it was passed almost a decade ago now, signed by President Reagan, strengthened by President Bush, strongly supported by this administration.

This is an issue that's very personal with me. I've dealt with the whole issue of right-to-know around chemicals for nearly 20 years now, since I was a young attorney general and a train loaded with chemicals in car after car blew up in a small southern town in the southern part of my State where a relative of mine was the sheriff. And it was just a God's miracle that we didn't have hundreds and hundreds of people killed in this little town. And the first thing that occurred to everybody is: Who knew what about what was on the train? Who knew what about how safely it was being carried? Who knew what about what kind of precaution should have been taken when the train pulled into the station?

That was almost 20 years ago, and I have seen this issue catch on now like wildfire as people in American communities all across our country have demanded the right to have some basic control over their own lives and their futures. The right-to-know law now requires manufacturers to tell the public how much they pollute. And if you want to know what's coming out of the smokestacks across the water, for example, all you have to do now is call your local library or the EPA and the information is there for you.

The Community Right-to-Know Act does not tell companies what they can and can't produce. It doesn't require massive bureaucracy. It doesn't affect every company, just those in certain industries. It's carefully focused on a list of 650 specific dangerous toxins. About 300 of those have been added since this administration came into office, I might add. And over 100 of them are known to cause cancer. This law works, as you have heard.

You have had particular success here because you've had such a good grassroots community effort with your 74 percent reduction. But you need to know that nationwide, every place in the country since the Community Right-to-Know Act has been on the books reported reductions in toxic emissions, or about 43 percent for the whole country. Now, that is a law worth passing—no new bureaucracy, just power to the people through basic knowledge.

This has kept millions of pounds of chemicals out of our lives. It's helped people to stay healthy and live longer. And as you have already heard, it's also helped to spur innovation to help

businesses work smarter and cleaner and become more profitable, not less profitable.

Our environmental progress, from the community right-to-know law to the Clean Air Act to so many others, has been the source of bipartisan pride, as has been mentioned. Therefore, it has been something of a surprise to many of us—and I think some in the Republican Party as well as most of us in the Democratic Party—to see what is happening in the Congress now, to see this dramatic departure from the bipartisan efforts of the last 25 years.

The House voted to gut environmental and public health protections last week under the pressure of lobbyists for those who have a vested financial interest in seeing that happen. The budget bill they passed would cut environmental enforcement by 50 percent. It would virtually bring to a halt the Federal enforcement of the Clean Water Act and toxic waste cleanups—a terrible mistake, a terrible mistake.

In a brazen display of the power of these special interest groups, the House added 18 separate loopholes, giveaways, and stop-in-your-tracks orders, stripping away very specific public safeguards to benefit very specific interest groups. One provision allows oil refineries to spew benzene, a cancer-causing chemical, without stringent safeguards. Another would allow factories to dump 15 million pounds of toxic chemicals into our Nation's rivers, lakes, and streams next year alone—one year. Another permits cement kilns and other incinerators to burn cancer-causing chemicals without effective control. The House majority also voted to gut community right-to-know, literally rolling back protections that are already on the books.

And if you ask them why they did this, they say, "Oh, well, we regret it, but there are all these crazy Federal regulators that are bringing to a halt the American economy." The problem is, there is no evidence that environmental protection has hurt our economy at all—none. And furthermore, this administration and this EPA Administrator have done more than anybody in 25 years to try to streamline regulation, reduce the burden of excessive regulation, get rid of dumb rules that don't make sense. Carol Browner has committed to reduce by 25 percent the amount of time businesses have to spend filling out forms, but not to destroy the standards, the rules, the regulation, and the community empowerment that are keeping our environment clean. And I am telling you, we can fix cratic problems, but we cannot fix, we cannot fix, the environmental damage that would be done if they tore up the progress of the last 25 years.

If the environmental laws have been so terrible for this country, you tell me how our economy has produced 7 million jobs in the last 2½ years, 1½ million new businesses, 2½ million new homeowners. Why is the stock market at 4,700 if the environment is so bad? We've got some problems. We have stagnant middle class incomes. We've got to get more money for people who are out there doing America's work. But the economy is doing well, and the people who own these businesses are doing well. And our country is moving forward in every single measure except raising middle class incomes. That is the problem. But the environment is not causing that, and there is no evidence for this. This is a big mistake. It is a terrible mistake. And I will not let our country make it. There is no evidence to support it.

I think all of you know, and I have already said, that the minute these antienvironmental measures hit my desk they will be dead. But I intend to do more than that. I want to use the authority of my office to ensure the right of parents to know what chemicals their children are being exposed to. I want more communities to be able to proudly introduce people like Doris and say we've reduced our chemical emissions by 74 percent. That's what I want. I want to see more people doing their own work for their own people and their own future. So just before I left for Baltimore, I signed an Executive order which says any manufacturer who wants to do business with the Federal Government must tell its neighbors what dangerous chemicals it puts into the air, the earth, and the water. No disclosure; no contract. [*Applause*] Thank you. And I am directing our agencies to take the next steps to act quickly and openly to continue to strengthen community right-to-know, if appropriate, to extend it to more industries and thousands more communities, to require companies to disclose more complete information.

Let me say this: There is an orderly process for this now. It is an orderly, open, fair process where we say what we're thinking about doing through the EPA. Then all the interests affected—people like you all across America and the industries, too, and the businesses—they get to come in and say what they feel. And if there

are mistakes or if the Government is going too far, if everybody admits something doesn't need to be done, it can all be changed. That is the orderly way this should be done. And that is precisely what Congress—at least some in Congress—are trying to stop us from doing, this orderly, neighborly, open, honest process in which we arrive at these kind of standards.

I want to continue to strengthen the right-to-know through that kind of open and fair process. But I want you to know something else. If Congress passes a law to block this kind of process in future right-to-know issues, then I will issue another Executive order to finish that job as well.

The message here is clear. Congress can go right on with its plan to undermine America's antipollution laws, but it will go nowhere fast. Community right-to-know is here to stay. I want more neighborhoods like this one all across America. And I want America to see you tonight on the evening news and hear about you tomorrow in the newspapers and on the radio stations so people know what they can do if they work together with the law.

Let me just say there is more here than a single law at stake. Democracies always have depended upon the free flow of information to ordinary citizens. Our democracy in this age, which has been heralded the information age, is being regaled constantly with the dreams of all the television channels we're going to be able to get, all the different radio stations, all the different magazines we can read. We are going to be awash in information. Wouldn't it be tragic if, in the information age, the single most significant thing to come out of this Congress was blocking information that you need to know about the most basic health and safety requirements of your families, your children, and your community? That's not my idea of the 21st century information society. I want you to know more, not less. And I think you do, too.

And if you need any evidence of that, just look what happened when the former Soviet Union and the whole Communist empire in Eastern Europe broke up. We saw some of the awfullest environmental problems anywhere in the world because there was development there without democracy, because today's economics took the place of the health and safety of their people and, in the end, helped to undermine their economy. If we needed any other evidence, that alone ought to be enough.

So I just want to close by asking you when you walk away from here to think about what your ordinary day is like. Think about the information that keeps you and your family safe and healthy. Think about what your child might see that might change his or her behavior: a stop sign, a label that tells you what's in the food you buy for your family, the warning on a pack of cigarettes. This and other things are simple things that we take for granted because their cost is minimal. But their value is priceless. The silent threat posed by pollution is as real and dangerous as the threat of a speeding car to a walking child. We've known for a long time that what we can't see can hurt us.

Our health and safety laws, they're our line of defense against these dangers. We're not about to abandon them, not about to abandon them, because of people like you. You know, there's a couple of lines in the Bible that say, if your child asks for bread, would you give him a stone; if he asked for fish, would you give him a serpent; if he asked for an egg would you give him a scorpion? Today we must ask, if our child asked about the future, will we give him or her dirty air, poison water; would we keep them from knowing what chemicals are being released into their neighborhoods and keep their parents from protecting them? We all know what the answer is. It's no.

It seems simple here in this wonderful neighborhood. Why don't you help us make it simple in Washington, DC?

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:10 p.m. at Fort Armistead Park. In his remarks, he referred to Doris McGuigan, environmental activist in the Brooklyn-Curtis Bay community of Baltimore, and Thomas V. (Mike) Miller, Jr., president of the Maryland Senate. The Executive order on Federal acquisition and community right-to-know and the related memorandum are listed in Appendix D at the end of this volume.