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Remarks on the 1998 Legislative Agenda and an Exchange With Reporters
April 21, 1998

The President. Good afternoon. In the coming weeks, Congress will be making an awful lot of important decisions about how to best prepare our children and our Nation for the 21st century. First, we have an historic opportunity to pass bipartisan legislation to protect our children from the dangers of tobacco. The legislation would put an end to the tobacco industry's calculated, multimillion-dollar media campaign to hook our children early to the deadly habit of smoking.

For years, the cartoon character Joe Camel was the star of their efforts to create a new generation of customers for cigarettes, what the tobacco industry euphemistically called "replacement smokers," what most of us call our children. Even as the executives denied they were targeting children, Joe Camel became as recognizable to them as Mickey Mouse.

Now, some in Congress say that teen smoking has nothing to do with Joe Camel. Medical science and common sense makes it plain: Teen smoking has everything to do with Joe Camel, with unscrupulous marketing campaigns that prey on the insecurities and dreams of our children. Indeed, a recent study by the American Medical Association found that over a third of our young people who try cigarettes do so because of advertising and promotion and that Joe Camel was the overwhelming favorite among 12- to 15-year-olds.

The industry has spent hundreds of millions of dollars on such marketing campaigns, plainly not designed to appeal to adults. It is time to end this story once and for all. So again I say to Congress, now is the time to pass strong bipartisan tobacco legislation. And again I say, I hope that both parties will work together for the benefit of our children.

Today is an extremely important day for the future of public education in America. Soon the United States Senate will be faced with a clear choice: whether to modernize 5,000 schools and strengthen educational opportunity for all children or offer families about a $7 tax rebate that would barely cover the cost of schools supplies and, in the process, would weaken our national commitment to education.

Above all, the information age is an education age. And the most important thing we can do to strengthen our country for the 21st century is to give our people the best education system in the world. In our balanced budget, I propose a plan that would help us to do that. It would help all Americans—teachers, parents, students, principals—bring a revolution of standards, accountability, and choice to our schools.

I am committed to seeing that our students master the basics with national standards and an exam to measure those in fourth grade reading and eighth grade math; to reduce class sizes in the early grades to an average of 18; to encouraging public school choice, charter schools; and to ending social promotion. Making sure that every child in America has an opportunity to learn in a modern, safe, state-of-the-art school is also a centerpiece of our plan.

The need is great. With the number of school-age children at a record high and growing, schools across the country already are at or beyond capacity. One-third of our schools need to be modernized. Nearly half don't have the wiring to support basic computer equipment. The Federal Government helps to build roads and bridges and other infrastructure projects because they are in the national interest. But none of that will matter if we do not see that our national interest in an adequate education infrastructure is also preserved.

Today Senator Carol Moseley-Braun will offer an amendment that will help communities raise the funds to modernize 5,000 schools. If we want our children to be prepared for the 21st century, they ought to have 21st century schools. I urge Congress to adopt the amendment right away.

Today the Senate will also vote on the wrong way—an ill-advised tax incentive for elementary and secondary expenses. The proposal is bad education policy and bad tax policy. It won't do anything to strengthen our schools and, in fact, would weaken public education by siphoning limited Federal resources away from public schools. The $1.6 billion proposal would do very little for average families, offering an average of $7 in tax relief for parents of the 90 percent of our children who are in public schools and

$37 for the parents with children in private schools. It would disproportionately benefit highest income taxpayers; families who are struggling to make ends meet would never see a penny of it. It would short-change our children.

The right way to fix the schools is to fix them not walk away from them. We have 600 days left before the turn of the century. We have to prepare our children for it. We should begin with protecting their health and giving them the best schools in the world.

I'd like to ask the Vice President and Senator Daschle and Mr. Gephardt to make some remarks. Thank you.

[*At this point, Vice President Albert Gore, Jr., Senate Minority Leader Thomas A. Daschle, and House Minority Leader Richard A. Gephardt made brief remarks.*]

Cartoon Characters in Advertising

Q. Mr. President, do you think that other cartoon characters used to market other products that potentially are dangerous to children, like beer, should be outlawed as well—the frogs in the Budweiser commercial, for example?

The President. I think that, by an order of magnitude, what we saw with the tobacco marketing is far greater in its impact on children and in its destructive capacity. And so I don't want to be deterred by focusing on other things when the business at hand is to pass this tobacco legislation. I don't think there's any—no other thing I can think of compares with what has been done there in terms of the destructive impact on our children and their health.

And also, I would say, based on all these documents which are coming out now and all these lawsuits—the latest one in Minnesota—it appears unambiguous that they were designed to do just what they did, which was to appeal to children.

Q. Mr. President, the tobacco companies——

Bipartisan Agreement on Tobacco Legislation

Q. Mr. President, how do you expect to get bipartisanship when you bash the Republicans and they bash you with the kind of rhetoric that we've heard here today?

The President. Well, first of all, I haven't bashed all the Republicans. Senator McCain—I bragged on the bill that came out of his committee, 19 to one. I talked—I called Senator Lott a few days ago and said that I very much wanted to get this bill passed.

What has caused our concern here is this apparent dramatic change in the statements made by Republicans about this. I mean, it wasn't so very long ago when the Speaker said that there's no way in the world that I could ever be for a more progressive tax bill—tobacco bill than he would be for. And I, frankly, loved hearing that. I don't mind sharing the credit for this. I don't want this to be a partisan thing; I want this to be an American thing.

Let's look what had happened here. All of us have been talking about trying to get bipartisan agreement on this. The tobacco industry says they don't like the McCain bill, and they refuse to negotiate any further, and they're fighting for their life, and this is war. And all of a sudden, we get different public statements coming out of people in important positions in the Republican Party.

I still believe and hope that there will be enough Republicans to make a genuinely bipartisan effort to pass sensible, sound, strong legislation. And that is my commitment. That is all of our commitments. We are responding to events as they have unfolded. But I would remind you that what sparked all this was the bipartisan action of the Senate committee. That is what I have lauded, and that is what I want.

Education Legislation

Q. Mr. President, regarding the education bill, sir, you seem to be unwavering over the vouchers issue. The Republicans have indicated they're going to be unwavering on the vouchers issue. Isn't the reality that there probably isn't going to be an education bill this year, over this issue perhaps?

The President. Well, I hope not. This may be just the opening foray, but I think a lot of them are genuinely opposed to the concept embodied in Senator Carol Moseley-Braun's bill. That is, they believe it's okay for Congress to invest money in highly specific local transportation projects but not to give even the most general kind of support for our education infrastructure.

Now, during all the time I've been President, when we had those tough budget years, I always tried to provide enough room for there to be some increase in infrastructure for transportation. But I believe the infrastructure of the nineties will be the superhighway that carries information, and I believe the people that can travel it will be those that have a good education

not the finest vehicle. And so, to me, when we've got cities with the average school building being 65 years old, when we've got small communities like the one I visited in Florida with 17 trailers out back of the main school building where the kids are going to school—this is a national infrastructure issue. And I think it's important.

Now, on this education IRA, I think the real thing you have to ask yourself about that is this: Does it make sense, when the Federal Government only spends about—provides about 6 percent of the total education budget of the country and when everybody recognizes we need more general investment—does it make sense to take $1.6 billion and put it into a program that will give the average public school parent 7 bucks? Let's assume the Republicans who favor more private school education are right—give the average public school parent 7 bucks to pay tuition to a private school? And for those that already have their kids in private school, if they're middle class families, give them an average of $37 a year?

I think the $1.6 billion would be far better spent funding charter schools, funding school standards programs, funding the master teacher program, and helping to fund this school construction program. That's what I believe. I don't think it's even close. If they believe these programs are so great, then they ought to be out there in every city and every State in the country making this case instead of using the limited Federal money we have which ought to be spent to benefit the largest number of people in the most impactful way.

Q. Mr. President, the tobacco companies——

Transportation Legislation

Q. [*Inaudible*]—fails to lower the spending levels in the transportation bills, will you veto the bills? And if not, why not?

The President. Well, first of all, the transportation bill has not yet passed; it's going into conference. I have a lot of problems with it, including the dropping of the provision for a tougher DWI standard in the House bill. But I think it is imperative that we wind up with a transportation bill which increases our investment in transportation but does not do so at the expense of education, of research—medical research—the environment, all the things that are also important to our future, on the one hand, and on the other hand, that doesn't run away from our Social Security first commitment on the surplus.

And so I'm going to do my best to fashion that sort of infrastructure highway bill. And I am concerned that the bills, as passed, are disembodied from the budget. They don't have any relationship with all the other pieces in the budget and, at least on their surface, appear to be far in excess of anything we can afford and still continue our commitments in education and honor Social Security first.

But this is a process, and we're not there yet. We're not to the point yet where we have to make the discussion you said.

Education Legislation Veto

Q. Do you expect that you can get anything done as long as Congress meets on Tuesdays and Thursdays?

Q. Would you veto an education bill if it included both the Coverdell accounts and the school construction money you want?

The President. Yes, yes.

Tobacco

Q. Mr. President, Speaker Gingrich yesterday said you sent the wrong signal to children by smoking a cigar when you're celebrating. How would you respond?

The President. Well, first of all, I think the only time I've done that since I was President was when we got that young man out of Bosnia. And I think he's probably right about that. I think he's probably right about that. But let me say, I do not—I think to contend that that isolated event has a bigger impact on children than these millions of dollars of deliberately calculated ads—billions—is just a way of avoiding taking responsibility for doing the right thing.

Now, secondly—you know, he made another point with which I agree, which is that there is too much—there are too many young actors and actresses in alluring movies in Hollywood making smoking look alluring again. But we've been talking about that for 2 or 3 years. The Vice President, I think, has already had two meetings with people in Hollywood; I have voiced the concern publicly and privately. I agree with that.

But these things get—said in the context in which he said it, it was like to let them off the hook for taking responsibility for passing tobacco legislation and making cigarettes both more expensive for kids to buy and then using

the money to deal with the health care consequences and to fund an antismoking advertising campaign that they know would be effective. And I'll tell you one—I'll bet you anything that in addition to their previously effective advertising campaigns, we'll be treated to another big ad campaign from the tobacco industries surrounding this before you know it.

So you can say all these things, but none of us should ever, ever be guilty of that. We can point the finger at others, but no amount of finger-pointing at others, by the President or anyone else, will ever absolve us of our own responsibility to push the public interest. And that's what I'm trying to do.

Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:23 p.m. in the Rose Garden at the White House. During the exchange, he referred to Capt. Scott O'Grady, USAF, an F–16 pilot shot down and subsequently rescued in Bosnia in June 1995.

Memorandum on Streamlining the Granting of Waivers
April 21, 1998

Memorandum for the Heads of Executive Departments and Agencies

Subject: Streamlining the Granting of Waivers

Five years ago, the Vice President asked you to create reinvention laboratories in your departments and agencies and to streamline the granting of waivers of internal agency rules within them so the laboratories could more effectively promote innovation. These waivers—delegations of authority to deviate from existing internal agency policies and procedures—are often sought by front-line employees who are trying to make their operations work better, cost less, and get results that Americans care about. The Vice President and I emphasized such measures in the Blair House Papers last year, when we encouraged you to delegate more power to front-line employees to unlock the enormous potential of the Federal workforce.

Your departments and agencies have responded, and Federal employees have used waivers to facilitate innovation and provide excellent customer service. For example, the Coast Guard marine safety programs have increased managerial flexibility for field commanders to waive unnecessary requirements that had previously accounted for over one-half million work hours annually. The Department of Agriculture's Animal Plant Health Inspection Service's Tort Claims Adjudication Team used a waiver to reduce the processing time for tort claims of less than $2,500 from 51 days to 8.

Based on these experiences, I am directing you, where you determine that it is appropriate, to adopt some of the best practices developed by agencies. These best practices include the following characteristics:

1. Waiver requests are acted upon within 30 days or less. After 30 days, the originating entity within the agency can assume approval and implement the requested waiver.

2. Those officials having authority to grant or change internal agency rules can approve waiver requests, but only the head of an agency can deny a waiver request.

3. Officials who have the authority to grant waivers are encouraged to identify potential waiver opportunities and extend waivers to their own agencies.

The Vice President's team at the National Partnership for Reinventing Government (NPR) is ready to assist you in developing a waiver process based upon lessons learned and best practices from agencies that have experience with waivers. Some of you already have this type of waiver process in place for reinvention laboratories. I direct you to take every opportunity to extend this process throughout your agency.

You should report to the Vice President on actions taken to implement this memorandum by July 1, 1998.

This memorandum does not apply to waiver requests by grant program recipients nor does it apply to the granting of waivers to statutory requirements or practices required by law. It applies to those internal agency rules not codified in the Code of Federal Regulations.

WILLIAM J. CLINTON