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means: guaranteed private insurance, a choice of doctors and health plans, outlawing unfair insurance practices, preserving Medicare, guaranteeing health benefits at work. It's that simple.

I want to cut through the complexity, the confusion, and downright distortions. This issue should be decided by informed citizens, not by special interests spending millions of dollars to prevent progress and to promote their own narrow interest.

Let's face the facts, debate our choices, and make an historic decision to build on what's best and fix what's worst in our health care system. That's democracy at its best, just like the old-fashioned American town meeting I attended in New Hampshire last week. And the lesson of history is that when the American people have the information they need, they do make the right decision.

Thanks for listening.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:06 a.m. in the Oval Office at the White House.

Remarks at a Children's Town Meeting

March 19, 1994

Mr. Peter Jennings. Good morning, everybody. Good morning, especially, boys and girls, and welcome back to the White House really. This is the second time that President Clinton has invited us back to the White House so that he and a group of children we've invited from around the country can exchange ideas about the state of the country and the state of the world. It's a chance for him and for them to talk about their dreams. So we hope you'll stay with us this morning.

If our timing is right, the President is just coming down from upstairs, in a house which we all know he loves very much.

Good morning, Mr. President.

The President. Good morning, Peter.

Mr. Jennings. Thank you for having us back, sir.

The President. I'm glad you're back.

Mr. Jennings. You really have spent a lot of time studying this house, haven't you?

The President. I have. Every President but George Washington has lived here. And so it's really the story of America. And it's a great honor to live here. So I like to know the history of it, and I like to know the things that happened to the people who lived here and what happened in which rooms and things. I've kept up with it pretty well.

Mr. Jennings. You all know there are a lot of kids in the East Room waiting to see us. But surprising, to me at least, a number of them asked us whether or not the President had to live here. [*Laughter*] And I just asked you that a moment ago.

The President. I don't know.

Mr. Jennings. We'll have to find that——

The President. Isn't that funny, I don't know. I don't think anyone's ever volunteered to live anywhere else, except once when there was a big renovation of the White House when President Truman was President, I think he had to spend more than 2 years out of here, across the street.

Mr. Jennings. We have actually a little—we're going to go into the East Room now, but we have just to introduce you or reintroduce you in many cases to what this is like, a little history package while you and I walk it. Ready?

[*At this point, a short film about the history of the White House was shown.*]

Mr. Jennings. And there is the White House, on a very sunny, lovely day here in Washington here. And we are, of course, in the East Room, which has its own great sense of history. And here all these boys and girls have joined us from around the country.

You notice the President's tie, everybody?

Audience members. Yes.

The President. This tie was designed by a 13-year-old named Kelly. It's called ''Save the Children,'' and it's part of a series of ties designed by children for the Save the Children Foundation. It's a group that works on the problems of children in poor communities and poor neighborhoods around America. And my wife and I have been involved in it for a long time. So they take the drawings of children, turn them into ties, and then sell the ties to raise funds. It's great; I have a lot of them.

Mr. Jennings. I bet people send you ties every day of the year, don't they?

The President. Every day of the year, just about. I especially love these. I bet I've had 20 of these ties; they're great.

Mr. Jennings. We have a lot of questions for you this morning, Mr. President, so we're going to go away for just one second. And then we'll have you and all these youngsters from around the country talk to one another.

We'll be right back.

[*At this point, the television stations took a commercial break.*]

Mr. Jennings. Mr. President, I said a lot of these kids had questions. How many of you have got questions for the President? We're going to be here for several days. You don't mind that, do you?

The President. No.

Mr. Jennings. Let's get right to it. Kevin, how about you?

Education and Employment

Q. My first question is for those children who wish to pursue a college education: What are you going to do to guarantee that there are jobs for them when they get out of college? Today, many adults have graduate degrees, bachelors—they have a hard time finding jobs. They have as good a chance as those who are straight out of high school. What are you going to do to guarantee that when I get out of college, I have a job waiting for me?

The President. I don't know that I can guarantee it, but I think we can make it more likely. But perhaps the main reason I ran for President was to try to restore the economic health of the country. And what I am trying to do is to follow policies that will generate more jobs in America. I have tried to bring our deficit down, get interest rates down to create more jobs. I've tried to open more markets to our products and sell more American products overseas. I've tried to train people to do the jobs of tomorrow, and I've tried to take the technologies that we developed when we had a big defense budget and turn them into jobs in the peacetime economy. And in the last 13 months, since we had this meeting last, we created over 2 million new jobs in this economy.

And let me also say, I know it's tough for college graduates, but let me tell everyone of you one thing: Your chances of getting a good job are still much, much better if you first graduate from high school, then get at least 2 years of further training, and finally, if you get a college degree. The unemployment rate in America for college graduates is 3.5 percent. The unemployment rate for high school dropouts is 11.5 percent.

Mr. Jennings. So the answer is, stay in school.

The President. So the answer is, even though it's tougher than it has been for college graduates, you still have a much better chance if you stay in school to have higher incomes and to have a job.

Mr. Jennings. Let's go over to the other side, here. Who's got a question there? Yes, go ahead.

Bosnia

Q. Mr. President, why are you fighting a war in another country when you have a war right here?

The President. Which war?

Q. The war in Bosnia.

The President. We're not fighting a war there. We're trying to help them bring the war to an end because many people are being killed and because the war could spread and because we have an obligation to try to support that. But we don't have soldiers on the ground there. I am trying to fight the war right here at home. There's a bill in the Congress now that I am supporting, which would put another 100,000 police officers on the street to make the streets and the schools safer, that would give more money for young people for programs to help them resolve their differences peacefully, would take semiautomatic weapons off the street, and would help us to fight the war here at home. I agree that the war here at home is killing more people than a lot of wars overseas, and we're trying to fight that one. And you're right, we should be fighting it.

Mr. Jennings. Right here in the front row. What's your name.

Race Relations

Q. Gary.

I was wondering, with all the racial problems going on, such as people not treating

each other the same way, do you have any plans for solving that problem?

Mr. Jennings. A lot of people worked hard on their questions here.

The President. Yes, they're great. There is a lot of racial tension in this country today. And I think there are two things that we have to do about it. First of all, we have to remind the American people that we have always been a multiethnic, multiracial country. We've always been a country with a lot of different racial and ethnic groups. And every time a new group came along, they've often been subject to prejudice. But what's made our country great is that we have been able to successfully blend in people of different races and religions and ethnic groups, let them respect what's different about them, and still live together. And I spend a lot of time working on that, talking to young people, talking to groups, trying to bring people together. I brought more diverse people into my Government than any President has in the past.

The second thing we have to do is to try to give a future back to all of our people. A lot of times people fight with one another if they think they don't have any opportunity. If we had more jobs and better education and a better climate in America, less crime, then people would be more relaxed and better able to appreciate one another.

I don't know if anybody's here from Los Angeles, but just for example, Los Angeles County alone has people from 150 different racial and ethnic groups. In Bosnia, you mentioned Bosnia, people from basically three different groups have been fighting and killing each other. So we've been, with all of our problems, we've been pretty successful. But we've got to know that our differences—look around this room—our differences in America are our strength. We live in a global economy, a smaller and smaller world. And the fact that we have so many different races and religions and ethnic groups is a good thing for America, and we have to learn to like it.

Mr. Jennings. Mr. President, you—Gary, are you happy with that answer, by the way?

Q. Yes.

Mr. Jennings. You are, are you? If you're not, you're entitled to tell him.

We know a lot of these kids, Mr. President, because we went out and we looked around the country to find kids who were sort of representative of various ideas in the country. One of them is Tanya up there. Hi, Tanya. Show the President just a little bit about you on the monitor here, and then we'll get you to talk to him.

[*At this point, a videotape of Tanya talking with the Vice President at Dunbar High School was shown.*]

Mr. Jennings. This is Tanya. Tanya sort of came to our attention when she met your Vice President at a meeting.

The President. At Dunbar. Are you a student at Dunbar? Good, I recognize the film.

Mr. Jennings. All right, so let's come out of the film now. All right Tanya, your turn.

Urban Youth

Q. Good afternoon. My question is going towards inner city kids. We feel as though the baby boomers have forgotten that the chaos that we create was given to us by you all. We want the problem to be stopped, but we need help. A lot of us are tired of hearing that we are a lost generation when we are not. We are a generation of renewal. And we want to know, what steps are you going to take to give us the hope, the pride, and the strength that we need to succeed in the future and to become strong, black, white, Chinese, African-American people in the society, 10 and 30 and 20 years in the future?

Mr. Jennings. Tanya, can I ask you a question before the President answers? Do you think the President can do a lot about that? Do you think he makes a really enormous difference here?

Q. He makes a very enormous difference, but one thing a lot of people fail to realize, if you don't come into the communities on positive notes, when you come for negative notes, it really angers a lot of people. It's angered me a lot. And I want the media and you, also, to know that I wanted to leave Mr. Gore very baffled, and I'm glad I left him baffled because I want him to understand that you need to come when positive things happen and not just come when negative things happen.

The President. I agree with that. Let me just make two comments about that, and then I'll try to answer your question.

We, at least, do come. I mean, he and I have been out there. My wife has been out there. We have been in inner city communities. We have walked streets that you don't normally see the President walking. We have been to places you don't normally see the President go. And I agree that we should support success stories.

I was in Detroit last week, and sure, Detroit has a lot of inner city problems. They also have, perhaps, the best job training program of its kind in America for inner city kids, putting them in very high wage, high-tech jobs. So I visited that program because it's a success story. It proves that all children can learn. So I agree with that. We shouldn't just show up when something terrible happens.

The second thing I want to say to you is that, essentially, everything that I do is designed to try to give young people like you some hope and some structure and some opportunity back. I agree that generations ahead of you have left you a pretty lousy situation. You've got all these kids that are born into families where there was never a marriage. You've got all these neighborhoods where the jobs have disappeared. You've got all these places where the schools have, in effect, been given up on. And that's not your fault. You just showed up. I mean, you're a child; you shouldn't have to deal with that, except to do your best. So what we're trying to do is to find ways to rebuild communities, rebuild schools, and bring the jobs back into the community and, at the same time, to follow policies which strengthen the family unit instead of undermine it, which encourage people to take responsibility for their children and reward them if they do it.

Let me just give you an example. The welfare system has often encouraged families to break up. We're supporting a welfare reform program that will encourage families to stay together as well as to get jobs. We've got a tax system that we've changed so that when taxes are due this year, 16 and a half percent of the American taxpayers, working parents with very modest wages, are going to get a tax cut to help them raise their children better, to strengthen them. We've got school reform bills going through Congress now to try to help strengthen schools to have more uniform excellence.

Now, those are things we're doing. I also have to tell you though, when kids get in trouble, they get in trouble one by one, and they have to be saved one by one. So we also need—the President needs soldiers, common workers in this battle. And that's why what people do in every school, in every neighborhood and every family and every church is important.

Mr. Jennings. Probably got some potential soldiers here.

The President. You bet, a lot of them.

But you're right, we owe you a better deal than you're getting, and I'm trying to give it to you. But you all are going to have to do your part, too.

The President's Schedule

Mr. Jennings. Now, there are a lot of serious questions, I know, here. But somebody had a question about the White House itself and about the President's day. They've all got shy and serious on me. A lot of them wanted to know whether or not you find this too big a job sometimes and wonder how you get everything done in one day.

The President. Sometimes I don't, and sometimes it is too big a job. But I have a lot of help, for one thing. A lot of good people work here, and we work hard to try to organize the day well. So I try to get up in the morning, go run, see my daughter before she goes off to school. And then I come in and I start every day with a briefing on national security, has anything happened in the rest of the world that could affect the United States, that we have to be concerned about? Then I get briefings on what's happened in the United States, and I read clippings from newspapers around the country to see what's happened. And then we start work, and we just work through these problems. And normally I finish at about 7 p.m. at night, sometimes a little later.

Mr. Jennings. You work every day?

The President. Yes.

Mr. Jennings. Don't take a day off every week?

The President. Sunday. I try to take Sunday off, but I don't always make it. But I try to work a half day on Saturday, take Sunday off, but Monday through Friday I work until pretty late at night.

Mr. Jennings. I think some of us know that.

The President. And sometimes until 12 a.m. or 1 a.m. at home when I read.

Children and Violence

Mr. Jennings. Now, there have been some pretty trying events on your watch in the year and a bit since you've been President. And one of them occurred in California. And we have a young lady here this morning.

Hi, Annie. You're getting tired, aren't you?

Q. Not really.

Mr. Jennings. Oh, you're not. Oh, good, good. I want the President to take a look at the television monitor here so he knows a little bit more about you.

[*At this point, a videotape was shown in which Annie Nichol explained that since her sister, Polly Klaas, was kidnapped and murdered, she no longer feels safe. She also explained that she keeps items such as loud bells and ropes in her bedroom because they help her to feel safe at night.*]

Mr. Jennings. Well, of course, that is Annie Nichol who is the sister of Polly Klaas, who, as you know, was kidnapped in northern California, became enormous news in the country. We asked Annie to come partly because she wanted to, but partly because when we talked to kids around the country, enormous numbers of them are concerned about their safety.

So Annie, away you go.

Q. Well, the other day when I was on the plane coming here, I asked my Mom, do you think I'm going to live to grow up? And my sister, Polly, didn't live to grow up, so I didn't feel that safe. And my question is, I just don't feel very safe, and I want America to be safer for children.

Mr. Jennings. And you think the President can do something, don't you?

The President. I agree. I think I could. Let me say, first of all, you're a brave girl to come here and let us see your story. As you probably know, I talked to some of your family members. And I'm doing what I can to change some laws.

Let's talk about it a little bit. First of all, there are people who get paroled out of prison who have serious problems and who are very likely to repeat them who should not be released. That's one thing that your sister's case has made people sensitive to. And that's why we're working on some laws to identify people who are serious threats to society who will likely repeat their crimes and not let them out.

The second thing we have to do is to try to make our communities and our streets safer. That's why I'm trying to pass a bill to take these assault weapons off the street and to put more police officers on the street to make the streets safer.

And then there's a lot of violence against children that occur in their own homes from family members and in schools, and we are trying to start programs now all across America where people learn to resolve their differences in nonviolent ways, to stop hurting each other and shooting each other and acting on impulse.

You do live in a country that's too dangerous. And we have to make it less dangerous. And it is a huge obligation that I feel, and I think about it every day. You know, I have a little girl, too. I want the children of this country to be able to grow up on safe streets and safe schools and safer homes. And I think that there are some very specific things we can all do about it.

We also need to change our attitudes. You may see pretty soon a public service announcement I did with a young woman from Washington, DC, a 14-year-old girl named Alicia Brown. She went to the sixth funeral of a friend of hers just yesterday. Six of her friends have been shot. So we did this public service announcement together—it's going to be on television—talking to young people and asking them to help us turn America away from violence.

Mr. Jennings. When you were young, Mr. President, do you ever remember being in a room with kids and people asked you if you felt safe?

The President. Never. When I was a kid, people beat each other up. I mean, the only thing you ever worried about was somebody

coming up to you on the street or in an alley or something and jumping you and beating you up. Nobody ever shot anybody, there were none of this—I mean, to speak of—there was very little of this, the kidnappings, the kind of thing that happened to your sister—much more rare then. It's much worse today.

Mr. Jennings. What do you think. Annie?

Q. Well, for one thing, that I think is that I think that other people shouldn't be released from jail, and they shouldn't be stealing as much children as they have been stealing.

Mr. Jennings. I was looking at some figures; 4,600 kids were abducted last year.

That stuff you put in your bedroom, did you really feel the need for that?

Q. I did feel the need.

The President. Did it make you feel better when you did it, that you were taking charge of your life and you were trying to protect yourself?

Q. Yes.

Mr. Jennings. You think the President's on the right track, though?

Q. I think so.

The President. I'll try, Annie. I think about your sister and the children like her all the time. I'm working hard on it.

Mr. Jennings. Okay, let's go over here. Thanks, Annie, my dear. Annie's had such a good time in the White House today. Where's your dolphin? He's had a tour of the White House, hasn't he?

The President. Good for you.

Mr. Jennings. Yes, this was a very rewarding morning for her.

Yes, love.

Q. Well, Mr. President Clinton, I know you get a lot of questions, but this is just a little thing about you. I think you're such a decent and honest person, and I really believe in you in trying to make everybody happy. And I think we kids have to take the responsibility, because we should know who's bringing in the drugs, the guns. And if we just report it in, that would really make a difference. And also that would make a really big difference is that most of the criminals and people who sell drugs, they don't feel loved. And so I think from the moment you're born you have to feel loved. You should tell your child that you love them very much.

Mr. Jennings. What a nice idea.

The President. Let me just say two things. First of all, remember what I said, no matter what I do, the President has to have partners all over America. Everybody's got a role to play. Everybody is important. In most schools where there are drugs and guns, some other kids who don't do drugs and don't have guns known about it. They could report it; they could help to get it done; they could organize themselves into groups in each school and say, ''We don't want drugs in our schools, we don't want guns, we don't want knives, we don't want violence in our schools.'' That could make a bigger difference in that school than anything the President could do.

On the other question, I think you're right. One of the things that we have to do is to find young people who are likely to get in trouble and try to reach them before they get to the point where they are hurting other people, because a lot of young people never felt like they were loved. That's obvious to me; I see it all the time.

Mr. Jennings. Do you know a lot of people who work here in the White House have children? And one of the things—this is a nice treat for you, Mr. President, perhaps—we asked several members of your staff to show us different rooms in the White House with their kids. And if we look at the monitors here now, we can see Henry Cisneros, one of your members of your Cabinet, showing his kids the Cabinet Room.

We'll be right back.

[*At this point, the videotape was shown, and then the television stations took a commercial break.*]

Mr. Jennings. Welcome back to our morning in the White House.

Physical Fitness Test

Q. I had a fun question to ask you, and I was wondering, Mr. President, in elementary school we had to pass a physical fitness test to pretty much get an A, and you got a President's award or a certificate. And I was wondering if you've ever tried or ever thought of passing the test, or if you've even looked at the test that we have to pass?

The President. I haven't, but I probably should. I imagine that I could pass it since I jog every day and do a little work on my weights and do some other things. I probably could, but I'll do it. I'll check on it. If I don't make it then I'll have to get myself in shape.

Socks the Cat

Q. I read a book called "Socks in the White House," and it said that Socks had a bulletproof case. Does he really?

The President. He can stand behind something that's bulletproof, but most of the time he's just out in the open. That's just a funny thing to say. It was a joke.

Mr. Jennings. We have a couple questions from around the country. Remember last year, sir, we had some people on the telephone. Well, this year—that was kind of difficult so we've asked some people out around the country to ask you questions they've wanted to, and here's one on tape.

Education

Q. My name is Jessica Jones. I'm 11 years old. I am from Red Bank, Tennessee. My question is, what are you planning for the improvement of public education?

Mr. Jennings. That's pretty general. That should keep you going for a while.

The President. Well, very briefly, we've got two bills in to design to help the public schools. One encourages schools to try all kinds of new and different experiments to improve education but gives them some real standards so we know whether kids are learning or not no matter where they live.

The other one gives opportunities for kids to move from school to further training if they don't go on to college. So young kids that don't go to college still have a chance to get a good education and make a good living.

Mr. Jennings. Now, we have a guest from overseas. Somebody mentioned Bosnia this morning. Right over here to your right, sir, is Zlata Filpovic, who comes from Sarajevo. And a lot of the kids in here last night, Zlata, knew all about you because of your diary. Perhaps we should show people at home a little bit first about your recent history.

[*At this point, a videotape was shown in which Zlata described the horrors children face living in war-torn Bosnia.*]

Mr. Jennings. Welcome to Washington again, Zlata. Your question for the President.

Bosnia

Q. Usually people when they start war they say with this war we will get things. But I think usually they—all of them lose things. And I think it's really big stupidity. And I would like to ask you, is it war—is it end of that stupidity close? Is it closer?

The President. I think it is closer. And I agree with you. These people started fighting in your country because they wanted territory for people who were just in their own ethnic group. And yet as you pointed out, people who lived in Sarajevo, they had friends—they didn't know if they were Serbs or Croats or Muslims. They lived together. But people from outside brought this war on to try to divide the country up. I think it is closer.

Yesterday we signed an agreement here in Washington between the Croats and the Government of Bosnia, which is mostly Muslim but not entirely. And now the question is, will the Serbs agree to sign on? Will they agree to give up some of the territory they took so that everybody can live with a fair piece of land and we can stop killing the adults and the children? I think we're closer, and we're working very hard on it.

Mr. Jennings. Okay. You've been very determined back there. Ram, is that your name? Mustaq, I'm sorry, Mustaq. I apologize.

Health Care Reform

Q. Do you like to be known as the President of the health care program?

The President. Be known? Yes.

Mr. Jennings. Sounds a bit like a set-up, doesn't it, sir?

The President. Yes, I do. Because I want every American family to have health care. And a lot of them don't now, and millions who have it can lose it. And every other major country in the world with a good economy like ours, gives all the families health care. We don't, and it's not right.

Mr. Jennings. Has anybody else got a question about health care, because—oh goodness, lots of them.

Q. My name's Mickey. I was on welfare. And you say you encourage people to get jobs when they are on welfare. But as soon as I started working, they took away all my benefits, including my medical benefits. I was better living off welfare than I am now working, because I'm not receiving any medical benefits anymore.

The President. I talked about you and people like you in my State of the Union Address. I pointed out—you asked a health care question—if you're on welfare in America today and if you have children or if you're just yourself on welfare, you get covered by a medical program paid for by the Government. If you get off welfare and you go to work in a job that has no health insurance, you start working and paying your taxes so that someone who stayed on welfare can still get health care and you don't get it anymore. It's not fair. And you're right, the best thing we could do to end welfare as we know it is to give everybody health coverage so people would never be encouraged to stay on welfare.

Good for you. Thank you for saying that.

Public Expectations

Mr. Jennings. Mr. President, do you think the people have too high expectations of what you can really accomplish?

The President. Well, sometimes. That's why I always try to say, here's what I can do, here's what I can't do, and remind the American people that in a democracy, the people have to do a lot of things. We have to change this country from the grassroots, and a lot of the changes we have to make have to happen inside us: our attitudes about violence and our attitudes about young people, without regard to their race and what they can do. We've got to change our whole way of thinking about things.

Mr. Jennings. Okay, here's a question right over here.

Education

Q. My name is Ebony. My major concern is education. My question to you is, why is it necessary to bus children out of their neighborhoods, to get a, quote, unquote, "equal education"? Shouldn't all schools offer the same programs, since we're all being taxed?

The President. The answer is yes, all schools should offer the same programs and should achieve the same high standards of excellence. One real problem we've had in America—let me just say this real quick, I don't want to get into a long answer—but in America, our school system has usually been a local school system, run community by community, paid for by the State and local governments and a little money from us at the national level. What we're trying to do now is to move toward greater equality. The State of Michigan just voted in a historic vote to take most of the property taxes away from schools and give State taxes so everybody could get a more equal education. And it's going to be one of the great crusades of the next 10 years, giving all kids, no matter where they live, a decent education.

Q. Thank you.

Mr. Jennings. Mr. President, I'm going to follow that up, if you don't mind, because we have a young man here more than determined to ask you a question about education. Reginald, right? Reginald, we've got a piece of tape of you at your school. Before you ask the President your question, let's take a look at that.

[*At this point, a videotape was shown in which Reginald explained how his school building had deteriorated over the years.*]

Mr. Jennings. Somebody observed, Reginald, you're at least going to make an investigative reporter when you grow up. You've got all the moves there.

The President. Didn't he do a great job? Give him a hand. He was good. [*Applause*] Good job.

Mr. Jennings. What's your question for the President?

Q. A lot of the students are drawing away from their education. And one thing, a lot of kids are talking about Super Nintendo and things like that. What do you think about video games? And do you know that you are on a video game?

The President. No, am I?

Q. Yes, you are. I'd just like to tell you this. On Super Nintendo it's a basketball called "NBA Jam." And it's a code for Bill Clinton and Al Gore, and you have your own sort of slam-dunk and everything.

Mr. Jennings. You're kidding.

The President. I have to confess, the Vice President's a better basketball player than I am, but I like the sport, I think, even more than he does.

Let me tell you something about this. What happened was in the last 12, 15 years, a lot of the schools got in financial problems, and it was easier to put off repairing the buildings and taking care of the buildings, instead of laying off personnel or other things. And it's a terrible problem. And I think there's going to have to be a real effort in every State in the country to fix these schools up. A lot of these old school buildings are better structurally than newer buildings, but nobody's taking care of them. And I appreciate your bringing that to public attention.

Mr. Jennings. Mr. President, somebody asked a little while ago what the difference was like between having this and meeting the press. Do you like to go to meet the press in the press briefing room?

The President. I do. I do that there—sometimes I meet the press here when we have foreign leaders here and when I have press conferences, we do it here sometimes.

Mr. Jennings. We've asked David Dreyer, your Deputy Communications Director, to give us a tour of the press briefing room. We'll be right back.

The President. This is where they ask me hard questions.

[*At this point, a videotape was shown, and then the television stations took a commercial break.*]

Mr. Jennings. We have another question on tape from across the country. I'll be curious to know what you think of this one.

The Media

Q. Hello, my name is Michael Marcus. I'm 17 years old, and I live in Palm Beach Gardens, Florida. My question to you, Mr. President, is with all the unfavorable press that you have been receiving, how are you able to focus and concentrate on the policies that you wish to pass through Congress?

The President. Well, what I do is I answer the questions the best I can. And I recognize that the press is like a herd of cattle sometimes, they just get swarming on some issue and they become obsessed with it. But the American people are obsessed with their own lives. Look at the questions I've been asked today. I try to focus on those things. I try to respond to the press, deal with the negative questions, and then keep my time and my attention devoted to the things I was elected to deal with: the crime problem, the health care problem, the jobs problem, the education problem, the things that I've been asked about today.

Mr. Jennings. Is that hard sometimes, though?

The President. Sometimes it's very hard, but that's a big part of the test. I mean, this whole job is like a character test, you're always being measured and tested and pushed. And I believe it is my job to keep focused on the things I was elected to do. So that's what I have to do. And no matter how hard it is, in the end that's how I'll be judged in history, and that's how I'll judge myself.

Mr. Jennings. All of these questions, you're perfectly right, are very much on the news. In fact, you mentioned cattle. This is Cotton over here, Cotton who is from Boulder, Wyoming.

The President. Wyoming?

Mr. Jennings. I know you have a question about cattle. Where's the microphone for Cotton there, guys? First of all, hold it, let's show the President a little bit about where you come from.

[*At this point, a videotape was shown in which Cotton explained that an increase in grazing fees could be detrimental to his family's cattle ranch.*]

Mr. Jennings. Okay, Cotton, what's your question?

Cattle Grazing Fees

Q. Mr. President, my family are ranchers and so are many of my neighbors. Part of the year, we graze our cattle on the BLM and U.S. Forest Service lands. I know a lot about ranching, and I know a lot about taking

good care of the environment. Mr. Babbitt and your administration's new plan is to double the grazing fees. This will really hurt my family, and our business cannot afford it. But it won't just hurt our family, it will hurt all of our neighbors and all the businesses in our town.

Mr. Jennings. What's your question, Cotton?

Q. The grazing fees is not the total cost of grazing on public lands. So, Mr. President, I want to know, do you understand what it actually costs to graze on public lands? Because there are a lot of nonfee costs. And if you don't understand that, I'd like to explain them to you.

The President. After the program, I'll be glad to talk to you more about it. But let me briefly say to all of you what this issue is about.

A lot of the land in the West belongs to the Federal Government but has to be used and should be used by farmers and ranchers out there. The fees they pay are about one-fourth the fees they pay to graze on private land, much less. So there's a big push in the Congress, and has been for years, to ask them to pay more fees.

On the other hand, if you charge them too much, they can't stay in business. Your Governor, Mike Sullivan, basically told Secretary Babbitt and me that the original plan that we proposed was too burdensome. And he went out there and started having meetings with the farmers and ranchers and basically changed that plan.

While this plan would call for the doubling of the fees over 3 years, it would also give farmers like you, who take good care of the land, a rebate, that is, the fees wouldn't go up that much if people are actually proving that they're doing their best to maintain the land.

So the real purpose of the fee increase is not to get more money for the Government—it's not that much money—it is to encourage us to keep the land, maintain it, and make sure people will be able to graze it for generations to come.

So it's a question of how to strike the right balance, and I'll be glad to talk to you about it after the program.

Mr. Jennings. Another very contentious subject, right in front here. Brodie.

The President. We'll talk some more after the program.

Go ahead. Brodie, you're up.

Smoking

Q. As you know, Mr. President, this has been concerning me for years, but as you know, all the illegal drugs, we get told how these can really hurt your body, they can mess you up, not to smoke marijuana or sniff cocaine, or anything like that. But there's one drug that kills a lot more people than all those illegal ones combined. This drug is legal, and it's a cigarette. And every day, about 1,000 Americans die from smoking. I have a three-part question here. The first part is why are cigarettes still legal? The second part is what is your administration doing to try to help—oh, God——

The President. Discourage people from smoking?

Q. No, it's not that. It's to prevent smoking—cigarette companies from targeting their ads at children, with Joe Camel and all those other people?

Mr. Jennings. Brodie, why don't you just hang on there for a second—there's a third part. Brodie works—I just met him a few minutes ago—he worked so hard on this question over night. You've done terrific. It's a subject that every kid here is interested in.

The President. The truth is, the reason cigarettes have not been declared illegal is because most Americans don't believe it should be illegal. They know that it's dangerous, the warnings are printed there. But most people believe that it's not as immoral as using drugs or as destructive to the fabric of society. And so there's not much sentiment to make cigarette smoking illegal. It's a deeply embedded part of our culture.

On the other hand, for many years, cigarette smoking was declining, thank goodness, among Americans. Now we see some evidence that smoking is increasing among some people, particularly younger women, which I'm very concerned about. So our Surgeon General, Dr. Elders, who's responsible for talking to the American people about their health, has really launched a real aggressive initiative against cigarette smoking

and especially against the second thing you talked about, which is targeting ads to young people, which I think is so wrong. I think it is really, really wrong. And we have to speak out against it and try to get people to change their practices. And I will keep doing that. I also favor increased taxes on cigarettes to discourage people from using them. The people in Michigan just voted for a 50-cent-a-pack tax on cigarettes and to give all the money to the schools. And we need to see more initiatives like that.

Mr. Jennings. How old are you, Brodie?

Q. Ten.

The President. Let me just make one other comment. Just like what Cotton said, there are a lot of good people in America who still raise tobacco. And we should have funds set aside for them in the cigarettes tax to help them convert away from raising tobacco to doing other kinds of farming so they can actually make a living. There are an awful lot of good people who do that work in States in our country, and we can move them, help them to do other things, and we should.

Mr. Jennings. Brodie, let's pass the mike down, just two down on your left there, okay? Oh, it's that third part.

The President. What's your third part?

Q. And I've got the third part to this.

Mr. Jennings. Is what?

Q. And it is, will you commit you and your administration to making the secret list of ingredients on cigarettes public, because food companies have to publish theirs?

The President. Oh, well, you know, we've been making a big deal out of that, about the fact that more nicotine has been put into some cigarettes. And we're going to try to get to the bottom of that and tell all of you what's going on. And I really appreciate your bringing that up. That really bothered me when I heard that there was more nicotine going in to make sure that people were really hooked on them.

The President's Wish

Q. I have a fun question. If you had one wish, what would it be?

The President. If I had one wish, what would it be?

Q. Yes.

The President. I would wish for a safe and secure childhood for all of our people, all of our children.

Mr. Jennings. Are you happy with that answer?

The President. That's what I want. I mean, I think if all the families in this country could give their children a safe and happy childhood, a lot of our other problems would be solved. Now, there's a lot of elements in that, but that's what I want. I mean, I think that would be my wish.

Mr. Jennings. Now, if my recollection is correct from a year ago, when the President meets with his staff tomorrow morning, he's going to tell them about a lot of the questions that you have raised. So, how would you like to see the room, now, where the President has his staff meetings every morning? This is the Roosevelt Room, and this is the Deputy Chief of Staff, Phil Lader, showing it to his kids.

[*At this point, the videotape was shown, and then the television stations took a commercial break.*]

Mr. Jennings. Welcome back to the East Room, and we're joined again—nice to have you back Purnell. Purnell Brewer is 13 years old from Gary, Louisiana. Did the President keep his word to you pretty much?

[*At this point, Purnell, who believes his brother's death from cancer was a result of environmental pollution, explained that, while more work needs to be done, environmental pollution has decreased since his appearance on the first ABC children's town meeting in February 1993.*]

Mr. Jennings. All right, Purnell, hang on a second there and let the President maybe talk to that point.

The President. Well, first, I'm glad things are getting better. We can now give people like your families all over America information about what kinds of chemicals are being produced in their areas so they can use it to work at the grassroots level to try to reduce it. We're also trying to reduce air pollution by 90 percent in toxic chemicals. And we're trying to protect poorer communities. You know, a lot of the worst pollution in this

country is in poorer communities, in rural areas and cities.

And so those are the things we are doing. We will stay on it; we'll keep talking about it. The Vice President, especially, and I have talked about it a lot. We'll keep doing that, and I'm glad to know it's better than it was.

Mr. Jennings. This is another issue that I know is on a lot of kids' minds.

Kimberly.

Prayer in School

Q. President Clinton, earlier you said that when you were in high school, went to school, you felt safe. And a lot of times I hear my parents and grandparents say the exact same thing. And I keep wondering—at that time, prayer was mandated in schools, and since the prayer was taken away from public education and public schools, the crime rate in schools has really gone up. I was wondering if you felt there was a connection, and what is your opinion of prayer in school?

The President. I don't know that you can say that there is a connection. I do believe that 30 years ago, you had more coherent families, you had less violence, you had less unemployment, and values were taught in our schools more explicitly. The reason the Supreme Court made the decision on prayer is that they said that no Government should order people to pray or should say exactly what prayer they should give. And I agree with that. I mean, that's the first amendment. That's what we were founded on.

On the other hand, I think schools should be available to religious groups. I think it's okay to have moments where people pray in silence. I don't think that prayer at sporting events or graduations is wrong, in my opinion. And I think that the most important thing is that we ought to start talking openly about what we need to do in our schools to promote values, truthfulness, law-abidingness, respect for others, and to lift those things up and talk about why kids shouldn't have kids, why people should not practice violence. I think those things should be put out there.

I think that we could waste a lot of energy trying to revisit the extent to which the Government could order people to be involved in prayer or order prayer services. But I think that it's okay for schools to permit moments where people can pray on their own if that's what they want to do. But the main thing is, the schools ought to be teaching values. I think they should be, and when they got out of it, it was a big mistake.

Abortion

Q. Mr. President, I was wondering, why do you think that abortions of teenagers and any women should be able to stay legal in America? And what about it makes you think this way?

The President. I believe that it should be—I think that until the child—the present law is that until a baby can live outside his mother's womb on its own, it is up to the mother to make the decision. And that's what I think the law should be because in America there is a huge difference of opinion. The American people are divided deeply on it, about when the soul goes into the body, when a person becomes a human being. And not everybody agrees that all abortion is murder. Not everybody agrees that every abortion, under any circumstances, is wrong. Therefore, I don't think that all the mothers should be made criminal.

I think that abortion should be safe. It should be legal, but it should be rare. I think we should liberalize the adoption laws. I think we should encourage people to adopt children. I think we should make it easier for people to adopt children across racial lines. But I don't believe—in my own view, I support the decision of the Supreme Court that this decision ought to be a matter between women and their doctors. I don't think everybody else in society can say with absolute certainty that they know that.

And there's even big differences in the religious community over it. So I don't think that one view should be imposed on everybody when there's so much difference of opinion about it.

Mr. Jennings. Patience, why don't you give the mike to the young woman next to you, Jamie. Right beside you. Jamie.

Child Support

Q. I think there is a big problem in America about fathers not taking care of their chil-

ren, not paying child support. And I'm wondering if there's anything you could do to help.

The President. It's a huge problem, billions of dollars a year. There are a lot of children who are forced onto welfare because their absent fathers don't pay child support. And one of the things that we are trying to do is to make it easier to collect that child support, if fathers cross the State line, if they run away from their responsibility, to be able to have their paychecks have the child support taken out on the front end, to be able to deny the father certain credit privileges and other privileges until they pay the child support that they owe. I think we need a tough national system of child support enforcement and collection. That would do a lot to help families grow up with dignity and children without poverty.

Mr. Jennings. Jamie, you asked that question for a reason, did you?

Q. Yes.

Mr. Jennings. What is it?

Q. My dad is very wealthy. They got divorced about 6 years ago, and he is not paying the amount he should be paying. And we've been going to court for a very long time, and nothing has come out of it at all.

The President. Do you live in a different State from your father?

Q. Yes, he lives in California.

The President. See, that's a big problem because most of the child support laws are State-by-State laws. If the father lives in a different State from the child, it's easier to get out of. What we're trying to do is to set up some national standards so the children of this country will be protected and be taken care of.

Mr. Jennings. Do you think you're getting any closer? This is a question that seems to come up every year.

The President. Well, it's better than it used to be, and it's going to get better. If we pass our welfare reform proposal, it will be better because people should not be able to bring children into the world and just walk off and leave them. They ought to take responsibility for the children that they bring into the world. And we ought to do what we can. And yes, we're making some progress.

Mr. Jennings. Okay. Right here.

Q. Hello.

Mr. Jennings. What's your name, dear?

Q. Sara.

Health Care Reform

Mr. Clinton, I am very concerned that it is very hard to get health care in America. And one of those reasons is because not all doctors take Medicaid. And if you're on Medicaid, then sometimes the people in my area, the doctors, would not see me. For 4 months I could not get medication for asthma and I missed a month of school. And my school decided to penalize me, withhold all my credits for that semester, because they have a State law in Texas that says that you have to go to school a certain amount of days. And my school is not in compliance with that law. And I was wondering, what can you do to help this problem of, first of all, doctors—more incentive for doctors to take Medicaid, to see the people that need to be seen? And another one is, to help the schools understand that when a person is sick they should be more helpful instead of penalizing that student.

Mr. Jennings. Double-barreled.

The President. Well, let me say, first of all, I can do more about the first than the second. The schools, it depends upon whether the people who run the schools are sensitive, whether the counselors and the teachers really know what the kids' lives are like. And I think that that's something we have to keep working on, and that's beyond what the President can do.

But I can do something about the first. A lot of doctors don't take—I don't think it's right for doctors not to see Medicaid patients, but the reason a lot of them don't is because in many States, Medicaid, the Government health program for poor people, doesn't reimburse the doctors at the real costs of providing the service. And it's a lot of paperwork headache. One of the things that our health care will do is to put Medicaid folks in with other people in the same sort of health care plans. So we'll provide health care coverage for everybody, for the employed, for the unemployed, and people will be able to go into common health care plans so that doctors won't, in many cases, might not even know in the beginning whether they

have a Medicaid patient or somebody who works at the store down the street. And Medicaid people will be treated with the same, by the same coverage and have access to the same kind of dignified treatment that others do. And it will really make a huge difference.

Presidential Powers

Mr. Jennings. Put your hands down for just one second. How many of you think that when you bring up a problem to the President that he can actually go and solve it? They're fairly practical about that, because there are only so many problems a President can——

The President. Yes. Some things I can do. Some things I can't do. Some things I can do if other people will help me. And it's very—that's why I try to tell you what I can do and what I can't when you ask these questions.

Mr. Jennings. We'll be right back.

The President. We ought to say one thing about that when we come back.

Mr. Jennings. Which is?

The President. Which is what Purnell said, that—Teddy Roosevelt, who was President at the early—the first President of the 20th century—McKinley until 1901. Teddy Roosevelt said once that the greatest power of the Presidency was the bully pulpit, the ability to talk about these problems and to give other people the chance to be heard. Some of you, like Cotton, want me to change a Government policy here. But because of the bully pulpit of the Presidency, because Peter came here, he can be heard by people who never saw a cattle ranch before and may not understand that problem. And you get to ask me all kinds of questions. You got to—Patience got to ask me the question she wanted to ask about abortion. Sara got to ask the question she wanted to ask about health care. That's because this is a bully pulpit. So even some things that I don't have legal authority over, it's still important for the President to talk about and to let others talk about and even disagree with the President on because that's the way America learns and grows and debates.

So I think it's very important. Like you asked—you said the question about welfare. It's important for the American people to know that the reason most people don't get off welfare is because they or their children lose health care, not because they like being on welfare, not because they want a check from the Government. Most everybody would rather be out working. But when you go to work and you lose the health care, then you wonder what you're going to do if your kids get sick. That's a real pain. So these are important things.

Mr. Jennings. We'll be right back.

The President. Is it time to go?

Mr. Jennings. Yes. We'll be right back.

[*At this point, the television stations took a commercial break.*]

Mr. Jennings. Welcome back to our answering children's questions with the President here in the East Room. As it used to look, President Adams and Abigail Adams, the first inhabitants here, hanging up the laundry in those days, I bet it was not as much fun around here then.

The President. That's right.

Mr. Jennings. Such a precious room now that everybody's very, very self-conscience about what happens in here.

The President. Oh, yes.

Electromagnetic Fields and Cancer

Mr. Jennings. We had invited a young boy here today named Kevin Larm, who very much wanted to ask you a question, sir. Unfortunately, last night, here in Washington, he got sick, and he's in the hospital. But his brother has come. And before you meet his brother, Patrick, perhaps you'd like to see the problem which he has around the country. This is a problem that has come up in the news on several occasions about the kind of environmental problem that you may or may not be able to do something about.

Here's Kevin Larm.

[*At this point, a videotape was shown in which Kevin explained that many children, including himself, are suffering from cancer because of the electromagnetic fields near their homes.*]

Mr. Jennings. Well, Kevin comes from Omaha, and as I said, he's in the hospital here this morning, sir, but his brother, Patrick, is here.

Patrick, do you want to talk to the President?

Q. I want to ask you his question. I have heard that recent studies have linked EMF's to childhood cancers. Other countries, such as Sweden, are passing laws to set standards. As our President, can you help lower EMF's, so hopefully some childhood cancers can be prevented?

The President. That's something that we can do something about. We had a study in 1990 which was inconclusive about it. But you're right, Sweden has concluded that EMF's do lead to higher rates of cancer. So I have asked the person who runs the Environmental Protection Agency for our Government to do a review of this and to make a report to me in the near future to try to make a decision about what we should do.

I think we've got to see what the best available evidence is. But I, frankly, was somewhat impressed by the arguments made by the Swedes. We just have to look into it and see whether we think there's honestly evidence there. And if there is, then we have to take action. And we're looking into it. And you tell your brother to hang in there.

Mr. Jennings. You can probably tell him yourself, sir. I have a suspicion he's watching.

The President. Kevin, I hope you're watching this, and we're praying for you and pulling for you.

Keeping in Touch

Mr. Jennings. Mr. President, you know, it occurs to me at least, listening to all these kids ask their questions today, that they're in touch with problems that you may be out of touch with sometimes. Here you are in the White House, you're surrounded by an enormous entourage all the time. Do you ever feel out of touch?

The President. Yes, but that's one reason I really work hard to get out into the country and to walk the streets. I went to New Hampshire last week, had a town meeting in Nashua, and then I walked the streets in Keene, New Hampshire, and just shook hands with people and talked to them and listened to them. When people come to see me in the White House, I always ask them what the cab drivers are talking about. Because it's so easy for the President to get out of touch with what real people are thinking. I mean, it's a wonderful life, but you can see it's not a normal life. So you get really isolated, and you have to work to avoid it.

Mr. Jennings. One other thing I cannot help but to have noticed, there hasn't been a question this morning about Whitewater. We'll be right back. [*Laughter*]

[*At this point, the television stations took a commercial break.*]

Mr. Jennings. Well, we've got about a minute left, Mr. President.

The President. I want to talk to you more about the prayer question.

Mr. Jennings. Okay. I must say that this year's group is incredibly eager and determined to ask their question. We've only got a minute or so left. Do you want to try to say something to them all?

The President. Well, do you want to take one more question?

Mr. Jennings. I don't think we have time, to be perfectly honest.

The President. And then I'll try to answer everyone who didn't get to ask a question. When you go through the line or when we go visit, then I'll try to answer your question.

Mr. Jennings. One thing I can tell you about the President, once you get him, when the broadcast is over, grab him. He'll be here all afternoon, driving his staff crazy.

Go ahead, sir. Final comments?

The President. Well, first I want to thank all of you for coming. I want to thank you for your questions. And I want to thank you for caring enough about all the things you raised. And I just want to encourage you in your lives. You know, we've got a big job to do in this country. And I have a big job to do to try to create more jobs and more opportunity. But we also have to have more people like you who really care about their friends and neighbors and family members. We have to rebuild our country from the ground up, safe streets, strong families, better schools, and a better chance. And I owe that to you to do my best, but I need you to do your best, too.

Heather, what were you going to say?

Mr. Jennings. Yes I was going to say, I just suddenly remembered, somebody told me, Heather has a handleable question.

McDonald's

Q. Well, I have a fun question for you. And I know you used to run in Arkansas, so I think you will like it. My favorite restaurant is McDonald's too. What do you get when you go there? [*Laughter*]

The President. What do I get when I go there? Normally, an Egg McMuffin or something for breakfast. Those are the big meals that I eat at McDonald's. My daughter and I used to go there sometimes on Sunday morning before Sunday school, and then Hillary and I would go and pick her up and we'd go to church. But we love to have McDonald's Egg McMuffins on Sunday morning.

Mr. Jennings. I must say, that's the first smile I've seen on Heather's face all morning.

The President. I'm glad you smiled, Heather. You've made me smile, too. You have a wonderful smile.

Mr. Jennings. Thank you, Mr. President, for having us in. And thank you all for coming. You can all come and say hello to him in person now.

The President. Thanks.

NOTE: The town meeting began at 11:30 a.m. in the East Room at the White House. Peter Jennings, ABC News, was the moderator for the program.

Statement by the Director of Communications on the President's Meeting With President Alija Izetbegovic of Bosnia

March 19, 1994

Following the signing ceremony yesterday, the President met with President Izetbegovic of Bosnia-Herzegovina. The two leaders discussed next steps following yesterday's agreements. The President told President Izetbegovic that the United States will work with the European Union and other states to provide economic assistance for the rehabilitation and reconstruction of Bosnia. The President also told the Bosnian President that the United States is prepared to sign a bilateral assistance agreement establishing a framework for future technical and economic assistance.

The President confirmed that the United States would reopen our Embassy in Sarajevo in the near future. Ambassador Victor Jackovich has been resident in Vienna since last fall because of the security situation in Sarajevo. Our decision to reopen the Embassy underscores our commitment to Bosnia's security and stability. The President reaffirmed the intention of the United States to participate in the implementation of a viable peace agreement among the parties in Bosnia.

The President also met with President Tudjman of Croatia. The two leaders discussed Croatia's role in helping make the agreements signed today succeed. The United States will work with Croatia and the Bosniac-Croat Federation toward their full integration in Western political, economic, and security arrangements. The President announced that the United States is ready to sign a bilateral aid agreement to establish a framework for future technical and economic assistance for Croatia. The United States also is prepared to sign a science and technology agreement and to open negotiations on a bilateral investment treaty and a double taxation treaty.

To help alleviate the humanitarian situation and to assist Croatia to care for refugees and persons displaced as a result of the conflict, the United States will provide $2 million for the "Hospital Partnership" and $1.5 million for medical supplies.

The President announced that Croatia would be allowed to open consulates in New York, Cleveland, Pittsburgh, and Los Angeles. To further advance the contacts between our nations, the United States will double the Fulbright program and donate $50,000 worth of American studies books to the recently rebuilt American Studies Library in Dubrovnik.

The President reaffirmed United States support for the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Croatia and committed to help secure the peaceful solution to the problems of the UN Protected Areas (UNPA's). To this end, the United States will continue to use sanctions and other economic pressure against Serbia in the most effective way possible. We also intend to play an active diplomatic role in assisting Croatia in resolving its dispute with the Krajina Serbs.