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The President's Radio Address

July 22, 1995

Good morning. Over a month ago, Speaker Newt Gingrich and I met with a group of senior citizens in Claremont, New Hampshire. That sunlit event had a special spirit. We showed that the great debate now occurring in our country can and should be conducted with civility and a sense of common ground. Many Americans of both parties have told me since then that this is exactly the way they want their leaders to work together. And that's what I'm committed to doing.

Perhaps the most visible example of that spirit of New Hampshire came when the Speaker and I shook hands on the question of political reform, something that has divided the two parties and the Congress and the country for too long. The first question we answered was from a retired steelworker named Frank McConnell. He said that politics had become polluted by special interests and that too often the voice of the people was shut out. He said that bickering between the parties had blocked reform for too long. And he proposed that we create a blue-ribbon, bipartisan commission to write reforms to curb the power of special interests. There, in front of the entire country, the Speaker and I agreed to create this commission.

A bipartisan commission could cut the knot that is strangling change. This panel would follow the approach that has worked on other critical issues. It would be comprised of distinguished citizens and would recommend broad changes in the rules which cover lobbyists and in how we finance political campaigns. Most important of all, the Congress would have to vote within a strict deadline, up or down, on the package as a whole, no loopholes, no amendments.

I'm happy to report that in addition to myself and Speaker Gingrich, this very idea has been strongly endorsed for some time by Senate majority leader Bob Dole, who just last February said again that this was the way we ought to approach this question.

It's clearer than ever that we need political reform. The American people believe their political system is too influenced by narrow interests, that our Government serves the powerful but not hard-working families. Even before the '94 elections, the special interests prevented passage of both campaign finance reform and lobby reform legislation that I had strongly asked the Congress to pass. When a minority in the Senate killed lobbying reform in 1994, lobbyists were standing right outside the Senate chamber cheering.

Since the New Congress came in, I'm sad to say, it's gotten worse, for even more power has been given to the lobbyists. Now this new majority lets lobbyists for polluters write legislation rolling back environmental and public health protections. They've brought them in to explain the legislation. They even gave them a room off the House floor to write the amendments and the statements the Members would have to give explaining the bills that the lobbyists had written for them.

Since things have gotten in this state, it was a real moment of hope when the Speaker and I shook hands on reform in New Hampshire. Just 5 days later, I sent Speaker Gingrich a letter laying out in detail my ideas for how to move forward. Now, 5 weeks later, I must say I'm very disappointed by what has happened since or, more accurately, what hasn't happened. The Speaker announced that he would send me his proposal, but he never has.

I think the people of this country want us to move forward with political reform. Speaker Gingrich and I shook hands on it. We have an obligation to get this done and not walk away. If we're going to restore a spirit of civility to American politics, a handshake has to mean in 1995 what it meant when I was

growing up: We have to be as good as our word.

Today, to move this process forward, I'm announcing that two distinguished Americans have agreed to work with me to get the commission idea underway. They're the kind of people I will appoint as its members. John Gardner's name is synonymous with integrity. He's a Republican Cabinet Secretary to a Democratic President, the founder of the citizens' lobby Common Cause, a wise and effective man. Doris Kearns Goodwin is a political scientist and a Pulitzer Prize winning author. She understands through her knowledge of history and today's political situation how politics affects the lives of ordinary people.

I have asked John Gardner and Doris Kearns Goodwin to meet with Speaker Gingrich as soon as possible and the other congressional leaders, to get them going on this idea so that we can make this commission a reality and keep our commitment to the Frank McConnells and all the other Americans who want us to improve the way our political system works.

John Gardner and Doris Kearns Goodwin will help us to get this movement going. And now I call on Speaker Gingrich and the other congressional leaders to come forward and do their part. The Speaker and I made a deal, and it's time to keep it. There's no excuse for further delay.

We already have signs of bipartisan agreement. On Monday, the Senate begins to debate on legislation to require lobbyists to disclose who they are, what they're paid, and what bills they're trying to influence. And the Senate will vote on legislation to ban lobbyists from providing lawmakers meals or gifts or travel. If a judge took a paid vacation from a lawyer in his courtroom, he'd be disbarred. But if a lobbyist pays for a trip to a sunny climate, right now it's perfectly legal. And it happens all the time.

Congress should send me the strongest possible ban on lobbyist gifts, such as the bill introduced by Democratic Senators Carl Levin and Paul Wellstone and Republican Senator Bill Cohen. Congress should not send me a bill that's more loophole than law. I hope the action I'm taking today will help lead to real political reform. We have to do everything we can to show the American people that their Government works for them and not the special interests.

Thanks for listening.

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

Remarks to the American Legion Boys Nation

July 24, 1995

Thank you very much. To all the delegates of Boys Nation, I'm delighted to be here, as you know, with many members of our administration who are involved in the setting of economic policy for our country; delighted to see Mr. William Detweiler, the national commander of the American Legion, here; along with your other leaders, Ray Smith; Ron Engel; Jack Mercier, who has been with Boys Nation for 31 years and I believe was there—that would make 32 years—when I was there in 1963; George Blume and others.

Let me say, as I'm sure you know, I am especially delighted to welcome all of you here to the White House. I don't have to tell you what an important event this is for me every year and how much I look forward to it. But this is an especially important time for all of you to be here. The world in which you will live, the world which I am sure many of you will help to lead, can be America's greatest time. But it is a world being transformed to a degree seldom seen in all American history. Much of this change is good. But it's not all good.

If you look at what is happening in America, we have more new businesses being formed, more Americans becoming millionaires, more people finding success than at any period in our history. But most Americans are still working harder for the same or lower pay they were making a few years ago, with greater levels of personal insecurity about their ability to take care of their parents if they get sick, their ability to educate their children, their ability to hold on to their own health care.

If you look at what's going on, most of our social problems are being addressed very well in many places. In most major cities the crime rate is down, but the rate of random