AUTHENTICATED
U.S. GOVERNMENT
INFORMATION
GPO

Week Ending Friday, November 24, 1995

The President's Radio Address

November 18, 1995

Good morning. Last night I went the extra mile to bring Republicans and Democrats together to open the Government up and get down to the hard work of balancing the budget. I sent my Chief of Staff, Leon Panetta, to Capitol Hill to forge a common ground. I had hoped the Republicans and Democrats of good faith would be able to work together to reopen Government and to continue our larger debate over national budget priorities.

But this morning it looks like this chance to reopen the Government may be slipping away. I hope that's not true, and I call on reasonable Republicans to join with Democrats in Congress to pass a bill to reopen the Government and open the way to real, serious talks on how to balance the budget.

I know that for many people across our country, all this conflict and drama looks just like people in Washington are playing politics again. What every American has to realize is that this is way beyond politics. There are very, very profound, fundamental issues involved. What's at stake is nothing less than two different visions of our country and two different futures for our people.

I believe we must balance the budget. I'm determined to eliminate the Federal deficit, to avoid passing a legacy of debt on to our children. I am proud that in my first 3 years in office our administration has cut the deficit in half and that now we already have the smallest deficit of any major economy in the world. It's time to finish the job and pass a balanced budget plan.

So what's at issue is not whether to balance the budget, but how. And we and the Republican Congress are offering two very different visions for our country and two different futures. You need to know the whole reason the Government is shut down is that the Republican Congress, following a plan announced last spring by Speaker Gingrich, has shut the Government down unless I accept the framework of their budget.

Well, last night the House of Representatives passed their budget. This is what they say we have to accept as the price of reopening the Government. First, on Medicare, just a few weeks ago the Speaker of the House said their goal was to let Medicare, and I quote, ''wither on the vine.'' Now we know that's exactly what will happen. We know the Medicare program that has worked for everyone and guaranteed a dignified retirement for senior citizens, that program's days are numbered, even though it's efficient and effective. Under the Republican plan there will be two Medicares in America: one for the healthy, one for the sick; one for the rich, and one for the poor, with everyone in the middle getting squeezed with fewer choices, higher costs, and less quality. Most sadly, the oldest, the poorest, and the sickest senior citizens will get hit too hard.

The Republican budget would also deny 360,000 deserving students the scholarships they need to go to college and make the most of their lives. And it would make college loans harder to get for millions more Americans at the very time when more people need to go on to college and when the costs are going up.

Unbelievably, this budget would deny Head Start preschool programs to 180,000 young children at a time when we know that on our mean streets, too many of our young people are raising themselves. This budget of theirs would make it much harder for our Government to guarantee the safety of the water we drink, the air we breathe, the food we put on the table. Unbelievably, too, their budget would actually raise taxes on 15 million of our hardest pressed working families. Oh, and by the way, it also cuts the school lunch program. And it would even prevent thousands of disabled children from being able to live with their parents by cutting off assistance for home care.

In recent days I've heard from Americans all across our country about the real impact this will have on the lives of our people. One of my friends called to tell me about a woman he knows with a disabled child. This woman rides an hour a day to work on subsidized transportation. And she works for barely above the minimum wage. She comes home to care for her child. Under their budget she loses three ways: Her transportation to work is going to be more costly because we're cutting aid to transportation in cities under their budget; her ability to help her disabled child will be less because the disabled child will lose Federal assistance; and unbelievably, at her low income with her child at home, she gets a tax increase under their plan so that people in my income group can get a tax cut. It doesn't make sense.

Another friend of mine, the chairman of the board of a technical college, wrote to say how important it is that we help our young people get scholarships to go on to college today. My friend remembers that in the 1960's he got help from Government to pay for his college education. And because all of us took a risk in lending him the money for college, today he pays a lot more in taxes every year than the total he borrowed. He asked a very simple question: If we can't invest in our people, how can we ensure the future of our country?

My fellow Americans, none of these extreme cuts, not one of them, are necessary to balance the budget. This extreme budget reflects not economic necessity but a philosophy that would strip the ability of our National Government to be an instrument of meeting our national goals. It would make us a more divided, winner-take-all society, a community with fewer connections and less common purpose. Its economic assumptions operate on the premise that our country will not grow very much if their plan is passed, that our best days are behind us.

I have proposed a balanced budget rooted in our fundamental values, providing opportunity but expecting responsibility from people, honoring our obligations to our parents and our children, helping our families to be stronger and to stay together, and making sure our country is the strongest force for peace and freedom, democracy, and prosperity in the world.

My budget cuts hundreds of wasteful programs. We have already reduced the size of the Federal Government by 200,000. It's the smallest it's been in 30 years and, as a percentage of the civilian work force, the smallest it's been since 1933. But my budget also invests in our people and our future. It secures Medicare and Medicaid into the future. It invests in education. It ensures the protection of the environment. It gives working families a tax cut targeted at education and childrearing. Now, that's the right way to balance the budget.

I'll say again, I want to balance the budget. But any budget that cuts funding for disabled children and school lunches, for Head Start for our youngest children, for college scholarships and loans, that doubles Medicare premiums and undermines the entire Medicaid program that provides for nursing home care and home health care for the elderly, the disabled, and health care for poor children—this budget's dead on arrival when it comes to the White House. And if the price of any deal are cuts like these, my message is, no deal.

The effort to make the American people swallow a budget that will hurt our country is over. Let's get back to work, together, to balance the budget without unbalancing our values.

To the Republicans in Congress, I say, listen to the American people. Let's all say yes to a balanced budget and no to extremism in cuts in health care, education, and the environment. If we do that, America will be strong and true to its values and its vision as we enter the 21st century. Now let's get the job done.

Thanks for listening.

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

Statement on Action To Reopen the Federal Government

November 19, 1995

Today I took concrete steps to put the Government back to work for the American people.