

Q. They seem to be suggesting that they'd made a great big step and that the response had been a rather smaller step——

The President. No, well, you can make—you can make numbers look like anything, but I—but let me say, I think if you go back and look at where my first budget plan was and where their first budget plan was, we have moved, I believe, at least as far as they have in the numbers.

But the point I want to emphasize to the American people is, our administration has cut this deficit in half in 3 years. I have always been for balancing the budget. I have bent over backwards to meet them halfway in a good bipartisan spirit, to do it in 7 years, not 9, as my plan would have done; to do it according to the Congressional Budget Office analyses, even though I don't entirely agree with it; and to make significant savings in the entitlement programs as well as the investment programs. But I don't believe we can go to the point where we don't know for sure that we have protected the people that are entitled to protection.

I have already—neither of these budgets is a big spending budget. Both these budgets will require steep cuts in spending. My discretionary budget, out of which we fund education and the environment, is lower than a hard freeze, which means there will have to be steep cuts in other areas in order for us to protect education and the environment.

So I will continue to work with them. We can do that, but we have to know when we adopt this budget that we can achieve these numbers without hurting innocent people. They depend upon us to balance the budget with discipline and with compassion.

Whitewater Investigation

Q. Mr. President, if I could just change the subject for a second. Your spokesman earlier today said that if you could, you'd like to punch William Safire in the nose for calling Mrs. Clinton a congenital liar in his column yesterday. I wonder if you'd care to respond publicly to these accusations against your wife.

The President. Well, what I said was, you know, when you're President, there are a few more constraints on you than if you're an ordinary citizen. If I were an ordinary citizen,

I might give that article the response it deserves.

I'm reminded of the great letter that Harry Truman wrote, which I—by the way, which I have now. It was a gift to me from a distinguished Republican. And I have it on my wall—you know, that Presidents have feelings, too. I think the American people—I would just remind the American people, we've been through this for 4 years now. And every time somebody has made a charge related to the Whitewater issue, it's turned up dry. And the only records, as far as I know, that haven't been disclosed so far, as far as you know, we still haven't seen the release of the RTC report, which says that, after all, we told the truth all along about the underlying matters here. So I just would like to ask the American people to take a deep breath, relax, and listen to the First Lady's answers, because we've been through this for over 4 years now, and every time a set of questions comes up, we answer the questions and we go on. The American people are satisfied, and they will be again.

She is—I've said before, I'll say again—if everybody in this country had the character that my wife has, we'd be a better place to live.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President's 112th news conference began at 5:16 p.m. in the Briefing Room at the White House.

Excerpts of Remarks on “Clearing the Air: Kids Talk to the President About Smoking”

January 9, 1996

Linda Ellerbee. How can a kid ask a grownup to stop smoking?

The President. Oh, I think directly. I think children should not be self-conscious about that. I can tell you, you know, Chelsea did some very blunt things to her grandmother. She said, “You ever seen a picture of a lung where people have smoked for years, as against the picture of a lung where people haven't?” I mean, very straightforward stuff.

Ms. Ellerbee. Did it work?

The President. It worked. It took a few years, but it worked finally. On my daughter's 8th birthday, her grandmother's present was that she quit smoking.

Ms. Ellerbee. Mr. President, do you have any final thoughts for kids on this issue?

The President. You young people cannot believe the potential influence you can have. You can ask adults the kind of hard questions you asked me. You can encourage every adult you care about and love to stop smoking. You can make it so that the cool thing to do is not to smoke instead of to smoke.

And you know, none of us are going to live forever, but you have the choice to maximize, to increase the chances of your living a long and full life. This is a choice you can make. The smoking choice is a choice you can make. It's totally within your control.

And I just want to encourage you. I'll do what I can, but I want to encourage you to do everything you can to get everybody you know to remain smoke-free. I think that is—that's the answer. And you can do it. We can change this country if we do it together.

NOTE: The President's remarks were recorded at 12:10 p.m. on December 12 for broadcast at 8 p.m. on January 9. Linda Ellerbee is the host of "Nick News" on Nickelodeon.

Statement on the Death of Ambassador M. Larry Lawrence

January 9, 1996

I was deeply saddened to learn of the death today of our Ambassador to Switzerland, M. Larry Lawrence. Larry was a good friend and a valued colleague who brought his abundant energy and fresh vision to every task he undertook. As Ambassador in Switzerland, he was a tireless and effective advocate of U.S. interests, especially the promotion of U.S. exports and commercial ties. Larry's service to his country did not begin with his diplomatic assignment. During World War II, at the age of 18, he volunteered for the merchant marines. He was wounded when his ship was sunk by enemy torpedoes in arctic waters. Many years later, Larry was decorated with the Medal of Valor by the Government of the Russian Federation.

Larry's civilian life showed the same courage and resolve. As an entrepreneur, he restored the Hotel del Coronado, one of the west coast's outstanding architectural landmarks. Larry's quiet philanthropy also touched many lives. He believed passionately in education for women; the scholarships he endowed for minority women at the University of Arizona represent a lasting contribution. Hillary joins me in expressing our deepest sympathy to Larry's wife, Shelia, and to his children. We will miss him.

Statement on the Death of Former Representative Mike Synar

January 9, 1996

Hillary and I were deeply saddened to learn this morning of the death of former Oklahoma Congressman Mike Synar. Mike Synar was a brave and unflinching public servant who in tough political times remained true to his principles. He did not always do what was popular, but he always did what he thought was right—for Oklahoma and for America. Throughout his life, and especially during the past 6 months, Mike Synar was a true profile in courage.

Hillary and I will miss him. Our thoughts and prayers go out to his family and friends at this difficult time.

Message to the House of Representatives Returning Without Approval the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act of 1995

January 9, 1996

To the House of Representatives:

I am returning herewith without my approval H.R. 4, the "Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act of 1995." In disapproving H.R. 4, I am nevertheless determined to keep working with the Congress to enact real, bipartisan welfare reform. The current welfare system is broken and must be replaced, for the sake of the taxpayers who pay for it and the people who are trapped by it. But H.R. 4 does too little to move people from welfare to work. It is burdened with deep budget cuts and structural changes that fall short of real reform. I urge the Congress