

**Remarks Prior to a Meeting With
Congressional Leaders and an
Exchange With Reporters**

January 30, 1996

Budget Negotiations and the Debt Ceiling

The President. I'm glad to have these Members here, and we are about to begin a discussion about how we can make progress in our effort to get the right kind of balanced budget. Let me also say I think it is terribly important that Congress pass a clean debt ceiling and do it immediately, so that we can honor the full faith and credit of the United States and so that those Social Security checks can go out at the first of March.

It's getting close, and we just have a month left, and I think it's imperative that this be done. But in the meanwhile, we're going to keep working on the budget, trying to find a solution that both parties can embrace and that I can sign.

Q. What about the House saying it's going to adjourn for a month at the end of the week? Are you going to be able to make any progress while they're gone?

The President. Well, I can only tell you that I think that we've got to deal with the debt ceiling. I'm more optimistic—I think we can clearly make progress on the budget whether they're in session or out of session. It depends upon who's available to meet and what kind of conversations can be held over the telephone. So I'm not so concerned about that, but it is imperative that we understand what the timetable is on the debt limit, and that we not play games with that. That's an emergency. We can deal with the budget over the telephone. But Congress has to be here and actually pass an act to lift the debt ceiling.

Q. Mr. President, some Republicans say that it was your Treasury Secretary who played games and said that the debt ceiling was going to run out the last time, and that in fact it didn't, and that there are ways to kind of correct this that he's talking about.

The President. No, he didn't play any games. He was deft and adroit and did the best he could to keep this country afloat. And he has notified them that he is out of options, just like he notified them before that we had some options. And I don't think anything has

happened to change his mind. So he has explained to them what the situation is; that's what it is.

This country has not one time in its entire history refused to honor the obligations that it has committed to. And I don't believe we should now, and I don't believe we will. But I want to urge Congress to deal with this in a prompt manner.

Q. Why won't the Social Security checks go out? What—is this a separate—

The President. Because if the country cannot honor its debt obligations, it won't be able to keep its cash flow up.

Welfare Reform

Q. Would you sign the Senate welfare bill?

The President. Well, let me say, as you know, we got the bill out of the Senate, and it was much improved over the House. Then they didn't send it back to me. I think the discussion is recently moot because we made some advances beyond the Senate welfare bill in our budget negotiations.

And the Republican leadership is not bound by anything that we agreed to in the budget negotiations, because we had an understanding that nothing was agreed to until everything was. But I thought we had reached a common understanding that, among other things, there ought to be more money put into the child care portion of the Senate bill, and that there should be a little more sensitivity to what might happen to families with children with disabilities.

And so I would like to see at least the common understanding that came out of our discussions in the budget negotiations incorporated into that bill, and I would imagine they would be. But I don't know any more than you do about that. I know what I read this morning.

Imia/Kardak Islet

Q. Mr. President, you were on the phone with the leaders of Greece and Turkey this afternoon?

The President. Yes, I was.

Q. Could you tell us about what the situation was there? Have you been able to make any progress on that?

The President. Well, I talked to the President and the Prime Minister of Turkey and

the new Prime Minister of Greece and asked them to move their forces away from that little island and to find a diplomatic solution to the issue. And I heard them out at some length, and we discussed some options. And then the Secretary of State, Secretary of Treasury—I mean, the Secretary of Defense, Secretary of State, and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff have all been involved in this. We have been working hard on this today.

Greece and Turkey have too much in common, too much to gain from getting along with each other, and we have too many other important issues in that area that affect both their interests for this small piece of land to be allowed to develop into a crisis for the two of them. So the United States is doing everything we possibly can, and I have some hope that the crisis will abate over the next 24 or 48 hours. But there's still one or two issues remaining in the air as we speak.

NOTE: The President spoke at 5:16 p.m. in the Cabinet Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Prime Minister Konstandinos Simitis of Greece and President Suleyman Demirel and Prime Minister Tansu Ciller of Turkey. A tape was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

Proclamation 6863—National African American History Month, 1996

January 30, 1996

By the President of the United States of America

A Proclamation

Today's schoolchildren are fortunate to grow up in classrooms where they are taught to appreciate all of the many heroes of American history. While previous generations read textbooks that told only part of our Nation's story, materials have been developed in recent years that give our students a fuller picture—textured and deepened by new characters and themes. African American History Month provides a special opportunity for teachers and schools to celebrate this ongoing process and to focus on the many African

Americans whose lives have shaped our common experience.

This year, our observance emphasizes black women and the strides made to bring their achievements to the fore. From Sojourner Truth's sermons, to Mary McLeod Bethune's speeches, to the contemporary novels of Nobel laureate Toni Morrison, the voices of African American women have called attention to the twin burdens of racism and sexism and have invited listeners to discover the richness of traditions kept alive in back kitchens and workrooms. In churches and communities, and more recently in universities and statehouses across America, these women have fought extraordinary battles for social, economic, and political empowerment.

Barbara Jordan once wrote,

'We the people'; it is a very eloquent beginning. But when the Constitution of the United States was completed on the seventeenth of September, 1787, I was not included in that 'We the people.'

As we mourn the loss of this great American, let us honor her by seeking to further the progress made since those early days toward true equality and inclusion. During African American History Month and throughout the year, we must embrace the diverse strands of our story so that all children can see themselves in our Nation's past and know that they have a role to play in seizing the future's countless opportunities.

Now, Therefore, I, William J. Clinton, President of the United States of America, by virtue of the authority vested in me by the Constitution and laws of the United States, do hereby proclaim February 1996, as National African American History Month. I call upon Government officials, educators in schools, colleges, universities, and libraries, and all the people of the United States to observe this month with appropriate ceremonies, activities, and programs that raise awareness of African American history and invite further inquiry into this area of study.

In Witness Whereof, I have hereunto set my hand this thirtieth day of January, in the year of our Lord nineteen hundred and ninety-six, and of the Independence of the United