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fought very hard to save Mexico—the economic bailout against people of your own party including. Will you fight as hard now that you don't need to run for reelection? Political considerations aside, will you fight just as hard to make sure that Latin America has a free trade agreement?

The President. Oh, sure.

Mr. Goldstein. It may take about a year or two. And are you optimistic you can do it by the year 2005, as they said in Miami at the Summit of the Americas?

The President. Well, yes, I will fight just as hard. And I will certainly—there are no political considerations for me one way or the other now. I would like to point out we did get quite a large number of Democrats who supported NAFTA and that the leadership in both parties supported me with the Mexican loan.

I'm quite concerned that there may have been an erosion of support for the free trade concept in the Americas, not just in the Democratic Party but in the Republican Party as well. And I find this surprising. Here we are now at the pinnacle of our economic success, political influence in the world, but the only way we can exercise our political influence for good is to become involved with other countries. And it disappoints me when I hear Americans who seemed to be reluctant to do that. I think that's a mistake. And so I'm going to try to persuade them to do the right thing from my point of view, and I believe we'll win.

Budget Agreement

Mr. Goldstein. And will you get a budget agreement? Everybody in the basement asked me to ask you——

The President. I don't know. I hope so.

Mr. Goldstein. Thank you, sir.

NOTE: The interview began at 11:42 a.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, the President referred to President Ernesto Zedillo of Mexico; President Alberto Fujimori of Peru; and President Fidel Castro of Cuba. A tape was not available for verification of the content of this interview.

Statement on the Interim Report of the Presidential Advisory Committee on Gulf War Veterans' Illnesses

May 1, 1997

I appreciate the ongoing, rigorous work of the Presidential Advisory Committee on Gulf War Veterans' Illnesses, and I welcome their interim letter report.

The care and well-being of our Gulf war veterans is a national duty and a national priority. That is why I appointed the Committee in May 1995, extended its mandate in January 1997, and directed its attention in February 1997 to the recently released intelligence documents concerning possible chemical exposures.

I am determined that my administration will do everything necessary to uncover all the facts and act on any relevant information, to provide our Gulf war veterans with the quality medical care they need, and to make sure that in any future troop deployments, we draw on lessons learned in the Gulf war to better protect the health of our troops and their families.

This interim report, like those that preceded it, will help us meet that responsibility in an increasingly effective way. I have asked the Secretaries of Defense, Veterans Affairs, and Health and Human Services, as well as the Acting Director of Central Intelligence, to study the report and, 2 weeks from today, provide me their proposals for implementing the Committee's recommendations.

To further strengthen our search for the facts, Secretary Cohen and Acting DCI Tenet have asked former Senator Warren Rudman to review the results of their ongoing investigations related to Gulf war illnesses and to offer appropriate recommendations. Senator Rudman brings solid expertise and sound judgment to this important job. I am confident he will assist the Department of Defense and the Central Intelligence Agency in ensuring their investigations are thorough and will also enhance our ability to integrate Gulf war intelligence "lessons learned" into our future planning.

I am grateful for the PAC's dedication and persistence, and look forward to their continued, indispensable efforts to make sure no stone is left unturned on behalf of America's

Gulf war veterans. We will not rest in our determination to find the answers our service men and women need and ensure that they receive the care and benefits they deserve.

Proclamation 6996—Older Americans Month, 1997

May 1, 1997

By the President of the United States of America

A Proclamation

Each year we set aside the month of May as a special time to pay tribute to older Americans and to acknowledge their many contributions to our national life. For the better part of this century, through tough times and good times, these Americans have raised families, strengthened our economy, defended our Nation, and reaffirmed our deepest values. All of us who are heirs to their service and sacrifice owe them a profound debt of gratitude.

The theme of this year's observance, "Caregiving: Compassion in Action," reminds us of one of the most important ways in which we can repay that debt. Each day across America, some 22 million caregivers and volunteers dedicate themselves to improving the qualify of life for older family members, friends, and neighbors. By providing personal care, housekeeping, transportation, and innumerable other services and assistance, these caregivers enable many older Americans to remain in their own homes and communities, maintaining a precious measure of dignity and independence.

As America's population of older Americans continues to grow in number, we will have an even greater need to call on the skills and compassion of caregivers. In keeping with the spirit of service that is sweeping across our Nation today, I ask that all Americans—every day, but especially during Older Americans Month—reach out to an older person in need, sharing time, talents, and attention with someone who has already shared so much with us. By putting our compassion in action to serve our older citizens, we can build a more promising future for all our people.

Older Americans deserve our respect and support for they have worked diligently in so many ways to enrich and preserve the way of life we all enjoy. Our senior citizens have woven the fabric of our Nation to exemplify the values and beliefs that have made our country great.

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 May 1997 as Older Americans Month. I call upon Government officials, businesses, communities, volunteers, educators, and all the people of the United States to honor our older Americans and acknowledge the important contributions made by their caregivers, this month and throughout the year.

In Witness Whereof, I have hereunto set my hand this first day of May, in the year of our Lord nineteen hundred and ninety-seven, and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and twenty-first.

William J. Clinton

[Filed with the Office of the Federal Register, 10:56 a.m., May 2, 1997]

NOTE: This proclamation was published in the *Federal Register* on May 5.

Proclamation 6997—Loyalty Day, 1997

May 1, 1997

By the President of the United States of America

A Proclamation

Each year, Americans dedicate the first day of May to formally acknowledge our love for this great land and our loyalty to the principles of freedom and equality on which our Nation was founded. This love and loyalty cannot be mandated or legislated; rather, these traits spring freely from our hearts and minds.

Looking back across the centuries, we recognize that each generation of Americans has been called upon to express its love and loyalty in a unique way. Our founders, defying