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more Government regulations, and reduced the size of the Government more than any Republican President in the last 50 years. Still, remember what the Founders said: We are forming this Government because alone we cannot protect, pursue, and enhance life, liberty, and happiness. That's why we got together, because in the nature of things we can't do all these things all by ourselves.

Maybe the most important thing we've done is to try to redefine the role of Government. The old debate was, Government's the problem versus Government's the solution. Our position is, Government is neither. Government is a glue that binds us together. And the job of Government on the edge of the 21st century is to create the conditions and give people the tools to make the most of their own lives; to solve their problems in their individual lives, their family lives, their community lives, their business lives; to be good for the American people as stewards; and to be a leading force in the world for peace and freedom and prosperity.

And so finally I would say that the third mission is, after freedom and opportunity, is that we are constantly forced to redefine our National Union. And that is the difference, the critical difference between the two parties today. I do not believe that we can be what we need to be unless we still believe that our eternal mission is what they said it was 220 years ago: to form a more perfect Union. Nobody—you won't find anybody in America that likes our diversity anymore than I do. I love our racial diversity. I love our ethnic diversity. I love our religious diversity. I love our cultural diversity. That's why I love to come to New Orleans, right?

But what is important is—and what makes it possible to enjoy all that is that underneath it all, at the bedrock, we are bound together by common values and a common understanding that we are going into tomorrow together. And the only way we can make the most of this phenomenal opportunity we have is to do it.

So I ask you to go and impart that message to your friends and neighbors. Help us to strengthen our party. Help us to continue to move forward. Help us to get the message to Washington. The American people want progress over partisanship, and the Democratic Party—far more important, the American people—will go strong into that new century.

Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 7:24 p.m. at Emeril's Restaurant. In his remarks, he referred to Sheriff Harry Lee of Jefferson Parish; Leonard Barrack, national finance chair, Democratic National Committee; Mayor Marc H. Morial of New Orleans; Ray Reggie, event coordinator; and Marjorie McKeithen, candidate for Louisiana's Sixth Congressional District.

Remarks Announcing New Nursing Home Regulations and an Exchange With Reporters

July 21, 1998

The President. Thank you, Secretary Shalala, and Nancy-Ann Min DeParle, and the advocates who are here. I wish your mother were here, Secretary Shalala. I have met her, and even a skeptical press corps would believe your account of her in full if they could see her.

The duty we owe to our parents is one of the most sacred duties we, as Americans, owe to each other. Nowhere is that duty more important than when a family makes the choice to move a parent into a nursing home. When that time comes, all of us need to know that all our parents will be well cared for.

Today, more than 1.6 million Americans live in more than 16,000 nursing homes nationwide. When the baby boom generation moves into retirement, the number will rise even higher. By 2030, the number of Americans over the age of 85 will double, making compassionate quality nursing home care even more important.

At their best, nursing homes can be a Godsend for older Americans and their families, providing a safe haven in times of need. But at their worst, they can actually endanger their residents, subjecting them to the worst kinds of abuse and neglect. For nearly 6 years, as Secretary Shalala said, we've worked hard to give our most vulnerable citizens the security and health services they need to live in peace and safety.

I am committed to honoring the great social compact between the generations, first, let me say, by reserving every penny of the budget surplus until we save Social Security first. The historic balanced budget I signed last summer preserves the Medicare Trust Fund into the 21st century. We've taken action to root out Medicare fraud and abuse, saving taxpayers over $20 billion.

Finally, we're fighting to meet the challenge of our changing health system by enacting a Patients' Bill of Rights, to include access to specialists and the right to appeal health care decisions. I have extended those rights already to Medicare beneficiaries; they should be the rights of every American.

One of the most important ways we can help our senior citizens is by improving the quality of care in our nursing homes. In 1995, when Congress tried to eliminate Federal assurances of nursing home quality, I said no. It was the right thing to do. That same year, we put into place tough regulations to crack down on abuse and neglect in our nursing homes. Since then we have made real progress, as Secretary Shalala said, stepping up onsite inspections and helping nursing homes to find and fix problems.

As the HCFA report Secretary Shalala talked about shows all too clearly, however, the job is far from over. When people living in nursing homes have as much fear from dehydration and poor nutrition as they do from the diseases of old age, when families must worry as much about a loved one in a nursing home as one living alone, then we are failing our parents, and we must do more.

Today I'm acting within my power as President to crack down on unsafe nursing homes. Effective immediately, HCFA will require States to step up investigations of nursing homes, making onsite inspections more frequent and less predictable, so there is no time to hide neglect and abuse. Whenever we find evidence that a nursing home is failing to provide its residents with proper care, or even mistreating them, we will fine that facility on the spot. And if State enforcement agencies don't do enough to monitor nursing home quality, we will cut off their contracts and find someone else who will do the job right.

I'll continue to do everything I can to fight nursing home abuse and neglect and to give more options to elderly, disabled, and chronically ill Americans who choose to stay at home. But Congress also must act. This week I am proposing comprehensive legislation to protect older Americans with a national registry to track nursing home employees down known to abuse nursing home residents, and criminal background checks to keep potentially abusive employees from being hired in the first place. I ask the Congress to put progress ahead of partisanship on this issue and pass this legislation to improve our Nation's nursing homes this year.

Choosing to move a parent or a loved one into a nursing home is one of life's most difficult decisions. But with these steps we can at least give families a greater sense of security in knowing we are doing everything we possibly can to make our nursing homes safe and secure.

Thank you very much.

Q. Do you think the Congress would be against the registry, per se?

The President. No, I have no reason to believe they would be, and I hope they would pass it.

Q. What do you mean by putting partisanship aside?

The President. Well, we haven't had a lot of bills coming out of Congress this year, but I hope very much that they will pass this. I don't believe—not since 1995, when there was an attempt to strip the Federal authority standards, has there been a serious move on this issue. And I believe there are a lot of Republicans, as well as Democrats, in Congress who will support this. So I'm quite hopeful that it will pass.

Patients' Bill of Rights

Q. How about the Patients' Bill of Rights; do you think you're going to get that?

The President. Well, I don't know. That's up to them. We have to have some significant amount of Republican support to get a strong bill. We have to have 60 votes to break a filibuster in the Senate and, obviously, a majority in the House, sufficient to actually make sure the bill could come to a vote. But we're still working on it, and it's terribly important.

Everywhere I go in the country—you know, I was just home last weekend, and I was stunned at the number of people who came up to me and just started talking about it and talking about their own experiences and how important they thought it was. So I'm very hopeful we'll get it.

Q. How can you parlay that, then, into a real public response?

The President. Well, I'm working at it. We've had a lot of events on the Patients' Bill of Rights. I'm trying to get the public involved in this, trying to get them to express their opinions to their Members of Congress, and I will continue to do so.

Secret Service Agent Testimony

Q. I wanted to ask you about another issue, sir. Now that the Secret Service agents have testified, are you concerned about what they might be saying, one; and, two, do you find yourself holding them more at arm's length, sir?

The President. The Secret Service has made its own decisions about what to say and how to do it, based on their professional sense of responsibility, and I'm not going to get into this. I've refused to comment on it so far, and I'm going to continue to refuse to comment.

Libya and the Pan Am 103 Aircraft Tragedy

Q. Mr. President, your administration is making a new push to end the standoff with Libya over the Lockerbie bombing, including possibly holding a trial in a neutral country, under U.S. or Scottish jurisdiction. Are you optimistic that this climate might help, and what has brought on this new push?

The President. Well, we have always said that our first goal was to bring the perpetrators of Pan Am 103 murders to justice. That's our first purpose. And since I got here, we've been looking for ways to do that. We have had conversations with representatives of the British Government as well. We've always said we thought that there had to be a trial under American or Scottish law. There may be some possibility of standing up a Scottish court in another country, but there are lots of difficulties with it as well, apparently.

All I can tell you is that it's one of the things that we have explored with a view toward accelerating the day—it's been a long time now; it's been a lot of years since that terrible day when Pan Am 103 crashed over Lockerbie. And we're looking at it, but I don't know that it can be done. Our people have spent a lot of time on it. We've talked to the British at great length about it. We're trying to find some way that has real integrity, that will work. But there are all kinds of practical difficulties that I'm sure our folks can explain. I don't know if we can do it, but we're working on it.

Q. What brought it up now? I mean, what—all of a sudden, after so many years?

The President. I don't know why it is just now coming into the press. But it's not just being brought up now. We have literally been working for years; I have personally been engaged in this for years, trying to find a way to get the suspects out of Libya, into a court where we thought an honest and fair and adequate trial could occur.

And in a case like this, like every other case, as the years go by you run more and more chances that something will happen to the evidence that is available, to any witnesses that might be available. So we've had a sense of urgency about this for some time. But my guess is that it has come to public light because a significant number of conversations have had to be held between the American and the British authorities and between others in potential third-party venues, like The Netherlands. And I know there's been some discussion of that. But it has not been resolved yet.

Thank you.

Q. Is there any indication that the Libyans might go along, sir?

Retracted CNN Report on Use of Nerve Gas in Vietnam

Q. Sir, can you comment on CNN's nerve gas report, that the Pentagon—[*inaudible*]—today?

The President. All I know is what Secretary Cohen has said to you, to the public, and to me, which is that their view is that it did not occur.

Thank you all very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 3:16 p.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Nancy-Ann Min DeParle, Administrator, Health Care Financing Administration (HCFA); and Edna Shalala, mother of Health and Human Services Secretary Donna E. Shalala.

Statement on Signing Legislation on Funding for the Disposition of Depleted Uranium Hexafluoride

July 21, 1998

Today I have signed into law S. 2316, a bill designed to help ensure that certain funds of the United States Enrichment Corporation will be dedicated to the disposition of depleted uranium hexafluoride. I strongly support this bill, but note that by virtue of the Recommendations Clause of the Constitution, Article II, section 3, the Congress may not require the President to recommend legislation to the Congress. Therefore, to the extent the bill would infringe upon my discretion to determine whether to recommend legislation to the Congress, I must treat it as hortatory. In this case, however, I believe that the development of proposed legislation by the Secretary of Energy furthers important and valuable objectives, and I intend to instruct the Secretary to develop proposed legislation for inclusion in my budget request for fiscal year 2000.

William J. Clinton

The White House,
July 21, 1998.

NOTE: S. 2316, approved July 21, was assigned Public Law No. 105–204.

Message to the House of Representatives Returning Without Approval the "Education Savings and School Excellence Act of 1998"

July 21, 1998

To the House of Representatives:

I am returning herewith without my approval H.R. 2646, the "Education Savings and School Excellence Act of 1998."

As I have said before, we must prepare our children for the 21st century by providing them with the best education in the world. To help meet this goal, I have sent the Congress a comprehensive agenda for strengthening our public schools, which enroll almost 90 percent of our students. My plan calls for raising standards, strengthening accountability, and promoting charter schools and other forms of public school choice. It calls for reducing class size in the early grades, so our students get a solid foundation in the basic skills, modernizing our schools for the 21st century, and linking them with the Internet. And we must strengthen teaching and provide students who need additional help with tutoring, mentoring, and after-school programs. We must take these steps now.

By sending me this bill, the Congress has instead chosen to weaken public education and shortchange our children. The modifications to the Education IRAs that the bill would authorize are bad education policy and bad tax policy. The bill would divert limited Federal resources away from public schools by spending more than $3 billion on tax benefits that would do virtually nothing for average families and would disproportionately benefit the most affluent families. More than 70 percent of the benefits would flow to families in the top 20 percent of income distribution, and families struggling to make ends meet would never see a penny of the benefits. Moreover, the bill would not create a meaningful incentive for families to increase their savings for educational purposes; it would instead reward families, particularly those with substantial incomes, for what they already do.

The way to improve education for all our children is to increase standards, accountability, and choice within the public schools. Just as we have an obligation to repair our Nation's roads and bridges and invest in the infrastructure of our transportation system, we also have an obligation to invest in the infrastructure needs of our public schools. I urge the Congress to meet that obligation and to send me instead the legislation I have proposed to reduce class size; improve the quality of teaching; modernize our schools; end social promotions; raise academic standards;