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for drugs of anybody in this country, and it is wrong.

Now, we are in good shape now. The life of the Medicare Trust Fund is secure until 2023—I mean 23d of whatever it is, I just forgot. [*Laughter*] What is it, Jack? Twenty-twenty-three, I got it right. My budget would take it out to 2030. I would like to have a 30-year cushion there. I would like for people to know that it would be there for 30 years. But it would also provide this prescription drug coverage.

Now I can tell you what is going to happen. Your Congressman and I are going to go back to Washington and there will be people to say—oh, mostly on the other side of the political, I would say—"Well we know this is a hot issue, and we've got to do something about it. So let's just provide drug coverage for people up to 150 percent of the poverty line." It's not enough. Medicare was intended to benefit all seniors, to help all seniors to keep from being driven into poverty. And this is an insurance program.

We would never, I will say again, we would never, ever think of creating a program if we were starting all over again with Medicare today that did not have a prescription drug component. You know it, and I know it. Since we wouldn't do that, since the program's in the best shape it has been in in a generation, since we have the funds to take it out to 30 years of life, let's add a prescription drug benefit that everybody in this room and everybody in this country who is eligible by age and who needs it can buy to provide the kind of security in health care all American seniors deserve.

I just want to say one other thing, sort of off my script, that a lot of you will remember, and you will identify with this. You only get a few chances in life as a people to do really big, good things, when times are going along so well and the circumstances are there, that you can do this. When Medicare was created, it was during what was up until this time the longest economic expansion in American history. And so the American people felt secure, and they supported their elected Representatives in doing things like beginning to provide national health to our schools and providing Medicare. Now that's the last time we were able to do something like this.

Now we are in the longest economic expansion in our history. But these things don't go on forever. And if we can't do this now, when will we ever do it? If we can't do the really big, right things now, in Medicare, in continuing to pay our debt off, in improving the education of our children, in providing economic opportunity to the neighborhoods and the rural communities and the other places that have been left behind, when will we ever get around to it?

So I want to ask all of you, whatever your political background, to give us some support to reform Medicare and provide this prescription drug benefit, to lengthen the life of Social Security to 2054, to make sure that the baby boomers' entire lives are a blessing to this country and not a burden to our children and grandchildren, and to immediately provide the seniors of today the prescription drug coverage that so many millions of them need.

This is an honorable and a good thing to do, but it is a solemn obligation, and we will never have a better chance to do it. And therefore, we have a solemn responsibility to get the job done.

Thank you, and God bless you all.

NOTE: The President spoke at 3:01 p.m. in the Crystal Room at the senior center in the Borough of Queens. In his remarks, he referred to Linda Nadel, office manager, Services Now for Adult Persons Senior Center, who introduced the President, and her mother. Ruth Freidman, lobbyist for senior issues; and Rabbi Gerald C. Skolnik, Forest Hill Jewish Center.

## Statement on the Regional Funding Conference for Southeast Europe

*March 30, 2000*

I want to congratulate the countries of southeast Europe, the Stability Pact, the European Commission, and the World Bank on the success of the Regional Funding Conference for Southeast Europe in Brussels.

Last year we launched the Stability Pact with a common understanding that an undivided, democratic, and peaceful Europe can only be built when the countries of southeast Europe are integrated with the rest of the continent. For that to happen, the countries

of the region have to accelerate their political and economic reforms, and the donor community needs to support the region's efforts.

I am very pleased by the progress that has been made on both fronts. The Governments of southeast Europe have begun to take steps to implement the reforms they have promised, including those that will improve their investment climate and strengthen the rule of law. And today, the donor community, including the United States, has reaffirmed its support for the region. We have agreed to fund Quick Start Projects ready to begin this year that will improve regional infrastructure, fight corruption, and advance reform. Countries have pledged $2.3 billion for these projects, out of a broader package of total assistance to southeast Europe in 2000 estimated at over $6 billion. Over 85 percent of this assistance is being provided by European countries and institutions together with international financial institutions. I congratulate our European partners for their leadership.

The message today from Brussels is clear. A democratic southeast Europe is on the road to a better future. While Serbia was represented at this Conference by the opposition, we look forward to the day when it will be represented by a democratic government.

## Statement on House Action on the Supplemental Budget Request

*March 30, 2000*

I am pleased that the House of Representatives today took action that would meet many of the essential, immediate needs in my supplemental budget request, including helping victims of Hurricane Floyd, providing energy assistance for families struggling with rising oil prices, helping keep illegal drugs out of our country by supporting the Colombian Government's fight against drug traffickers, and providing for our troops in Kosovo.

It is vital that Congress avoid delay in meeting these needs; the costs of delay are great. A delay in Kosovo funding would soon jeopardize our current level of military readiness around the world and our ability to help the people of Kosovo build peace and a better future. A delay in support for Colombia's antidrug efforts would signal that Colombia lacks the international support to prevail against drug traffickers. At home, delaying funding for the victims of Hurricane Floyd would leave thousands in temporary housing possibly through their second winter and without funding to replenish the program for home energy assistance. A delay in LIHEAP funds, would leave many Americans, especially the elderly and infirm, vulnerable in the event of an extreme heat wave this summer.

The bill produced by the House today, while meeting essential needs, is also flawed. The House bill is too large—providing unnecessary funding for certain areas while failing to fund areas of the highest importance, including Embassy security for our diplomatic personnel in Kosovo and elsewhere in the region, building peace and stability in Kosovo to support the efforts of our troops, and contributing our Nation's share to the U.N. peacekeeping force there. In addition, the House bill fails to provide debt relief for the world's poorest nations.

Because the needs in my budget request are essential and immediate, I urge the Senate to turn swiftly to its work on the budget request and to produce a better, right-sized bill, that includes the necessary level of funding for Kosovo and debt relief, and that should pass without delay.

NOTE: In this statement, the President referred to LIHEAP, the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program.

## Remarks at a Democratic National Committee Dinner in New York City

*March 30, 2000*

You know what I want to do? I want to tell you this is Michael—birthday. It's also—George, where are you? Is that your name, George? It's his birthday, also, and he came all the way from Alaska to be here. [*Laughter*] So I'm trying to think about what I should do when I leave office, and I think I'll do birthday parties. [*Laughter*] Birthday parties—no, this is good.

John and Margo have been so good to us, and this is going to be such a long, arduous