

that 1994 will go down in history as the year when, after decades and decades of false starts and lame excuses and being overcome by special interests, the American people finally, finally had health care security for all.

This will be a year when we attempt to fix what's broken with our health care system, keep what's right, to emphasize the program that we outlined of guaranteed private insurance for every American, comprehensive benefits that can never be taken away, and a system that gives people who presently don't have insurance and small businesses greater power to choose affordable quality health insurance.

In the days and weeks ahead, I will be asking the American people and the Congress to go beyond rhetoric to fact and to ask and answer some simple questions: Of all the available alternatives, which ones guarantee health security to all Americans? Of all the available alternatives, which ones carry the greatest promise of reducing bureaucracy, paperwork, and absolutely wasted billions of dollars? Of all the available alternatives, which ones guarantee more choices of health care, not only to the patients who really matter but also to the doctors and the health care providers? Of all the available alternatives, which ones guarantee the least second-guessing of the doctor-patient relationship? If we can have these simple questions asked and answered, I believe that, together, we can solve this great riddle which has bedeviled our country for too many years now, strengthen our economy, and restore a great sense of security to the American people.

We will do this in connection with our efforts to also dramatically alter the education and job training systems of the country to provide greater economic security and our efforts to pass a comprehensive crime bill to provide greater personal and family and community security.

I am looking very much forward to this year. I want to thank the First Lady and Secretary Shalala and Ira Magaziner for the work they have done on health care. I want to welcome Pat Griffin and Harold Ickes to our team. I'm glad that George Stephanopoulos will be taking a more active role in working on the health care debate in Congress.

Let me just say one last thing in closing. I suppose every Christmas and New Year's gives us the opportunity to reflect on the time we've just spent and the time that lies ahead. But I think it is so easy for us to forget here that

what we do affects the lives of real people and that what is at stake here is not some great looming political battle. What is at stake here is the actual living conditions of the American people, whether families who work hard and do their very best to do what they're supposed to do are going to be able to know that their children will always have health care, whether we are going to be able to maintain a health care system and still have the money that we need to invest in a growing and highly competitive global economy so that America will be strong. And if we can keep that in mind, if we can move beyond the rhetoric and the smoke and the process to keep in mind every day that real people's interests are at stake here and that America must not go into the 21st century without health security for all, without a dramatically improved system of education and training, without a new commitment to the security of our families and our children, I think we're going to be in good shape.

And lastly, let me say I very, very much hope that this will be a bipartisan effort, that Democrats and Republicans will be working together and that we will resolve in the new year not to further a partisan interest but to further the interest of the people who sent us all here.

Thank you very much.

Health Care Reform

Q. Mr. President, how much are you willing to compromise on this plan itself, in view of the strong opposition in many quarters and, of course, on the Hill?

The President. Well, I think, first of all, we are going to see a fleshing out of all the alternatives, something that hasn't happened yet. The burden has been borne almost entirely by our plan, which is something I was willing to do. But now we need to look at the cost of the status quo and the cost and the consequences of the other plans and do what is best.

I have said all along what my bottom line is, that we have to have comprehensive benefits that can never be taken away, that we cannot go on being the only country in the world with an advanced economy that cannot figure out how to guarantee health care security to all our people. Now, that leaves a whole lot of room for working out the details. We should emphasize preventive and primary care, we ought to emphasize efficiencies, we ought to reduce the bureaucracy, and we ought to do it in a way