

A ripple effect extended the economic hardship beyond the federal work force to millions of other Americans who provide services to or receive them from you—hardships that, sadly, will not disappear with the stroke of a pen.

Let us be clear: there was absolutely no excuse for this shutdown. We and Republicans in Congress have differing views on how to balance the budget, and that's why we are engaged in negotiations. But there was no justification for this government to be closed while negotiations progress. And there is no justification for Congress' failure to fully fund all government services.

Once again, many of the men and women who make up our federal government were held hostage, with your paychecks delayed and your security threatened during the holiday season. You were put unfairly in the middle of a battle you did not seek. But—whether you were furloughed or working—by your commitment and your sacrifice, you continued to serve our nation as loyally as ever during this crisis.

We salute you for your dedication, and we thank you.

BILL CLINTON
AL GORE

Remarks on the Budget Negotiations and an Exchange With Reporters January 6, 1996

The President. Let me say that I am pleased that Congress has completed the task of reopening the Federal Government which was begun a few days ago. And I hope that no Congress will ever again shut the Federal Government down in this way. As has been said, it is morally indefensible to hold needed Government services and hard-working Government employees hostage in a political battle.

I'm also pleased to submit the budget plan prepared by Senator Daschle which the Congressional Budget Office says will reach balance in 7 years. This plan illustrates what we have been saying all along, that you can balance the budget in 7 years and protect Medicare, Medicaid, education, and the environment and provide tax relief to working families.

Now it's time to get back to work. This is a moment of great national promise, and we need to find unity and common ground; we need to rise above partisanship to fashion a sensible solution that is true to our values, honors our obligations to our parents and to our children, and builds a stronger future for our country. And in just a few moments we will go back to work.

Q. Sir, what was your priority, to technically meet their demands and open it up, or to get it—

The President. Well, we have reached a point in our negotiations—we have been working in good faith now for days and days, identifying

areas of agreement as well as areas of disagreement. And last evening when we ended our session and we agreed to meet again today, we both said that we would try to speed up the negotiations, move as quickly as possible to see if we couldn't at least reach a framework agreement. And this was an appropriate time to do that. And so I'm hopeful that we can reach agreement.

As I said, these numbers show that the Congressional Budget Office agrees that you can balance the budget and still provide adequate protection for Medicare, Medicaid, education, and the environment.

Q. How soon do you think you can get this closed?

The President. How soon? I don't know. We've been in about a 2-hour recess now, and I'm looking forward to getting back to work. And I'm prepared to work all day tomorrow. We have tentatively agreed to start again tomorrow morning, and if the weather doesn't prevent us, I'm prepared to just stay all day. Depending on how big a snow, the weather might not only not prevent us but actually help us to stay here and get downright cozy.

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:06 p.m. in the Oval Office at the White House.