

reopen the Government today for the next several days while we attempt to finalize this, and I hope the House will follow suit. That's a very good sign, and I'm looking forward to the meeting tonight.

Q. Will the House follow suit, Mr. Speaker?

Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich. Well, our Members will be back by noon tomorrow, and we hope to meet with all of them and brief them on tonight's meeting and whatever happens tomorrow morning and maybe get something done during the day tomorrow. I think if we can both get movement on the balanced budget and get the Government back to

work and paid for, that really would be a good step in the right direction.

Q. Will you encourage them to take the Senate bill?

Speaker Gingrich. We're going to have a good meeting tonight, and we'll report to the Members what happened when they get back tomorrow.

NOTE: The exchange began at 6:15 p.m. in the Oval Office at the White House, prior to a meeting with congressional leaders. A tape was not available for verification of the content of this exchange.

Remarks on the Impact of the Budget Impasse and an Exchange With Reporters

January 3, 1996

The President. Good afternoon. I have just finished meeting with my Cabinet to receive an update on the consequences of the Government shutdown that Congress has imposed on the American people and on the hardworking public employees who are now working without pay and the many who want to work but are not permitted to return to work. Each day this shutdown continues, the consequences grow worse.

Before I get into some of the specific things that came out of the Cabinet meeting, let me remind the American people that this shutdown is not caused by the fact that the congressional leaders and I have not yet reached agreement on a balanced budget plan or on all the appropriations for this year. In fact, it is part of an explicit strategy by Republicans to shut the Government down to get their way on budget and tax issues. This has never been done before. It is not a natural disaster. It is an unnatural disaster born of a cynical political strategy.

It is long past time to reopen the Government. I am pleased that after 2 weeks of this shutdown, the Senate Republicans have voted to reopen the Government, putting the interest of our country ahead of politics. Our budget talks are proceeding seriously and in good faith. I have been impressed by the efforts made on all sides, including those by Senator Dole and by Speaker Gingrich and Leader Arney and

Senator Daschle and Mr. Gephardt. We are working together in good faith. This shutdown is not speeding our talks. It is only casting a shadow over them.

Let me report to you some of the specific examples of harm already caused by the shutdown. This week, the Meals on Wheels program for senior citizens will run out of money. Half the Head Start programs in the country will run out of money within the month. The Centers for Disease Control tracking system cannot accurately keep up with the flu outbreak in the Midwest. On an average day, 260 small businesses are being denied \$40 million in capital, loans that would create new jobs for Americans. We are not able to enforce our trade laws to protect our workers and our products. We're not able to weatherize homes in this winter to protect the elderly from the cold.

Yesterday, the Environmental Protection Agency shut down toxic waste cleanups at 32 sites across America. Every day, 240 calls to the Drinking Water Contamination Hotline now go unanswered. The EPA's efforts to prevent cryptosporidium from contaminating city water supplies, something that proved a deadly threat in the city of Milwaukee, have been badly delayed. EPA enforcement efforts have completely stopped.

Medicare contractors who serve our elderly are not being paid. Many of them now are dip-