

our duty for our parents and our children, strengthening our communities, our families, and America.

As all of you know, I have submitted a plan to balance the budget in 7 years using the conservative estimates of the Congressional Budget Office. Let me repeat: With this letter, which I am carrying around with me to remind everyone that we have done it, Congress' own economists confirm what we have said all along. We can balance the budget without excessive cuts in Medicare and Medicaid, without cutting education or the environment or raising taxes on our hardest pressed working families.

Now, as all of you know also, the Republicans in Congress are insisting on cuts in Medicare, Medicaid, education, and the environment that I believe are well beyond what is necessary to balance the budget, well beyond what is necessary to secure the solvencies of those programs, well beyond what is necessary for the Congressional Budget Office to say we have to do to balance the budget.

We all know, too, that there are two strains at work in the Republican effort. There is the genuine desire to balance the budget, which I share. But there are those who want to use the balanced budget and a huge tax cut crammed within the balanced budget to strip our National Government and our country of our ability to do our part here in Washington to help people out in our communities with the challenges they face. We shouldn't let our fundamental agreement on a balanced budget be held hostage to a narrower agenda that seeks to prevent America from giving Medicare to senior citizens or quality nursing home care or educational opportunity for young people or environmental protection to all of us.

We could quickly find common ground on balancing the budget and providing appropriate modest tax relief; we could do this in 15 minutes, after the tens of hours we have already spent together. What has held up this agreement is the insistence of the Republicans on cuts that I believe are excessive in Medicare, Medicaid, education, and the environment, and insistence on a tax hike on the lowest income of our working families. These things are not necessary to balance the budget.

Having said that, let me say we have come a long way. We have agreed on well over \$600 billion of savings, far more than necessary to balance the budget. This should be a moment

for national unity, a time to put aside partisanship, to reject ideology, to find common ground for the common good. A balanced budget that reflects the best of both parties, the best of our values, and will pass on to the next generation a stronger America, that is within our grasp. We should get it done now, and I believe we will get it done in the near future.

Terry [Terence Hunt, Associated Press].

The First Lady

Q. Mr. President, some newly released documents raised questions about some statements by Mrs. Clinton on the White House Travel Office firings and her role in representing the Madison Guaranty Savings and Loan Association. Do you think it would be a good idea for her to testify before Congress to clear up these issues?

The President. Well, she has said that she will do whatever is necessary to answer all the appropriate questions, and I think that she should do that. And I think that we will determine in the days ahead, together, what is necessary. She has begun to answer those questions. We'll be doing some more of that before the week is out, and I presume we'll be doing quite a lot of it in the days ahead. And as you know, there was a hearing, I think, today on part of this matter in the Senate and will be another one next week. These questions should be answered.

Let me say, for 4 years, as these questions have come up, we have tried to answer them all; we have tried to be fully cooperative. And we will be in this case. And I think she should do what is necessary to answer the questions. That's what she said she'll do, and I think that's what will happen.

Q. Is that within the pale, though, testifying? Do you—

The President. Well, I think—I want to leave it the way I said it today. I think whatever is necessary to fully answer the questions she will do. That's what she said she would do, and I think we should leave it there for now.

Budget Negotiations

Helen [Helen Thomas, United Press International].

Q. Mr. President, Speaker Gingrich seems to have thrown in the towel on the budget, seems to—says something about there won't be a budget, not until the next election. And you