

sent them on is being implemented, that I tell them, personally, that they are doing a good job. They are performing a remarkable service in a terribly important mission. So I feel quite comfortable about this trip. We have worked very hard with our commanders on the ground in Bosnia to structure the trip so that its objectives can be met without in any way undermining our fundamental mission there. And on the security front, I feel quite comfortable with the trip as it has been designed and as we will carry it out.

Yes?

Budget Negotiations

Q. The offer that you made over the weekend—certified now, as you point out, by the Congressional Budget Office—has extracted from the Republicans a rather substantial set of concessions, the most substantial they've made yet. In light of that, they seem to be expecting you to counter that with a similar offer of your own. If you did, and you're as close as you say they are, it seems that would almost clinch it. Why not go ahead and do that, sir?

The President. That's my speech. You just made my speech for me. [Laughter] I have—first of all, I believe if you look at the spending concessions and you start from equal points, whether you start from our beginning budget offers or the ones that were made back in December, we have both made substantial concessions away from our original point.

My belief is that we should go for a balanced budget that is scored in a way that Congress recognizes because that's what the law requires, but that having done that, we should not—we should not—violate the other conditions of our previous agreement which is to take any risks with Medicare or Medicaid or do things that we know will cause us to undermine our investment in education and the environment.

Now, we can do that and get a tax cut. We still have some differences on policies relating to Medicare. We're trying to work out our differences over Medicaid. We still have some significant differences on environmental policies. But I believe all that can be worked out. And so that's why I say I have been somewhat surprised at some of the negative tone of the stories coming out since we adjourned because I, frankly, felt quite good, and I did make them, as I said, an offer that I hoped that they would sleep on and work on.

Q. Well, is now the time for the President to come forward and say, let's split the difference?

The President. It's not as simple as splitting the difference. It's not just—there's more than money at stake here. There are policies at stake. And if you split the difference, again, according to the rules of the Congressional Budget Office, there must be policies which back up whatever number that you pick. So that's why I say that if we know we can balance the budget and we know it will work over 7 years, we shouldn't go beyond that in any kind of gratuitous cuts in Medicare and Medicaid that will require policy changes that either we may have to back up on, which will undermine the credibility of the agreement, or that could do serious damage to the programs.

The First Lady

Q. Mr. President, when you campaigned in 1992, you and the First Lady both said that the American people would get two for the price of one. I wondered if that's still going to be a slogan in 1996, and if the First Lady has really taken the role that you envisioned for her as First Lady or if she's just simply become too controversial?

The President. Well, first of all, I think she's done a fine job. I may have asked her to do more than anybody should ever have been asked to do when I asked her to undertake the health care effort. But there are worse things than wanting every American child to have health care coverage, just the way every child in every other advanced country in the world has.

I believe that—in the last 6 months or 8 months she wanted to take a lot of time off to write her book, which she did do. And I think the book is a very important contribution to America which reflects 25 years of work, learning, and exposure on her part. And I expect that she will continue to be an enormous positive force in this country.

And in terms of controversy, very often in this town you don't make yourself controversial; someone else makes you controversial. So I don't think you can do anything about that, especially in the wake of the health care issue.

Q. If I could just follow up, sir, are you saying that her conduct, especially involving the Travel Office and the discrepancies in what she said about her involvement in Madison Guaranty,