

The charitable choice provision that had been debated in the welfare reform package fully explored the constitutional questions involved with funding people and/or faith-based programs. And I am confident that our program not only is constitutional but, more importantly, our program is going to change America for the better, that we're going to help people, and we're going to help people help themselves, and we're going to rally the great compassion of America.

And I look forward to implementing this program. I look forward to working with Members of Congress to put the required package together.

Prescription Drug Legislation

Q. How do you respond to the Members of Congress who say they would rather see a universal, broad-based approach to Medicare reform rather than your drug plan first and a broader approach later?

The President. Well, if, in fact, what they're saying is that they plan on expediting a Medicare reform that will include prescription drugs for all seniors, then all of a sudden, I begin to say, "Well, gosh, that may make sense that you look at our proposal the way you do." If they're going to drag their feet, if the Members of the Congress on both sides of the aisle don't feel the same urgency that I feel and these two chairmen feel on Medicare reform, then I feel it's very important for us to have an Immediate Helping Hand. There are a lot of seniors who need help when it comes to prescription drugs.

President Clinton's Pardon of Marc Rich

Q. Why did you decide not to challenge the Clinton pardon, sir?

The President. Oh, on Marc Rich? First of all, I didn't agree with the decision. I

would not have made that decision myself. But the ability for a President to make decisions is—a decision on pardons is inviolate, as far as I'm concerned. It's an important part of the office. I am mindful not only of preserving executive powers for myself but for predecessors as well. And that's why I made the decision.

Q. Are you troubled by the appearance, sir? Are you troubled by the appearance of that pardon, sir?

The President. I was troubled by the decision the President made. I would not have made the decision. I would not have made that decision. But nevertheless, he was the President. He had the right to do so, to make that decision, and he did. And I'm going to protect that privilege, not only for me but for future Presidents as well.

Q. Is it a quid pro quo—

The President. I don't know about that. It's going to be up for a good journalist to figure that out—like you, Roberts [John Roberts, CBS News].

Q. I'm just wondering, sir, if you're taking a look at the path that's been laid and said, "It walks like a duck"?

The President. It what—it walks like what? [Laughter]

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:04 p.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Representative William M. Thomas, chairman, House Committee on Ways and Means; Senator Charles Grassley, chairman, Senate Committee on Finance; Treasury Secretary-designate Paul H. O'Neill; and Gov. Gray Davis of California. The President also referred to ANWR, the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. A tape was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.