

that they can pass on to their heirs. And the death tax is unfair. The death tax is a tax that unfairly penalizes people who have worked hard to build up their own businesses.

So this tax relief package is not only good for taxpayers; it is also good to stimulate and to help the entrepreneurial spirit in America, a spirit seen right here with these good folks who have taken risk, are creating jobs, but most importantly, realized their dreams of owning their own business. So it's such an honor to be here. I appreciate your inviting us. Thank you all for your hospitality. I'll be glad to answer a few questions.

David [David Gregory, NBC News].

#### *Patients' Bill of Rights*

Q. Mr. President, can you explain your position on a patients' bill of rights, as proposed today in the Senate? Are you for it, as it was outlined by Senators Kennedy and McCain and others?

*The President.* Well, I haven't seen all the details. But first, I am pleased that Senator Kennedy and Senator McCain have come together to offer a plan. Inherent in their plan, as I understand, is some tort reform. That is a really important ingredient in order to move patients' bill of rights, as far as I'm concerned. We can't have a patients' bill of rights that encourages and invites all kinds of lawsuits, because the ultimate effect will be to run up the cost of business, particularly for small businesses. And so, as I understand, there is some tort reform language in there.

I'm a little concerned about the size of the cap on punitive damages. I want to make sure that if there is tort reform, it's a tight tort reform package, without a lot of loopholes that will allow trial lawyers to skirt the intent of the law. But as far as I am concerned, I am really pleased with the fact that they are moving legislation in the Senate. It is a good sign that Republicans and Democrats are getting together.

Q. May I just follow up on one point?  
*The President.* Sure.

Q. The administration's meeting last night with Congressman Norwood—was that in any way an effort to stall this effort on a patients' bill of rights for now? Do you feel like anybody's trying to steal your thunder as you're trying to talk about tax cuts?

*The President.* No, I don't think so, David. I know the reason why our folks met with Charlie Norwood, like we're meeting with other people, is to lay out our principles, is to talk about an administrative initiative. And our initiative is going to encompass many of the principles that are inherent in John's and Senator Kennedy's—John McCain's and Senator Kennedy's bill. All these bills, they are going to get worked out over time.

I just want the people in the House and the Senate to know that I'm coming with a plan. And as you know—and you heard me in the campaign several times talk about the fact that our legislation in Texas, our patients' bill of rights in Texas, was a pretty strong piece of legislation. And one of the things I am concerned about is to make sure that the Federal Government law doesn't override what we did in our State.

There are a lot of details to be worked out. But I am really pleased with the progress, and I am very hopeful that we can get a patients' bill of rights on my desk pretty soon. And the fact that, again, John McCain and Senator Kennedy and others have come together is a good sign.

#### *Airline Labor Disputes*

Q. Are you worried about the possibility of strikes at four major airlines, sir, and what can you do about it?

*The President.* I am worried about strikes at airlines. I think that could have a harmful effect on our economy. And I would urge that the parties settle their disputes. The President has got some opportunities—