

Remarks Following a Meeting With the Economic Team and an Exchange With Reporters
January 10, 2002

Pension Reform

The President. Thank you all for coming. I met with my economic security team last week to talk about ways to create jobs. We're meeting again with the components of the team to talk about one part of economic security, and that's pension security.

One of the things we're deeply concerned about is that there have been a wave of bankruptcies that have caused many workers to lose their pensions, and that's deeply troubling to me. And so I've asked the Secretary of Treasury, Secretary of Labor, and Secretary of Commerce to convene a working group to analyze pensions, rules and regulations, to look into the effects of the current law on hard-working Americans, and to come up with recommendations how to reform the system to make sure that people are not exposed to losing their life savings as a result of a bankruptcy, for example.

As well, Secretary of Treasury, along with the SEC, the Fed, and the CFTC, are going to convene a working group to analyze corporate disclosure rules and regulations. In light of the most recent bankruptcy, Enron, there needs to be a full review of disclosure rules to make sure that the American stockholder or any stockholder is protected.

And so, I think this is an important part of, obviously, other investigations that are ongoing. The Justice Department announced and informed us late yesterday that they're in the process of investigating aspects of the Enron bankruptcy. The administration is deeply concerned about its effects on the economy. We're also deeply concerned about its effects on the lives of our citizenry.

I'll be glad to answer a few questions.

Enron Corporation

Q. When was the last time you talked to either Mr. Lay or any other Enron official about the—about anything? And did discussions involve the financial problems of the company?

The President. I have never discussed with Mr. Lay the financial problems of the company. The last time that I saw Mr. Lay was at my mother's fundraising event to—for literacy, in Houston. That would have been last spring. I do know that Mr. Lay came to the White House in—early in my administration along with, I think, 20 other business leaders to discuss the state of the economy. It was just kind of a general discussion. I have not met with him personally.

Q. [*Inaudible*]—to inoculate and your administration politically from the fallout?

The President. Well, first of all, Ken Lay is a supporter. And I got to know Ken Lay when he was the head of the—what they call the Governor's Business Council in Texas. He was a supporter of Ann Richards in my run in 1994. And she had named him the head of the Governor's Business Council, and I decided to leave him in place, just for the sake of continuity. And that's when I first got to know Ken and worked with Ken, and he supported my candidacy.

This is—what anybody's going to find, if—is that this administration will fully investigate issues such as the Enron bankruptcy to make sure we can learn from the past and make sure that workers are protected.

Iran and Afghanistan

Q. Mr. President, does it appear that Iran is flexing its muscles in western Afghanistan, and does that threaten the U.S. war on terrorism in that region?