

Week Ending Friday, December 22, 1995

Remarks on Budget Negotiations

December 15, 1995

As all of you know, today the Republicans in Congress broke off our negotiations on how best to balance the budget in 7 years. They said they would not even continue to talk unless we agreed right now to make deep and unconscionable cuts in Medicare and Medicaid. That's unacceptable. The cuts they propose would deprive millions of people of health care: poor children, pregnant women, the disabled, seniors in nursing homes. They would let Medicare wither on the vine into a second-class system. And these things simply are not necessary to balance the budget.

You know, I don't agree with their very large tax cuts for wealthy Americans and for all the special interests that get help in their bill. But I did not require them to drop those provisions as a condition of just talking. But they wanted us to agree to big cuts in Medicare and Medicaid simply to talk.

Last week, before these talks even began, I forwarded to Congress a detailed plan to balance the budget in 7 years without violating our values. That plan contained a large amount of deficit reduction over and above our original proposal. Today, we made yet another good-faith effort to resolve our differences. I have sought reasonable discussions and honest compromise to balance the budget.

Now the Republicans in Congress are not only refusing to talk; once again they're threatening to shut the Government down if I do not accept their deep cuts in health care, education, the environment, and their tax increases on working families. I would not give in to such a threat last month, and I will not give in today.

I would remind you when we signed the last resolution we said we would work in good faith to balance the budget in 7 years without harmful cuts in Medicare, Medicaid, edu-

cation, the environment, agriculture, veterans benefits, and without raising taxes on working families.

So let me say again—and all Americans must understand this—the decision by the Republican congressional majority to shut the Government down has nothing, nothing, to do with the discussion over the 7-year balanced budget plan. Congress has simply refused to pass this year's budgets and has forced the Government to operate on a series of temporary approvals so that they can use the threat of a shutdown to pressure me and the congressional Democrats into approving long-term reductions in Medicare, Medicaid, education, and the environment that we believe strongly are not good for America.

It is wrong, it is simply wrong, for the congressional Republicans to insist that I make deep cuts in Medicare and Medicaid or they will not even talk, and furthermore, they will shut the Government down again just before Christmas.

The Congress should simply pass straightforward legislation to keep the Government open. And then our negotiators should return to the table without threats, without ultimatums, to discuss how we can find common ground on balancing the budget. That is what we ought to do. That is what I am willing to do. And the idea that we should abandon the commitment we made and they agreed to just a few days ago in not having unacceptable cuts in Medicare and Medicaid as a condition of talking is wrong—is wrong—and we should not do that.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 5:39 p.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. This item was not received in time for publication in the appropriate issue.

Message on the Observance of Hanukkah

December 15, 1995

Warm greetings to all who are celebrating Hanukkah.

Each year, as the days grow shorter and the nights colder, we welcome the return of this Festival of Lights, and each year we find fresh meaning in its ageless story of the triumph of the Maccabees. We are reminded of God's powerful presence in our lives, strengthening and sustaining us in times of struggle. We are inspired to reflect upon the meaning of courage, commitment, and faith. We are encouraged to acknowledge our blessings—the love of family, the strength of community, the hope of peace. We rediscover the wisdom of pausing, in the rush and hurry of everyday life, to give joyful thanks for these blessings.

This year, especially, we need such reminders, for with the death of Yitzhak Rabin, a great man, a true friend, and a peacemaker was taken from our midst. But as families throughout our nation and around the world gather to rekindle the flames of the menorah, let us renew our faith that God will continue to guide our steps through adversity until we can all rejoice in the light of peace.

Hillary and I extend best wishes for a joyous Hanukkah and a wonderful holiday season.

William J. Clinton

NOTE: This item was not received in time for publication in the appropriate issue.

Statement on the Nomination of General Joseph W. Ralston to be Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff

December 15, 1995

I am pleased to announce that I have nominated Gen. Joseph W. Ralston, U.S. Air Force, for assignment as Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, succeeding Adm. William A. Owens, who is retiring.

General Ralston currently serves as the Commander, Air Combat Command. In this capacity, he is responsible for training and equipping all active Air Force, Air National

Guard, and Air Force Reserve combat wings and squadrons in the United States and Panama. During his distinguished career, General Ralston flew more than 2,500 flying hours, including 147 combat missions over Laos and North Vietnam. He also served as the Air Force's Director for Tactical Programs and its Director for Operational Requirements. In the latter capacity, his championing of the rapid transition of advanced technology to the battlefield was instrumental in determining the shape and force structure of tomorrow's Air Force. General Ralston brings to the job of Vice Chairman a wealth of experience in the development of military requirements and an in-depth knowledge of the defense acquisition process. These and other attributes provide General Ralston the requisite leadership and management necessary for the post of Vice Chairman at a critical time in the history of the Armed Forces.

I will depend upon General Ralston to continue the initiatives of Admiral Owens which are designed to ensure that our Armed Forces best determine their warfighting requirements and capabilities. I commend Admiral Owens for his exemplary service to his Nation. His sound military advice on the use of military power to back U.S. diplomacy, his crucial role in shaping our forces to fight as a joint team, and the superlative leadership he provided in harnessing the information and technological revolution to our current and future defense posture will ensure that our military will remain the best in the world as we enter the 21st century. Admiral Owens will truly be missed in the senior decision-making ranks of our national security structure. Hillary and I join in wishing him the very best as he begins a new phase of his life.

NOTE: This item was not received in time for publication in the appropriate issue.

The President's Radio Address

December 16, 1995

Good morning. At midnight last night, for the second time in a month, the Republican Congress shut down the Federal Government in an effort to force through their unac-