

Today I want to send a very different message to those who would endanger our children: Young people are not the future of the tobacco industry; they are the future of America. And we must take immediate, decisive action to protect them.

We know that every day 3,000 young people will start smoking and 1,000 of them will die prematurely due to tobacco-related disease. We know that 90 percent of adults who smoke—90 percent—began using tobacco before the age of 18. That is why, starting in 1995, we launched a historic nationwide effort with the FDA to stop our children from smoking before they start, reducing their access to tobacco products and severely restricting tobacco companies from advertising to young people. The balanced budget agreement I signed into law last summer includes a \$24 billion children's health initiative, providing health coverage to up to 5 million uninsured children, paid for by tobacco taxes.

But even these efforts are not enough to fully protect our children from the dangers of smoking. To do that we need comprehensive, bipartisan legislation. Last September I proposed five key elements that must be at the heart of that legislation. First, and most important, it must mandate the development of a comprehensive plan to reduce teen smoking with tough penalties for companies that don't comply. Second, it must affirm the FDA's full authority to regulate tobacco products. Third, it must include measures to hold the tobacco industry accountable, especially for marketing tobacco to children. Fourth, it must include concrete measures to improve the public health, from reducing secondhand smoke to expanding smoking cessation programs to funding medical research on the effects of tobacco. And finally, it must protect tobacco farmers and their communities from the loss of income caused by our efforts to reduce smoking by young people.

If Congress sends me a bill that mandates those steps, I will sign it. My administration will do all it can to ensure that Congress passes this legislation. In September I asked the Vice President to build bipartisan support for the legislation, and he has held forums

all across our country to focus public attention on the issue.

In a few weeks, my balanced budget proposal will make specific recommendations on how much the tobacco industry should pay and how we can best use those funds to protect the public health and our children. Today I want to let Members of Congress know that our administration will sit down with them anytime, anywhere to work out bipartisan legislation.

Reducing teen smoking has always been American's bottom line and always our administration's bottom line. But to make it the tobacco industry's bottom line, we have to have legislation. This is not about politics. This is not about money. It is about our children.

The 1998 Congress should be remembered as the Congress that passed comprehensive tobacco legislation, not the Congress that passed up this historic opportunity to protect our children and our future.

Thanks for listening.

NOTE: The address was recorded at 10:50 a.m. on January 16 in the Oval Office at the White House for broadcast at 10:06 a.m. on January 17.

Statement on Representative Louis Stokes' Decision Not To Seek Reelection

January 18, 1998

Throughout his illustrious career in the United States Congress, Representative Louis Stokes has been a champion of America's finest values. He has worked tirelessly to better the lives of our children and our veterans and has stood steadfast in an effort to bring our country together amid all of our diversity to build a stronger community.

Representative Stokes has been a true advocate for the people of Cleveland and for all Americans who support giving people the tools they need to make the most of their own lives. He has served our country from the bottom of his heart, and his retirement after three decades of dedicated service will be a loss felt by all.

Exchange With Reporters at Cardozo High School

January 19, 1998

Paula Jones Lawsuit

Q. Mr. President, according to Ambassador Seitz, the British believe that Jean Kennedy Smith passed along intelligence information to the IRA. Does that concern you, sir?

On another subject—[laughter]—sir, I didn't hear, I'm sorry, I'm getting hard of hearing. Well, on another subject, after Saturday are you persuaded you may prevail if the Jones case actually does go to trial?

The President. You know, the judge asked us not to talk about it, and I think at least somebody involved in it ought to follow her instructions.

Q. You mean the judge's gag order, sir?

The President. Mr. Bennett will say anything that I have to say about that.

Attack on U.S. Citizens in Guatemala

Q. Did you see that Seitz story, sir, the Ambassador Seitz book?

You've seen the news from Guatemala. Is there anything the United States can do to safeguard U.S. citizens down there?

The President. Well, first of all, it's a terrible thing what happened with that. I have a lot of concerns, obviously, for the victims and their families. But we're persuaded that the Government is taking appropriate action. And it is—where they were, you know, there had been some difficulties. But I think that the Government is doing what it can, and we've been in touch with them. The main thing we need to do now is be concerned with the victims and their families and do whatever we can to minimize such things happening in the future.

Middle East Peace Process

Q. Are you discouraged about the advance word that Prime Minister Netanyahu may not have anything to say that would advance the peace process?

The President. Well, I'm looking forward to the meeting. I'm committed to making it a success. I'm going to do my part, and I just want us to have constructive relations where we can move this forward. And I've

been working on it all morning; that's why I'm a little late here today. I'm going to be prepared to reach out a hand in cooperation to both the Prime Minister and to Mr. Arafat and we'll see what happens. But I've got high hopes. I've worked hard on it. The United States, I think, is viewed rightly as a country that just wants a just, stable, and lasting peace. And we're all going to have to make some moves if we're going to get there. But I'm looking forward to this meeting.

Participation in Community Service

Q. When was the last time you painted a wall, sir?

The President. Not very long ago. This is the third painting project I've done with the national service—with the AmeriCorps people. But we really wanted to emphasize Martin Luther King's birthday as a day of service, a day on, not a day off. And I want to thank the people from the DC school system and the city government and General Becton and the others. This is encouraging, to have all these young people out here. And all over America there are young people working today, tens of thousands of them. That's the image of our young people I'd like for the rest of America to see, and I hope that they will inspire more people of all ages to get involved in community service.

Q. Thank you.

The President. You guys need to give Sam his cuts; he didn't have to work hard today. [Laughter]

Ambassador Jean Kennedy Smith

Q. Sir, could you look into that Smith thing?

The President. Yes, I will. I will.

Participation in Community Service

Q. Mr. President, how much painting experience do you have?

The President. When I was a younger man, I did quite a bit of it.

Q. For who?

The President. For myself. That's the advantage when you elect a real middle class President—you get people who've had to do things like this in life.

Q. What's the shirt mean, Mr. President?