

dentist, a man who has simply acted on his convictions and his experience. And I think we would all do well to listen to him. It's probably a little harder for him to come out for this bill than it was for me, and I feel particularly indebted to Congressman Charlie Norwood.

Representative Norwood.

[At this point, Representatives Charlie Norwood and John D. Dingell and Senators Arlen Specter and Edward M. Kennedy made brief remarks.]

The President. Well, I just want to end on sort of a cautionary but clarion note. Where I come from, this exercise that we have just engaged in is known as preaching to the saved. [Laughter] And it's very important. But this is one of those examples where the public and the people that really know how the system works are in the same place. And I believe a majority of Members of Congress, if—as Congressman Norwood said so eloquently, if they're permitted—they're given a good bill to vote for, they'll vote for it. So the only way that we won't get a good bill is if this conference committee prevents the Congress from voting on a bill they would like to vote for, that is consistent with not only what the majority of the American people want but virtually 100 percent of the medical professionals in the country and a majority of the Congress.

So that's what the stakes are. I am profoundly indebted to the Members who are here, to all the health care professionals who are here, to Dr. Herald who spoke so well. But I ask you to remember the work is ahead of us. And I think we need to, all of us, each in our own way, go to work to impress upon that conference committee their profound responsibility to give the Congress and the country the bill they want to vote on and the bill they want to live under.

Let's get to work. Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11 a.m. in Presidential Hall in the Dwight D. Eisenhower Executive Office Building. In his remarks, he referred to Mary Herald, member, American College of Physicians-American Society of Internal Medicine, who introduced the President.

Remarks Following a Meeting With Biotechnology, Foundation, and International Leaders and an Exchange With Reporters

March 2, 2000

Vaccine Research

The President. Ladies and gentlemen, as you can see, I have a very distinguished group of leaders here in the White House today, and I thank them all for coming—leaders of the international organizations concerned with the health of people throughout the world; Minister of Health from Uganda; the leaders of the pharmaceutical industry and biotech industry and the foundation community in our country who are profoundly interested in joining forces to fight against diseases that kill both people and progress in the world's poorest countries, diseases like AIDS, TB, and malaria, each of which claim over a million lives a year, and others as well.

We agreed that the solution must include the development and the delivery of effective vaccines. That's how we got rid of smallpox and come close to eliminating polio. So today we're beginning a partnership to eradicate the leading infectious killers of our time, speeding the delivery of existing vaccines and getting to the heart of the problem, the lack of incentives for private industry to invest in new vaccines for people who simply can't afford to buy them.

I have attempted to put a comprehensive package on the table so that the United States can do its part to change this: a billion-dollar tax credit to speed the invention of vaccines; a \$50 million contribution to a global fund to purchase vaccines; substantial increase in research at the National Institutes of Health.

I've asked the World Bank to dedicate more lending to improve health, and Mr. Wolfensohn has been very forthcoming here today, and I thank him for that. The private sector is also responding to this challenge, and I want to thank them and recognize the

commitments that have been announced here today. Merck is committing to develop an AIDS vaccine not just for strains of the virus that affect wealthy nations but for strains that ravage the poorest nations as well. This is profoundly important. It's also donating a million doses of Hepatitis B vaccine to those who need it most. American Home Products will donate 10 million doses of a vaccine to—strains of pneumonia and meningitis in children. SmithKline Beecham will expand its malaria vaccine program and begin new vaccine trials in Africa and will donate drugs worth a billion dollars to eliminate elephantiasis, which is a painful and potentially very crippling and disfiguring tropical disease. Aventis Pharma will donate 50 million doses of polio vaccine to five war-torn African nations.

This is a very important beginning. It will save lives and make it clear that we're serious. But all of us agree there is more to do. We have to first build on the bipartisan support that now exists in our Congress to enact the research and experimentation tax credit and the tax credit that we proposed for this specific purpose and to get the funding increases through. I will go to the G-8 meeting in Okinawa this summer to urge our partners to take similar steps. And so let me say, I am profoundly grateful.

Michigan and Pennsylvania Shootings

Now, because this is my first opportunity to be with you when you can say something back today, the press, I also want to just say a word about the terrible shooting yesterday, which followed the killing of the 6-year-old child the day before in Michigan.

These two incidents were very troubling, and they have individual causes and explanations and doubtless will require individual responses. But they do remind us that there is still too much danger in this country and that for more than 8 months now, Congress has been sitting on the commonsense gun safety legislation to require child safety locks, to close the gun show loophole, and the background law, and to ban the importation of large ammunition clips.

I have said before, I will say again today, I'm going to invite the leaders of this con-

ference down to the White House to talk about what we can do to break the logjam. I also think we should go further. We ought to invest in smart gun technology. We talked about investing the vaccines; we're not too far from being able to develop technology which could change all the handguns so that they could only be fired by the adults who purchase them. And that would make a big difference. Apparently, the child who was killed was killed by another child with a stolen gun. If we had child trigger locks on all the guns, it wouldn't have happened.

And finally, I think that it's long, long past time to license purchases of handguns in this country. Car owners are licensed. All drivers are licensed, whether they own a car or not. I think it's time to do that.

So I hope that we will see some action. But the most important thing now, thinking about this child, is, if we had child trigger locks on all these guns, we could keep them alive. So I hope Congress will break the logjam. And I'm going to invite the conferees down here to do it.

Let me finally say again, this is a truly astonishing turnout of people around this table, and together, if we work on it over the next few years, we can literally save the lives of millions of people. And it couldn't be done without the presence of all these people. And I'm very grateful to them. Thank you.

Thank you very much.

Gun Control Legislation

Q. Mr. President, if legislation was sent to you that included the riddance of ammunition clips and included safety locks but did not include the gun show loophole, would you veto that?

The President. Well, I don't know. I think they'd have a very hard time explaining why they did it. Let me remind you, when I signed the Brady bill, and the NRA opposed it, they said, "Oh, this Brady bill won't do any good now because criminals don't buy their guns through gun shops. They buy their guns at gun shows and these urban flea markets or on the sly, one on one. They don't use gun shops." Well, come to find out, 500,000 people couldn't get a handgun because they were felons, fugitives, or stalkers. And it's a safer country because of it.

Now that we want to extend the background check to the gun shows, they say the people—they say the criminals don't use the gun shows, even though 5 years ago they said they did. There is no logical reason to let these gun shows off the hook on the background checks. And the technology is there to do it without causing a total breakdown. And I suggested, if they're worried about the inconvenience to the buyers and the sellers, they could always—and they have these things out in the country somewhere—they could always deposit the weapon with the local sheriff's department while they're waiting to do the background check.

There are all kinds of fixes for the alleged problems here, and there's no reason to do the—the Brady bill is saving people's lives and keeping guns out of the wrong hands. But we do need the child trigger locks. That child would be alive today if that gun had had a child trigger lock on it that the other 6-year-old child could not have fired. And we just need to—we've got to have it. We've got to have it.

The accidental death rate of children by guns in this country is 9 times higher than the rate of the next 25 biggest industrial economies combined. I mean, that's something that—if you forget about the intentional crime, just look at the accidents, we've got to do it, and we need to do it tomorrow. We need to do it as quickly as we can.

International Monetary Fund

Q. Mr. President, what are your specific objections to the German IMF candidate, and what do you expect to happen from here?

The President. We've handled that in the appropriate way, I think, through Secretary Summers. Let me say, I want there to be a European Director of the IMF. I will not support an American candidate, even though I have enormous respect for Mr. Fischer. And I'm gratified that the African nations expressed their support for him. He's an enormously able man. But we have a naturalized American over there leading the World Bank in a great way, and I think the Europeans should lead the IMF. And it would suit me if a German led the IMF.

I don't—nobody is playing any games here. We went through a terrible crisis in the late nineties in Asia. We in the United States went through a terrible problem with our friends in Mexico when their economy was on the verge of collapse and causing others in Latin America and, indeed, far beyond Latin America to teeter. We think the IMF will become even more important in the years ahead.

We want the strongest possible person in the world to head it. It's a big, big, important job. But I am completely committed to having a European head of the IMF. And it would suit me if the person were from Germany. I'd like to see Germany play a bigger role in all these international institutions.

Religious Right

Q. Mr. President, how do you feel about Senator McCain's remarks about the leaders of the religious right? Would you care to associate yourself with his description of what's wrong?

The President. Well, they've been a lot rougher on me than they have on him. [Laughter] I thought it was rather interesting that he was—you know, they weren't for him, and I understand that.

Look, let me say what I think is the—I think that people of faith who believe that their faith drives them to certain political positions should be able to pursue that, their political views, whatever they are, in American politics. I just don't believe they ought to say that people who disagree with them are somehow unworthy of receiving the same consideration they expect to receive in the political arena.

And so I don't want to—I think that for the last 20 years, we've all been too focused on harsh rhetoric and the politics of personal destruction, and I don't want to contribute to it today. But I've been the recipient of some of their venom, and I don't want to respond in kind. What I want to make is I think most people who take positions in politics take them not because they're the prisoners of interest groups but because that's what they believe. And there are plenty of differences that ought to be debated, and then the voters should make their judgments.

And I think any attempt to demonize or, in effect, perform the first plastic surgery on these candidates and to treat them like they're not even people, is wrong, whoever does that. So I don't want to contribute to that. I welcome the members of the religious right into the American political community, and I welcome their right to vote against me at every election. [Laughter] I do. It's part of what makes America a great country. I just don't think they should be condemning of other people, particularly in ways that may not be true, and certainly in ways that are almost cruel.

I think what we need to do is to tone down the personal destruction and turn up the focus on the big challenges facing the country, and we'll all be better off. They ought to be into politics, but we ought to just tone it down a little bit.

Funding for Kosovo

Q. Mr. President, last night Senators were here meeting with your Joint Chiefs of Staff, where they were asked for another \$2.6 billion in supplemental aid to Kosovo. One of the main concerns these Senators had was whether or not the allies were pulling their fair share. Do you believe that the allies are contributing equal portions that the U.S. is putting into this?

The President. The EU, the European allies, will pay the big majority of the continued costs of maintaining order and building the infrastructure and the future of Kosovo. We are being asked to pay a minority of the money that I think is more or less in line with our fair share and in line with the fact that we paid the majority of the costs for conducting the military campaign that brought the Kosovars home.

But I know it's difficult for Congress to come up with this money, and they'd rather spend it someplace else. But just like we're talking about this vaccine issue and how, if we spend money here, it's good for Americans as well as for the people around the world.

It would be a good thing if we can prove that we can end ethnic cleansing and slaughter in the Balkans, and nobody else has to be drug back there to fight in another war, or we don't have to figure out how to handle

and take care of a million refugees who will have their health problems and their other problems. And so, as expensive as this is, as General Shelton always says, the cheapest peace—the most expensive peace is cheaper than the cheapest war.

And so I hope the Congress will go along here. But it is a minority share, and it should be. The Europeans are shouldering the lion's share of the burden.

Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:55 p.m. in the Cabinet Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Minister of Health Crispus W.C.B. Kiyonga of Uganda; James D. Wolfensohn, president, World Bank Group; Kayla Rolland, who was shot and mortally wounded by a 6-year-old classmate in Mount Morris Township, MI; and Stanley Fischer, first deputy managing director and acting managing director, International Monetary Fund, who was nominated for the position of managing director of the IMF. A reporter referred to State Secretary for International Finance Caio Koch-Weser of Germany, who was also nominated for the position of managing director of the IMF. A tape was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

Statement on the First Estimate of E-Commerce Retail Sales

March 2, 2000

Today the Commerce Department released the first-ever official estimate of retail E-commerce sales—or “E-tail” sales. This is a historical landmark that symbolizes and helps measure our transition to a new information economy. We first started keeping track of retail sales on a monthly basis in 1951. The announcement that E-tail sales over the Internet and other electronic networks reached \$5.3 billion in the fourth quarter of 1999 is an important step to ensure that we have accurate and timely information about the economy in the 21st century.

This is only the latest evidence of the dramatic contribution that the Internet, information technology, and E-commerce have made to what is now the longest economic expansion in history. When I became President in 1993, there were 50 sites on the World Wide Web. Today, there are more than 10 million. The information technology