

So what I said was, I didn't—I had already presented the budget and that all military retirees would be covered in my program, along with all other seniors. But now that Congress is doing this, I think that this ought to be evidence that they understand, A, that people over 65 need this coverage and, B, that this is a good kind of mechanism to guarantee that they get the medicine at affordable prices.

Thank you.

Colombia

Q. Mr. President, are you worried about Colombia aid? Mr. President, the aid to Colombia?

The President. Well, it's funny, I talked to General McCaffrey about it this morning, actually. At this time I'm not worried about it, but I think it's important, given the continuing difficulties and challenges the Government in Colombia is facing, that it pass as soon as possible. We need to send a signal to those people down there who are fighting for democracy, fighting for freedom, fighting for the rule of law, fighting against the narcotraffickers, fighting against terrorism, that we're on their side.

And we also need to signal to them that there is an alternative economic way that the people can make a living who've been caught up in the drug trade kind of at the grassroots farmer level. And this bill does that, so that I think in the end, Congress will pass this bill. But I hope it can be put on some bill I'll get as quick as possible so we can send the right signal in a very timely fashion. I just don't want it dragged out another 3 or 4 months. I think it would be a really bad mistake in terms of our national security interests, not just in Colombia but throughout the Andean region. People are looking at us to see if we're really going to make a serious commitment.

It also will help Colombia to get the other support it needs from the international institutions, from other countries, to make a stand there, and in the process, hopefully, to see victory there for a democratic government and the rule of law, a reduction in drug production and exports, and a stabilization of the democracies that surround Colombia in the Andean region.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:09 p.m. in the Rose Garden at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Gov. George W. Bush of Texas; President-elect Chen Shui-bian of Taiwan; Hong Kong Democratic Party Chair Martin Lee; and Prime Minister Zhu Rongji of China.

Memorandum on Assistance for Federal Employees Affected by the Fires in the Los Alamos Area

May 16, 2000

Memorandum for the Heads of Executive Departments and Agencies

Subject: Assistance for Federal Employees Affected by the Fires in the Los Alamos Area

I am deeply concerned about the devastating losses suffered by many as a result of the fires in the Los Alamos, New Mexico, area. Many parts of the Federal Government have been mobilized to respond to this disaster.

As part of this effort, I ask the heads of executive departments and agencies to excuse from duty without charge to leave or loss of pay those Federal civilian employees who are affected by the fires in the Los Alamos area and their aftermath and who can be spared from their usual responsibilities. Specifically, I request that excused absence be granted to employees who are needed for emergency law enforcement, relief, or clean-up efforts authorized by Federal, State, or other officials having jurisdiction and employees who are prevented from reporting for work or faced with a personal emergency because of the fires and their aftermath.

I am also authorizing the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) to determine whether there is a need to establish an emergency leave transfer program to assist employees affected by this major disaster. An emergency leave transfer program would permit employees in an executive agency to donate their unused annual leave for transfer to employees of the same or other agencies who were adversely affected by the fires in the Los Alamos area and who need additional time off for recovery. If the need for donated annual leave becomes evident, I direct the

OPM to establish the emergency leave transfer program and provide additional information to agencies on the program's administration.

William J. Clinton

NOTE: An original was not available for verification of the content of this memorandum.

**Remarks at a Reception Following
the New York State Democratic
Convention in Albany, New York
May 16, 2000**

First of all, I want you to know how I came to be here tonight. [*Inaudible*]*—*but before we knew exactly when Hillary was going to give her speech, I agreed to appear tonight at the Mexican American Legal Defense Fund and to a campaign event for the Democratic Senate Campaign Committee. So I told all that group, I said, "I've been with you folks a long time, and if you'll let me go hear my wife give a speech, I'll do any event you want, anywhere in America, any time." [*Laughter*] And I told the Democratic Senate Campaign Committee that the Senate campaign I was most interested in was otherwise occupied tonight, and I was going there. [*Laughter*]

So I'm delighted to see you. And I want to thank Judith Hope for doing a wonderful job as the chair. A lot of you don't know this, but Judith Hope grew up in Warren, Arkansas, in a community that I never failed to carry as Governor, proof positive that people from Arkansas can do very well in New York.

I want to thank all the leaders of Congress and the State legislature and your State officials who are here with me tonight, and my good friend Andrew Cuomo, for the wonderful job he's done as our HUD Secretary.

I want to ask you one question. Did Hillary give a great speech tonight? I was sitting next to Senator Moynihan, and she kept going over all these issues. And Senator Moynihan looked at me, and he said, "Good speech." [*Laughter*] "Now, that would be like the rest of us who—[*inaudible*]*—*into the Gettysburg Address." [*Laughter*] And I knew that she was on a roll.

I want to say three things very quickly. First of all, I do not have the words to express to the people of New York my gratitude for the primary victory in '92, for the magnificent convention in '92, for the overwhelming margin of victory in '92, and the even bigger margin of victory you gave to me and to Al Gore in 1996. I will never forget it.

The second thing I want to say is that I am profoundly grateful to you for the way you have embraced Hillary and the way you supported her tonight and the way you have been helping her. And I thank you for that. But I can tell you this, that she will not disappoint you. She'll be one of the great Senators this country has ever—[*applause*].

And the last thing I want to say is this. On this night we've had a lot of fun. And big tests facing New York and America is what are we going to do with this magic moment of prosperity we have all worked so hard for? And a moment like this imposes a test on people just as severe as great adversity does. When we were flat on our back in the Depression and we elected Franklin Roosevelt President, we did in part out of desperation. We knew we had to have somebody who was upbeat and strong and who would try new things.

When I was elected President in 1992, the American people took a huge chance. I was just, as President Bush used to say, the Governor of a small southern State. [*Laughter*] And I was so dumb and inexperienced, I thought he was complimenting me. I was kind of proud of it. [*Laughter*]

But we were feeling rather desperate, and now we feel good. But I was so proud by the response you gave Hillary tonight, because this is a great test for us. And make no mistake about it, this election in 2000 is every bit as important as the election in '96 was, every bit as important as the election in '92 was. I worked so hard for 8 years with clearly the finest and most effective Vice President in the history of the United States to turn this country around.

Now we've got a campaign, and the people have to choose. And the Republicans are telling us they're compassionate. [*Laughter*] And they're saying, "I'm for all the same things that they're for, we're just doing it a little different. And we want to give you a whole