

NLWJC - Kagan

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**POTUS Press Conference -
Q&A's March 23, 1998**

Questions and Answers on Tobacco
March 23, 1998

Q: What is your support for saying that one million lives can be saved over 5 years if Congress passes comprehensive legislation?

A: The Treasury Department has done an analysis showing that my proposal for comprehensive tobacco legislation -- a real price increase of \$1.10 per pack over five years coupled with sales and advertising restrictions -- will reduce underage smoking by nearly half, stopping 3 million teens from smoking and saving a million lives over the next five years. This analysis includes a conservative estimate that advertising and access priorities will reduce teen smoking by 15 percent. The rest of the reduction is attributable to our proposed price increase.

Q: Is the Administration working with Senator McCain on a bill?

A: We have had very constructive meetings with Senator McCain and his staff. We used these meetings to tell McCain in greater detail about what we need to see in a comprehensive tobacco bill. We know that we will need bipartisan support to enact comprehensive tobacco legislation, and we are pleased that Senator McCain is reaching out to Democrats on the Commerce committee. We think Senator McCain is making good progress and we look forward to seeing his new legislation.

Q: Many legislators and public health officials have said that tobacco legislation must not include limits on liability. What is your position?

A: I would prefer legislation without liability limits, but will evaluate tobacco legislation as a whole to determine whether it protects public health. In the context of a comprehensive bill that meets my five principles and advances the public health, reasonable limits on liability will not be a dealbreaker. What's important is achieving comprehensive legislation that includes a large per-pack price increase, strong penalties for marketing to children, and affirmation of FDA's authority to restrict advertising aimed at children and prevent children's access to tobacco products. That's why, for example, I support the Chafee-Harkin bill, even though it includes a cap on annual damage payments.

Q: Could you support a tobacco bill that does not set aside funds for the child care and education initiatives you proposed in your budget?

A: My first priority is to ensure that Congress enacts comprehensive tobacco legislation that dramatically reduces youth smoking. That's why I supported the Chafee-Harkin bill, even though it didn't have the exact same spending priorities as my budget. I believe strongly that final tobacco legislation should include spending for child care, education, and public health. But the first step is to commit to enacting comprehensive tobacco legislation. After that happens, I am confident that we will resolve the budget and

spending issues.

Q: So much of your agenda relies on tobacco money. You are not going to get an agreement without a compromise on liability. Are you willing to step forward with a compromise? If so, when?

A: I would prefer legislation without liability limits and do not plan to offer a liability proposal. But as I have said before, in the context of a comprehensive bill that meets my five principles and advances the public health, reasonable limits on liability will not be a dealbreaker. That's not because my agenda relies on tobacco money. It's because comprehensive tobacco legislation is necessary to protect our children by dramatically reducing their smoking rate.

Q: Senator Lott this past week said you were not engaged on the tobacco issue and ruled out the \$1.50 tax. What is your reaction?

A: Enacting comprehensive tobacco legislation this year is one of my highest priorities. By articulating a set of principles and providing still further details in my budget, I have given Congress a roadmap for crafting tobacco legislation. My Administration has provided advice and assistance of all kinds to Members of Congress. And of course I have tried to keep both the public and Congress focused on this subject. I will continue to be relentless in pressing forward on this issue.

As for Senator Lott's view on an excise tax increase, it is important to understand that my budget does not include such a tax increase, but only an annual lump-sum assessment on the industry, as it agreed to in the proposed June 20 settlement. We do need a substantial price increase to reduce youth smoking -- up to \$1.50 over 10 years -- but that does not have to come, and my budget does not contemplate that it comes, from an excise tax increase.

Questions and Answers on Needle Exchange
March 23, 1998

Q: What is your current position on needle exchange?

A: Before authorizing the release of any Federal funds for needle exchange programs, the law requires the HHS Secretary to make two determinations: First, that needle exchange programs are effective in preventing HIV; and second, that they do not increase drug use. Last year, Secretary Shalala released a report that concluded that needle exchange programs have proved effective at reducing HIV. HHS is still in the process of determining whether or not they increase drug use.

Q: What is your reaction to the fact that your Drug Czar and your AIDS Czar hold opposing views on this issue? How will you resolve these tensions in your Administration?

A: There's no doubt that both General McCaffery and Sandy Thurman have strong feelings on this issue. But they both share the goal of reducing the incidence of HIV and reducing the incidence of drug use. We will work carefully with them and others within the Administration to develop a process that reduces the incidence of HIV without increasing drug use.

Question and Answer on Campaign Finance Reform
March 23, 1998

Q: What do you think of the House Republican leadership's campaign finance reform plan?

A: It's clear that this is a plan not to pass campaign finance reform but to kill campaign finance reform. It's chock full of controversial poison pills that they know can't pass. As we understand it, their plan even contains a provision that would enable states to screen voters based on their appearance or ethnic background.

If House Republicans were serious about campaign finance reform, they would permit a straight up-or-down vote on the Shays-Meehan bill, which is the House version of the McCain-Feingold bill. This action only makes it clear that their only goal is to kill reform.

Welfare Reform Questions and Answers
March 23, 1998

Question: You have pointed to the decline in welfare caseloads as a sign that welfare reform is working, yet a story in Monday's Washington Post says one of the main reasons people are leaving the rolls is that they are being sanctioned. Do you consider this a success?

Answer: One of the principles of the welfare reform law enacted in August 1996 is personal responsibility. I believe that establishing fair, firm and credible consequences if people fail to follow the rules is an important part of the new approach. And for many people, sanctioning may be a step along the way to work. Data from several state studies finds that after being sanctioned, about half the people go to work and about 40 percent have an increase in their income. Several states also found that one-quarter to one-third of those sanctioned returned to the rolls, presumably after complying with the requirements.

[While some states do appear to be increasing their use of sanctions, it is too early to confirm this trend on a national basis. HHS is still compiling state data under the new welfare reform reporting system. According to HHS, in 1993 and 1995 33% and 32% of cases were closed for failure to comply with procedural requirements and the preliminary figure for October 1996 to June 1997 was 38%.]

Question: Monday's New York Times cites evidence in New York that only one-third of those leaving the rolls are actually working. Are you disappointed by these results?

Answer: While I haven't seen these preliminary New York State data, I do know that a number of other states have had much better results, finding between 50% and 60% of those leaving the rolls were working. There's no doubt, based on these findings, that more people are leaving welfare to go to work than ever before. And in an effort to give states strong incentives to help as many recipients go to work as possible, HHS recently announced rules for a High Performance Bonus that will award \$200 million a year to the states who have the most success in placing people in jobs and ensuring that welfare recipients succeed in jobs once they get them, by remaining employed and increasing their earnings over time.

Question and Answers on Education
March 23, 1998

Q. It is clear that the Coverdell amendment has enough votes to pass cloture. Does this mean that your education agenda is floundering?

A. Not at all. Just last week the House Education and Economic Opportunity Committee passed my High Hopes proposal to create college-school partnerships and help middle school students prepare for college. I expect the Senate to act in the near future on Charter Schools legislation, on my America Reads initiative, and on my proposal to consolidate job training programs, each of which have already passed the House.

While Congress has a very short work session this year, it is still relatively early. There is a lot still to be done. I have proposed measures to lower class size to a national average of 18 in grades 1-3, to help states and local communities modernize or build more than 5,000 schools around the country, and to help high poverty urban and rural communities strengthen their schools by ending social promotion, holding schools accountable for results, rewarding outstanding teachers, such as those who earn recognition from the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards and removing ineffective teachers from the classroom. These are the right steps to take to improve education, and I urge the Congress to pass them.

Q. Would you veto a bill that included the Coverdell proposal if the legislation also included your school construction and 100,000 teachers proposal?

A. I'm not going to address hypothetical situations.

I can say, however, that I fully support the amendment Senator Mosley-Braun will offer to devote the revenue that would be spent on the Coverdell proposal on my school modernization proposal instead. This proposal would provide tax credits to help finance the construction and modernization of more than 5,000 schools, so that children across America will be able to learn in safe, modern, well-equipped schools. It would improve public schools and help provide a high quality education to every American child, regardless of income. It is the right thing to do for our children.

I am opposed to the Coverdell proposal because it is bad education policy and bad tax policy. We should be targeting limited Federal resources to build stronger public schools and secure our children's future. This proposal would divert needed resources from these schools. It would also disproportionately benefit the most affluent families and provide little benefit to lower- and middle-income families. For these reasons, Secretary of the Treasury Rubin and Secretary of Education Riley have recommended that I veto this bill if it reaches my desk. I intend to pay very serious attention to their recommendations.

Q. Is there a compromise form of the Coverdell proposal which you could accept?

A. I have not seen any compromise versions of the Coverdell proposal. Again, I would urge the Congress to use the revenue spent by the Coverdell proposal on the school modernization proposal instead. In this way, the Congress could take on the real problems in education that need to be addressed, such as leaky roofs and overcrowded classrooms.

Q: US News is reporting that a soon-to-be-released study of the Cleveland voucher experiment by the Ohio Department of Education found that voucher recipients in parochial schools hadn't done any better academically than their public-school counterparts. Do these findings strengthen the administration's opposition to vouchers?

A: The President is opposed to vouchers because they are the wrong way to improve education. Public schools enroll 90% of our students. Our priority must be doing the hard work of strengthening our public schools for all students, rather than simply on providing a way for a small number of students to go elsewhere. This study shows that leaving the public schools may not accomplish the most important purpose -- improving student achievement.

The President has proposed the right way to improve education, especially for students in urban school systems. He has proposed essential steps to strengthen public education including (1) a national initiative to reduce class size, so that students get individualized attention and the help they need to learn to read; (2) A school modernization initiative, so that students are learning in safe and technologically updated classrooms, and (3) education opportunity zones to provide additional funds for those urban and rural districts that are implementing reforms to develop high academic standards, intervene in failing schools, and eliminate social promotions.

Question & Answer on Immigration: H1B visas
March 23, 1998

Q: Senator Kennedy intends to introduce a bill that would, among other things, increase the cap on temporary visas for foreign workers (H1B visas). Would the Administration support this?

A: We have heard a lot recently about the shortage of trained workers in the information technology (IT) industry. I believe that the first response to increasing the availability of IT workers must be increasing the skills of American workers and helping the labor market work better so there is a supply of skilled workers where there is a demand for skilled employees. While it may be necessary in the short-term to increase the number of visas for temporary foreign workers (under the H1B program), this must only be done in conjunction with doing more to raise the skill level of American workers. Key components of that strategy are our HOPE scholarships, the Lifetime Learning Tuition Credit, and the expansion of Pell Grants. It is also critical that Congress pass the G.I. Bill for America's Workers this spring.

Any temporary increase in the H1B visa program should be limited to the minimum amount necessary. Also, expanding the number of visas, even temporarily, must be accompanied by needed improvements to the H1B program. Since 1993, this Administration has sought reforms of the H1B visa program, including requiring employers to "recruit and retain" U.S. workers before hiring temporary foreign workers, prohibiting lay-offs of U.S. workers to replace them with foreign temporary workers, and reducing the maximum stay for H1B workers from 6 to 3 years. These reforms, if enacted, would help target H1B usage to industries and employers that are exhibiting genuine labor shortages.

I understand that Senator Kennedy intends to introduce legislation that addresses both the short-term and long-term implications of the increased need for skilled workers. His approach -- combining industry and government commitments to substantial education and training with reforms to the H1B program and a temporary increase in the H1B cap -- appropriately addresses the labor market needs of our rapidly changing economy.

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Q: Is the Administration working with Senator McCain on a bill?

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Q: Many legislators and public health officials have said that tobacco legislation must not include limits on liability. What is your position?

A: I would prefer legislation without liability limits, but will evaluate tobacco legislation as a whole to determine whether it protects public health. In the context of a comprehensive bill that meets my five principles and advances the public health, reasonable limits on liability will not be a dealbreaker. What's important is achieving comprehensive legislation that includes a large per-pack price increase, strong penalties for marketing to children, and affirmation of FDA's authority to restrict advertising aimed at children and prevent children's access to tobacco products. *That's why, for example, I support the Chafee-Harkin bill, even though it includes a cap on annual damage payments.*

Q: If you opposes liability limits, how can you support the Chafee-Harkin bill?

A: I have said I would prefer legislation without liability limits, but that if a bill meets my principles for comprehensive legislation, reasonable limits on liability will not be a dealbreaker. What's most important is achieving comprehensive legislation that includes a large per-pack price increase, strong penalties for marketing to children, and affirmation of FDA's authority to restrict advertising aimed at children and prevent children's access to tobacco products. The Chafee-Harkin bill does these things while including only a limited liability cap on annual damage payments.

My first priority is to ensure that Congress enacts comprehensive tobacco legislation that dramatically reduces youth smoking. That's why I supported the Chafee-Harkin bill, even though it didn't have the exact same

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A: ~~Hooks forward to working with Senators Chafee and Harkin and other Members of Congress to ensure that the final tobacco legislation includes spending for my child care, education, and health proposals. The Chafee-Harkin bill provides funds for states to use to improve early education and increase child care -- but at state discretion. I strongly believe that this should be changed. But I am confident that we will resolve any budget or spending issues as the process moves forward.~~

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Q: So much of your agenda relies on tobacco money. You are not going to get an agreement without a compromise on liability. Are you willing to step forward with a compromise? If so, when? ~~After that~~

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Q: Senator Lott this past week said you were not engaged on the tobacco issue and ruled out the \$1.50 tax. What is your reaction?

A: Enacting comprehensive tobacco legislation this year is one of my highest priorities. ~~As I said in my radio address to the nation on March 7th and in my speech to the state attorneys general on March 12th, raising the price of a pack of cigarettes significantly is a critical step to reducing youth smoking. A new Treasury Department analysis announced by the Vice President this week shows that my proposal for comprehensive tobacco legislation -- a real price increase of \$1.10 per pack over five years coupled with sales and advertising restrictions -- will reduce youth smoking by nearly half and will prevent premature deaths in every state. My budget assumes that the money will come from annual industry payments pursuant to a settlement -- something the industry agreed to in the proposed settlement last summer -- it would not come from a tax.~~

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Answer: One of the principles of the welfare reform law enacted in August 1996 is personal responsibility. I believe that establishing fair, firm and credible consequences if people fail to follow the rules is an important part of the new approach. ~~Different people react differently to sanctions.~~ For some people, ^{And} sanctioning may be a step along the way to work. Data from several state studies finds that after being sanctioned, about half the people ~~are working and about~~ ^{many} ~~approximately~~ 40 percent have an increase in their income. Several states also found that one-quarter to one-third of those sanctioned returned to the rolls, presumably after complying with the requirements. ^{go to}

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~~**Question:** The Post article cited a woman in Tennessee who was sanctioned even though she had back problems. Isn't it unfair to require someone like that to work?~~

~~Federal law requires states to put 30 percent of recipients to work this year (a figure which rises to 50 percent by the year 2002) and gives states considerable flexibility in how they apply these work rules. According to a recent survey by the American Public Welfare Association, most states waive sanctions when a person has good cause for not complying, and disability, incapacity or illness are the most frequently cited reason for good cause (by 31 states). In addition, low income individuals whose disabilities prevent them from working can receive assistance under the federal SSI program, for which the work rules do not apply.~~

Question: Monday's New York Times cites evidence in New York that only one-third of those leaving the rolls are actually working. Are you disappointed by these results?

Answer: While I haven't seen these preliminary New York State data, I do know that a number of other states have had much better results, finding between 50% and 60% of those leaving the rolls were working. ^{There's no doubt, based on the finding, that more people are leaving welfare to go to work than ever before.} In an effort to give states strong incentives to help as many recipients go to work as possible, HHS recently announced rules for a High Performance Bonus that will award \$200 million a year to the states who have the most success in placing people in jobs and ensuring that welfare recipients succeed in jobs once they get them, by remaining employed and increasing their earnings over time. ^{And}

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Q: US News is reporting that a soon-to-be-released study of the Cleveland voucher experiment by the Ohio Department of Education found that voucher recipients in parochial schools hadn't done any better academically than their public-school counterparts. Do these findings strengthen the administration's opposition to vouchers?

A: The President is opposed to vouchers because they are the wrong way to improve education. Public schools enroll 90% of our students. Our priority must be doing the hard work of strengthening our public schools for all students, rather than simply on providing a way for a small number of students to go elsewhere. This study shows that leaving the public schools may not accomplish the most important purpose--improving student achievement.

The President has proposed the right way to improve education, especially for students in urban school systems. He has proposed essential steps to strengthen public education including (1) a national initiative to reduce class size, so that students get individualized attention and the help they need to learn to read; (2) A school modernization initiative, so that students are learning in safe and technologically updated classrooms, and (3) education opportunity zones to provide additional funds for those urban and rural districts that are implementing reforms to develop high academic standards, intervene in failing schools, and eliminate social promotions.

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Any temporary increase in the H1B visa program should be limited to the minimum amount necessary. Also, expanding the number of visas, even temporarily, must be accompanied by needed improvements to the H1B program. Since 1993, this Administration has sought reforms of the H1B visa program, including requiring employers to "recruit and retain" U.S. workers before hiring temporary foreign workers, prohibiting lay-offs of U.S. workers to replace them with foreign temporary workers, and reducing the maximum stay for H1B workers from 6 to 3 years. These reforms, if enacted, would help target H1B usage to industries and employers that are exhibiting genuine labor shortages.

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