

Oct. 29 / Administration of William J. Clinton, 1994

Statement on Signing Legislation To Reauthorize the Merit Systems Protection Board and the Office of Special Counsel

October 29, 1994

Today, I am signing into law H.R. 2970, a bill to reauthorize the Merit Systems Protection Board and the Office of Special Counsel and provide additional protections for Federal employee whistleblowers and other victims of prohibited personnel practices.

I have been advised that one provision in this bill (section 9), which concerns the apparent authority of an arbitrator to discipline a Federal employee who was not a party to the original action, raises serious constitutional questions.

Accordingly, I am directing the agencies to follow appropriate procedures to protect the constitutional rights of such Federal employees and to consider the need for remedial legislation.

WILLIAM J. CLINTON

The White House,
October 29, 1994.

NOTE: H.R. 2970, approved October 29, was assigned Public Law No. 103-424.

Remarks at the National Italian-American Foundation Dinner

October 29, 1994

Thank you very much. Can you hear me in the back? You can't hear, can you? Can the people with the sound turn it up a little bit? Now, can you hear in the back? I think some people can hear, but not see. So if the rest of you would accommodate them, I would appreciate it, or they would anyway. I can't see some of you. Thank you.

I want to thank Senator Leahy for his kind remarks. As a matter of fact, I want to thank Senator Leahy for being able to stand up here after the 3 days I just put him through. He did a wonderful job for our country on this trip to the Middle East, and I thank him for that.

I'm delighted to be back here for the third year in a row with Frank Guarini, Frank Stella, Art Gajarsa, with the distinguished Ambassador from the Vatican, and the distinguished Italian Ambassador. I have to say, Hillary wanted me to especially say tonight how sorry she was she couldn't come again. You know last year when she was here, she met Fabio, and he picked her up and carried her around. She wasn't the same for weeks afterward. [Laughter] She went to the Middle East with me. She needed a little energy boost tonight, so I came here thinking somebody with muscles would pick her up. But she's in California on our behalf. I had a great time here last year, too. Fabio lifted Hillary

up; Danny DeVito sat in my lap. [Laughter] At least it wasn't Dom DeLuise. [Laughter] We had a great—all of us had a good time here.

You know, I'm sure everyone thinks from time to time about what he or she might have liked to do with their lives, and a lot of you know I've been made fun of for some of my habits. But when I saw Nicholas Cage tonight, I told him that one of my great disappointments was that I wasn't hired as one of the Elvis impersonators to be in "Honeymoon in Las Vegas" with him. [Laughter] He promised me a role in his next movie. [Laughter]

Senator Leahy said in jest what I would say in jest, which is that it was nice to be home in the safety and security of the White House after going to the Middle East. [Laughter] I want you to know a couple of things about that, seriously. First of all, a gunman did open fire; nobody was hurt. The man was captured. The man was captured in part because of ordinary citizens who were standing there, who did their duty. And I hope that is an example for others around the country. I also want you to know the Secret Service did their usual magnificent job. I was upstairs listening to a football game, and the shots were sort of intermittent with the cheers—[laughter]—and they were up there within a minute. And I thank them for the fine work that they do every day for our country.

The last thing I'd like to say to all of you is, if we ever needed an example of why the Congress did the right thing to pass the crime bill, including the assault weapons ban, that was it today.

As you know, Senator Leahy and I just returned from the Middle East. We got home this morning about 8 o'clock. I went there for three reasons: first of all, to witness the historic peace treaty between Israel and Jordan, which the United States was privileged to help bring about; second, to try to continue to further the peace process in the Middle East. We now have the Washington Declaration between the PLO and Israel, and I was there working to see that it is fully implemented and that we do everything we can to minimize the ability of terrorists to kill the peace by killing innocent people and to try to further the prospect of peace with Syria and with Lebanon, without which we will never have a complete peace there. And finally, I went there to thank our troops in the Persian Gulf and to reiterate the intention of the United States to protect the freedom of the nations in the Persian Gulf.

I'm sure all of you shared the pride that I felt, the pride of an ordinary American citizen, over the last several weeks as we have seen from the Middle East to South Africa, from Northern Ireland to Haiti, the people of the world look to America to support them in their courageous efforts to support peace and freedom. They respect our strength. They respect our military and our economic strength. But they also respect our energy, our drive, our creativity, the power of our example, and the fact that they know the United States has good intentions for the rest of the world, that what we really want is to be more secure and more prosperous by helping other people to live up to the fullest of their capacities and by taking away all incentives for people to oppress each other, so that they can get on with the business of building better lives for themselves and their children.

Sometimes I think we'd all be better off if every American could just, once in a great while, travel beyond our borders, just to see a little more how other people see us. If you could have seen the people lining the streets in Jordan, the reaction from the Jordanian Parliament when I had the privilege of being the first Western leader ever to address the Parliament, the people in the streets in Israel, the people pour-

ing out of their apartments in Damascus to see the first President in 20 years on the streets of Damascus, it just made me so proud of our country and so grateful to be the representative of 250-plus million people who are setting a standard, with all of our difficulties, that others want to strive for.

It is the standard that brought so many of you or your parents or your grandparents to these shores. It is our capacity for constant renewal and for continued efforts to institutionalize our sense of good will and our sense of challenge.

And if I could say anything else today, I would be happy for all the words to be forgotten if you could just remember this: This is a very great country. But it requires us to keep working to make it great. If you look at all the renewal that's going on in the world, the restoration of democracy in Haiti, the success of a booming democracy in South Africa, the struggles of the people, Catholic and Protestant, to lay down their centuries-old conflict in Northern Ireland—[*applause*]
—I just said that to see whether Pat Leahy would clap. [*Laughter*] I'm always trying to test which side of his ethnicity is the more dominant. [*Laughter*] If you think about the Middle East, if you could have just—I know you saw it on television, but it was overwhelming to see those two little girls bringing flowers to Prime Minister Rabin and King Hussein, one the granddaughter of an Israeli, the other the granddaughter of a Jordanian killed in war fighting each other, and to think that our country had the chance to be a part of helping to make it possible for them to do what they desperately wanted to do. What we need to remember is, this renewal that is sweeping the world, energized in large measure by the impulses of the people themselves but in no small measure by the support and the encouragement of the United States, we also have to do that here at home for ourselves.

We have to say: Look, we have challenges; we're going to face them instead of complain about them. Instead of pointing the finger of blame, we're going to assume responsibilities. Sure we've got problems, but the promise of this country at the dawn of the next century, at the dawn of the new millennium, is far greater than the range of our problems, if only we will have the same sense of confidence in ourselves that others have in us. That is my message to you tonight, my fellow Americans.

I must say, there is something to be said—Frank took away all my good lines, because he mentioned most of the Italian-Americans in my administration that I was going to eulogize so they'd be nice to me tomorrow morning—[laughter]—but there is something to be said for the incredible spirit and energy and drive and adherence to old-fashioned Americanism that I see in every Italian-American in my administration, from Leon Panetta on down, because they keep the spirit of this country alive in our work every day. And you do that everywhere.

I do want to tell Ed Rensi that I had nothing to do with his being recognized tonight, in spite of my affiliation with McDonald's, which is well-known. [Laughter] You can see it in my eyes; you can see it in my waist. That's why I stand behind this wide podium, hoping your imagination will get the better of you.

This is a very important thing. We sometimes minimize the power of the spirit of the imagination. If I have learned anything since I have been President, it is that. This job and the work of this country involves a lot of very specific things: Do we have the right foreign policy, or don't we? Did we pass the family leave bill, or didn't we? Did we do this or that specific thing? But it is also a spirit. And it has to pervade people in their lives. It has to reach down deep into them in order for us to do what we can do.

This Nation has never been made great primarily by its Government. Its Government has to reflect the greatness, the energy, the direction of the people. And leadership in a democracy like ours is possible only insofar as it is connected to what is profoundly good and enduring but also open to change in America. The greatest thing about this country is, and the reason we're still around after more than 200 years, is that we have been rooted to a set of constitutional values and principles rooted in the deep, philosophical conviction that each and every one of us is a creature of God, entitled to be treated equally before the law, entitled to be challenged and given the opportunity to live up to the fullest of our God-given capacities.

That is what has kept us going. And rooted to those things, we have been free, therefore, to change over and over and over again with every age and time to meet whatever challenges we've faced. The freedom to change because we were rooted in these values and they were

enshrined in our Constitution and we were willing to fight and die for them—that is what has kept us here as the longest lasting free government in all of human history. It is a magical thing.

Now, if you look at the problems we have today, they largely grow out of a curious combination of our refusal to adapt to the challenges of today and tomorrow and our violation of the traditional values which got us where we are. And so I say, as you look toward the future, we have to do something that you may think is contradictory but is not contradictory at all: We have to do the basic things better, and we have to be better at facing our problems and turning them into a promise and being agents of change.

Consider the problems of America. For 30 years we have had increasingly difficult social problems, all starting with the breakdown of the solidity of the family—the institution which made most Italian-Americans what they are today, and the rest of us as well—then the breakdown of the sense of community and the other institutions of community and the availability of work, without which life does not have sufficient dignity. And all the things we don't like, the drugs, the gangs, the guns, the violence, the deterioration of the ability of our young people to exercise discipline and self-control, all of the bad things we don't like were created because of the vacuum which existed from the absence of the good things. Now, this did not happen overnight. It has been a generation in coming. And it will not turn around overnight.

Your Government has certain responsibilities, in the crime bill, to empower communities to hire more police and to defend themselves and to make the schools safer and to do more about violence within the families and to protect victims and all of the things we tried to do in the crime bill—in dealing with the assault weapons. But a lot of this has to be done at the grassroots level. Where communities and police work together, the crime rate goes down. There are many cities in this country where, for 3 years running now, we've have double-digit reductions in the crime rate. In every case, it was because of what people did where they live and work, not because of something that happened up here. We have empowered people to drive down crime and lift up kids, but they must do it; you must do it.

And in the end, all of these young people who are going astray have got to have somebody to look up to again. They have got to have somebody to look up to again. Did you ask yourselves what in God's name was going on in the minds of those kids that dropped the 5-year-old from the high rise in Chicago? What turns the heart of a 10-year-old to stone? Everybody in this world's going to look up to somebody. Who is it going to be? What will they stand for?

At the end of this congressional session, a bill little noticed and barely commented on, sponsored by the retiring Senator from Ohio, Howard Metzenbaum, passed the Congress, a bill to make it easier for Americans to adopt children without families across racial lines. It was just a small step. It was just a small step, but I hope and pray this is something we'll be able to get together people across racial lines, across religious lines, across political party lines. I am telling you, these little kids are going to look up to somebody or something. They're either going to watch 4 hours of television at night, with people with violent behavior providing cheap thrills, where the future is what happens in 5 minutes, not 10 years, or somebody is going to be putting a hand on them and showing them a different way.

And the Italian-American community can have a major impact on our ability to lift the children of America, to turn around a 30-year trend and push it back the other way. For all the modernization of America, if we continue to allow the brutalization of childhood for millions of our kids, we will not have what we need to have. And that is a fact.

Now, if you look at the economy, you find a different set of challenges. For 20 years, more or less—although there is some indication the trend may finally be changing this year—for 20 years, more or less, hourly wage earners have not gotten a raise. The average working family is spending more hours at work in 1994 than in 1969, 25 years ago.

Why? Well, there are lots of reasons. But most of it, I'm convinced, is the globalization of the economy, the globalization of wage rates, the fact that every job and every investment now has to be considered in terms of all the pressures all around the world and our failure to adapt to those changes.

Why is America coming back? Because the private sector is adapting. The United States

car companies, in 1994, sold more automobiles than the automobile companies of Japan for the first time since 1979 this year. We've had 9 or 10 months of manufacturing job growth for the first time in 10 years. For the first time in 9 years, the annual vote of international economists said America had the most productive economy in the world. Why? Because we were prepared to change.

And now we have to do more of that. We have to make some changes if this economy is going to work right. We have to move people who are dependent on welfare to work, through welfare reform. We have to provide people—you can clap for that. *[Applause]* We have to provide for a lifetime of education and training. The average 18-year-old will change jobs six times in a lifetime.

Sooner or later, in some way that people trust, that they don't think is too dominated by the Government, we've got to face the health care crisis. Another million Americans lost their health insurance this year, and they were in working families. They were not on welfare; they were working people.

So, you tell me what the answer is. I can tell you that this year, for the first time in 25 years, your Government reduced both defense and domestic spending, the first domestic spending reduction in 25 years, even though we increased investment in education. The only thing that increased was health care costs; they're exploding. We spend 14 percent of our income on it; nobody else spends more than 10 percent. And yet, we've got 40 million people without insurance, and the 85 percent with insurance almost all are at risk of losing it at some time in their lifetime. Now, if you didn't like what I tried to do, you tell me what we ought to do. But I'll tell you this: We have got to face this challenge. Burying our head in the sands is not an answer and not an option.

And I would like to say one other thing. So we've got the old problems where we violate our values; we have new challenges where we have to change. And we have to do both. One last thing I'd like to say is, I believe most of the problems we face today do not have an easy, partisan division, if you define it in terms of the rhetoric that has dominated our politics for the last 20 years. And I just want to say, since one of them is here today, the more we can have partnership instead of partisanship, the better this country is going to be. I want to

thank good Republicans like Congresswoman Connie Morella, who is here, and Mayor Rudy Giuliani for their support of the crime bill. That's the kind of work we ought to be doing in America today.

You know, I always like to speak here because you're so enthusiastic. And I promised I wouldn't talk very long. And I know I'm a little tired, and tomorrow Hillary will watch this on film and tell me I talked too long. [Laughter] But I want to just say one other thing. A reasonably famous Italian, Niccolo Machiavelli—whom Leon can read without benefit of translation—[laughter]—said 500 years ago, "There is nothing so difficult in all of human affairs than to change the established order of things, for all people who will be discomforted by the change will immediately oppose you, and those who will be benefited will be lukewarm, because they are uncertain of the result." Based on the last 2 years, I'd say he was a pretty smart fella. [Laughter]

I ask you to remember that again, because the secret of our successes today are rooted once again—I say again, if you look at Haiti, if you look at the Gulf, in both cases, a part of that story is something that you hardly ever read about. Our ability to perform well in Haiti, our ability to move in the Gulf in part represented the success of American military strategy in the last 2 years, learning from the Gulf war, increasing our ability to coordinate our military efforts and to move more quickly—change, change in the service of traditional American values of freedom and democracy and prosperity and security.

If you look at why our economy is growing today, it's because we got the deficit down, we got our house in order, we began to invest in America again, and the private sector changed to become more competitive. Old-fashioned values, commitment to change, that is what you

represent. That's what your foundation's activities represent. That's what your personal stories represent.

And so I say, again, I wish every one of you could have been with us in the Middle East. I wish you could have looked into the faces of those people. I wish you could see this country as others see it. One of the reasons I think that immigrant families in the first or second generation are so often the most patriotic of Americans is that they still have a collective memory of America from the outside in, as well as from the inside out.

So I ask you to think about it. If we're going to go into the next century as the greatest country on Earth, and I am convinced our best days are still ahead of us, we must blend a ferocious devotion to the institutions of family and work and community and to the values of our Constitution and the integrity of the individual in this country, with a relentless willingness to change to do whatever it takes to develop and empower the capacities of our people to do well in an increasingly interdependent world. We must stand up for what we believe abroad, because it makes us more secure. But every day, we have to first stand up for what we believe at home. You can lead the way.

Thank you, and God bless you all.

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:25 p.m. at the Washington Hilton Hotel. In his remarks, he referred to foundation officers Frank Guarini, president, Frank Stella, chair, and Anthony J. Gajarsa, vice chair; Ambassador Agostino Cacciavillan of the Holy See; Ambassador Boris Biancheri of Italy; actor and model Fabio; actors Danny DeVito, Dom DeLuise, and Nicholas Cage; Edward Rensi, president and chief executive officer, McDonald's; and Mayor Rudolph Giuliani of New York City.

Remarks at a Rally for Democratic Candidates in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

October 31, 1994

The President. Thank you. It is good to be home, and it's good to be back in Philadelphia. Thank you.

Let's give a big hand to the George Washington High School Band. [Applause] Weren't they great? Thank you. Thank you.