

Apr. 8 / Administration of William J. Clinton, 1997

Remarks Following the Entertainment at the State Dinner Honoring Prime Minister Jean Chretien of Canada *April 8, 1997*

Let me say to all of you, first, I have wanted Denyce to sing here for a very long time, and I have patiently waited for the chance to get all this worked out. And I heard her sing not very long ago at the annual prayer breakfast here in Washington. And I came home, and I said, "I'm impatient. I'm tired of this. I want this woman at the Canadian state dinner." [Laughter] I don't know whether she had to cancel something else to be here tonight or not.

Thank you, Warren, for your wonderful playing and your artistry. I thought they were a fitting end to a wonderful evening.

Now, let me again say to Jean and Aline and to all the Canadians who are here, we're de-

lighted to have you. There will be music and dancing in the hall for those of you who are capable. [Laughter] And the rest of us will creep off into the sunset. [Laughter] But you may stay as long as you like.

And again, please join me in expressing our appreciation to Warren Jones and Denyce Graves. [Applause]

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:34 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Prime Minister Chretien's wife, Aline.

Remarks at a Memorial Service for Albert Shanker *April 9, 1997*

Thank you very much to all of you, but especially to Eadie and the members of Al's family, to the members of the family of the AFT, the other labor leaders who are here, and other friends and admirers and those who are indebted to Al Shanker.

I'd like to begin simply by thanking everyone who has already spoken and all the people at the AFT who put together that wonderful film at the beginning. I think if Al were here and were whispering in my ear, he would say, "This has been very nice, Mr. President, but keep it short, we're getting hungry." [Laughter]

I have to say also that Hillary very much wanted to be here with me today. She worked with Al on a number of things over the last 15 years, and a long-standing commitment in New York kept her away. But I want to speak for both of us today in honoring a person we considered a model, a mentor, and a friend, a union leader, a national leader, a world leader. But first, last, and always, as the film began today, Al Shanker was our teacher and clearly one of the most important teachers of the 20th century.

In 1983, in April, when the "Nation At Risk" report broke like a storm over America and resonated deeply in the consciousness of the country, that our country was at risk because we weren't doing right by our children and our schools—one month before, I had signed a law passed by my legislature establishing a commission to study our schools and to improve them, and I had appointed my wife to chair the commission. And we were eagerly reading this report and the reactions to it, and we noticed that there was Al Shanker, the first leader of a union to come out and say, "This is a good thing. We need to do this. We've got to raise these standards. We've got to hold ourselves to higher standards. We've got to be accountable. We owe our children more."

That began what was for me one of the most remarkable associations of my entire working life. Hillary and I had occasion to be with Al on so many different occasions, and one of the previous speakers said, "You know, if you go to enough of these education meetings, the usual suspects are rounded up, and after a while we could all give each other's speech, except for Al." [Laughter] And it really did make a