

darkest, when the fortunes of war often favored an unforgiving enemy, somehow those of you who won the Medal of Honor and who earned the Medal of Honor found the strength, the will to fight more valiantly and turn the tide, to save the lives of your comrades, to save the day for America.

Your president spoke a moment ago about the event we commemorated at Little Rock Central High School. Forty years ago, something happened here that none of us who are native to this State are especially proud of. Our former Governor, Governor McMath, who also was a major general in the Marine Corps, tried to stop it. And I'll always be grateful to him. But in the end, those children were not denied admission to our high school, because the law of the land said we were all created equal. A Federal court issued an order to carry out the law, and the President of the United States and the Attorney General of the United States and the 101st Airborne Division of the United States Army did exactly that, and they stood up for the Constitution. They were heroes in that day, as well.

And somehow I think it's fitting that you are here on this day, and we can celebrate your heroism, and you can participate in a moment of unique citizen heroism in the history of America. Think what it was like for those nine kids to show up and face a jeering mob, armed only with their notebooks and their schoolbooks. Think what it was like for their parents to send them into the storm not knowing whether they would come home.

But if you look at the whole history of America, and if you look at the whole history of our military services, we see an unbroken chain in the continuing struggle to make our historic commitment to freedom and equality more real in each succeeding generation.

Every American knows about our military's vital role in protecting our national interest and our values around the world. But the Armed Forces also has reflected and protected our values here at home. Our military promotes equality by rewarding merit without regard to race or gender and sets an example for every American and for every American institution where two or more people work together.

And as I said, you cannot talk to any person who was alive and well in Little Rock 40 years ago who doesn't remember that it was the Army paratroopers who ultimately stood as a bulwark of protection for those nine little children, who were there for them because their President ordered them to stand up for the law of the land here at home.

So I hope that you will always remember, throughout all your conventions and all your meetings, that you happened to come to Little Rock on a special day for America and a special day for America's military, a special example of personal patriotism and bravery by civilians, and that all of us—all of us—are profoundly grateful that you're here, for your valor and your sacrifice, for being there when your country needed you the most.

Thank you for what you have done, and thank you, too, for what you continue to do as living examples of everything we love most about America.

God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 8:44 p.m. at the Aerospace Education Center. In his remarks, he referred to Paul Bucha, president, Congressional Medal of Honor Society; Mayor Jim Dailey of Little Rock; Mayor Patrick Henry Hays of North Little Rock; State Senator Mike Beebe; former Arkansas Governor Sid McMath; and Mary Lou Keener, wife of Secretary of Veterans Affairs Hershel Gober.

Statement Urging House of Representatives Action on Campaign Finance Reform

September 25, 1997

I am greatly encouraged by the statements calling for House action on campaign finance reform legislation made earlier today by Demo-

cratic Leader Gephardt, and yesterday by House Majority Leader Arney. I applaud these two

House leaders for their commitment to scheduling a House floor debate on this critical issue before Congress adjourns for the year.

This bipartisan call for action is a promising sign that we are moving forward in our response to America's demand for reform. I urge the Members of the House to take the next step and give their full support for the meaningful bipartisan campaign finance reform offered by

Representatives Shays and Meehan. This measure is both balanced and effective, and it addresses many of the most pressing needs for reform.

Congress faces the best opportunity in a generation to enact campaign finance reform. Let us work together in a bipartisan spirit to enact the Shays-Meehan legislation and answer the public's call for reform.

Letter to Congressional Leaders Transmitting a Report on Future Free Trade Area Negotiations

September 25, 1997

Dear Mr. Chairman:

In accordance with section 108(b)(4) of the North American Free Trade Agreement Implementation Act (19 U.S.C. 3317(b)(4)), I transmit herewith the report containing recommendations on future free trade area negotiations.

Sincerely,

WILLIAM J. CLINTON

NOTE: Identical letters were sent to Bill Archer, chairman, House Committee on Ways and Means, and William V. Roth, Jr., chairman, Senate Finance Committee.

Interview With Tom Joyner, Tavis Smiley, and Sybil Wilkes on the Tom Joyner Morning Show in Little Rock

September 26, 1997

Mr. Joyner. Mr. President, good morning.

The President. Good morning. You're having a lot of fun there for this early in the morning. [Laughter]

Mr. Joyner. And you're having a lot of fun, too, aren't you? Now that Chelsea is gone, you all are having some fun, aren't you, Mr. President? [Laughter]

The President. That's what Hillary says.

Mr. Joyner. See, Sybil? See, Tavis? I told you. [Laughter]

Ms. Wilkes. But he's the President. He can say that. You can't say that about him.

Desegregation of Central High School

Mr. Joyner. Mr. President, when this happened 40 years ago, how old were you?

The President. Eleven.

Mr. Joyner. And what was going through your mind when you saw all this that was happening here in Little Rock?

The President. I thought it was a bad thing. I didn't understand why people were so upset. But as I said yesterday, most of the white kids didn't think about it one way or the other until it actually happened. Until the Little Rock Nine were turned away, I think most people didn't think about it one way or the other. Children are basically self-absorbed in their own lives. It's part of the privilege of childhood.

But then, all of a sudden, kids that had never thought about it before, it's all they talked about for weeks. And everybody then had to decide really how they felt about it. It seemed obvious to me that sooner or later this was going to have to be done; it might as well be done sooner.