

Governor—there is nobody in the State of Texas that has a better background than Garry Mauro for making the right decisions about how to protect the environment and grow the economy.

I want you to think about that. I want you to go home to Texas and talk about it. And I want you to forget about the public opinion polls. The only poll that matters right now is the one inside your heart, inside your mind. If you believe that your candidate is as good as I believe he is, if you believe that the issues are as important as I believe they are, if you believe he's on the right side of the issues, and most important of all, if you buy what I just

said about the nature of this time, yes times are good, yes we are grateful—but it just imposes on those of us who have done well enough to show up at this fundraiser tonight a bigger responsibility to see that we use these good times to prepare for our children's future. You're going to have a fine election, and you're going to be proud of what you're doing.

Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 8:47 p.m. in the Mount Vernon Room at the Sheraton Hotel. In his remarks, he referred to Gov. George W. Bush of Texas.

Remarks on Signing the Deadbeat Parents Punishment Act of 1998 and an Exchange With Reporters

June 24, 1998

The President. Thank you very much, Sonia. And Jonathan and Jesse, welcome to the White House. Thank you, General Reno. Thank you, Senators Kohl and DeWine, for coming. And Congressman Hoyer, thank you for your hard work on this. I'd also like to thank Congressman Henry Hyde, who is not here, for his leadership on this legislation. Welcome Judge David Ross, the Commissioner of the Federal Office of Child Support Enforcement; United States Attorney Helen Fahey; child support advocates; and Leslie Sorkhe and Gerri Jensen, two other mothers who are here. I thank you all for being here.

I am very pleased to sign a vital new law that shows what we can achieve when we act in the national interest. For 5½ years now we have renewed our economy with a strategy that balances the budget while it invests and instills the future of our people and in the strength of our families. The key to expanding opportunity in this new century I want to say, though, is education.

I want to say a little more about child support in a minute, but these two young men behind me and all the children of our country deserve a world-class education. I have asked the Congress to help me in that, to help us to reduce class size by hiring 100,000 teachers and building or repairing 5,000 schools. I have asked them to help me institute high standards to connect all classrooms to the Internet, and I've

asked them to make child care for working parents more affordable.

Yesterday the Republicans in the House of Representatives took a huge step in the opposite direction. Last night they began to dramatically cut education investments from Head Start to after-school to antidrug programs. This is out of step with our values and with America's shared vision of our future. In the coming months I'll have more to say about this, but you can be sure that I am going to keep fighting to advance education, to invest more in education, to lift education standards, to expand education opportunities. And if they continue to fight against all these things it will, I expect, be the major conflict of the coming months.

I still hope that I will not have to sign an education bill or veto one that short changes the future of our children. I don't intend to sign it. I hope a veto won't be necessary, but there is no excuse for this. We have a balanced budget. We're going to have a surplus. We have the money. We ought to give it to the children and their future.

This bill today is a gift to our children and the future. The quiet crisis of unpaid child support is something that our country and our families shouldn't tolerate. Our first responsibility, all of us, is to our children. And today we all know that too many parents still walk away from that obligation. That threatens the education, the

health of our children, and the future of our country.

One of the main reasons single mothers go on welfare is that fathers have failed to meet their responsibilities to the children. Even when a family manages to stay out of poverty, a father's failure to pay child support puts mothers who are raising children by themselves under terrible pressure. A lot of women are forced to work two jobs, to work at night, or simply to worry sick about their children either because they're away from them all the time or because they're with them but they don't have enough to support them.

When fathers neglect support of their children, it aggravates all the other problems a family faces. When I was Governor and then when I ran for President the first time in 1992, I made child support enforcement a big part of my concerns. I've always asked parents to take responsibility for their children. I've always pledged to do my best to force them to do so if they refused.

We have waged an unprecedented campaign to make deadbeat parents live up to their obligations. Thanks to tougher laws, more sophisticated tracking, powerful new collection tools we've increased child support collections by 68 percent in the last 5 years. Almost a million and a half more children are getting child support today.

There are two other signs of success that I would like to report. Last year our effort to find out the identity of fathers allowed us to establish paternity in 1.3 million cases, up from only 510,000 in 1992. Our new national database for identifying deadbeat parents across State lines has found more than 1 million delinquent parents in just the first 9 months of its operation. Before we created this database, deadbeat parents found it easy to avoid paying up by skipping from job to job or State to State. But with this database there is no where left to run.

With these and other successful child support initiatives, we believe that we've made a real difference for people like Sonia and her two fine sons. But we can and must do more. Current law is too soft on the most serious cases of neglect, the cases in which a parent flees across State lines or national borders and skips out on supporting children for a year or more. In 1996 I asked the Attorney General to draft legislation to crack down on this appalling prac-

tice. Senators DeWine and Kohl and Congressman Hyde and Hoyer championed their cause, introduced versions of the legislation, and helped to secure an overwhelming bipartisan majority for the bill I am proud to sign into law today.

The Deadbeat Parents Punishment Act of 1998 deals with child support evaders in the most serious cases. From now on if you flee across State lines and refuse to pay child support you may be charged with a Federal offense, a felony offense, and may land in jail for up to 2 years. One way or the other people who don't support their children will pay what they must.

I thank all the Members of Congress and all the children's advocates who are here today, who contributed this major victory to our children. Now we can work together to ensure that the progress we have made on child support is not accidentally undone; let me mention that, one more very important issue. Under bankruptcy reform bills now in the Senate and House some mothers could find themselves in competition with powerful banks and credit card companies to collect the child support they need. In that competition I think we all know who would lose, our children.

We are working with Congress now, and we will continue to do so to produce a bankruptcy reform bill that demands responsibility from both debtors and creditors and stems abuse. But any bill must make protecting child support payments a high priority. It would be ironic indeed, after all this work we have done, to increase child support collections—and here we are signing a bill today to make it more difficult to avoid the collections—if we turned around and passed a bankruptcy bill that put mothers and their children back in the pack along with other creditors. That's not the right thing to do. So I hope that we will see action on the bankruptcy bills and on the education bills that will reflect the same priority for our children that this bill does today.

And again, let me thank all the advocates and all the sponsors and let me thank Sonia and her two fine sons for being here. This is a happy day for Attorney General Reno and me, and I would like to ask you all to come around now, and I'll sign the bill.

Thank you.

You guys stand on either side here. Sonia, you come up here and I'll show you how I

sign a bill into law. See I have all these pens because there are all these people who want one. [Laughter] I have to find a way to use every one of these pens when I sign this. So don't start laughing at me, all right?

[At this point, the President signed the bill.]

China's Refusal of Radio Free Asia Visas

Q. Mr. President, hasn't this latest rebuff by China cast a really severe pall over your trip to China now? They've really turned you down—

The President. You mean the Radio Free Asia thing?

Q. —on special appeal—visas.

The President. I think they made a mistake. And before I leave here, as a matter of fact in just a few minutes, I'm going to do an interview with Radio Free Asia correspondents to send a clear signal that we don't believe ideas need visas and that we support freedom of the press in our country.

I think in a way it will help to highlight some of the very important issues that we wanted to discuss. I hope that this trip will not only allow me to learn more about China and allow the American people to learn more about China but will help me to explain America and what we believe in and why to not only the Government but to the people of China and this is a good beginning here.

Q. Well, have they encouraged you to—

The President. I will do my best to do that. I think they made a mistake. And as I said, ironically, is the Chinese granted more visas to more journalists from more different media outlets than they ever have before. So they were actually showing a greater openness than they have, and because they reversed themselves on the Radio Free Asia visas, for reasons I don't understand, they have denied themselves that credit. So, I intend to press this issue by doing the interview in just a few minutes.

Q. Is this going to mean that it will be harder for you to reach agreements with the Chinese on detargeting nuclear missiles, on market access—is this disagreement going to make that a harder process?

The President. I don't know. I hope that we can deal with all these issues independently. I think the Chinese understand, as we do, we've got a big common stake in nonproliferation of weapons of mass destruction. I expect to make

some progress. We have a big stake in the Asian economic situation and the difficulties there. We have a big stake in our own bilateral economic relations and the impact that a lot of this will have in terms of integrating China into the global economy.

So I would think that they would not let this get in the way of what is in their self-interest, just as I won't let it get in the way of what is in the interest of the United States, but our values are an important part of our interest.

We don't live by money alone, or even by power alone, but also by our ideals and convictions, so I think it is important to point this up. But I also think it's important that you see it in its proper framework.

The irony—as I said, this is an ironic situation because the Chinese granted more visas to more different media outlets apparently than ever before. They granted this visa and then reversed themselves. I think it was a mistake, and I'll do my best to make it clear why.

President's Visit to China

Q. Are you going to see dissidents now—I mean, as a retaliation?

The President. I'm going to see a number of people from different elements in Chinese society, and I'm going to do what I think is best to promote the cause of human rights.

Q. Is the White House taking any symbols of democracy, as has been suggested by some Republican lawmakers such as copies of the American flag or the Constitution?

The President. I'm sorry, I don't have anything to say about that.

Nuclear Detargeting Agreement

Q. What about detargeting? You didn't mention that specifically, and I had asked you about it. Do you see an agreement on that?

The President. I think it would be a good thing if we could reach an agreement on it. I think it does two things. It literally delays significantly the amount of time it takes to arm a missile and aim it, therefore, eliminating the possibility of accidental firing. And it also really increases, I think, the confidence between the countries that were moving to reduce the nuclear threat. So I hope we can do that, but I don't know yet. I don't have an announcement to make. But you know—I've made it very clear that I would like to do that.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:10 a.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Sonia Evans, who introduced the President, and her sons, Jonathan and Jesse.

Interview With Radio Free Asia

June 24, 1998

Q. Mr. President, thank you very much for taking the time to do this with us. We know you have a busy schedule, and we appreciate the gesture.

Human Rights

Q. The first question: Dissidents in China recently issued many open letters hoping to meet you during your stay in China. Why you cannot meet them and what message do you want to send them now?

The President. Well first of all, I have determined to try to meet with as many different kinds of people as I can when I'm in China, but I also want to make decisions based on what I think will maximize the impact of my trip for all the objectives, which include the advancement of human and political rights. One of the things we have pushed very hard for is the adherence of the Chinese Government to the U.N. Convention on Civil and Political Rights, which President Jiang has said he will sign in the fall, in September or October which, as you know, will among other things require China to begin to admit on a regular basis international observers to talk to citizens, including political dissidents, on a regular basis to try to make sure that they are not abused in the practice of their civil and political rights and that they begin to be integrated into the mainstream of society.

I want this trip to advance that cause. And I will structure my meetings and also the meetings of all my staff people appropriately. But I am glad to see so many of these dissidents speaking out and feeling free to speak out. It's obvious that they have concluded, some of them probably at some risk to themselves, to do this. I do believe, as I told President Jiang when he was here, that free political speech and expression is plainly a precondition for any modern state. And over the long run, it is essential to the strength of a country. I mean, we live in an information age where people's ideas basically grow the economy.

So I think that this is a long-term battle that we're all involved in, and I believe we're on the right side of it. And I think in the end, the Chinese will agree.

Q. But Mr. President, the dissidents say that it is disheartening for them that you are not taking this opportunity to make a statement by attempting to meet with them or the families of the Tiananmen students who fell.

The President. Well, I will make a lot of statements. I worked very hard to get a lot of the dissidents out of prison, and I will continue to work very hard on that. And I will do whatever I think will increase my impact. And I won't do anything that I think will actually undermine my ability to get real results. But keep in mind, we also have some other very important objectives right now. Not objectives we will sacrifice for—our human rights agenda to—but objectives that we will pursue in addition to that.

We have very important nonproliferation concerns which have been given new urgency because of the nuclear tests in India and Pakistan. We have very important concerns about trying to stabilize the economic situation in Asia, which if it got out of hand could have an enormous destructive impact on hundreds of millions of people in China, and a number of other issues that we're working on.

So, I will do my best to pursue all of our legitimate concerns and never to minimize the human rights issues, but I have to structure the way I spend my time on this trip in a way that I think is most likely to further the interests of the United States as well as the values we have that we want to—and the things we're trying to do for Chinese people.

Tiananmen Square

Q. Mr. President, when you are being welcomed in the Great Hall of the People adjacent to Tiananmen Square, will the image of the one lonely man standing in front of a tank trying to prevent it from mowing down students in Tiananmen Square flash through your mind