

Statement on House Action on the Census Amendment

August 5, 1998

I am very disappointed that the House failed to adopt an amendment to the FY '99 Commerce-Justice-State appropriations bill that would have removed onerous restrictions on the Census Bureau's plan for the decennial census. By failing to adopt this amendment, the House is undermining the Census Bureau's ability to plan and conduct an accurate decennial census.

To ensure a fair and accurate count, my administration has supported the 2000 census plan, developed by the experts at the Census Bureau, that was based upon recommendations by the National Academy of Sciences. It is a plan that will correct the inaccuracies of the 1990 census,

which missed millions of Americans and disproportionately undercounted children, minorities, and residents in urban and rural communities. This is the first census of the 21st century, and we must ensure that the census, the single most important source of information about the American people, is accurate.

Congress must remove these restrictions. It is critically important that the Census Bureau have the funding it needs to implement its 2000 census plan, a plan that will produce the most accurate census in history using the best, most up-to-date scientific methods.

Remarks at a Unity '98 Dinner

August 5, 1998

Thank you. I know you need a stretch, but it's going on too long. *[Laughter]*

Let me just say the most important words I can say: Thank you. Thank you for your support for me and for our administration and for our candidates for Senate and Congress and for the whole concept of this Unity campaign. Thank you, Representative Pelosi and Leader Gephardt and Senator Torricelli and Steve Grossman, all dedicated Democrats, all dedicated Americans.

Thank you, Mr. Vice President, for the wonderful work that you have done in so many ways, and everything that we've done together in the last 5½ years.

In 1996, when the American people were good enough to give the Vice President and me another term and made me the first Democratic President in 60 years, since Franklin Roosevelt in 1936, to be reelected, we picked up some seats in the House. And if we had picked up a few more, we would have won the House. There was, I think, one overwhelming reason: In the last 10 days, even though we had the issues and the direction, we were outspent in the 20 closest districts 4½ to one.

But we did begin this Unity concept a little too late, but it still did very well. All of our

contributors liked it because all three committees weren't asking at the same time to give money or raise it. But it was the right thing to do, because we could work on helping particular candidates, targeting particular States, going after particular constituencies, getting our turnout up.

This year we're trying to go sooner and do more. And I cannot say enough for what I believe is the vision of the leaders of the House, the Senate, and the Democratic Committee for doing this early and doing it together and in good faith with a good heart. The Vice President and I and the First Lady and Tipper, we're all committed to making this work.

The Vice President gave that wonderful portrait of what's happened the last 6 years through chapter 6. Chapter 7 is, we win if we do the right things; if we do the right things, we win.

Hillary came up with this great motto for the millennial celebration we're going to have on New Year's Eve 1999–2000 and between now and then: "Honor the past; imagine the future." And we started out a couple of weeks ago honoring the past by announcing grants by private citizens to help us save the Star-Spangled Banner. It's hard to think of anything that embodies

our past more. And then Hillary went to Thomas Edison's* home in New Jersey to talk about saving that and then to Harriet Tubman's home, then to George Washington's revolutionary headquarters, then to New York to celebrate the 150th anniversary of the beginning of the women's movement, all honoring the past.

But we've also had a lot of interesting lectures at the White House imagining the future. Stephen Hawking, the great physicist from Cambridge, England, came and spoke in a very heroic way, because he suffers from Lou Gehrig's disease, about what we would learn about the larger world in the future. We had poets for the first time in a long time, a genuine poetry reading in the White House with our poet laureates and ordinary citizens, including children, thinking about their future.

Steve said that never, at least—I quit looking at the Civil War because I'm not sure before that political trends are indicative. But since the Civil War, the party of the President in the President's second term has always lost some seats at midterm. But there is a reason for that which we have determined to erase—and these records are made to be changed—and that is, that generally there is the sense that no matter how well liked the President might be, the term is three-quarters over, so what else is new?

Well, when I was reelected, the Vice President and I sat down one day, and I told our people, I said, "Look, I want us to drive the agenda of this country until the last hour of the last day of my term in January of 2001. That is what we signed on for. That is what we owe the American people. That is the right thing to do." And if you look at what is happening today, our party—I love what Dick Gephardt said about, when he was the majority leader, how he met with the minority leader and how we tried to work together. Because this election fundamentally is not about the Democratic Party. It's about the American people, and it's about our agenda, which puts progress over partisanship and people over power and unity over division.

We believe this country has big challenges. We believe, first, you don't sit on a lead in a global economy and society like the one we're living in. You know, the temptation is, after all the tough years we had, "Things are going so well now; why don't we just relax, kick back,

and enjoy it?" All you have to do is pick up the paper every day to know that it's a reasonably dynamic world we're living in.

If someone had told you 5 years ago that Japan would have 5 years of one percent growth a year during which time the stock market there would lose half its value, would you have believed that? Is there a person in this room that really thought that would happen? If there is, I'd like to clean out what little I've got left in my bank account and let you be my investment adviser from now on. *[Laughter]*

Now, they're a very great country, and they're going to come back. I don't mean that in a negative way. I'm trying to point out that nothing stays the same. The way people work and live and relate to each other and the rest of the world is changing at a breathtaking pace. Nobody is smart enough to understand it all and figure out all of its ramifications. But I know this: When people have the good fortune of good times, they should take their treasure and their confidence and think about tomorrow and deal with the long-term challenges of the country.

There are four big issues that I think will sweep across the country this year and carry us home if our party will advance them.

Number one, we waited 29 years to get out of the red. Let's don't run out and spend this surplus on a tax cut or a spending program until we save the Social Security system for the 21st century so that the baby boomers don't bankrupt their kids and their ability to raise their grandchildren when we retire.

Number two, managed care, on balance, has been a good thing for America because we couldn't sustain inflation in health care costs at 3 times the rate of inflation in the economy. That was an unsustainable trend that developed in the 1980's. But it is just a device, and it must not be allowed to block quality care. Therefore, we should have a Patients' Bill of Rights that puts quality care back at the center of the health care debate.

People should have access to the medical care they need; decisions should be made by doctors, not by accountants; people shouldn't be turned away from emergency rooms or specialists if they need them; and their privacy should not be violated in the medical arena. That's what this Patients' Bill of Rights is all about. It's a first step toward reconciling the imperative of having better management in the health care

* White House correction.

system with keeping health care uppermost in the health care system.

And a lot of you are in the health care business. One of the reasons we need legislation is, it is simply unfair to all the good people out there in health care today that are already complying with the requirements of the Patients' Bill of Rights because they think it is the morally right thing to do. It is unfair for them to be at an economic disadvantage with those who don't. So we need a Patients' Bill of Rights.

Number three, we have succeeded in the last 5½ years in opening the doors of college to just about everybody in America. The HOPE scholarship makes the first 2 years of college virtually free to most Americans. It certainly makes community college virtually free to most Americans. We now have tax credits for the junior and senior year and for graduate school. The interest deductibility on student loans is back. We've dramatically increased scholarships and work-study positions. We had 100,000 young people go through AmeriCorps. One of you told me you had a child going to California in the AmeriCorps program, and I thank you for that.

But no one believes that we still even after all this, we still can't say that we have the best elementary and secondary education in the world for all Americans. We have an agenda for smaller classes, more teachers, more well-trained teachers, modernized schools, hooking up all the classrooms to the Internet, more after-school programs, more summer school programs for kids in difficult areas with troubled lives—things that we know work—higher standards, greater accountability, more charter schools, more school choice. We've got an agenda, and we think it ought to be supported. So we have a better schools agenda.

Number four, after this summer, I take it no one seriously questions the fact that the climate is genuinely changing. The 9 hottest years on record have occurred in the last 11 years. The 5 hottest years in history have occurred in the 1990's. Last year was the hottest year on record; this year every month has been hotter than the same month last year. This is not a joke.

We still have 40 percent of our water that's not safe for swimming, in spite of all the work since the Clean Water Act passed. We still have problems with safe drinking water in some places. We still have too many toxic waste dumps in some places.

If there is one thing America has learned since 1970, it is that we improve the quality of life and the strength of the economy when we clean up the environment in the right way. So this old-fashioned, antienvironmental rhetoric doesn't hold much water. We've got to face the environmental challenges of today and tomorrow and do them in a way that promotes new markets, new technologies, new jobs, but a cleaner environment and a growing economy.

So those, I think, are the four great national issues: save Social Security, pass a Patients' Bill of Rights, improve the public schools, clean up the environment and improve the economy. There are lots of local issues. In a lot of places our farmers are in trouble. A lot of urban areas, where we have a good empowerment agenda, still haven't felt the economic recovery. But Social Security first, the Patients' Bill of Rights, the school agenda, the environmental agenda, those things will help us to move forward. And if we can get the Congress to face our clear international economic responsibilities, which take an awful lot of my time these days, then obviously that's something that the new Congress won't have to do. And I'm still hoping and praying that we'll face up to our responsibilities as Americans and do the International Monetary Fund and these other things we have to do.

But that is an agenda we can win on. You win elections with a message, with candidates, and with the means for the candidate to get the message to the people. That's what the Unity campaign is all about. I believe that I've gone to more of these events than any person in America in the last 6 years. [Laughter] Therefore, the happiest citizen in the United States was me when the Shays-Meehan campaign finance reform bill passed the House last week.

And we Democrats have been almost unanimous in support of real campaign finance reform. The other party's leadership has been unanimous against it, although we have had some of their great renegades. We got 51, I think, bolted and voted with us last week, and I applaud them. But until we get that done, we've got the candidates; we've got the message; you're giving us the means to get the message out; and you're going to have a lot to celebrate this November.

Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 8:46 p.m. in the Crystal Ballroom at the Carlton Hotel. In his remarks, he referred to Steve Grossman, national chair, Democratic National Committee.

Remarks on the Proposed Extension of the Brady Handgun Violence Prevention Act

August 6, 1998

Thank you, Sarah and Jim. I think every American should be grateful that the power of your spirit was great enough to overcome the pain of your injury and disappointment, so that you could dedicate all these years to this great cause.

Thank you, Mr. Vice President, for being, as you said when you got such a laugh, a critical part of every good thing that happens and, even before we met, an early sponsor of the Brady bill. Coming from where we come from, the Vice President and I were not always popular with all of our constituents because we were always for the Brady bill, but just about every one of them knows now that it was the right thing to do.

I thank the Attorney General and the Secretary of the Treasury for all they have done. I thank all the law enforcement officials, the leaders of the Association of Chiefs of Police, the Sheriffs Association, the Brotherhood of Police Officers who are here. And Officer Flynn, I thought you were just downright terrific up here today, and I was very proud of you. Thank you.

I want to thank all the Members of Congress who are here. I think the Vice President attempted to introduce everyone. I think we inadvertently didn't mention Congressman Roemer from Indiana. We thank him for being there. And there are a number of you who have played large roles over the years. I hesitate to single out anyone, but I want to thank Senator Durbin, and I want to say a special word of appreciation to Congressman Schumer. Thank you, sir, and all the rest of you for what you have done.

As the Vice President said, more than 5 years ago we committed ourselves to a comprehensive strategy to lower the crime rate and to make America a safer place to live: community policing; antigang initiatives; targeted deterrence; tougher penalties; but most important of all, because of what law enforcement officers and

community leaders told us, smarter, more comprehensive prevention.

The strategy from the Brady bill to the crime bill, from the assault weapons ban to the Violence Against Women Act has begun to show remarkable results, thanks to police officers and citizens all across America. We're ahead of schedule and under budget in meeting our goal of putting 100,000 police on the street. All across America, violent crime, property crime, murder are down. Crime rates overall are at 25-year low. Americans should take pride in that but should resolve to do better. No serious person believes that this country is as safe as it ought to be.

The Brady law, in particular, shows the progress we can make when we take responsibility for making our community safe. Since the law took effect, gun trafficking and gun-related crime are on the wane. And as has been said, according to a recent Justice Department report, background checks have put a stop to nearly a quarter of a million handgun purchases since the law took effect, 62 percent of them based on felony convictions or indictment.

Now, that sounds like a big number, and Officer Flynn mentioned those gripping, personal, tragic cases. But let me break it down for you: That number is 118 felons a day, every day, since the Brady law took effect, 118 a day going home empty-handed instead of well-armed. How many people are alive today because of that law? We will never know. But no one doubts the number is very, very large indeed.

As we near the fifth anniversary of the law and celebrate its progress, we have to continue to fight against crime and violence. We cannot retreat. Yet, as has already been noted, that is precisely what the gun lobby and its allies on Capitol Hill have asked us to do, to retreat from a law that is keeping guns out of the