

Remarks on the Budget Agreement October 16, 1998

Good morning. Please be seated. I am delighted to be here with the Vice President and Senator Daschle, Congressman Gephardt, Mr. Bowles, who's got a great closing act here—[laughter]—the terrific representation from Congress and the administration, especially our economic team, and all of you.

Northern Ireland Recipients of Nobel Peace Prize

Before I make some remarks on the budget, I'd like to first say how very pleased I was, personally and as President, that the Nobel Prize Committee has awarded the courage and the people of Northern Ireland by giving the Nobel Peace Prize to John Hume and to David Trimble today. I am very grateful for that.

For 30 years, John Hume has been committed to achieving peace through negotiations, not confrontation and violence. He has been an inspiration to the nationalist community, to all the people of Northern Ireland and, indeed, all around the world. David Trimble, as Unionist leader, took up the challenge of peace with rare courage, negotiating and beginning to implement the Good Friday accord. Both have earned this award.

But I believe there are others, too, who deserve credit for their indispensable roles, beginning with Gerry Adams, the Sinn Féin leader, without whom there would have been no peace; Prime Minister Ahern, Prime Minister Blair, Mo Mowlam, their predecessors, without whom there would have been no peace; other Irish leaders, like Seamus Mallon; and I would like to say a special word of thanks to Senator George Mitchell for his role in the peace talks. The American people appreciate the recognition the Nobel committee gave our Nation in the citation, and we thank all these people for their continuing work for peace.

Budget Agreement

Yesterday our administration and the Democrats in Congress reached agreement with the Republican leadership on a fiscally responsible balanced budget that seizes this moment of prosperity and wisely invests it in the future. By standing together, we were able to achieve historic victories for the American people.

We fought for and won vital new investments, especially for our children. By hiring 100,000 new teachers, we will reduce class size in the early grades to an average of 18. We will enhance individual attention, increase student learning and, as we learned yesterday at the school violence conference, find more kids who are in trouble and need help early, and prevent more bad things from happening while more good things happen. We're also making very important investments in child literacy, college mentoring, after-school programs, and summer jobs, all of them at risk until the people behind me stood firm and united.

We fought for and won emergency relief for our hard-pressed farmers and ranchers who are suffering not only from the collapse of world markets but from crop diseases and drought and floods. And we fought for and won an impressive package to deal with this emergency only because the people behind me were willing to sustain my veto of the first bill, and I thank them for that very much.

We fought for and won a substantial increase in funding for our clean water initiative to help restore the 40 percent of our lakes and rivers still too polluted for fishing and swimming. We won substantial increases in funding to head off the threat of global climate change which disruptive weather patterns in America have warned us about in the last couple of years. We fought for and won the ability to protect precious lands in America, and we struck down the worst of the antienvironmental provisions the Republicans had put into the budget bill, because of the people who are standing behind me.

And we worked and worked and worked for 8 long months until finally we were able to persuade the Republican majority to join with us in funding America's responsibility to the International Monetary Fund so that we can protect the American economy and fulfill our responsibility to stabilize the global economy. It is a critically important thing to our future; it could not have happened if the people behind us hadn't stood strong and united for months and months.

Let me say, I am especially proud of the way we fought and won the right to reserve every penny of the surplus until we save Social Security first. Despite the efforts of the majority, particularly in the House of Representatives, to squander the surplus on election-year tax plans, we are still now well positioned to save Social Security.

Although we can take justifiable pride in these accomplishments, let's not make any mistakes here. Eight days of progress cannot totally erase 8 months of partisanship. We all know that in those 8 months of partisanship, too many dreams of too many families were deferred. The Republican majority is now leaving town to campaign, but they're also leaving a lot of America's business unfinished.

Partisanship killed the Patients' Bill of Rights. Rest assured, as my first legislative priority, I will ask the next Congress to guarantee your right to see a specialist, to receive the nearest emergency care, to keep your doctor throughout your course of treatment, to keep your medical records private, to have medical decisions made by doctors, not insurance company accountants. That's unfinished business because of partisanship.

Partisanship killed our efforts to help students stuck in crumbled and overcrowded schoolrooms. We fought and fought and fought and won the right for the 100,000 teachers. Now we've got to fight to give the teachers someplace to teach and to give those smaller classes someplace to meet. This is a battle our children cannot afford to lose.

You know, I must say, of all the things that we disagreed with the Republicans on this year, this one mystified me the most. I would have thought they would like this program, not a Government spending program but a targeted tax cut, fully paid for in the balanced budget, that wouldn't take a dime from the surplus, wouldn't add an inch of redtape to the Government's rules but would build or repair 5,000 schools. We were right to fight for it, and we ought to take it to the American people and ask them to put progress over partisanship.

Republican partisanship killed an increase in the minimum wage. You can't really raise a family on \$5.15 an hour anymore. If we value work and family, we ought to raise the minimum wage. You know, all those arguments against the minimum wage were wrong the last time we did it. We kept on growing, and unemploy-

ment now and inflation now are lower than they were the last time we raised it. Only partisanship killed it. I hope we can take that to the American people and come back here in January and raise the minimum wage.

And partisanship killed our best chance at bipartisan campaign finance reform. We had a handful of Republicans who did agree with us on this, but the majority was able to defeat us. Senator Daschle produced a unanimous vote from the Senate Democratic caucus—absolutely unanimous—but partisanship defeated us. It said yes to soft money, yes to the status quo, no to reform. The next Congress must strengthen our democracy and finally reform these outdated campaign finance laws, and people will do it who are here with me.

And finally, let me say that partisanship killed the comprehensive anti-tobacco legislation which would have saved millions of young Americans from painful and premature death. I still can't believe—I think about it every day—I still can't believe that the tobacco interests were able to persuade the Congress, with the majority in Congress, to walk away from this. It didn't have anything to do with the tobacco farmers; Senator Ford back there took care of that. *[Laughter]* This was about whether we were going to take appropriate action to save our children, and pure, old-fashioned partisanship killed it. The people behind me will save more of our children's lives when the voters give them a chance to do so next January. We're going to do that.

So let me say again, by way of thanks to all of them and to all of you who worked on this, we can be justifiably proud of the hard work and hard-won gains that this budget represents, of the 100,000 teachers, of the after-school programs, the saving the surplus for Social Security, of protecting the environment and advancing the cause of clean water, and a safer global environment, of keeping our economy going strong. But 8 days of progress cannot replace or make up for 8 months of partisanship, to protect our patients, to modernize our schools, to raise the minimum wage, to look out for the 21st century and reform Social Security and Medicare in the right way. We need a Congress that will put people before politics, progress ahead of partisanship.

I will always remember these last 8 days. I will always remember what our caucus, united,

was able to achieve. And I will always be grateful to them for what they did for the American people. Thank you very much.

Now, I want to introduce the Vice President and the other leaders. Thank you very much.

[At this point, Vice President Al Gore, Senator Thomas A. Daschle, and Representative Richard A. Gephardt made brief remarks.]

The President. Let me say, as we close, how very grateful I am to all those who have spoken and those who have not spoken, those who are here and those who stood with us who are not here, for giving us a chance to, in the last 8 days, have some very important victories for the American people and, today, for giving us a chance to make it absolutely clear what is at stake in the next 2 years.

When we leave here, I am going to take a brief trip to Chicago to stand with Senator Carol Moseley-Braun. And I think it is worth pointing out today that she is the very first member of our caucus who stood up for the idea that the National Government had an opportunity and an obligation to do something to promote the building and the repair of school facilities for our children's future. I say that to make this point: Every one of us here, standing here, except Mr. Bowles, and he may be about to take the plunge—[laughter]—every one of us here is here because of the judgment of the American people. The jobs we hold are not our jobs in any fundamental sense; they belong to the American people.

And in 18 days, after a blizzard of advertisements—probably 2 or 3 times as much from the Republican side as from ours, maybe even more when you count the third-party committees and all that—they will make a decision. The first decision they'll have to make is whether to go and vote in a midterm election, which always, always seems to have lower turnout than the Presidential elections.

If we have accomplished nothing else here today, even when our voices reach those who disagree with us—who think we're making a mistake to put 100,000 teachers in the classroom, who think we're making a mistake to fight for a Patients' Bill of Rights or a rise in the minimum wage or better school facilities—if we have done nothing else, I hope we have reminded the American people that in the end, every one of us gets to raise our voice, to cast our vote, to wield our sign-or-veto pen because

of their judgments. And in 18 days, they will be given a chance to render another judgment.

Between now and then, they will have to sort their way through all the conflicting claims and the blizzard of advertisement. But I think that in the end, many will agree that it is worth going to vote to ratify those who fought for 100,000 teachers and a clean environment and a strong American economy and an America playing a responsible role in the world economy, and perhaps most important of all, people who voted to save the surplus until we save Social Security and honor the compact with generations and keep our country strong when the baby boomers retire.

In 18 days they'll have a chance not only to support those people but to say, "With my vote, I choose to go back and build world-class school facilities; I choose to say, yes, we're going to have managed care, but even people in managed care deserve the right to have medical decisions made by medical doctors, not accountants; to choose to give people the minimum wage; to choose to save Social Security in the right way; to choose these things."

That's the message. I hope the American people know that the people standing behind me earned their pay the last 8 or 9 days. They were worth every penny of tax dollars they got. And they did it the last 8 months because they fought and waited and stood in storm after storm until the time came when they could stand up and do something right for America. And in 18 days I hope the voters of this country, the citizens, will exercise their power to say, "This is the path I choose." Staying home is not a very good option when so much is riding on a trip to the ballot box.

Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:36 a.m. in the Rose Garden at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Presidential Chief of Staff Erskine B. Bowles; John Hume, leader, Social Democratic and Labor Party, and David Trimble, First Minister, Northern Ireland Assembly, Nobel Peace Prize Laureates; Sinn Fein leader and Northern Ireland Assembly member Gerry Adams; Prime Minister Bertie Ahern of Ireland; Prime Minister Tony Blair and Secretary of State for Northern Ireland Marjorie Mowlam of the United

Kingdom; Deputy First Minister Seamus Mallon of the Northern Ireland Assembly; and former Senator George J. Mitchell, independent chairman of the multiparty talks in Northern Ireland.

Remarks at a Luncheon for Senator Carol Moseley-Braun in Chicago, Illinois

October 16, 1998

The President. Thank you very much. I think the Senator has to go to a radio debate, so I'm going to let her off the hook. She's heard me speak a thousand times. You have an excused absence. Let's give her a hand. [Applause] You guys have got to stay with her now. Thank you. Goodbye.

I want to thank all of you who are responsible for this today. One of the things that Pat Arbor said to me—he said, “You know, the Union League Club took longer than America did to open up membership to women, but they elected a president quicker.” Isn't that right? There's the president of the Union League Club. [Applause] Thank you. Hope the country does that before too long.

Let me say to Pat and to all of you who are responsible for this event, I thank you very much. I'd like to thank all the people who provided our meal, and I'd like to thank this wonderful pianist for all the great music he gave us during lunch. Thank you very much.

I will be pretty brief here, but I want to make a very important point to you. The election in less than 3 weeks now will be very important in defining what kind of country we decide to be well into the next century, whether we ratify the course that we have been taking for the last 6 years. Carol Moseley-Braun talked a lot about it; I'd like to give you some sense of what the last few days have looked like to me.

First of all, they've sort have been a blur because I haven't had a lot of sleep. Our country was able to persuade our NATO Allies to take a strong stand in Kosovo, and we have an agreement, which I think now will avoid mass starvation or freezing this winter and move that country on the path to peace.

We have been heavily involved in trying to stabilize the global financial system, which as all of you know has been very much in turmoil, and looking to the long-term need for reform,

as well as what it takes to fix the short-term crisis.

Last night until well past midnight, I was talking with Prime Minister Netanyahu and Chairman Arafat, trying to make the next big agreement in the Middle East peace process. And I'm going to leave you after the lunch and one or two other things and go back to Washington to spend the weekend in intense efforts there. And I'm convinced they're both really trying to breach the gaps between them.

This morning I woke up to learn with a great deal of pride that John Hume and David Trimble had been awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for their role in bringing about the peace in Northern Ireland, something that my administration and our country have been heavily involved in.

And of course, we reached agreement on the balanced budget yesterday. Let me say, it's been a dizzying week but a wonderful week for our country. And I'd like to also say what I said just before I left Washington today: This budget would not have been possible unless the members of the Democratic caucus in Congress had been united behind me.

There is a reason that this budget looks like we wrote it and passed it, even though our party is in the minority. The Congress has to pass a budget; that's not an option. It's the first time in 24 years when there was no budget plan passed, but in the end, if you want to go home, you've got to pass a budget. And so by standing strong for the things we believed in and by having Carol Moseley-Braun and Glenn Poshard and other people in our party who agree with the course we're taking say so strongly, that's what made this possible. And I'd like to just reiterate a couple of the things that Carol said.

This budget, which will continue our balanced budget policy that produced the surplus this year, first of all, beat back an attempt to provide