

The White House,
November 3, 1998.

NOTE: S. 1260, approved November 3, was assigned Public Law No. 105-353.

Remarks on the Legislative Agenda and an Exchange With Reporters November 4, 1998

The President. Good afternoon. Now that the election is over, it is time to put politics aside and once again focus clearly on the people's business. In yesterday's election, I think the message the American people sent was loud and clear: We want progress over partisanship and unity over division; we should address our country's great challenges; above all, now we must address the challenge to save Social Security for the 21st century.

We have work to do in other areas as well. We should move forward to pass a Patients' Bill of Rights. We should strengthen our schools by finishing the job of hiring 100,000 teachers and then passing the school modernization initiative, to give us 5,000 remodeled or new schools. We should increase the minimum wage. We should pass campaign finance reform. We must maintain our fiscal discipline to strengthen our own economy and maintain our efforts to stabilize the global economy.

But above all, now we have to seize this opportunity to save Social Security. And we're about to have another meeting here, one of many, in anticipation of the White House conference. I have spoken tonight and today with Senator Lott and Speaker Gingrich, with Senator Daschle and Mr. Gephardt, to ask them to join with me in this effort. On December 8th and 9th we will hold the first-ever White House Conference on Social Security, bringing together people from Congress and the administration, from the public and experts of all persuasions. We will only be able to do this if we reach across party lines, reach across generational lines, indeed, reach across philosophical lines to forge a true national consensus.

I believe we can do it. I believe we must do it. Yesterday's election makes it clear that the American people expect us to do it.

1998 Election Results

Q. To what do you attribute, Mr. President, the Democratic gains? I mean, was there one factor that you think was really the motivation?

The President. Well, let me say I'm very proud of what our party did yesterday in the face of the tide of history and an enormous financial disadvantage. I think it's clear what happened. I think that they stayed together; they had a message that was about the American people, their needs, their opportunities, and their future. I think that they won because they had a clear message that was about America, about saving Social Security, and improving education, and passing the Patients' Bill of Rights, and raising the minimum wage and those other things. I think that's why they won. And they were able to get an enormous outpouring of support in all quarters of the country. And I'm very proud of what they did. But I think they did it by putting progress over partisanship.

1998 Election Results and Impeachment Inquiry

Q. Mr. President, do you think the election results will have an impact, or should have an impact on the impeachment inquiry?

The President. That's in the hands of Congress and the American people. I've said that before; I'll say it again. I have nothing else to say about that.

Q. Mr. President, the Republicans have made no secret of the fact they intend to look at these elections and draw a lesson in terms of how they conduct an impeachment inquiry. What lesson would you hope they draw from these elections on that point?

The President. That's a decision for them to make. I'm not involved in that, and I'm not going to comment on it. I think that the lesson all people should draw is that the people who were rewarded were rewarded because they wanted to do something for the American people. They wanted to do something to pull this country together and to move this country forward.

If you look at all the results, they're clear and unambiguous. The American people want their business, their concerns, their children, their families, their future addressed here. That's

what the message of the election was. And because the Democrats were able to do that in a unified fashion, even while being badly outspent and while running against a tide of history that goes back to, really to 1822, they were able to have an astonishing result. And I'm grateful for that.

But I think that people of both parties who care about these issues and want to pull the country together should now put the election behind us, put Social Security reform and education and health care reform before us, and go forward. That's what I want to do.

1998 Election Results

Q. [*Inaudible*]*—the outcome is a vindication of your policies?*

The President. I think it is a vindication of the policies and of the general policy of putting partisanship behind progress and of putting people before politics and of trying to find ways to bring people together instead of to divide them. It was clearly a vindication of the message that the Democrats put out there on education,

health care, Social Security and the minimum wage, campaign finance reform, the environment, a number of other things.

A lot of people worked very hard in this election—the Vice President did; the First Lady did; a lot of people did—but I think the American people basically said to all of us—all of us—“We sent you there to work for us, and we want you to find a way to do it, to address the challenges we face and to bring this country together and move this country forward.” I think that was the loud, clear, completely unambiguous message of the election.

Governor-Elect Jesse Ventura of Minnesota

Q. [*Inaudible*]*—the election of Ventura in Minnesota—*

The President. I don't know. I think that you're going to have a lot of politicians spending time in gyms now. [*Laughter*]

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:15 p.m. in the Cabinet Room at the White House, prior to a meeting with the economic team.

Statement on the Russia-United States Agreement on Food Aid November 4, 1998

I am pleased to announce that a U.S. team will begin today to finalize an agreement with the Government of Russia on a program to provide at least 3.1 million metric tons of food. This program will help sustain Russians through a serious food shortage this winter as well as their country's continuing economic distress. In addition, this agreement will bolster American farmers and ranchers who have been hit hard by an agricultural crisis here. We will be pre-

pared to consider additional assistance if necessary.

The program is being developed under the auspices of the binational commission chaired by Vice President Gore and Prime Minister Primakov. Our negotiating team will work with their Russian counterparts to ensure that our assistance is distributed properly and exempted from taxes and customs duties. These are key elements to a successful program.