Americans have demonstrated time and again that we can protect our environment while growing our economy. We can and must meet the challenge of climate change in the same way. I urge Congress to join us in this critical endeavor.

Remarks at a Birthday Celebration for Jazz Musician Lionel Hampton
July 23, 1998

Thank you. I would say you gave a better speech for me than I played a song for you. [*Laughter*]

Let me say to Lionel Hampton and this wonderful orchestra, to all of you who are here who made this evening possible. LeVerne, thank you. Max Roach, thank you for coming. All of us who have been your fans for so long are honored to be in your presence. Thank you, Reverend Jackson. Thank you, all the Members of Congress who are here. A very, very special word of thanks to two perfectly wonderful men and fellow travelers along the road of jazz music and progressive politics—[*laughter*]—John Conyers and Charlie Rangel. Thank you for making this evening possible.

You know, Hillary and I have loved many things about the opportunity to serve here, but maybe none more than the opportunity to share with America the great gifts of our artists. And this is a special night. Lionel Hampton is 90 years old this year. You should know that he has played for every President since Harry Truman. I was minus one when Harry Truman became President—[*laughter*]—so he's been at this a day or two.

It's been a long time since he joined Louis Armstrong and gave him a hit song and revolutionized jazz music forever. I was telling Hillary, when Hamp was up there playing and singing, I said, "You know, my ears are going. I can't even hear the pitch anymore, and there he is, hitting the pitch." [*Laughter*] All of you who've ever played or tried to sing, the idea that he hit the pitch is something. And they played magnificently tonight. They lifted our spirits; they lifted our hearts.

I am personally indebted to Hillary and Charlie Rangel and John Conyers for cooking this night up, and I think all of us are. And I just want to say that even though your real birthday was a few months earlier, what the heck, you only turn 90 once—[*laughter*]—we think it ought to be a year-long celebration.

So I would like to ask the White House magnificent chef, who does these things for us, to bring Mr. Hampton a little gift in here, and I'd like to ask all of you to stand and join me in singing "Happy Birthday" to him.

NOTE: The President spoke at 8 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to LeBaron Taylor, senior vice president-corporate affairs, Sony Corporation; musician Max Roach; and civil rights activist Rev. Jesse Jackson.

Remarks to the American Legion Boys Nation
July 24, 1998

Thank you very much. Good morning, and thank you, "Sheriff" Riley, for that introduction and for your wonderful work for the education of our young people.

I'd like to welcome your Boys Nation director, Ron Engel; your legislative director, George Blume; your director of activities, Jack Mercier, celebrating 35 years with Boys Nation—he was here when I was here, back in the "dark ages"; your national chairman for the American Legion, Joseph Caouette President Sladek; Vice President Rogers.

We've got a good representation for former Boys Nation people here. I know Fred DuVal, my Deputy Assistant, who was in Boys Nation class of 1972, has already spoken to you. I'd

also like to recognize Sean Stephenson, class of 1996, now an intern in Cabinet Affairs; thank you for what you're doing here. And I'd like to acknowledge someone who has worked with Boys Nation, year after year as long as I've been here, in facilitating this event, a long, long-time friend of mine, Dan Wexler, who is leaving the White House. This is his very last event. And thank you, Mr. Wexler, for a wonderful job for the United States.

As some of you may know, a few days ago we had a reunion here at the White House for our 35th anniversary of our Boys Nation summer, and "Nightline" ran 2 nights on our reunion. I asked your president if he'd seen either one of them; he said he saw the first one, the second one he was here on duty. But I had an opportunity to meet with about half the men who were with me 35 years ago, and we were reminiscing. It was exactly 35 years ago on this day, July 24, 1963, that President Kennedy spoke to us right here in the Rose Garden about our future. He made us believe that together we could change the world. I still believe that, and I think it is no less true for your generation. Indeed, I believe you will live in the time of greatest possibility in all human history.

Today I want to talk with you a little bit about what we have to do as a country to make the most of those possibilities, specifically about what we have to do to strengthen our education system.

When I was here, President Kennedy complimented us for supporting civil rights legislation which the Nation's Governors had declined to do. I was very proud of that because two delegates from Louisiana and I and one from Mississippi were four Southerners who broke from the pack and ensured that the legislation would pass. But I have to say that, looking back over the years, we knew then that our school systems were separate and unequal and that we never could make them what we ought to until we integrated our schools so that we could integrate our country. What we did not see then and what we know now is that equal access to public schools does not guarantee the educational excellence that should be the birthright of every American on the edge of the 21st century.

Today we enjoy a remarkable amount of peace and prosperity and security. We have the lowest unemployment rate in 28 years, lowest percentage of our people on welfare in 29 years, lowest crime rate in 25 years. On October 1st we will realize the first balanced budget and surplus we have had in 29 years. We have the highest homeownership in history, and the Government has played an active role in this, but it is the smallest Government we have had in 35 years, since I was here where you are today.

Still, the world is changing fast, and it is full of challenges that we have to meet. We must build an alliance of nations, committed to freedom and human rights and to fighting against terrorism and organized crime and drug trafficking, against weapons of mass destruction, and racial, ethnic, and religious violence that bedevils so much of the world. We must build a global alliance against the global environmental and health challenges we face, including the degradation of our oceans and especially the problem of climate change.

Those of you who come from Texas and Arkansas and Oklahoma and the other places in the South that have been experiencing record heat know a little about this, but it's worth pointing out that the 9 hottest years on record have occurred in the last 11 years; 1997 was the hottest year ever recorded; each and every month of 1998 has broken a record. So unless something happens, notwithstanding this cool morning we're enjoying now, 1998 will be the hottest year on record. Unless we act now, by the time you're my age, you will have a much, much more severe problem to confront.

We have a lot of challenges here at home. We have to save Social Security and Medicare for the 21st century in a way that protects the retirement age of the baby boomers without bankrupting our children and our grandchildren. Until your generation—that is, you and all the people younger than you, starting the year before last—entered school, my generation—and I'm the oldest of the baby boomers—were the largest group of Americans ever. When our fathers came home to meet our mothers after World War II, there was a sense of enthusiasm and exuberance which manifested itself in unusually large families. [*Laughter*] And we all enjoyed being part of the baby boom generation, at least I think most of us did. But all of us now, I think without regard to our station in life, are quite concerned about the potential burdens we might impose on our children.

Not so long ago, I had to go home to Arkansas because we had some serious tornadoes.

After I toured the damage sites, I had dinner at the airport in Little Rock with about 20 people I grew up with. And I try to stay in touch with them, and we just went around the table, and most of them are just middle class working people. Every one of them was absolutely determined that we had to make the changes now to prepare ourselves to retire in ways that didn't impose undue burdens on our children. Because when we begin to retire, when all the baby boomers get into their retirement age—that is over 65—at present birth rates and immigration rates and retirement rates, there will only be about two people working for every person retired.

Now, this is a significant challenge. But it can be met. It is, in this way, like the problem of climate change. If we act now and take modest but disciplined steps now, well ahead of the time when we have to face the crisis, then we won't have to take big, dramatic, and maybe draconian steps later. So, especially saving Social Security is important.

And I'd like to say just a couple more words about it, because I want all of you to think about it; it's important. The idea behind Social Security is, number one, even though your retirement may be a long way off, you can know that it's going to be there for you. Number two, even though most Americans have something other than Social Security to retire on—and you should begin as soon as you get into the work force to save and plan for your own retirement, because if you save a little bit when you're young, you'll have a whole lot when you're older—Social Security actually is responsible for keeping about half of our senior citizens out of poverty. And beginning about 10 or 15 years ago, we achieved a remarkable thing for a society. We had a poverty rate among seniors that was lower than the poverty rate for the society as a whole. We want to continue that, and we can.

Thanks to our fiscal discipline, we're going to have the first budget surplus we've had, as I said, in 29 years. And this gives us some money to help to pay for the transition. I believe it is very important to set aside every penny of this surplus until we save Social Security. Now, that's a big challenge here in Washington, because after all, it's an election year, and it's more popular to give tax cuts or even to have big new spending programs than to say to people, "Okay, we've got this money, but we don't want to spend it right now. We may well be able to afford new spending programs; we may well be able to afford a tax cut, but we need to know how much it's going to cost to fix Social Security and how we can make it as small a burden as possible today and tomorrow."

That's why I have said save Social Security first. If it doesn't take all the money of the projected surplus, then we can figure out what else to do with it. I believe that is important. Some people here disagree with me; some want a tax cut before we fix Social Security. I am determined not to let that happen, because I think we should invest in your future, not squander it.

I do not believe that those of us who are adults should enjoy a limited small tax cut now and sacrifice your future tomorrow. And I'm going to do what I can to stop that. I think there is broad support for this position among both Democrats and Republicans in Washington, and I hope very much that, by the time you're out in the work force and having children of your own, that this will be yesterday's problem, and you will not have to confront it. And we're going to do our best to see that that happens.

Let me talk a little about, very briefly, some other challenges we face. We have to provide access to affordable quality health care to all Americans. More and more Americans, probably a lot of you here, are in managed care plans. Managed care has done a lot of good. It's cut a lot of inflation out of health care costs. But health care decisions ought to be made by doctors and patients, not by accountants and insurance company executives who are determined to save money whether or not it's the right thing to do for the patients. That's the idea behind the Patients' Bill of Rights we're trying to pass up here in this session of Congress.

I think it is very important that we recognize that, in spite of all this economic growth, there are still areas of our country which have not reaped the benefits of American enterprise. There are inner-city neighborhoods, there are Native-American communities, and as a lot of our farmers have been telling America lately, there are a lot of rural American communities that still have not felt the benefits of the economic recovery. If we can't find a way to expand opportunity to these areas now, when we're doing so well, we will not be able to do it the next time a recession comes along. So that, I think, is a very important challenge.

I think it is very important that we build an America, as Secretary Riley says, that crosses the boundaries of race and religion and culture; that respects, revels in our diversity; that enjoys our heated arguments; but that recognizes that underneath it all we are bound together by those things that the framers laid out so long ago. We all believe in life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. We all believe that we have constituted a free Government of willing citizens because there are things we have to do together that we can't do alone. We all believe that America will always be on a permanent mission to form a more perfect Union.

So I say to all of you, even though I think it's a great thing to have vigorous debates—I love them. I think it's a good thing that we have different opinions. I think it is a terrific thing that we have people in America who come from every other country on Earth. Just across the Potomac River here, in Fairfax County, there are students from 180 different national, racial, and ethnic groups in one school district, and they come from 100 different language groups. That is great for America in a global society. But we still have to find a way to be one America, to recognize that what we have in common as human beings, as children of God, is more important than what divides us.

And finally let me say, we have to build a world-class system of elementary and secondary education. You heard Secretary Riley say that we have done a lot of work to open the doors of college to everyone who is willing to work for it. And just about everyone in the world believes that America has the finest system of higher education in the world. Now we have the HOPE scholarship, a $1,500 tax credit for the first 2 years of college; tax credits for the junior and senior year, for graduate school, for adults who have to go back for continuing education; a direct student loan program that allows you to borrow money and then pay it back as a percentage of your income so you don't ever have to worry about borrowing money, making you go broke later, just to get an education; more work-study positions, more Pell grants. We have the AmeriCorps program for young people who want to do national service for a year or two and then earn credit for college. And this has been a very, very good thing.

But almost no one believes that every American has access to world-class elementary and secondary education. And if you think about all the other challenges I have mentioned, they all rely on a well-educated, responsible citizenry. You have to be well-educated, and you have to be a good citizen to say—take the Social Security challenge—"Don't give me a little bit of money now. Save me a huge headache later. Save my children; save my grandchildren. I'll give it up right now so we can do something good for tomorrow."

You have to be well-educated to imagine what the world would be like if this climate change continues and the polar ice caps melt and the water levels rise and the Everglades are buried or the Louisiana sugar plantations are underwater or Pacific island nations are buried, to understand what it means when the climate changes and mosquitoes bearing malaria go to higher and higher climates and infect more and more people, and then they get on airplanes and meet you in the airport, and now people in Norway come home with airport malaria. It sounds funny, but it's happening. You have to have an education to understand these things.

It helps to be well-educated to understand the importance of diversity and respect for diversity and still what we have in common. So every other challenge we face requires us to meet the challenge of educating all our citizens.

We've come a long way since 1963, when most of the schools in the South were segregated, and when I was here—listen to this—one quarter of our high school students dropped out of school before they graduated; less than half went on to college. Today, almost 90 percent of high school students do graduate, and nearly 70 percent will get some further education.

Many of you are here, as I was 35 years ago, in part because of a special teacher who's had a positive influence on your life. Our schools have always been the cornerstone of our democracy. At a time of increasing diversity through immigration, they are more important than ever. Ninety percent of our children are in our public schools, and in an age of information and ideas, a strong education system is now even more important to you than it was to me when I was your age. Now is the time to strengthen public education, not to drain precious resources from it. That is America's first priority, and it is our administration's first priority.

If our schools are to succeed in the next century, however, it will require more than money.

We have to raise standards for students and teachers. We have to heighten accountability. We should widen choices for parents and students. We have to expect more of everyone, of our students who must master the basics and more and behave responsibly; of our teachers who must inspire students to learn and to be good citizens; and of our schools which must be safe and state-of-the-art.

We've worked hard to strengthen our public schools, to promote higher standards and to measure student progress, to do what we can to improve teaching and to certify more master teachers throughout the country, to give schools the means to meet our national education goals and to help students not going to 4-year colleges make the transition from school to work, to get more aid to students in schools with special challenges and to hook all the classrooms and libraries in our country up to the Internet by the year 2000, and to have more public school choice.

But we clearly have to do more. I have called for smaller classes in our early grades and 100,000 new teachers to fill them, teachers that pass rigorous competency tests before they set foot in the classroom. I've called for an end to social promotion so that no child is passed from grade to grade, year after year, without mastering the materials and for extra help for those who don't pass, like the summer school program in Chicago.

Chicago now has mandatory—mandatory—summer school for children who don't make the social promotion hurdle. And the summer school there is now the sixth biggest school district in the entire United States of America. I don't think I have to tell you that more children are learning and the juvenile crime rate is way down. We need more of that in America.

These are important investments. We have to also do more. We need to build more schools and modernize more schools. I was in Philadelphia the other day where the average school building is 65 years old. They are magnificent old buildings. They're very well built, but they need to be modernized. A child that goes to school every day in a school where a whole floor is closed off or the roof leaks or the rooms are dark or the windows are cracked gets a signal, a clear signal that he or she is not as important as we all say they are day in and day out.

I have been to school districts in Florida where there were more than a dozen trailers outside the main school building because the schools are so overcrowded and the districts don't have the funds to keep building schools to deal with the new students. We have to do that.

We have to finish our effort to connect all our classrooms to the Internet. We have got to, in other words, make these investments that will make our country strong.

President Kennedy said our progress as a Nation can be no swifter than our progress in education. That is more true now than ever before, and I hope in the remaining few days of this congressional session, our Congress will put progress above partisanship, leave politics at the schoolhouse door, and make the education of our children America's top priority.

We know our schools are strengthened also by innovation and competition brought about increasingly in our country by more choice in the public schools children attend. Public school choice gets parents and communities more involved in education, not just in helping with homework or attending parent-teacher conferences but actually in shaping the schools.

Some of you, having gone to public schools of choice, may know this from experience. David Haller, for example, from Arkansas, attends a school that's very close to my heart, in the town I grew up in, the Arkansas School of Math and Science in Hot Springs, which I help to found as Governor.

Across our Nation, public school choice and, in particular, charter schools are renewing public education with new energy and new ideas. Charter schools are creative schools, innovative schools, public with open enrollment, strengthened by the commitment of parents and educators in the communities they serve. They can be models of accountability for all public schools, because they are chartered only when they meet rigorous standards of quality, and they should remain open only as long as they meet those standards.

According to new data from Secretary Riley's Department of Education, parents are choosing charter schools more and more often because they're small, safe, supportive, and committed to academic excellence. We can do more of this.

I am pleased to report some interesting progress. When I was elected President, campaigning on the idea that we should have more of these charter schools, there was only one such school in the country. It was in the State of Minnesota. I am pleased to tell you that this fall there will be 1,000 of them, serving more than 200,000 children. We're well on our way to meeting my goal of creating 3,000 such schools by the beginning of the next century, and again, I ask Congress to help us meet the goal and finish its work on the bipartisan charter school legislation that is now making its way through Congress.

The Department of Education has released a guidebook to help communities learn from each other's successes. I commend it to you. Charter schools do very well in general, but they face a lot of challenges, including finding the funding to get started and keep going. Lack of access to startup funding, as the report I release today shows, is the biggest obstacle facing more rapid development of these schools. To make it easier for parents and educators to innovate, I have proposed to increase the $80 million for startup funds this year to 100 million next year. That's up from 6 million when we started in 1994.

Now, let me just say one other thing. A lot of you are going back for your senior years. You'll be leaving your hometown school. Some of you will be going a long way away to college. I urge you to go wherever your dreams take you. But in the years to come, I hope you won't forget about your schools. I am very impressed by all the resolutions and the legislation that you have passed, and I have been given a review of it this morning before I came out here. But I'm also impressed by the commitment that so many of you have expressed to citizen service. I hope you will always take part of your time to be servants to young people who are younger than you are.

Some of you may become teachers or professors, but most of you won't. Wherever your life's travels take you, every one of you can find some enduring connection to education. I hope some of you will consider, some time during your next few years, joining our national service program, AmeriCorps, and serving young people in your community and building up some more scholarship money.

But whatever you do when you get out of school, I hope you will maintain a connection to young people and to their schools. You can volunteer your time, you can mentor someone who needs guidance. You can remember that only a very few young people ever have the experience you're having now, but hundreds and thousands more can hear about it from you and be inspired by it, to believe in our country and to believe in themselves and their capacity to learn and live out their dreams.

As I get older and older, I think more and more, as is natural I suppose, about people who are coming along behind me. It's hard to get used to—most of us will tell you that we consider anyone who is a year younger than we are to be young, however old we are. I never will forget, once I was talking to Senator Mike Mansfield, who was our Ambassador to Japan, and Senator Mansfield must be about 96 now. He still walks about 5 miles a day. And he was having lunch with another former Senator, J. William Fulbright—who was a mentor of mine and for whom I worked when I was in college—when Senator Mansfield was 91, and Senator Fulbright was 87. He looked at him, and he said, "Bill, how old are you now?" And he said, "I'm 87." And Mansfield said, "Oh, to be 87 again." [*Laughter*] So we all get our perspective from our own age.

And for you, your future is all ahead of you. But just think about how many Americans there already are who are younger than you are, and think about how many there are who would never have a chance like the one you've had this past week. And just remember, never, never, never underestimate your ability to teach, to inspire, to guide, to help them to love this country the way you do, to embrace concepts of good citizenship the way you have, and frankly, to live a good, constructive, ambitious life the way you will. All of us—all of us—sometimes underestimate the enormous power that we have to influence other people one-on-one.

Alexis de Tocqueville said a long time ago that America is great because America is good. America cannot be good except through her people. To say America is good is to say the American people are good. We have all these big challenges. I'm convinced we will meet them, as we have all our other challenges for over 200 years, because America is good.

I ask your support in meeting those challenges, and I ask for your commitment never to forget all those young people who are coming along behind.

Good luck, and God bless you. Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:25 a.m. in the Rose Garden at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Secretary of Education Richard W. Riley, who, as a boy, was elected sheriff of Boys State, South Carolina; and Kevin Sladek, president, and Jeffrey Rogers, vice president, 1998 Boys Nation Session.

Statement on House of Representatives Action on Patients' Bill of Rights Legislation

July 24, 1998

The Patients' Bill of Rights should not be designed for the political needs of any party; it should be designed to meet the health needs of all Americans. Unfortunately, the House Republicans passed legislation today that simply does not meet this test. This bill leaves out millions of Americans; it leaves out critical patient protections; and it adds in "poison pill" provisions which undermine the possibility of passing a strong bipartisan Patients' Bill of Rights this year.

The Republican leadership's legislation does not apply to the individual insurance market and therefore excludes millions of Americans. It does not include many important protections such as ensuring direct access to specialists so that patients can see the cancer doctors or heart specialists that they need, or ensuring that care will not abruptly change if a patient's provider is unexpectedly dropped or an employer changes health plans. Moreover, the enforcement mechanism in this legislation is insufficient as it gives little recourse to patients who are injured or who die because of a health plan's actions. Finally, this legislation is undermined by provisions that have nothing to do with patients' rights.

Americans want a Patients' Bill of Rights that gives them the protections they need in a rapidly changing health care system. The legislation passed by the House Republicans today falls far short of ensuring Americans the quality care they need and deserve. It is my strongest hope that the Senate will move quickly to have a fair and open debate that can produce a strong, enforceable, and bipartisan Patients' Bill of Rights this year.

Message to the Congress Reporting a Budget Rescission

July 24, 1998

To the Congress of the United States:

In accordance with the Congressional Budget and Impoundment Control Act of 1974, I herewith report one proposed rescission of budgetary resources, totaling $5.2 million.

The proposed rescission affects programs of the Department of the Interior.

WILLIAM J. CLINTON

The White House,

July 24, 1998.

NOTE: The report detailing the proposed rescission was published in the *Federal Register* on August 3.