

Statement on Proposed Legislation To Assist Young People Leaving the Foster Care System

May 13, 1999

Hillary and I are pleased that Representatives Nancy Johnson and Ben Cardin today introduced important legislation to assist the approximately 20,000 young people who leave our Nation's foster care system each year at age 18 without an adoptive family or other permanent family relationship. Today, Federal financial support for these young people ends just as they are making the critical transition to independence. Without the emotional, social, and financial support that families provide, many of these youth are not adequately prepared for life on their own.

I believe that we have a responsibility to ensure that these young people have the tools they

need to make the most of their lives. That is why my budget request includes significant new investments to provide them with access to health care and help them to earn a high school diploma, further their education or vocational training, and learn daily living skills such as budgeting, career planning, and securing housing and employment. Today, Representatives Johnson and Cardin have moved this issue forward. I am committed to working with them and other Members of Congress in the months ahead to enact meaningful and fiscally responsible legislation to enable these young people to live up to their God-given potential.

Message to the Congress Transmitting a Report of the National Institute of Building Sciences

May 13, 1999

To the Congress of the United States:

In accordance with the requirements of section 809 of the Housing and Community Development Act of 1974, as amended (12 U.S.C. 1701j-2(j)), I transmit herewith the annual report of the National Institute of Building Sciences for fiscal year 1997.

WILLIAM J. CLINTON

The White House,

May 13, 1999.

NOTE: An original was not available for verification of the content of this message.

Remarks at a Dinner for Representative John Conyers, Jr.

May 13, 1999

Thank you very much. Let me, first of all, thank Bob Johnson and the whole BET family for making us feel at home at this wonderful place tonight. And I want to thank Kenny Burrell and Donald Byrd and James Moody, and also I'd like to thank the musicians who were playing for us earlier. They were very, very good, and I enjoyed hearing them.

I want to say how much I appreciate the fact that so many of John Conyers' colleagues are here from the Michigan delegation, from the Congressional Black Caucus, and the whole Congress would have showed up if they could have. And notwithstanding his claims of false advertising, he really is 70 years old. *[Laughter]*

Now, I say that in astonished admiration. He has a child who is 10 years younger than my

daughter—[laughter]—maybe more—and one of the most impressive young men I've ever met in my life. And thanks to Debbie Dingell, he went through the Detroit Auto Show with me, and he knew more about the cars than I did. [Laughter]

Let me say to all of you, there are many things that I appreciate about John Conyers. I appreciate the fact that he has supported my economic and social initiatives since I've been President. And thanks to his leadership, we have tried to do things that make sense—for our economy, to give everybody a chance to participate. We've tried to do things to help young people stay out of trouble, instead of just punishing people after they commit crimes. We've tried to do things that make sense to bring people together and to create more opportunity. And he's had a big impact on that.

I appreciate the fact that in standing up for me last year, he stood up for the Constitution of the United States. And I'm grateful to him.

I am grateful for the fact that long before it was fashionable, he believed the United States ought to be on the side of human rights in South Africa, in Haiti, and throughout the world. So I am very grateful to be a friend of John Conyers.

I am also hoping that if I hang around him long enough, I get to meet some more great musicians—[laughter]—I get another chance or two to play. I can't tonight. I've got to work. And maybe I'll learn the secret of how to look young when I'm 70. People always ask me how old I am, and I say, "I'm the oldest 52-year-old man in America"—or 53, or however old I am—I can't keep up with it.

Let me say one other thing that's very important as I look around this crowd tonight—you know, our hearts have been heavy in the United States over the loss of the children in Colorado. And our hearts have been burdened over the efforts that we are making in Kosovo. And I think about the world we would like to build for our children. I think about how jazz music brought people together across racial lines, long before there was much of any other way to do it in America, long before it was cool or noticed—I'm talking about in the twenties and thirties. Mr. Gregory, I'm glad to see you here—thank you.

And I look around this crowd tonight and I think about—those of you who are here who are young, you imagine what you want your

life to be like. And a lot of you, you know all about computers and the Internet and how to relate to people all around the world and go into these strange chat rooms and talk to people in Mongolia or someplace. And we all want to believe it's going to be great and wonderful and fascinating. And isn't it interesting, after all our long journey, so that we could come here tonight, together—a journey which John Conyers, having been in the Congress since 1964, had a lot to do with helping us make.

But isn't it interesting that we had in our own country a horrible murder-suicide which the young people involved said was perpetrated because they felt that they were part of a gang that was not respected by others, and they hated other people, partly for racial, partly for other reasons. And this is 1999. And these kids were so far gone that that's what they said. And our hearts were broken by it. And all those brilliant young people—one African-American, the others not—had their whole future taken away because these kids wanted to destroy and then to destroy themselves.

And isn't it interesting that that's sort of against everything both that the whole history of jazz but also the potential of America and the world represents. And then you look around the world today, and what's the trouble? What's the trouble in Northern Ireland, in the Middle East and Africa, in the Balkans—from Bosnia to Kosovo—what's the trouble? People can't get along because of their racial, their ethnic, or their religious differences.

And so if we ought to think of one thing we can honor John Conyers for, thinking about what he stood for in South Africa, think about the record he stood for on civil rights at home, what he's fought for on the Judiciary Committee—it ought to be the idea that America ought to be a good place and a safe place and a full place for all its children.

Yesterday—I will tell you this story in closing. I want to tell you a story. Yesterday, at the request of the Senators from North Dakota and Senator Daschle and Senator Baucus, I had a fascinating meeting with 19 tribal chiefs from the 19 Indian tribes of the high plains, the northern high plains in America. And all of you who don't know about that part of the country need to know that notwithstanding all the things you read about how rich the Native Americans are because of their gambling enterprises today,

the tribes that don't have those gambling enterprises and the tribes that are in the poor, rural areas, a long way from economic activity, are still the poorest people in America.

And so these very dignified, mostly pretty young tribal leaders, men and women, came in; we sat in a circle, according to their request, in the Roosevelt Room in the White House; and they spoke in their turn about the needs of their people. And then after they had done that, the person whom they had designated to be their spokesperson stood up in a very dignified way and said, "Mr. President, we have something to say about our involvement in Kosovo. We know something about ethnic cleansing. We were removed from our lands, and some of the people who did it said that it was God's will, which we hear in the Balkans. And we have seen America come a very long way. And we have signed this proclamation to tell you that we, the leaders of the first Americans, support America's policy to stand up against ethnic cleansing and the murder of people because of their religious and ethnic background."

And then another man said, "I would like to be heard." And this young man stood up with great dignity, and he had a beautiful silver Indian necklace on. And he said this—he said, "Mr. President, I had two uncles. One landed on the beaches at Normandy on D-Day; the other was the very first Native American fighter pilot in the history of the American military. My great-great-grandfather was slaughtered by the 7th Cavalry at Wounded Knee." He said, "I now have only one son. America has come a very long way from Wounded Knee, to the beaches at Normandy, to the opportunity I have

to be in the White House today. And I love my son more than anything, but if he needed to go and fight against ethnic cleansing and the brutality and the murdering of people because of their race or their ethnicity or their religion, I would be proud for him to stand for the United States and for the humanity of man."

No one in the room could breathe, we were so moved by this man in his simple dignity, representing Americans who still don't have a total, fair shot at educational and economic opportunities, who live in places that still don't have adequate health care. But he told a story that needs to be told.

So I say to you—you honor John Conyers tonight—the best way we can honor John Conyers is to say, we've got a pretty picture of the 21st century, and we've got an ugly picture of the 21st century that is every last nightmare that has dogged human society since people came up out of the caves and first got together, and that is fear and hatred of people who are different from us. And we're better than that. And he's helped us to be better than that. And we're going to do better still.

Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 8:45 p.m. at the BET on Jazz Restaurant. In his remarks, he referred to Robert L. Johnson, chairman and chief executive officer, BET Holdings, Inc.; musicians Kenny Burrell, Donald Byrd, and James Moody; Representative Conyers' son John; Debbie Dingell, wife of Representative John Dingell; civil rights activist Dick Gregory; Tex Hall, chairman of the Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara Nation (the Three Affiliated Tribes); and Gregg Bourland, chairman, Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe.

Remarks on Senate Action on Gun Control Legislation

May 14, 1999

Good morning. It is now clear that the tragedy at Littleton has helped to create a broad national consensus that we must act together to protect our children from violence, including taking efforts to keep guns away from children and away from criminals. The question is whether Congress will write that national consensus

into law or block it. Thus far, the Senate has not fully lived up to its responsibility.

I am very pleased that on Wednesday a bipartisan majority in the Senate passed two important measures I proposed 2 weeks ago. First, they agreed to ban the import of high-capacity ammunition clips that are used to evade the 1994 ban on assault weapons. Second, they