

Sincerely,

WILLIAM J. CLINTON

NOTE: Identical letters were sent to Jesse Helms, chairman, and Joseph R. Biden, Jr., ranking member, Senate Committee on Foreign Relations; Ted

Stevens, chairman, and Robert C. Byrd, ranking member, Senate Committee on Appropriations; Benjamin A. Gilman, chairman, and Sam Gejdenson, ranking member, House Committee on International Relations; and C.W. Bill Young, chairman, and David R. Obey, ranking member, House Committee on Appropriations.

Remarks at a Dinner for Senator Tom Harkin in Des Moines July 16, 1999

Thank you very much. First of all, thank you, Jerry, for having me in your home. The last time, he took me to his golf club; now, he takes me to his home. I can't wait for my third trip. *[Laughter]*

Thank you, Linda. Thank you all for being here. Governor, thanks for spending the day with me, with your Lieutenant Governor and your distinguished array of officials and the First Lady from the great State of Iowa. I want to thank Tom and Ruth for giving me the chance to come down here and be with them. I want to say it's wonderful to see Congressman and Mrs. Smith. He did everything he could to educate me about agriculture before he left the Congress, and I did the best I could to learn. I'm a little slow, but he's working on me still. *[Laughter]*

Let me say to all of you, first, I want you to know that I wanted to come here to say thank you to the people of Iowa. We had a big crowd over at the middle school earlier today when we were promoting one of the many initiatives Tom Harkin is identified with: our efforts to get a modest tax cut through that will lead to \$25 billion in construction or modification or modernization of 6,000 schools in this country. And so we were over there, and there were, I don't know, a few hundred people there. And the air-conditioning was out, so the atmosphere was warm and friendly. *[Laughter]* Secretary Riley and I, having come from the Washington heat, felt right at home.

And so, anyway, we were there and having a good time. And I said, "You know, you folks in Iowa ought to be glad to see me; I'm the first guy that's been here in weeks that's not running for anything." *[Laughter]* And I must say, after 24 years, most of which—25 now—

most of which time I was running every 2 years, it's a little awkward for me to say that. But I want you to know that I am profoundly grateful to the people of Iowa for being so good to me and Hillary and the Vice President and Mrs. Gore, for voting for us twice, for supporting our policies, for giving us a chance to serve.

And the second reason I wanted to come down here is I love Tom Harkin, and I am profoundly grateful. You know, I'm not sure—and this is no offense to the people of Iowa—but I bet you could get elected and reelected Senator from Iowa without being the world's number one opponent of abusive child labor in foreign countries. He just did that because he thinks it's wrong and because he doesn't want children anywhere to suffer when children everywhere should be going to school and growing up to decent lives.

Yes, he's one of the greatest advocates for farmers this country has, and we've got an earful again today about the terrible dilemmas that our farmers are facing. And there's a general consensus, I think, on what causes it. And Tom and I both said back in 1994 or '5, when they passed that freedom to farm bill, that without a safety net this would happen sooner or later; unfortunately, sooner came before later. And we have to act there, and we will.

He also is perhaps the foremost advocate for the disabled in the United States Senate, perhaps one of the two or three foremost advocates for research and development in new technologies in sciences. There is hardly anybody who serves in either House in the United States Congress that has the combination of wide interest, deep knowledge, genuine compassion, and effectiveness. I have rarely known anyone in

public office that I thought was as truly good a person and as truly good a public servant as Tom Harkin. And you are very lucky to have him.

And I just want to say a couple of things. You're going to become—Iowa is once again at the vortex of America's political concerns. And everybody is coming here to tell you how great they're going to be if you vote for them. And one of the things I think we should posit is that most everybody who comes here will actually believe what they say. Having been criticized, as Tom noted inside, fairly mildly for a few years—[laughter]—it has been my observation that most people in politics in both parties actually pretty much believe what they say and believe in what they do and show up every day and try to pretty well do a good job.

Forty years ago this year, I took eighth grade science from a guy who was a coach and a science teacher named Vernon Dokey. Now, to be charitable, he was not the most handsome man I had ever seen. And he knew it. He was—he looked sort of like a grizzly bear that had been through a meat grinder, but walked out. [Laughter]

And he would come—it wouldn't be politically correct to do so today, but in those days it was bearable—he used to smoke these cheap cigars that he had in a cigar holder which he would grit in his teeth like that—[laughter]—and he had this sort of highly prominent, well-chiseled nose, and he was a big, burly guy. And he was not particularly conventionally attractive. Interesting—he had a beautiful wife who was our social studies teacher, who had a beautiful sister who was my geometry teacher. [Laughter]

And we were 13, and we were crazy, and we were trying to figure out how the world works. So old Vernon Dokey says one day in science class, he says, "You kids won't remember a thing I teach you about science, but I want you to remember some things I teach you about life." He said, "Now, look at me." He said, "I want you to know something. Every morning, I get up, and I go in the bathroom; I throw water in my face; I put shaving cream on; I shave my face; I wash that shaving cream off; I look in the mirror, and I smile, and I say, 'Vernon, you're beautiful.'" [Laughter] And he said, "Now, if you kids remember that, you'll get a lot further in life." [Laughter]

Now, you think about that. Forty years later, I still remember. So if you notice when I fight

with the Republicans, no matter how hard I fight with them, I don't question their motives or their patriotism or their love of country. When I think they're wrong, I say they're wrong.

Iowa and New Hampshire, because you go first, have a heavy responsibility to help to render judgment, if you will, for the country about not only candidates but issues. What I want to say to you is that I came to the Presidency in 1992, having been Governor of what my predecessor affectionately called a small southern State. And I loved every day of it. And to me, politics was about ideas, action, and people. It was not about Washington rhetoric, personal destruction, and who looked good in the morning paper. It was about ideas, action, and people.

And we believed that we could bring new ideas based on old-fashioned Democratic philosophy that everybody who was willing to work for it ought to have opportunity in this country; that we had to change to meet the changes of the time; and that everybody who was a responsible citizen ought to be part of America's community. It was pretty simple, really.

But if that's what was guiding you, then we no longer believed that you couldn't, for example, balance the budget and still increase investment in education; that you couldn't have a strong and effective Government and reduce the size and burden of Government. When you heard Tom say that the Vice President ran our reinventing Government plan—this is one of those—if you do a survey on this, people say, "I don't care; I still don't believe it." People do not believe it, but we have the smallest Federal establishment since 1962 when John Kennedy was President. We have eliminated hundreds of programs, and you can't name one of them. I'll give \$5 to anybody in this audience who can name two of the hundreds of programs we have eliminated. And we have a more vigorous, more effective Government.

We've got the longest peacetime expansion in history, the lowest crime rate in 26 years, the lowest welfare rolls in 30 years, the lowest unemployment rate in 30 years, very high wage growth, high business startups, highest homeownership in history, the lowest minority unemployment in history—all that is only evidence of the important thing: All elections are about tomorrow. All elections are about tomorrow. And a good record is only evidence of what

will be good in the future—however, very important evidence.

And many of these things we've had to fight with our friends on the other side, and Tom Harkin was always leading the fight. We said we could lower the crime rate, but you had to help these communities put police on the street, and you had to take more guns out of the hands of criminals. Well, they said, "If you try to put 100,000 police on the street, it wouldn't make a lick of difference. And if we checked the backgrounds of people that tried to buy handguns in gun shows, all you would do is make the hunters mad. And criminals didn't buy guns at gun shows, anyway." Well, years later, we haven't inconvenienced a single hunter, and 400,000 people—400,000 people—were not able to buy guns, because of their criminal backgrounds, at gun stores. So our arguments were right, and theirs were wrong.

They said we couldn't balance the budget, and we were going to provoke a recession. But we balanced the budget, biggest surplus in history, and we doubled our investment in education while we were doing it. So we have evidence here.

So I say to you as you think about the future of your State and Nation, there is evidence here. And what I want to say to you is, Tom Harkin and I—I'm not running for anything, and he's not running for anything right yet—[laughter]—but we and all the people that are running who are in public office, we're still drawing a paycheck from you every 2 weeks, and we should show up for work, and we should do things. I tell all the Republicans and Democrats in Washington all the time, if we agreed on everything I'm asking us to agree on, there would still be stuff for us to fight about. There will always be something to have a next election on. But we get hired to show up for work.

Now, the big question we have before us today is: What are we going to do with the surplus; what are we going to do with this period of bounty we have? And I would argue—I don't want to repeat my whole State of the Union Address, but I want to tell you, I would argue three things for sure. Number one, we ought to do whatever we can to deal with the aging of America, because when the baby boomers retire, we're going to have more people retired and fewer people working to support them. And if you want the seniors of this country to be able to have their Social Security and

their Medicare, and you want them to have it in a way that is secure and does not bankrupt their children so they can't afford to raise their grandchildren, now is the time to set aside most of this surplus to save Social Security and Medicare and provide a prescription drug benefit with Medicare. So I think that is a big deal.

The second thing I think we ought to do is everything we can to keep this economy going and then, to reach out and touch the people who have not been affected by the recovery. And let me just say on the first, the way I want to save Social Security and Medicare will keep us from spending that surplus and devote the interest savings on the surplus to making Social Security last longer, so we'll make Social Security last for more than 50 years, make Medicare last for more than 25 years, and make the country debt-free in 15 years, for the first time since 1835. Now, these are big things. We should not wait for another election to deal with these big things.

On the economy, the last thing we've got to do is to try to reach the people that aren't affected by the recovery. There are a lot of disabled people, as Tom would tell you, who want to go to work and could go to work. There are still people on welfare who want to go to work, who could go to work. There are whole regions of our country—from Appalachia to the Mississippi Delta to the Indian reservations to the inner city—that need new investment. And of course, there is the problem of the farm, which you are very well familiar with.

But consider the irony of the lowest unemployment rates in the country being in Iowa, North Dakota, South Dakota, all these farming States where we're at risk of losing a huge percentage of our family farmers unless there is both an emergency response and a different long-term course that they have available. So I say to you, yes, have the election; yes, have the debate; but let's keep on working for what's good for America, and let's not avoid the big choices; let's not pretend that we don't have to make them.

We're in the shape we're in today because we made the tough choices and we kept at it, and that's what the country needs to do. And that's the gift I want to give you, is that when you see me, you think I'm working and not enjoying the sunshine of our prosperity.

The last point I want to make is this—I thought about this today when I was in Iowa.

Politics is really personal to me. You know, in this debate we just had over the Patients' Bill of Rights, several doctors who are here today thanked me for that, thanked Tom for fighting for that. Look, here's the issue: More people than not are in managed care plans. A lot of them have done a lot of good; they've cut down on a lot of inflation and health care costs. But if your doctor says you need to see a specialist, no accountant should be able to stop your doctor from sending you to a specialist. If you get hit in an accident, you ought not to have to go by the nearest hospital to one that's farther away because that's the one covered by your managed care plan. Now, if you are working for a small business and your small business—your employer has to change coverage at some point and you're 6 months into a difficult pregnancy, you ought not to have to get another ob-gyn to finish your pregnancy. If you are halfway through a difficult chemotherapy treatment, you ought not have to get another oncologist to finish your treatment. Now, every physician in this audience will tell you this happens all the time in America. This is not some radical notion; this happens all the time. So all we said was that basically everybody in America ought to have the same protections that I gave all the people in the Federal programs—Medicare, Medicaid, the Federal health employees program, the veterans program—by Executive order. And we were actually attacked by our friends in the other party. Tom was attacked, because, they said, "Oh, you're relying on personal stories. You're trying to play on the emotions of the people." Well, get a life. [Laughter] I mean, what is politics about anyway? Why are we doing this?

Every time I come to Iowa, I think of two things. One of them I got hit right between the eyes with today. When I was here for the flood in 1993, I'd go out to sack my—you know, my sandbags, you were talking about that—I'd go out and do my sandbag deal. And I look up, and there is this child about so big, with a head about so big—huge bones coming out of her eyebrows—very short, large head, knobby elbows, gnarled knuckles, knobby knees. This child has brittle bone disease. She's 12 years old. She has been operated on already more than a dozen times. Her bones shatter at will. She has come all the way from Wisconsin to stand in the flood in Iowa to help people who

are putting the sandbags up, literally risking her life.

So I talked to this kid, and I said, "Where are you from?" And she said—and I said, "Well, how's your condition?" Because I've seen—you know, she's actually done pretty well. There are a lot of children who have that disease never get out of bed, they have to be prone for their whole life. But this kid is up walking. She said, "I told my parents I wanted to go down there." She said, "I can't hide my whole life. I've got to serve; I've got to be a citizen. I've got to do this like everybody else."

Then that child started coming to the National Institutes of Health for help. Tom Harkin—you know, all this money is put in the NIH all these years. So am I playing on your emotions? You bet I am. What else is there? What else is life about? What is politics about? This child has a chance at life.

And you know what happened? Six years later I go to American University and give a speech, and here is this girl, beaming, a freshman at American University, still growing, still getting stronger, still out there taking chances, doing things other kids wouldn't do with those problems, being brave. We didn't—none of us—Tom Harkin and I didn't have a lick to do with her courage, her bravery, her heart, her soul, her character. But because of what he did, she had a better chance. She had a better chance.

And I'll tell you another story: 1992, Cedar Rapids, Iowa, huge rally we're having out in front of Quaker Oats. And I'm working the crowd—[laughter]—after the speech, grasping for votes. And there is this lady there, this tall white woman, holding an African-American baby. And I said, "Whose baby is this?" She said, "This is my baby." And I said, "Well, how did you get this baby?" She said, "From Miami." She said, "This child was born with AIDS, and no one would take her, and she was going to be homeless, and so I took her."

Now, this is a good story, right? But what you need to know is this woman was living in a rented apartment with her two kids because she had been left by her husband. And she barely had enough money to support her own kids, but she couldn't bear to see this child be left alone, so she took in the other child. Okay, fast-forward to today. Today, at that middle school, Mama was there, since remarried, doing fine, with her daughter, giving me a report on her son, holding that beautiful child

who is almost too big for me to hold. And she has come repeatedly to the National Institutes of Health.

And I held her today, and I said, "Jimiya, how you doing?" She is so beautiful. And I have seen her a half a dozen times. She is so beautiful. And she said, "Oh, Mr. President, I'm giving myself my own shots now, and I'm going to be just fine."

Now, is this playing on your emotions? You bet it is. What is life about anyway? Tom Harkin didn't put a heart in that little girl or a heart in the mother. But she has a chance because of the kind of things he's fought all his public life for. And it is a beautiful story.

So I just ask you to be faithful to your friend Tom Harkin, to fight for the things we believe in. If your friends and neighbors wonder whether the President is right or whether the Republicans are right in saying we ought to take all the non-Social Security surplus and spend it on a tax cut right now and make everybody happy right here before the election, tell them that you think we have earned the benefit of the doubt with our record, and that, you know, we should not squander this. We ought to think about our children's future. We ought to think about what we're going to do when the baby boomers retire. We ought to think about how we can make everybody a part of this economy.

And remember the stories. That's part of what makes us who we are.

It's not about power. It's about ideas and action, and in the end, it's about people. When you breathe your last breath, you are not going to be thinking about what some arcane political philosophy was that you embraced. You're going to be thinking about who you liked, who you loved, how you felt when the seasons changed, and what you're proud of that you did for somebody else. And I want to be part of a political party that tries to give those gifts to America.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 7:35 p.m. at a private residence. In his remarks, he referred to dinner hosts Jerry and Linda Crawford; Gov. Thomas Vilsack of Iowa, and his wife, Christie; Lt. Gov. Sally Pederson of Iowa; Senator Harkin's wife, Ruth, former President and Chief Executive Officer, Overseas Private Investment Corporation; former Congressman Neal Smith and his wife, Beatrix; American University student Brianne Schwantes who suffers from brittle bone disease; and Laura Poisel and her adoptive daughter, Jimiya, who was born with AIDS. The President also referred to the Federal Agriculture Improvement and Reform Act of 1996 (Public Law 104-127). A tape was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

Remarks at a Reception for Senator Tom Harkin in Des Moines July 16, 1999

Thank you very much. First of all, I'm delighted to be in a true Iowa museum, the place where Tom Harkin went to his high school prom. I'll tell you, he is a silver-tongued devil, but when he started talking about bringing the love of his life to the high school prom, old Ruth said, "I don't know how he is going to get out of this one." [Laughter] Sure enough, there he was on his feet again, before you know it. [Laughter]

I want to thank many of you for many things. I want to thank my good friend Secretary Dick Riley for coming with me today and going to the school in Iowa and talking about the need to build or modernize thousands of new schools for America's children for the 21st century. I

thank him. I want to thank my great friend, and Hillary's great friend, Congressman Leonard Boswell for going around with us today and for representing Iowa's farmers and workers and educators and children so well in the House of Representatives. And Dody, thank you for your 31 years of teaching. Thank you very much. Thank you, Rob Tully, for your role in making it fun to be a Democrat again in Iowa. Thank you. Thank you, Lieutenant Governor Sally Pederson, for your leadership. And thank you, Jim Autry. And I'm glad you got a better office, because you deserve it, Sally. Thank you. And I want to say to Governor Vilsack and to Christie, this has been a very impressive administration to watch from afar.