

July 19 / Administration of William J. Clinton, 1999

Earlier this year, I sent to Congress my proposal to reauthorize the Elementary and Secondary Education Act that would help all students reach high standards by strengthening accountability, improving teacher quality, and building on our progress to reduce class size in the early grades all across America. Regrettably, in its current form, H.R. 1995 abolishes a dedicated funding stream for class size reduction and replaces it with a block grant that fails to guarantee that any funding will be used for hiring new teachers to reduce class size. It eliminates the focus on early grades where smaller classes make the most difference and help children learn to read and master the basics. Moreover, the block grant could be used simply to replace state or local funding instead of increasing overall investment in our public schools. I urge the House to approve a substitute measure

that I understand will be offered by Representative Martinez, that would improve teacher quality and maintain our commitment to the class-size reduction effort begun last year.

Last year we made a promise to America's children to provide smaller classes with well-prepared teachers. I urge Congress to keep that promise by enacting legislation that improves our nation's schools by ensuring greater investments in education, improved teacher quality, and smaller classes all across America.

Sincerely,

BILL CLINTON

NOTE: Identical letters were sent to J. Dennis Hastert, Speaker of the House of Representatives, and Richard A. Gephardt, minority leader, House of Representatives.

## Remarks at a Democratic National Committee Dinner

July 19, 1999

Thank you very much. John, that was so nice. I hope somebody got a tape of it. *[Laughter]* Next time somebody gets mad at me, I'll just turn the tape on and play it. *[Laughter]*

I want to thank you and all your officers and Governor Romer and all the people from the DNC here. I'd like to say a special word of appreciation to some people who are here, without whom I could not do my job: my political director, Minyon Moore; and Karen Tramontano, who's done so much work with all of you. I thank them for being here. And someone who's here who spends more time with you than me now, but without whom I would not be here, my good friend Harold Ickes. And Janice Enright, who's also here, thank you very much.

And I'm delighted to see all of you, but I'm especially glad tonight to see emerging from his own rather unique diet control plan, Gerry McEntee—*[laughter]*—thank you for coming back to us tonight. Thank you. I told him how good he looked, and he said, "I don't recommend it to anybody." *[Laughter]*

Let me say the most important thing I can say to you is thanks. Thank you for being so good to me and to Al Gore, to Hillary, to Tip-

per, to our entire administration. We are very grateful to you. And thank you for fighting not only for your own members, but for the interests of Americans everywhere who are not fortunate enough to belong to an organized group who can give them voice.

I sat down 3 or 4 years ago—I wish I had done it again tonight before I came here—just one day I had a little time in my office, and I wrote down the list of all the things that the labor movement was fighting for, with me and the Congress. And only about half of them directly affected your members. Most of our members wouldn't benefit from an increase in the minimum wage. Most of your members even had family and medical leave. Most of your members had the health care protections you were trying to get for other people. And I wish that more Americans knew how much time and effort and money you spend doing things because you believe that you'll be better off if the rest of America is better off.

And I guess—I was in the home of a very wealthy man in Florida a couple of days ago—well, what's today—Monday—4 or 5 days ago—who said that he had stayed a Democrat all these years because he really thought he'd be

better off if everybody else was better off. And I think that is the fundamental issue.

We were talking around the table here. I have a friend who is the head of one of America's largest companies, one of America's most profitable companies, who told me that he had taken to going around New York telling his fellow business executives, if you paid more in taxes in 1993 than you've made in the stock market since, by all means support the Republicans in 2000. [Laughter] But if you didn't, you better stick with us, and you'll do well. [Laughter] I thought it was an interesting argument.

One of the things that I would like to emphasize tonight, as we look at where we are today and we look to the future, is that the ideas that we have fought for and the issues we have fought for and the initiatives we have pushed are no longer seriously a matter of debate. And that is something that you ought to share not only with your members, but they ought to share with their friends and neighbors in every community in this country.

It is no longer open to debate whether we were right to reduce the deficit while we doubled investment in education and training, starting in 1993. We do have nearly 19 million jobs, the longest peacetime expansion in history, the highest homeownership in history, the lowest minority unemployment ever recorded, the lowest welfare rolls in 30 years. It's not open to debate now. It's not open to debate that the approach we took on crime, which was to prevent as much as we could, put more police out there, focus on taking guns away from people with criminal records, get our kids more prevention, and then, punish more severely the relatively small number of people who commit a very high percentage of the crime—we have the lowest crime rate in 26 years. It's not a matter of debate anymore. And I think this is important.

Our country is better for the fact that we have cleaner air, cleaner water, safer food, 90 percent of our kids immunized against serious childhood illnesses for the first time in the entire history of the country. So we have a lot, all of us together, to be proud of. And helping other people to do well turns out to be better for all of us.

John mentioned all those labor issues. If you really go back and dissect every issue he mentioned, basically, the contrary position, the people that were against us were arguing to their

people, if we just take a little more away from the working people we'll be better off. Well, the truth is, they're doing very well because the working people have more.

We're in a big debate in the Congress right now about whether, in the financial reform legislation working its way through Congress, there should or should not be a continued, profound commitment to the Community Reinvestment Act, that basically says, if you've got a bank and a community and you take the community's paychecks as investments in your bank, you need to make investments in that community. The law was passed in 1977. But it was pretty well moribund until we took office. Over 95 percent of the community investment, \$17 billion, made in the 22 years of that law have been made in the 6½ years that I've been in office—investing money into poor areas and in neighborhoods and to businesses that normally couldn't get credit.

Unbelievably enough, there are people in the Congress trying to weaken that law. Our financial institutions have never been healthier—for obvious reasons. The more you spread economic opportunity, the better the rest of us do. And we have always believed, as Democrats, that if we widen the circle of opportunity, if we broaden the meaning of our freedom, if we reward every responsible citizen, if we create a community that's a bigger and bigger and bigger tent where everybody who is doing right has a chance to do well, then our country will be stronger in ways that go way beyond economics.

And every single indicator of social health—from unemployment to the rates of teen pregnancy and drug abuse and smoking—is going in the right direction. Not because all of us are always right on every issue, not even because all of us agree on every issue; but our animating philosophy is we will make the changes necessary to fit America for the 21st century and we will do it in a way that gives everybody a chance to do well and helps us to grow together, not grow apart. And I think that is profoundly important.

But what I think we should think about in the next year and a half, as we continue to fight to move forward in Congress and as we go out into the country in a new political season, is saying to people, this is not a matter of debate anymore. The evidence is in. The argument cannot be refuted. We have shown you that this is right.

And if you look at where we are now—I'd just like to mention two or three things. We've got a lot of issues before us in Congress. But if I might, let me just start with the lamentable defeat of the Patients' Bill of Rights in the Senate. Now, why in the world would anybody be against that? Well, you saw all the ads, and they say, "Oh, this is going to really raise health insurance premiums, and we wouldn't want to do that and reduce the number of people with health insurance." Remember, that's what they said. They said, "You know, if you vote for Bill Clinton's health program, the number of people with health insurance will go down." Remember they said that? "And the number of people being insured by the Government will go up." And as one Democrat said the other day, he said, "I voted for Bill Clinton's health insurance program, and sure enough, the number of people with health insurance went down and the number of people the Government was insuring went up." That's exactly what has happened. Why? Because of the cost of the burden.

Now, again, this was an argument where you had rhetoric and money on one side and reality on the other. I put in the protections of the Patients' Bill of Rights by Executive order for everybody covered by the Federal Government—Federal employees, the veterans, people on Medicare and Medicaid, they all have it. Do you know what it cost us? Less than a buck—a buck—a month a premium.

And then the Republicans had the Congressional Budget Office estimate the cost of the Patients' Bill of Rights in the private sector. And you will all remember all the arguments we've had over the Congressional Budget Office, right, as they have—they've erected a veritable statue of truth for the Congressional Budget Office. So the CBO comes in and says, well, it might cost \$2 a month. And then all of a sudden the CBO was like Rodney Dangerfield and the Republican caucus—no respect any more. And they just discarded it, said, "Well, I don't believe it. I don't believe the evidence; I don't believe the study by my own people. I don't believe it. I believe what the health insurers told me."

And what happened? For the first time—did you ever believe you'd see an article which said that the doctors of the country are thinking about joining a union, organizing a union? Did you ever think? Why? This is not rocket science. If we're going to move into the 21st century, should we manage our health care system as

well as possible? You bet we should. Is there a person in this room or in this country that has a vested interest in seeing a dollar wasted when people's lives are at stake? Of course not.

Take McEntee—suppose—no, look, wait a minute. Suppose he goes to a doctor at an HMO and says, well, you might have a little blockage, come back in 6 months and I'll decide whether you should see a specialist or not. Wait a minute. This is the kind of thing that happens all the time. The doctor says, "I think you should see a specialist;" the person at the HMO says, "No, I'm not sure." And I've got a lot of sympathy—I've said this a million times—I've got a lot of sympathy for those young employees at the HMO's. Those of us who aren't so young anymore, put yourself in their position. Suppose you're 25 years old and you're the first entry point on the claim. What do you know if you like your job? You will never get in trouble for saying no. Right? You never get in trouble for saying, no. They'll just kick the decision up. And you think, "Well, sooner or later this will get to a doctor, and if I'm wrong, the doctor will do right." Now, it may take too long and the damage may be irreparable.

So we said, let the doctors make the call. Maybe they'll do it when they shouldn't, but it's worth the risk to save lives and to save quality of life and to save health care. We said that if you get hurt—God forbid—going out to dinner tonight, a car runs up on the curb and hits you, you ought to go to the nearest emergency room, not the one your plan happens to cover. And we said that if you're 6-months pregnant and you're having a difficult pregnancy, and you work for a small business and your employer has to change plans in the middle of your pregnancy, you shouldn't be forced to change your ob-gyn, your obstetrician. You shouldn't be forced to. Or if you're in the middle of a chemotherapy treatment which may determine whether you live or not—which is traumatic enough anyway—and your employer has to change providers, you ought to at least finish the treatment.

And all this stuff would cost, they said, two bucks a month. So what harm could it do to give that kind of peace of mind to the country? But the HMO's said, no; so they beat it. Now, I think the HMO's would be better off if America were healthier. I mean, we'd all pay premiums, and they'd get to keep more of them because they wouldn't have to spend as much

on hospital bills and surgical bills. It's just what I think.

I believe that we ought to always think about what's best for the largest number of our people and the rest of us are going to do fine. And if you look at the decisions facing us over this budget—the big issues here involve a debate that if I had told you in '92, when you were helping me get elected President, we'd be talking about now, you'd say, "You know, I like that young fellow, but he's crazy." [Laughter] If I had said to you, vote for me and in 6 years we'll be debating what to do with this surplus—you think about it; we had a \$290 billion deficit, we quadrupled the debt in 12 years—I say, "I want you to vote for me because we'll have a huge debate 6 years from now about what to do with the surplus"—you'll say, "That kid is too nuts to be President." You will never be for him. Right?

So, we're having the debate. And what they say is, don't let—we seem to have an agreement, although it's not complete, on not spending the Social Security tax portion of the surplus, and putting that against Social Security. And that's a very good thing; I don't want to minimize that—although, the agreement is not complete. But then they say, "Well, we'll spend the rest of the surplus on a tax cut; we'll give the people back their money." It's very appealing—and that their tax cut is bigger than our tax cut.

What they don't say is to fund their tax cut you can do nothing to add a day to the life of the Medicare Trust Fund, with the baby boomers coming down the pike. You will have to have massive cuts in education and other domestic spending. They can't even fund my defense budget, much less the one they say they're for. And we won't pay the debt off.

What I have done is to ask the American people to think about today, but also think about 10 and 20 years from today—what made us strong. And I just mention three things: the aging of America, the education of our children, and the health of our economy.

The aging of America means that we'll have twice as many people over 65 in 30 years as we do today—twice as many. I hope to be one of them. And we'll have more people drawing Social Security and Medicare and fewer people working. How are we going to bridge the gap? We have to make some changes in the programs, but we also have to put more money into Medicare.

Now, my plan saves most of the surplus for Social Security and Medicare. It also makes some reforms in Medicare that require people to pay more for the copay for the lab tests that often are overdone, and a modest increase in the part B premium according to inflation—which is pretty small, anyway—but in return, gets rid of all the copay for all the preventive screenings that keep us alive and keep us healthy in the first place, and starts a modest, but important, prescription drug benefit which would pay half the cost of prescription drugs, up to \$5,000, for most beneficiaries, and will give subsidies up to 150 percent of the poverty level and require no copay up to 130 percent, and no premium.

Now, I think this is a good thing to do. I think it will save money over the long run. It will keep people out of hospitals. It will keep people out of surgery. It will help people who are going to live longer anyway to live better, as well as helping a lot of people to prolong their lives. And it will relieve—it is not just a program for the elderly, because it will relieve their children of the financial burden of caring for them so they can invest their money raising their grandchildren.

So I believe that we should save Social Security and Medicare first. Then I believe we should continue what we've been doing the last 6 years, our investments in the things that are fundamental to our future, especially the education of our children. You know, by next year we'll have every classroom in this country hooked up to the Internet. And because of the E-rate we'll be able to subsidize the poor schools, so even the poorest children will be able to take advantage of that. That means that it won't matter as much as it used to if they don't have enough books in the school library. All they've got to have is that hook-up and a printer, and they will have just as much access to what is in the great libraries of the world as children in the wealthiest schools in this country. And I think it's important.

We gave this HOPE scholarship, this \$1,500 tax credit for the first 2 years of college, and tax credits for the other years of higher education. And we've got a proposal now that will provide people access to funds for a lifetime of training. And I think we should continue to do this. I think this is important. I don't believe that we, in this time of good economic fortune, should have a tax cut that is so big it would

require us to cut education when, plainly, we need to continue to invest in it.

And the third thing I want to talk about is the health of the economy itself. You know, I used to carry around with me a sort of 10 rules of politics. And one of my rules of politics was, when someone tells you it's not a money problem, they're talking about somebody else's problem. [Laughter] They're never talking about their own problem. Life is far more than economics and politics is about more, but this is a better country in no small measure because more good people can find work and be rewarded for it. And, therefore, it is important for us to try to keep this economy going and to spread its benefits.

And I would just mention two things in that regard that I think are profoundly important. First of all, this new markets tour I took last week—I went to Appalachia; I went to the Mississippi Delta; I went to the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation, to East St. Louis, south Phoenix, and to East L.A. I saw the urban and rural face of continuing need in America. Secretary Slater was there with me; many others went. I saw all these people who are dying to work, saw a lot of people who are working who are poor. I saw people living in conditions that you would think are unconscionable at a time when homeownership is at an all-time high and construction is doing well.

Now, one of the big debates we have in the White House and in the Treasury Department is, how can you keep this economic growth going with unemployment under 5 percent for 2 years in a row without inflation? One way is to extend that to the areas that haven't felt it—because you get more workers and more consumers and, therefore, you won't have inflation. You'll just be literally adding to the whole rounded economic picture.

So I have asked the Congress, yes, to fund a second round of the empowerment zone program the Vice President has done such a brilliant job of running; but also to pass laws which would give people the same financial incentives to invest in the poor areas of America we give them today to invest in poor areas overseas—from the Caribbean to Latin America to Africa to Asia. That is important. And that's something we ought to do. And our friends in the Republican Party ought to be for this. They always say they want tax incentives to do everything. This is one where I agree with them, because

we should lower the relative risk of taking a chance in a place that has not known this recovery. But anybody who analyzes it will tell you this is the number one opportunity we have to keep this economy going.

And the last thing I want to say about that is, if you adopt our plan for saving the surplus, most of it—for Social Security and Medicare—we cannot only provide a tax increase for families that's worth hundreds of dollars a year—to save for retirement, for child care, for long-term care—we can actually make America debt-free in 15 years for the first time since 1835.

Now, you ask yourself, why would the progressive party of America care about that? Because in the world in which we live—as opposed to the world we lived in 60 years ago, when Franklin Roosevelt had to help spend us out of the Depression—in the world in which we live the interest rates are set globally and money can cross the globe in the flash of an eye. Just think about it. If we keep paying this debt down until we're out of debt, what does that mean? That means lower interest rates; that means more investment, more jobs, more money for wages at low inflation. It means working people have lower interest rates for house payments, car payments, credit card payments, college loan payments. It means that when there's a global financial crisis, as there was in Asia 2 years ago, we will be less affected by it. And it means the people we sell things to around the world will be able to borrow the money they need at a lower cost, too, because we won't be in there taking it away to fund our bad habits. I'm telling you, it is a gift we could give our children. It would save the lives—the lives of working people by keeping interest rates low for a very long period of time.

Now, I think we have to say, yes, America should get a tax cut, but we should save Social Security and Medicare first, and we ought to do it in a way that allows us to pay off the debt and continue to invest in education, in defense, in the environment, in the things that we have to have to keep this country going. And it will keep us coming together.

Now, I believe that is the right thing to do. But like I said, it's not just an argument anymore. Look at the evidence. Look at the evidence. When you think about all these people that are out there that are still looking for a chance, if we give them a chance, the rest of us will do better. That's what I believe.

Let me just close with this story. I went to Iowa a couple of days ago, had a great time. They had this big crowd of folks. I said, "You all ought to be glad to see me, I'm the only person that's been here in months not running for anything." [Laughter] But I was in Iowa, and I was reminded of two things—in 1993 I went to Iowa when they had that flood—you remember the flood we had along the Mississippi—500-year flood. And there I was in Des Moines, all this flood and the water everywhere. And I went over and I was stacking those sandbags and visiting with the people that were doing it. And I looked down and there was this tiny child who was 13 years old, but was the size of about a 6- or 7-year-old. And I noticed that her bones were bulging everywhere. It turned out she has that brittle bone disease that some children are born with. Some children never get out of bed with it. She was up and walking but there around people stacking sandbags, actually working.

And she had had, I think, 12 or 15 operations already, and was—never had been able to grow—and the knots where her elbows were and in all of her joints because her bones had been broken so many times. The child's name was Brianne Schwantes. I'll never forget her. And I said, "What are you doing here?" I said, "Do you live here?" She said, "No, sir, I live in Wisconsin." But she said, "You know, I saw this on television, and I told my parents we ought to go down there and help those people." And I said, "Aren't you afraid of getting hurt?" She said, "Yes, but you know, I could get another break at home. I want to be part of what my country is doing." She said, "These people need all the help they can get."

Last year I went to American University to give a speech. There was Brianne Schwantes, 18 years old, a freshman at American University, with all of her friends. I brought them to a radio address, let them come see me. But what I want you to know is, every year from that year, the time I first met her till then, she kept coming to NIH getting help. NIH—paid for by taxpayers. Well, my daughter—thank God—didn't have brittle bone disease, but I think I'm better off that I live in a country that gives a child like that a chance to grow up and go to college.

I was giving a speech in Iowa, and I looked out, and there was this beautiful African-American girl smiling. The first time I saw her she

was a baby, in 1992, in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. I spoke at this rally in front of the Quaker Oats plant. I was working my way through the crowd, and there's this real tall white lady holding this African-American baby. And I said, "Where did you get that baby?" She smiled, and she said, "That's my baby." I said, "Well, where did you get the baby?" She said, "This baby was born in Miami with AIDS and abandoned, and no one would take her. So I thought I should."

So I got so interested in this woman and I figured, well, gosh, it's nice that a nice middle class lady in a place like Iowa would do this. Guess what—this woman had been abandoned by her husband, was raising two children on her own, living in an apartment where she could barely pay the rent. But she cared enough about a baby she never knew to take this child with AIDS, not knowing whether she would live.

I have seen that child about once a year since 1992. That child was permitted to come to the NIH to get good treatment. And when I was giving that speech in Iowa and I looked out—she is tall now, probably above average height for her age, a perfectly beautiful child, smiling, lighting up the room. She jumped in my arms, and I said, "Jimiya, you're about to get so big I can't hold you anymore."

What I want to tell you—what's all that got to do with this? I'm glad I live in a country which gave that child a chance to have a life. I'm glad I live in a country where people like her mother, who had no rational way in the world she should have given that child a home, but she did. And what I want to say to you is, I'm not running for anything, but, darn it, we were right. We have evidence. We were right about Social Security and Medicare. And we're right about keeping our commitments to education. And we're right about trying to reach out and give people who haven't been part of this economic recovery a chance to be part of it. And we're right about trying to secure our economic health for the long term. And we're right about not cutting anybody out, but cutting everybody in.

And so you gave those ideas the chance to be proved right. I am profoundly grateful that I had the opportunity to be President. I am very grateful I am still President, because I think we can do some of the most important things that this administration has done in the next year and a half. But what I want you to

do when you go home tonight is to know in the marrow of your bones that what you always believed was right is right, and that you have had a chance to demonstrate that you don't have to debate anymore; you don't have to worry; you don't have to argue.

And tomorrow and every tomorrow from now on, you will be able to stand up with greater confidence in what you believe because it works. And when you get discouraged and when you worry whether if they outspend us by \$3 million or \$4 million, we can prevail, just think about those two little girls. And you will know, you will know, that it's worth fighting for that kind of America for all the children of this country in the 21st century.

Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:03 p.m. in the State Room at the Mayflower Hotel. In his remarks, he referred to John J. Sweeney, president, AFL-CIO; former Gov. Roy Romer of Colorado, general chair, Democratic National Committee; former Deputy Chief of Staff Harold Ickes; former White House assistant Janice Enright; Gerald W. McEntee, president, American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees; Laura Poisel and her adoptive daughter, Jimiya, who was born with AIDS; and Alfonso Fanjul, who hosted a Democratic National Committee dinner in Coral Gables, FL, on July 13.

## Remarks on the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty and an Exchange With Reporters

July 20, 1999

*The President.* Good morning. I have just had the privilege of meeting with the three Apollo 11 astronauts who, 30 years ago, carried out the first landing on the Moon: Neil Armstrong, Buzz Aldrin, and Michael Collins. They and everyone at NASA over the years have made an extraordinary contribution to our Nation and to humanity. I am very grateful to them.

President Kennedy, who set a goal of putting a man on the Moon by the late 1960's, was committed to using technology to unlock the mysteries of the heavens. But President Kennedy was also concerned that technology, if misused, literally could destroy life on Earth. So another goal he vigorously pursued was one first proposed by President Eisenhower, a treaty to ban for all time the testing of the most destructive weapons ever devised, nuclear weapons.

As a first step, President Kennedy negotiated a limited test ban treaty to ban nuclear tests except those conducted underground. But for far too long nations failed to heed the call to ban all nuclear tests. More countries sought to acquire nuclear weapons and to develop ever more destructive weapons. This threatened America's security and that of our friends and allies. It made the world a more dangerous place.

Since I have been President, I have made ending nuclear tests one of my top goals. And in 1996 we concluded a Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty; 152 countries have now signed it, and 41, including many of our allies, have now ratified it. Today, on Capitol Hill, a bipartisan group of Senators is speaking out on the importance of the treaty. They include Senators Jeffords, Specter, Daschle, Biden, Bingaman, Dorgan, Bob Kerrey, Levin, and Murray. I am grateful for their leadership and their support of this critical agreement.

And today I want to express, again, my strong determination to obtain ratification of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty. America already has stopped nuclear testing. We have, today, a robust nuclear force and nuclear experts affirm that we can maintain a safe and reliable deterrent without nuclear tests.

The question now is whether we will adopt or whether we will lose a verifiable treaty that will bar other nations from testing nuclear weapons. The Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty will strengthen our national security by constraining the development of more advanced and more destructive nuclear weapons and by limiting the possibilities for more countries to acquire nuclear weapons. It will also enhance our ability to detect suspicious activities by other nations.