

Remarks on the 25th Anniversary of the Legal Services Corporation July 27, 1999

Thank you very much. Let me say, first of all, I apologize for being late. I've been over meeting with the Russian Prime Minister, and you would have given me a pass, I think. I was doing good work, I hope.

Lucy, thank you for your statement, and on behalf of all of us, for the award. Let me say, I could just sit here and sort of look at all the people that are here. I hesitate to even call people by name, but I want to thank all the Members of Congress who are here, including Congressman Berman and Congressman Ramstad. I'd also—I see Mr. Conyers and Congressman Cardin, Congressman Allen, Congresswoman Waters, former Congressman Fox, and Father Drinan, we're glad to see you here, sir. Thank you. Sarge and Eunice Shriver; the ABA presidents, Jerry Shestack, Bill Ide, Roberta Cooper Ramo, William Paul. And I see former Secretary of Commerce and Trade Ambassador Mickey Kantor, who was on the Legal Services board with Hillary.

We all go back a long way, all of us who care about this, it seems like. Doug Eakeley and Tom Allen and I, we went abroad together as young men 30 years ago. We must have gotten infected with a Legal Services virus. *[Laughter]* Judge Broderick, it's good to see you here. And Jim Ramstad said, we were there 36 years ago—is that how long it was? *[Laughter]* They're coming tomorrow; you should come back. Make you feel old, or young, as the case may be.

I want to say that for our family, the Legal Services Corporation has been very important. My wife has done many things I've been proud of, but I have never been more proud of anything than her service on the Legal Services Corporation to which President Carter appointed her, and the work she did as the chair of that Corporation.

You know, here in Washington, everybody's got a lawyer. Whether you need one or not, everybody's got a lawyer, you know? *[Laughter]* We forget what it's like to have a lawyer be the difference between homelessness and having a stable home; between unemployment and the security of a job; between the disintegration of a household and holding a family together in difficult times. The Legal Services Corporation

has made equal justice not a political cause but an everyday occurrence. We have tried to advocate that—I see our former chief advocate, Mr. Dellinger, there—but this is a personal thing for those of us who have experienced it.

Hillary's brother, in the back, was a public defender for many years in Miami. And Janet Reno, as a prosecutor, supported efforts to make sure that everybody had a decent defense—something that I think is a sterling example.

Every one of you in this room has that sort of story. But those of us who are old enough to remember when it was different feel it perhaps the more strongly. And I want to thank Howard Berman and Jim Ramstad for giving voice to the struggles we're now engaged in in Congress. Sometimes I think that the Legal Services Corporation, even though it's very young—25 years old—is suffering from the infirmity of its success and, perhaps, from the success of our economy at this moment that we have people who may make this decision without the benefit of memory. So I ask you to remember.

It was in 1962, not that long ago, when the Supreme Court had not yet established a constitutional right to counsel in criminal cases. Then, the idea of legal assistance in civil cases was a distant dream. Disadvantaged Americans who had a hard enough time just getting through the day found that the legal system was stacked against them, and even if it wasn't, they couldn't possibly know it because they couldn't get a lawyer.

Our country's faith in the law was strained in the hearts of many because of injustice and the stain of racism. But the men and women who founded the Legal Services Corporation knew that educating people about the legal rights they did have was critical in the fight for equal rights; that if people did not know about their rights and could not exercise them, the fact that the Supreme Court had enshrined them was of little practical impact.

Today, thanks in large measure to the efforts of the Legal Services Corporation and the countless lawyers you have inspired, it is clear that a lot of progress has been made. Lucy's

story really tells the tale. The doors of opportunity are open wider, and we are fortunate now to be living in a period of unique prosperity, with the lowest minority unemployment in our history and the highest homeownership in our history. We have the lowest crime rates and welfare rolls in a generation. But you and I know there are still a lot of poor folks out there. There are still people in places that have been left behind, even by this great recovery.

I traveled across the country a couple of weeks ago, from Appalachia to the Mississippi Delta, to East St. Louis, to the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation, south Phoenix, and East Los Angeles. And there are still people out there—most of them, by the way, are working; most of them are working, doing the same thing you and I do every day, for much lesser rewards—who are having enormous difficulties. So we have this.

It is also true that in spite of the progress that we've made in meeting the promise of equal justice, there are still a lot of people out there who don't trust the legal system or the law enforcement system. So there is a need, a crying need for the work of the Legal Services Corporation. And that's idealistic, hard-working lawyers—virtually 100 percent of whom could be making a lot more money doing something else—who believe that the law should be an instrument that benefits us all equally and that the rights that are enunciated in the law books and in the Supreme Court cases should be real in the lives of all Americans.

President Kennedy did call for equal justice here 36 years ago. Last week in this room, with another glittering array of legal talent, from lawyers to judges to scholars of all races and backgrounds in this country, we renewed our pledge to that ideal.

Today I think we have to say again, equal justice is the birthright of every American. It is the obligation of those of us in public life and politics to try to bring the benefits of this economic recovery into every corner of our country. But the Scripture says that the poor will be with us always. But American law says they will not be disadvantaged under the law. And until we close the gap between our principles and our reality, we will need the Legal Services Corporation.

For years now, some in Congress have tried to dismantle it. They have seen it as a political thing. I do not believe it is political to say a

poor person should have the same right as a rich person. I do not believe it is political to say we have to bring the law into the real lives of all Americans.

We have stood firm against the opposition to the Legal Services Corporation. I'm proud that every budget we have submitted has requested more funding for Legal Services. Like Congressman Ramstad and Congressman Berman—and by their presence here, all the other Members who are here—I was deeply disappointed that last week the Appropriations Subcommittee in the House voted to cut my request in half, leaving hundreds of thousands of American families without the critical legal protections they need.

But need is the wrong word. Under the law, they are entitled to them as citizens. For 25 years, the Legal Services Corporation has stood above the fray of partisanship, but in the fray of the grimy details of daily life that require legal protection and legal assistance. I ask Congress to put politics aside, to follow on this issue the model of the Legal Services Corporation, and give the full funding and support the Corporation needs. In a very large budget, it is a very small item. But it has an enormous impact.

Think how outraged Americans of both political parties in all political philosophies would have been if this fine woman and all of her fellow tenants had been thrown on the street for failure to pay electric bills that they paid. We could have passed the hat in America and collected the annual budget of the Legal Services Corporation to help them. You know that's true. How then can we walk away from the people who save them, and can save so many like them every day, in every way—in publicized and quiet ways that we will never know?

Thomas Jefferson once said that equal justice is a bright constellation of our political faith. With conscience and conviction, let us get the support for the Legal Services Corporation it needs. We cannot let the bright constellation dim. Twenty-five is too young, and there are still too many people out there who need you.

Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 5:08 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Prime Minister Sergey Stepashin of Russia; Legal Services Corporation client Lucy Johnson, who introduced the President; former

Representative Jon D. Fox; R. Sargent Shriver, honorary cochairman, Consortium for the National Equal Justice Library, and his wife, Eunice Kennedy Shriver; Father Robert F. Drinan, professor of law, Georgetown University; Jerome J. Shestack, R. William Ide III, Roberta Cooper Ramo, former presidents, and William G. Paul, president-elect, American Bar Association; Douglas Eakeley, chair, Legal Services Corporation

board of directors; retired Marin County, CA, Superior Court Judge Henry J. Broderick; former Justice Department Solicitor General Walter E. Dellinger; and the First Lady's brother, Hugh Rodham. The transcript released by the Office of the Press Secretary also included the remarks of the First Lady. The proclamation of July 26 is listed in Appendix D at the end of this volume.

Statement on the Death of Dan Dutko *July 27, 1999*

Hillary and I are deeply saddened by the untimely death of our good friend Dan Dutko. Dan has been a friend, an ally, and an adviser for nearly three decades. He enriched our lives with his enthusiasm and served his country with distinction. He deeply believed in the cause of the Democratic Party and worked tirelessly to

ensure that it would have the ability to communicate effectively with the voters. He was a devoted supporter of Israel and a champion of national service.

Our thoughts and prayers are with his wife, Deborah, and their two young children, Matthew and Jonathan.

Statement on House Action on Proposed Legislation To Extend Normal Trade Relations With China *July 27, 1999*

I welcome the strong bipartisan vote in the House today to extend normal trade relations (NTR) with China.

Extending NTR is the right way to advance America's interests. Our exports to China have nearly tripled over the past decade to \$14.2 billion. NTR boosts not only America's economy but also those of Hong Kong and Taiwan, as well as China.

NTR promotes China's integration into the global economy, which in turn strengthens market-oriented reformers within China. Expanding trade can help bring greater social change to China by spreading the tools, contacts, and ideas that promote freedom. Maintaining NTR helps us to move China toward global norms on

human rights, weapons of mass destruction, crime and drugs, and the environment, as well as on trade. China clearly has far to go in all these areas, and we will continue to address our differences directly and protect our national interests.

I remain determined to pursue an agreement for China to join the WTO on viable commercial terms—not as a favor to China but as a means of opening and reforming China's markets and holding China to the rules of the global trading system. I remain ready to work closely with Congress to secure permanent NTR status for China in the context of a commercially strong WTO agreement.