

Remarks at a State Dinner Hosted by Prime Minister Jennifer Shipley of New Zealand in Christchurch
September 15, 1999

Thank you very much. Forgive my hoarseness.

First, Prime Minister, to you, your family, your government, and the people of New Zealand, I cannot thank you enough for the wonderful welcome that our party and my family members have received here. I apologize for having to rush home, but all of you know of the great storm that is now hitting the American coast. We had to move over 2½ million people today in an attempt to minimize the loss of life. So I hope you'll forgive me, but let me say I have had a wonderful time here.

I'm glad that the fashion people approved of the way I wore the beautiful outfit you gave me. [Laughter] You know, I've been President 7 years now. I've been all over the world. I've received any number of items of clothing. And when you go to these meetings, very often the people who are there get the native dress, and we wear them. And usually, when I go home, there is someone making fun of how I looked in the dress of whatever country I was. This is the smartest outfit I've ever been given.

In the calendar cycle, we in the Northern Hemisphere are moving in the opposite direction, so we're coming into fall and winter. And if you watch the television, I'll probably be in your outfit several times more before the end of the year.

Let me say from the bottom of my heart, this has been a magical trip. I think every person, when he or she is young, dreams of finding some enchanted place, of beautiful mountains and breathtaking coastline and clear lakes and amazing wildlife, and most people give up on it because they never get to New Zealand. This has been an amazing thing for me and for all of us.

You might be interested to know that on the front page of the Washington Post today, there is a picture of my National Economic Adviser bungee jumping. [Laughter] We all had to re-

mind him that he wasn't supposed to be Houdini and slip the cords, you know. [Laughter] And so the whole story was about how much fun we were all having.

I hope that it will also be reported that at this meeting we took a strong stand for freedom and human rights in East Timor, and we are going in there, together with our friends from Australia and others in this region, to try to protect the integrity of the referendum for democracy and independence, and save lives. And I thank New Zealand for its leadership in this cause. We also stood for the proposition that we can best lift the world's fortune by having more free and fair trade. And that, too, was profoundly important.

We celebrated today our partnership in Antarctica and talked about the importance of Antarctica to our whole future. I have mentioned often that, as all of you know proudly, when the new millennium dawns, it will dawn first on New Zealand. I will be proud to cross that bridge into the 21st century with you, knowing that we will be partners for peace and prosperity and a more decent and humane future for all our children. And I thank you for that partnership.

I'd like to ask all of you to join me in a toast to the Prime Minister, to her wonderful husband, to her government, and to the people of New Zealand.

[At this point, the participants drank a toast.]

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 6:56 p.m. in a hangar at the Wigram Air Museum. In his remarks, he referred to Prime Minister Shipley's husband, Burton. The transcript released by the Office of the Press Secretary also included the remarks of Prime Minister Shipley.