

Oct. 29 / Administration of William J. Clinton, 1999

Message to the Senate Transmitting the Ireland-United States Tax Convention

October 29, 1999

To the Senate of the United States:

I transmit herewith for Senate advice and consent to ratification the Convention Amending the Convention Between the Government of the United States of America and the Government of Ireland for the Avoidance of Double Taxation and the Prevention of Fiscal Evasion with Respect to Taxes on Income and Capital Gains signed at Dublin on July 28, 1997. The Convention, which was negotiated pursuant to the Senate's resolution of October 31, 1997, granting

advice and consent to the 1997 Convention, modifies the tax treatment of dividends received from Real Estate Investment Trusts.

I recommend that the Senate give early and favorable consideration to this Convention and give its advice and consent to ratification.

WILLIAM J. CLINTON

The White House,
October 29, 1999.

Remarks at a Democratic National Committee Dinner in Atlanta, Georgia

October 29, 1999

Thank you so much. Well, first, Larry and Carol, thank you for opening your home. This is a beautiful tent. I was complimenting Larry on the tent, and he said, "Well, it covers the parking lot." [Laughter] And I said, "Well, maybe you ought to just leave it up then." [Laughter] It's wonderful, and we could probably, most of us, be back tomorrow night if you'll have us here. [Laughter] This is really, really beautiful.

And I want to compliment you, too, Doctor, on your short speech, where you said everything that needed to be said. And maybe we'll get a chance to vote for you someday; if you give speeches like that, you'll be elected to anything.

I want to thank our DNC chair, Joe Andrew, for coming down with me tonight and for his leadership, and my good friend Andy Tobias and your State chair, David Worley. Thank you, David. I also want to acknowledge our finance director, Fran Katz, who is here. And her sister's family is here tonight. And I think this is Fran's last event. She has been magnificent for us, and thank you, Fran, for all the work you've done.

I want to thank my longtime friend Senator Max Cleland and tell all of you that, in my opinion at least—I may be a little biased because we've been friends a long time, and I was the happiest person in America outside

Georgia when he got elected in 1996. But he is doing a wonderful job for you, and you should be very proud of him.

I want to thank Senator Charles Walker, the majority leader of the Senate, for being here; and Mike Thurmond, your labor commissioner; and all the other officials that are here: my longtime friend Michael Hightower, the Fulton County executive. Thank you all for coming.

I will try to make a fairly brief speech tonight, but it occurred to me you have so many new people here tonight that don't normally come to these things, and two of them I see are from Arkansas. I don't know if the others have any excuse or not. [Laughter] But it occurred to me that if people were asking you why you were doing this, that tomorrow, people might ask the rest of you why you were here. And I would like to give you a few reasons, because they're why I'm here.

And Joe Andrew's right. I guess I don't have to be here; I'm not running for anything. I kind of hate it; I wish I could. [Laughter] But that's the system we've got and every time I see a debate, I wish I were part of it. When the Republicans were debating in New Hampshire the other night, I wish I had been part of it, you know. [Laughter] I'm always convinced I could turn just one more, you know.

I come here tonight because I believe in what we have done these last 7 years, because I believe the choices before the American people are stark but also marvelous, and because I believe that we are now in a position to do something that in my whole lifetime—in my whole lifetime, which now spans 53 years—we have never been able to do as a country before. We are, for the first time in my lifetime, economically and socially and politically strong enough and free enough of external and internal debilitating crises that we actually have a chance to write the future of our dreams for our children.

And I'd like to tell you how I think that came to be and what I think the choices are. And tomorrow I hope you'll be able to tell people why you came.

When I came to Georgia in 1991 and 1992, the United States was in a period of economic distress, social division—we had a big riot in Los Angeles, remember?—political drift, where the so-called vision thing was derided and government itself had been discredited. Even liberals thought government would mess up a two-car parade. And I came before the people of Georgia, and I said, "Look I have some new ideas. It's time to put people back at the center of our politics. It's time to work for unity, not division. It's time to build a country with a goal of opportunity for every citizen and responsibility from every citizen and a community of all of our people, meeting our responsibilities at home but also our responsibilities to lead the world for peace and freedom and prosperity."

And Georgia was good to me. I remember when I ran in the Georgia primary, all the Washington experts said that "Governor Clinton heads south to Georgia in deep trouble. If he doesn't get at least 40 percent in the Georgia primary, he's toast." It was by then I'd already been declared dead three times. Now it's happened so often, I'm going to open a tombstone business when I leave office. [Laughter] But anyway—and the people of Georgia in the primary gave me 57 percent of the vote in 1992 and sent me on my way. And I'm very grateful for that.

And then I remember, we had a rally in a football stadium outside Atlanta, in the weekend before the election of '92. You remember that, Max? And we filled it. And I think Buddy Darden was there. We filled the rally. And I remember Hank Aaron was there, and there

were over 25,000 people there. And we won the State by 13,000 votes. So everyone who spoke at that rally can fairly claim to have made me President of the United States, since there were twice as many people there as we won the State by. But we made it, and the rest is history.

I believe that a parallel process has been going on in Georgia, trying to create a new Democratic Party with Max and, first, Governor Miller and now Governor Barnes, with the election of Mike Thurmond and Thurbert Baker, Senator Walker, all the other people on your team, a new generation of leadership, reflecting the broad society of this great State.

We've been working at this now, the Vice President and I and our team, for 7 years. And when I came in '92, we made an argument to the people. We said, "Hey, give us a chance; the country's in trouble." And the American people gave us a chance. But there is no more argument, because the results are in. And from the day I became President to this day, this is the record: We have 19½ million new jobs and the longest peacetime economic expansion in history, which by February, if it continues, will be the longest expansion ever, including all that has occurred during our wars; we have the highest homeownership in history, the lowest unemployment rate in 29 years, the lowest inflation rate in 30 years, the lowest welfare rolls in 30 years, the lowest poverty rate in 20 years, the lowest teen pregnancy rate in 30 years, the lowest crime rate in 30 years, the first back-to-back budget surpluses in 42 years; we've paid \$140 billion, all for the national debt, the largest in history in the last 2 years; and we've done it with the smallest Federal Government in 37 years.

Now, those are not arguments; those are the facts. And it was done by a Democratic Party with a modern philosophy rooted in old values that proved that we could manage the economy, balance the budget, reform welfare, be for high standards and more investment in education, be for the right kind of crime policies, and move this country forward. And it wasn't easy.

We had our casualties. One of them is Buddy Darden, sitting right back there. He was one of the people who was brave enough to stand up and vote for my economic plan. When the Republicans said, falsely, that it would raise taxes on all Americans, it didn't. It raised taxes on most everybody in this room, including me—

[laughter]—but not all Americans. And we said, “Look, everybody’s been talking about this deficit, but nobody wants to do anything about it. If we don’t cut the deficit in half in 4 years, we’re never going to turn the economy around.” And most everybody in this room has made more from the stock market and their investments and the healthy economy and low interest rates than the higher taxes of ’93 cost. But Buddy Darden’s just one of the people who was brave enough to lay down his job in Congress to build up a better future for our people and our country, and I will never forget it.

So the first thing I want to say is, these are real numbers. And everywhere along the way, we had to fight in the face of bitter partisan opposition for our economic plan, for our crime plan, for the right kind of welfare reform that required able-bodied people to work, but also protected their children’s food and medicine, and gave their parents more child care. And it’s working. It’s working. And you should be proud of that.

So the first thing you can say is, “Well, we gave those guys a chance 7 years ago, and it’s worked out pretty well.” Now, that ought to be the first part of your answer.

And the second thing we have to ask ourselves is, now what? You know, all these polls say, well—and the press always, because they love to kind of stick the knife in and see if you squirm while they’re sticking you—they’re always saying, “Well, but the polls say 70 percent of the people want a change.” And I always say, “Well, if they’d polled me, I’d have been in the 70 percent.” If someone said, “Vote for me; I’ll do everything Bill Clinton did,” I’d vote against that person. Why? Because the world is changing very fast. And because what I have tried to do, compared to where we were in 1991 and 1992, is get this country turned around. It’s like turning around an ocean liner in the middle of the ocean; you can’t do it overnight. And we are moving in the right direction. But there are a lot of big challenges out there.

So the second thing I want you to think about is, what are we going to do now? My belief is, since this is the chance of a lifetime to build the future of our dreams, we ought to be taking on the big challenges and seizing on the big opportunities. And I’d like to tell you what they are. And then I’d like to compare our position with the contemporary Republican position.

But first, let me just make a general observation here. Twenty-one years ago, when I ran for Governor for the first time—and I was 32 years old, and I didn’t know what I was doing, I don’t think—I asked this kind of old sage in Arkansas, I said, “You got any advice for me?” I was about 30 points ahead in the polls. He said, “Yes, Bill.” He said, “Let me tell you something. In this business, you’re always most vulnerable when you think you’re invulnerable.” And if you think about that, that’s a pretty good rule for life. You know, I’m convinced one of the reasons that we’ve had such intense partisan battles in the last year is that the majority party of Congress believe they have the luxury of doing it because the country’s doing so well, so there can’t be any really adverse consequences to not paying our United Nations dues and not ratifying the test ban treaty and not funding the Wye peace talks or anything else, fooling around with the environment. Because, after all, things are going well and everybody’s in a good humor, and so this will be treated with a certain amount of frivolity.

And if you think about it, countries are no different than businesses or families or individuals. How many times have you made a mistake in your life because you relaxed your concentration or you got diverted when things were going well, and you felt that nothing possibly could happen very bad? I see a lot of you nodding your heads. This is a common human challenge.

So it is not self-evident that we will use this great moment of prosperity and success to do what we ought to do. But if you think about the children and the grandchildren that we all have or hope to have, and what we owe to them and how, at least in my 53 years, our country has never had this kind of a chance before, we’ll have a hard time explaining why we didn’t make the most of it if we don’t.

So here’s what I think we ought to be doing to build that bridge to the new century for our kids. Number one, we have to deal with the aging of America. We’re going to double the number of people over 65 in 30 years. That means we have to save Social Security for the baby boom generation, which is a gift not only to the baby boom generation but to their children and grandchildren who won’t have to support us if we save Social Security. It means we have to save Medicare, and we should reform it to make it more like the best private sector practices in medicine, but also we should

add a prescription drug benefit, because 75 percent of our seniors don't have affordable prescription drugs.

It means that we should deal with the children of America. For the first time ever in the last 2 years, we have more kids in the public schools than we had in the baby boom generation. And they're a very different crowd. They are the most racially and ethnically, culturally and religiously diverse group of children we have ever had. It is true here in Atlanta, where you have more foreign companies headquartered than any other city in America. It is true just across the river from the Nation's Capital in Washington, in Fairfax County, which has the most diverse school district in America, children from 180 different national and ethnic groups in one school district. It's true in my home State of Arkansas, which in the 1980 census had the highest percentage of people living in Arkansas who were born there of any State in the country except West Virginia, now ranks second in the country in the percentage growth of Hispanics. This is a nationwide thing. We are changing the whole scope of what it means to be an American in our schools before our very eyes. And we must be committed to giving these kids, every one of them, a genuinely world-class education.

We need higher standards; we need more accountability; we need to be committed to turn around failing schools or close them down. But we don't need to brand kids failures if the system is failing them. We need the after-school programs, the summer school programs, the modern schools, all of our classrooms hooked up to the Internet, smaller classes that we want to bring with 100,000 teachers there. There are a lot of things we can do. But we don't get there unless we make it our priority.

We need to deal with the fact that not everybody in our country has participated in our recovery. I'll give you some surprising examples. In the State of South Dakota, the unemployment rate is 2.8 percent. On the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in South Dakota, the unemployment rate is 73 percent. In the Mississippi Delta, we still have in my part of the country the poorest part of America, on the average, in the lower Mississippi Delta valley. In Appalachia, there are still places where, because of their physical isolation, there is no new enterprise and opportunity. In many of our inner cities from coast to coast that is so.

But I'll give you another surprising thing. If you look at New York State and you take out New York City and the suburban counties in New York, the rest of New York ranks 49th in job growth since I've been President—if it were a separate State. That includes Albany, Rochester, Buffalo, Syracuse, big towns that you know about.

I have proposed to double the number of the empowerment zones that the Vice President has managed so well over the last 6 years—which put intense effort into bringing cities back and rural areas back—and to pass something I call the new markets initiative, which would simply give people like you the same financial incentives to invest in poor areas in America we now give you to invest in poor areas in Latin America, in the Caribbean, in Africa, in China. I think that you should have those incentives.

I think we have to do more to build a balance between family and work in the 21st century, when almost all parents, fathers and mothers, will be working. We have to find a way to extend health care to all of our children. We have to find a way to extend child care to working families who need it. Only about 10 percent—in spite of the fact that we have increased dramatically in my administration, only about 10 percent of the people who are eligible for child care assistance actually get it.

We need to have a real equal pay law for equal work for women and men. We've still got problems there. We need to pass the Patients' Bill of Rights. We need to continue to invest in biomedical research. We need to make a commitment that everybody who works 40 hours a week should not live in poverty. It's time to raise the minimum wage again. I feel very strongly about that.

But the main point I want to make is this: We need an administration with a focus on trying to balance family and work so that our goal is that people can succeed at home and at work. The most important job of any society is raising children. It dwarfs the importance of any other job.

So if people who are at work, either because they want to be or they have to be, are worried sick all day that their kids are in trouble, they're not going to be very productive workers. On the other hand, if people, because they're worried about it, don't go to work at all when they

want to and could, and could make a contribution to our society, we won't be as strong a country. We have got to be more deliberate and disciplined in creating a framework of support for people to succeed at home and at work.

I can mention a lot of other things. Just let me mention a couple more issues that are really important. We need a commitment to build 21st century communities that are both safe and livable. I told you the crime rate's at a 30-year low, and it is. And I'm proud of it. Murder rate's at a 32-year low. Does anybody in this audience tonight believe that America is safe enough? Of course not.

So I say we should set ourselves a real goal. If we're the freest big country in the world, why shouldn't we be the safest big country in the world? Why shouldn't we say, if it worked to put 100,000 police on the street, and it gave us a 30-year low in the crime rate, I promise you, if you put 50,000 more out there concentrated in the high crime areas, we can drive this crime rate down more.

If the Brady bill kept 400,000 people with criminal or mental health backgrounds from buying handguns, and didn't deprive one single hunter of a day of deer season or one single sports shooter of one contest, then we ought to close the loophole in the Brady bill and apply it to the urban flea markets and the gun shows and get some more people out there.

We also ought to recognize that having 21st century communities means we have to find a way to preserve the environment and grow the economy. We're going to have to do more to provide green space in urban areas. More people need to live in cities where you get to drive through woods, like we did to come here tonight. And we can do that. We can do that. We have a whole agenda before the American people.

One of the things that I'm proudest of as President is that under our administration, we have protected more land than any administration in the entire history of America except those of Franklin and Theodore Roosevelt, and I'm proud of that. But we have to do more of that.

So the aging of America, the children of America, the continuing poverty challenge of America, balancing family and work, building 21st century communities, ensuring the long-term prosperity of America—you hear all these people running for President and they're prom-

ising all these tax cuts and all these spending programs, you just remember one thing. We got to the dance that we're enjoying today because we got rid of that awful deficit, and we had the first back-to-back surpluses in 42 years. And that has given us low interest rates and a booming environment for entrepreneurs to succeed in. We now have a chance. If we stay within the parameters of the budget I sent to this Congress, we can actually pay off the debt of America and be debt-free within 15 years for the first time since Andrew Jackson was President in 1835.

Now, if we do that, if we do that, what does it mean? Does it mean there will never be another recession? Of course not. But it means no matter what, interest rates will be lower, that means more jobs, higher incomes, more new businesses, cheaper home mortgages, car loans, and college loan payments. Because we have paid the debt down \$140 billion in the last 2 years, because the aggregate debt is over 1½—listen to this—trillion dollars less than the experts said it would be when I became President, that amounts to a tax cut and lower mortgage payments of \$2,000 a year to the average family, \$200 a year in car interest payments, \$200 a year in college loan payments to the average family in America.

We don't want to forget what got us here. The Democrats are the progressive party. We like to invest money in people. We like to help people, and we ought to. But we have to do it within a framework that says it is this economy that has been our best social program, those 19½ million new jobs, every year a new record in new businesses started, creating an environment in which people like a lot of the great entrepreneurs here present have been able to be so successful.

So I say we ought to set a big goal. Let's get ourselves out of debt over the next 15 years, and then we'll have more money than we know what to do with. And our children and grandchildren can look forward to a generation of prosperity.

You mentioned the world earlier, and how concerned you were. I believe that America has special responsibilities that are, if anything, even greater now that the cold war's over. And it bothers me that the majority in Congress don't want to pay our U.N. dues; that they so blithely walked away from a Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty that our nuclear allies Britain

and France and 150 other countries had signed; that they wouldn't even let us offer the safeguards that answered the problems they said were there with the treaty; that it was just a political issue.

It bothers me that they passed a foreign assistance package that not only had no money to meet America's commitments that I made pursuant to a 25-year bipartisan involvement in the Middle East peace process, nothing for the Wye peace accord, to finance it and do our part, when we're at a very critical juncture in the Middle East talks, and I'm about to go off to Oslo to meet with Prime Minister Barak and Chairman Arafat; nothing to continue the denuclearization program started by Georgia's Senator Sam Nunn and Dick Lugar of Indiana, the Nunn-Lugar program, which has done more to make the world safe than anything else we've done lately, because it destroys nuclear weapons in Russia—no money for that—no money for America to join everybody from His Holiness the Pope to the European Union to Japan in providing debt relief to the poorest countries in the world in the year 2000, so they can begin to grow and buy our products—some of them really think that the only thing we've got to do is build a bigger bomb and a bigger wall and we'll be fine, because the cold war's over. I think that is nuts.

You know, we went in and won a war in Kosovo so that people could go home and not be butchered because of their ethnic and religious background. But when we left, the European Union and our other Allies are bearing the lion's share of the costs and the burden in Kosovo now. We helped to end a terrible, brief, bitter conflict in East Timor, after the people there voted for independence, and stopped another ethnic slaughter. But when we left, our friends from Australia, New Zealand, Malaysia, and other places went in and did the lion's share of the work. They needed us to help them get in there, but they did it. We get something out of cooperating with other people in the world. And if we stop it and we don't want to pay our fair share, then someday we'll be confronted with crisis after crisis after crisis where we've either got to go alone or watch while nothing happens.

Every President since Franklin Roosevelt and Harry Truman endorsed the idea of the United Nations, has understood that America would be more influential if we were a good neighbor

and a good partner, and did a responsible job of paying our fair share. And I think it's important.

And the last point I want to make is the most important of all. If I had to leave the Presidency tomorrow—as much as I have worked on all the things we just talked about: the economy, the family, the environment, the children, the seniors—and I could give America one gift, my one gift would be to give America the ability to be one America, to bridge all of the divides.

It is so ironic that we're celebrating the explosion of technology, the explosion of biology, the solving of the mystery of the human genome. We look ahead to all these unbelievable things happening, and the biggest problem of the world is the oldest problem of human society. We're still scared of people who aren't like us. And when you strip it all away, that's what's going on in Northern Ireland; that's what's going on in the Middle East; that's what's going on in the Balkans; that's what's going on in the tribal wars in Africa; and that's what you see when Matthew Shepard gets killed in Wyoming, or James Byrd gets torn apart in Texas, or the little Jewish kids get shot at going to the community center, and the Filipino postalworker gets murdered in California, or the Korean Christian gets shot coming out of church in Indiana, right after the African-American basketball coach gets murdered walking on the street in Chicago.

What happened to all these people? We still can't form a society where no one hates anybody else because they're different. And it all starts with fear, which leads to distance, which leads to looking down on people, which leads to eventually dehumanizing them, which then justifies violence against them.

So if I could leave this country with one gift, it would be the gift of just being one America. Because people are smart in this country. We nearly always get it right when we've got enough time. That's why we're still around here after 200 years, you know, we eventually get it figured out. And the reason—so the second reason that I hope you will say, if people ask you why you're here, say, "You know, they had some good ideas, and they've got a good record, the Democrats do," first thing; secondly, "They want to take on the big challenges for the 21st century, and so do I, and I agree with them on what they are."

The third thing I want to point out, just briefly, is that the new Republican Party wanted a tax cut that's so big, it would have spent all the non-Social Security surplus and there would have been no money to do any of this I talked about. We wanted a tax cut, too, but one that would be consistent with paying off the debt and investing in the education of our children and dealing with the aging of America.

The second thing I want to say is, it may be popular in the South, but I think it's wrong. I don't think it's so popular anymore. Even the new Republican Party is for whatever the NRA says they ought to do on these gun fights. Now, you know, I once had a lifetime membership in the NRA. I've even got my jacket here. I'm sure they revoked it somewhere now. *[Laughter]* But you listen—hadn't anybody missed a day of deer season on what I've done, nobody, and nobody's been knocked out of one sporting contest for what I've advocated. But there are people alive today because of these background checks. We did the right thing.

So we differ. We're for the Patients' Bill of Rights, and they're against it. We believe our education program ought to include 100,000 teachers, and we ought to build or modernize 6,000 schools. I was just in Philadelphia today where the average school building is 65 years old. In New York City, 40 percent of school buildings are over 70 years old, and they still are heated by coal. There are places in this country where we cannot hook up the rooms to the Internet because they cannot be wired. I was in Florida, in a little town, the other day; there were 12 housetrailer out behind the elementary school in a little town where the kids were going to school. This is an important issue.

In our budget, we not only don't spend the Social Security surplus, we extend the life of Social Security and Medicare. Their budget doesn't add a day to the life of Social Security and Medicare. They're opposed to our initiatives on the environment. You know what they've done in foreign policy; we've talked about it earlier. So we have profound differences.

And I hope tomorrow you'll say, "You know, whether I voted Democrat or Republican over the last 20 years, looking at the next 10, I agree with the Democrats. Those are three pretty good reasons to have been here. I like the record; I like the agenda; I agree with them on the differences."

But if you don't remember anything else, just remember this. We're all pretty lucky or we wouldn't be sitting under this tent tonight. The good Lord has been good to us. And most all of us would like for people to believe we were born in a log cabin we built ourselves, but the truth is we've all had a lot of luck and a lot of kindness and a lot of gifts. And with all the turmoil, the person in this room I believe has made the greatest sacrifices for our country is Max Cleland, and I think he would tell you even he feels lucky to be here and be with us.

So if you don't remember anything else, just remember this. I'm not running for anything. I'm 53 years old; I've had the best life I could imagine. I will never be able to give this country enough to repay what has been given to me. But if I could give you anything, you would remember this—believe me, this is the only chance in my lifetime we have ever had to build the future of our dreams for our children, and we dare not pass it by.

Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 8:20 p.m. at a private residence. In his remarks, he referred to dinner hosts Larry and Carol Cooper; Andy Tobias, treasurer, and Fran Katz, national finance director, Democratic National Committee; State Democratic Party Chair David Worley; former Representative Buddy Darden; former Senator Sam Nunn; State Senator Charles Walker; Fulton County Commissioner Michael Hightower; State Attorney General Thurbert E. Baker; baseball Hall of Famer Henry (Hank) Aaron; former Gov. Zell Miller and current Gov. Roy E. Barnes of Georgia; Prime Minister Ehud Barak of Israel; Chairman Yasser Arafat of the Palestinian Authority; and Pope John Paul II.