

that the Federal Government continues to provide needed disaster assistance in a timely manner.

I know the rebuilding process will not be easy, but as I saw on my trip to North Carolina, the true spirit of America remains evident, with people from all backgrounds coming together when times are tough. Let us do our part and authorize the necessary funding to support the hard work being done to rebuild all of the States affected by recent disasters.

Sincerely,

WILLIAM J. CLINTON

NOTE: Letters were sent to J. Dennis Hastert, Speaker of the House of Representatives; Richard A. Gephardt, House minority leader; Trent Lott, Senate majority leader; and Thomas A. Daschle, Senate minority leader. An original was not available for verification of the content of this letter.

## Interview With Maria Elvira Salazar of Telemundo Noticiero in Hartford, Connecticut

November 5, 1999

### *Enforcement of Gun Control Laws*

*Ms. Salazar.* Before we talk about your visit here to Hartford, the head of the NRA, Charlton Heston, said that the White House and the Justice Department lack the spine to enforce the existing gun control laws. How do you respond to this?

*The President.* Well, first of all, let me say what the substance of his claim is. They say that we are bringing fewer criminal prosecutions in the Federal courts for violations of the gun laws than were being brought a few years ago. The truth is that prosecutions for violations of the gun laws are increasing in America. But we have a partnership between the Federal prosecutors and the State prosecutors. And more of the minor cases are being brought at the State level now, and the major multistate cases are being brought at the Federal level. So it is simply not true that the gun laws are not being enforced.

But let me say, the more important thing is—why is Charlton Heston saying this? Because he doesn't want us to do background checks when people buy guns at gun shows or at urban flea markets. He didn't want us to do background checks when people bought handguns in gun stores, and they said it wouldn't do any good. But we know that 400,000 people, because of a criminal background, couldn't buy guns under the Brady bill. We know we've got the lowest crime rate and the lowest murder rate in 30 years. So he's just wrong about it.

We also know that America is still a country that's too dangerous, because we're the only country in the world that still doesn't have enough sensible restraints on keeping guns out of the hands of criminals and children. So I disagree.

### *New Markets Initiative*

*Ms. Salazar.* Okay. Let's talk about, now, your visit to Hartford. Tell us why this new markets initiative is so important to you.

*The President.* It's important to me because even though we have the longest peacetime economic expansion in history, over 19 million new jobs, highest homeownership ever, lowest unemployment rate in 29 years, the lowest welfare rolls in 30 years, the lowest poverty rates in 20 years, the lowest Hispanic- and African-American unemployment rates we have ever recorded. In spite of all that, there are still all these people and places that have not felt this recovery, that need investments and businesses and jobs and hope. And I believe that we need to convince the American business community that these are markets to invest in. And I think we ought to give them the same incentives to invest in poor areas in America we give them to invest in poor areas in Latin America or Africa or Asia. That's the whole deal, and I think it will work.

*Ms. Salazar.* And what incentives can you offer them that are not in place right now?

*The President.* We can offer them tax credits, and we can offer them loan guarantees. And

we can offer them modest expenditures of public funds to support these kinds of investments. They will make a big difference.

For example, if—let's just take a poor neighborhood in Houston or San Antonio or even here in Hartford, where there's a very large Hispanic population. Let's suppose that we wanted to have a \$150 million investment. Under this proposal, if my bills were to become law, they could put \$50 million in equity, and they would get a 25 percent tax credit. They could borrow \$100 million and have it under a Federal loan guarantee, which would dramatically lower the interest rate. So you would say, okay, you're taking a little bit of a risk investing in a poor area, but we will cut the risk way, way down.

#### *Plight of Hispanic-Americans*

*Ms. Salazar.* Beautiful. There are 30 million Hispanics in the United States and counting. Yet a disproportionate number live in poverty, do not have health care, and can't get a job. Why has the American dream eluded them?

*The President.* Well, let me start with the positives. We also have more successful Hispanics in America than ever before, more people like you and the people that work for Telemundo. We have the lowest unemployment rate we have ever recorded, and we started keeping separate Latino unemployment rates in the early seventies.

Now, why is it still a problem? Number one, a lot of the Hispanic population of America are recent immigrants. Recent immigrants always have more problems with health insurance and with employment. They haven't very often mastered English; they often don't have the right contacts. So part of that's inevitable.

But there are some other things that I'd like to point out. Because of the family traditions that have been so strong in Hispanic families, very often the children would leave school early to go to work. And that worked for generation upon generation of Hispanic families, the people that had been here for 50, 60, 80 years. It doesn't work anymore because if you drop out of high school, your chances of getting a good job with a growing income are very, very small.

And the biggest separate social problem we have with Hispanics in America today is the dropout rate from school is way too high. Last year, for the first time ever, the graduation rates of non-Hispanic whites and African-Americans

was almost identical. So the black—you know, the message is there. Hispanics are still dropping out at a very rapid rate.

So we have started this Hispanic education initiative to try to overcome that. But a lot of it is culture. We must get the message out that this doesn't work anymore. It worked a long time; it won't work anymore. You can't do it. You've got to stay in school. And we have to try to get more Hispanic young people to go on to college.

So I think that's very, very important. I think that is—there are a lot of other things, but that's—the single most significant thing that we can do something about is getting people to stay in high school. The fact that we have so many immigrants, they'll always have more problems in the beginning, and we just have to integrate them as quickly as we can.

*Ms. Salazar.* I think you have answered my next question, but I want to ask you anyway, and it has to do with youth. In the barrio in New York City, or in any barrio in the United States, there is a 12-year-old boy whose name is Juan Gonzalez, let's say. His parents struggle to make a living and provide him with a decent education. What message do you have for him, a kid that was born in the United States?

*The President.* My message to him is, if you stay in school and you learn your lessons, no matter how difficult your economic circumstances, you can now go on to college in America.

We have changed the rules in the last 6 years. If your parents come up with some money, they can get a tax credit back for it. We have more generous scholarships. We have more other funds for you to go. You must stay in school. You can go to college if you stay in school. And if you do, you can make the life that you dream of.

#### *Cuba*

*Ms. Salazar.* Let's talk a little bit about Cuba. The democratically elected leaders of 17 Spanish-speaking nations will gather in Havana in the next couple of weeks. Are you concerned that they are legitimizing Castro's government?

*The President.* I'm a little concerned about it. I think the important thing is, when they go there, I hope that they will reaffirm their support for democracy and for human rights and for a transition to democracy and to an open economy in Cuba.

As you know, most countries don't agree with our policy on Cuba. They think that it hurts the Cuban people, that it hurts the American business community, and that it doesn't speed the transition away from Castro because they think we give him an excuse for the failures of the Cuban society, that he can blame everything on us instead of having to take responsibility for himself. And you know, this argument is now occurring more and more among Cuban-Americans of all age groups. And so it's a debate we ought to continue to have.

The most important thing for me, though, is I have—every time I have reached out to Cuba, and I have tried to increase contacts, to make it easier for people in America to send money home, to have direct telephone service, to have more trips to Cuba more accessible for people, and you know, something happens. He put journalists in jail, or shot the Brothers to the Rescue people out of the air. And they were—those people were murdered. It was illegal for them to be shot. I don't care—even if they had been inside the territorial waters of Cuba, which they weren't, there is a convention which binds the United States and Cuba which would not have permitted them to be shot down, because they did not present a threat. So all my efforts to change things have been met with a rebuff. And it makes me wonder whether he really wants this to change, because he can always use us as an excuse.

But if the countries want to go there and meet, I understand that. If they differ with us on their policy, I respect their right to differ. But I hope when they're in Cuba, they will make it clear that they're for democracy and human rights.

*Ms. Salazar.* Have you expressed this to any of the Presidents?

*The President.* Absolutely. Yes, I have. I have said that to every one of them that I have seen since they made the decision to go down there.

*Ms. Salazar.* And do you ever foresee normalized relations with Castro and the United States?

*The President.* I think it would be difficult for relations to be completely normal. I think we could certainly do a lot more for food, for medicine, in other ways, if the circumstances were right. And I think that if there were a clear commitment to a transition to democracy and human rights, which were clear and verifiable, I think that you could see some really

dramatic changes. I think—you know, if we could just have a commitment to have no more shootings, like the shootings of the airplanes, and to have no more clear oppressings of human rights, it would be easier.

I think the American people would like to be reconciled with the Cuban people. And I think we are—it is painful. It's painful most of all, I think, for the Cuban-Americans.

*Ms. Salazar.* Definitely. I come from that group. They tell me two more questions. I need to do Colombia, and I need to do Vieques. I need to do two more.

*The President.* Yes, you do them. You do need to do those.

#### *Colombia*

*Ms. Salazar.* Okay. Yes, I do. Colombia—Washington is debating billions of dollars in aid to that country. Serious problem. Do you foresee, or could the United States be dragged into the civil war that they are living?

*The President.* Well, first of all, let me say we already give a lot of aid to Colombia. They are—after Israel and Egypt, Colombia is the third-biggest recipient of American aid.

I am very concerned about the combination of the narcotraffickers and the people that have been engaged in the civil war down there totally destabilizing Colombia. They've already hurt the economy. They've divided the society. They've weakened the country and its government. And it is a big, big country with enormous significance for all of Latin America. If you look at the Venezuelan border, the trouble we've seen there, if you look at all the problems that could be presented with Panama, with the canal going back there, and if you look at all the countries to the south, if you look at Bolivia, Peru, the problems they've had there, the future of Colombia is very, very important. And Colombia borders Amazonia, and all the problems that could be created there. So we should be working with them, and we should help them.

But, you know, if you look at the whole of the history of America's involvement in Latin America, if we were to become directly involved, I think it would ensure a disastrous result for the Colombian Government, and people would accuse us of being imperialists in some way. I have worked very hard to reach out to Latin America in a way that no other American President has, at least since President Kennedy, to be a friend, to be a partner, to be supportive,

and not to be a dictator, not to be an imperialist, not to be abusive in our relationship.

So I'm going to keep trying to help Colombia. But I don't think we should be drawn directly into their conflict, because I think it would boomerang. I don't think it would work, and I think it would actually hurt the cause of freedom and the integrity of governments in Latin America.

#### *Vieques Island*

*Ms. Salazar.* Vieques, sir. The U.S.S. *Eisenhower* is scheduled to begin exercises December 1st off the coast of Puerto Rico in Vieques. Will you approve the use of live fire?

*The President.* Before that happens, I hope and believe there's a chance that we will reach an accommodation between the Navy and the Government and the representatives of Puerto Rico.

Let me say, as I've said before, I think the fact that there was an agreement made back in 1983, that then the Navy and the Defense Department regularly and flagrantly ignored, treating Puerto Rico as if it were still a colony, is really at the root of all this.

I think that, as you know, that the Pentagon has a point, in the sense that if you look at what we had to do in Kosovo, for example, or what we had to do earlier in Bosnia, they need to be able to train. They have to be able to do live-fire training somewhere. They need to be able to fly over water. We also have to do landings. You know, when we restored the democratically elected government of Haiti, thank God there was no violence, but there could have been. And we have to practice, you know, how do we approach on the shore?

On the other hand, we don't want to be in a position of jamming down the throat of Puerto Rico, and the people and the elected officials of Puerto Rico, one bad memory after another of a longstanding relationship where we didn't honor our commitments.

So what Secretary Cohen has tried to do is take the security report he got saying, you know, we need to use Vieques for 5 more years and the reality of the feelings of the people of Puerto Rico and the positions of the leaders, and we're trying hard to work through both of those in a way that there can be an agreement.

I think the most important thing is we get out of this treating Puerto Rico as if it were literally, for these purposes, a colony of the United States. It is not a colony. And if—you

know, I think the Congress should give them an authoritative vote on whether they want to be a State or continue commonwealth status. I mean, the last vote they had was very close, narrowly for commonwealth, but it wasn't a sanctioned vote by the Congress.

So I have done as much as I could to try to restore the integrity of the relationship between the people and the Government of Puerto Rico and the United States. And so for me, because I'm the Commander in Chief and I also have heavy responsibilities to ensure the preparedness and the integrity of our Armed Forces—there's a reason we lost no pilots on Kosovo. It's because they train hard, and they're careful. And we try to save lives.

So this is a very difficult decision. But I believe there is an agreement which can be made here, which respects the legitimate interests both of the people of Puerto Rico, particularly those that live on Vieques, and the national security interests of the Navy. And so they're trying to get there. And before I answer the specific questions, I'm going to give them a chance to get there. We've got about a month, and we're going to work hard at it.

#### *Immigration Policy*

*Ms. Salazar.* Two weeks, sir. One more, on immigration. Immigration laws have disrupted the lives, or many people think that they have disrupted the lives of thousands of Hispanic families, or they consider that's the way. Will the issue be resolved before you leave office?

*The President.* Well, many of the difficulties have been resolved. We have repealed almost 100 percent of the cuts that were imposed in the welfare reform law. And we have tried to alleviate some of the very harsh impacts of the law which would require the return of people who have been here for a long time.

*Ms. Salazar.* Who have children who were born here.

*The President.* That's right. And I am now trying—and also by Executive order—everything I could do without an act of Congress, I believe I have done. So the specific answer to your question is, we've done a lot. There are still some important things to do. And I will do my best. I can't say whether it will be done or not, because some of the things that have to be done require an act of Congress. And the Congress has actually been pretty helpful to me in this since '96, in putting the pieces

back together. And I'm doing my best to stop any more family disruption.

*Ms. Salazar.* And you are aware of the disruptions and the problems?

*The President.* Oh, absolutely. It's been terrible problems. And I have tried to minimize them, and I will continue to work on it.

#### *New York Senate Race*

*Ms. Salazar.* Well, I was going to ask you about who you were going to vote for in Senate, State Senate of New York, but they won't let me.

*The President.* I think you know. I will authorize you——

*Ms. Salazar.* You live in New York now, sir, right?

*The President.* I will authorize you to tell the people who I'll vote for for Senator in New York.

NOTE: The interview was recorded at 7:20 p.m. on November 4 in the Performance Studio at the Artists Collective for later broadcast and was embargoed for release by the Office of the Press Secretary until 6 p.m. on November 5. In his remarks, the President referred to actor Charlton Heston, president, National Rifle Association; and President Fidel Castro of Cuba.

## The President's Radio Address *November 6, 1999*

Good morning. Today I want to talk to you about new steps we're taking to make America safer for consumers, particularly for older Americans.

For 7 years now, we've worked hard to build safer streets and stronger communities, and our strategy is working. We have the lowest crime rate in 30 years. Our Nation is safer. But no one really believes America is as safe as it can be. We have to fight all kinds of crime at every level.

To many of our most vulnerable citizens, especially our seniors, the greatest threat may not come from a criminal on the street, but from a scam artist on the phone. Every year, illegal telemarketers bilk the American people of an estimated \$40 billion, and more than half the victims are over 50 years of age.

Telemarketing thieves are stealing more than money; they're stealing people's hopes and dreams and their security. In far too many cases, victims have been robbed of savings they've spent a whole lifetime building up. Some have even lost their homes as a result.

Over the years, I've taken a number of steps to crack down on telemarketing fraud. I signed into law the toughest criminal penalties for telemarketing crimes in history. Our enforcement efforts have resulted in more than 300 convictions nationwide. But we have to do more.

Today I am announcing important new tools to help government, organizations, and con-

sumers take action, and I'm directing the Attorney General to send me a plan to crack down on consumer fraud. Specifically, I'm calling on the Justice Department to strengthen prevention and enforcement and improve coordination among the Federal Government, State, and local law enforcement officials and our consumer groups.

Citizens also need new tools to take on telemarketing fraud and to find out where to go for help. According to a recent study, one out of four Americans said they wouldn't know where to turn if they were victimized by a telemarketing scam. This is an even greater concern as we enter the holiday season and the chance of becoming a victim of fraud rises.

That's why today we're launching a new nationwide campaign to help consumers fight telemarketing ripoffs. It's called Project kNOW Fraud, and it's led by the U.S. Postal Service, the American Association of Retired Persons, the Council of Better Business Bureaus, the Department of Justice, the Federal Trade Commission, the National Association of Attorneys General, and the Securities and Exchange Commission.

This campaign will give consumers new resources to slam the phone on telemarketing scams. Beginning November 15th, every household in America will receive an easy-to-read postcard with commonsense tips and practical guidelines to prevent telemarketing fraud. This