

## Remarks at a Dedication Ceremony for the New United States Embassy Building in Ottawa, Canada

October 8, 1999

Thank you, and good morning. Madam Governor General, I congratulate you on your—you told me the proper word was installation. I might have said elevation, coronation. [Laughter] It's a wonderful thing for Canada and for us as your friends.

Mr. Prime Minister, members of the Cabinet, distinguished justices of the Supreme Court, members of Parliament, Mr. Ambassador, members of the diplomatic corps, ladies and gentlemen: I would like to begin by thanking the Canadian and American military bands, and the four young men who sang our national anthems, equally well, I thought.

I also want to thank the Prime Minister for his words and the Prime Minister and Mrs. Chretien for their friendship to us.

You know, having said all these—you're supposed to only say nice things at an event like this. But I really resent Jean Chretien. [Laughter] He first came to Ottawa to represent the people of Canada when President Kennedy was in the White House and I was in high school. [Laughter] Now I have more gray hair than he does. [Laughter] And he's not even term-limited. [Laughter]

Your wonderful Ambassador to our country, Raymond Chretien, once joked that the Prime Minister is, I quote, "the only leader in the G-7"—that includes me; therefore, it's a put-down—"the only leader in the G-7 who could still slalom on water skis with one of his grandchildren on his shoulders." [Laughter] It is true that even if I had grandchildren, I could not do that. [Laughter]

Well, Prime Minister, that's not the only way in which you carry the children of this country on your shoulders. And I thank you for being my friend and partner.

I also want to say a special word of appreciation to the men and women who serve in our Embassy here, both American and Canadian citizens, and to my good friend Ambassador Giffin, who gave me an unusually generous introduction, confirming Clinton's fourth law of politics: Whenever possible, be introduced by someone you have appointed to high office. [Laughter]

You know, Gordon's had an unusual life. He grew up in Canada, then moved to Georgia, where he became one of the few people in the South who had ever stood on frozen water. [Laughter] For years, Atlanta had no hockey team; no one there could even skate. Now they have a hockey team. The NHL announced it was awarding a new team there as soon as he came here. [Laughter] Instead of divided loyalties, he is for both the Senators and the Atlanta Thrashers.

We even have two minor league hockey teams in my hometown of Little Rock, now, if you can believe that. The whole American South has gone hockey-mad. And since we're all dealing with global warming, it's becoming increasingly difficult to pursue the sport. [Laughter]

I just had the honor of touring this new building. It was nice of the Ambassador to mention that the words of four of our Presidents are on this wall: President Kennedy's very memorable description of our relationship and wonderful quotes by Presidents Eisenhower and Reagan, and this is the first time I've ever had anything I've said carved in stone. I've had one or two speeches sink like a stone over the years. [Laughter] I've had several audiences sit like a stone. [Laughter] I'm glad to be carved in stone.

As was said earlier, I'm not the first member of my family to visit here, nor is this my first visit here. Hillary was here just last week and, among other things, had the opportunity to dedicate the new sculpture out front of the Embassy. And I want to thank the renowned artist, Joel Shapiro, for honoring both our countries with such a beautiful piece of his work.

I have now been here five times. Jean says I must learn to speak French, so let me say, *Je suis chez moi au Canada*. He also says if I come one more time, I have to start paying taxes. [Laughter] I think that's more important than the French to him. I don't know. [Laughter]

More than a decade ago, I came to Canada<sup>\*</sup> with Hillary, our young daughter, and my mother-in-law. We celebrated the new year. We had a few wonderful days in Montreal. We drove to Chateau Montebello. In 1990 Hillary and Chelsea and I had a wonderful vacation in the summer in Victoria and Vancouver.

And 6 years ago this month—something that means a great deal to me—my mother, just 2 months before her death, took one of her last trips to Ottawa, where she spoke to the Ontario Cancer Society. She, typically, gave a new wrinkle to American relations when she turned down a visit to the Parliament or the Supreme Court so that she could visit something called Elvis Lives Lane. [Laughter] My mother was always a great fan of Elvis Presley. She's convinced that he's going to appear at one of my speeches one day. [Laughter]

Today we add another chapter to the remarkable history of the friendship of our people. It is true, I believe, that in the 223-year history of our country, the President has never left the United States to dedicate an Embassy. If that tradition were ever to be abandoned, it would have to be here in Canada. In a world where too many regions are torn by conflicts and too many nations torn by hatred among people of different racial, ethnic, and religious groups, our two nations, the harmony we seek to promote within, and the friendship we seek to promote between us, have shown the world a better way and given ourselves a great responsibility for the new millennium.

If we took the border we share and stretched it across Europe, it would reach the combined distance from Lisbon to Moscow, Belfast to Tehran, across lands scarred by warfare for many centuries. Yet our border has been undefended for 180 years now. It's hard to believe the Rideau Canal, which passes a few blocks from here, originally was built after the War of 1812 to protect Canada from the United States. It's a sign of how far we've come that today the canal isn't a barrier, but the largest outdoor skating rink in the world.

The United States and Canada have benefited from sharing our continent. We, in particular, have learned from you, a parliamentary democracy with two official languages, many distinct cultures, an inspiring commitment to social justice and solidarity. Our culture is richer, much

richer, for the writings of Robertson Davies, the photographs of Yousuf Karsh, the magnificent music of Oscar Peterson, and for those of us who are country music fans, we were thrilled when Shania Twain was named the Country Music Star of Year. And last week, of course, when number 99 was raised to the rafters in Edmonton, most people on both sides of our border agreed that Wayne Gretzky is the finest hockey player ever to be seen.

Our two nations have a wonderful tradition of standing together in moments of difficulty and need. During last year's terrible ice storm, I was proud to hear that linecrews from Vermont helped restore power to some small towns in Canada. And we in the United States will always be grateful for the way in which the people of Nova Scotia responded to the tragic crash of Swissair flight 111.

All of you know well that we share the world's largest trading relationship, with more than a billion dollars a day passing over the border. Our NAFTA partnership, together with Mexico, has resulted in a 100-percent increase in trade within North America in just 5 years and the creations of millions of new jobs in both our countries. I know Canada is looking forward to hosting the third Summit of the Americas in Quebec City in early 2001, to talk about ways to strengthen trade within our hemisphere.

We also share a responsibility to help to spread the benefits of freedom and democracy beyond our borders. That's what my quote on the wall is all about inside. It is fitting that the first American Embassy in Ottawa—the first American Embassy in Ottawa—was opened the same week that the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier was dedicated at Arlington National Cemetery in Washington.

For in this century, young Americans and young Canadians have fought side by side again and again to turn back tyranny and defend democracy. Together, we stood against mass killing and ethnic hatred in Bosnia, in Kosovo, and East Timor. Together, we have worked to build peace and democracy from the Balkans to Haiti. We have stood against aggression in the Persian Gulf. And together we must continue to work for the day when all the world can look to us and see how much stronger the bonds between nations can be when freedom and human rights and the diversity of human beings are all respected, how much richer society can be when we work to build each other up in our

<sup>\*</sup> White House correction.

common humanity, rather than to acquire political advantage by putting each other down.

It is no surprise that the word “multicultural” actually comes from Canada. For two centuries, you have shown the world how people of different cultures can live and work together in peace, prosperity, and mutual respect in a country where human differences are democratically expressed, not forcefully repressed.

Earlier this year, we in the United States were pleased to see Canada’s rich tradition of democracy deepen with the creation of the new territory of Nunavut. We are proud to be your partners and allies. And we deeply value our relationship with a strong, united, democratic Canada.

Of course, as any two nations as complicated as ours are, we have our differences, and we don’t always see eye to eye. It’s kind of interesting to watch Jean Chretien and me get in an argument. It’s kind of like getting in an argument with your brother, you know? You have to do it every now and then just to keep in practice. *[Laughter]*

When we do have our differences, we try to approach them in good faith and directly, as true friends must. And we have shown that when we work together, on nearly every issue we can reach agreement.

I know that there’s still one big issue out there that the Canadians are really pretty tense about. But I simply do not have the legal authority to order Doug Flutie to return to Canada. *[Laughter]*

Let me say to all of you, in closing, as we move into this new world of the 21st century; as we contemplate whether our children and grandchildren live to be 100 years or more because of the decoding of the human gene; as we imagine whether poor people across the world, from Africa to Latin America to Asia, will be able to skip 50 years of economic development because of the availability of the Internet and the cell phone and the rapid transfer of knowledge; as we imagine all the glories of modern technology in the modern world, it is well to remember that for all this race to tomorrow in technology, the deepest problem the world faces today is the most primitive problem of human nature, the fear of the other, people who are different from us.

What have we done, Jean and I, since we’ve been in our respective positions around the world? We tried to stop people from killing each

other in Bosnia and Kosovo because of religious and ethnic differences. I spent an enormous amount of time trying to help the people in the land of my forbears in Northern Ireland get over 600 years of religious fights. And every time they make an agreement to do it, they’re like a couple of drunks walking out of the bar for the last time. When they get to the swinging door they turn around and go back in and say, “I just can’t quite get there.”

It’s hard to give up these things. Look at the Middle East. For all of our progress, it is so hard for them because of millennial differences. Why were all those people slaughtered in Rwanda?

When we have differences here in our homes, in our neighborhoods in Canada and in the United States, it is well to remember that the effort we are making to remind our own citizens that our common humanity is always more important than the things which divide us. They make life more interesting, our differences, but we must constantly reaffirm that.

Canada and the United States, I think, have a special responsibility to the new millennium. It would be tragic if all the dreams that we share for our children and our grandchildren’s future, if all the potential of the modern world, were to still keep crashing on the rocks of mankind’s oldest failing.

Let us show the world we don’t need to be afraid of people who are different from us. We can respect them. We can differ honestly. But always—always—we must reaffirm our common humanity. That, to me, is the true story of our long friendship, which this magnificent building embodies.

And now, it is with great pride and privilege that I declare this Embassy officially open, in service to the people of the United States and in friendship to our greatest neighbor and ally, the people of Canada.

May God bless the people of Canada and the United States of America. Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10 a.m. at the McKenzie Street entrance at the U.S. Embassy. In his remarks, he referred to Governor General Adrienne Clarkson of Canada; Canadian Prime Minister Jean Chretien and his wife, Aline; U.S. Ambassador to Canada Gordon Giffin; the President’s mother-in-law, Dorothy Rodham; and NFL Buffalo Bills quarterback Doug Flutie.