

Statement on Proposals To Reopen Trade in Elephant Ivory and Whale Products

April 14, 2000

I am deeply concerned that successful efforts by the international community to protect endangered species would be undermined by proposals to reopen trade in elephant ivory and whale products. We will oppose these proposals and urge other nations currently meeting in

Nairobi, Kenya, to maintain current trade restrictions. I am proud of the fact that the United States has been a worldwide leader in the protection of elephants and whales. We will continue our work with international partners to protect these magnificent animals.

Statement on National Youth Service Day

April 14, 2000

This weekend, as we celebrate the 12th annual National Youth Service Day, I want to recognize the millions of young Americans across the country who give to their communities day-in and day-out. They are rebuilding our Nation's schools and neighborhoods and sparking a new spirit of civic engagement. And they know that service is not the work of just a single day; it is the work of a lifetime.

In recent months we've had too many tragic reminders that young people pay the price when bonds of community and responsibility become

frayed. But we should also remember that our children are our greatest resource and that, if we are to build a stronger, safer Nation, we should begin by empowering young people to make a difference. That's why I am so proud of the young citizens who have served in AmeriCorps. And that's why I am so proud of the many contributions that so many of our youth are making on this special day. Through the leadership of young Americans, all of us—whatever our age—can help keep alive our sense of opportunity, responsibility, and community.

Remarks at a Dinner for Representative John Lewis in Atlanta

April 14, 2000

Thank you very much. Thank you, ladies and gentlemen, for that wonderful welcome. I want you to know what I've been thinking, sitting over here. I'm sitting here thinking to myself, now that Reverend Lewis has preached—[laughter]—and Sister Battle has sung—[laughter]—there's nothing left for me to do but pass the plate, and that's already been done. The invitation was issued in advance; I'm just preaching to the saved. [Laughter]

Let me say to all of you how profoundly grateful I am to be here, to be joined by John and Lillian and John Miles and the whole Lewis family; Governor and Mrs. Barnes; Mayor and Mrs. Campbell; Congressman Bishop; former Congressman Buddy Darden and Lillian. And

I want to thank Brock Peters; he's been a great master of ceremonies. And Reverend Belin also sang us a pretty good prayer, didn't he? [Applause] I thought he was great.

I want to congratulate Ray Strother on that beautiful, beautiful film. He did a wonderful job, and I thank him.

You know, John was up here talking about being 60 years old, and I was thinking about the first time I met him, when I was just a young man back in the seventies, held no office, wanted to get elected to something in my State, and was interested in helping a fellow from Georgia named Carter get elected President. And I remember John talking to me about all these stories we saw in the movie. Twenty-five

years ago, my eyes were big. I thought, one of the reasons I liked politics and one of the reasons I'm a Democrat is I can sit here, a 29-year-old kid, and talk to John Lewis about his life. If anybody had ever told me 25 years later I'd be back here talking about a distinguished 60-year-old Congressman, and I'd be President, I'd have thought they were nuts. [Laughter] But I'm honored to be here.

It's amazing how quickly time passes. I was looking at John Miles Lewis talking about his daddy. Didn't you think he did a good job, by the way? I thought he was great. [Applause] But Lillian and John and John Miles and I were standing up there getting our picture taken. And John was playing his daddy role, and he said, "I don't know about that hair." I said, "John, let's don't act like we're old." I said, "If I was 23 and I could have hair like that, I'd do it in a bird-dog minute." [Laughter] I thought it was great.

That's true. When John Lewis introduced me a few weeks ago in Selma and we were standing at the Edmund Pettus Bridge, he gave a beautiful statement like he did tonight. And then when he introduced me, I said, "John, the only thing you said I'd disagree with is, you said the President didn't have to be in Selma today." Because I did have to be there; because it was my story, too; because what was done at Selma before and after freed me, too.

And what I want to say—I had to be here tonight, too. I have loved John Lewis from the first day I met him. I would feel that way if he had never gone to Congress and certainly if I had never become President. I love Lillian. She and I were over here crying at the gospel singing tonight.

John Lewis and two of his colleagues—then colleagues—Congressman Mike Espy from Mississippi and Bill Jefferson from New Orleans, met with me in 1991 when I wanted to run for President, and they pledged their friendship and support to me when only my mother and my wife thought I could be elected. [Laughter]. And then he went out trying to validate me to these very skeptical northern Democrats. They sort of agreed with President Bush who used to refer to me as the Governor of a small southern State. [Laughter] And I was so dumb, I thought that was a good thing. [Laughter] I was kind of proud of that. And then through all the dark days of the campaign, John was

there, and Georgia was there. So I had to be here tonight for that reason.

I had to be here tonight because without John and the many people in our Congress that he influenced, the prosperity and peace and social progress we enjoy could not have been achieved over these last 7 years. And I had to be here tonight most of all because, just as much today as 40 years ago, John Lewis' life reflects what I think is the central lesson we all have to learn about life, and that is that we find more meaning in compassion than in judgment, and we find more meaning in unity than division.

John has somehow incorporated into himself the spirit that elevated Gandhi and Dr. King, that freed Nelson Mandela of his hate and bitterness in spite of 27 long years in prison. He always says that one of his favorite hymns is "This Little Light of Mine." Well, his little light has certainly shined. And I've tried to make it mine.

And I say that because for all the good that's happened in the last 40 years, we still have a lot of bridges to cross. There are still a lot of people who are just as smart and hard-working as we are who couldn't afford to be here tonight because they haven't participated in our recovery. Then there are a lot of people who are here tonight, but they're serving our food. Their kids deserve a chance to go to college, too. They ought to be paid a decent wage, too. They ought to have access to health care, too.

And for all the bridges we have crossed, even in the last 2 years, there are people in this country who have been shot because they were black or Asian or Jewish, people who have been falsely accused of terrorism because they were Muslims, a young boy stretched out on a rack to die in Wyoming because he was gay. So we've still got a few bridges to cross.

But I close with this thought, so you know why I came here for someone I truly love. People ask me all the time, you know, "Well, what do you think your greatest achievement was? What do you think your biggest disappointment was? If you had one wish for America, what would it be?"

And if I had one wish—God came down to me tonight and said, "It's time to pack it up and go. You can't finish your term. But I'm going to give you one wish. I'm no genie; no three wishes, just one"—I would pray that somehow America could be infected, every single one of us, with the spirit that has animated

John Lewis' life. Because, you know, all of us, we get so puffed up with the importance of what we're doing and our positions. And I finally got so frustrated trying to reach people who were fighting with each other that I—I had a gift that was given to me last year, and I just put it smack dab on the table that you see when the Oval Office is on television, you know. And I'm there meeting with a world leader, and there's two chairs and two couches, and there's a little table in between. On that table, I have a gift, a Moon rock that Neil Armstrong took off the Moon in 1969. He brought it to me for safekeeping—only during the period of my service, I might add. *[Laughter]* It belongs to you, to NASA.

But it is this vacuum-packed Moon rock, and it is 3.6 billion years old. So when people get to fighting each other and they are just about to call each other names and they are just about to go over the top, and we're sitting there in the Oval Office—including me; I get angry, you know—I call a timeout. And I say, "Here, everybody. See that rock there? It's 3.6 billion years old. Chill out; we're all just passing through here." *[Laughter]*

Ultimately, the lesson of the civil rights movement was that what freed us is that the people who were oppressed—not that they got legal rights. It's that they got legal rights and we overcame past problems, and then they let it go, and they forgave us, and they were able to go on.

So many problems in the world today are still caused by the fact that we are, A, afraid of those who are different from us. And once we fear people it is easy to dehumanize them, and once you dehumanize them, it is easy to justify hurting them or not helping them when they deserve a hand up. And then it is a short step from there to violence.

The next big problem is that almost all of us at some point in our lives find it impossible to define our importance, our meaning, unless it is with negative reference to another human being or group. And there's not a soul in here who hasn't done that. You make some big mistake, and you say, "Well, at least I'm not them. I'm not like that. I didn't do that. We're not there." And I have spent so much time as your President just trying to get the Democrats and Republicans together to get over years of accumulated frustration and hurts and angers and perceived slights and the deep need that both

of us sometimes have to at least feel we're better than them.

I've had to send young Americans in to risk their lives for the freedom of Muslims in Bosnia and Kosovo so that Europe has a chance to be free and at peace and we don't drift back into a world war situation. To try to stop the conflict in Northern Ireland or try to stop the conflicts and make peace in the Middle East or try to help the tribal differences in Africa get sorted out—every one of them is rooted in the fundamental fact that people have a natural tendency to define the pluses in their life in terms of the negative in someone else's.

And all those beautiful things John says about the beloved community, what it basically means is you'd rather hold hands than clench your fist. You don't mind being different from other people. You celebrate it; you enjoy it; you laugh about it; it makes life more interesting. But in the end, you know somehow, when you strip it all away, our common humanity is the most important fact of life on this Earth. Now, that's what John Lewis' life in public service represents to me.

So if I could do one thing for America, I would move us closer to being one America, so we could hold our trembling house down. But to do it we'll have to be more like him. We'll have to forgive all those people that beat us up, at least with words. We'll have to get over all of our—not just our perceived but our real beefs. Everybody here has got a real beef against somebody. Everybody here has been the subject of some unfairness, some piece of bad luck, some people's mean-spiritedness.

When you strip it all away, the thing that makes us want to be here for John tonight is not just that he got his brains beat out, nearly, 35 years ago for all our freedom but that he let it go. He's not mad at anybody. He treats people right, doesn't think he's better than the rest of us. He believes we can get more out of holding hands than clenching fists.

I wanted to come here tonight because America and the world need more of what is in John Lewis' heart. And for that, I am eternally grateful and full of love.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 7:15 p.m. in the Grand Salon at the Atlanta Airport Hilton and Towers. In his remarks, he referred to soprano

Kathleen Battle; Representative Lewis' wife, Lillian, and son, John Miles Lewis; Gov. Roy E. Barnes of Georgia and his wife, Marie; Mayor Bill Campbell of Atlanta and his wife, Sharon; Brock Peters, master of ceremonies; former Representative George (Buddy) Darden and his wife, Lillian;

Rev. Roderick Dwayne Belin, who delivered the invocation; media consultant Raymond D. Strother, who produced and directed a brief film biography of Representative Lewis; and former astronaut Neil Armstrong.

Remarks on Signing the Proclamation Establishing the Giant Sequoia National Monument in Sequoia National Forest, California

April 15, 2000

Thank you very much. Thank you, and good morning. I think we should all be very grateful for the beautiful day we have. I know it was exciting that it snowed here last night—[*laughter*]*—*but I was watching Alexander give his fine remarks, and I was thinking that growing older has some merit, but one thing it doesn't have is the ability to withstand cold better. [*Laughter*] We took this whole walk, and there he is in his short-sleeve shirt, and he never flinched, he never shivered, he just walked right on. I want to thank Alexander for his remarks and for his example and the work that he has done and the other young people he has exposed to this magnificent grove.

I want to thank Secretary Glickman and Art Gaffrey. Secretary Glickman did a lot of work on this, and he talked about it in advance, and I'll say a few more words about it, but I appreciate it. Art told me he's been here almost 5 years now.

And I want to thank Marta Brown, who is, herself, a remarkably devoted and accomplished public citizen. I wish George were here with us today. I think he's smiling down on us, and I'm glad you could be a part of this. Thank you, Mike Dombeck and Jim Lyons. And I'd also like to thank my main environmental adviser, George Frampton, who runs our Council on Sustainable Development, Environmental Quality, for being here.

I'd like to thank the representatives of the Tule River Tribe who are here, who also cherish these great trees. Thank you for coming.

About 100 years ago, Theodore Roosevelt dedicated America's first national monuments. He said he was doing it because we couldn't improve upon our native landscape. In his words, "The ages have been at work on it, and

man can only mar it. What you can do is keep it for your children and your children's children."

Well, as we have already heard today, these giant sequoias clearly are the work of the ages. They grow taller than the Statue of Liberty, broader than a bus. They are the largest living things on this Earth, so perfectly adapted to their environment that one has never been known to die of old age. And as has already been said, many we have seen today are more than 1,500 years old. They began when America was not even imagined and Europe was in the Dark Ages.

Once these groves flourished all across the American West. Today, they exist only here in the Sierras. Our second national park was created in 1890 to protect them. Yet half the remaining groves lie outside the national park. And although sequoias on Federal lands are currently protected from logging, the environment around them must also be protected for the great trees to grow and reproduce.

That is why we're here today. We're looking forward to the first Earth Day of the 21st century, and I think the best way to celebrate it is to designate the Trail of 100 Giants, more than 30 nearby sequoia groves, and the magnificent forest that surrounds them, the Giant Sequoia National Monument.

These lands will continue to be managed by the Forest Service, as it once again embraces the conservation ethic that inspired its creation 95 years ago. More and more Americans are discovering our national forests, with places to hike, camp, ride horses, enjoy a few hours of quiet contemplation. Years from now, Americans will come here to do all these things, and these