

July 12 / Administration of William J. Clinton, 2000

hate crimes legislation before the August recess. We must send a message that hate crimes will not be tolerated, and that one more hate crime is one too many.

Sincerely,

WILLIAM J. CLINTON

NOTE: An original was not available for verification of the content of this letter.

Remarks to the NAACP National Convention in Baltimore, Maryland July 13, 2000

Well, let me say it's good to see you. Thank you for making me feel so welcome. Thank you, Julian; thank you, Kweisi. Thank you, Myrlie Evers-Williams, Ben Hooks, Elaine Jones, the whole board. Thank you, Wendell Anthony, for letting me come to Detroit to the biggest dinner in the history of the world.

I know I had dinner with Wendell in Detroit with over 10,000 people, because he told me so, but I couldn't even see the people at the other head table, it was so big. *[Laughter]*

Thank you, Mayor O'Malley, for welcoming us to Baltimore and for being such a great leader. Thank you, Representative Elijah Cummings, for representing Baltimore so well. And thank you, Mayor John Street, for representing Philadelphia so well and making it true to the Founders' dreams.

I have, I know, oh, a dozen or more members of the White House staff here, but I would like to mention a few: Thurgood Marshall, Jr., whose father was a native of Baltimore; my chief speechwriter, Terry Edmonds, a Baltimore native. I thank Mark Lindsay; Mary Beth Cahill; Ben Johnson, who runs our One America office; my political director, Minyon Moore; Janis Kearney; Broderick Johnson, a Baltimore native; Orson Porter; and we have at least another half a dozen folks who are here because they wanted to be here with you today.

This has been a remarkable week for African-Americans. Venus Williams became the first African-American woman since Althea Gibson to win the Wimbledon. Perhaps even more remarkable for those who know the mysteries of the church, Baltimore's own Dr. Vashti McKenzie became the first woman bishop in the history of the A.M.E. church.

And you have had an amazing conference. I'm really glad Governor Bush came. *[Laughter]* I am. But I thought the other fellow gave a

better speech. *[Laughter]* And I liked especially the speech that that Senate candidate from New York gave. I caught that one on Tuesday.

I want to tell you, I'm very proud, as we look back on the last 7½ years of all the work that my wife has done, not just for those but for 30 years for children, for families, for education, for health care. But as First Lady, she has done so much to increase adoption and improve foster care, to increase the access to children to health care and to early education. And one thing that ought to be of particular importance to the African-American community—for the celebration of the millennium, she started—she had this theme, we were going to honor the past and imagine the future. And part of honoring the past was setting aside millennial treasures, a lot of which are important landmarks of the civil rights movement, Abraham Lincoln's summer home at the Old Soldiers' Home, Harriet Tubman's cottage up in New York, a lot of other places.

And the head of the National Historic Preservation Trust came up to me the other day when we were protecting Mr. Lincoln's home, and he said, "Mr. President, I want you to know that your wife came up with this idea of the millennial treasures. It has now raised \$100 million in public/private money. It's the biggest historic preservation movement in the history of the United States of America." So I'm very proud of her for that.

Now, as all of you know, I came here from Camp David this morning, where we are meeting with the Israelis and the Palestinians in an effort to resolve the profound differences that have kept the people of the Middle East apart for a very long time. I know that in our quest for a full, fair, and final peace—which Dr. King reminded us is more than the absence of war, but the presence of justice and brotherhood and

genuine reconciliation—I know we will have your prayers and your best wishes.

But I had to come to Baltimore today, because you embody the spirit of freedom and reconciliation we're trying to capture there, that we need so badly in our talks; a spirit that is woven into the fabric of American life because of the contributions of African-Americans from W.E.B. Du Bois to Rosa to Thurgood to Martin to Daisy Bates, Coretta, Medgar, Malcolm, to Jesse, and John Lewis and Julian and Kweisi.

One of the greatest days of my Presidency was last March, on the 35th anniversary of Bloody Sunday, when I was honored to walk with many people in this room across the Pettus Bridge in Selma. I said then something I'd like to repeat today, that as a son of the South, the brave souls who marched across that bridge 35 years ago set me free, too. It is important to know that every movement for human rights in this country is about even more than gaining equal opportunity and equal rights and decent justice for the oppressed. It is also about forgiveness and healing, about letting go and moving on, about giving our children a better tomorrow.

So I wanted to be here especially during these peace talks to draw strength from you and take the spirit of the NAACP back to Camp David. And I wanted to come here one last time to say thank you, a simple but deep thank you for your support, your prayers, your friendship over all these years, for all that we have done to turn America around and bring America closer together.

Eight years ago this week—I can't believe it—8 years ago this week, at your national conference in Nashville, I was the Governor of Arkansas, the apparent nominee of the Democratic Party. And I brought my choice for Vice President, Senator Al Gore, to the NAACP convention. Rather, I accepted Ben Hooks' mandatory invitation to appear. *[Laughter]*

And I pledged then—and I want to quote it exactly; I don't want to miss a word—I pledged you, “an administration that looks like America, one that knows the promise and the pain of this country, one that will rebuild, reunite, and renew the American spirit.” I think together we have honored that pledge.

The American dream is real to more Americans than it was 7½ years ago. And we are more nearly one America than we were 7½ years ago with 22 million new jobs, the lowest unemployment and welfare rolls in 30 years,

the lowest crime rates in 25 years, the lowest child poverty in 20 years, the lowest minority unemployment rates ever recorded, the lowest female unemployment rates in 40 years, the highest homeownership in history, the longest economic expansion in history. We have more opportunity than we did 7½ years ago.

And perhaps equally important, our social fabric is on the mend. The family and medical leave law, the first bill I signed, vetoed in the previous administration, has allowed over 20 million Americans to take a little time off when a baby was born or a parent was sick, without losing their jobs, and it's been good for the economy, not bad for the economy.

For the first time ever, 90 percent of our children are immunized against serious childhood diseases. Our food is safer. Our air is cleaner. Our water is purer. More land has been protected for all time to come for Americans to enjoy; 150,000 young Americans have served in communities in every State in this country in AmeriCorps. The high school graduation rate of African-Americans is virtually equal with that of the white majority for the first time in the history of the United States of America. And all over the country I have seen schools, that once were failing, turning around.

In Harlem, I was in a school the other day where 2 years ago 80 percent of the children were reading and doing mathematics below grade level; 2 years later 74 percent of the children reading and doing mathematics at or above grade level—in just 2 years. This is happening all over America.

Today we're releasing an annual report on the status of our children. According to the study, the teen birth rate for 15- to 17-year-olds has dropped to the lowest level ever recorded. The birth rate for African-American adolescents has dropped by nearly one-third since 1991.

The report also found that child poverty continues its decline. And the rate of serious violent crime committed by young people has dropped by more than half since 1993 to the lowest level recorded since statistics has been kept on this subject. This is very good news. And I hope you will trumpet it, not because we're as safe as we need to be but because we need to destroy stereotypes so we can start making real progress on the issues still remaining.

Now—so that's my report. Thank you for giving me a chance to serve. That's my report.

Now, here's my question: What do you intend to do with all this? You know, I'm going to treasure this award for the rest of my life. But what really matters is what all of us do tomorrow with what our yesterdays have piled up. So before you leave here, when you go home and people say, "What did you do in Baltimore?" if you don't answer any other thing, you ought to be able to say, "Well, I figured out what I was going to do with all the prosperity and progress my country has made in the last 8 years."

That is the issue. And I guess I can say this now because my hair is a lot grayer, and I've got a few more wrinkles than I had 8 years ago. But one thing I know—how a nation deals with its prosperity is just as stern a test of its judgment, its vision, and its values as how a nation deals with adversity. After all, when you elected me 8 years ago—and the other side kind of referred to me as a Governor of a small southern State, and I was so naive, I thought it was a compliment. *[Laughter]* And you know what? I still do. But when you elected me, it didn't require rocket science to know that if we had quadrupled the debt in 12 years and all the social indicators were going in the wrong direction and the country was coming apart at the seams and unemployment was going up and crime was going up and opportunity for our children was going down, that we had to change. I mean, this was not—I don't want to deprive myself of any credit, but it wasn't rocket science. We had to do something. So you said, "Well, I'll take a chance on that fellow."

Now, every person in this room—we've got a lot of young people here, and I'm grateful for that, and I'm grateful for the role that you've done to bring all the young people back into the NAACP. But listen, everybody over 30 in this room—listen to me—if you're over 30, you can remember at least one time in your life when you have made a mistake, not because times were so bad but because times were good, so good you thought there was no penalty to the failure to concentrate. Am I right about that? *[Laughter]*

Listen to this. In the Scripture, Ecclesiastes 11:25 says, "In the day of prosperity there is forgetfulness of affliction." Everybody over 30 has had that kind of forgetfulness at one time or another. Am I right about that? So here is my point to you. You look at these kids before you leave here. We cannot do that now. I have

done everything I knew to do to turn this country around, to move this country forward, to lift people up, to lift people together. But man, the best stuff is still out there. And the big challenges are still on the horizon. And we will never forgive ourselves if we don't say we are going to use this moment of prosperity to build the future of our dreams for all God's children. That's what this is for.

That's what this millennial election is all about. I want to commend the NAACP for your campaign to register new voters. I want to join you in mourning the passing of the chairman of your voter empowerment campaign, Earl Shinhoster. But you need to finish his job. And then, you have to get people to actually go to the polls, to choose and choose wisely.

We must make it clear again that every election is a choice. This is a big election. There are big differences, honest differences, between the parties, the candidates for President, the candidates for the Senate and the House of Representatives—big and honest differences.

I'm determined to make as much bipartisan progress with the Congress as I can in the last 6 months. I think we'll get a lot done, but no matter how much we do, there will still be a lot that remains on America's future agenda. And there will be differences. And the thing I like about this election is, if we've got the right attitude about it, it can be an old-fashioned election, the kind the civics books say you ought to have, where we don't have people swinging mud at each other and repeating what we've seen in too many elections in the past where people basically say, "You ought to vote for me, not because I'm so great, because my opponent is just one step above a car thief." *[Laughter]* I mean, how many elections have you seen run like that?

Well, we don't have to do that. We can assume everybody is honorable and good, got their merit badges in the Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts, but they're different. There's a choice to be made, and there are consequences.

So when you leave, you say, "What I learned was, we've got to use this year to decide what to do with this moment of prosperity. It may never come around again in our lifetime. I want to build the future of my dreams for my children. This is a big election. That's the main arena right now, and there are big differences."

Now, let me just mention a few of them. On economic policy, the Vice President and

most people on our side of the political aisle, we believe that we ought to keep the prosperity going and do our dead-level best to extend it to people and to places that have been left behind so far. But we think to keep the prosperity going, the right thing to do is to take the taxes you pay for Medicare and take them off the books, like we do with Social Security; keep paying the debt down; use the interest savings to put into Medicare and Social Security to lengthen our life so us baby boomers don't bankrupt the rest of you when we retire; invest in education and science and technology, the health care, and the environment; and then have a tax cut we can afford that helps families with the basic things they're dealing with and still leaves us the money to meet our responsibilities around the world—to help fight AIDS in Africa and Asia, to help relieve the debt of the poorest countries of the world, to help promote freedom and stand against ethnic cleansing, fight against terrorism—that allows us to do these basic things and still get this country out of debt over the next 12 years.

Why? Because that will keep interest rates lower. And if interest rates stay a percent lower over the next 10 years than they otherwise would be, that saves families—listen to this—African-American homeownership at an all-time high—that will save families \$250 billion in home mortgage rates in a decade.

Now, they say something different, and it's easier for me to give you their pitch, and it sounds better the first time you hear it. They say, "We have a projected surplus of \$1.9 trillion, and it's your money. So we're going to give more than half of it back to you in a tax cut. And then we're going to spend the rest of it to partially privatize Social Security. And when we take money out of the Social Security Trust Fund, we'll put money in it from this surplus." And by the time you do that, they've spent the whole projected surplus and then some.

Now, here's the problem with that. If I ask you—I want to ask all of you right now—you just think about this real quiet, now; you don't have to say anything out loud, but everybody think about this—what is your projected income over the next 10 years? Now, think. How much money do you think you're going to make over the next 10 years? How confident are you that you're right about your projected income? [Laughter] Now, get it on up there to where

you're about 80 percent confident. Now, if I sat here at a desk with a pen and a notary public, and I said, "I want every one of you to come up here right now and sign a contract that commits you to spend every penny of your projected income," would you do it? Well, if you would, you should support them. If not, you should support us and keep this economy going. That's what this is about.

Then there are the issues of economic justice. How can we assure a fair share? We believe that we should strengthen efforts to require equal pay for equal work for women, and they don't agree with us. We think we should raise the minimum wage a dollar over 2 years, because we think the people that serve our food at restaurants and help us do things, we think they ought to be able to raise their kids, too, and send their kids to college and make a decent living. And they're not.

Our top tax cut priorities are for working families with low incomes and a lot of kids, for increasing child care assistance, for a long-term care tax credit, when you've got an elderly or disabled loved one, for retirement savings, and to allow you to deduct college tuition for up to \$10,000 a year. That's our top—[inaudible]. We can do all that and still pay the country out of debt over the next 12 years and have money to invest. Their top tax cut priority rolling through Congress like a hot knife through butter is a complete repeal of the estate tax, which costs \$100 billion over 10 years, and half of the benefits—half the benefits go to one-tenth of one percent of the population. There's a difference here.

In education, we know that every child can learn. I just told you about the school I visited in Harlem. I was in rural western Kentucky the other day in this little old school that, 4 years ago, 12 percent of the kids—over half the kids on school lunches—4 years ago 12 percent of the kids could read at or above grade level; today, 57 percent; 5 percent of the kids could do math at or above grade level; today, 70 percent; zero percent of the kids could do science at or above grade level; today, 63 percent—in 4 years. It's amazing. It's happening everywhere.

Now, intelligence is equally distributed. It's opportunity that's not equally distributed. So our education policy is to invest more and demand more—higher standards, greater accountability, but empower people to develop the capacities

of all of our children. And it's working. But we have a very definite set of ideas about that, based on what we have seen and what educators have told us.

We want to modernize or build 6,000 schools and repair another 25,000 over the next 5 years. And the other side doesn't agree with us. They think that's wrong. We want to keep our commitment to hire 100,000 teachers for smaller classes in the early grades, because we know that's important to long-time learning capacity, and the other side doesn't agree with us. They don't think we should require that, somehow, of the States.

We want universal access to preschool, summer school, after-school for all kids who need it. You can't say, end social promotion and then blame the kids for the failure system; you have to have a system that says, okay, no social promotion, but here is how the children are going to meet the standards and go on and learn and do what they're supposed to do.

So there are differences here in the economy, in economic justice, in education, and there are differences in health care. And the Vice President talked a lot about this yesterday, so I won't beat it to death. But this is very important. We believe that because we have the money to do it, we should have a true Medicare prescription drug benefit that's available and affordable to all seniors and disabled people who need it. We think we should do this.

They say it might be too costly. I'll give you their honest—and I think they really believe this. [Laughter] No, I do. I think they really do believe this. They say it could cost more money than we think it would, and so we ought to have this more limited, private benefit, funded through insurance companies.

The problem is—let me say just this—the problem is—I fought with the health insurance companies quite a bit, you may have noticed that. But I've got to give it to them, they've been real upfront about this. The health insurance companies have said, "No, this won't work. We cannot offer these poor people an insurance policy to buy drugs that they can afford to buy that will be worth having." The insurance companies have been really honest about it. And you know what? Nevada adopted a plan just like the Republican plan, and you know how many insurance companies have offered coverage under it? Zero. Not one.

So we've got this interesting debate going on now in Washington. We said "We're for Medicare prescription drug coverage," and they say, "So are we." So the "so are we" is designed—I learned from reading the newspaper that they hired a political consultant to tell them what language to use so you would think they were for something they were not. [Laughter]

And I'd rather them say, "Look, we're not for this, because we think it will cost too much money." But if they took that position, then they would have to explain how come they want to spend \$100 billion on repealing the estate tax and give 50 percent of it to the top one-tenth of one percent of the population and not spend money on drugs for our seniors. There are choices to be made here.

We don't have to be hateful. They really believe this. They don't think it's a good idea. But instead of trying to convince us that they are really for our plan, they should fess up that they're not and explain why they're against it. And then you decide whether we are right or they are.

And the same thing on the Patients' Bill of Rights. The Patients' Bill of Rights we're for covers all Americans and all health care plans and gives you a right to see a specialist, a right not to be bumped from your doctor if you change employment and you're in the middle of having a baby or a chemotherapy treatment or any other kind of treatment. It gives you a right to go to the nearest emergency room if you get hit—God forbid—when you walk out of the convention center here today. And if you get hurt and you're wrongly treated, it gives you the right to sue. Their plan doesn't cover 100 million people, and it doesn't give you a right to sue.

Now, we say we're for the Patients' Bill of Rights. They say—what they should say is, "We don't agree with this. We think it will cost too much." But that's not what they say. What they say—they try to figure out how to convince you they're for what we're for. So they say, "We're for a Patients' Bill of Rights"—if you ever hear that, if you hear "a" instead of "the," big alarm bells ought to go off in your head. You ought to say, ding-dong, hello, what is going on here?

But this is a huge deal. You heard the Vice President talking about this yesterday. I was down the other day in Missouri with the Governor, and we were with an emergency room nurse, a male, who was 6'1", weighed 230,

looked like he could bench-press me on a cold day. [Laughter] And this big old husky guy spends his life trying to save people's lives. And he almost couldn't get through his talk, talking about somebody who died because they couldn't take him to the nearest emergency room. This happens every single day.

We're one vote away from passing it. I want to compliment the Republicans in the House who voted for the Patients' Bill of Rights, and the four in the Senate who did. We are one vote away. I'm telling you, there are big issues here. This affects 100 million of your fellow citizens.

We're for expanding the Children's Health Insurance Program that Hillary did so much to create. We think the parents of the kids ought to be able to buy in, too. We think people who are over 55 and not old enough to be on Medicare but lost their insurance at work, ought to be able to buy into the Medicare program, and we should give them a little help of they need it.

And we want to do more to close the gaps and do something about the fact that people of color suffer far higher rates of heart disease, cancer, AIDS, and diabetes. Let me just give you one example. Diabetes is 70 percent higher among African-Americans than white Americans. Hispanics are twice as likely to suffer from it.

Type I diabetes, commonly known as juvenile diabetes, affects a million Americans alone, half of them children, but research has taken us to the threshold of a potential new breakthrough. Recently, researchers successfully transplanted insulin-producing cells into seven individuals with juvenile diabetes, and apparently, every single one of them was cured.

Now, if we can repeat these preliminary findings, it could put a cure for juvenile diabetes within our reach, a true miracle—for anyone who has ever had this in your family, you know this. But we have to do more to get there. That's why today I want to tell you a couple of things we're doing.

First of all, the National Institutes of Health is investing in 10 research centers immediately to try to replicate the results of the first study so we can prove it wasn't an accident. This is part of a larger partnership between the NIH and the Juvenile Diabetes Foundation—we have some of their leaders here with us today—with a commitment of \$300 million over 5 years for research and the prevention of diabetes.

Now, I've been pretty tough on my friends on the Republican side today, so I want to say something nice about them. This is one we all agree on—that there is no partisan position on whether we would like to see our children lifted from the burden and the fear and the terrors and the agony that can come with juvenile diabetes. But we actually have some research here that may allow us to close one of the big racial gaps and help disparities in our country. And I just want you to know we're going to do everything we can about it, and I hope we'll have your prayers and your support. It's worth some of your money to spend on that.

The last thing I want to talk about in terms of your decision this year is civil rights and equal justice. I don't have to come here and say nobody should be denied a job, a home, access to school or a loan because of their race or any other condition; that no one should have to fear being a target of violence because of the way they worship God or their sexual orientation. And I don't have to come here for you to know that those indignities are still all too real to too many Americans. I have proposed the largest investment in civil rights enforcement ever, so that the EEOC, the Departments of Health and Human Services, Agriculture, and others can enforce our civil rights law.

And we're fighting for passage of a strong hate crimes bill. And I am so grateful—I'm so grateful—that our unanimous caucus was joined the other day by enough Republicans who are willing to break from the leadership to pass the hate crimes bill in the Senate. I am grateful for that, and I hope that we can pass it in the House.

But the hate crimes legislation, if it does not become law, should be an issue in this election. The employment nondiscrimination legislation, if it doesn't become law, should be an issue in this election. This is not negative politics. We should talk about what side we're on and why, and let people decide. It's important.

You look all around the world at all these places that are bedeviled by the hatreds of the groups of people within their countries for one another, from Kosovo to Northern Ireland to the Middle East to the tribal wars in Africa to the Balkans. I mean, look at what the world has been dealing with just for the last few years. We have to keep hammering away at this. It's not over.

And you look at all the hate crimes that have occurred in America in the last few years, in spite of all of our improving attitudes and greater contact across racial and religious lines. We've still got problems here. This deals with the biggest problems of the human heart. We've got to keep at it, and we ought to debate our different approaches to it in an open way. We may never have this chance again, where we are secure and confident and we know we can go forward if we make the right decisions.

One other thing I want to say about this: One of the most important responsibilities of the next President is appointing judges, and one of the most important duties of a Senator is deciding whether to confirm the people the President appoints. Now, I believe the next President will be called upon to appoint in the next 4 years between two and four Supreme Court judges, more than a score, much more, Court of Appeals judges; and perhaps over 100 Federal district court judges.

The record here is instructive. The quality of justice suffers when highly qualified women and minority candidates, fully vetted, fully supported by the American Bar Association, are denied the opportunity to serve for partisan political reasons.

Now, just last year the Republican majority in the Senate, on a party-line vote, defeated my nominee for the Federal court in Missouri, Ronnie White, the first African-American State supreme court judge in the history of the State of Missouri, plainly well-qualified, defeated on a party-line political vote in an attempt to give the incumbent Senator a death penalty issue against the incumbent Governor in the race for the U.S. Senate in Missouri. Never mind that—throw this guy's career away. Act like he's not qualified. Distort his position on the death penalty. Ignore what it will make the African-American community in Missouri feel like. It was awful.

As we speak today, there are four African-American appellate court nominees poised to make history if the Senate would just stop standing in their way: Judge James Wynn, Roger Gregory, Kathleen McCree Lewis, Judge Johnnie Rawlinson. That's just the ones I've got up there now. But let me—to put that in perspective, in the 12 years that they served, the two previous Presidents appointed just three African-Americans to the circuit courts of our country—in 12 years.

Of course, we all want justice to be blind, but we also know that when we have diversity in our courts, as in all aspects of society, it sharpens our vision and makes us a stronger nation.

I have nominated two highly qualified candidates for the fourth circuit—that includes where we are now, the State of Maryland. The fourth circuit has the largest African-American population of any of our circuits, and remarkably, there has never been an African-American jurist on the fourth circuit. We've got a chance to right that wrong.

Two weeks ago I nominated Roger Gregory of Virginia. He is a Richmond lawyer of immense talent and experience. Almost a year ago, I nominated Judge Wynn for a North Carolina seat on the circuit, and he's not the first African-American from North Carolina I nominated. Now, Senator Helms won't let these people get confirmed. He says we don't need any more judges on the fourth circuit.

Maybe, that's what he thinks. But I think it's interesting that for over 7 years now, he has stopped my attempts to integrate the Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals, and the Republican majority has made no move to change the tide that turned the policies. This is outrageous—the circuit court with the highest percentage of African-Americans in the country, not one single judge on the Court of Appeals.

Now, a lot of women don't do much better. We have excellent nominees—Elena Kagan; Helene White; Bonnie Campbell, former attorney general of Iowa, up there—no movement.

Another travesty of justice is taking place in Texas, and I want to talk about this. I nominated a man named Enrique Moreno to the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals. He grew up in El Paso and graduated from Harvard Law School. The State judges in Texas said he was one of the three best trial lawyers out there in far west Texas. The ABA, the American Bar Association, unanimously gave him its top rating. But the two Republican Senators from Texas, they say he's not qualified. And the leader of the Republican Party in Texas—who, I think, talked here a couple days ago—[laughter]—stone cold silence. Nobody says, "Give this guy a hearing."

Why don't they want to give these people a hearing and vote? Because they don't want him on the court, but they don't want you to know they don't want him on the court.

The face of injustice is not compassion; it is indifference or worse. For the integrity of our courts and the strength of our Constitution, I ask the Republicans to give these people a vote. Vote them down if you don't want them on; go out and tell people. At least they voted Judge White down. They're having a hard time explaining it in Missouri, but at least they did it.

This is not right, folks. You know, the judges I've appointed, yes, they're the most diverse judges in history. But they also have the highest ratings from the ABA in 40 years. And no one says that they're ideological extremists. Therefore, I conclude that the people that don't want them on the court want people who are ideological purists.

But you've got to have—a judge needs somebody that's felt the fabric of ordinary life, that's got a good mind for stuff in the books and a lot of common sense, that can understand what happens to people, that can be fair to everybody that comes before him. I'd be ashamed if one of my judges discriminated against someone before them because they were members of the other political party or a different religion or had strong views. I would be outraged. I just want people who will be just and fair. But I don't want people denied their chance to serve because of their race or their politics. It's not right. Now, you need to think about that, because it's an important part of the next 4 years.

I just want to make one last point in closing. You all heard the Vice President's speech. I thought it was brilliant and impassioned, and I can't make a better case. But I want you to remember four things about him. I don't want you to forget this—"the President told me four things about Al Gore."

Number one, he is by far the most influential and active Vice President in this history of the country. We've had a lot of Vice Presidents. A lot of Vice Presidents made great Presidents—Thomas Jefferson, Teddy Roosevelt, Harry Truman, Lyndon Johnson—but we've never had a Vice President that did so much good as Vice President as Al Gore—never, not ever in the history of the country.

Second, for the reasons I said earlier, when none of you wanted to contract away your projected income for the next 10 years, he is the most likely, by far, to keep our prosperity going and to spread it to people left behind.

Thirdly, you can see from his leadership with the empowerment zones, to connect all of our schools to the Internet, to his work with the science and technology issues and the environment issues, this is a guy who understands the future. And the future is coming on us in a hurry.

I'm glad we've decoded the human genome, but I don't want anybody denied a job or health insurance because of their genetic map. I love the Internet, and I think the Internet can move more people out of poverty more quickly than ever before. But I don't want anybody to be able to get your financial or health care record just because they're on somebody's computer somewhere unless you say okay.

You need someone in the White House who understands the future. So, he's the most qualified person we've ever had because he's the best Vice President. He'll keep the prosperity going. He understands the future.

And the fourth and most important thing for your point of view is, he really does want to take us all along for the ride, and I want a President that wants to take us all along for the ride.

Thank you. Thank you. Let me just say this one last thing. After January, I won't be President, but I'll still—wait a minute—[laughter]—hey, everything comes to an end. [Laughter] But I have loved every day of it. It has been an honor to fight, an honor to work. And for the rest of the time the good Lord gives me on this Earth, I'll be with you. I'll work with you.

But you just remember this. The arena that counts today on the question of what we're going to do with our prosperity is what we do today to elect tomorrow's leaders. You've got to lead the country in this. You've got to make sure we choose and choose wisely. Believe me, in spite of all that's happened, the best is still out there. Go get it.

I love you. Godspeed. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:55 a.m. at the Baltimore Convention Center. In his remarks, he referred to Julian Bond, chairman, Kweisi Mfume, president and chief executive officer, Myrlie Evers-Williams, former chairwoman, Benjamin Hooks, former executive director, Elaine Jones, Legal Defense and Education Fund director-counsel, and Rev. Wendell Anthony, Detroit branch president, NAACP; Mayor Martin J.

O'Malley of Baltimore; Mayor John F. Street of Philadelphia, PA; Orson Porter, Mid-Western Political Director, White House Office of Political Affairs; Republican Presidential candidate Gov. George W. Bush of Texas; Richard Moe, presi-

dent, National Trust for Historic Preservation; civil rights leader Rev. Jesse Jackson; Coretta Scott King, widow of Martin Luther King, Jr.; Gov. Mel Carnahan of Missouri; and family nurse practitioner Doug Bouldin.

Remarks on Presenting the Congressional Gold Medal to Father Theodore M. Hesburgh

July 13, 2000

Thank you. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker; Senator Daschle, Senator Thurmond, Senator Bayh, Senator Lugar, Congressman Roemer. Thank you all for your efforts today. Chaplain Coughlin and distinguished Members of the Congress and, of course, Chaplain Ogilvie. I'd like to say a special word of welcome to the Notre Dame Glee Club, who sang the national anthem without benefit of musical background. Most of us need the music to cover up the mistakes we make, and they were wonderful.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to begin by thanking you for your gracious leadership on this and many other occasions like this, and especially today. I want to also thank you for your work for democracy and freedom and helping to save it in the oldest republic in Latin America, Colombia. I just signed the legislation that you passed in a bipartisan way, and I thank you for that.

I want to say, I have heard many speeches today about a man I admire very much, a servant and child of God, a genuine American patriot, and a citizen of the world and a person that Hillary and I were fortunate to get to know several years before we moved here to Washington. Father, she told me this morning to tell you hello and congratulations. We hope that now that you've got one more award, you'll still be nice to all your ordinary friends who admire you so much. *[Laughter]*

In 1987, when Father Hesburgh retired after 35 years as president of Notre Dame, the New York Times wrote this: "The Hesburgh era is ended, and the Hesburgh legend begins." Well, today, we have seen the legend growing. We've heard a lot about the recognition of his accomplishments, beginning with President Johnson's bestowal of the Medal of Freedom and going through these degrees. You know, this is getting

to be like a fish story; there will be 200 degrees before we finish this ceremony today. *[Laughter]*

But I will say again, I think that all of your friends, the people who have known you over the years and admired everything you've done for civil rights and world peace and for Notre Dame, they'd say that the most important thing about you and the greatest honor you will ever wear around your neck is the collar you have worn for 57 years. From the age of 6, you wanted to be a priest—in his words, a mediator between God and humankind. "A priest belongs to no one," he said, "so he can belong to everyone."

Father's first job at Notre Dame was chaplain of the married veterans who enrolled on the GI bill. He said he loved the job. He had two or three baptisms every Sunday, and he bargained with the local obstetricians to get volume discounts for Notre Dame babies. *[Laughter]*

One of his charges rushed into delivery only 6 months pregnant. The baby was taken by caesarean with a heartbeat but no breath. The medical team could not bring breath. But the instant Father Hesburgh baptized the baby with cold baptismal water, the baby began to cry loudly. That premature baby is now a 6-foot, 2-inch graduate of the University of Notre Dame.

Father Hesburgh never let one value be an excuse for not achieving another. You heard Senator Daschle say that he gave Notre Dame a great university with a great football team. Once he was criticized by some clergy for his emphasis on academic improvement, and he said this: "Piety is no substitute for competent scholarship."

The legendary Robert Maynard Hutchins of the University of Chicago once said that Father