

school. Today, 76 percent are reading and doing math at or above grade level—in 2 years.

Now, if you do it on a—one of the biggest problems with education reform is that no one has ever done it systematically. Every problem in American education has been solved by somebody somewhere. Places like North Dakota have generally done very well because they have time and space enough to give everybody the personal attention they needed. But they will have a lot of these challenges, too. And I'm telling you, it really matters who is Governor. No one has ever succeeded in systematically doing what teachers and principals do every day in the most difficult circumstances, creating miracles all over this country. It's never been done in any State in a systematic way, but some have done much better than others. It matters who the Governor is.

And those are only two examples. It matters economically. It matters in terms of the social services. It matters in terms of how the elderly are treated, and especially those that get nursing home care. And what about the people who are going to be living in boarding homes, and

what about the people that are going to be—you're going to see the most unbelievable explosion of living options for elderly and disabled people, as we are able to keep more disabled people alive and functioning and doing well, and more elderly people live longer, that you can imagine.

And a lot of it—I don't care what we do at the national level and who's the President and what the Congress does; it will matter who the Governor is. I just—the first time I ever met her, I thought she was great. I wanted to take her home to meet Hillary and keep her there for a couple weeks. And she had other obligations. [Laughter] She is an extraordinary woman. You did a good thing coming here and giving her money today. And if we all keep doing it, I think she'll win in November.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:30 p.m. in the Crystal Ballroom at the St. Regis Hotel. State Attorney General Heidi Heitkamp was a candidate for Governor of North Dakota.

Remarks on Senate Action on Permanent Normal Trade Relations With China and an Exchange With Reporters

September 19, 2000

The President. Good afternoon. Today the Senate voted to pave the way for permanent normal trade relations between the United States and China. This landmark agreement will extend economic prosperity at home and promote economic freedom in China, increasing the prospects for openness in China and a more peaceful future for all of us.

When we open markets abroad to U.S. goods, we open opportunities at home. This vote will do that. In return for normal trade relations—the same terms of trade we offer now to more than 130 other countries—China will open its markets to American products from wheat to cars to consulting services. And we will be far more able to sell goods in China without moving our factories there.

But there is much more at stake here than our economic self-interests. It's about building a world in which more human beings have more

freedom, more control over their lives, more contact with others than ever before, a world in which countries are tied more closely together, and the prospects for peace are strengthened.

Trade alone won't create this kind of world, but bringing China under global rules of trade is a step in the right direction. The more China opens its markets to our products, the wider it opens its doors to economic freedom and the more fully it will liberate the potential of its people.

When China finishes its negotiations and joins the WTO, our high-tech companies will help to speed the information revolution there. Outside competition will speed the demise of China's huge state industries and spur the enterprise of private sector involvement.

They will diminish the role of government in people's daily lives. It will strengthen those

within China who fight for higher labor standards, a cleaner environment, for human rights, and the rule of law.

And we will find, I believe, that America has more influence in China with an outstretched hand than with a clenched fist. Of course, none of us should think for a moment that any of these outcomes are guaranteed. The advance of freedom ultimately will depend upon what people in China are willing to do to continue standing up for change. We will continue to help support them.

Peace and security in Asia will depend upon our military presence, our alliances, on stopping the spread of deadly weapons. So we will continue to be a force for peace, and we will not rest in our efforts to make sure that freer trade also is fairer trade.

These are some of the most important issues that our Nation faces. That's why this vote was so important and, for many, so difficult. I want to thank Senator Lott and Senator Daschle, Senator Roth, Senator Moynihan, and Senator Baucus, as well as those who led our effort in the House, and everyone within this administration who worked so hard to achieve this important milestone.

But I also want to acknowledge those who raised important questions about this policy and say to you, this is not the end of the story; it is the beginning. We have a chance, not a certainty but a chance, to strengthen our prosperity and our security and to see China become a more open society. Now our test as a nation is whether we can achieve that. I hope, and I strongly believe, that we will.

Thank you very much.

Middle East Peace Process

Q. Mr. President, what's your understanding of what's going on in the Middle East? Prime Minister Barak announced a suspension of talks. Now, he says he'll resume tomorrow. What's going on there, sir?

The President. They're down to the difficult issues, and they're both feeling the pressure of these hard issues and the press of time. I don't think it's more complicated than that, and I think you should expect, from time to time, both sides to express some exasperation. And as long as they get back to the work, you should feel positive about it.

Q. Are you, sir, exasperated by the process itself?

The President. No. I always thought it was going to be hard. And they're down to the difficult—there are no easy decisions now, so we've just got to keep working at it and try to finish.

Permanent Normal Trade Relations With China

Q. Now that they have the trade bill, sir, what incentive will China have to listen to our concerns about human rights and weapons proliferation?

The President. Well, first of all, on the proliferation front, let me point out that we've made a lot of progress. China signed the Chemical Weapons Convention, the Biological Weapons Convention, the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. And they work with us to stop transfers that we thought were destructive on more than one occasion.

Are there still problems? Yes, there are. I think that the incentive they will have is that more and more countries will want to become more and more involved with them as long as they feel that they're becoming more responsible members of the international community. And also, they'll have other ways to earn money over the long run that are responsible, legal, and actually socially beneficial. And I also believe that they have shown in other ways that they would like to be partners in the international system and assume a leadership role that is constructive. All of this will be possible if there is a common course on nonproliferation. Furthermore, I think that all big countries will come to see that their own personal interests are more advanced by nonproliferation than by having various entities within the country make a quick buck through proliferation. It's not good politics, and it's certainly not good for national security.

Downed Cuban Aircraft

Q. Mr. President, have you followed the situation of this downed aircraft just off of Cuba, and what can you tell us about that situation, sir?

The President. I don't know that I can say any more than I have seen on the breaking news. I have clearly—I've been briefed, and we know about what's been on the news reports. Let me say this. I can imagine that there will be a lot of questions about what should be done about the people that are found alive. I think the most important thing now is just to worry about their care: How badly are they hurt; what

kind of medical care do they need; how quickly can we get it to them? To me, that's the overwhelming question, and I think other facts will emerge as the day goes on, and we'll probably know a lot more about it tomorrow.

Strategic Petroleum Reserve

Q. How close are you, sir, to making a decision on tapping the Strategic Petroleum Reserve, and what sort of time constraints do you have to work with, given the fact that winter's coming?

The President. Well, first I want to—I really do want to see what is the considered market judgment about the recent OPEC move, and I don't think we've seen it yet. It's been sort of complicated by speculations about Iraq, about speculations about what the refinery capacity is, and some uncertainty, still, about how much oil is on the seas now based on production.

So I'm studying this very closely. I've talked to a lot of people about it; I will continue to do that. But we have some time before it will be too late to affect the supplies and availability of all the products we'll need as the cold weather sets in. I just think we need a few more days to see what the real market impact of the OPEC decision is. And as all of you know—you've read all the stories and analyses about what the decision might or might not mean, and I just want to see what the lay of the land is, and then I'll make the best judgment I can.

Q. Would mid-October be too late?

Independent Counsel's Report

Q. Mr. President, there's word that Independent Counsel Ray will release a statement tomorrow about his findings on Whitewater, including the role of your wife. Six weeks away from the election, do you question the timing?

The President. Well, you know, even Mr. Starr said almost 2 years ago that there was nothing to any of that stuff that's just been coming out now, a year and a half later. So I think people are capable of drawing their own conclusions about that. I don't think I can serve much of the public interest by commenting on it. I think it's pretty obvious.

We had a report from a truly independent source in 1996, saying that nothing wrong was done and that Hillary's billing records fully supported her account—1996. So nothing has changed in this thing in the last few years, and I think people will just be able to draw their own conclusions.

Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 3:42 p.m. in the James S. Brady Briefing Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Prime Minister Ehud Barak of Israel and former Independent Counsel Kenneth Starr. A reporter referred to Independent Counsel Robert W. Ray.

Statement on Legislation To Establish a National Drunk Driving Standard September 19, 2000

A new study released today by Transportation Secretary Rodney Slater underscores the need for Congress to act swiftly to strengthen protections against drunk driving.

The study by the U.S. Department of Transportation's National Highway Transportation Safety Administration makes clear that crucial driving skills are seriously impaired when an individual's blood alcohol content (BAC) reaches .08. Simply put, this study lends further proof that at .08, a person is too impaired to safely get behind the wheel. To help stem drunk driving and other safety hazards, the Department is releasing nearly \$44 million in highway safety

grants to 38 States and the District of Columbia. These grants will provide important incentives for States to save lives through tough programs and penalties to reduce drunk driving and increase seat belt use.

But we must do more to make our streets and highways safer. In the Transportation Appropriations conference report, Congress has the opportunity right now to save an estimated 500 lives a year by setting a nationwide standard of .08 BAC. The Senate courageously passed this lifesaving measure in June, thanks to the leadership of Senators Lautenberg and Shelby. I urge the Congress to send me a final bill