

July 22 / Administration of William J. Clinton, 2000

Yomitan Village in getting the island ready for the G-8 summit; like our naval hospital and our fire departments, working with their counterparts to improve emergency services; like the 7th Communication Battalion's efforts to do cleanup, make repairs, and pay visits to the residents of Hikariga Ogata Nursing Home.

And so many of you, the rest of you who reach out in your own way to schools, to orphanages, to hospitals, to retirement homes, these acts of kindness give a whole new meaning to the old words: Send in the Marines.

Two hundred and twenty-four years ago, when America was born, the world's only democracy was defended by an army that was then very badly outnumbered. Today, you are part of the greatest fighting force in history, part of the forward march of freedom.

But the most important thing I want to say to you is that your fellow Americans are proud of you and grateful to you. As I think about the enormous honor I have had for 7½ years now to serve as President, an honor which includes visiting more military units than any other

Commander in Chief in the history of the Republic, I am profoundly moved by what I have seen and by what I see here tonight. I wanted to come here, and I thank you for changing the schedule and coming out tonight. I thank you for the inspiration you've given me as I go back to try to finalize the peace talks on the Middle East. I thank you for giving your lives to the United States and the cause of freedom and peace.

Thank you. God bless you, and God bless America. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:18 p.m. In his remarks, he referred to 7th Fleet Landing Force Commander Lt. Gen. Earl B. Hailston, USMC; 18th Air Wing Commander Brig. Gen. James B. Smith, USAF; Camp Smedley D. Butler Commander General Brig. Gen. Gary H. Hughey, USMC; Seventh Fleet Amphibious Force Commander Rear Adm. Paul S. Schultz, USN; First Special Operations Squadron Staff Sgt. Shane A. Wehunt, USAF; and U.S. Ambassador to Japan Thomas S. Foley.

Remarks Prior to Discussions With Prime Minister Tony Blair of the United Kingdom and an Exchange With Reporters in Okinawa

July 23, 2000

Education Initiative for Developing Countries/ Group of Eight Summit

President Clinton. Good morning. Well, Prime Minister Blair and I are about to have breakfast together, and we have a lot to talk about, but before we do, I wanted to just make a couple of comments.

First of all—can you hear me now?—I wanted to make a couple of comments before I start my breakfast with Prime Minister Blair. First of all, let me say how much I appreciate the leadership of Prime Minister Mori in hosting this G-8 summit. This was the idea of the late Prime Minister Obuchi. I talked to him about it several times. I'm so glad that his wife was also able to be at our event last night. But I think the Japanese were very wise in bringing us to Okinawa. I personally enjoyed it. Of course, for an American President, it was a special pleasure because I was able to see so many of our troops and their families here. But this

was a very good thing. I also think it was a very good summit.

I wanted to say just a few words about one aspect of development that Prime Minister Blair has been particularly interested in, and shown a lot of leadership in our group, and that is the importance of the developed countries, the EU, the United States, Japan, and others, doing more for education in the developing countries. And I wanted to say just a few words about that.

I've been working on a proposal now for some months. It's obvious to me that we can't fight poverty effectively without not only dealing with the disease issue, which you Americans know we've done a lot with, without trying to close the digital divide, but also without expanding literacy and learning.

About 120 million children in the developing world never enroll in school. Hundreds of millions more never learn to read. The G-8 embraced our common commitment to ensure universal basic education in the poorest countries. One of the best things we can do to get children in school is to provide them at least one nutritious meal there every day.

So today I'm announcing a new initiative to support the international effort to provide meals to hungry school- and preschool-age children. Working with the World Food Program and NGO's, the United States will make a contribution of \$300 million to this effort. That money is enough to give one good meal to 9 million schoolchildren for a year in the developing world.

It will go to countries with a commitment to expand access to basic education, especially for girls who are still disproportionately left out of the education process. We will work carefully to do this in a way that does not interrupt local agricultural production. And let me say, one of the reasons we have to try to do this in a pilot way, even though this is a very large pilot, is to make sure we can find ways to add to the stock of school meals for children without interrupting the livelihoods of local farmers.

This idea has extraordinary bipartisan support in the United States. It was first brought to me by our U.N. Ambassador in Rome for Food, former Senator George McGovern, and Senator Bob Dole, along with Congressman Jim McGovern from Massachusetts. There is an enormous amount of support in both parties in our country for this, and I want to especially thank Senator McGovern, Senator Dole, and Congressman McGovern for their leadership in this.

I hope this pilot will grow over time as other nations participate and as we find out how to do this in a way that supports, not undermines, local agricultural efforts. And we will work with our partners and with Congress to make sure this has the maximum impact.

But I just want to say again, we estimate that we can increase school enrollment in the developing countries by millions and millions and millions just by telling these children and their parents that we can give them one nutritious meal a day if, but only if, they show up in school. So I think this is one of the most cost-effective ways we can help the developing

countries who are trying to improve school enrollment to do so.

So that's what I wanted to say. And again, I want to thank Prime Minister Mori for his leadership in this conference and especially for the work done on development. This is the first time, at least in my experience, and this is my last G-8 conference, that there has been such a systematic focus on the developing world, on the problems of disease and the digital divide and education. And he deserves a lot of credit for that, as well as for the advances we made today—I mean, this week—in our bilateral relations. So I'm glad I came, and I think it was a great conference.

I'd like for the Prime Minister to have a chance to say a few words now.

Prime Minister Blair. First of all, can I join in what President Clinton has just said to you about the excellence of the chairmanship of Prime Minister Mori, and our thanks, too, for the way that he has hosted this conference, and also to the people of this island of Okinawa.

Can I also express my very strong support for the initiative that President Clinton has just announced to you. And we in the U.K. will look at the ways that we can help work with the U.S. and with others to make this initiative count.

I mean, obviously at this G-8 conference we have been discussing issues to deal with the international financial system. You may remember a couple of years ago that was the very difficult issue that we were trying to deal with, and we managed to deal with it with a certain amount of success I think. We dealt also with issues like organized crime and drugs, issues to do with biotechnology and so on.

But I think President Clinton is absolutely right that the focus of this summit has been very much on what we can do for the developing world. And I think that this summit, perhaps more than any other that I've attended, we've tried not just to deal with the issue of debt, with the issues of trade, with the issues of aid and development, with the issues of health, but we've also tried to look at how we foster and help education and access to education in the developing world. Because unless we deal with all these issues together, and in particular, unless we give the young children in the developing world the chance of getting quality education and being able to enroll in school and being able to get access to the new

technology and best learning available, then it's very difficult for these children, for these countries, to make progress.

So, of course, I know for many who work hard in the developing world, progress is often agonizingly slow. But I think that in the range of issues that we've discussed over these last few days, and in the focus on dealing with all these issues together, we have made some very significant steps forward. And I think and hope in the years to come that we will be able to do even more.

I think also, if I may just say, since this is President Clinton's last G-8 summit, last night all the leaders of the G-8 spoke not just of our immense affection for President Clinton, personally, but of our real admiration for his strength and his leadership over these past few years. I mean, he will have heard me say this many times, but I wouldn't want to leave this G-8 summit without just underlining that. That is the universal feeling amongst the leaders of the G-8, and we're all going to miss him very greatly, indeed.

Middle East Peace Summit

Q. Mr. President, after this 3-day interlude in the Middle East peace talks, do you think the chances of getting an agreement are any better than when you left Washington and it appeared that it was basically dead?

President Clinton. Well, I can't say that because of the rule that they follow, which you have to follow in such matters, which is nothing is agreed to until everything is agreed to. But I can say that they have not wasted the time. They've really worked, and I am very grateful for that. There is a rhythm in every one of these things I've ever been involved in. Some of them start off with a bang, and you go from there. Some of them never get off the ground. Some of them—most of them, there's a lot of feeling around until you get your bearings. They have worked. That's all I can tell you. Whether we get an agreement or not, they have tried. They have really been out there working.

I cannot comment yet on the respective positions of the parties because they're going on, and it would violate my understanding. But my understanding is, since I left—maybe because I left—I don't think that—but since I left there has been a lot more sort of systematic effort with the groups on a lot of the issues. So what-

ever happens, I think they have continued to make headway.

Genetically Modified Foods

Q. Mr. President, do you think the Europeans are being too cautious on the issue of GM foods? And perhaps the Prime Minister could also comment on that issue.

President Clinton. Well, I think you know that I believe that. On the other hand, I believe every country, and certainly the European Union, has a right and a responsibility to assure food safety. The only thing I have ever asked on GM foods is that the decisions be made based on clear science.

And I have certainly no objection to consumers knowing whether the food they buy are GM—I think there's nothing wrong with people knowing that—but knowledge only matters, knowledge of a certain category of things only matters if you know what it means underneath. So I think we should continue to do research; we should explore all alternatives. I can only tell you that I would never knowingly let the American people eat unsafe food.

Q. Prime Minister?

Prime Minister Blair. At the risk of running into trouble on these issues back home from time to time, I just believe what is essential is that we recognize two things. The first is that this whole science of biotechnology is going—I mean, I'm not an expert on it, but people tell me whose opinions I respect that this whole science of biotechnology is perhaps going to be, for the first half of the 21st century what information technology was to the last half of the 20th century. And therefore, it's particularly important, especially for a country like Britain that is a leader in this science of biotechnology, that we proceed according to the facts and the science.

And the second thing to say is that in respect to the facts and the science, I just hope we have an open and a fair debate. I mean, there are intensely held views on both sides of this argument, but the most important thing is that we get access to the best scientific evidence. Consumers should, of course, know what it is that they're eating and consuming. But for the consumers to make that judgment properly, they need the best science available. And that's what we've been working to in the U.K.

As I say, it's not always popular to say that, but I think it's important because it's the right

thing to do. And who knows what in 10, 20, 30 years will be the judgment about this new science. All I know is that our responsibility as leaders is to say to people, let's set up the best system, best process available so that you get the real facts, not the prejudices of one side or the commercial interests of one side but the facts and the science. And then we can make judgments.

President Clinton. Let me just make one other comment about this, because I'm not running for anything so I can say this. This tends to be treated as an issue of the interest of the agribusiness companies and earning big profits against food safety or some ultimate impact on biodiversity, which of course also should be studied. But that's not the real issue here.

The real issue is, how can you get the best food to the largest number of people in the world at the lowest possible price? That is the real issue. If it's safe—that's the big issue. All the evidence that I've seen convinces me, based on what all the scientists now know, that it is. But of course, every country has to deal with that.

But just for example, if we could get more of this golden rice, which is a genetically modified strain of rice, especially rich in vitamin A, out to the developed world, it could save 40,000 lives a day, people that are malnourished and dying. So this is a big issue, and it seems to me that's the way we ought to approach it, which is why I think we ought to, of course, be guided by the safety issues, but it ought to be a scientific judgment.

Go ahead.

Group of Eight Summit

Q. Mr. President, this being your last G-8 summit, how would you sum up the achievements of this summit, and how would you change G-8 for the better, given your experience over the years? And finally, do you think Russia should now be a full member of G-8, from start to finish, without a separate G-7 and G-8 procedure?

President Clinton. Let me start at the back. For all practical purposes, Russia is a full member of this. But the G-7 have to meet separately when there are creditor nation issues that only the creditor nations can deal with. And I think that you will see more and more and more of that. But for all practical purposes, they are

There are some decisions that have to be taken by the leaders in the G-7 as creditor nations. It's purely a question of financial necessity. Otherwise, Russia is fully involved.

Secondly, last year we had a big—at Cologne—we had a big debt relief initiative for the developing world. This year we've built on the debt relief issue by looking into other issue related to alleviating poverty and closing the vast gaps in income and quality of life. And that's what we talked about today with education; that's what the disease initiative was all about. So I think they're going in the right direction.

And I don't have any particular suggestions for changes, except I think that every year if we could do what Prime Minister Mori did this year, focus on some problem that affects not only us but the rest of the world and have at least half-day where we bring in people like they did in Tokyo—and I regret that I missed that part of it because I think it was fascinating—I think that would be a good thing to do.

I think the fact that it's more informal now than it used to be and that the leaders spend more time talking than they used to—maybe not making news on a particular day, is a plus, not a negative. These people need to know each other. There are a lot of decisions they have to make, a lot of conflicts they can avoid if they know each other and trust each other. So I'm not troubled by the format.

U.S. Presence on Okinawa

Q. Mr. President, if so many people on Okinawa resent the presence of American military here, why not withdraw them?

President Clinton. Well, because we still have security needs here and because I believe that as long as we're good citizens, most of the people on Okinawa understand and appreciate that. What we are doing is aggressively trying to reduce our footprint, and we should continue to do that. We should be as little burden and as great an economic support to the people of Okinawa as possible, because they have borne a disproportionate share.

But I want to say again to Governor Inamine and the people of Okinawa, they've done a great job on this conference, but they've been very, very good to the United States service families that have been here over all these years. And we're going to keep trying to reduce our burden, but we have not yet reached the time, in my

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judgment, when the Japan-U.S. security partnership requires no presence of the United States forces in northern Asia.

Thank you.

NOTE: The exchange began at 9:20 a.m. in the lobby at the Manza Beach Hotel. In his remarks,

the President referred to Prime Minister Yoshiro Mori of Japan; Chizuko Obuchi, widow of former Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi of Japan; Gov. Keiichi Inamine of Okinawa; and former Senator Bob Dole. A tape was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

Statement on the Department of Health and Human Services Report on the Decline in Youth Gun Deaths

July 24, 2000

The Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) released promising new data today showing that the number of children killed by gunfire in America continues to decline. The HHS report shows that 3,792 children and teens were killed with guns in 1998—a 10 percent decline from the year before. The reduction is even more significant when compared to 1994: 2,000 fewer young people were killed by gunfire in 1998 than in 1994—a 35 percent decrease. Our combined efforts to reduce gun violence and save lives are indeed having an impact.

While these figures are encouraging, there is no question that gun violence is still far too prevalent in our Nation. Despite our progress, 10 young people are killed with guns every day in America. All of us must work together toward a solution. Parents must ensure that guns are

stored safely to prevent accidental shootings. Schools and communities must give children positive alternatives to steer them away from guns and violence. Law enforcement must crack down on gun traffickers who supply young people with firearms and armed criminals who commit violence against our children. And the gun industry must responsibly design, distribute, and market its products to make sure that they do not fall into the wrong hands.

Congress has an important role to play as well by fully funding my \$280 million national gun enforcement initiative and by passing the stalled commonsense gun safety legislation that can help keep guns out of the hands of children and criminals. Working together, we can keep gun violence on the decline and the prospects for our children's future going up.

Statement on the Selection of Zell Miller To Be Senator From Georgia

July 24, 2000

Georgia Governor Roy Barnes has exercised great wisdom in selecting former Governor Zell Miller to fill the Senate seat of the late Paul Coverdell. Zell Miller will continue to demonstrate the same devotion to the citizens of Georgia and our Nation that was the hallmark of Senator Coverdell's Senate career. Having established himself as one of the greatest Governors in Georgia history, Zell returned to his first love, teaching college. He now comes to Washington out of a profound sense of duty to his Nation and the people of his State.

His commitment and accomplishments in education have rightly earned him the title, "the education Governor." I was so impressed with the HOPE scholarships he began in Georgia that I took the program national, giving millions of young people the opportunity to pursue their dream of a college education. Zell Miller has also been a leader in the areas of economic development, crime prevention, and social justice. In every job he has ever held—as a U.S. marine, college professor, Lieutenant Governor, and Governor—Zell Miller has put the interest of hard working families first. I believe he will