

## Remarks at a Reception for the United States Olympic and Paralympic Teams

November 29, 2000

Thank you very much. First of all, Hillary and I are delighted to welcome all of you here. And I want to thank Secretary Shalala and General McCaffrey for being part of our Olympic delegation to Sydney. I thank the United States Olympic Committee President Bill Hybl for being here, and the Olympians who are here with me, who will come up in a moment.

I'm also grateful, I might say, to the people of Australia, who did a wonderful job in welcoming our American athletes and organizing these Olympics. And really, I asked all the team here so that I could forgive them for completely destroying my sleep habits for several weeks during the Olympics. [*Laughter*] Like so many Americans, I was thrilled by the accomplishments of these remarkable teams.

I have often said that it seems to me the Olympics capture our imagination not just because we love athletics and love competition but because we think the Olympics and Paralympic games work the way life ought to work: people work together; if you work hard and play by the rules, you get rewarded; you're evaluated regardless of race or gender or station in life; individuals and teams find success and wind up winning just by making the efforts.

The summer games in Australia were no different than the ones before them. America did very well, once again, with 40 gold medals, 97 overall, more than any other country. And our spirit was put on display there, as one athlete after another overcame tremendous odds to achieve victory, athletes like our diver, Laura Wilkinson, who captured the gold medal just 3 months after breaking three bones in her right foot; Lenny Krayzelburg, who came here from the Ukraine in 1989 and just a decade later won all three of the backstroke events; the women's softball team lost three games in a row and still came from behind to win the gold medal; and of course, there was the minor matter of a little farm boy from Wyoming, Rulon Gardner, who defeated Alexandre Karelin.

The Sydney games broke new barriers, opening gates of competition to people once left behind. More than 4,000 athletes, representing a record 122 countries, competed in this year's

Paralympic games. Americans like sprinter Marlon Shirley and cyclist Pam Fernandes proved that disability is no barrier to success.

We also reached a milestone for female athletes. A hundred years ago the first women competed at the Paris summer Olympics. There were 19, and one, the golfer Margot Abbot, became the first American woman to win an American Olympic gold medal.

This year, in the first Olympics of the new millennium, women comprised a recordbreaking 42 percent of the participants. And for the first time, women competed in the pole vault, water polo, and weightlifting. I might say, I watched the women's weightlifting and water polo competition with great interest, and after it was over, I couldn't tell which one was rougher. [*Laughter*] The final American medal of this year's Olympic games went to a woman, Emily deRiel, in the first-ever women's pentathlon. You pushed the limits of the human body and the human spirit.

Every Olympian stands in the starting blocks alone, of course, but no one wins alone. No one wins without family, friends, coaches, and others who have helped you make the most of your God-given ability. I hope that you, each and every one of you, in your own way, will take some time to help others make the most of their God-given abilities.

And let me just put in one plug for one public interest matter that I care a lot about. One of the great ironies of the present day is that as Americans fall more and more in love with athletes and athletics, more and more of our young people are participating by sitting on the sidelines or on the couch only. More and more of our young children are overweight and out of shape, and they are putting their health, long-term, at risk. We have got to turn this around.

This morning Secretary Shalala and our Education Secretary, Dick Riley, led a meeting with our partners to explore the most effective way to implement a report's recommendation that was issued to me today about this—and you may have read about it in the newspaper—more

and more young people doing less and less exercise mean more and more overweight. It's going to take a team effort for us to turn this around.

Not every young person can win an Olympic medal or even make the Olympics teams, but every young person has a body that is a gift from God that ought to be maximized in terms of health and capacity. So I ask for your help in that.

Let me just say one final thing. For some of you, your Olympic moment may be now just a wonderful memory in your lives. For others, it is just the beginning of a long and illustrious career in your sport. But for all of you, your training and your achievement will bring a lifetime of benefits. You now know what you can do if you do your best. I hope that these benefits will accrue to you, your community, your country, and the rest of our world.

We must always remember that no matter how many records we break or how fast we run or how high we jump, there are still no limits to our quest for excellence—the Olympic motto from the beginning: *citius, altius, fortius*, swifter, higher, stronger. I hope you will bring that to the work of citizenship as well as to your competition, now and forever.

Congratulations. We are very, very proud of you.

[At this point, U.S. Olympic Committee President Bill Hybl, International Olympic Committee Vice President Anita L. DeFrantz, and members of the Olympic team presented gifts to the President.]

*The President.* Thank you. Let me—I don't think I did this right, but the Olympians who gave me the award were Stacy Dragila and Lenny Krayzelburg and Marlon Shirley and Pam Fernandes, and they represent this whole team. And they also made me a little warmer out here today. [Laughter] So I want to thank them for their remarks. I thank all of you for being here. We either are or already have taken a picture with the whole team, and then we're going to go inside and let everybody look at the White House. But thank you very, very much, all of you. Welcome again, and happy holidays.

Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:45 p.m. in the South Portico at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Greco-Roman wrestler Rulon Gardner and pole vaulter Stacy Dragila, U.S. Olympic team; and Greco-Roman wrestler Alexandre Karelin, Russian Olympic team.

## Statement on the 25th Anniversary of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act

November 29, 2000

Today I join millions of Americans in celebrating the 25th anniversary of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), a landmark civil rights law that opens the doors to education and success for more than 6 million American children each year. As we recognize this milestone, we know that education is the key to our children's future, and it is the IDEA that ensures all children with disabilities have access to a free, appropriate public education. We have seen tremendous progress over the past 25 years—students with disabilities are graduating from high school, completing college, and entering the competitive workforce in record numbers—and we must continue this progress over the next 25 years and beyond.

The benefits of the IDEA stretch far beyond just those with disabilities. The new technologies and teaching methods developed to assist students with disabilities are improving education for all students. Three-quarters of children with disabilities are learning in classrooms alongside their non-disabled peers, contributing to the diversity that is one of America's greatest strengths. This level of success would not be possible without the dedicated involvement of parents and educators who are committed to a strong educational system for all children, and I salute their dedication and accomplishments.

In this time of record prosperity, with more opportunities for success than ever before, we must ensure that all of our children have the