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Remarks at a Dinner Honoring President Chirac

February 1, 1996

Ladies and gentlemen, good evening. President Chirac, Mrs. Chirac, members of the French delegation, to our distinguished guests from France and the United States, Hillary and I are delighted to welcome a great friend of our country to America's house.

As President tonight I am thinking of the experience of one of my most illustrious predecessors, Thomas Jefferson. As every American knows, when Thomas Jefferson was Minister to France, he developed a fondness for everything French. When he returned home, his political opponents tried to turn the American people against him by accusing him of excessive Francophilia. [Laughter] Patrick Henry struck the harshest blow. He denounced Jefferson, and I quote, for "abjuring his native victuals" in favor of French cuisine. [Laughter] Somehow Jefferson overcame the attack and went on to become President. And thank goodness, today Americans consider a good French meal to be a supreme treat, not high treason. [Laughter] Still, I feel compelled to make full disclosure to our French guests, our extraordinary White House chef, Walter Scheib, is an American. [Laughter]

A decade before Thomas Jefferson went to France, France came to the aid of American people. Dozens of ships carrying cannon, rifles, mortars, and clothing crossed the Atlantic to supply those who were fighting here for our independence. At Yorktown, General George Washington's troops were one-half French. And together with the French fleet, they decided our great revolutionary struggle in freedom's favor there. So it is not an exaggeration to say that the American people owe our liberty to France.

Today, freedom-loving people all over the world still look to France, not only for its

strength, but for its values, the tolerance, the freedom, the process. We see that in Bosnia where the heroism of France's soldiers and the determination of its President are helping peace to take hold.

We see it in Africa where France is battling poverty and disease to bring hope to millions. We see it in Europe where French leadership is transforming Jean Monnet's vision of an undivided continent finally into a reality.

And we see it in the struggle that France is waging against the forces of destruction in the modern world, against the terrorism, the organized crime, the drug trafficking—forces from which none of us are immune.

Mr. President, I am grateful to have you as our partner in facing all these common challenges. I have long admired your political tenacity, and I have a suggestion that in France they should begin to call you, "Le Comeback Kid." [Laughter] I also think all of my fellow Americans should know that, as far as I know, the President is the only foreign head of state who once worked behind the counter at a Howard Johnson's restaurant. [Laughter]

I know the deep affection he developed for our Nation lives on and that he still takes vacations in California. Today, he gave me some good advice; he suggested that I should spend a little time out there in the next few months. [Laughter]

Most of all, Mr. President, let me say I admire the course you have set for France and the strength and determination which you are bringing to pursuing that course. Our nations have a special responsibility to lead by example and by action. Under your leadership, France is meeting that responsibility. And the United States is very, very proud to be a partner on the verge of a new century with our very first ally.

And so let us all raise a glass to France, to its President and First Lady, and to our enduring alliance. Long live our two nations.

NOTE: The President spoke at 8:36 p.m. in the State Dining Room at the White House.

**Remarks to the Community in
Concord, New Hampshire**

February 2, 1996

Thank you very much, Mayor Veroneau, Superintendent Sokness, to my host principal today, Mr. Cogswell, thank you. We had a wonderful time at your wonderful school. I want to thank the two people who spoke just before me. It's great to be back in Concord, great to be back in New Hampshire, great to be reminded of what makes our country work.

Cullin Wible, I thought, gave a good talk today for a person of any age, but a remarkable talk for a high school junior. We ought to give him another hand. *[Applause]* It was good. But his service in helping the other students to fully access the learning that can come with being able to use technology is even more important than how well he spoke. And that is symbolic of what we need more of in America, people helping each other to bring out the best in themselves.

I also want to say that I am truly amazed and genuinely admiring of the remarkable work that Stephen Rothenberg has done with his students, in bringing the computers into the classroom and getting private businesses here to help to give more equipment to young people who otherwise never would have been able to afford to have any high technology equipment, especially things they could take home; in letting people work together to put out that remarkable newspaper and taking it to the community, even beyond the school; and in realizing that every child has a contribution to make and a gift to develop. You know, if we had every teacher in America that committed, that innovative, that creative, and every community providing the kind of support I've seen today, our country could cut its social problems in half in a matter of a few years. I thank you, Stephen Rothenberg; you did a great job.

I am delighted to be back here. I want to thank all of you for coming out, from Merrimack Valley, from Pembroke, from Hopkinton, and of course from Concord. Four years ago, I visited Concord High School, 4 years ago this month. I had a horrible cold. I could hardly speak. I'm glad to be in somewhat better voice today. I'm glad

to see all the people from the Second Start program again. *[Applause]* Thank you.

You know, every 4 years this State performs a very valuable function for the rest of the country. In the New Hampshire primary system you have the opportunity, face-to-face in small groups and community meetings and real settings, at work and in school, to hold people who would seek the Nation's highest office accountable to the citizens who are ultimately in control of our destiny. You can ask about issues, and you can teach people who come from different lives and different experiences what it's like to see the entire American experience.

In your tradition of town meetings and quiet conversations and genuine dialog, you rebuke the loud slogans and the harsh conflicts and so much of modern political life which sheds more heat than light. I know that, 4 years ago, I think the most valuable experience for me in New Hampshire was not just surviving and going on to be nominated and win but what I learned about America from the people of New Hampshire, including a lot of the students of New Hampshire who told me what their families' lives were like in those difficult days.

I'm thrilled to be here at this Capital Center for the Arts. I know that Bob Hope and George Burns have been here, and I can't promise to be as funny as they were. *[Laughter]* But I can tell you, once I found out that they had been here, I wanted to come, because if they have been here, this is obviously a good place to extend your career. *[Laughter]*

I also want to say a word to you of support for this incredible project, this beautiful, beautiful facility, this breathtaking ceiling that I just learned before I came out took 3,000 hours of volunteer labor. When this theater was condemned in 1989, you could have shrugged your shoulders and gone about your business; if you had done that, we would be holding this meeting in a parking lot today. But community leaders did not do that. Individuals, large companies, small businesses, the government, everybody decided they would work together to turn this challenge into an opportunity; and this grand theater is the result.