

I can't think of a better Thanksgiving present that you could give to them.

Let me also say that I was very honored—I've got four Members of the Congress here who voted for this, but I was very honored to sign the legislation which raised the pay and improved the retirement of members of the military. But let me also say that we are well aware that in this good economy, with the training you've gotten in the military, that you're not serving for the money, but we think you ought to be properly compensated and have a good retirement, and it ought to be an incentive for you to stay if you're so inclined.

But we honor your service; we need you. And on Thanksgiving, those of us who came here will be home, and you will be a long way from home. But you will be in our hearts, and I hope you know that what you're doing is a great, great gift to your country.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 3:30 p.m. in a dining tent. In his remarks, he referred to the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2000, Public Law 106-65, approved October 5.

Remarks at the Thanksgiving Turkey Presentation Ceremony and an Exchange With Reporters

November 24, 1999

The President. Please sit down, everyone. Welcome to this annual day-before-Thanksgiving ritual here at the White House. I want to welcome particularly the Boys and Girls Clubs from Greater Washington, Horton's Kids, the people from the National Turkey Federation, and especially Chairman Jim Rieth and the president, Stuart Proctor.

I also want to say a special word of welcome to Representative Peter Deutsch from Florida and his family, who are here. This is a triumph of human stamina, because Peter just made the trip with me to Bulgaria and Kosovo. We got back very late last night, so he promised to come so there would be two jet-lagged people standing here together, and we're glad to see them.

I want to thank, as always, the National Turkey Federation for donating this year's tom turkey. It traveled here all the way from

Minnesota. Minnesota may be the second biggest turkey-producing State in our country. Sometimes I wonder if it's really a match for Washington, DC. [*Laughter*]

Tomorrow we celebrate the last Thanksgiving of this century. A hundred years ago, on these very grounds, President William McKinley reflected on the last turn of the century. He said, "Seldom has this Nation had greater cause for profound thanksgiving." Those words ring even more true today.

Today we count among our national blessing a time of unprecedented prosperity, with expanding economy, low rates of poverty and unemployment among our people, limitless opportunities for our children and the future. We are also very grateful for the peace and freedom America continues to enjoy, thanks to our men and women in uniform—many of whom I saw yesterday—a very long way from home at Thanksgiving.

As we gather around our dinner tables tomorrow with family and friends, let us give thanks for all these things that hold us together as a people—the duty we owe to our parents and our children; the nurturing and education of our families, especially our children, and for many, our grandchildren; the bounty of our earth; and the strong spirit of community we enjoy here in the United States.

We also know as we celebrate our blessings that there are still too many people who are hungry at this holiday season, both beyond our borders and around the world and, sadly, even here in the United States. That's why it's so important that we not only give thanks but also give back to our communities.

Before coming out here, I asked some of our staff members what they were thankful for this holiday season. One of my staff members said, "Today I'm thankful that I'm not a turkey." [*Laughter*] I know that one turkey doesn't have to worry about that—this fine-looking bird from the State of Minnesota. At over 50 pounds, he is the namesake of Harry S. Truman, the President who began the tradition of keeping at least one turkey off the Thanksgiving dinner table. Harry, the turkey, will get his pardon today.

So before I feast on one of the 45 million turkeys who will make the ultimate sacrifice,

let me give this one a permanent reprieve, and tell you all that he will soon be on his way to the wonderful petting zoo at Fairfax County, Virginia, where he can enjoy his golden years.

I want to say a special word of appreciation for the people who run this petting zoo and who give, therefore, a lot of children the opportunity to see animals and to touch them in a way that they never would.

Just before we came out here—or before we started the ceremony, Stuart reminded me that this turkey is a little more calm than the one we had last year. One of the most interesting things I've discovered in the 7 years we've done this is that turkeys really do have personalities, very different ones. And most all of them have been quite welcoming to the President and to the children who want to pet them. On occasion, they're as independent as the rest of Americans. [Laughter]

So, Harry, you've got your pardon. Ladies and gentlemen, Happy Thanksgiving.

Vieques Island

Q. Mr. President, on Vieques, how are you going with reaching a compromise with Governor Rossello with regard to Vieques?

The President. Well, we're working very hard on it, and the Defense Department and the Government of Puerto Rico have been working together. And here's a case where I believe there are two legitimate issues here. There's the legitimate concerns of the people of Puerto Rico, which I think are quite real, particularly the people on the island. And then there's the absolutely legitimate concern of sending all of our units out combat-ready. So we're working hard through that.

I have spent a lot of time on it myself, and I hope that in the next few days, we'll have something to say about it. We're getting there.

Hillary Clinton's Senate Campaign

Q. What did you think of your wife's emphatic statement, Mrs. Clinton's emphatic statement yesterday regarding the Senate race? And did you advise her to do that?

The President. Well, I think—first of all, I thought it was a good statement. I thought she did well yesterday. And what told—what

she said in public is what she's been telling me for weeks and weeks, and I think she just thought that, even though, for a lot of good reasons, she thought she should wait until next year to make a formal announcement, I thought it was a wise thing for her to do, to decide that—to make it clear that she had no doubt that she was going to do it.

Q. Are you, in a sense, prepared to not have a First Lady here? Are you prepared to do many of the things, in a sense, that she might do?

The President. Well, I want her to do this if she wants to do it—and she does—and if a lot of people in New York want her to do it—and they do. And I think that we'll have to make accommodations. She'll be here and do some things, and some things that she might otherwise do she won't. But I'm excited for her, and if I can help her in any way, I will. I think it's wonderful.

Q. Did she sense that many people in New York were concerned, many Democrats especially in New York were concerned about her veracity—that's the only word—

The President. You mean about whether she was serious about running?

Q. Whether she was serious.

The President. Well, I think that there are a lot of people who kept saying that, and apparently there was some concern, so I thought it was a good thing to clear it up. I always think if there's any doubt and you can resolve it, you ought to do it. So I think she did that, and I'm proud of her.

Vieques Island

Q. Mr. President, how soon will you hear from Secretary Cohen on Vieques? Today or Friday?

Q. What kind of a race do you think she'll have? Do you think it's going to be tough?

The President. I don't know. We've worked hard on this. I think largely the timing will be determined by the facts—that is all the issues that are out there that we're still working through. Because I feel very strongly that the people of Puerto Rico have some legitimate concerns, not only just on the facts here but on the whole relationship since 1983 with the military. I think that Secretary Cohen and Secretary Danzig were

very concerned about it. They've been extremely responsive, and I think everyone has worked hard in good faith here.

I must say, I've been very impressed by the work of—and the approach that Governor Rossello and Congressman Romero-Barcelo have had, and also the people at Defense. We've really worked hard on this in a good spirit. And like I said, I've spent an awful lot of time on it myself. And I hope we can get it worked out. I'm not sure—I can't say for sure we will, but we're making real headway, and we're working hard.

Hillary Clinton's Senate Campaign

Q. What will be your role in your wife's campaign?

The President. Well, I don't have any idea yet. I think—I'll try to do for her what she's always done for me. I'll try to give her good advice. But I've got a job here, and I'm going to do it. And I also think that in the beginning of the campaign the people want to see her. They want to know what she's going to do and how she's going to do it and what she can do if the New York citizens decide to put her to work for them. But if there's some way I can help, I'll be happy to.

I think she's got a lot to offer and I think——

Q. Have you established your residency in terms of where you're going to——

The President. Well, I suppose that is, strictly speaking, a legal question. But we have a home there, and we're working on getting it furnished. Then she'll have a place to be when she's up there campaigning and not here in the White House. So I think we're on our way to doing that. But I'm excited about the house; it's a pretty house.

Drug Enforcement Agency Practices in Mexico

Q. Mr. President, with Mexico—the DEA agents in Mexico were intercepted by narcotraffickers, and they found guns in their car. That is an illegal matter in Mexico, DEA agents carrying guns in Mexico. Are you concerned with the security of those agents working in Mexico, and what are you doing to resolve these kinds of violations of international problems with Mexico?

The President. You know, I just got back from a 10-day trip. I haven't been briefed, and I don't think I can comment now. I'm sorry.

President's Possible Visit to India

Q. Mr. President, are you ready to travel to India now, after traveling the whole world? And the Ambassador of India here in Washington said that now it's overdue for President Clinton to travel to India.

The President. I've always planned to go there, and I hope I can.

Q. The First Lady, when she visited there, said that "I'll bring my husband."

The President. Yes. Well, I certainly intend to go, and I hope we can work it out.

Colombia and Narcotrafficking

Q. For the first time in over 9 years is a citizen of Colombia and nationality to the United States—President Pastrana—do you feel this is a good step? Will this help you——

The President. It's a very, very good step, and a courageous step on his part, and real evidence that we're committed to working together to fight the narcotics trade. I think you will see early next year, on a completely bipartisan basis, an effort by the United States to do more to assist Colombia across a whole broad range of issues. Colombia is already the third largest recipient of American assistance, but it's a very large country with a very old tradition and a lot of profound challenges. And I think you will see next year that we'll be out there together—Republicans and Democrats alike—trying to be good partners with the people in Colombia that are trying to build a safe, decent, harmonious society.

Q. Happy Thanksgiving, Mr. President.

The President. Happy Thanksgiving.

Seattle Round

Q. Going to Seattle, sir, are you disappointed that other leaders aren't going?

The President. Originally, it was just supposed to be a ministerial, and I thought—just almost at the last minute, I thought, well, since I'm going to be out there a day and a half or a day, that if anybody wants to come, other people who are interested in this, I

ought to give them a chance to come. But I think we decided to do it so late, it was just more of a logistical problem than anything else. So, no.

Q. Did you try to talk——

The President. No. No, we just explored whether they wanted to come because I was going to be there. But it was just something done, literally, at the last minute. It was originally supposed to be a ministerial, and I thought, well, gosh, I don't want them to think that I'm out there, and they're not welcome. That's all.

President's Visit to Turkey and Southeastern Europe

Q. Are you dead tired? Are you dead tired?

The President. No, I had a nice—good night's sleep last night. It was a wonderful trip for America. You know, what we did—I think we made some real progress with Greece and Turkey. I think that the pipeline that we signed is a great insurance policy for democracies everywhere, including the United States. I think the fact that we got an agreement for a new charter for the OSCE, where the Russians acknowledged the legitimacy of all nations being concerned about internal affairs within countries I think is good. I think the fact that we got an agreement on military forces in Europe which will get the Russian forces out of Georgia and Moldova, and also give them the security of knowing there are certain limits on how many foreign forces can be established in other countries, I think all those things are quite good.

So this was a big trip for the United States; long term, our security was substantially advanced. And I hope and pray and believe that we really made some progress on helping Greece and Turkey to work out their differences and moving Turkey toward membership in the European Union. That's what I hope.

Q. The Russians out of Chechnya—do you think the Russians——

DEA Practices in Mexico

Q. [*Inaudible*]*—an agreement to allow the agents to carry weapons?*

The President. I just told this gentleman, I just got back last night, and I got back very

late, and I haven't been briefed on a lot of this. So I think, before I comment on that, I should have a chance to talk.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:50 p.m. in the Rose Garden at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Jim Rieth, chairman, and Stuart Proctor, Jr., president, National Turkey Federation; and Gov. Pedro Rossello of Puerto Rico. The President also referred to Kidwell Farm at Frying Pan Park in Fairfax County, VA, future home of the turkey. A portion of these remarks could not be verified because the tape was incomplete.

Digest of Other White House Announcements

The following list includes the President's public schedule and other items of general interest announced by the Office of the Press Secretary and not included elsewhere in this issue.

November 20

In the afternoon, the President and Hillary Clinton traveled from Athens, Greece, to Florence, Italy.

November 21

In the evening, the President traveled to Sofia, Bulgaria.

November 22

In the morning, the President participated in a wreath-laying ceremony at the Bulgarian Tomb of the Unknown Soldier.

In the afternoon, the President participated in a discussion with students from the American University of Bulgaria at the Down the Alley, Behind the Cupboard Restaurant.

The President announced his intention to appoint David J. Hickton as a member of the President's Advisory Committee on the Arts of the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts.

November 23

In the morning, the President traveled to Pristina, Kosovo, where he attended two meetings at the Pristina Airport. First, he met with U.N. Special Representative Bernard Kouchner and the German Commander of KFOR, Gen. Klaus Reinhardt,