

*Mayflower*, whether they came through the portals of Ellis Island or on a plane to San Francisco, whether they have been here for thousands of years, we believe that every individual possesses the spark of possibility, born with an equal right to strive and work and rise as far as they can go, and born with an equal responsibility to act in a way that obeys the law, reflects our values and passes them on to their children. We are white and black, Asian and Hispanic, Christian and Jew and Muslim, Italian- and Vietnamese- and Polish-Americans and goodness knows how many more today. But above all, we are still Americans. Martin Luther King said, "We are woven into a seamless garment of destiny. We must be one America."

The Little Rock Nine taught us that. We cannot have one America for free, not 40 years ago, not today. We have to act. All of us have to act. Each of us has to do something. Especially our young people must seek out people who are different from themselves and speak freely and frankly to discover they share the same dreams. All of us should embrace the vision of a colorblind society but recognize the fact that we are not there yet, and we cannot slam shut the doors of educational and economic opportunity.

All of us should embrace ethnic pride, and we should revere religious conviction, but we must reject separation and isolation. All of us should value and practice personal responsibility for ourselves and our families. And all Americans, especially our young people, should give something back to their community through citizen service. All Americans of all races must insist on both equal opportunity and excellence in education. That is even more important today than it was for these nine people, and look how far they took themselves with their education.

The true battleground in education today is whether we honestly believe that every child can learn, and we have the courage to set high academic standards we expect all our children to meet. We must not replace the tyranny of segregation with the tragedy of low expectations. I will not rob a single American child of his or her future. It is wrong.

My fellow Americans, we must be concerned not so much with the sins of our par-

ents as with the success of our children, how they will live, and live together, in years to come. If those nine children could walk up those steps 40 years ago, all alone, if their parents could send them into the storm armed only with school books and the righteousness of their cause, then surely together we can build one America, an America that makes sure no future generation of our children will have to pay for our mistakes with the loss of their innocence.

At this schoolhouse door today, let us rejoice in the long way we have come these 40 years. Let us resolve to stand on the shoulders of the Little Rock Nine and press on with confidence in the hard and noble work ahead. "Let us lift every voice and sing, till Earth and Heaven ring," one America today, one America tomorrow, one America forever.

God bless the Little Rock Nine, and God bless the United States of America. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11 a.m. on the front steps of Central High School. In his remarks, he referred to Gov. Mike Huckabee of Arkansas and his wife, Janet; Mayor Jim Dailey of Little Rock and his wife, Patti; Daisy Bates, NAACP attorney in 1957; and Rudolph Howard, current principal, and Fatima McKendra, current student body president, Central High School.

### **Remarks at the Reception for the Congressional Medal of Honor Society in Little Rock**

*September 25, 1997*

Thank you very much. Secretary Gober, President Bucha, Mayor Dailey, Mayor Hays, Senator Beebe. Governor McMath, it's wonderful to see you here tonight, sir.

I thank Secretary Gober for his introduction. It was overly generous but a good illustration of Clinton's first law of politics: Whenever possible, try to have yourself introduced by someone you have appointed to high office. [*Laughter*] Did you hear the story Secretary Gober said about he was in the Army, then he was in the Marine Corps, and his wife was in the Navy and then the Air Force. They're the only people I ever knew who organized a 30-year campaign to

be Secretary of Veterans Affairs. [Laughter] It worked.

He has done a wonderful job. And thank you, Secretary Togo West, for the job you do for the United States Army, sir. I'd also like to thank the United States Military Academy Cadet Glee Club. I thought they did a terrific job. Go ahead and give them a hand. [Applause] And I think we can forgive them if there was just a little more zip in the Army song than the others. [Laughter] That, after all, is befitting.

Ladies and gentlemen, I am honored to be here with you. I thank you for coming to my native State. I hope you have enjoyed it. I'm especially honored to be in the presence of people who are in what has been described as the most exclusive club in America, the Congressional Medal of Honor Society. Along with every other American, I feel a profound admiration for all of you for your acts of valor and heroism. I am especially gratified that several who wear the medal and who are in this room tonight are my fellow Arkansans, including Nick Bacon, director of veterans affairs here; Scooter Burke; Clarence Kraft; and Nathan Gordon.

No one could live in this country for very long without being especially impressed with how genuinely patriotic most of our fellow citizens are. We are a nation of immigrants, proud of our roots, proud of what is distinctive about us, but there's an extraordinary amount of love in this country for our Nation, felt by almost every single citizen.

Indeed, there's so much love in our country that, as you know, we very often have people join the United States military even before they're naturalized as citizens. I never will forget when we welcomed the Pope to Denver for the first time and I was escorting His Holiness down the line of all the well-wishers there at Regis University. We got to a young man in a United States Army uniform, and he broke into this elaborate conversation with the Pope in Polish. And I thought to myself, we could have had a Haitian-American speaking to the Pope in Creole; we could have spoken to the Pope in Spanish and Chinese and Japanese, in any number of languages in the world. This is the only country in the world where you can say that. When we turned back the dictators

and restored the duly elected leaders in Haiti, America was the only country in the world where we were able to send 200 United States-citizen soldiers to Haiti who spoke the native language, Creole. But we are united by this almost mystical love of our country and its history and what it means.

Nonetheless, we know that in every generation there will be a few who stand out, who are called upon to do things of such selfless heroism that their patriotism shines above all the others.

Twice since I have been President, I have bestowed the Medal of Honor. First, very sadly, to Master Sergeant Gary Gordon and Sergeant First Class Randall Shughart posthumously, two men who bravely lost their lives in Somalia trying to save the lives of their fellow soldiers. Then, this year, because so much time had passed, a much happier occasion. Fifty years after the fact, we recognized seven African-American heroes of World War II who were prepared to sacrifice everything for our freedom, even though they didn't have full freedom when they came back home. That was a wonderful day. One painful, one wonderful, I will never forget either one, because both of them were examples of the truly extraordinary heroism which all of you who wear this medal have demonstrated in your service.

When the battle was darkest, when the fortunes of war often favored an unforgiving enemy, somehow those of you who won the Medal of Honor and who earned the Medal of Honor found the strength, the will to fight more valiantly and turn the tide, to save the lives of your comrades, to save the day for America.

Your president spoke a moment ago about the event we commemorated at Little Rock Central High School. Forty years ago, something happened here that none of us who are native to this State are especially proud of. Our former Governor, Governor McMath, who also was a Major General in the Marine Corps, tried to stop it. And I'll always be grateful to him. But in the end, those children were not denied admission to our high school, because the law of the land said we were all created equal. A Federal court issued an order to carry out the law, and the President of the United States and

the Attorney General of the United States and the 101st Airborne Division of the United States Army did exactly that, and they stood up for the Constitution. They were heroes on that day as well.

And somehow I think it's fitting that you are here on this day, and we can celebrate your heroism and you can participate in a moment of unique citizen heroism in the history of America. Think what it was like for those nine kids to show up and face a jeering mob, armed only with their notebooks and their school books. Think what it was like for their parents to send them into the storm not knowing whether they would come home.

But if you look at the whole history of America, and if you look at the whole history of our military services, we see an unbroken chain in the continuing struggle to make our historic commitment to freedom and equality more real in each succeeding generation.

Every American knows about our military's vital role in protecting our national interest and our values around the world. But the Armed Forces also has reflected and protected our values here at home. Our military promotes equality by rewarding merit without regard to race or gender and sets an example for every American and for every American institution where two or more people work together.

And as I said, you cannot talk to any person who was alive and well in Little Rock 40 years ago who doesn't remember that it was the Army paratroopers who ultimately stood as a bulwark of protection for those nine little children, who were there for them because their President ordered them to stand up for the law of the land here at home.

So I hope that you will always remember, throughout all your conventions and all your meetings, that you happened to come to Little Rock on a special day for America and a special day for America's military, a special example of personal patriotism and bravery by civilians, and that all of us—all of us—are profoundly grateful that you're here, for your valor and your sacrifice, for being there when your country needed you the most.

Thank you for what you have done, and thank you, too, for what you continue to do as living examples of everything we love most about America.

God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 8:44 p.m. at the Aerospace Education Center. In his remarks, he referred to Paul Bucha, president, Congressional Medal of Honor Society; Mayor Jim Dailey of Little Rock; Mayor Patrick Henry Hays of North Little Rock; State Senator Mike Beebe; former Arkansas Governor Sid McMath; and Mary Lou Keener, wife of Secretary of Veterans Affairs Hershel Gober. A tape was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

### **Statement Urging House of Representatives Action on Campaign Finance Reform**

*September 25, 1997*

I am greatly encouraged by the statements calling for House action on campaign finance reform legislation made earlier today by Democratic Leader Gephardt, and yesterday by House Majority Leader Armev. I applaud these two House leaders for their commitment to scheduling a House floor debate on this critical issue before Congress adjourns for the year.

This bipartisan call for action is a promising sign that we are moving forward in our response to America's demand for reform. I urge the Members of the House to take the next step and give their full support for the meaningful bipartisan campaign finance reform offered by Representatives Shays and Meehan. This measure is both balanced and effective and it addresses many of the most pressing needs for reform.

Congress faces the best opportunity in a generation to enact campaign finance reform. Let us work together in a bipartisan spirit to enact the Shays-Meehan legislation and answer the public's call for reform.