

**Remarks at the Commissioning of
the U.S.S. *Harry S. Truman* in
Norfolk, Virginia**

July 25, 1998

Thank you very much. Secretary Cohen, Mrs. Cohen; Secretary Riley; Secretary and Mrs. Dalton; Senator Robb; Governor Carnahan; Representative Skelton; Congressman Pickett and other Members of Congress; Admiral Johnson and Admirals Bowman and Reason and Gehman, and the other distinguished leaders of the Navy who are here; Captain Otterbein; men and women of the Navy; veterans; Mr. Fricks and others who had a role in building this magnificent vessel; my fellow Americans:

Good morning, and what a beautiful morning it is. Let me begin this day by saying that we are all thinking of someone who should be here but cannot be, Margaret Truman Daniel. She has been a great friend to Hillary and our daughter and to me—a great American citizen. And Harry Truman was very proud of her, justifiably. I wish she could be here.

I'd also like to thank especially a man who will speak after me, one who knew President Truman well and stands in his tradition, and who did so much to make this day happen, Representative Ike Skelton of Missouri.

In 1913 Harry Truman was a young Missouri farmer, experiencing some business difficulties, as he did from time to time. But as always, he didn't give up easily. He wrote to his sweetheart and future wife, Bess, these words, "My ship's going to come in yet." Now, we all know that Harry Truman was a man of his word. It took 85 years, but here on July 25, 1998, Harry Truman's ship has come in.

Of course, President Truman's hometown of Independence, Missouri, is not exactly a center of naval operations. Coming from the State just south of Missouri, you know, we're completely landlocked. And Harry Truman was an Army man. But in 1944, as a United States Senator, he spoke at the christening of the battleship *Missouri*, on whose decks Japan surrendered just a year later. He felt a life-long affection for the ship known as the "Mighty Mo," and as President, he came

to rely, as all Presidents do, on the world's greatest Navy.

The American people still feel a strong affection for Harry Truman. He seemed to some an ordinary man, but he became an extraordinary President. He represented the best in us, and he gave us the best in himself. He never failed to live up to the words of his fellow Missourian, Mark Twain, which he kept on his desk at the Oval Office: "Always do right. This will gratify some people and astonish the rest."

Fifty years ago, when Harry Truman became our President, America faced a mountain of crises: Europe lay shattered; a cold war bred danger around the world; terrible new weapons made every false step a potential catastrophe; and angry voices were being raised here at home by Americans against other Americans. At such a time, and after the rigors of World War II, some wanted to turn away from the world, to relinquish the leadership that had rescued freedom from tyranny. But Harry Truman said no. He made courageous decisions, focused always on doing right, making sure everyone knew the buck stopped with him.

He approved massive aid to Europe, including our former enemy, in one of the most farsighted instances of enlightened self-interest in history. In 1948 he became the first world leader to recognize the new state of Israel, over the bitter protest of his advisers. That same year, when Stalin closed off Western access to Berlin, he ordered the heroic airlift to relieve the beleaguered city.

And 50 years ago tomorrow, as Secretary Cohen has noted, Harry Truman made one of the best decisions any Commander in Chief ever made. He was sickened by stories of African-American veterans fighting heroically for America in war, only to return to violence and hatred. He wrote, "As President, I know this is bad. I shall fight to end evils like this." And despite the extraordinary political pressures against him, despite growing up himself in a segregated community, on July 26, 1948, Harry Truman ordered the Armed Forces to integrate with Executive Order 9981. From that day forward our men and women in uniform have truly been a force for freedom and a shining example to all humanity.

President Truman's decisive acts made crystal clear that America would not stand by while the world unraveled, that our ideals were not just words on parchment but guideposts for coming together as Americans. As Truman said in the first address by any American President to the NAACP, "When I say all Americans, I mean all Americans." When we scan the landscape of the new century ahead, the future Harry Truman defined is the promise we now enjoy.

Think of what has happened, growing out of the decisions he made 50 years ago: The cold war is over; Europe is thriving; Berlin is united; Greece and Turkey are vital NATO allies working with us to promote peace in the Balkans; Israel, Japan, South Korea are among our strong, democratic partners; International organizations like NATO, the United Nations, the International Monetary Fund are essential components of the architecture of peace and prosperity. These are not accidents of history. They reflect the vision of the leader we celebrate here today.

Harry Truman knew that a President's ability to persuade others in the world is greatly enhanced when commanding the world's strongest military. That is still true. When we aimed to restore hope in Haiti 4 years ago, the Navy was there to make it happen. When violence tore apart Bosnia, naval operations in the Adriatic helped to create the conditions of peace. When we needed a quick action in the Persian Gulf last winter, the Navy was there again to put steel behind our diplomacy.

And on this day, our persuasiveness has been enhanced considerably. This carrier occupies 4½ acres, stands 20 stories tall; it will be home to up to 6,000 personnel, about the population of Harry Truman's hometown. From aviators in their ready rooms to the engineers in their spaces, from catapult officers who can launch four aircraft in just one minute to the cooks who prepare 18,000 meals a day, the men and women of the *Harry S. Truman* will do America proud.

And let me say to the families of those crewmen here today, we appreciate your commitment, too. Your loved ones on the *Harry S. Truman* will never be sent into harm's way without clear purpose and superior preparation. As Secretary Cohen has

made clear, the readiness of our military will remain a top priority. Today and for the future, our forces will be fully capable of meeting our commitments around the world.

We have done much to meet these readiness goals, but we must do more. As the Members of Congress here keenly appreciate, Congress is the vital partner in this effort. This year, with bipartisan congressional support, we provide emergency funding for our military operations in Bosnia and southwest Asia and, thus, are able to meet critical readiness needs. But Congress as yet has not approved the funding we need on the same terms for the crucial operations in fiscal year 1999, which begins only 9 weeks from now. If we are to remain fully prepared, it is imperative that Congress act.

A month ago the Defense Department sent to Congress a request to transfer one billion dollars from lower priority programs to important training, maintenance, and readiness requirements to sustain our readiness. Again, I ask Congress to approve this request before the summer recess.

This ship, the *Harry Truman*, is a monument to strength of character—to the character of a President and the character of those who serve aboard her, to the character of the shipyard workers who built her in Newport News. The motto you have adopted says it all: "The buck stops here."

Over the next 50 years, America must continue to be responsible, to say the buck stops with the United States, to ask the questions that the President we honor here today asked. What do the decisions we make today mean for our children and grandchildren? Is what we are doing good for all our people? Will it deepen our freedom, expand opportunity, strengthen our Union, advance the cause of freedom and peace and security in the world? Will it bring hope to the oppressed and fear to the oppressors?

The very sight of the *Harry S. Truman* will summon our best ideals and recall the will and vision of a man who arrived when we needed him most. Some will look at this carrier and see only her massive physical dimensions. I hope most of us will see something even bigger, the living spirit of America and the indomitable courage of one of the

greatest leaders our still young Nation has yet produced.

To the men and women who will serve on the *Harry S. Truman*, remember, the buck stops with the United States. Godspeed, and if he were here he would say, "Give 'em hell." God bless you, and thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:40 a.m. on the ceremonial quarterdeck of the U.S.S. *Harry S. Truman* at Norfolk Naval Base. In his remarks, he referred to Janet Langhart, wife of Secretary of Defense William S. Cohen; Margaret Dalton, wife of Secretary John H. Dalton; Gov. Mel Carnahan of Missouri; Adm. Jay L. Johnson, USN, Chief of Naval Operations; Adm. Frank L. Bowman, USN, Director, Naval Nuclear Propulsion; Adm. J. Paul Reason, USN, Commander in Chief, U.S. Atlantic Fleet; Adm. Harold W. Gehman, Jr., USN, Commander in Chief, U.S. Atlantic Command; Capt. Thomas G. Otterbein, USN, commanding officer, U.S.S. *Harry S. Truman*; and W.P. (Bill) Fricks, chairman and chief executive officer, Newport News Shipbuilding.

Remarks at a Democratic National Committee Dinner in Aspen, Colorado

July 25, 1998

Thank you very much. Thank you, Beth. Thank you, Steve. Like others, I want to thank Christy and Sheldon for having us in this magnificent home tonight with the wonderful natural surroundings. I haven't been to Aspen for a long time, and for the last 3 or 4 hours I've been kicking myself for how many years it's been since I was here last. But in the eighties, Hillary and I had some wonderful trips up here, and just looking around has been very—it's a wonderful opportunity. And again I say that this has been a particularly unique opportunity for me to see many of you and to see you in these magnificent settings. So, thank you, Sheldon; thank you, Christy. We're very grateful.

I'd like to thank many people here. I thank Secretary Riley and Secretary Slater for coming out here and being a part of this. Once I had a meeting of Presidential Scholars at a time when things were not so rosy for our administration as they are now—after the '94 elections, I don't know, it was early '95, and

my obituary once again had been written several times by several people. [Laughter] And this fellow who is a professor at Harvard in Presidential studies, he said, "I think you're probably going to be reelected." And I said, "Why?" And he said, "Well, for one thing, you have the most loyal Cabinet since Thomas Jefferson's second administration," which was very touching to me because they're also very good.

Rodney Slater has worked with me for more than 15 years now, and I'm very proud of the work he has done. And Secretary Riley and I have been friends for more than 20 years now, and colleagues. We are so creaky; we were actually Governors in the 1970's. [Laughter] So I thank them for being here and for their ardent support of our political objectives. I thank Senator Feinstein and Congresswoman DeGette.

I'd also like to thank my wonderful friend, Governor Roy Romer. He and Bea are here tonight, and he has done a great job being a spokesperson from our party, going around the country trying to do his job as Governor of Colorado and give us as much time as he can. I thank Steve Grossman and Barbara and Lynn and Len Barrack who are here, and all the weekend hosts.

I thought I would tell you—I was asking myself, although some of you are actually new to this, most people have heard me give too many speeches, and I was feeling very badly for all of you tonight. [Laughter] So I was thinking what I could tell you, and I thought maybe I ought to start with where I started this day.

Hillary and Chelsea and I had a wonderful weekend. Last night—or yesterday afternoon, we all went out to Camp David, and we managed to fool my brother into believing that we had to have this high-powered family conference. And I think he honestly thought I was going to tell him that I had a life-threatening illness or something. [Laughter] And we had gathered his 20 best friends from all around America, and we threw a surprise birthday party for him last night, and he never did figure out what it was about until we hit him with it. So I didn't think I was capable of such sleight of hand, and I felt very good about myself afterwards. [Laughter]