achieve a decent living, despite the misfortune of bad weather, crop disease, collapsing markets, or other forces that affect their livelihoods. It is especially necessary for the Government to act this year, with prices dropping precipitously, crops destroyed by flood, drought, and disease, and where many farmers will see their net income drop by as much as 40 percent below a 5-year average.

Two years ago, when I signed the ''Freedom to Farm Bill,'' I made clear that it did not provide an adequate safety net for our Nation's farmers. There is no better proof of that bill's shortcomings than the hardship in America's farm country this year. Our farm families are facing their worst crisis in a decade.

My Administration has already taken steps to address this crisis. In July, we announced the purchase of $250 million of wheat to export to hungry people around the world. In August, I signed legislation to speed up farm program payments. But in the face of a growing emergency for our Nation's farmers, we must do more to ensure that American farmers can continue to provide, for years to come, the safest and least expensive food in the world. Last month, I sent to the Congress a request for $2.3 billion in emergency aid for our farmers, and I supported Senator Daschle's and Harkin's proposal to boost farm income by lifting the cap on marketing loan rates.

I am extremely disappointed that the Congress has reacted to this agriculture emergency situation by sending me a bill that fails to provide an adequate safety net for our farmers. I have repeatedly stated that I would veto any emergency farm assistance bill if it did not adequately address our farmers' immediate needs, and this bill does not do enough.

The lack of sufficient emergency aid for farmers in this bill is particularly problematic in light of the bill's other provisions that affect farmers and their rural communities. Cutting edge agricultural research is absolutely essential to improve our farmers' productivity and to maintain their advantage over our competitors around the world. But this bill eliminates the $120 million in competitive research grants for this year that I strongly supported and signed into law just last June. It also blocks the $60 million from the Fund for Rural America provided through that same bill, preventing needed additional rural development funds that would help our Nation's rural communities to diversify their economies and improve their quality of life. The bill also cuts spending for our food safety initiative in half, denying funds for research, public education, and other food safety improvements.

Many of our most vulnerable farmers have also had to face an obstacle that no one in America ever should have to confront: racial discrimination. Over 1,000 minority farmers have filed claims of discrimination by USDA's farm loan programs in the 1980s and early 1990s that the statute of limitations bars from being addressed. While I am pleased that this legislation contains a provision waiving the statute of limitations, I am disappointed that it does not contain the language included in the Senate's version of this bill, which accelerates the resolution of the cases, provides claimants with a fair and full court review if they so choose, and covers claims stemming from USDA's housing loan programs.

Therefore, as I return this bill, I again call on the Congress to send me a comprehensive plan, before this session ends, that adequately responds to the very real needs of our farmers at this difficult time.

William J. Clinton

The White House,
October 7, 1998.

NOTE: This message was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on October 8.

Remarks on the Decision of Certain Health Maintenance Organizations To Opt Out of Some Medicare Markets

October 8, 1998

Thank you. I would like to begin by thanking Senator Rockefeller and Congressman Dingell for their steadfast support of Medicare and their participation in our Medicare Commission. Let me say just in advance, I would think that the very issue we discuss today offers further evidence that it is time

to take a look at the challenges and the responsibilities of the Medicare program, long-term, and I'm glad we have Jay Rockefeller and John Dingell on that commission.

I'd like to thank Senator Kennedy and Senator Lieberman and Congressman Stark and Congressman Cardin also for being here today. I'd like to thank Secretary Shalala for her marvelous service, and Nancy-Ann Min DeParle who is here with her. I'd like to thank all the members of the seniors groups who are representing their constituents, standing to my right here. I thank them for joining us today.

Kosovo

Since this is the only time I'll have to talk to the press for the next several hours, I hope you will indulge me for a moment while I make a few comments about the present situation in Kosovo.

As a result of the unconscionable actions of President Milosevic, we face the danger of violence spreading to neighboring countries, threatening a wider war in Europe. We face a humanitarian crisis that could be a catastrophe in the making, as tens of thousands of homeless refugees risk freezing or starving to death as winter comes on.

Our goal is simple: It is full compliance with United Nations Security Council resolutions by President Milosevic. My Special Envoy, Richard Holbrooke, has just completed 3 days of talks with Mr. Milosevic, making absolutely clear that he must meet the demands of this Security Council resolution, end the violence, withdraw his forces, let the refugees return to their homes, give the humanitarian relief workers full and free access to the people who need them, and begin negotiations with the Kosovar Albanians on autonomy for their region, which is provided for under the law of their nation.

Yesterday I decided that the United States would vote to give NATO the authority to carry out military strikes against Serbia if President Milosevic continues to defy the international community. In the days ahead, my counterparts in Europe will be making similar decisions. We would prefer—we would far prefer—to secure President Milosevic's compliance with the will of the international community in a peaceful manner. But NATO must be prepared to act militarily to protect our interests, to prevent another humanitarian catastrophe in the Balkans.

HMO's and Medicare

Now, let me echo, first of all, the sentiments which have already been expressed here. Since John Dingell was in the chair when Medicare was passed, it has been more than a program; it has been a symbol of our intergenerational unity as a country, fulfilling our responsibilities to our grandparents and parents, protecting our families. Strengthening Medicare has been one of this administration's top priorities. Last year we took historic bipartisan action to improve benefits and extend the life of the Trust Fund for a decade. We expanded the number and types of health plans available to Medicare beneficiaries so that older Americans, like other Americans, would have more choices in their Medicare.

I think it ought to be said in defense of this decision and the enrollment of many seniors in managed care plans that one of the principal reasons that so many seniors wanted it is that there were managed care plans who thought, for the reimbursement then available, they could provide not only the required services under Medicare but also a prescription drug benefit, something that these Members and I tried to get done for all the seniors of the country at an earlier point in time.

Well, today there are 6½ million Medicare beneficiaries in HMO's. As we all know, in recent weeks the HMO industry announced that unless all Medicare HMO's could raise premiums and reduce benefits—all—some health plans would drop their Medicare patients by the end of the year.

We told them, no deal. That's what we should have done. We were not going to allow Medicare to be held hostage to unreasonable demands. So several HMO's decided to drop their patients. These decisions have brought uncertainty, fear, and disruption into the lives of tens of thousands of older Americans across the country. While the overwhelming majority of seniors affected will be able to join another HMO covering Medicare

in their area, 50,000 of them will be left without a single managed care alternative.

Now, these HMO's say they are looking after the bottom line. All of you who understand the Medicare program know that the reimbursement rates are different across regions and in different areas. We have tried very hard to alleviate that—the problems with that system. And we recognize that there were problems. We have worked to alleviate them. But that wasn't what we were asked to do. We were asked just to give all HMO's permission to raise rates whether they needed to or not, without regard to how much money they were making or not. And I think that was wrong.

We have to do everything we can to protect Americans who have been dropped by their HMO's and to protect the health care options of all seniors in the future. So today we're taking three steps.

First, we'll do everything we can to encourage HMO's to enter the markets abandoned by managed care. Beginning immediately, the Health Care Financing Administration will give first priority in its review and approval process—first priority—to all new HMO's applying to serve seniors in deserted areas.

Second, I am asking Secretary Shalala to work with Congress, aging advocates, and health plans to develop new strategies to prevent another disruption in coverage like the one we are seeing now. I'm asking the Secretary to consider all possible legislative options that can be included in the next budget I send to Congress.

Finally, I am launching a comprehensive, public information campaign to make sure all affected seniors understand the health coverage plans that are already available to them. We'll bring together a broad public and private coalition from the AARP to the Older Women's League to the Social Security Administration to local offices on aging, to educate seniors about all their rights and options. We must say to them, losing HMO coverage does not mean losing Medicare coverage. You are still protected by Medicare. You are still eligible for the traditional fee-for-service program and for Medigap policies.

Let me just say one other thing. In the last few days before it adjourns, let me ask Congress again to put aside partisanship and embrace our common responsibilities by reauthorizing the Older Americans Act. For years, this law has improved the lives of millions of our senior citizens, providing everything from meals on wheels, to counseling, to legal services. Every day that goes by without passing the bipartisan legislation to reauthorize the act sends a troubling message to seniors that their needs are not a priority.

More than 30 years ago, Congress was able to put progress before partisanship when it created Medicare in the first place. As a result, millions of older Americans have been able to live healthier, happier, more stable lives. It is one of the signal achievements of this century.

So let me say again, we have to do that again—to work to strengthen Medicare, to reauthorize the Older Americans Act, to treat each other in the work of America as we want people out in America to treat each other and to work. The Members who are here have certainly done that. And for that, I am grateful.

Secretary Shalala and I hope very much that these steps we are taking today and the work we will do with these senior advocates will provide some peace of mind, some support, and some help to the seniors who have been so shaken by the events of the last few days here.

Thank you very much. Thank you.

I want to say one other thing. Senator Dodd came in late, but has actually offered legislation in this area, so I want to give him credit for that. Connecticut is the only State here with 100 percent representation. [*Laughter*] Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:49 a.m. in the Roosevelt Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Health Care Financing Administrator Nancy-Ann Min DeParle; President Slobodan Milosevic of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro); and Special Envoy Richard Holbrooke, the President's nominee to be U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations.

Remarks Prior to a Meeting With the Economic Team and an Exchange With Reporters

October 8, 1998

Impeachment Inquiry Vote

The President. We are about to start a meeting with the economic and budget team about the unfinished work in the budget that has to be done in the next few days. But before we start I'd like to make just a very brief comment on today's vote.

First of all, I hope that we can now move forward with this process in a way that is fair, that is constitutional, and that is timely. The American people have been through a lot on this, and I think that everyone deserves that. Beyond that, I have nothing to say. It is not in my hands; it is in the hands of Congress and the people of this country—ultimately, in the hands of God, there is nothing I can do.

But there are things I can do something about. And the most important thing I can do now is to work in the next few days to work to cross party lines to do the work that we have to do here. We have got to pass a budget that protects the surplus and still to save Social Security, that keeps the American economy going amidst all this economic turmoil in the world, that protects, instead of damages, the environment, and that gives the kind of priority to our elementary and secondary education that it so clearly needs.

Those are my priorities. I think those are the priorities of the American people. It will require us to put progress ahead of partisanship, but it clearly will strengthen our country. And that's what we're going to work on, and I hope we can do it.

Q. Sir, you could speed the pace of this up if you were to volunteer to testify, decide whether or not now you would challenge Monica Lewinsky's account of your relationship. Have you made any decisions on that front?

The President. Let me say again, on that I will do what I can to help to ensure this is constitutional, fair, and timely. Ultimately, it is in the hands of the Congress. I don't think it's appropriate to comment further than that.

International Financial Situation

Q. Mr. President, what's your reaction to the Republican demands on the IMF funding bill, and how closely are you watching the decline of the dollar against the yen?

The President. Well, we're watching that very closely. Of course, the strengthening of the yen could be a good thing. The yen got too weak, and it led, for example, to breathtaking increases in imports of Japanese steel, which hurt a lot of our people, our industry, and our workers who were clearly competitive internationally.

And if the Japanese yen were to come back because people believed Japan was serious about economic reform, then it would be a good thing. It would be a balancing of forces in the world economy. It would strengthen the American economy by strengthening our own domestic manufacturing sector and making our exports more competitive. It would make it possible for Japan to buy other country's exports in Asia.

If it's a temporary phenomenon that evidences some sort of instability, then that's something we just have to try to sort out. But I don't think we can know for sure yet. The clear answer over the long run is for America to fund our responsibilities to the IMF, for Japan to get serious about its economic reform, for the Europeans to keep their markets open and continue growth so that all of us can get more money back into the global economic system right now and then deal with the long-term problem. That's what I hope. I think it's very important not to be diverted by day-to-day developments here and think about what the larger problem is.

International Consultations/ Impeachment Inquiry Vote

Q. Mr. President, have you talked to other world leaders today? And how are you feeling personally about the vote?

The President. Today I spoke with President Chirac of France. And I am meeting tomorrow with the man who will be the next German Chancellor, Mr. Schroeder. And we talked about Kosovo. And I have been working, as you know, all week long with people from all over the world on the international financial crisis.