Statement on the Sweatshops Agreement

November 3, 1998

Today's agreement on fighting sweatshop practices is an historic step toward reducing sweatshop labor around the world and will give American consumers confidence that the clothes they buy are made under decent and humane working conditions. I applaud the apparel industry, labor unions, nongovernmental organizations, and consumer groups who answered the challenge I laid out 2 years ago to find cooperative ways to reduce sweatshop labor.

This agreement is only the beginning. We know that sweatshop labor will not vanish overnight. While this agreement is an historic step, we must measure our progress by how we change and improve the lives and livelihoods of apparel workers here in the United States and around the world. That is why I urge more companies to join this effort and follow these strict rules of conduct.

I want to thank all the parties who worked so hard to bring this agreement to a close, and especially Senator Tom Harkin, who first brought this issue to my attention a long time ago.

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

November 4, 1998

Legislative Agenda

The President. Good afternoon. Now that the election is over, it is time to put politics aside and once again focus clearly on the people's business. In yesterday's election, I think the message the American people sent was loud and clear: We want progress over partisanship and unity over division; we should address our country's great challenges; above all, now we must address the challenge to save Social Security for the 21st century.

We have work to do in other areas as well. We should move forward to pass a Patients' Bill of Rights. We should strengthen our schools by finishing the job of hiring 100,000 teachers and then passing the school modernization initiative, to give us 5,000 remodeled or new schools. We should increase the minimum wage. We should pass campaign finance reform. We must maintain our fiscal discipline to strengthen our own economy and maintain our efforts to stabilize the global economy.

But above all, now we have to seize this opportunity to save Social Security. And we're about to have another meeting here, one of many, in anticipation of the White House conference. I have spoken tonight and today with Senator Lott and Speaker Gingrich, with Senator Daschle and Mr. Gephardt, to ask them to join with me in this effort. On December 8th and 9th we will hold the first-ever White House Conference on Social Security, bringing together people from Congress and the administration, from the public and experts of all persuasions. We will only be able to do this if we reach across party lines, reach across generational lines, indeed, reach across philosophical lines to forge a true national consensus.

I believe we can do it. I believe we must do it. Yesterday's election makes it clear that the American people expect us to do it.

1998 Elections

Q. To what do you attribute, Mr. President, the Democratic gains? I mean, was there one factor that you think was really the motivation?

The President. Well, let me say I'm very proud of what our party did yesterday in the face of the tide of history and an enormous financial disadvantage. I think it's clear what happened. I think that they stayed together; they had a message that was about the American people, their needs, their opportunities, and their future. I think that they won because they had a clear message that was about America, about saving Social Security, and improving education, and passing the Patients' Bill of Rights, and raising the minimum wage and those other things. I think that's why they won. And they were able to get an enormous outpouring of support in all quarters of the country. And I'm very proud of what they did. But I think they did it by putting progress over partisanship.