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William J. Clinton

The White House,
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Remarks Prior to a Meeting With Labor Leaders and an Exchange With Reporters

January 13, 1999

The President. First of all, I want to thank these distinguished leaders of the American labor movement for coming here today for this meeting. We are meeting to talk about the economy, the challenges we face in the 21st century—in part, what I intend to say about it at the State of the Union next week. We will be discussing ways we can work together to save Social Security, to renew our public schools, to improve health care, and deal with a whole range of other issues.

In large measure, opportunity for America's labor families and their children will depend upon whether America can master the challenges of a global economy. We have worked hard over the last year, as all of you know, to deal with the global financial crisis and to restore growth. I talked about that at the Detroit Economic Club on Friday. This will require a very vigorous set of actions this year, and a part of it will involve the Congress, part of it will involve our work with other nations over the course of the year. But it will be very important.

I have received a briefing this morning from Secretary Rubin and my economic team on the situation in Brazil, and on the developments in the world markets. We are monitoring these developments closely, especially what is going on in Brazil. We've been in contact with key Brazilian Government officials, the G-7, and other important countries. We've been in contact with the International

Monetary Fund. We have a strong interest in seeing Brazil, with whom we have worked on so many important things around the world, carrying forward with its economic reform plan, and succeed. And we certainly hope that they will.

At the present time, I think that's about all I have to say about developments there.

Senate Impeachment Trial

Q. Mr. President, what do you think will be the outcome of the impeachment trial? We know what your hopes are, but what do you think is really going to happen?

The President. I think the Senate has to deal with that. We filed our brief today. It makes our case. The important thing for me is to spend as little time thinking about that as possible, and as much time working on the issues we're here to discuss as possible. They have their job to do in the Senate, and I have mine. And I intend to do it. I intend—

Q. Well, do you fear any removal from office, with the buildup of this case?

The President. I think that the brief speaks for itself and the statements which have been made by hundreds of constitutional experts and others—I trust that the right thing will be done. And I think, in the meanwhile, I need to work on the business of the people.

Q. Mr. President, your impeachment is before the Union, and you're giving your State of the Union Address. Don't you think you should directly address that matter during your speech?

The President. I think the American people have heard about that quite extensively over the last year. My instinct is that I should do their business. I think they would like it if somebody up here were putting their interests first, their business first. And I think that's what they expect me to do. They know the Senate has a job to do; they expect them to do it. There is nothing else to be said to the House about it. The Senate has to deal with it.

And my position is that, in addition to that, we have to deal with the problems of America, the challenges of America, the opportunities of America, and that's what I intend to do in the State of the Union Speech.

Q. Mr. President, your lawyers are arguing that the charges against you don't amount to high crimes and misdemeanors. Do you personally believe that perjury and obstruction of justice are not impeachable offenses?

The President. I believe that it's not necessary for me to comment further than our brief. The important thing I think you should be asking yourself is, why did nearly 900 constitutional experts say that they strongly felt that this matter was not the subject of impeachment?

My opinion is not important here. My opinion is that I should be doing my job for the country, and other people should be handling the defense and dealing with this issue. And that's what I intend to do.

Brazilian Currency Devaluation

Q. Mr. President, on Brazil. Do you—[*inaudible*—]harmful effect on the U.S. economy? We send a lot of exports to Latin America.

The President. Well, as you know, we have worked hard to keep the financial crisis in Asia, which engulfed Asia last year, from spreading to Brazil. Latin America is our fastest growing market for American goods and services. And Brazil is the largest country in Latin America. So obviously, we hope that the situation will be resolved in a satisfactory way not only for the people of Brazil but for all of the people in the Americas that want to continue to enjoy the good progress that all of us have enjoyed in the last several years. And we're working hard to that end and will continue to do so.

NOTE: The President spoke at approximately 10:30 a.m. in the Cabinet Room at the White House.

Remarks Announcing an Initiative To Improve Economic Opportunities for Americans With Disabilities

January 13, 1999

Wow! Wasn't she great? Let's give her another hand. She was great. [*Applause*] Thank you.

On behalf of all of us in our administration, many of whom are here, I want to thank all the advocates for persons with disabilities

in our audience. I thank especially Tony Coelho, Becky Ogle, Paul Marchand, my great friend Justin Dart, Paul Miller, and others. I want to thank all the people in the administration, those in the Cabinet who are here with me, and the agency heads and the others in the White House who have done so much to help to sensitize me and the Vice President and others to the challenges and our obligations.

I say a special word of thanks to Tom Harkin, who has personally taught me a lot about the issues we discuss today, to Senator Ted Kennedy and to Senator Jeffords. I knew if I listened long enough, that Republican rhetoric would finally sound good around one issue. [*Laughter*] And you did it today, and I thank you. You were just great. It was great.

I'd also like to thank two great friends of this cause who are in the audience: Senator Jack Reed from Rhode Island; Congressman Ben Cardin from Maryland. We thank them for being here.

You know, a lot of things have already been said, and I would like to say something not in my notes. I hope nobody will take this the wrong way, because everybody knows what a great enthusiast I am of athletics. Most of the cameras at this hour are somewhere else, and I want to say, on behalf of my wife from Chicago and myself, that we wish Michael Jordan well. We admire him. We like him very much, and we thank him for years of thrilling exploits.

In my life, I don't know that I ever saw another athlete with such a remarkable set of qualities of mind, body, and spirit, not only somebody who had a body that would do things no one else's would do but who always expected to do whatever it was he tried to do. And I think it's appropriate that the sports fans around America take a day or two to "ooh" and "aah" and hold their breath again, and be glad again. But the courage of Karen Moore, and all the people like her, is greater still, by far.

I remember once, many years ago, after I lost an election and became the youngest former Governor in American history—[*laughter*]—with very dim future prospects, a wise old country lawyer wrote me a letter. And he said, "Bill, you know, it takes a little bit of strength to sustain a terrible setback,