Week Ending Friday, February 5, 1999

Statement on the Attorney General's Decision To Conclude the Investigation of Harold Ickes

January 29, 1999

I have always had confidence that Harold Ickes acted lawfully and appropriately, and I am pleased by the decision announced by the Attorney General today. Harold's contributions to this administration over the years have helped improve the quality of life in this country, and I will always be thankful for his advice and hard work on behalf of the American people.

NOTE: This item was not received in time for publication in the appropriate issue.

The President's Radio Address

January 30, 1999

Good morning. Americans have always believed that people who work hard should be able to provide for themselves and their families. That's a fundamental part of America's basic bargain. Today I want to talk to you about what we're doing to make sure that bargain works for all our people, by ensuring that women and men earn equal pay for equal work.

We're living in a time of remarkable promise, with the strongest economy in a generation: nearly 18 million new jobs; the lowest unemployment in 29 years; family incomes rising by $3,500, the greatest real wage growth in over two decades. We have an opportunity now, and an obligation, to make sure every American fairly benefits from this moment of prosperity.

One of the best ways to meet this challenge is to put an end to wage discrimination. When President Kennedy signed the Equal Pay Act 35 years ago, women were joining the work force in ever-increasing numbers, but their work was undervalued. At that time, for every dollar a man brought home in his paycheck, a woman doing the same work earned only 58 cents.

We've made a lot of progress since those days. Last June my Council of Economic Advisors reported that the gender gap has narrowed considerably. In fact, it's been cut nearly in half. Today, women earn about 75 cents for every dollar a man earns. Now, we can be proud of this progress, but 75 cents on the dollar is still only three-quarters of the way there, and Americans can't be satisfied until we're all the way there.

One big reason why the pay gap persists, despite women's gains in education and experience, is the demeaning practice of wage discrimination in our workplaces. Too many employers still undervalue and underpay work done by women. And make no mistake, when a woman is denied equal pay, it doesn't just hurt her; it hurts her family, and that hurts America.

Between 1995 and 1996 alone, the number of families with 2 working parents increased by nearly 2 million. And in over 10 million families, the mother is the only breadwinner.

Now just think what a 25-percent wage gap means in real terms over the course of a working year. How many bags of groceries, or visits to the doctor? How many mortgage or rent or car payments? And over the course of a working life, it can mean hundreds of thousands of dollars: smaller pensions, less to put aside for retirement.

To prepare our Nation for the 21st century, we must do more to ensure equal pay, equal opportunity, and equal dignity for working women. Today I'm pleased to announce a new $14 million equal pay initiative, included in my balanced budget, to help the Department of Labor and the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission expand opportunities in the workplace for women and end wage discrimination once and for all. With more resources to identify wage discrimination, to educate employers and workers about their rights and responsibilities, and to bring more women into better-paying

jobs, we'll be closer than ever to making equal pay a reality for all Americans.

In my State of the Union Address, when I called on Congress to ensure equal pay for equal work, it brought Members of both parties to their feet in a strong show of support. Equal pay is not a partisan issue. It's a matter of principle, a question of what kind of country we want America to be today, and into the 21st century, when our daughters grow up and enter the workplace.

There's been strong leadership on fair pay from Members in both Houses of Congress, including Senator Tom Harkin and Representative Eleanor Holmes Norton. Today I ask Congress, as one of its first orders of business, to pass the "Paycheck Fairness Act," sponsored by Senator Tom Daschle and Representative Rosa DeLauro. It strengthens enforcement of our equal pay laws, expands opportunities for women, and helps working families to thrive.

If we meet this challenge—if we value the contributions of all our workers—we will be a more productive, more prosperous, more proud, and a more just nation in the 21st century.

Thank you for listening.

NOTE: The address was recorded at 1:22 p.m. on January 29 in the Roosevelt Room at the White House for broadcast at 10:06 a.m. on January 30. The transcript was made available by the Office of the Press Secretary on January 29 but was embargoed for release until the broadcast.

Remarks on Submitting the Fiscal Year 2000 Budget

February 1, 1999

Thank you very much, Mr. Podesta, Mr. Vice President, members of the Cabinet, the economic team, and Members of the Congress. I would like to, first of all, thank the Vice President for his invaluable partnership these last 6 years, and for the remarkable address he gave in Davos, Switzerland, just a couple of days ago on the global economy and our responsibilities there. I will say more about that in a moment. But all of you know how much our long-term prosperity is tied to that.

I'd like to thank the large number of Members of Congress who are here. There are so many, we haven't introduced them all, but in view of the Vice President's remarks, I would like to point out that there is one person here in whom I take particular satisfaction. Congressman Jay Inslee from Washington is one of the people who lost his seat in 1994, in no small measure because he voted for the economic plan of 1993. And in 1998 the voters in Washington returned him to the House of Representatives, and I'm delighted to see him. Stand up. [*Applause*] Thank you.

I'd also like to point out that after the first couple of years, when we passed our economic plan in a highly partisan manner, we achieved a bipartisan consensus on a balanced budget which enabled us to continue our progress. And I think I speak for every member of my party in this room—we would like to return to that to pass this budget and keep going in the right direction.

This is our budget for the year 2000. It is the first budget of the 21st century. It charts a progressive but prudent path to our future, a balanced budget that makes vital investments.

Seven years ago, when I ran for President, I committed to put our fiscal house in order. Irresponsible policies had quadrupled our national debt in the 12 previous years. The deficit was $290 billion in 1992 alone. That brought us high interest rates, low growth, and a Government unable to meet its most basic obligations or to build our bridge to the 21st century.

When I took office we charted a new course, as the Vice President said: fiscal responsibility, smart investments, more trade. Today, following that path, Americans have created the longest peacetime expansion in our history: nearly 18 million new jobs, wages rising at twice the rate of inflation, the highest homeownership in history, the lowest welfare rolls, the lowest peacetime unemployment since 1957.

Last year, for the first time in three decades, as all of you know, we had turned red ink to black with a $70 billion surplus. It is projected to be only the first of many. As I said in the State of the Union, America