Weekly Compilation of

Presidential Documents

Monday, February 21, 2000
Volume 36—Number 7
Pages 291–341

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WEEKLY COMPILATION OF

PRESIDENTIAL DOCUMENTS

Published every Monday by the Office of the Federal Register, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC 20408, the *Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents* contains statements, messages, and other Presidential materials released by the White House during the preceding week.

The *Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents* is published pursuant to the authority contained in the Federal Register Act (49 Stat. 500, as amended; 44 U.S.C. Ch. 15), under regulations prescribed by the Administrative Committee of the Federal Register, approved by the President (37 FR 23607; 1 CFR Part 10).

Distribution is made only by the Superintendent of Documents, Government Printing Office, Washington, DC 20402. The *Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents* will be furnished by mail to domestic subscribers for $80.00 per year ($137.00 for mailing first class) and to foreign subscribers for $93.75 per year, payable to the Superintendent of Documents, Government Printing Office, Washington, DC 20402. The charge for a single copy is $3.00 ($3.75 for foreign mailing).

There are no restrictions on the republication of material appearing in the *Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents.*

Week Ending Friday, February 18, 2000

Statement on Action in the Northern Ireland Peace Process

February 11, 2000

The Good Friday accord, made possible by the courage of leaders from both of Northern Ireland's communities, responded to the people's overwhelming desire for peace. It has been sustained by those leaders making the tough decisions necessary to keep the process moving forward. I regret that the IRA did not give the de Chastelain Commission a more timely commitment on arms decommissioning to maintain the momentum toward full implementation of the accord—a commitment which reflects the wishes of the vast majority of people both in Ireland and in Northern Ireland.

At the same time, we have seen real progress in the past few days. This progress is reflected in the most recent report from the de Chastelain Commission, which states that the commitment made by the IRA's representative "holds out the real prospect of an agreement which would enable [the Commission] to fulfill the substance of its mandate." I urge all the parties to build on that progress, remain engaged, and carry through on their responsibilities to work together to achieve the full implementation of the Good Friday accord.

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

Proclamation 7272—National Consumer Protection Week, 2000

February 11, 2000

By the President of the United States of America

A Proclamation

Americans have long enjoyed shopping from the comfort of their homes. Door-to-door sales and mail-order catalogs have given consumers the opportunity to choose from a wide variety of products while saving precious time for family and personal interests. As we move into the digital age, the Internet and other information technologies have made electronic commerce possible, and online shopping is opening doors for consumers, established retailers, and small entrepreneurs across the Nation. With these opportunities, however, come certain risks for home shoppers. Advances in telecommunications and marketing technology bring new opportunities for unfair, deceptive, or fraudulent practices that target consumers where they live. It is now easier than ever for perpetrators of fraud to reach shoppers in their homes; consequently, it is more important than ever that consumers know their rights, understand the risks, and know to whom they can turn for recourse.

While there are risks to home shopping, including unwanted solicitations, ill-advised purchases, and failure to deliver items purchased, consumers can protect themselves against these dangers by taking basic, commonsense precautions. Home shoppers should ascertain the seller's location and reputation; give out personal information only if they know who is collecting it, why it is being collected, and how it will be used; and report problems that they cannot resolve with the vendor.

In order to protect consumers, the Federal Trade Commission, the Department of Justice, the Consumer Federation of America, the American Association of Retired Persons, the National Association of Consumer Agency Administrators, and the National Association of Attorneys General have joined forces to inform Americans about their rights as home shoppers, about merchant responsibilities, and about how to enjoy safely the benefits of shopping from home. This information is available in writing, by telephone, and online, helping to educate consumers about

such issues as how to stop unwanted telemarketing or mail-order solicitations and when to provide private information to an on-line business.

I encourage all Americans to take advantage of this opportunity to learn more about safe shopping from home. By becoming wise and well-informed consumers, we can reduce the incidence of fraud and deception in the marketplace.

Now, Therefore, I, William J. Clinton, President of the United States of America, by virtue of the authority vested in me by the Constitution and the laws of the United States, do hereby proclaim February 14 through February 20, 2000, as National Consumer Protection Week. I call upon government officials, industry leaders, consumer advocates, and the American people to participate in programs promoting safe and reliable shopping from home and to raise public awareness about the dangers of deceptive and fraudulent practices targeting home shoppers.

In Witness Whereof, I have hereunto set my hand this eleventh day of February, in the year of our Lord two thousand, and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and twenty-fourth.

William J. Clinton

[Filed with the Office of the Federal Register, 8:45 a.m., February 15, 2000]

NOTE: This proclamation was published in the *Federal Register* on February 16. This item was not received in time for publication in the appropriate issue.

The President's Radio Address

February 12, 2000

Good morning. Today I want to speak with you about the important steps we're taking to reach one of our Nation's highest goals, helping all our people to succeed at work and in the most important work of all: caring for their children.

For 7 years now, this administration has taken action to give families more of the tools they need to balance the difficult demands of work and home. We've helped to make child care better, safer, and more affordable for millions of families. We've greatly expanded preschool and after-school programs. We've fought to give generous tax credits to help the growing numbers of families who provide care for aging or ailing loved ones at home.

This month we're celebrating the seventh anniversary of the Family and Medical Leave Act, the very first bill I was privileged to sign as President. That bill was the product of years of hard work by a large coalition of caring leaders, many of whom have joined me here today. They should be very proud of their efforts.

The family and medical leave law has now given more than 20 million Americans the opportunity to take up to 12 weeks of unpaid leave to care for a newborn child or a sick relative or attend to their own serious health needs—without fear of losing their jobs. Everywhere I go, people come up to me and tell me how much this law has meant to their lives. I've heard people say that the time they were able to take off to be by their dad's side in the hospital or bond with a new daughter at home was the most important time they've ever spent.

Not only has the law been a godsend for families, it's also been good for business. Nearly 85 percent of businesses reported that complying with the law required no extra cost. In fact, in many cases it has actually helped save them money by cutting down on turnover and reducing the expense of training new workers.

But for all the success of this law, we know we can and should do more. Today, there are still large numbers of families who need to take leave from work but can't afford to give up the income. That's why, 3 months ago, Labor Secretary Alexis Herman and I proposed a new rule to give States flexibility to use their existing unemployment insurance programs to offer paid leave to new parents. Participation is purely voluntary, but we hope States will take advantage of this. Before they do, they must determine how it will affect the soundness of their unemployment system.

Today I am pleased to announce a new way we can make it easier for States to take up this challenge. I'm proposing $20 million in new competitive grants to help develop

and evaluate creative new approaches for providing paid family leave to workers—whether it's through unemployment insurance, temporary disability programs, or any other source. Many States have already recognized the great need for paid leave and have begun drafting their own proposals to provide it. We hope and believe our grants will help to speed the way.

There are two more steps I believe we should take right away. Once again, I asked Congress to expand family and medical leave to give parents time off when they have to go to see their children's teachers or take them to the doctor. And I asked Congress to extend the benefits of the law to employees of smaller companies, so that we can reach another 10 million, American families. I want to thank Senator Dodd, who is here with me today, and Senator Kennedy and Representatives Clay, Woolsey, and Maloney, for their tireless work on behalf of these proposals. With their leadership, I believe we will succeed in expanding family and medical leave this year.

I've often wondered how my own mother, when she was a young widow, would have been able to go away to train as a nurse if my grandparents hadn't been there to take care of me. My mother and I were lucky. So were many other American families. But none of our families should have to rely on luck alone, and no American should ever have to choose between the job they need and the parent or child they love. If we use this moment wisely, we can help to ensure that they'll never have to make that choice again.

Thanks for listening.

NOTE: The address was recorded at 4:52 p.m. on February 11 in the Oval Office at the White House for broadcast at 10:06 a.m. on February 12. The transcript was made available by the Office of the Press Secretary on February 11 but was embargoed for release until the broadcast.

Statement on the Death of Charles M. Schulz, Jr.

February 13, 2000

Hillary and I were deeply saddened to learn of the death of Charles M. Schulz, Jr. On the day that our newspapers print his very last "Peanuts" strip, it is especially poignant that we mourn the passing of Charles Schulz himself. For 50 years, his keen eye, his good and generous heart, and his active brush and pen have given life to the most memorable cast of characters ever to enliven our daily papers. The hopeful and hapless Charlie Brown, the joyful Snoopy, the soulful Linus—even the "crabby" Lucy—give voice, day after day, to what makes us human.

Today, in his final strip, Charles Schulz writes, "Charlie Brown, Snoopy, Linus, Lucy . . . how can I ever forget them. . . ." We can say with certainty that we will never forget them, or their creator, or the many gifts he has given us all.

Our thoughts and prayers are with his wife, Jeannie, and their children.

Remarks on Receiving the League of United Latin American Citizens' Lifetime Achievement Award

February 14, 2000

Thank you very much, ladies and gentlemen. Well, thank you, President Rick Dovalina. Elvia Morales, thank you very much for reminding us of why we're all here working every day. She did a fine job, didn't she? I was very proud of her. Thank you.

I thank the students from Cesar Chavez Public Charter High School for Public Policy for joining us, and their teachers and principal. Thank you all again for being here, and good luck to you.

I'd like to thank Senator Chuck Robb from Virginia and Congressman Silvestre Reyes from Texas for joining us today. Thank you very much, gentlemen. I want to thank our Secretary of Energy, and my dear friend, Bill Richardson for the wonderful statement that he made in opening this meeting today.

I thank all the people of our administration who are here, but I would like to especially acknowledge my Deputy Chief of Staff, Maria Echaveste; my Assistant to the President who deals with all the Governors, mayors, and half the headaches in America, Mickey Ibarra; Administrator of the Small Business Administration, Aida Alvarez, whom you've acknowledged already; Army

Secretary Louis Caldera, who's here; the President of the Overseas Private Investment Corporation, George Munoz; the Chairwoman of the EEOC, Ida Castro; and the Director of the Selective Service Commission, Gil Coronado. And there are other present and past members of the administration here. I thank you all.

Tornado Damage in Georgia

I have, before I begin—and I know you'll all forgive me, because they, too, are part of our American family—I have to say that I am very saddened by the terrible loss of life and the other damage which occurred as a result of the tornadoes which swept Georgia early this morning. And we're working with the Federal Emergency Management Agency, which is already there and providing me with regular updates on the situation.

I know that all Americans join me. Let me say, my home State very often had the largest amount of tornado damage in the country in any given year, and the loss of life in Georgia this morning is unusual and terrible. And I ask for your prayers for those people today.

LULAC Lifetime Achievement Award

Let me also say, I am deeply touched by this beautiful award. I have always said that the President's job was reward enough, and no one should give the President an award. And you always have to check your pulse to make sure you're still living, when you get an award, if you're in my business. [*Laughter*]

But having said that, I accept it, and I am delighted to have it, because this has been a lifetime passion of mine. Bill Richardson talked about the people I met in Texas 28 years ago. I was born in a little town in southwest Arkansas which now has one of the Federal migrant centers there, because it's on the way that people come up from Mexico through south Texas and then go all the way up the Mississippi River in their migrant work, all the way to the cherry crop in Michigan.

When I went to Texas 28 years ago, in addition to meeting impressive people, I always begged to be permitted in my work to go to San Antonio and to the Rio Grande Valley. And I just went back to the Rio Grande Valley last week. When I went there as President, I found that I was the first elected President to go to the valley since Dwight Eisenhower 40 years before. I have been there three times because—partly to help the people there who are doing so well—it's now the third fastest growing area in America, population wise, and they're lifting themselves up; and partly because I want the rest of America to know about their contributions and, generally, the important role that Latinos are going to play in 21st century America.

I also want to say that more than any other person in America, the President accomplishes nothing on his own and would be nothing without all the people who help. So this award really belongs to all the people in this administration, especially my Hispanic appointees whom I've mentioned, and two who once were here who aren't anymore, Federico Pena and Henry Cisneros. I thank them for what they did. And I'd like to say a special word of appreciation also to the Vice President, who has done so much, through the empowerment zone program and in so many other ways, to lift the lives of our Hispanic-Americans. And I thank him for that.

I would like to thank all the LULAC members who are here and all the members of the National Hispanic Leadership Agenda who are here—and for all you are doing to try to help forge unity among the great diversity within Hispanic America, something many Americans don't know enough about. For all the differences of ethnicity, national origin—and occasionally even a difference of opinion—Hispanics in this Nation are united by common values of faith, family, hard work, by a common vision of a unified future.

When I became President 7 years ago, America was already a very diverse country, not nearly so much as it is today. It was clear to me then that we had to go beyond the kind of divide-and-conquer politics which had dominated our country for many years; that if we could make a virtue of our diversity—if we could not only tolerate one another but celebrate and honor one another—it would be America's meal ticket to the

globalized information society of the 21st century.

And so we have worked for 7 years, as your president said, for a society in which there is opportunity for all and responsibility from all and a community of all Americans. And it is working. We have the strongest economy we have ever had, with the lowest Hispanic unemployment rate in history, as you pointed out, a 20-year low in poverty, over 2 million fewer children in poverty, the lowest welfare rates in 30 years, the lowest crime rates in 30 years. We are moving forward.

But what I would like to say to all of you is that in my judgment—and I say that as a person who is no longer running for any office but a person who looks on these children as America's children—we have only scratched the surface of our potential as a nation. And we have only scratched the surface of the potential of our young people. And we have only scratched the surface of what we can do because of our increasing diversity.

Therefore, it is more important even than it was 7 years ago when I took office in a time of stagnant economy and social difficulty and political gridlock. It is more important now—now that we know we can do better, now that we know we're moving forward—that we understand clearly we have only scratched the surface; and that we resolve to say we have only begun to meet the big challenges and seize the big opportunities that are out there for our country and especially for this generation of young Americans in the new millennium.

I would like to mention some of them but begin by saying we have a special opportunity in this year, as we do every 10 years, but since we just changed centuries it's particularly momentous to begin by getting an accurate picture of precisely who we are as a nation and what we are becoming. That's why I want to say a few words about the vital importance of the census in 2000. It begins next month.

In the 1990 Census, 8 million children were uncounted—8 million people were uncounted, and over a quarter of them were children. Parents with limited English often failed to include their children on the forms, or left them out for fear that landlords or housing officials might learn their families had grown, not realizing the information on census forms is totally confidential.

Now, if we believe everybody in our American community counts, we've got to make sure everyone is counted in this year's census. It's important for the Federal investments that are made in States and communities—yes, that's one reason it's important. It's important for the drawing of congressional district lines and the allocation of representation in Congress. But it is also important because it gives us a picture of where America is, and we compare it with where we were 10 years ago—we can see where we're going.

I must say, as a public official, I found the 1980 and the 1990 Census documents extremely important in showing, among other things, the profound impact of education on income for younger workers. If you compare the 1990 Census with the 1980 Census, it shows you more grippingly than any other study can how important it is for us to get our young people not only out of college but in 1990 through—out of high school—but through at least 2 years of college if we expected them to get jobs with growing incomes.

And what this 2000 Census will show is how important it is not only to make 2 years of college but 4 years of college available to all the young people in America. These are the kinds of things you learn in the census, because behind all those numbers there are real lives and real life stories. And when you put them all together, you see the patterns emerge. This is a profoundly important issue. If we want to make good decisions about where we're going, we first have to know exactly who we are.

Now, we have, to try to do better in this census, launched a program called "Census in the Schools," that will provide classroom teachers with lesson plans and other materials to encourage children to tell their parents to fill out the forms, to include information on the whole family, and to make it clear that no one outside the Census Bureau—not even other Government agencies—can ever see the information included on the census forms. If every American knew just those

things, I believe more Americans would be counted.

Today I am glad to announce that over one million classrooms already have committed to using this "Census in the Schools" material. More orders are coming in every day. I'm also pleased to announce the Census Bureau today is launching three new public service announcements to get that message out again that all the census information is strictly confidential. The announcements feature three of my favorite baseball players—Barry Bonds, Derek Jeter, and Ivan Rodriguez. Thank you for doing that.

I also want to congratulate Dr. Ken Prewitt, the Census Bureau Director, and his staff for their hard work, and to say a special word of thanks to the Census Monitoring Board members I appointed, including Cruz Bustamante and Gil Casellas. Thank you very much for what you have done. Thank you, Gil.

Now, let me just say briefly a few words about the other things we have to do if we want to do more than scratch the surface of our potential. I just presented my budget to the Congress last week. The budget contains a lot of new investments, some of which were mentioned. It also, however, continues to pay our debt down. And there's a lot of controversy about that. Some people are saying, "Well, isn't it enough that you got rid of the deficit. Why are you paying the debt down?"

So I want you to know why I hope that all of you will support not only investing more money in education and in health care and in the environment and in new jobs but also paying the debt down. Because if we pay the debt down, every working family in this country with a home mortgage, a car payment, a college loan payment, will have lower interest rates. Every struggling small business in America will be able to borrow money at lower cost to expand. And these children, when they become adults, will be able to finance whatever they have to finance at a lower cost than would otherwise be the case if we get the Government out of the business of borrowing so there is more there for the private sector and for individual citizens. Just think of it. We could be out of debt for the first time since 1835.

There's something else I want to say. Even though the primary beneficiaries of this endeavor are the young, it is also important that we do this in a way that takes the benefits of debt reduction and secures Social Security and Medicare for the time when the baby boomers retire, so that we will not impose unbearable burdens on our children and our grandchildren.

When we all retire, those of us in the baby boom generation, the people born between 1946 and 1964, there will only be about two people working for every one person drawing Social Security. It is, therefore, imperative that we begin now—not later, now—to prepare for that day. And because we are fortunate enough to have a strong economy, we can know, if we do the right things today, that these children will not have to worry about raising their children because they can't afford to do that and take care of their parents. So that's another very important thing we have to do.

We have the opportunity to meet the challenge of the aging of America. And the older I get, the more I see that as a very high-class problem. [*Laughter*] That is a good problem. But it can only be good if our children have greater opportunities than we do, not fewer.

A couple of other things I would like to mention that I think are very important—you were kind enough to say that in 1993 the Congress, by the narrowest of margins, passed a big deficit reduction package that also gave tax relief to 15 million working people—and a lot of them were Latinos—through what is called the earned-income tax credit. It is a good program because it basically gives money back, off taxes, to lower income working people, particularly with children.

I have proposed another big expansion of that, which would help a lot of Hispanic families. It would give more money to families where both the mother and the father are working. It would give lots more money to families that have more than two children. You've talked about coming from a large family—I think this is very important. The way that program works now, it virtually punishes working families that have more than two children at home. I think we ought to keep

such families together and reward them and help the parents to succeed. So I hope you will help me to expand that.

I hope you will help me to get another increase in the minimum wage. And I hope that you'll help me with these education programs. My budget would give us enough funds to give after-school and summer school programs to children in every school that's under-performing in the entire country. That's a huge, huge advantage.

Of all the ethnic groups in America, the percentage with the highest—the group with the highest percentage of people without health insurance are Hispanic-Americans. Over 40 million Americans still have no health insurance—more than there were in 1993 when I took office—in 1994, when I tried to find a way to provide coverage to everyone.

We passed a couple of years ago the Children's Health Insurance Program, which gave States the ability to insure children who came from families who were not poor enough for Medicaid, but not well enough off to afford private health insurance. We now have 2 million children in that program. We'll soon have somewhere between 4 million and 5 million, as we get them all enrolled.

The Vice President has made a suggestion that I embraced in the State of the Union to allow all their parents to be enrolled, as well. If we did that, we could insure about 25 percent of all the uninsured people in America. And keep in mind, we're talking about working people here. We're talking about people that get up every day, for very modest earnings, and they pay their taxes. They obey the law. They raise their kids and do the best they can, and they cannot afford health insurance. And with one simple action, we could insure 25 percent of the people in America who don't have health insurance. So I hope you will support that.

And then our Hispanic Education Action Plan was mentioned earlier. This budget has over $800 million more for that, to try to get tutoring and after-school and mentoring programs specifically targeted at Latino children to help them meet higher standards, to help them finish high school, to help them go to college.

Now, why is that important? Well, you heard Elvia's story. And if I could have anything come out of this ceremony today, by the way, it would be her story, not my speech. Why? Because think of all the obstacles she had to overcome—back and forth to Mexico, this in Spanish, this in English. You know, you hear a lot of people preach about what our children should learn and how everybody ought to learn in English, and I believe that and all that. But they don't think about the practical problems.

Remember the story this young woman told of her life. She has had a heroic journey, to have a degree from a 4-year institution that's a fine institution of higher education. And she did that. Doubtless, she had a lot of support along the way, as she said. But it was still—I mean, it took my breath away to think she's telling the story of her life. She's got one more hurdle she has to leap over.

And I'd far rather people remember her life story than anything I say today—first, because it should inspire these children and people like them all across America. And second, because it would remind people, in the Congress and in other places where we have responsibility, that it's all very well to tell our young people they should be responsible citizens, but when they're doing the best they can, the rest of us need to pitch in and help them. And we need to give them more support.

I will say again, this is the most sobering thing—I am glad we continue to be a nation of immigrants. The largest group of immigrants still coming to America are people whose first language is Spanish, although they are increasingly a diverse lot, as all of you know. Because so many of our children in our schools are first generation immigrants, we have the continuing frustrating problem that the dropout rate in high schools is far, far higher among our Hispanic children than among any other group. Last year we reached a milestone: for the first time ever high school graduation rates of African-Americans was more or less equal to the high school graduation rate of the white majority. That's a great step forward. We should be proud of that.

But the dropout rate among Hispanic children is still high. Why? A lot of them are still quitting to go to work to support their families. An enormous number of others still have serious language problems. One of the most important things we've tried to do in the last few years is to make sure all of our kids who are in our schools can read independently by the end of the third grade. We have a thousand colleges sending tutors into the schools now.

I noticed Jim Barksdale, a Silicon Valley executive, the founder of Netscape, put over $100 million into a foundation at the University of Mississippi the other day to do nothing but teach people to make sure they could teach our young people to read—because when children get to junior high school or middle school, as it's commonly called now, and they can't keep up, a lot of people drop out because they're bored stiff because they're not fluent in the language enough to keep learning the material.

So I say to you, remember Elvia's story. It shouldn't be that hard. She was great, but it shouldn't be that hard. We've got to do more to keep all our children in school, get them out of high school, get them on to college. That's what this Hispanic education effort is all about.

And the last point I want to make is, while we've seen a big drop in welfare rolls and a significant but not nearly large enough drop in child poverty, we have to recognize that there are still lots of people in places this economic recovery has left behind. That's why I want to expand the number of empowerment zones and enterprise communities and give people more incentives to invest in them. That's why I'm trying to pass this big new markets initiative, to give Americans the same incentives to invest in poor areas in America they get to invest in poor areas in Latin America, Africa, and Asia. I want people to invest overseas, but we ought to give them the same incentives to invest in underdeveloped areas right here in the United States and give our people an opportunity, too.

So these are some of the things that I hope we will do. I hope the Congress will also agree to invest more funds in the education of immigrants to teach them English, to teach them civics, to support them.

And finally, let me say, I want to thank those of you who are from Puerto Rico who came up to me today and talked to me about that. I have, ever since I ran for President, been committed to allowing the voteless citizens of Puerto Rico the right to choose for themselves the ultimate status of the island. And again, I have included resources in my budget for them to do that, and I ask Congress to look at this and to stop walking away from this. We cannot—we cannot—continue to pretend that there is any other ultimate resolution to this and to the difficulties that continue to arise, other than letting the people of Puerto Rico decide for themselves.

And I have also done what I could to empower the residents of Vieques to decide for themselves whether the Navy training there should end in 2003. We ought to be a good neighbor, and they ought to be able to decide. And we ought to be able to work around whatever decision they make.

Now, let me just mention one other big issue to me. Bill Richardson and Rick Dovalina were kind enough to refer to all the Hispanic-Americans who have served in this administration. And I'm proud of that. A big part of them, who cannot be here today because they are otherwise occupied, are those whom I have appointed to Federal judgeships. And unlike me, they are not term-limited. They get to stay a long time. Almost half my total appointees are women or minorities. And yet, these appointments have garnered the highest percentages of top ratings from the ABA, the bar association, in 40 years.

Now, one of my frustrations as President right now is that I'm having a hard time getting all these candidates processed and voted on by the Senate. There are three first-rate Hispanic judicial nominees that the Senate has not voted on yet, and I want to call their names, because I want you to know who they are: Judge Julio Fuentes, for the third circuit, a distinguished civil litigator from Texas; Enrique Moreno, a graduate of Harvard and Harvard Law School, well qualified by the American Bar Association, has still not been given a hearing by the Senate Judiciary Committee—better qualified academically than

many, many judges who have been appointed by all previous Presidents of both parties; and Judge Richard Paez, for the ninth circuit, he is a sitting Federal judge. He has finally been promised a vote in March. But he has been waiting—listen to this—for 4 years for the Senate to vote on him. I nominated him 4 years ago.

Now, why is that? Because some people don't want these folks on the court, but they don't want you to know they don't want them on the court, because then you may not want them in the Senate. [*Laughter*] Now, this is not rocket science; this is what's going on. So if you don't want somebody on the court, but you don't want the folks back home to know you don't want them on the court, you just arrange for there never to be a vote.

It's not right. That they think that they're too progressive, they ought to stand up and vote them down. But they ought to—it's time to stop patronizing people or insulting them by playing games with them. Just vote them up or down. They're entitled to it, and they can take it. We can all take it. But when good people agree to submit themselves for Federal service—and they are good people and they are not disqualified by the investigation, they're elevated by the investigation, they are entitled to be voted up or down. And I ask you to help us.

Now, again I want to say, I hope that all of you when you leave here will remember that, even though the President should never get awards, I'm tickled to get this one. [*Laughter*] I hope you will remember the story of Elvia Morales' life and try to replicate it. I hope you'll remember these children who came to join us today from the Cesar Chavez Charter School. And I hope you will remember that we have just scratched the surface of what their lives, and our life as a nation, can be.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:09 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Enrique (Rick) Dovalina, national president, League of United Latin American Citizens; Elvia Morales, graduate, California State University at Sacramento, who shared her story of growing up as a child of immigrants; Irasema Salcido, principal and founder, Cesar Chavez Public Charter High School for Public Policy; former Secretary of Energy Federico Peña; former Secretary of Housing and Urban Development Henry G. Cisneros; and Major League Baseball players Barry Bonds, San Francisco Giants, Derek Jeter, New York Yankees, and Ivan Rodriguez, Texas Rangers. A portion of these remarks could not be verified because the tape was incomplete.

Interview With Wolf Blitzer on CNN.com

February 14, 2000

2000 Presidential Election

Mr. Blitzer. Thank you very much, Lou. We are in the Oval Office, here with President Clinton. Mr. Clinton, thank you so much for doing this historic, first-ever on-line news interview with CNN.com.

I just want to set the scene for you and for our audience. This is not only being put forward on CNN.com and other Internet users, but also it will be seen simultaneously on CNN and CNN International. Fifteen minutes after we're completed, there will be an on-line video that people will be able to see, whenever, if they missed it. There will also be a transcript. They will be able to stream and see this as it goes on, on the Internet. So it's a historic moment for the new technology.

I know you've been fascinated by this, so let's get right at it. We have some E-mail questions. First one from Frank Williams in Tinley Park, Illinois: Mr. President, understandably, you're supporting the Presidential candidacy of Vice President Al Gore. But please share your personal political opinions of Senator John McCain and Governor George W. Bush.

The President. I think I should pass on that. I think—I've tried to stay out of this Presidential election. I'm not a candidate, and I don't think any headlines that I make should interfere with the ability of Senator McCain or Governor Bush to make their point. They're going to have an election in South Carolina, and then they'll go on to other States. And I think that—and at some point it might become appropriate for me to say something, maybe at the Democratic Convention or something, or if they make a specific statement about my administration or my record.

But I really believe that the American people—this is their year, their time. And I am going to vote for the Vice President, and I do support him, because I think he's been the best Vice President in our history by far. And I think he's got a good program for the American people, and I know him to be a good man who will make good decisions.

But I just don't think I should get in the middle of this Presidential race. It only interferes with the voters' ability to draw their own conclusions. And I trust them; they almost always get it right.

Mr. Blitzer. But you do know Senator McCain and Governor Bush?

The President. Sure.

Mr. Blitzer. You've met them, and you have your own opinions of both of them.

The President. I do, and I follow this campaign closely. I'm interested. It's the first time in over 20 years when I've just been an onlooker, so it's been fascinating to me as a citizen. But I don't think that I should say anything right now. And I don't mean to dodge the gentleman's question, but I just think that anything I do would only complicate their lives. And they're making their case to the people, and they're arguing with each other as they should be. And that's the way it ought to be done right now.

Hillary Clinton's Senate Campaign

Mr. Blitzer. All right, we have another E-mail question from Peggy Brown: Do you find it difficult, Mr. President, watching, listening to criticisms of the First Lady as she attempts to capture the Senate seat in New York?

The President. Sure. I mean, of course, I do. I now know how she felt all those years. You know, I love her very much, and I think—I know her better than anybody else, and I believe she'd be a great public official. And I hope the people of New York will put her to work. But if she's criticized, particularly if somebody says something I know is flatout wrong, it drives me nuts. I want to be able to say, "Gosh, I wish I could answer that one."

Middle East Peace Process

Mr. Blitzer. All right. We have a chat room that's going on even as we speak right now. There's a question from one person: Are you optimistic, Mr. President, about the future for Middle East peace?

The President. Yes, I am. This is—we're in a little tough patch right now, because a lot of things are going on in the Middle East, the trouble in Lebanon right now. And we're down to the last strokes, if you will. We're down to the hard decisions. But I believe it is so clearly in the interests of the long-term security of Israel and the long-term interests of the Palestinians and the Syrians and the Lebanese to have a comprehensive peace. And I think we're so close on the substance, that I am optimistic.

Now, it will require courage, and it will require courage not just by the leaders but the people of those countries have to recognize that you cannot make peace unless you're willing to give as well as to get. But they ought to do it, and they ought to do it sooner rather than later. I think that the longer you delay something like this, when you have a moment of opportunity, the more you put it at risk. But I am basically optimistic.

Mr. Blitzer. You've invested a lot of your personal time and energy in the Israeli-Palestinian and the Israeli-Syrian peace process. Is it time for you, once again, to personally get involved and bring the parties together, do something to make sure this opportunity is not lost?

The President. Well, I am personally involved, even when I'm not in a public way. I'm always on the phone, always working this issue. But I think that there will have to be some forward progress here in the next few weeks, and I'll do whatever I can to facilitate it in whatever way I can. But beyond that, I don't want to say anything right now. We're working it, and the parties are working it.

Internet Security

Mr. Blitzer. Okay. Let's take another question from an E-mail that we received: Do you think, Mr. President, the Federal Government could do more for Internet security? I know you have a big conference, a big meeting coming up here at the White House tomorrow to deal with this sensitive issue, especially given the hacker problem that we saw in the last few weeks.

The President. Well, the short answer to that is, we probably can. And I'm bringing in a group of people to meet with me tomorrow, a lot of people from the high-tech community and from all our Government agencies. These denial-of-service attacks are obviously very disturbing, and I think there is a way that we can clearly promote security.

I think it's important that the American people not overreact to this. That is, we're into a whole new world with the Internet, and whenever we sort of cross another plateau in our development, there are those who seek to take advantage of it. So this is a replay of things that have happened throughout our history, and we'll figure out how to do it and go forward.

But I think on balance, no one could dispute what a great thing the Internet has been for our country and for the world. There are now over 200 million people that use it every day, about half of them here in the United States. And we just need to keep pushing it.

National Economy

Mr. Blitzer. And we're using it right now. Let's take another question from our chat room, from our CNN.com chat room: Mr. President, how will you advise Vice President Gore to keep this economy growing?

The President. Well, I think he's got a pretty good idea because he's been here with us and has been part of all the decisions that have been made the last 7 years. But if you look at where we are, the question is—we have the longest economic expansion in history; how do we keep it going?

I think we need to remember the fundamentals. We need to keep the debt being paid down, because that allows people in the private sector to borrow money not only to invest in new businesses or in their existing business but also to purchase things. So the continuing debt repayment is important. Keeping our markets open, to make us competitive and keep inflation down, is important. Investing in science and technology and research and in education and training and closing the digital divide to make sure access to the Internet is available to all Americans, those are the kinds of things that will keep this economy going.

Especially, I would say, we have both the moral obligation and an economic opportunity, by increasing investment in the areas which have been not so helped by the economic recovery—in the Indian reservations, the inner-city communities, the rural communities, where there haven't been a lot of new jobs. If you get growth there, it is by definition non-inflationary, because you get—they haven't had much. So you can lower the unemployment rate there, and you create new businesses, new employees, and new consumers at the same time.

Mr. Blitzer. Mr. President, there's another E-mail question that we have: How would you respond to arguments that you personally have had very little to do with the economic boom that the country has experienced during your administration?

The President. Well, I would respond by asking them to remember what it was like before we announced and implemented our deficit reduction plan and remember what a direct impact that had on interest rates, on investment, and on the stock market.

The American people deserve the lion's share of the credit. The high-tech community—we're part of it today—they deserve a lot of the credit. High-technology companies employ only 8 percent of our people; they're responsible for 30 percent of our growth. The companies that restructured in the eighties deserve a lot of credit. Everybody who's kept our markets open, guaranteeing low inflation and more competition, they deserve a lot of credit.

But nonetheless, we had a completely jobless recovery, what some people called a "triple dip" economy, until we finally said we're going to do something about this deficit. And when we did it, it was like breaking a dam, and the interest rates came down, and people started being able to get money and investing at an unprecedented rate, and the stock market started its upward march.

So I think the critical things we did—we had a good fiscal policy; we had a good policy on the markets; and we had a good policy on investing in technology and in people and education and training. And I don't think there's any question that had we not taken that first big bite out of the deficit, then the

growth would have been much slower than it has been.

Mr. Blitzer. Okay. I guess the person asking this question was also suggesting that the Republicans in Congress, Alan Greenspan, and the Internet economy, all of that combined to help you.

The President. And I agree with that. I agree. I think Chairman Greenspan did a good job. The main thing he's done, that I think he deserves a lot of credit for, is that he has been able to look at the evidence of the new economy and act on the evidence, instead of what you might call the old theology; otherwise he could have killed this recovery by raising interest rates too much too frequently in the past.

I think the Republicans in Congress—not a one of them voted for the economic plan in '93. But we did have a bipartisan majority in both Houses in '97 for the Balanced Budget Act, which continued what we were doing. And they deserve credit for that. And I have never—I try never to deny anybody else credit. This is an American achievement, not just mine. But if we hadn't taken that first big bite out of the deficit, I don't think we'd be where we are today.

Situation in Chechnya

Mr. Blitzer. All right, Mr. President, we have another question, an E-mail question: Why are the Western nations, why have they not done enough for Chechnya like they did for Kosovo?

The President. Well, first of all, I don't think the situations are parallel. But I think the Western nations have spoken out against the excesses. We believe—I think I speak for all the Western leaders; I certainly will speak for myself—that Russia had a right to take on the paramilitary forces who were practicing terrorist tactics but that it was a mistake to adopt the position that, in effect, ruled out negotiations with the elected officials in Kosovo, who weren't part of the terrorism, and to adopt tactics that cause a lot of civilian losses without any kind of corresponding gain. So I think we've been pretty clear about that. That's different from what happened in Kosovo, where Milosevic basically ran the whole country out based on their ethnic origin and had no intention of letting them come back until he had crushed anybody's ability to say anything.

So I don't think that the situations are paralleled. But I think we have spoken out against the excesses in Chechnya and tried to get humanitarian aid in there and will continue to try to help the people of Chechnya and the legitimate political forces there. That's very different from what the paramilitary forces did. They have to bear their share of responsibility for what happened as well. I think some of them actually wanted the Chechnyan civilians attacked because they thought it would help improve their political views.

Russia-U.S. Relations

Mr. Blitzer. Okay, we have a followup question from our chat room. Let me read it to you as it's coming in: How can Americans know that America is really at peace with Russia?

The President. Because we're neither fighting with them nor on the edge of fighting. We've detargeted the nuclear weapons against each other. We are working to secure the nuclear weapons in Russia, to help them destroy nuclear weapons, to help safeguard the materials that remain. And I hope very much that after the next Russian election, we'll be able to make further progress on reducing the nuclear weapons there that we both hold.

Mr. Blitzer. And Vladimir Putin, the Acting President, is he someone that you can deal with?

The President. Based on what I have seen so far, I think that the United States can do business with this man. I think he's obviously highly intelligent; he's highly motivated; he has strong views. We don't agree with him on everything, but what I have seen of him so far indicates to me that he's capable of being a very strong and effective and straightforward leader.

Taxes and the Internet

Mr. Blitzer. All right, let's go back to another issue involving the Internet. This is a question: Mr. President, what role will you play in the debate on taxing Internet commerce?

The President. Well, we've played some role already. I signed a bill last year to have a 3-year moratorium on any kind of discriminatory or transactional tax, if you will, on the commerce on the Internet. I don't think that there should be any access or any other kind of discriminatory taxes, from my point of view, ever on the Internet.

The tough question is the whole question of what happens to sales that if they were not on the Internet would be subject to State and local sales tax. And the Governors are trying to work through that. I know Governor Leavitt has taken a particular interest in that—the Governor of Utah. I think that's something that we have to work through because we need—there are whole questions about the need for States to simplify their tax structures, and there are other questions there that have to be resolved. And I think that's going to take some time to resolve.

But I don't think we should have access taxes on the Internet or any other kind of discriminatory taxes because this is an important part of our economy, and we want it to grow. I think that for the States and the localities, they're going to have to keep working until they work through what the operational problems are.

Mr. Blitzer. Doesn't that discriminate, though, against stores—a bookstore, for example——

The President. Of course it does.

Mr. Blitzer. ——that you have to pay tax——

The President. Absolutely, it does.

Mr. Blitzer. ——but if you go to Amazon.com you don't have to pay taxes?

The President. It does, and that's the argument that the Governors are making and the argument a lot of the merchants are making.

Mr. Blitzer. Well, where's your position on that?

The President. Well, what I'm trying to do is get them together. There are also—the Internet people point out that there are also a lot of complications in the way State taxes are. And they have on their side the weight of Supreme Court law which basically was made from mail-order sales. The same argument was made against mail-order sales. And the prevailing legal position is that if you don't have enough connections to a State, you don't have the obligation to collect and remit the sales tax.

Keep in mind, the sales taxes do—it's just that the seller doesn't have to collect and remit it. So most of the people I know who have Internet businesses are concerned about trying to make sure they get a simplified system, and they know what the drill is. Their main concern, however, is not having access to the Internet itself taxed. And I'm with them on that. And I'm trying to support the process that now exists to resolve the issue of how State taxes, the sales taxes, can best be collected in the way that's not too burdensome on the Internet.

You don't want to burden the Internet, but you don't want to put people who aren't making sales on it out of business. And we've got to find that right balance, and that's what we're working on.

Austria

Mr. Blitzer. We have another question from our chat room, an international question involving the political situation in Austria given the fact that Joerg Haider is now—his party is part of the Austrian Government. Let me read to you the question: What does the United States plan to do to make sure that Austria knows that Nazi sympathy will not be accepted?

The President. Well, I think we've made it quite clear that we do not support any expression of either sympathy with the Nazis in the past or ultranationalist race-based politics, anti-immigrant politics in the future. That, I think, is equally important here. And we've also tried to stay pretty close to where the European Union has been because, after all, Austria is a part of Europe, and they've been very tough in condemning what the Austrians have done here. So I think we're on the right track.

There is a delicate balance, however. You know, Austria is a democracy; this man's party got a certain percentage of the vote. He did it based on appeals that went well beyond a narrow race-based appeal. And we don't want to say or do anything that builds his support even further. But I think it ought to be clear to every Austrian citizen that we

in the United States do not approve of his political program or his excessive rhetoric.

Iran-U.S. Relations

Mr. Blitzer. Let's stay overseas. We have another E-mail question about U.S.-Iranian relations: I'd like to know, Mr. President, your view on the recent developments of Iranian-American relations as we, the Iranian youth, are really anxiously following political developments between the two countries and no doubt willing to finally see a healthy and mutually respectful relationship between the two.

The President. Well, that's what I want. You know, I said several weeks ago now—maybe a few months ago—that the United States had not been entirely blameless in the past in our relationships with Iran, and that we wanted a good relationship with Iran, that we did not support and did not condone anyone who would support terrorist actions, and that we had some difficulties with Iran, but we were viewing with interest affairs within Iran. We wanted the Iranian people to have a good democracy. We like to see these elections, and we want to be supportive of better relationships if we can work them out on ways that are mutually agreeable.

I think that one of the best things we could do for the long-term peace and health of the Middle East and, indeed, much of the rest of the world, is to have a constructive partnership with Iran. And I'm still hoping that that can materialize. A lot of that is now in the hands of the Iranian people and their elections and also the leaders of Iran. Some of them don't want that, but I think some of them may want that. And I think it's important that the genuine reformers there not be, in effect, weakened because of their willingness to at least talk to us, because I think the United States should always remain open to a constructive dialog to people of good will.

And I think that the estrangement between these two countries is not a good thing. I think it would be better if we could have a relationship.

Mr. Blitzer. As you know, Mr. President, in this regard, 13 Iranian Jews were accused of spying, and they're being held. Is this an irritant in this? What do you want the Iranian Government to do on that front?

The President. Well, I have been assured by the Israelis that they were not spies. And I've done quite a bit of work on it. I'm very, very concerned about this, because people cannot—it is an irritant. The American Jewish community is very, very concerned about it, and we've done a lot of work on it. And I'm hopeful that justice will be done there and that no one will be punished for being a spy who isn't. That's not a good thing to do. And that, obviously, is a real—it's one of the sticking points.

But I think that there are other people of good will who the Iranians recognize are their friends, who want better relationships with them, who have also talked to them about this, and I'm hoping that it will be worked out in a satisfactory manner.

Media Mergers

Mr. Blitzer. Okay, Mr. President, I think we have another question from our chat room. Let's see what it is: How can we keep the media giants from squashing the little guy? I guess they might be referring to the recent merger of our own CNN-Time Warner-AOL. What's your answer to that?

The President. Well, I think the main things to me are—there are two sets of little guys, I guess—the one thing is you don't want to—and Steve Case has talked about this for many years, himself——

Mr. Blitzer. He's the chairman of AOL.

The President. The chairman of AOL—that it's important not to have access choked off. We want all these—if these mergers go through, we want them to lead to greater access to greater options to consumers at more affordable prices. Then the second thing is, you want other competitors to be able to get into the game. That's what all the big controversy was over the antitrust suit involving Microsoft. And that's handled in the Justice Department, strictly apart from the White House. So we had no role in that one way or the other.

And without expressing an opinion on that case one way or the other, I think what I favor is an American economy where people who have good ideas and new messages they want to get out ought to have some way to

do that, if they can generate a following. So that's what needs to be monitored here.

Some of this amalgamation I think is inevitable, given the possible synergy that could exist, for example, between a company like AOL and Time Warner, with all of its myriad publications and programs and networks. But you've got to have—there has to be some room for people who want to compete, and then there has to be a guarantee that consumers will not be choked off and their prices hiked and, in fact, they will have more access to more programs at more affordable prices. And I think those are the touchstones that ought to guide Government policy.

Small Business

Mr. Blitzer. All right. Let's take another question from our chat room, CNN.com chat room: What will the current and future administrations do to keep small business alive? Sort of related to the last question.

The President. One of the things that I'm very proud of about this economy—and again, I don't take total credit for this; this is part of our prosperity—but in every year I've been President, we've set a new record for starting small businesses—every single year.

I think that the Small Business Administration has an important role to play. I think that we have dramatically increased the number of small business loans that we finance, and we've concentrated on women and minorities, others who have been traditionally denied credit.

We have promoted aggressively for the first time what we call community development financial institutions, where we put Federal money into banks to try to help them make small loans to people who never could have gotten credit before. Just as we do around the world, we're now doing that here. And that's helping.

We've tried to continue to minimize the burden of Government regulations on small business. And I think that's important—to keep an entrepreneurial environment in America, so people can get access to venture capital if they've got an idea and start it.

So I think having the right conditions, and then having specific access to capital and technical support through the Small Business Administration and the community financial institutions—that's the best thing we can do for small business.

President's Legacy

Mr. Blitzer. We have another question about the future in our chat room: What will the history books say about the Clinton Presidency?

The President. Well, I'm not sure, because that's for the historians to decide. But I think they will say, among other things, that we had a—we came into office with a different approach that was attuned better to the changes that were going on in the economy, in the society and in the world, and that we helped America get through this enormous period of change and transition—in the metaphor I use, to build our bridge to the 21st century—and that our country was stronger when we finished than it was when we began. I hope that's what they'll say, and I believe they will.

Post-Presidential Plans

Mr. Blitzer. All right, we have a follow-up question from our chat room. Let's take a look at that one: Mr. President, what are you going to do when you leave office? Which is now less than a year away. You probably—are you counting the days?

The President. No, not in a negative way. I mean, I'm not eager for them to be over. In fact, one of the problems I have is, I want to work even harder now to try to get as much done as I can.

When I leave, I'm going to establish a library and a public policy center.

Mr. Blitzer. That will be in Little Rock.

The President. And that will take a couple years to do. And I'm going to try to maintain a high level of activity in the areas that I'm particularly interested in. I've spent a lot of my life working on reconciliation of people across racial, religious, and other lines. I'm very interested in using the power of technology, like what we're doing now, to help poor countries and poor areas overcome what would ordinarily take years in economic development and education.

I'm very interested in continuing my work to try to convince Americans and the rest of the world that we can beat global warming

without shutting down the economy, that it's no longer necessary to use more greenhouse gases to grow economically. I'm very interested in promoting the concept of public service among young people and trying to get more young Americans to take some time off to serve in our National Government or the State and local government.

Those are four things I'll do. Basically, I want to try to be a good citizen. America's given me a lot, and more than I could have ever dreamed. I've loved being President. And I feel that I've acquired a certain level of experience and knowledge, that I owe that to my country. And along the way, I hope to write a few books and have a little fun, too. And I hope I'll be a member of the Senate spouses' club. I'm going to do my best to support my wife in every way I can.

But I just want to be a good citizen. I want to try to put what I've learned in a lifetime to use in a way that benefits the people of America and others around the world who I care about.

Mr. Blitzer. And you'll commute between Chappaqua, New York, and Little Rock, sort of?

The President. Yes, I'll spend some time in Little Rock for the next couple of years, you know, like I said, getting the facility up. And I'll spend some time with Hillary, as much as I possibly can, in New York. And then I'll probably travel some. And I hope we'll be able to travel some together. It depends on what happens in the next year.

But I'm really looking forward to it. I love this job. I don't know if I'll ever do anything again that I love the work as much as I love this. John Kennedy described it well. He said, basically, it challenges all your abilities. It challenges your mind, your emotions, even your physical strength. But I think that I can do a lot of things that will help other people when I leave here, and I'm going to do my best to do that.

President's Favorite Websites

Mr. Blitzer. All right, Mr. President, if you'll take a look at our chat room, the people who are participating in the CNN.com chat, they're participating in huge numbers right now. Let's take another question, though, from an E-mail person named Seth. He says this: Mr. President, I have heard that you are an avid web surfer and on-line shopper. What are your favorite websites?

The President. Well, I wouldn't say I am avid. I did do some Christmas shopping for the first time on-line this year, though. And I even—I bought some things from the Native American craftspeople up in South Dakota, at Pine Ridge, which was really interesting to me.

But I love books, so I like Amazon.com. And I'm fascinated by eBay, because I like to swap and trade, and it reminds me of the old kind of farmer's markets and town markets I used to visit when I started out in politics in Arkansas so many years ago. I think the whole concept of people being able to get on-line and sort of trade with each other, and almost barter, is utterly fascinating to me.

Issues of the New Millennium

Mr. Blitzer. All right, we have another question, Mr. President. We only have a little time left. Let's take this from the chat room: Mr. President, what is the biggest issue facing Americans in the new millennium?

The President. Well, I think the most important thing that we have to do is to make up our minds that we are actually going to build a more united country out of our diversity and out of our groundbreaking technology and advances in science and technology. That is, I think that if you look around the world today, the biggest problems seem to be rooted in racial, ethnic, religious strife. If you look at America and how well we fit with a positive vision of the 21st century world and you look at the continuing problems we've had here, with these hate crimes, for example, the most important thing we could do is get our minds right and get our spirits right and realize that we have to learn to live with people who are different from us. We have to learn to keep our conflicts with them within proper bounds, so that our common goals override the differences between us.

If we build one America, that's the most important thing. The American people are so innovative, so creative, and we're so well-positioned for the future, everything else will work out. But if we allow ourselves to fall

into these deep divisions over—including political ones—differences of opinion are healthy; demonization is destructive and self-indulgent. And that's basically what we've got to work on.

If we can keep working together enough in creative tension, then everything else will work out. I'm confident of it.

Social Security Earning Limits

Mr. Blitzer. All right, Mr. President. We have time for one final question. It's from Wolf in Washington, DC—that would be me, by prerogative, as the moderator of this discussion, this on-line interview we're having: You know the Republicans today in the House of Representatives are pushing legislation that would remove the limits, ease the limits on Social Security recipients as far as their earnings after they reach 65 until 70—a very sensitive subject, affects a lot of people watching right now, how much money they could earn and still be eligible for Social Security. Will you work with the Republicans, support them, in eliminating those caps on earnings?

The President. Absolutely. I'm thrilled by this. I hope this is just the beginning of a signal from them that they're willing to work on this whole Social Security area.

I think we should lift the earnings limit for two reasons. One is, I don't really think it's fair for people—if you're 65 today in America, your life expectancy is 83. And you want to be alert; you want to be physically strong. And we know as people stay more active, they're going to live better, not just longer. So I don't think we should penalize them.

Secondly, I think as the baby boomers retire, it's going to be important to have a higher percentage of people over 65, if they want to, working. This will be good for our society. I'm strongly in favor of it.

If they will send me a bill—what we call in Washington-speak, a clean bill—that is, doesn't have a lot of other things unrelated to that littered to it—I will be happy to sign it.

Then the second thing I'd like to urge them to do is to think about my proposal to dedicate the interest savings that we get from paying down the debt because of the surplus in the Social Security tax to the Social Security Trust Fund to do two things: Number one, put the life of the Trust Fund out to 2050; that will take care of most of the baby boom generation; and number two, do something about a single woman's poverty on Social Security. Married women's poverty on Social Security, about 5 percent; overall, seniors over 65, under 10 percent now. Single women on Social Security tend to live longer, tend to have less money. Their poverty rate is somewhere between 18 and 20 percent.

So I like getting rid of the earnings limitation. It's the right thing to do. Let's just do it. But then let's lengthen the life of the Trust Fund and do something about the poverty rate among women who are retired.

Mr. Blitzer. Mr. President, thank you so much for joining us, from the Oval Office. Always of course, great to be in the Oval Office, and one day when you're not in the Oval Office, you'll probably be excited coming back here as well.

The President. I will be. I'll always be excited to come here. And maybe I'll even get to do a web chat with you afterward.

NOTE: The interview began at 1:43 p.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, the President referred to Gov. George W. Bush of Texas; President Slobodan Milosevic of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro); Gov. Michael O. Leavitt of Utah; Austria's Freedom Party leader Joerg Haider; and Steve Case, chairman and chief executive officer, America Online. A tape was not available for verification of the content of this interview.

Radio Remarks on Funding To Make Communities More Livable

February 14, 2000

Across America, communities are struggling to protect precious lands so their children will have places to play, hike, and enjoy the great outdoors. Today I'm announcing nearly $60 million in new grants to help communities in all 50 States create parks, preserve forests, and save open space.

And the lands legacy initiative in my new budget will provide permanent funding so that communities can conserve additional lands year after year.

NOTE: The President's remarks were recorded at approximately 5 p.m. on February 11 in the Oval Office at the White House for later broadcast, and the transcript was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on February 14. These remarks were also made available on the White House Press Office Radio Actuality Line.

Statement on the Bombing of a School in Sudan

February 14, 2000

I am deeply concerned by reports that the Government of Sudan bombed a school in the Nuba Mountain region on February 8, killing and wounding many young children. It is an outrage that such egregious abuses against innocent Sudanese citizens have become commonplace in the ongoing civil war in Sudan, which has claimed over 2 million lives.

The United States calls on the Government of Sudan to cease all aerial bombardment and to refrain from any attacks on civilian targets. We also call for full and immediate access for humanitarian organizations seeking to provide relief to war-ravaged civilians in Sudan.

Remarks Prior to a Meeting With Technology Industry Leaders and Computer Security Experts and an Exchange With Reporters

February 15, 2000

Internet Security

The President. The room is smaller than it looks on television. [*Laughter*] Usually I don't get so many of them coming in, except you guys are—[*laughter*].

Well, first of all, I want to welcome the leaders of the high-tech industry and experts on computer security to this meeting at the White House to talk about how to maximize the promise and minimize the risks to the Internet.

The disruptions at several websites last week highlight how important the Internet has become to our whole way of life in America and how vulnerabilities at one place on the net can create risks for all. Our administration has been working for years now to reduce vulnerabilities in Government computers and to encourage the private sector to do more.

We know that we have to keep cyberspace open and free. We have to make, at the same time, computer networks more secure and resilient, and we have to do more to protect privacy and civil liberties. And we're here to work together.

Last month I released a draft plan to help do our part to meet these challenges. And in the budget, I asked Congress for $2 billion for cybersecurity to safeguard Government networks, to detect attacks, to hire and train more security experts, to increase cooperation with the private sector. I want to jump-start this effort by providing $9 million right away to begin some of these key initiatives. And so we'll do what we can.

I understand that many leading industry members, including the companies represented here today, have agreed to create a mechanism to share cybersecurity information, and I applaud that. I am asking Secretary Daley and my Science Adviser, Dr. Neal Lane, and Richard Clarke from the White House, to work with these companies to accelerate our efforts with the private sector.

Now, having said that and before we open the floor for questions, I'd like to ask Peter Solvik, who is to my right, the senior vice president and chief information officer of Cisco Systems, to say a few words on behalf of the private sector people who are here today.

Peter.

[*At this point, Mr. Solvik made brief remarks.*]

The President. Thank you.

Q. Mr. President, is there such a thing as a plan to actually secure the Internet?

The President. Secretary Daley says there is. [*Laughter*] Let me say, what we're going to try to do today is to talk about what the Government's responsibility is for our own systems and networks, what the private sector's responsibility is, and as I said before, how to talk about having adequate security, how to protect privacy and civil liberties, but also how to keep the Internet open.

And keep in mind, one of the reasons this thing has worked so well is that it has been free of Government regulation. The only contribution the Government made to the Internet was the early research over 30 years ago, now, I guess, is when it started—'69. And there may be more work for us to do in research here. But I think that, insofar as we can, we ought to stay with what brought us here.

The companies and the sector they represent in this room are about 8 percent of our employment. They do represent, as Peter said, over 30 percent of our growth. And so the trick is going to be how to do what needs to be done on security and privacy and still keep it flourishing and growing.

But we ought to approach this with determination, and we shouldn't be surprised that these things have happened. It's just a replay of what has always happened whenever there's a new way of communicating, a new way of making money throughout human society; there's always going to be somebody that tries to take advantage of it. And we'll figure out how to deal with it and go on.

Q. Mr. President, one issue involved here is the sharing of information, and there are some reports this morning that banks were conscious of efforts to disable their systems but did not share that information more broadly. Can the Government solve that without forcing industry or business to disclose information it would rather keep private?

The President. I think—let me tell you what I know about that, and there may be something I don't know, so I will offer that caution at the outset. The Justice Department, the FBI had certain information that they made broadly available, and I think the banks were in better shape to take advantage of that information than others were. And I think one of the purposes of this meeting is to figure what do we do from here forward to make sure that everybody is in the same position.

But I don't think that, based on what I know now, we should be out there finger-pointing at any sector of the economy and what they didn't do. I think that they were just better organized to engage in information sharing and to set up the defenses necessary to guard against this. And what we really want is for every sector of our economy to be in the same position.

Oil Prices

Q. Mr. President, oil prices have now risen above $30 a barrel. Does that increase a need to do—is there anything you can do about that? Or are you more sympathetic to arguments toward releasing the Strategic Petroleum Reserve?

The President. I think we have to watch this the next few days. There are going to be some important meetings with the oil producing countries in the next few days, and we will know more about this in a week or 10 days about what the trends are going to be.

But the American people are handling the price increase pretty well in terms of every aspect of our lives because of increased energy efficiency, except for home heating oil, where you have, in the Mid-Atlantic States and New England, unfortunately, so many people still dependent upon a source of heating which the rest of the country left long ago, and they are unbelievably burdened by this.

Now, we've released $200 million in LIHEAP funds so far. We can release more. But that eases the burden on the poorest of our citizens, but there are a lot of working people on modest incomes that are just getting killed by this because their reliance on home heating oil. And I have not closed off any options. I'm monitoring this on a daily basis. It's a deeply troubling thing.

But I think the rest of our country should know—I mean, a lot of people are feeling the pinch, maybe if they drive long distances, because the price of gasoline has gone up. But there is a group of Americans, middle class and lower middle income Americans, who have limited disposable incomes, who have no option to heat their homes but home heating oil. They're the people that are really getting hurt. And I hope—and obviously, the poor would be devastated by it, but we're monitoring that daily to make sure we've released enough of the Federal funds that we have that go directly to benefit them.

And so this is a daily watch, and we'll just have to see where we are. And I may have

more to say as the days go by. But we should know more in a week about what the trend lines are going to be and what's going to happen to the price of oil over the next few months.

Congressional Subpoenas

Q. Mr. President, did the White House deny congressional committees access to E-mails it subpoenaed?

The President. I believe that we have complied with every request, and there have been thousands. If the American people knew how much of their money we had to spend complying with requests for paper and E-mails, they might be quite amazed. But we certainly have done our best to do that. There has never been an intentional effort to do that, and I think that we are in full compliance. I believe we are. That's what Mr. Podesta told me right before we came out.

Internet Security

Q. Would you entertain one last question, sir? We've always heard for the last 4 or 5 years that it was going to take an electronic Pearl Harbor—many of the people around this table I've interviewed over the last 4 or 5 years, and they've agreed that's the kind of impact we would need for everybody to play together and work together. Is that what happened last week?

The President. Well, I hope not. [*Laughter*] I think it was an alarm. I don't think it was Pearl Harbor. We lost our Pacific Fleet at Pearl Harbor; I don't think the analogous loss was that great. But I think it——

Q. Was it of concern?

The President. Look, it's a source of concern, but I don't think we should leave here with this vast sense of insecurity. We ought to leave here with a sense of confidence that this is a challenge that was entirely predictable. It's part of the price of the success of the Internet, and we're all determined to work together to meet it. And so, yes, we got an alarm, but I wouldn't say—I wouldn't analogize it to Pearl Harbor.

We're all here. We're going to figure out what to do. But you need to let us work now.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:57 a.m. in the Cabinet Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Richard A. Clarke, Special Assistant to the President and National Coordinator for Transnational Threats, National Security Council. The President also referred to LIHEAP, the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program. The transcript released by the Office of the Press Secretary also included the remarks of Peter Solvik. A tape was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

Letter to Congressional Leaders Transmitting a Report on Actions on Digital Computer Exports

February 15, 2000

Dear _____:

In accordance with the provisions of section 1211(d) of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 1998 (Public Law 105–85) (the "Act"), I hereby notify you of my decision to establish a new level for the notification procedure for digital computers set forth in section 1211(a) of the Act. The new level will be 12,500 millions of theoretical operations per second (MTOPS). In accordance with the provisions of section 1211(e), I hereby notify you of my decision to remove Romania from the list of countries covered under section 1211(b). I have taken this action based on the recommendation of the Departments of Defense, Commerce, State, and Energy. The enclosed report provides the rationale supporting these decisions and fulfills the requirements of sections 1211(d) and (e) of the Act.

Section 1211(d) provides that any adjustment to the control level described in section 1211(a) cannot take effect until 180 days after receipt of this report by the Congress. Section 1211(e) provides that any deletion of a country from the Tier 3 group cannot take effect until 120 days after the Congress is notified. Given the rapid pace of technological change in the information technology industry, these time periods are too lengthy. I hope that we can work together to reduce both notification periods to 30 days. Such changes will permit implementation of my current decision and future changes in a more timely fashion.

I have directed the Secretary of Commerce to adjust the level at which an individual license is required for computer exports to Tier 3 countries. For sales to military entities, the level will be raised from 6,500 MTOPS to 12,500 MTOPS. For sales to civilian end users, the new level will be raised from 12,300 MTOPS to 20,000 MTOPS. I have also directed the Secretary of Commerce to adjust the level at which an individual license is required for computer exports to Tier 2 countries from 20,000 MTOPS to 33,000 MTOPS. Given anticipated significant increases in microprocessor performance in the near term, the Secretaries of Commerce and Defense will review these levels, as well as the level described in section 1211(a), by April 2000, to determine if further adjustments are necessary at that time.

The aforementioned adjustments will take place immediately, with the exception of the change to the individual licensing level for military end users in Tier 3, which will coincide with the change for the notification provisions of the Act, section 1211(a). Both changes will become effective at the end of the 180-day notification period, unless the Congress provides for a shorter period.

I look forward to working cooperatively with the Congress on these issues.

Sincerely,

William J. Clinton

NOTE: Identical letters were sent to John W. Warner, chairman, and Carl Levin, ranking member, Senate Committee on Armed Services; Phil Gramm, chairman, and Paul S. Sarbanes, ranking member, Senate Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs; Floyd Spence, chairman, and Ike Skelton, ranking member, House Committee on Armed Services; and Benjamin A. Gilman, chairman, and Sam Gejdenson, ranking member, House Committee on International Relations. This letter was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on February 16.

The President's News Conference

February 16, 2000

The President. Good afternoon. I would like to cover a couple of topics in an opening statement, and then I will take your questions.

First, let me say that we all know that we're in the midst of the longest and strongest economic expansion in our history, with nearly 21 million new jobs, unemployment at 4 percent, and solid income growth across all income groups.

Americans in public service and in the private sector must remember that our success in promoting peace and prosperity is not the result of complacency but of our common commitment to dynamic action rooted in enduring values. If we want to continue to enjoy success, we must continue our commitment to dynamic action.

There is important work to be done in America this year, and in Washington, DC, this year. First, we must stay on the path of fiscal discipline that got us to this point. If we stay on that path, we can make America, in just 13 years, debt-free for the first time since 1835. Then we can use the benefits of debt reduction to preserve two of the most important guarantees we have made to the American people, Social Security and Medicare, something that will be a challenge as we see the number of people over 65 double in the next 30 years with the retirement of the baby boom generation.

Specifically, we can make a bipartisan downpayment on Social Security reform by crediting the interest savings from debt reduction to the Social Security Trust Fund to keep it strong and sound for 50 years, beyond the lifespan of all but the most fortunate of the baby boom generation. As a first step toward a comprehensive solution, I believe we should do something I called for in my 1999 State of the Union Address, to end the earnings limit for Social Security retirees between the ages of 65 and 69.

To strengthen and modernize Medicare, I propose to implement important reforms and to dedicate more than half the non-Social Security surplus to Medicare, over $400 billion, to keep it solvent for another decade, past 2025, and to add a voluntary prescription drug benefit. I'm pleased Congress is beginning to take up this issue, and I ask them to move quickly and to resist the temptation to spend large portions of the surplus before

we have lived up to our commitment to prepare for the undeniable health and financing challenges that Medicare will bring.

We should also move to complete the unfinished business of the last Congress, passing a real Patients' Bill of Rights, campaign finance reform, hate crimes legislation, an increase in the minimum wage, and especially, commonsense gun safety legislation.

Guns in the wrong hands continue to claim too many young lives—lives like those of Andre Wallace and Natasha Marsh, the fine young DC residents who were gunned down in front of Natasha's home last week and were buried just yesterday. We saw it also in Littleton just a few days ago, with the shooting deaths of two teenage students from Columbine High School.

Today the Secretary of Housing and Urban Development, Andrew Cuomo, who is with us today, released the first-ever comprehensive analysis of gun-related violence in public housing in America. The report shows that while crime in public housing is declining, as it is in the rest of the country, gun-related crime remains a serious problem there, with residents of public housing more than twice as likely to be victims of gun violence as other members of our society. More than a million children and 360,000 seniors live in public housing in the United States. They deserve to be as safe as the rest of us. Ten months after the tragedy at Columbine, it is long past time for Congress to pass this commonsense gun safety legislation.

I would also like to address the impact of rising oil prices on American families. In the Northeast, the impact has been particularly harsh because, from the Mid-Atlantic States to New England, many families still rely on home heating oil, a source of heating no longer used in the rest of the country. These families have been especially hard hit. That is a serious concern, especially because the winter months have been colder this year than in the past few years.

Since January we have released $175 million to help lower income families pay their heating bills. We have also asked refiners to keep producing at full throttle until the crisis is past. And we directed the Coast Guard to expedite deliveries of home heating oil to affected areas. These actions have helped to ease the burden on the citizens who are most vulnerable. Still, there are too many families with moderate incomes who have no option other than heating their homes with oil, and they need help, too. There is more to do.

Secretary Richardson is in New England today holding a summit with refiners, distributors, and major users of home heating oil to determine how Government and industry can work together to better meet the needs of consumers in the Mid-Atlantic and New England States. Today I'm announcing additional steps to help families struggling to pay their heating bills. I directed my Budget Office and the Department of Health and Human Services to release right now the remainder of this year's funding for emergency heating assistance, about $125 million more. This money will be targeted toward the hardest hit States, those with the highest usage of home heating oil. I will be meeting with Governors and Members of Congress in those States to ask them to use all their authority to expand the pool of people who receive those funds, making sure that as many people who need the help can get it.

And let me explain what I mean by that. Under the present law, States can pay LIHEAP assistance, low income heating assistance to people up to 150 percent of the poverty line, the national poverty line, or up to 60 percent of the median income in their States. In the States that are most severely affected, where you have a lot of people who live on middle incomes, but particularly if they have children, are really hurt by an increase of 2 or $300 a month in their home heating bill—are eligible for this assistance but don't presently receive it. So if we provide more money—if the States really want to see the maximum number of people helped, they have the ability to raise the income limits of people eligible for that help and to structure the help accordingly.

We will also be requesting $600 million in emergency supplemental funding for the LIHEAP program to help more hard-hit families through the current crisis, as well as to have some money for others who may be hard hit later in the year when the hot weather sets in. We will send legislation to Congress in the next 10 days, and I hope there will be fast action on it.

Meanwhile, we will continue to work toward a longer term solution. I've asked Secretary Richardson to conduct a 60-day study on converting factories and major users from oil to other fuels, which will help to free up future oil supplies for use in heating homes.

Americans have always pulled together to help their fellow citizens in times of need. Over the last 7 years, we've stood to help the victims of earthquakes in California, of the farm crisis and a 500-year flood in the Middle West, and again and again and recently again this week, the violent storms in the South. Now the families in the Northeast need our help, too, and we must act.

Again I say, the United States did not get to this fortunate moment by inaction and complacency. We got here by a commitment to giving the American people the tools and conditions to solve their own problems and continuing to act aggressively and dynamically. This must be a year of that kind of action.

Thank you very much.

Now, Helen [Helen Thomas, United Press International], would you like to begin?

2000 Presidential Election

Q. Mr. President, you don't seem to have any good news on the Northern Ireland and Middle Eastern front, so I thought I'd ask you a homefront question. How do you like being targeted in the Republican Presidential campaign? Texas Governor—I have to quote this: Texas Governor Bush told Senator McCain, quote, "Whatever you do, don't equate my integrity and trustworthiness with Bill Clinton. That's about as low as you can get in the Republican primary." And McCain said that he resented being called "Clinton" or "Clinton-like," and a few other things. What do you say?

The President. Well—[*laughter*]—I have a couple of observations. One is, you know, they're playing to an electorate, most of whom did not vote for me. And secondly, I have a lot of sympathy with Governor Bush and Senator McCain. I mean, it's hard for them to figure out what to run on. They can't run against the longest economic expansion in history or the lowest crime rate in 30 years or the lowest welfare rolls in 30 years or the progress America has made in promoting peace around the world or the fact that our party overrode theirs and passed the family leave, and it's benefited 20 million people, and it hasn't hurt the economy.

So they've got a tough job, and I have a lot of sympathy with them. And I don't want to complicate their problems by saying any more about them. [*Laughter*]

Terry [Terence Hunt, Associated Press].

Moratorium on Capital Punishment

Q. Mr. President, there are growing calls for a national moratorium on capital punishment, from the American Bar Association to Members of Congress. Governor Ryan has halted executions in Illinois, as you know, because the convictions of 13 people on death row were overturned. On the other hand, Governor Bush said last night that he's confident that the 100 people who were put to death in Texas under his watch were all guilty. You've had some experience with this. You signed four death warrants or execution warrants while you were Governor. What's your feeling about a moratorium on executions?

The President. Well first, I think Governor Ryan did the right thing, and it was probably a courageous thing to do, because a majority of the American people support capital punishment, as do I. But I think that in Illinois, you had a situation where the exonerations and the executions were about equal in number over the last several years. So he had a difficult situation, and I think he did the right thing.

And I think that if I were a Governor still, I would look very closely at the situation in my State and decide what the facts were. There are, I think, not those grounds for that kind of moratorium under the Federal law because of the circumstances under which people are convicted. Now, we have a different review going on here, a Justice Department review on the racial impact or whether there was one in the death penalty decisions under the Federal law. There are 27 people who have been sentenced to death under Federal law, 20 in the civilian courts and 7 through the military system.

We also are in the process of developing guidelines for clemency applications when an

individual's claims of innocence or questioning of the sentence, even though guilt is not a question, can be pressed. And I think, in an attempt to address the problem you mentioned, I think Senator Leahy has introduced some legislation to try to give convicted criminal defendants access to DNA testing and other things, which might tend to disprove their guilt.

So I think all these things need to be looked at. The people who support the death penalty, it seems to me, have an especially heavy obligation to see that in cases where it is applied, there is no question of whether the guilt was there. So the only issue that is left is whether, philosophically, you think it is the right or wrong thing to do.

Q. So you would not support a ban? You would not support suspending it or a moratorium now?

The President. In the Federal cases, I don't believe it is called for. But as I say, we do have the review going on in terms of the racial implications of the way it's been applied, and we also are in the process of drawing up guidelines for clemency requests, which, obviously, would give people an opportunity to raise the question of whether there was some doubt about their guilt or innocence.

But I do think Governor Ryan did the right thing. I think it was a great thing to do.

Steve [Steve Holland, Reuters].

President's Upcoming Visit to South Asia

Q. Mr. President, next month you're going on a trip to India and Bangladesh but not Pakistan. What can Pakistan's military rulers do to get you to reconsider?

The President. Well, first of all, I haven't decided whether I'm going to Pakistan or not. I have decided that I am going to India and Bangladesh, and I will make a decision about whether to go based on what I think will best serve our long-term interests in nonproliferation, in trying to stop, particularly, the nuclear arms race and trying to help to promote stability, democracy, and a resolution of the conflict between India and Pakistan.

I hope that my trip will serve to highlight to Americans the importance of that region to us and the very real danger that a conflict between India and Pakistan not contained is one of the most significant security threats to the interests of the United States in this new century and, I might say, a tragic situation.

You know, we—I think one of the reasons we've been able to play a meaningful role in Northern Ireland is we have so many Irish-Americans here. I think one of the reasons we've been able to play a meaningful role in the Middle East is we have a lot of Jewish-Americans and a lot of Arab-Americans. I think we forget that among all the some-200 ethnic groups that we have in our country, Indian-Americans and Pakistani-Americans have been among the most successful in terms of education level and income level. They have worked and succeeded stunningly well in the United States and, astonishingly maybe, had good contacts with one another.

And I think the United States should be more involved there, even though I think that they'll have to work out this business of Kashmir between themselves. Unless we were asked by both parties to help, we can't get involved. We've been—in every other case we're involved, it's because both parties have asked us to be involved.

But I will make a decision about where to go and what to do based on what I think will further our long-term goals. And I have not reached a final decision.

Yes.

Post-Presidential Legal Issues

Q. Mr. President, as you're well aware, the Arkansas Supreme Court Committee on Professional Conduct has initiated an investigation into a complaint regarding statements that you made in testimony before Judge Susan Webber Wright—action that could include disciplinary action, up to and including disbarment. My question, sir, is would you be willing to surrender your law license to avoid such a hearing? Or will you fight it, up to and including availing yourself of a public hearing, as you are entitled to under the regulations?

The President. Well, let me say to you, the reason—and the only reason—I even settled the lawsuit in the first place was because I thought that it was wrong for the President to take an hour, much less a day, much less

weeks, away from the job of the American people to deal with anything that could be a distraction. And I did it only after there was a court ruling that the case had absolutely no merit, which was obvious to everybody who looked at the facts.

Now, I haven't changed my position on that. As a result, in all the things that have happened subsequently, I have left a lot of things unsaid which I might have otherwise said. And I hope I can continue to do that, and that's what I'm going to do today. I don't think I should be spending my time on this. I think I'm working for the American people. And I'm going to do my best to adhere to that. And as a result, I have refrained from saying a lot of things I would otherwise have said as an American citizen and as a lawyer.

Yes, go ahead, in the back.

Oil Prices

Q. Mr. President, along the lines of the heating oil situation or whatever, would you at any point consider—because, perhaps as the prices continue to spike up—would you at any point consider that it could have some detrimental effect on the economy? Would you consider tapping into the Strategic Petroleum Reserves? And conversely, I'd like to ask if we as Americans have some kind of divine right to cheap gasoline and cheap heating oil?

The President. Well, you've asked two questions, and let me try to answer them. And I'd like to make, if I might, three points.

Number one, the statute for using the Strategic Petroleum Reserve sets forward the conditions under which it might be used. And I have not ruled out any action which I think is in the interest of the American people.

Number two, I think what is in our interest are stable prices that are not too high but don't drop real low, encourage overconsumption, and then jump way up again. That is, what we need is stable prices that are not too high but that are also stable.

I also think that is in the interest of the producing countries. Why? Because if prices got so high they weakened—disregard America's economy—other people's economies, that would shrink the markets for the producers. If the economy goes down, that would lower the price, and they'd wind up with the worst of both worlds. If the price stayed up for any period of time, it would make non-OPEC members who could produce oil more likely to do it, which would further drive the price down.

So I think the OPEC members understand that, and I think that there is an interest in stable prices at an acceptable level. And we have these conversations all along, and I think that is clear. And we will see what happens on that. But I wouldn't rule out using the Petroleum Reserve.

Now, the third point I want to make is this. You said, do Americans have a right to cheap gas and cheap heating oil. What I want to do, because I think it's important for our long-term security, is get America in a position where the fuel efficiency of our vehicles is so great—or our ability to use alternative-fuel vehicles or dual-use vehicles, biofuels, mixed electric and gasoline-fuel vehicles that have automatically regenerating batteries—that our capacity to do that is so great that we will not be reliant on the ups and downs of supplies and the increases that might come in the future would have a much more limited impact on us. I would remind you that these increases have had a much, much more limited impact on the United States than the oil price increases of the seventies, for example, because we're so much more energy efficient.

The final point I would like to make is, there are all kinds of problems and historical explanations for why the Mid-Atlantic and New England States are so dependent on home heating oil, and no place else is, but it's not a good situation. It's just not. We need to examine it. That's one of the things I asked Secretary Richardson to look at, is look at what are the institutional barriers for businesses and individuals converting away from heating oil to heating sources that are more commonly used in other places? What are the costs? Are there any Federal actions that might be undertaken in concert with the States or with the private sector to help minimize those costs and facilitate a conversion?

The people on home heating oil are the most vulnerable people in America by a good long ways to these radical swings in oil prices.

And it's also because they're delivered essentially by individual businesses who come to your home and send you a bill. Consumers don't have the option that many of you who live in DC have, for example. You can average your electric bills. You can average your utility bills over a period of months. So if you have a couple of bad months, you can average them out. Those options are not available to them either.

So I think we have to look long term, in my judgment, at whether there's a conversion strategy there that would enable a whole different energy future to open up in terms of home and business energy usage.

Yes.

Gun Control Legislation

Q. Mr. President, on the topic of gun control, as you're well aware, the central sticking point in the Congress is over this division between the Senate and the House over a waiting period for gun sales at gun shows. The Senate has endorsed 72 hours. The House and a goodly number of Democrats endorsed 24 hours. Would you accept a compromise in-between, sir, or is that 72-hour waiting period so important, you prefer no bill to a compromise?

The President. Well, first, I think, to me, this is a fact question. There are two benefits to the waiting period. One is, does it really give you an adequate amount of time to check the records? And two is, should there be a cooling-off period if somebody who is really hot buys a gun with a bad intent and might cool down and refrain?

If you move away from 72 hours to a shorter period, then the question is, since so many of these gun shows occur on the weekend, will there be access to the records to do the check? Will you be able—I mean, to me, in terms of all compromises—at least, I can only tell you what I believe—this is not theology. This is, what does it take as a practical matter to have a bill that works to keep people alive. I mean, there's no question that the Brady bill has kept a lot of people alive. And there is, furthermore, no question that there has not been a huge amount of inconvenience in the waiting period.

Now, I know what the argument is. The argument is, well, the gun show people are mobile. So it's not like you can wait 5 days, go back to the same store where you placed the order for the gun, and it's going to be there 5 days from now. And the gun shows are mobile. I understand what the problem is. But there has got to be a solution here that deals with that. Maybe they could park the guns at the local police department or something else. There's got to be some way to deal with this that allows us to have a practical law that works. The one thing I will not do is, I will not sign a law which promises the American people that this is going to make them safer, and it won't do it.

But I am not hung up—I don't think we should be hung up on any of the facts. The facts should be, what is necessary to make us a safer people? What is necessary to save more lives? That should be the only driving concern.

Yes, go ahead, Jim [Jim Angle, Fox News].

2000 Campaign

Q. Mr. President, is a candidate's past record on abortion fair game in a campaign? The First Lady seems to think it is; the Vice President seems to think it isn't.

The President. Oooh. [*Laughter*] Now, if I get into that, then you'll have me handicapping that debate last night. [*Laughter*]

Let me just say this. I'll make a generic comment about that because I think all of you are going to be writing about this. I see, you know, one candidate says this about the other's record. Then one complains about how the other one interprets his record and all that kind of stuff. I have never seen a hard-fought political race where candidates did not disagree with their opponent's characterization of their record and their positions. I mean, that's part of the debate, and it's always going to happen.

And again, I think anything I say to get in the middle of that is not—I'm not running for office, and by and large, I think I shouldn't comment under—there may be a few exceptions, but I think basically, the American people are in the drivers's seat. They're making this decision. I get to vote like everybody else, but I'm not a candidate, and I don't think I ought to get in the way unless there's some specific issue related to something I've done as President.

Yes.

Northern Ireland Peace Process

Q. Mr. President, may I return to Northern Ireland, sir? In light of what's happened this week, wasn't it a mistake not to ask for specific assurances to disarm from the IRA, not Sinn Fein but the IRA, in advance of going down the political road and starting a new government?

The President. I think Senator Mitchell believes, who, you know, negotiated the Good Friday accords, that, like any accords of that kind, there were compromises involved that both sides had to accept about the other. And I believe he thought he got the strongest agreement he could. It was ratified overwhelmingly by the Irish people, by both communities in the North and overwhelmingly by the Republic of Ireland.

It has been honored, to date, in all of its specifics, including standing up the governmental institutions, although there was a delay of several months in doing that. And then the de Chastelain report came out, and then after the British Government passed through the Parliament the bill, in effect, suspending the institutions and reasserting control over Northern Ireland, the IRA made certain representations which General de Chastelain considered quite hopeful. And now they're in a rough spot.

But I don't think you can Monday-morning-quarterback that. I think Senator Mitchell and all the people who were negotiating it got the best deal they could from both sides. And I think what we have to recognize now is, while this is a very unfortunate development, a year ago at this time, the Irish had had no taste of what self-government was like. They now have had it, and they like it: positive point number one.

Positive point number two: The IRA has given no indication whatever that they will revert to violence. And so that means that they still think, no matter what the rhetoric says, that all the parties really believe that they ought to find a way to work this out. And I can assure you, virtually every day since I've been here, we've worked on this. And in the last several days, we've been involved on a daily basis, and we're working very hard to work this out. I can't tell you what the end will be. I can only tell you that I think we're way ahead of where we would have been, and I still think there's a good chance we'll get there.

Yes, Claire [Claire Shipman, NBC] and then Susan [Susan Page, USA Today].

Al Gore

Q. Maybe this will be one of the exceptions that you'll be willing to make. Senator Bradley has made it a point of late to challenge Vice President Gore's veracity, essentially, to cast him as a politician not to be trusted. He's been your Vice President for the last 7 years. Are you offended by those remarks? Certainly there's nobody in a better position than you to speak to his character.

The President. Well, my feelings are not relevant, but I can say this: He has always—one of the great strengths that he had as Vice President is that he was always brutally honest with me. I mean, he was never afraid to disagree with me. And when we had very tough decisions, very often we'd be in these big meetings, and very—you see these—when these tough decisions come down—and I mean this, no offense to any of you; this is actually a compliment to you—but when you've got seven people in a meeting and some huge decision is on the line and you realize that if you make the wrong call, it cannot only be bad for the country, it could be very bad for the health of the administration, it's amazing to see how some people guard their words, because they're so afraid that what they say, even though the meeting is in confidence, will be public. In all those tough times, he took a—he decided what he thought was right, and he took a clear and unambiguous stand. And I think the country is better for it. And I could give you lots of examples.

I mean, when it was an unpopular thing to go into Kosovo, he wanted to do it. When it was unpopular to go into Bosnia, he wanted to do it. When it was unpopular to stand up for freedom in Haiti, he wanted to do it. When only 15 percent of the people thought we ought to help Mexico but I knew it could hurt our economy, he was right there. And I could go on and on. So all I can tell you is that in all my dealings with him, he has

been candid in the extreme and all anyone could ever ask.

Now, I'll say again what I said before: I have never seen a tough race where people fought with each other, where they didn't have different interpretations of each other's record and each other's positions. And then once you disagree with someone's position or someone's record, then the person will say, "I just think you're mischaracterizing it." Now, depending on the level of heat and intensity of the campaign, how they say that and how they feel about it will go up or down.

But this happens in every election. And I think the important thing to remember is, you've basically got four people running for President now who are people of accomplishment, people who have certain convictions, people who have, I think, pretty clear philosophies and records. And I know that everybody will get hot and mad at everybody else, but, I mean, this is not a bad thing for America, this choice they've got. And they're very different.

So America has a good choice. And I think that it's tough to be in these races, and when you're not running anymore, you can look back—everybody can look back on a life in public life and say, "There's one thing I said I kind of wish I hadn't said," or, "I said that, and I believe what I said, but I wish I said it in a slightly different way." But by and large, what's happening here is just perfectly normal, and we shouldn't get too exercised by it.

Q. You don't think Bill Bradley's charges have been below the belt?

The President. Well, I don't agree—I'm not going to get into characterizing his charges. You ask me if the Vice President—I don't have to fight this campaign for anybody. You asked me if the Vice President has been perfectly honest and candid with me, and I said, yes, in the extreme. And that's true, and America's been well served by it. That's all I can say.

My experience is that he is exceedingly honest and exceedingly straightforward and has taken a lot of tough positions which, since he always, presumably, knew he wanted to run for President, could have cost him dearly, and he did it anyway. And I was proud of him for doing it.

Yes, Susan.

Possible Involvement in a South Asia Peace Process

Q. Mr. President, I would like to follow up on Steve Holland's question. You said that it's up to India and Pakistan to settle the issue of Kashmir and that they have not asked the U.S. to help mediate that dispute. If India and Pakistan both ask the United States to get involved to try to help mediate the issue of Kashmir, would the United States be willing to do that?

The President. Absolutely. I would. Why? For the same reason we've been involved in Northern Ireland and the Middle East. Because, number one and most importantly, it is a hugely important area of the world. If the tensions between India and Pakistan on the Indian subcontinent could be resolved, it is my opinion, based on my personal experience with people from India, people from Pakistan, and people from Bangladesh, that the Indian subcontinent might very well be the great success story of the next 50 years.

You're talking about people who are basically immensely talented, have a strong work ethic, a deep devotion to their faith and to their families. There is nothing they couldn't do. And it is heartbreaking to me to see how much they hold each other back by being trapped in yesterday's conflicts—number one.

Number two, like Northern Ireland and the Middle East, this country has been deeply enriched by people from the Indian subcontinent, and I think we might be, because of our population, in a position to make a constructive contribution. But if they don't want us, it won't be doing any good. We'd just be out there talking into the air. And I'm not in for that.

Yes, Mark [Mark Knoller, CBS Radio].

Post-Presidential Legal Issues

Q. Mr. President, by your answer earlier to John Roberts [CBS News], did you mean to say that you or your lawyers would not offer a defense to the Committee on Professional Conduct?

The President. No, I meant to say I'm not going to discuss it any more than I absolutely have to because I don't think I should

be dealing with it. I should be dealing with my job.

Yes, Mara [Mara Liasson, National Public Radio].

2000 Presidential Election

Q. You say you're not running this year, but you are casting a shadow over the debate on the campaign trail. And all of the candidates——

The President. I'd like to think I'm casting a little sunshine over it. [*Laughter*] I keep trying to build these fellows up, you know. I'm being nice and generous and all that. [*Laughter*]

Q. All of the candidates are running against your behavior and conduct, not just the Republicans, as Helen mentioned, but all of the candidates.

The President. Well, if I were running, I'd do that. [*Laughter*]

Q. But on the other hand, also all of the candidates, Republicans and Democrats, do sound a lot like you when they talk about policy. Even the Republicans say they want prescription drug coverage for Medicare——

The President. Yes.

Q. ——and they support a Patients' Bill of Rights with the right to sue. And I am wondering if you could comment on both aspects of your influence, both the negative, the fact that everybody seems to be running against your behavior and also, on the other side, why everyone seems to sound like you when they discuss policy.

The President. First of all, I think, for the Republicans, it's probably good politics to do that, because they spent years and years trying to tell everybody how bad I am.

Q. But it's not just——

The President. So, so—but for everybody—the public, however—people are really smart, you know, and it's pretty hard to convince them that they should hold anyone responsible for someone else's mistake, particularly a personal mistake. I mean, I can't imagine any voter ever doing that. That's like shooting yourself in the foot.

I even caution people, for example, if somebody says something—one of you says something or prints something or has a story that we don't agree with—I tell people all the time, "Don't ever talk about the press. There is no such thing as 'the press.'" You can't blame—if you think somebody made a mistake, you can't blame everybody else for a mistake somebody made. But that's in a professional context. In a personal context, it's even more true.

So my view is that the voters are going to—this is, as I have said repeatedly, the Presidential election is the world's greatest job interview. And the voters are going to hire someone that they believe, of course, is a good person, a strong person, a person who will be a credit to the office. But they want to know what in the world are they going to do? How are we going to keep this expansion going? How are we going to meet the big challenges facing the country?

And it is, to me, a source of reassurance—not personal but for my country's future—that so many of the candidates have adopted at least some of the policies that we have tried to put in place over the last 7 years, that moved the country away from this big, deep partisan division that dominated Washington politics for so long.

So all I can tell you is, I think—my instinct is that the voters are going to take the measure of these people. They're going to think: Who will be a good President; who will make good decisions; and do I agree with this person, in terms of priorities and positions? That's what I think. I think the implication that anybody would be held responsible for somebody else's mistake or misconduct is just—it's a real insult to the American people. And they're not going to do that. That's not in their interest, and it's not in their nature. They're too smart and too good for that.

Yes.

Normal Trade Relations Status for China

Q. Mr. President, would you rule out the one-year automatic renewal of China's normal trading status, unless Congress disagrees? And do you think that would be a formula Democrats would find easier to accept?

The President. That would be a—I would not support that because, in order to get China into the WTO and in order for us to benefit from the terms of the agreement that Ambassador Barshefsky and Gene Sperling and others made with China, they have to

get permanent normal trading status. And since you asked the question, let me tell you why I feel so strongly about it. This is not a political issue for me. This is a huge national security issue—for three reasons.

Number one, our biggest trade deficit is with China, because China has access to our markets and our access to theirs is highly restricted. This trade agreement offers no increased access to the American markets by China but gives us dramatically increased access to their markets.

Moreover, it means that we can get access to their markets without having to transfer technology or agree to do manufacturing in their country, and we retain specific rights, even once China is in the WTO, on a bilateral basis to take action if there is a big surge of imports in some sector into our economy that would throw a lot of people out of work in a short time.

So, economically, from agriculture to high-tech products to automobiles and all things in-between, I think this agreement is a clear hundred-or-nothing deal for us, if the price of admission to the WTO is modernizing and opening the economy.

Number two, having China in a rule-based system increases the likelihood not only that China will follow the rules of the road in terms of the international economy but that China will cooperate more in other forums, the United Nations and many other areas—to try to help reduce, rather than increase, the proliferation of dangerous weapons or technology, for example. That's what I believe with all my heart.

Number three, I believe this agreement will change China from within more than all the other economic opening of the last 20 years combined, fairly rapidly, because of the dramatic increase in access to communications and contact with the outside world that this agreement portends.

Now, as I said in the State of the Union Address, and I tried to say it again when I went over to Switzerland to talk, the truth is, I don't know what choice China will make. I don't know what path China will take, and neither does anyone else. I don't want to oversell this to the American people in that sense. But what I believe I do know, based on all my experience, not only as President but just with human nature, is that they are far more likely to be constructive members of the international community if they get into the WTO and they make these changes than if they don't.

And I think it's quite interesting—one of the things that has really moved me on this, since one of the big issues with which we have differences with China is in the repression of political and religious expression, is how many of the religious groups that actually have missions operating in China agree with this. People that have actually worked there, lived there, and been subject to some of the repression there agree that what we're doing is the right thing to do. I think that a substantial—a majority of opinion in Taiwan agrees that this is the right thing to do.

So I'm going to push this as hard as I can. I want to get the earliest possible vote I can. And I cannot tell you how important I think it is. I think that if we didn't do this, we would be regretting it for 20 years. And I think 10 years from now, we'll look back, and no matter what decisions China makes, we'll say the only thing we could control is what we did, and what we did was the right, the honorable, and the smart thing to do for America over the long run.

Yes.

Federal Election Commission

Q. Both Senator Bradley and Vice President Gore have condemned your nomination of Bradley Smith to the FEC. Would you care to take this opportunity to explain exactly why you've nominated this man and to say what exactly this says about your own commitment to the campaign finance reform that you said you would support?

The President. Well, it doesn't say anything about my commitment, although I think they were right to condemn it, except that—look at what the law says. The law says, A, this is a Republican appointment, and B, as a practical matter, the way the appointments process works in the Senate, if you want anybody to be confirmed for anything, you have to take—and the Republicans in this case happen to be in the majority—the majority leader always makes that recommendation.

Now, I have—I argued with him, as he will tell you, for months about this. And there is a reason they wanted Bradley Smith on the FEC. You know, he hates campaign finance reform, Bradley Smith does. He's written about it. And he'll get a 3-year appointment now, where it will be one person on the FEC. And I don't like it, but I decided that I should not shut down the whole appointments process and depart from the plain intent of the law, which requires that it be bipartisan and by all tradition that the majority leader make the nomination.

And I think it ought to be instructive for the American people, and you ought not to change the subject and confuse them. We have a bill, the McCain-Feingold bill before the Congress. The administration is for it. Both the Democratic candidates for President are for it, and 100 percent of our caucus in the Senate and the House are for it, every last person down to the last man and woman. There is only one reason this is not the law: The Republicans are not for it.

And ever since I've been here—we didn't have unanimous support in '93, but ever since '94, '95, somewhere in there, we always had a big majority of the Democratic Party for campaign finance reform and a big majority of the Republicans against it, even though some Republicans are for it. But basically, the big majority of the Republican Party, particularly in the House and the Senate—I don't mean out in the country; I mean in the House and the Senate—are against this. That's why it is not the law of the land.

That is the ultimate truth. This appointment demonstrates that. It's the poster child—this should be—this is like a big neon sign, "Hello, America needs"—if you care about this issue, you need to know what the real issue is here. Ever since I've been here, there's been an attempt to say, "Oh, a pox on both their houses. The Democrats don't really care. If they really cared, if the President really cared, somehow we would have this." It is just not true.

What else can we do? Both our Presidential candidates, the White House, and 100 percent of our Members of Congress are for it. Why hasn't there been a signing ceremony? Because they are against it. Now, this man, his writings and his honest convictions demonstrate that. And I hope there will be no further doubt about this. The American people can make their own decision.

Go ahead.

Hillary Clinton's Senate Campaign

Q. Mr. President, current polls show that your wife is virtually tied with her likely challenger, Mayor Rudy Giuliani, when it comes to women voters in New York, and that she is trailing when it comes to white voters. And by most accounts, women will play a decisive role in this race. Can you address why you think your wife is having some trouble connecting with women voters, in particular; what advice, if any, you're offering her to help her better connect? And are you playing the role of a senior strategist in her campaign?

The President. Well, I'm basically doing for her what she's always done for me. You know, I'm talking to her about whatever she wants to talk about. I'm giving her my best ideas. I thought she had a wonderful announcement. I was really proud of her. She got up there and said that she understood she was new to the neighborhood, but she wasn't new to the concerns of the people of New York. And then she said in exact detail—she did what I believe all candidates should do—she said, "Look, if you vote for me, here's what you get. Here's what I'll fight for. Here's what I'll do. Here's what I'll fight against. Here's what I won't do."

And now the campaign is underway. And I think she's doing remarkably well, given the unusual nature of the campaign and the formidable obstacles out there. And I think now the people will begin to listen and debate, and I think she'll do real well. But I'm very proud of her, and I think she's doing fine.

But you should not—all I'm doing for her is what she did for me. So when she says something, it's what she believes. And she's made up her mind what she wants to run on, what she wants to be for, and why she wants to do it. And I was ecstatically happy with the way her announcement came out, because I just knew it was her. And I just think if—you know, you just go out there and make your best shot and hope that it works. But my instinct is, she'll do right well.

Sarah [Sarah McClendon, McClendon News Service], go ahead.

Isolation of the Presidency

Q. Sir, do you see any way to make the Presidency a position that is closer to the people? It's sort of aloof now. And you're a friendly type of man. You must see some means whereby you can bring the Presidency down to the people more.

The President. Well, I think part of what makes the Presidency aloof is that if you show up for work every day, you don't have as much time to spend with people as you'd like. I think that—I think technology will help some. I think this web chat I did earlier this week with Wolf Blitzer [Cable News Network], where he asked me questions, but he also let a lot of other people ask questions—I thought that was a good way to do it. I think that—in my first term, I did a lot of these townhall meetings, and I think they're good, although I think they tend to get turned in a certain way around whatever's breaking in the news at any given time.

I've tried to not get too aloof from the people. I went down to the Rio Grande Valley the other day. I was the first President since President Eisenhower to go down there, and I've been there three times. And a lot of people came out, and I stopped along the street and talked to them and visited with them. I think that you have to have—I think doing these press conferences helps. I think using the Internet and finding other ways that ordinary citizens can ask you questions in the course of your work helps. And I think that you have to find the proper balance of work in Washington and getting out with the folks to do that.

It's a constant struggle, but my instinct is that technology will help. I think a lot of you, for example—I think your jobs are changing because of the way technology works. And there will be ways that you also can help make people in public life less aloof and bring more people into it. It's going to be very interesting.

Yes, go ahead.

Northern Ireland Peace Process

Q. Mr. President, to follow up on what you said before, you said that no one should be held accountable for somebody else's actions. But if you examine the suspension of the powers in Northern Ireland last week, the British Government was holding Sinn Fein responsible for the IRA not disarming. According to the Good Friday accord, they encouraged both sides to encourage disarmament. Is there any protest on your part to the British Government for bringing down a democratically elected government—and similar to the way you pointed your finger at the IRA in a statement saying that you hoped that there wouldn't be any backsliding after they retracted their previous statements.

The President. Well, let me say, first of all, I was in constant contact with the Irish and the British Governments, and I think we all know what is going on here. The question is, how can we keep the peace process going; how can we get the institutions back up; and how can we keep the Unionist Party involved and under the leadership of David Trimble, an objective I believe that Sinn Fein strongly supports? That is, I believe that they believe that they have to have people they can work with in order to make this thing last.

I have found that my influence is greater when I say what I think about most of these things to the parties themselves but when I don't try to make their jobs any harder by what I say, particularly after the fact. Now, our big job now is to get these people back on track. In order to do it, we have to honor the votes of the people of Northern Ireland; we've got to stand these institutions back up; and then all the parties that said they supported the Good Friday accords and the people they represent, who voted in record numbers for it, they've got to comply. And we've got to find a way to get this done.

And I think that—I know it's not satisfying to a lot of people; they want me to be judgmental about everything. And all I can tell you is, in private I've tried to be straightforward and clear with them. But I don't want to say anything that would make it even harder to put this thing back together. We've got to keep going forward. The most important thing now is to look about how to go forward and how to get—how to keep the Unionists in harness and how to find a way

to comply with all the requirements, including putting those institutions back up.

Yes.

Oil Prices

Q. Mr. President, back on the rising oil prices, Secretary Richardson is beginning a series of consultations with oil companies. Do you think that this will have some moderating effect on oil prices?

The President. I think that oil prices may well moderate. We'll have to see about that. But what I think that he wants to do is to make sure that we've gotten rid of some of the bottlenecks. There are plainly some reasons that are only indirectly related to the general rise in oil prices—that home heating oil prices, for example, have gone up so explosively. That's why he went up to Boston first and why the Coast Guard is trying to assure rapid delivery of the oil.

So I think that he believes that in his talks with the oil companies—not necessarily he can talk the oil prices in the aggregate down but that they may be able to take certain specific steps which would alleviate some of the biggest burdens on them.

Yes.

Q. [*Inaudible*]—the oil-producing countries, I believe he's going to make some consultations around the world.

The President. Yes, I think we're in regular touch with them, and they know what our views are. I think that's all I should say about that.

Yes.

DNA Testing for Death Row Inmates

Q. Back on an earlier question, the death penalty, you mentioned that supporters of the death penalty, like yourself, have a special burden to make sure that innocent people are not executed. And you mentioned the Leahy bill, but you didn't state a position on that. That would make DNA testing available to death row inmates. Is it a good idea? Is it workable? Would you sleep better at night if it were law?

The President. Well, first of all, the reason I didn't take a position on it—I tried to make it clear that I am quite favorably disposed toward it, but I just learned about it in the last couple of days, and I've asked our people to review it, to answer the questions that you ask.

Would I sleep better at night, if it were law? If it would really work, I would. In other words, I am favorably disposed toward it. I just want—and we just have a review underway to analyze the law, how it would work, whether it will work, what, if any, practical problems are there. And I am trying to come to grips with it, and as soon as I do, I'll be glad to state a position. But I want to make it clear—I thought I had made it clear before—I am favorably disposed.

Yes.

Vieques Island, Puerto Rico

Q. On the issue of Vieques and Puerto Rico, currently, there is major resistance by religious groups, civic groups, opposition parties to the agreement reached on Vieques. There's continued civil disobedience on Navy lands. This might entail a Waco-style operation to get these protesters out. Are you willing to go all the way with Federal authority to clear these Federal lands? And as a followup, do you believe in your heart that Puerto Rico's colonial status is the root of this problem or is related to Puerto Ricans' ambivalence to issues of national security?

The President. I think the root of the problem—I think the root of the problem is twofold. One is, as the Pentagon has acknowledged—and they should get credit in Puerto Rico for doing this. It's hard to get people in Washington to admit they're wrong, including me. We all hate to do it, you know—including you. We all hate to do it. The Pentagon has acknowledged that the 1983 agreement was not followed in letter and spirit. They have acknowledged that. That left a bad taste in the mouths of the people of Vieques and of all Puerto Rico.

Problem two is the unwillingness of the Congress to give a legislatively sanctioned vote to the people to let them determine the status of Puerto Rico. Now, I think those are the roots of the problem.

Now, there may be some people there who, on any given day, would be, I don't know, against the military or would think the military shouldn't train or whatever. But it's clear that if you look at the offer we made—to begin now to give the western part of the

island to Puerto Rico; to facilitate transit back and forth between Vieques and the main island; to do a lot of the other environmental and economic things on the island of Vieques; to have no live fire in the short run here while we're going through this transition period; to cut the training days in half; and then to let the people decide for themselves with the future of the island is; but to give us a transition period when we don't have any other place to train—it is a perfectly reasonable compromise, unless either those first two things are eating at you, so you don't trust anything America or the Pentagon does or unless you're just philosophically opposed to America having a military which has to train.

So I still believe it's a good agreement. I will continue to work with the Governor, with the Mayor in Vieques, with the authorities, with a view toward trying to work this out. I want the people of Puerto Rico to decide this. You know, I did a message to them. I wish they could decide their status. If it were just up to me, if I could sign an Executive order and let them have a sanctioned election, I would do it today. And I view this compromise as an empowerment of the people of Puerto Rico and, to that extent, a ratification of their longstanding grievances.

But the people of Vieques should be able to decide this. And I don't think that—just as I don't think the Pentagon should impose it on them, I don't think the demonstrators should stop them from having a vote either. I think they ought to be able to make a judgment.

Thank you very much. Thank you.

NOTE: The President's 186th news conference began at 2:25 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Nicholas Kunselman and Stephanie Hart, students at Columbine High School, Littleton, CO, who were murdered in a Subway sandwich shop on February 14; Gov. George W. Bush of Texas; Gov. George H. Ryan of Illinois; former Senator George J. Mitchell, who chaired the multiparty talks in Northern Ireland; Gen. John de Chastelain, Canadian Defense Forces, chair, Independent International Commission on Decommissoning; David Trimble, leader, Ulster Unionist Party; Gov. Pedro Rossello of Puerto Rico; and Mayor Manuela Santiago of Vieques, PR. Reporters referred to Mayor Rudolph W. Giuliani of New York City; Judge Susan Webber Wright, U.S. District Court for Arkansas, who presided over the Paula Jones suit against the President; and former Senator Bill Bradley. The President also referred to LIHEAP, the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program.

Proclamation 7273—To Facilitate Positive Adjustment to Competition From Imports of Certain Steel Wire Rod

February 16, 2000

By the President of the United States of America

A Proclamation

1. On July 12, 1999, the United States International Trade Commission (USITC) transmitted to the President a report on its investigation under section 202 of the Trade Act of 1974, as amended (the "Trade Act") (19 U.S.C. 2252), with respect to imports of certain steel wire rod provided for in subheadings 7213.91, 7213.99, 7227.20 and 7227.90.60 of the Harmonized Tariff Schedule of the United States (HTS). The USITC commissioners were equally divided with respect to the determination required under section 202(b) of the Trade Act (19 U.S.C. 2252(b)) regarding whether such steel wire rod is being imported into the United States in such increased quantities as to be a substantial cause of serious injury, or threat of serious injury, to the domestic industry producing a like or directly competitive article.

2. Section 330(d)(1) of the Tariff Act of 1930, as amended (the "Tariff Act") (19 U.S.C. 1330(d)(1)) provides that when the USITC is required to determine under section 202(b) of the Trade Act whether increased imports of an article are a substantial cause of serious injury, or the threat thereof, and the commissioners voting are equally divided with respect to such determination, then the determination agreed upon by either group of commissioners may be considered by the President as the determination of the USITC. Having reviewed the determinations of both groups of commissioners, I have decided to consider the determination of the group of commissioners voting in the

affirmative to be the determination of the USITC.

3. Pursuant to section 311(a) of the North American Free Trade Agreement Implementation Act (the "NAFTA Implementation Act") (19 U.S.C. 3371(a)), the USITC made negative findings with respect to imports of steel wire rod from Mexico and Canada. The USITC commissioners voting in the affirmative also transmitted to the President their recommendations made pursuant to section 202(e) of the Trade Act (19 U.S.C. 2252(e)) with respect to the action that would address the serious injury or threat thereof to the domestic industry and be most effective in facilitating the efforts of the domestic industry to make a positive adjustment to import competition.

4. Pursuant to section 203 of the Trade Act (19 U.S.C. 2253), and after taking into account the considerations specified in section 203(a)(2) of the Trade Act, I have determined to implement action of a type described in section 203(a)(3) and to provide exclusions for enumerated steel wire rod products ("excluded products"). Pursuant to section 312(a) of the NAFTA Implementation Act (19 U.S.C. 3372(a)), I have determined that imports of steel wire rod from Mexico, considered individually, do not account for a substantial share of total imports and do not contribute importantly to the serious injury, or threat of serious injury, found by the USITC, and that imports from Canada, considered individually, do not contribute importantly to such injury or threat. Accordingly, pursuant to section 312(b) of the NAFTA Implementation Act (19 U.S.C. 3372(b)), I have excluded steel wire rod the product of Mexico or Canada from the action I am taking under section 203 of the Trade Act.

5. Such action shall take the form of a tariff-rate quota on imports of steel wire rod (other than excluded products), provided for in HTS subheadings 7213.91, 7213.99, 7227.20 and 7227.90.60, imposed for a period of 3 years plus 1 day, with annual increases in the within-quota quantities and annual reductions in the rate of duty applicable to goods entered in excess of those quantities in the second and third years, as provided for in the Annex to this proclamation.

6. Except for products of Mexico and of Canada, which shall all be excluded from this restriction, such tariff-rate quota shall apply to imports of steel wire rod from all countries. Pursuant to section 203(a)(1)(A) of the Trade Act (19 U.S.C. 2253(a)(1)(A)), I have further determined that this action will facilitate efforts by the domestic industry to make a positive adjustment to import competition and provide greater economic and social benefits than costs.

7. Section 604 of the Trade Act, as amended (19 U.S.C. 2483), authorizes the President to embody in the HTS the substance of the relevant provisions of that Act, and of other acts affecting import treatment, and actions thereunder, including the removal, modification, continuance, or imposition of any rate of duty or other import restriction.

Now, Therefore, I, William J. Clinton, President of the United States of America, acting under the authority vested in me by the Constitution and the laws of the United States of America, including but not limited to sections 203 and 604 of the Trade Act, do proclaim that:

(1) In order to establish a tariff-rate quota on imports of steel wire rod (other than excluded products), classified in HTS subheadings 7213.91, 7213.99, 7227.20 and 7227.90.60, subchapter III of chapter 99 of the HTS is modified as provided in the Annex to this proclamation.

(2) Such imported steel wire rod that is the product of Mexico or of Canada shall be excluded from the tariff-rate quota established by this proclamation, and such imports shall not be counted toward the tariff-rate quota limits that trigger the over-quota rates of duty.

(3) I hereby suspend, pursuant to section 503(c)(1) of the Trade Act (19 U.S.C. 2463(c)(1)), duty-free treatment for steel wire rod the product of beneficiary countries under the Generalized System of Preferences (GSP) (Title V of the Trade Act, as amended (19 U.S.C. 2461–2467)); pursuant to section 213(e)(1) of the Caribbean Basin Economic Recovery Act, as amended (CBERA) (19 U.S.C. 2703(e)(1)), duty-free treatment for steel wire rod the product of beneficiary countries under that Act (19 U.S.C. 2701–2707), pursuant to section

204(d)(1) of the Andean Trade Preference Act, as amended (ATPA) (19 U.S.C. 3203(d)(1)), duty-free treatment for steel wire rod the product of beneficiary countries under that Act (19 U.S.C. 3201–3206); and pursuant to section 403(a) of the Trade and Tariff Act of 1984 (19 U.S.C. 2112 note), duty-free treatment for steel wire rod the product of Israel under the United States-Israel Free Trade Area Implementation Act of 1985 (the "IFTA Act") (19 U.S.C. 2112 note), to the extent necessary to apply the tariff-rate quota to those products, as specified in the Annex to this proclamation.

(4) During each of the first three quarters of a quota year, any articles subject to the tariff-rate quota that are entered, or withdrawn from warehouse for consumption, in excess of one-third of the annual within-quota quantity for that quota year (as specified in the Annex to this proclamation) shall be subject to the over-quota rate of duty then in effect. During the fourth quarter of a quota year, any articles subject to the tariff-rate quota that are entered, or withdrawn from warehouse for consumption, in excess of the remaining quantity of the annual within-quota quantity for that quota year shall be subject to the over-quota rate of duty then in effect. The remaining quantity shall be determined by subtracting the total quantity of goods entered at the in-quota rate during the first three quarters of the quota year from the annual within-quota quantity for that quota year.

(5) Effective at the close of March 1, 2003, or at the close of the date which may earlier be proclaimed by the President as the termination of the import relief set forth in the Annex to this proclamation, the suspension of duty-free treatment under the GSP, the CBERA, the ATPA and the IFTA Act shall terminate, unless otherwise provided in such later proclamation, and qualifying goods the product of beneficiary countries or of Israel entered under such programs shall again be eligible for duty-free treatment.

(6) Effective at the close of March 1, 2004, or such other date that is one year from the close of this relief, the U.S. note and tariff provisions established in the Annex to this proclamation shall be deleted from the HTS.

(7) Any provisions of previous proclamations and Executive orders that are inconsistent with the actions taken in this proclamation are superseded to the extent of such inconsistency.

(8) The modifications to the HTS made by this proclamation, including the Annex hereto, shall be effective with respect to goods entered, or withdrawn from warehouse for consumption, on or after March 1, 2000, and shall continue in effect as provided in the Annex to this proclamation, unless such actions are earlier expressly modified or terminated.

In Witness Whereof, I have hereunto set my hand this sixteenth day of February, in the year of our Lord two thousand, and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and twenty-fourth.

William J. Clinton

[Filed with the Office of the Federal Register, 11:42 a.m., February 17, 2000]

NOTE: This proclamation was published in the *Federal Register* on February 18.

Memorandum on Imports of Steel Wire Rod

February 16, 2000

Memorandum for the Secretary of the Treasury, the United States Trade Representative

Subject: Action Under Section 203 of the Trade Act of 1974 Concerning Steel Wire Rod

On July 12, 1999, the United States International Trade Commission (USITC) submitted a report to me of its investigation under section 202 of the Trade Act of 1974, as amended (the "Trade Act"), with respect to imports of steel wire rod. The USITC commissioners were equally divided in their determinations under section 202(b) of the Trade Act of whether steel wire rod is being imported into the United States in such increased quantities as to be a substantial cause of serious injury or threat of serious injury to the domestic steel wire rod industry. The report also contained negative findings by the ITC pursuant to section 311(a) of the North

American Free Trade Agreement Implementation Act (the "NAFTA Implementation Act") with respect to imports of steel wire rod from Canada and Mexico.

Having reviewed the determinations of both groups of commissioners, I have decided pursuant to section 330(d)(1) of the Tariff Act of 1930 to consider the determination of the group of commissioners voting in the affirmative to be the determination of the USITC.

After taking into account all relevant considerations, including the factors specified in section 203(a)(2) of the Trade Act, I have implemented action of a type described in section 203(a)(3) of that Act. I have determined that the most appropriate action is a tariff-rate quota on imports of steel wire rod, other than enumerated steel wire rod products ("excluded products"), with an increase in currently scheduled rates of duties for imports above the tariff-rate quota level. I have proclaimed such action for a period of 3 years and 1 day in order to facilitate efforts by the domestic industry to make a positive adjustment to import competition.

Specifically, I have established a tariff-rate quota for steel wire rod in an amount equal to 1.58 million net tons in the first year (March 1, 2000 through February 28, 2001), an amount that is equivalent to 1998 import levels of covered products from the countries subject to the TRQ plus 2 percent (to account for growth in demand). The tariff-rate quota amount will increase by 2 percent annually in the second and third years of relief. I have established increased rates of duty for imports above the tariff-rate quota level: namely 10 percent *ad valorem* in the first year of relief, 7.5 percent *ad valorem* in the second year of relief, and 5 percent *ad valorem* in the third year of relief. In addition, I have provided that during each quarter of the first three quarters of a quota year, any articles subject to the tariff-rate quota entered or withdrawn from warehouse for consumption in excess of one-third of the total within-quota quantity for that quota year shall be subject to the over-quota rate of duty then in effect. During the fourth quarter of a quota year, the tariff-rate quota shall apply as though the preceding sentence did not have effect, except that any imports subject to the over-quota duty as a result of the preceding sentence shall not be counted against the in-quota quantity for that quota year. In this regard, I instruct the Secretary of the Treasury to publish or otherwise make available on a weekly basis, import statistics that will enable importers to identify the rate at which the in-quota quantity for that quota year, and the portion of the in-quota quantity allotted to that quarter, is being filled. I further instruct the Secretary of the Treasury to seek to obtain by March 1, 2000 statistical subdivisions in the Harmonized Tariff Schedule for the excluded products (specified in the Annex to the proclamation). The Secretary of the Treasury will monitor imports of the excluded products by country of origin and imports the product of Mexico and Canada throughout the period of this action, and report to the United States Trade Representative on relevant volumes each quarter during the period of this action, or more often as needed, or as the United States Trade Representative may request.

I have further determined, pursuant to section 312(a) of the NAFTA Implementation Act, that imports of steel wire rod produced in Canada and Mexico do not account for a substantial share of total steel wire rod imports or are not contributing importantly to the serious injury or threat of serious injury. Therefore, pursuant to section 312(b) of the NAFTA Implementation Act, the safeguard measure will not apply to imports of steel wire rod that is the product of Canada or Mexico.

I have determined that the actions described above will facilitate efforts by the domestic industry to make a positive adjustment to import competition and provide greater economic and social benefits than costs. This action will provide the domestic industry with necessary temporary relief from increasing import competition, while also assuring our trading partners continued access to the United States market.

Pursuant to section 204 of the Trade Act, the USITC will monitor developments with respect to the domestic industry, including the progress and specific efforts made by workers and firms in the domestic industry to make a positive adjustment to import competition, and will provide to me and to the

Congress a report on the results of its monitoring no later than the date that is the midpoint of the period during which the action I have taken under section 203 of that Act is in effect. I further instruct the United States Trade Representative to request the USITC pursuant to section 332(g) of the Tariff Act of 1930, as amended (19 U.S.C. 1332(g)) to examine the effects of this action on both the domestic wire rod industry and the principal users of wire rod in the United States, and to report on the results of its investigation in conjunction with its report under section 204(a)(2).

The United States Trade Representative is authorized and directed to publish this memorandum in the *Federal Register.*

William J. Clinton

Letter to Congressional Leaders Transmitting Documentation on Imports of Steel Wire Rod

February 16, 2000

Dear Mr. Speaker: (Dear Mr. President:)

I am pleased to provide to the Congress documents called for by section 203(b) of the Trade Act of 1974, as amended, pertaining to the safeguard action that I proclaimed today on imports of steel wire rod.

Sincerely,

William J. Clinton

NOTE: Identical letters were sent to J. Dennis Hastert, Speaker of the House of Representatives, and Albert Gore, Jr., President of the Senate.

Remarks to the National Association for Equal Opportunity in Higher Education Leadership Banquet

February 16, 2000

Thank you very much. Dr. McClure, my mother is up in heaven smiling at that introduction. And she's probably the only person who heard it who believes every word of it. [*Laughter*] But I liked it, and I thank you. [*Laughter*]

I thank you so much, all of you, for welcoming me. To your chair-elect, Joann Boyd-Scotland, who sat with me for a few moments; your CEO, my long-time friend Dr. Henry Ponder; Dr. Earl Richardson, who welcomed me to Morgan State not too many years ago, and then Vice President Gore yesterday; to Dr. Iris Ish and all the members of my Board of Advisers on Historically Black Colleges and Universities; to my president, the Arkansas Baptist College president, Dr. William Keaton, my long-time friend.

I want to also have a special word of acknowledgement to your vice president, Dr. Wilma Roscoe. Her daughter, Jena, works in the White House; that's really why I'm here tonight, to preserve peace in the family. [*Laughter*]

I want to thank all the White House members who are here: the Director of our Office of Public Liaison, Mary Beth Cahill; and Ben Johnson, who has done a wonderful job for us. I know he spoke here earlier today. I also would like to thank Catherine LeBlanc, who is Executive Director of our Initiative on Historically Black Colleges and Universities. And I congratulate all the alumni award winners here tonight.

When Dr. McClure was saying his kind words, what I wanted to say was, I feel like the luckiest person alive; that at this moment in history, I was fortunate enough to be given a chance to serve as President and to focus the attention of the Nation on the future, on some old-fashioned ideas: everybody counts, everybody ought to have a chance, everybody's got a role to play, we all do better when we help each other.

The work I have done to build one America for a new century was a joy every day. Even on the darkest days, the fact that I had this job to do for you and for our children and our children's children made this a joy.

And I think of all you have done to make the last 7 years possible. Think about what a different country America would be today had it not been for the institutions all of you represent. Think about what a different administration I would have had. We have Alexis Herman, the Secretary of Labor, graduate of Xavier. Togo West, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs; Bob Nash—the hardest job in the White House—he handles my appointments. I get the credit when they get it, he takes the blame when they don't. [*Laughter*]

And Judith Winston, who ran our one America initiative when I put my White House committee together on race. All graduated from Howard. Dr. David Satcher from Morehouse; Terry Edmonds, my chief speechwriter from Morgan State.

But if you think about this economy we have, which is not only the longest expansion in history but has given us the lowest African-American unemployment rate ever recorded and the lowest poverty rate in 20 years and the lowest female unemployment rate in 40 years—that would not have happened if it hadn't been for the educational opportunities provided by the people in this room and their forebears, and you should be very, very proud of that.

I was very glad to be invited to come by here and to be able to redo our schedule so I could come, because I wanted to make one simple point to you. Everybody knows how important your institutions were to 20th century America. I want everybody to know how important your institutions will be to 21st century America.

A third of all the undergraduate and advanced degrees awarded to African-Americans are awarded by your institutions. I want America to know that and to know what a vital role you play in building your communities, nurturing new businesses, and revitalizing neighborhoods, as Howard is doing here in our hometown of Washington. I want America to know about your enormous contributions to research. I want every American to know that last November Tennessee State astronomers made the world's first direct detection of a planet orbiting another star.

We've done what we could to play our role. The Vice President and I have worked hard to be good partners to you. I told Earl, Al Gore was so happy that he got to go to Morgan State yesterday because, when I got to go to Morgan State to give a commencement address, to talk about, of all things, science and technology—not him, I got to talk about that—he was so jealous. [*Laughter*] And I just told him, I said, it won't be long before nobody pulls rank on you anymore, but I'm going there. And he got to go yesterday.

We want people to know what's going on. And we want you to be able to define a mission for the 21st century that will help to create opportunity for every responsible American. We now have 30 agencies in our Government all singing out of the same hymnal, working for you, to help you reach your goals and your aspirations. The budget I just submitted to Congress includes almost a 40 percent increase in HBCU funding, including the new dual degree program Secretary Riley talked about yesterday.

I want to ask you now to think beyond that. In the State of the Union, I said that I thought America should be proud of what we had done together these last 7 years, but not satisfied. There's a big difference. We should remember that we got to where we are as a country with the right vision and the right values and an awful lot of effort—an awful lot of effort. All of you know because of the work you do that the one constant of the time in which we live is change; that there is an inherent dynamism in this moment, which rewards people who are educated, who work hard, who can think and create, and punishes the sluggards mercilessly.

And I don't want to see our country become a sluggard in 2000 just because we're feeling good about ourselves. I don't want to see Washington become a sluggard in 2000 just because there's an election on the horizon that will occupy the headlines, because what is rewarded is action. And so I ask you to help me convince our country and our Congress that this may be an election year, but it's still got to be an action year.

We have an action agenda. You know, I think we can really say—with the HOPE scholarships, with the direct student loan program, with a million work-study positions, with the increases in the Pell grants—we've opened the doors of at least 2 years of college now to every American who will work for it. But it's time to open the doors of college for 4 years to every American who will work for it.

That's why we want to raise the Pell grant again. That's why I want to make college tuition tax deductible up to $10,000, and I want to do it in a progressive way so that whether the family is in the 15 percent income tax bracket or the 28 percent income tax bracket,

they get a 28 percent tax deduction for college tuition. This can make a huge difference to help children stay in school.

One of the things that bothers me most is that since 1993 we have a 10 percent increase in the percentage of our high school graduates going on to college. A couple years ago, for the first time in history, the percentage of African-Americans graduating from high school on time was almost identical to the white majority. The percentage going on to college has significantly increased. But the dropout rate is still way too high.

You wait till this census comes in. And it will give you a profile of the American people and their incomes and their prospects. And what it will show is just what the 1990 Census showed, but more so: people with an education do well, people without an education work harder for less. We've got to get these kids into college; we've got to keep them in college. And you have to help us—financially, academically, in every way.

I have proposed some new college completion grants to try to help schools experiment with new strategies to keep young people in school within the TRIO program. I know that this is a big concern of yours. This is a big issue to America.

I want you to help me convince the country and the Congress that we ought to bring economic opportunity to every area that hasn't seen it. We ought to increase the number of empowerment zones under the program the Vice President has headed so ably. We ought—in every poor neighborhood in America—an inner city, a rural area, an Indian reservation—we ought to give people the same tax incentives to invest there that we give them to invest overseas, in Latin America or Africa or Asia. I'm for helping Americans to invest overseas, but we ought to give them the same incentives to invest in poor areas here, where people are dying to go to work or start businesses or have a better future.

I want you to help me convince the country and convince the Congress that there are still a lot people out there in poverty; that they ought to have access to jobs and education; and that even though we have 2 million-plus fewer children in poverty, there are still too many. And as rich as we are now, as low as our unemployment rate is now, there is no excuse for any child in America living in poverty. And we ought to say as a goal—we're going to make sure that we increase the earned-income tax credit for working families; we're going to make sure that we increase child care support; we're going to do whatever it takes to make sure that every parent can succeed at home and work, and no child is raised in poverty. I want you to help me convince the Congress and the country that that is the right thing to do.

The one thing you can play a big role in is making sure we close the digital divide—it's okay to clap for that, that's good. I was so pleased to learn of your new agreement with Gateway to empower your students, your faculty, your alumni with a million affordable new computers; to put in place the E-commerce tools for improving distance learning, on-line admissions, registration and financial aid. It's a good company, doing what I think we ought to do.

I visited Gateway's offices in Belfast, Northern Ireland. I met with all their young employees who worked there. They had young people from seven, eight, nine different countries working in one office there, talking all over the world where they were selling these computers. And Ted Waitt and the people at Gateway have decided that if they're trying to bring that kind of opportunity to the rest of the world, they ought to be closing the digital divide here at home. I applaud them, and I applaud you for working with them. We have to do more with that. There is so much we can do to help young people skip a generation of educational and economic development, in terms of time, if we close the digital divide.

I ask you to help me persuade the Congress to give the biggest increase in civil rights enforcement in history—we still have actual problems with bigotry and discrimination out there—to enforce the equal pay laws; and to pass hate crimes legislation; to do things that will give us the tools to create one America.

Let me just say this briefly in closing. I know you all agree with my agenda. I know you do. And I'm grateful for the support you've given us in everything we've worked on through the years together. But the truth

is, you're feeling pretty good here tonight, too. Things are going pretty well at home, aren't they? Yes, you know some people in trouble, but more people are doing better. And so we're all feeling pretty good.

The great test of our people in this age is what we do with our good feeling. How many times—anybody that's over 30 in this audience will identify with this—how many times in your life have you made a mistake, not because things were going badly but because things were going well? The whole history of the civil rights movement is about people who were saints under fire; people burned crosses in their yards, throw rocks or bullets through the front window. Stand up and be counted. March down the street. We're commemorating Selma this year. We honor these people. But how many times have you made a mistake and failed, and your courage and your vision has failed you, not because you were under duress but because things were going so well you thought there were no consequences to taking your eye off the prize. And I want you to have a good time here tonight, but I want you to hear me about this.

I thank you for acknowledging what I've tried to do with you for America. But being President should always be honor enough. If nobody ever did another thing for me in my life, and I spent the rest of my life doing for other people, I would never catch up, not ever. So what I want to say to you is, take a little time tonight while you're having fun at dinner and clapping for the award recipients and feeling pretty good about where you are and where your institutions are, but think about what you are going to do with this good fortune and what your country is.

You know, you talked about me being a little boy in Hope. I'm talking to you now more as a citizen than as a President. I'm not running for anything, you know. [*Laughter*] And most days, I'm okay about it. [*Laughter*] And I think about the young people and how I've always said, don't stop thinking about tomorrow, keep your eyes on the future, always have a vision. But I also know that to understand today and tomorrow you have to have some sense of what yesterday was like.

This month when we celebrated the longest economic expansion in history, I did a little looking into, and thinking about, what was the longest economic expansion until this one. You know when it was? Nineteen sixty-one to 1968. Now, I remember what that was like. I remember in the beginning how full of hope we were when President Kennedy was elected. I remember when President Kennedy was assassinated, how heartbroken we were, but how we rallied as a country behind President Johnson.

All these people that look back at the sixties and say American cynicism started when President Kennedy was assassinated are just wrong. That's not true. This country was heartbroken, but we stood up together, and we joined hands. And Lyndon Johnson provided great leadership, and he pulled us together. So in 1964, I'm graduating from high school into an America that was the nearest like this America: we had low unemployment, low inflation, high growth. And everybody thought as difficult as the civil rights problems were, they were going to be resolved in a peaceable manner, with this wizard in the White House and the votes in Congress, to lawfully give African-Americans what they were constitutionally entitled to. And all the while we would win the cold war against communism, and we would create the greatest society America had ever known. That's what I believed the night I graduated from high school.

Two years later, we had riots in the streets, a half a million people in Vietnam, the country was beginning to be deeply divided. Two years after that, I graduated from college in this city—2 days after Robert Kennedy was assassinated, 2 months and 4 days after Martin Luther King was killed, 5 weeks after Lyndon Johnson said he couldn't see his way clear to run for President again. The streets were burning in Washington, DC and the country was broken and divided. And we decided a Presidential election on the politics of division, the so-called silent majority. You remember that? The silent majority was, there are two kinds of folks in America, the silent majority and the loud minority, and you're either us or them. [*Laughter*] We can laugh about it. But I want you to hear me now. I'm not running for anything.

I have waited 35 years and some months for my country to be in a position again to build the future of our dreams for all our children. We dare not blow this. Every one of you who can remember how we felt in those early days of hope—you don't know whether in your lifetime you'll get a third chance. America has a second chance to do it together, to build one America, to give all our kids a good education, to give health care to all our people, to lead the world to peace and freedom, to figure out how to live together across all the lines that divide us. We have a chance.

And it's so easy to forget that it requires effort, because things are going well. When you go home tonight, before you put your head on the pillow, just remember where you were, if you're old as I am or just old enough to remember where you were the last time America thought everything was going to be all right, more or less automatically—it would be taken care of by then, and how quickly we lost it all.

I have waited 35 years. You can take it where we need to go, in the heart of every boy and girl who wasn't alive back then; in the spirit as well as the mind. We can do it, but we've got to work at it.

Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 7:52 p.m. in the International Ballroom at the Washington Hilton Hotel. In his remarks, he referred to Wesley C. McClure, chair, Joann R.G. Boyd-Scotland, chair-elect, Henry Ponder, president and chief executive officer, Earl S. Richardson, secretary, and Wilma Roscoe, vice president, National Association for Equal Opportunity in Higher Education; Lucile Ish, Vice-Chair, President's Board of Advisors on Historically Black Colleges and Universities; Jena Roscoe, Associate Director, White House Office of Public Liaison; J. Terry Edmonds, Assistant to the President and Director of Speechwriting; and Ted Waitt, chairman and chief executive officer, Gateway 2000, Inc.

Memorandum on Assistance to the Economic Community of West African States

February 16, 2000

Presidential Determination No. 2000–13

Memorandum for the Secretary of State

Subject: Determination on Eligibility of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) to Be Furnished Defense Articles and Services Under the Foreign Assistance Act and the Arms Export Control Act

Pursuant to the authority vested in me by section 503(a) of the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961, as amended, and section 3(a)(1) of the Arms Export Control Act, I hereby find that the furnishing of defense articles and services to the Economic Community of West African States will strengthen the security of the United States and promote world peace.

You are directed to report this determination to the Congress and to publish it in the *Federal Register.*

William J. Clinton

NOTE: This message was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on February 17.

Remarks to the Opening of the National Summit on Africa

February 17, 2000

Thank you very, very much. It's a wonderful thing to be introduced by an old friend. Old friends and people you have appointed to office will tell false, good stories about you every time. [*Laughter*]

Africa never had a better friend in America than Andrew Young, and I thank him. I want to say I'm honored to be in the presence today of so many distinguished Africans. Secretary Salim, thank you for your visionary remarks and your leadership. President Moi, thank you for coming to the United States

and for giving me another chance to visit with you and for the work we have done together. Vice President Abubakar, thank you for what you are doing in Nigeria to give that great country its true promise at long last. We thank you, sir.

I welcome all our distinguished guests from Africa: Mrs. Taylor, foreign ministers, ambassadors. I thank all the Americans who are here, beginning with Andy's wife, who puts up with this relentless travel of his around Africa. Mayor Williams, thank you for welcoming us to Washington. There are three Members of our Congress here today representing what I hope will be a stronger and stronger bipartisan commitment to the future of Africa, Congressman Royce and Congresswoman Barbara Lee and Congresswoman Sheila Jackson Lee, I thank you for being here.

I want to thank Leonard Robinson and Herschelle Challenor and all the people responsible for this remarkable conference. Thank you, Noah Samara, and thank you, Bishop Ricard, for being here. And I want to say a special word of appreciation to all the people in our administration who have worked so hard to give us an Africa policy that we can be proud of, that I hope will light up the path for America's future.

I know that Secretary Slater has already spoken here. Our AID Director, Brady Anderson, will speak. Our Vice President will be here. You said, Secretary Salim, you hope future administrations will follow our lead in Africa. I know one that would. [*Laughter*]

I want to thank Susan Rice at the State Department, Sandy Berger, Gayle Smith, all the people in our White House, all the ones who have helped us here.

Secretary Salim said Africa lacks a strong constituency in the United States. Well, I open this National Summit on Africa with a simple message: Africa does matter to the United States.

Of whatever background Americans claim—Leonard Robinson told me when I came here, we even have 17 delegates from Utah here. There they are, you see? [*Laughter*] Africa matters, not simply because 30 million Americans trace their heritage to Africa—though that is profoundly important; not simply because we have a strong interest in a stable and prosperous Africa—though 13 percent of our oil comes from Africa, and there are 700 million producers and consumers in sub-Saharan Africa—though that is important. Africa's future matters because the 21st century world has been transformed, and our views and actions must be transformed accordingly.

For most of history, the central reality in international relations was that size and location matter most. If you were a big country or on a trade or invasion route, you mattered. If not, you are marginalized. The average American child growing up in the past saw African nations as colorful flags and exotic names on a map, perhaps read books about the wonderful animals and great adventures. When colonialism ended, the colors on the flags were changed and there were more names on the map. But the countries did not seem nearer to most Americans.

That has all changed now, for the central reality of our time is globalization. It is tearing down barriers between nations and people. Knowledge, contact, and trade across borders within and between every continent are exploding. And all this globalization is also, as the barriers come down, making us more vulnerable to one another's problems: to the shock of economic turmoil, to the spread of conflict, to pollution, and, as we have painfully seen, to disease, to terrorists, to drug traffickers, to criminals who can also take advantage of new technologies and globalization, the openness of societies and borders.

Globalization means we know more about one another than ever before. You may see the Discovery Channel in Africa. I was thinking of that when that little film was on. The Discovery Channel followed me to Africa and talked about how they were building communications networks in African schools to share knowledge and information. We can find out within seconds now what the weather is in Nairobi, how a referendum turned out in Zimbabwe, how Cameroon's indomitable Lions performed in the latest soccer match. [*Laughter*] We can go on-line and read the Addis Tribune, the Mirror of Ghana, the East African, or dozens of other African newspapers. We sit in front of a television and watch people in a South African township

line up to vote. We also, now, bear witness to the slaughter of innocents in Rwanda or the ravages of AIDS in scores of lands or the painful coincidence of remarkable growth and abject poverty in nation after nation.

In other words, it is no longer an option for us to choose not to know about the triumphs and the trials of the people with whom we share this small planet. Not just America and Africa, I would imagine millions of Africans identified with the Muslims of Kosovo when they were run out of their country, all of them at one time. We know about each other. We can no longer choose not to know. We can only choose not to act, or to act.

In this world, we can be indifferent or we can make a difference. America must choose, when it comes to Africa, to make a difference. Because we want to live in a world which is not dominated by a division of people who live on the cutting edge of a new economy and others who live on the bare edge of survival, we must be involved in Africa. Because we want to broaden global growth and expand markets for our own people, we must be involved in Africa. Because we want to build a world in which our security is not threatened by the spread of armed conflict, in which bitter ethnic and religious differences are resolved by the force of argument, not the force of arms, we must be involved in Africa. Because we want to build a world where terrorists and criminals have no place to hide and where those who wish harm to ordinary people cannot acquire the means to do them harm, we must be involved in Africa. Because we want to build a world in which we can harness our natural resources for economic growth without destroying the environment, so that future generations will also have the chance to do the same, we must be involved in Africa.

That is why I set out in 1993, at the beginning of my Presidency, to build new ties between the United States and Africa, why we had the first White House conference, the ministerial, and that wonderful trip in the spring of 1998 that I will remember for the rest of my life. I went to Africa as a friend, to create a partnership. And we have made significant progress. There are challenges that are profound, but in the last 2 years we have seen thousands of triumphs large and small. Often they don't make the headlines because the slow, steady progress of democracy and prosperity is not the stuff of headlines.

But for example, I wish every American knew that last year the world's fastest growing economy was Mozambique; Botswana was second; Angola fourth. I wish every American knew that and understood that that potential is in every African nation. It would make a difference. We must know these things about one another.

People know all about Africa's conflicts, but how many know that thousands of African soldiers are trying to end those conflicts as peacekeepers and that Nigeria alone, amidst all its difficulties, has spent $10 billion in these peacekeeping efforts?

For years, Africa's wealthiest country, South Africa, and its most populous, Nigeria, cast long, forbidding shadows across the continent. Last year South Africa's remarkable turnaround continued as its people transferred power from one elected President to another. Nigeria inaugurated a democratically elected President for the first time in decades. It is working to ensure that its wealth strengths its people, not their oppressors. These are good news stories. They may not be in the headlines, but they should be in our hearts and our minds as we think of the future.

No one here, no one in our Government, is under any illusions. There is still a lot of work to be done. Hardly anyone disagrees about what is needed: genuine democracy, good government, open markets, sustained investment in education and health and the environment and, more than anything, widespread peace. All depend, fundamentally and first, on African leadership. These things cannot be imported, and they certainly cannot be imposed from outside.

But we must also face a clear reality, even countries making the right policy choices still have to struggle to deliver for their people. Each African government has to walk down its own road to reform and renewal. But it is a hard road. And those of us who are in a position to do so must do our part to smooth that road, to remove some of the

larger barriers so that Africa can fully share in the benefits and the responsibilities of globalization.

I tell the American people all the time, and they're probably tired of hearing it now, that I have a very simple political philosophy: everybody counts; everybody has a role to play; everybody deserves a chance; and we all do better when we help each other. That is a rule we ought to follow with Africa.

There are five steps in particular I believe we must take. First, we must build an open world trading system which will benefit Africa alongside every other region in the world. Open markets are indispensable to raising living standards. From the 1970's to the 1990's, developing countries that chose trade grew at least twice as fast as those that chose not to open to the world.

Now, there are some who doubt that the poorest countries will benefit if we continue to open markets, but they should ask themselves: What will happen to workers in South Africa and Kenya without the jobs that come from selling the fruit of their labors abroad? What will happen to farmers in Zimbabwe and Ghana if protectionist farm subsidies make it impossible for them to sell beyond their borders?

Trade must not be a race to the bottom, whether we're talking about child labor, harsh working conditions, or environmental degradation. But neither can we use fear to keep the poorest part of the global community stuck at the bottom forever. Africa has already taken important steps, forming regional trade blocks like ECOWAS, the East Africa Community, and SADC. But we can do more. That is why our Overseas Private Investment Corporation in Africa is working to support 3 times as many business projects in 1999 than it did in 1998, to create jobs for Africans and, yes, for Americans as well. That is why we are working with African nations to develop the institutions to sustain future growth, from efficient telecommunications to the financial sector.

And that is why, as soon as possible, we must enact in our Congress the bipartisan "African Growth and Opportunity Act." This bill has passed in one version in our House and another version in our Senate. I urge the Congress to resolve the differences and send me a bill for signature by next month. [*Applause*] And I ask every one of you here who just clapped—and those who didn't, but sympathize with the clapped—[*laughter*]—to contact anyone you know in the United States Congress and ask them to do this. This is a job that needs to be done.

We must also realize the trade alone cannot conquer poverty or build a partnership we need. For that reason, a second step we must take is to continue the work now underway to provide debt relief to African nations committed to sound policies. Struggling democratic governments should not have to choose between feeding and educating their children and paying interest on a debt. Last March I suggested a way we could expand debt relief for the world's poorest and most indebted countries, most of which are African, and ensure the resources would be used to improve economic opportunity for ordinary African citizens. Our G–7 partners embraced that plan.

Still, I felt we should do more. So in September I announced that we would completely write off all the debts owed to us by the countries that qualified for the G–7 program, as many as 27 African nations in all. The first countries, including Uganda and Mauritania, have begun to receive the benefits; Mozambique, Benin, Senegal, and Tanzania are expected to receive benefits soon. Mozambique's debt is expected to go down by more than $3 billion. The money saved will be twice the health budget—twice the health budget—in a country where children are more likely to die before the age of 5 than they are to go on to secondary school.

Last year I asked Congress for $970 million for debt relief. Many of you helped to persuade our Congress to appropriate a big share of that. Keep in mind, this is a program religious leaders say is a moral imperative, and leading economists say is a practical imperative. It's not so often that you get the religious leaders and the economists telling us that good business is good morals. It's probably always true, but they don't say it all that often. [*Laughter*] We must finish the job this year; we must continue this work to provide aggressive debt relief to the countries that are doing the right thing, that will take the money and reinvest it in their people

and their future. I ask you, especially the Americans in this audience, if you believe in what brought you here, help us to continue this important effort.

A third step we must take is to give better and deeper support to African education. Literacy is crucial to economic growth, to health, to democracy, to securing the benefits of globalization. Sub-Saharan Africa has the developing world's lowest school enrollment rate. In Zambia, over half the schoolchildren lack a simple notebook. In rural parts of Tanzania, there is one textbook for every 20 children. That's why I proposed in our budget to increase by more than 50 percent the assistance we provide to developing countries to improve basic education, targeting areas where child labor is prevalent. I ask other nations to join us in this.

I'll never forget the schools I visited on my trip to Africa, the bright lights in the eyes of the children, how intelligent they were, how eager they were. It is wrong for them to have to look at maps of nations that no longer exist, without maps of nations in their own continent that do exist. It is wrong for them to be deprived of the same opportunities to learn that our young people have here. If intelligence is equally distributed throughout the human race—and I believe it is—then every child in the human race ought to have a chance to develop his or her intelligence in every country in the world.

A fourth step we must take is to fight the terrible diseases that have afflicted so many millions of Africans, especially AIDS and also TB and malaria. Last year 10 times as many people died of AIDS in Africa as were killed in all the continent's wars combined. It will soon double child mortality and reduce life expectancy by 20 years.

You all laughed when Andy Young said that I was going to get out of the Presidency as a young man. Depending on the day, I sometimes feel young, or I feel that I'm the oldest man my age in America. [*Laughter*] The life expectancy in this country has gone from 47 to 77 in the 20th century. An American who lives to be 65 has a life expectancy in excess of 82 years. AIDS is going to reduce the life expectancy in Africa by 20 years. And even that understates the problem, because the people that escape it will live longer lives as African economies grow and strengthen.

The worst burden in life any adult can bear is to see a child die before you. The worst problem in Africa now is that so many of these children with AIDS have also already lost their parents. We must do something about this. In Africa there are companies that are hiring two employees for every job on the assumption that one of them will die. This is a humanitarian issue, a political issue, and an economic issue.

Last month Vice President Gore opened the first-ever United Nations Security Council session on health issues, on a health issue, by addressing the AIDS crisis in Africa. I've asked Congress for another $100 million to fight the epidemic, bringing our total to $325 million. I've asked my administration to develop a plan for new initiatives to address prevention, the financial dimensions of fighting AIDS, the needs of those affected, so that we can make it clear to our African partners that we consider AIDS not just their burden but ours, as well. But even that will not be enough.

Recently, Uganda's Health Minister pointed out that to provide access to currently available treatments to every Ugandan afflicted with AIDS would cost $24 billion. The annual budget of Uganda is $2 billion. The solution to this crisis and to other killer diseases like malaria and TB has to include effective and expensive vaccines.

Now, there are four major companies in the world that develop vaccines, two in the United States and two in Europe. They have little incentive to make costly investments in developing vaccines for people who cannot afford to pay for them. So in my State of the Union Address, I proposed a generous tax credit that would enable us to say to private industry, "If you develop vaccines for AIDS, malaria, and TB, we will help to pay for them. So go on and develop them, and we'll save millions of lives."

But I have to tell you, my speech—and I don't want anybody else but me to be responsible; my speechwriters were so sensitive, they didn't put this in the speech. But I want to say this: AIDS was a bigger problem in the United States a few years ago than it is today. AIDS rates are not going up in

African countries, all African countries. They're actually going down in a couple of African countries.

Now, I know that this is a difficult and sensitive issue. I know there are cultural and religious factors that make it very difficult to tackle this issue from a preventive point of view. We don't have an AIDS vaccine yet. We have drugs that will help to prevent the transmission from pregnant mothers to their children, which I want to be able to give out. We have other drugs that have given people with AIDS in our country normal lives, in terms of their health and the length of their lives. I want those to be available. But the real answer is to stop people from getting the HIV virus in the first place.

I got to see firsthand some of the things that were being done in Uganda that were instrumental in driving down the AIDS rate. Now, I don't care how hard or delicate or difficult this is; this is your children's lives we're talking about. You know, we who are adults, when our children's lives are at stake, have to get over whatever our hang-ups or problems are and go out there and do what is necessary to save the lives of our children.

And I'll help you do that, too. That's not free; that costs money. Systems have to be set up. But we shouldn't pretend that we can give injections and work our way out of this. We have to change behavior, attitudes. And it has to be done in an organized, disciplined, systematic way. And you can do more in less time for less money in a preventive way, to give the children of Africa their lives back and the nations of Africa their futures back, with an aggressive prevention campaign than anything else. And there is no excuse for not doing it. It has to be done.

Finally, let me say there is one more huge obstacle to progress in Africa, that we are committed to doing our part to overcome. We must build on the leadership of Africans to end the bloody conflicts killing people and killing progress. You know the toll: tens of thousands of young lives lost in the war between Ethiopia and Eritrea; thousands killed and disfigured at unbelievably young ages in the civil war that nearly destroyed Sierra Leone; 2 million killed by famine and war in Sudan, where Government sees diversity as a threat rather than a strength and denies basic relief to citizens it claims to represent.

Most of the world's conflicts pale in complexity before the situation in the Congo. At least seven nations and countless armed groups are pitted there against each other in a desperate struggle that seems to bring no one victory, and everyone misery, especially the innocent people of the Congo. They deserve a better chance. Secretary Albright has called the Congo struggle Africa's first world war. As we search for an end to the conflict, let us remember the central lesson of the First World War: the need for a good peace. If you mess up the peace, you get another World War.

A year ago, I said if the nations of the region reached an agreement that the international community could support, I would support a peacekeeping operation in the Congo. The region has now done so. The Lusaka cease-fire agreement takes into account the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Congo, the withdrawal of foreign forces, the security of Congo's neighbors, the need for dialog within the nation, and most important, the need for the countries within central Africa to cooperate in managing the region's security. It is more than a cease-fire; it is a blueprint for building peace. Best of all, it is a genuinely African solution to an African problem.

There is still fighting in Congo. Peace will not happen overnight. It will require a steady commitment from the parties and the unwavering support of the international community. I have told our Congress that America intends to do its part by supporting the next phase of the U.N.'s peacekeeping operation in the Congo, which will send observers to oversee the implementation of the agreement.

We need to think hard about what is at stake here. African countries have taken the lead, not just the countries directly affected, either. They are not asking us to solve their problems or to deploy our military. All they have asked is that we support their own efforts to build peace and to make it last. We in the United States should be willing to do this. It is principled and practical.

I know—I see the Members of Congress here. I say again—I see Congressman Payne,

Congresswoman Sheila Jackson Lee, Congresswoman Barbara Lee, Congressman Royce—we need to stand by the people of Africa who have decided how to solve this most complex and troubling problem. We have learned the hard way in the United States, over decades and decades, that the costliest peace is far cheaper than the cheapest war. And we need to remember that as we approach our common responsibilities in central Africa.

Finally, let me say that I intend to continue to work hard on these things for every day that I am President. For me, the remarkable decade of the 1990's began with the liberation symbolized by Nelson Mandela's first steps from Robben Island. In a few days, I will have the opportunity to join by satellite the conference in Tanzania that President Mandela is organizing to build peace in Burundi.

A lot of people look at Africa and think, oh, these problems are just too complicated. I look at Africa, and I see the promise of Africa and think, if the problems are complicated now, think how much worse they'll be if we continue to ignore them.

Other people grow frustrated by bad news and wish only to hear good news. But empty optimism does Africa no more service than groundless cynicism. What we need is not empty optimism or groundless cynicism but realistic hope. We need to see the promise, the beauty, the dreams of Africa. We need to see the problems clear and plain and stop ignoring the evident responses. We in the United States need to understand that our obligations to be good partners with Africa are not because we are certain that everything will turn out all right but because it is important. Because we're human beings, we can never expect everything to turn out all right.

Africa is so incredibly diverse. Its people speak nearly 3,000 languages. It is not a single, monolithic place with single, monolithic truths. A place of many places, each defined by its own history and aspirations, its own successes and failures. I was struck on my trip to Africa by the differences between Ghana and Uganda, Botswana, and Senegal, between Capetown and Soweto. I was also struck by what bound people together in these places.

In George Washington's first draft of his Farewell Address, he wrote, "We may all be considered as the children of one common country." The more I think about globalization and the interdependence it promises and demands, the more I share that sentiment. Now we must think of ourselves as children of one common world. If we wish to deepen peace and prosperity and democracy for ourselves, we must wish it also for the people of Africa. Africa is the cradle of humanity, but also a big part of humanity's future.

I leave you with this thought: When I think of the troubles of Africa, rooted in tribal differences; when I think of the continuing troubles in America, across racial lines, rooted in the shameful way we brought slaves here from West Africa so long ago, and our continuing challenges as we integrate wave after wave after wave of new immigrants from new places around the world; I am struck by the fact that life's greatest joy is our common humanity, and life's greatest curse is our inability to see our common humanity.

In Africa, life is full of joy and difficulty. But for too long, the African people have lacked for friends and allies to help the joys overcome the difficulties. The United States will be a friend for life.

Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:50 a.m. at the Washington Convention Center. In his remarks, he referred to master of ceremonies and summit national cochair Andrew Young and his wife, Carolyn; Salim A. Salim, secretary general, Organization for African Unity; President Daniel T. Moi of Kenya; President Olusegun Obasanjo and Vice President Atiku Abubakar of Nigeria; Mayor Anthony A. Williams of Washington, DC; Noah Samara, chairman and chief executive officer, WorldSpace Corp.; Gayle Smith, Director of African Affairs, National Security Council; Minister of Health Crispus W.C.B. Kiyonga of Uganda; former President Nelson Mandela and President Thabo Mbeki of South Africa; and the following National Summit on Africa officers: national cochair Bishop John Ricard, board of directors members Andrea L. Taylor and Herschelle S. Challenor, and president and chief executive officer Leonard H. Robinson, Jr. The President also

referred to ECOWAS, the Economic Community of West African States, and SADC, the South African Development Community.

Statement on a Third Consecutive Budget Surplus

February 18, 2000

Today we received further evidence that our economic strategy of fiscal discipline is working. When I came into office, the debt had quadrupled over the previous 12 years. The deficit had reached a record $290 billion and was projected to keep rising as far as the eye could see. As a result, interest rates were high and growth was slow. We have turned this around with strong deficit reduction packages in 1993 and 1997 and tough choices in each and every budget. As a result, we have enjoyed back-to-back budget surpluses for the first time in over 40 years.

The latest financial numbers from the Department of the Treasury indicate that we are on track this year to reach a third consecutive budget surplus. The surplus in the first 4 months of this fiscal year was $25 billion larger than the surplus last year. These surpluses will allow us to repay a projected $157 billion in debt this year alone, bringing the debt reduction over 3 years to nearly $300 billion. If we maintain our strategy of fiscal discipline, we can keep our economy strong and pay down the debt by 2013 for the first time since Andrew Jackson was President.

Message on the Observance of Presidents' Day, 2000

February 18, 2000

I am pleased to join all Americans in observing Presidents' Day.

Today we salute the leadership and achievements of all those who have held America's highest elected office, and we celebrate with special pride the rich legacies of Presidents Washington and Lincoln.

As our first President, George Washington gave strength and legitimacy to our young democracy while ensuring that the newly formed federal government remained accountable to the American people. A leader of exceptional courage and vision in both war and peace, he helped shape the 13 colonies into a nation dedicated to the values of liberty and justice for all.

More than 70 years later, Abraham Lincoln sought to reunite Americans behind these same fundamental values. Through the extraordinary hardship and sacrifice of the Civil War, he remained devoted to the causes of freedom and equality and to preserving our Union. In the waning days of that cruel conflict, he showed remarkable compassion and determination in his efforts to bind our nation's wounds and restore dignity to all our people.

It was within view of our national monuments to these two great leaders that thousands of our fellow Americans recently joined Hillary and me to welcome the first moments of the 21st century. The era of unrivaled prosperity and peace in which we now live affords us a singular opportunity to reaffirm the values that guided Washington and Lincoln and that have shaped our national character and destiny for more than 200 years. By strengthening our democracy, embracing equal justice and opportunity, and celebrating our diversity, we can continue to build the America that they envisioned and strived so hard to achieve.

Best wishes to all for a wonderful celebration.

Bill Clinton

Digest of Other White House Announcements

The following list includes the President's public schedule and other items of general interest announced by the Office of the Press Secretary and not included elsewhere in this issue.

February 15

In the morning, the President met with President Heydar Aliyev of Azerbaijan in the Oval Office.

The President announced his intention to appoint Rear Adm. Keith W. Lippert as a member of the Committee for the Purchase

From People Who Are Blind or Severely Disabled.

The President announced his intention to appoint Rabbi Irving Greenberg as chair of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Council.

The President announced his intention to appoint James V. Kimsey to the Board of Trustees of the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts.

The President announced his intention to appoint Salvador Diaz-Verson as a member of the Christopher Columbus Fellowship Foundation.

The President declared a major disaster in Louisiana and ordered Federal aid to supplement State and local recovery efforts in the area struck by a severe winter storm on January 27–30.

The President declared a major disaster in Georgia and ordered Federal aid to supplement State and local recovery efforts in the area struck by severe storms and tornadoes on February 14.

February 16

The President announced his intention to appoint Alice A. Kelikian as a member of the Commission for the Preservation of America's Heritage Abroad.

The White House announced that the President directed Health and Human Services Secretary Donna E. Shalala to release an additional $120 million in Low Income Home Energy Assistance emergency funds for States, territories, and tribes due to continuing increases in home heating fuel prices.

February 17

The President declared a major disaster in Alaska and ordered Federal aid to supplement State and local recovery efforts in the area struck by severe winter storms and avalanches beginning on December 21, 1999, and continuing.

February 18

The President declared a major disaster in Alabama and ordered Federal aid to supplement State and local recovery efforts in the area struck by a severe winter storm on January 22–29.

Nominations Submitted to the Senate

NOTE: No nominations were submitted to the Senate during the period covered by this issue.

Checklist of White House Press Releases

The following list contains releases of the Office of the Press Secretary that are neither printed as items nor covered by entries in the Digest of Other White House Announcements.

Released February 14

Transcript of a press briefing by Press Secretary Joe Lockhart

Released February 15

Transcript of a press briefing by Press Secretary Joe Lockhart

Transcript of a press briefing by Chief of Staff John Podesta, Secretary of Commerce Bill Daley, President of Information Technology Association of America Harris Miller, President of eBay Technologies Maynard Webb, and Chief Information Officer of Microsoft Howard Schmidt on the President's meeting on cyber security.

Fact sheet: Cyber Security Budget Initiatives

Fact sheet: Strengthening Cyber Security through Public-Private Partnership

Released February 16

Statement by the Press Secretary: Federal Panel Continuation to Declassify Selected Historically Valuable Documents

Statement by the Press Secretary announcing action on Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program

Released February 17

Transcript of a press briefing by Deputy Press Secretary Jake Siewert and NSC Spokesman David Leavy

Fact sheet: Solidifying our Partnership with Africa

Acts Approved by the President

Approved February 11

S. 1733 / Public Law 106–171
Electronic Benefit Transfer Interoperability and Portability Act of 2000

Approved February 18

H.R. 2130 / Public Law 106–172
Hillory J. Farias and Samantha Reid Date-Rape Drug Prohibition Act of 2000