won't sign appropriations measures that grant you more funding than you even requested, as they seem prepared to do?

The President. Well, first of all, the President should never be in a position of, in effect, usurping the Congress's authority. They always add something to what I spend. I have consistently shown more fiscal discipline. But this is a question of the dimensions of it. And the Supreme Court said that I didn't have the authority for the line-item veto, and so I have—the only option I have is a meat-axe option now. And we'll just have to see whether I will be able to sustain those and what the consequences would be, and my main concern here is all the things that are left undone, all this money they're spending, but they still have an inadequate commitment, in my judgment, to education—at least based on what I've seen so far—and all these other things. The priorities of the Congress strike me as strange. I mean, look at what their—their first priority for tax cuts was something for the wealthiest 2 percent of Americans, and they still haven't done anything for long-term care or college tuition tax credits or child care for average Americans, and they still haven't done anything to raise the minimum wage.

So this is a question of priorities and balance. In terms of whether I would veto one, it depends on how much extra money they spend in the end and what it looks like. So I can't say that. I'd have to study the bills first.

Strategic Petroleum Reserve

Q. Mr. President, 8 months ago, Vice President Gore said he thought it was a bad idea to tap the Strategic Petroleum Reserve. You spoke with him last week before announcing your plans in that regard. What's your take on his change in position?

The President. Well, I think the circumstances are quite different. I didn't tap the Strategic Petroleum Reserve 8 months ago either. And as you know—I think it's been reported in the press—we had a very long and serious discussion about this, and we discussed all the pros and cons and decided that after OPEC had set a target range of $22–28 a barrel—which most of us, certainly me and the producing countries, thought was a reasonable range; that is, we didn't want to go back down to 13 or 12 or 10 again because that was also disruptive—that the accumulated decisions were not going to come near that target and that there seemed to be a trendline going quite high.

And so Secretary Richardson and his experts at the Energy Department argued for a couple of weeks, based on their experience and their understanding of the supply situation, that among the various options we considered—and there were three or four of them, including doing nothing right now, and others—that the most prudent thing to do is what we did.

So I essentially took the advice of Secretary Richardson and the experts at the Energy Department, after discussing it extensively with our whole economic team, including the Vice President.

Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:55 a.m. in the Rose Garden at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Yugoslav opposition candidate Vojislav Kostunica.

Remarks at a Gay and Lesbian Leadership Council Luncheon in Dallas

September 27, 2000

The President. You've got to calm down now. We've got work to do. [*Laughter*] But I thank you for that welcome. And I want to thank Chuck and Jim for welcoming us. This is a really beautiful place. I love the art. I love the architecture. I love the light. This is the first time I've ever gotten to give a speech under Bette Davis eyes. [*Laughter*] I bet I hear about that one. [*Laughter*]

Thank you, Julie and Kay. I'd like to thank Ed Rendell for agreeing, after he left the mayor's job, to do this old part-time job as chair of the DNC. And my friend of many, many years Andy Tobias, who has really done a wonderful job in more ways than most people know. Thank you, Elizabeth. I thank Julian Potter, my White House liaison, and the others who are here from the White House today.

I also want to thank Brian Bond, who is the director of the Gay and Lesbian Victory

Fund. And we have one very important candidate for Congress here, Regina Montoya Coggins—[*inaudible*]. And Molly Beth Malcolm, thank you for being here, for getting on that—what was that talk show you were on last night, taking up for our side? That guy just talks louder when he starts losing arguments. You hung in there really well. [*Laughter*] You did a good job.

I want to say to all of you that this is an interesting time for America. It's a time of enormous progress and prosperity but a time of real ferment, too. And people are trying to come to grips with all the currents of change that are running through America: The Fort Worth City Council voted to extend discrimination protection to gays and lesbians; gay Dallas city councilman changes party. Good deal. Regina wants to represent the community, and the Congressman says he doesn't—not sure he does. [*Laughter*] It's a big deal. We're debating all these things.

I'm honored to have had the chance to be President at a time when all these issues were coming to the fore, and to have a record number of members of the gay community in my administration. We are fighting for the hate crimes bill, and basically, we now have a bipartisan majority in both Houses for it. We've got all the Democrats but one, and about—I don't know—12 or 13 Republicans in the Senate voted for the hate crimes bill. And we have 41 Republicans in the House who voted with about 200 of our crowd to instruct the conferees on the defense bill to leave it in there.

I was asked just before I left Washington—a couple of you mentioned it to me that one of—someone in the leadership of the Republican Congress said that he didn't think this would get to be law this year. Well, if it doesn't get to be law, it's because the leadership doesn't want it, because we've got a majority of the votes for it. So I would urge you do to whatever you can.

There's been a sea change movement. Gordon Smith, who is the Republican Senator from Oregon and an evangelical Christian, gave an incredibly moving speech in the floor of the Senate for it. I don't know if you saw it, but there was a Republican State representative from Georgia who gave a decisive speech in the Georgia legislature for the hate crimes bill. And I don't know if you've circulated that, but it's an overwhelmingly powerful speech. And I think it could have, if we can get it around, an impact on some more Members in the House, but we've got the votes. It's just a question of whether the leadership of the Republican Party in the Congress stays to the right of the country on this issue.

The same thing is true of the employment nondiscrimination legislation. I actually hope that we might pass that this year. There are big majorities across the country for this. It is not just a Democratic issue. It is not just a liberal issue. It's not even just a gay rights issue. It's a fundamental fairness issue in America. And we get a few changes in the Congress, that will pass next time too, assuming the election for President works out all right.

So we're moving in the right direction. But we're dealing with this—this election, in some fundamental way, I think, is a referendum about whether the whole approach we've taken to our national problems in our national life is the right one. I ran for President partly because I just got sick of seeing my country held back by the politics of division, by a sense of political and economic and cultural entitlement, almost, on the part of the people who had been running things for a long time, with absolute confidence that they could divide the American electorate in ways that made their opposition look like they were out of the mainstream and not part of ordinary American life.

And it seemed to me that it gave us bad economic policies, bad social policies, ineffective crime and welfare policies, and a lot of hot air and not much results. So when the people gave Al Gore and me a chance to serve, we tried to adopt a unifying approach that would bring the American people together and that would not make choices that were essentially phony.

We believed we could cut the deficit and invest more in education and the American people, and sure enough, it worked. Today, before I came here, I announced that we would have this year a $230 billion surplus, the biggest in the history of the United States, that we would, when I left office, have paid off $360 billion of the national debt.

Keep in mind, the annual deficit was supposed to be $450 billion this year when I took office. So it's gone from $450 billion projected deficit to a $230 billion actual surplus.

And yesterday we released the annual poverty figures, which show that poverty is at a 20-year low. Last year we had the biggest drop in child poverty since 1966, the biggest drop in minority poverty in the history of the country since we've been measuring the statistics; 2.2 million people moved out of poverty last year alone; all income groups experienced roughly the same percentage increase in their income. But in America—and the bottom 20 percent actually had slightly the higher percentage increase, which is good because they've been losing ground for many years while working hard.

So I think it makes sense to have economic and social policies that bring people together. And it's rooted in an essential Democratic belief that everybody counts, everybody ought to have a chance, and we all do better when we help each other. It's not complicated, but it turns out to be good economics.

And it turns out to be quite effective social policy. If you look—we said that we ought to put more police on the street, punish people who are particularly bad, but do more to prevent crime in the first place and keep guns out of the hands of criminals and kids. And lo and behold, it worked. Now, that hasn't stopped people from fighting us, because they're driven by ideology and control, not by evidence.

One thing I respect about our opponents, they are totally undeterred by the evidence. [*Laughter*] I mean, in a way, you've sort of got to admire that—"I don't care what works. This is what I believe." [*Laughter*] "So what if they've got the longest economic expansion in history and 22 million new jobs and the lowest minority unemployment rate recorded and the lowest female unemployment rate in 40 years. I don't care. I still want to go back to running the deficit and having a big tax cut."

"So what if keeping a half a million felons, fugitives, and stalkers from getting handguns, and not interrupting anybody's day in the deer woods, and putting 100,000 police on the street has given us the lowest crime rate in 27 years. I still don't want to close the gun show loophole, and I want to get rid of the 100,000 cops program." That's their position. It's not just about guns; it's about police. They do not favor the Federal program that is now putting 150,000 police on the street, and they have promised to get rid of it. And I could go on and on.

"So what if 18 million Americans every single year are delayed or denied coverage by an HMO when a doctor is pleading for it. I'm still not for the Patients' Bill of Rights."

Now, I could just go on and on, but the point I want to make is, this election is about way more than gay rights. I have a unifying theory of how America ought to work. I've tried to build one America. I'm elated when the human genome project revealed we are all 99.99 percent the same, genetically. [*Laughter*]

I've been touting to a lot of people this new book by Robert Wright called "Non Zero." He wrote an earlier book called "The Moral Animal." The essential argument of the book is that notwithstanding all the depravity of the 20th century and the Nazis and the Communists, that essentially society is moving to higher and higher levels of decency and justice, because it's becoming more complex and we're becoming more interdependent. And the more interdependent people become and the more they recognize it, the more they are forced to try to find solutions to their disagreements, in game theory parlance, which are non-zero-sum solutions as opposed to zero-sum solutions—those are where in order for somebody to win, somebody has got to lose.

It's not a naive book. I mean, we're going to have a race for President. It's a zero-sum race. One will win; one will lose. But the general idea is that we ought to organize society in such a way that we more and more and more look for solutions in which, in order for me to win, you have to win, too. We have to find respectful ways to accommodate each other so that we can honor our differences but be united by our common humanity.

So, for me, cutting the welfare rolls in half, adding a couple million kids to the rolls of children with health insurance, being for the

hate crimes bill and the employment nondiscrimination bill, being for new markets legislation to expand opportunity to people and places left behind, and continuing to get the country out of debt so interest rates stay low and prosperity stays high, so the rest of the country is secure enough to reach out to people who are different from them—which is easier to do when you're secure than when you're insecure—to me, this is all part of a unified strategy.

And I guess what I would like to ask you to do is to continue to reach out and to keep working. Never allow yourselves to be marginalized or divided against your friends and neighbors, because the progress we're making is because more and more people are identifying with our common humanity. As horrible as it was when young Matthew Shepard was stretched out on that rack to die in Wyoming, it got a lot of people's attention. And when that police commissioner from Wyoming stood up and said, "I was against hate crimes legislation before, and I was wrong. The experience of knowing this young man's family, knowing his friend, knowing what his life was like, and understanding the nature of this crime and why the people committed it has changed my life—seeing his parents stand up and talk"—obviously, not exactly a liberal Democratic activist living out there in Wyoming—[*laughter*]—talking about this whole issue in profoundly human terms has helped to change America. And they are trying to redeem their son's life by making sure that his death was not in vain.

And the American people are fundamentally good people. They nearly always get it right once they have a chance to have personal experience, if they have enough information and they have enough time to absorb it.

Now, that's why, in this election, it's important that you keep reaching out and understand that clarity is our friend. I just get so tickled watching this Presidential campaign, maybe because it's interesting for me—I'm not part of it now. [*Laughter*] Except as I often say, now that my party has a new leader and my family has a new candidate, I'm now the Cheerleader in Chief of the country. [*Laughter*] But it's sort of like—one week we read in the press that there is something wrong with one of the candidates. Then the next week, "Oh, there's something wrong with the other." And let me tell you something. I totally disagree with that whole thing. I think we ought to posit the fact that we have two people running for President who are fundamentally patriotic, good, decent people who love their country but who have huge differences that tend to be obscured by the daily and weekly coverage of this or that flap.

And sometimes, I get the feeling that the flaps are being deliberately used to obscure the underlying reality. Now, the underlying reality is that these people have huge differences on economic policy—huge. And the Republican position would basically take an enormous percentage of the non-Social Security surplus, roughly three-quarters of it, and spend it on a tax cut. Then, if you partially privatize Social Security, that's another trillion bucks. You're into the Social Security surplus, and that's before you have kept any of your spending promises. That means higher interest rates.

We just got a study which said that the Gore plan would keep interest rates roughly a percent a year lower, over a decade, and that's worth—there's some dispute about it, but somewhere between $300 billion and $390 billion over 10 years in lower home mortgages and $30 billion in lower car payments and $15 billion in lower student loan payments. That's a big tax cut.

It also keeps the economy going. There are huge differences in economic policy, big differences in education policy. Even though both say they're for accountability, I would argue that the Democratic program on accountability is stronger, because it says we favor voluntary national exams. We favor identifying failing schools, and then having to turn them around, shut them down, or put them under new management. So there are real consequences here.

And we favor, in addition to that, which they don't, putting 100,000 teachers out there to make smaller classes and rebuilding or building a lot of schools, because you've got kids just running out of these buildings and a lot of school districts just can't raise property taxes any more.

There are huge differences in health care—a Patients' Bill of Rights, Medicare drug program. You know, all this medicine flap, it obscures—what is the underlying reality here? The underlying reality is, we have the money to give senior citizens, who cannot afford it otherwise, a drug benefit through Medicare. And our position is that we ought to do it and that, over the long run, it will keep America healthier, make lives longer and better, and keep people out of the hospital. It's a simple position—that if we were creating Medicare today, there's no way in the world we would do it without a prescription drug program.

Their position is, "We ought to do that for the poorest Americans, and everybody else ought to buy insurance." Now, half of the seniors who cannot afford their medical bills are not in the group of people they propose to cover, number one. Number two, even the health insurance companies, with whom I've had my occasional disputes, if you've noticed—I've got to hand it to them. They have been perfectly honest in this. They have said, "We cannot write a policy that makes sense for us that people can afford to buy." Nevada passed the bill that the whole Republican establishment is for, and you know how many health insurance companies have offered people drug coverage under it? Zero. Now, so the evidence is not there. But like I said, I've got to give it to them. They are never deterred by evidence. [*Laughter*]

Now, what's the deal here? What's the real deal? The real deal is, the drug companies don't want this. Why don't they want it? You would think they would want to sell more medicine, wouldn't you? They don't want it because—I can't believe we just don't read these things—they don't want it because they believe if Medicare provides this many drugs to this many seniors, they will acquire too much market power and require them, through market power, not price controls—there are no price controls in this; this is totally voluntary—that they believe they will have so much market power, they will be able to get down the price of these drugs a little bit and cut the profit margin.

Well, we can argue about how much more expensive drugs are here than drugs made here are in other countries—and it's different from drug to drug—but instead of getting into one of these sort of nitpicking deals, let's look at the big picture. The big picture is, you can go to Canada and buy medicine made in America cheaper in Canada. Why? Because all these other—and Europe—because they impose limits on the price.

So we all, Americans, we have to pay for all the research and development for the medicine. Now, we've got great drug companies. We want the drugs to be developed. I personally think we ought to be willing to pay a premium. But I don't think there's a living person who needs the drugs who should not be able to get them. And we can do this for seniors on Medicare now—the fastest growing group of people in America are people over 80.

So it's not just about gay rights. It's about seniors' needs. It's about kids' needs to be in decent schools, It's about what works to make our streets safer. And then, there are the environmental issues.

Now, it's not like we don't have any evidence here. We've got the toughest clean air standards in history. We've got cleaner water, safer drinking water, safer food. And we set aside more land than any administration in history except the two Roosevelts, and now we've got the longest economic expansion in history. So that's the evidence, right?

We also know, in terms of the present energy crisis, that we've been trying for years to get this Congress to give tax credits to people to buy presently available energy conservation technologies and products and that, off the shelf today, there are available products that would dramatically increase the efficiency of our energy uses. We've tried to put more and more money into research for new fuels, new engines, fuel cells, the whole 9 yards, without success.

What's their approach? They still say, "Don't bother me with the evidence. You cannot grow the economy and improve the environment, so put us in there. We will reverse President Clinton's order setting aside 43 million acres, roadless acres in the national forests. We will review even the national monuments, may get rid of some of them. We will relax the clean air standards—because you can't do it. Don't bother me with

the evidence.'' This is about the air gay and straight people breathe. [*Laughter*]

What I'm saying to you is, this is a big deal. I get so frustrated because I wish—that's why I hope these debates serve to clarify this. I mean, I know it's hard for them, because it's hard for them to get up and say, ''I'm sorry, I just think we ought to have dirtier air.'' I mean, it's hard. [*Laughter*] I understand it's a hard sell. I understand that.

But you've got to understand, there are differences here that will affect the lives of real people, that will affect the kind of America this young man grows up in. That's what these elections ought to be about. And I'm perfectly prepared to posit that they're all good people. And I'm sick and tired of everybody trying to pick them both apart. That's not the issue. The issue is that people—study after study after study after study shows that people who run for President, by and large, do what they say they will do.

And by the way, there was one independent study that showed that in my first term, even before all the stuff I've done in my second term, I had already kept a higher percentage of my promises to the American people than the last five Presidents.

Now, you couldn't possibly win a Pulitzer Prize or a Niemann fellowship if you said that. But we ought to be better. We do not need to jump on our opponent's personally, but we do need to make darn sure that every single person knows what the differences are. And these Congress—I'm telling you, every House seat, every Senate seat is pivotally important to the future of this country.

Audience member. [*Inaudible*]

The President. That's one example—assume they are honorable people in the Senate and the House and the people running for the White House.

One of them believes in *Roe* v. *Wade*; one of them doesn't. There's going to be two to four judges on the Supreme Court coming up. Why wouldn't they each do the honorable thing, that is, what they believe is right? Now, we ought to have—we've never had a time like this in my lifetime. We may never have another time where we've got so much peace and so much prosperity, where people are secure enough to talk about a lot of things we used to not talk about.

I mean, let's face it. Here we are in Dallas, Texas, having this event, right? Because America has come a long way. Your friends and neighbors have. Your fellow citizens have. This is a different country than it was 8 years ago. So now we've got to decide, what do we propose to do with all this? You have friends all over the world. Most of you have friends in virtually every State in America. I am imploring you to talk to people every day between now and the election.

Regina will win if people understand exactly what the choices are. The Vice President will be elected if people understand exactly what the choices are. Hillary will be elected to the Senate if people understand exactly what the choices are. And yet so much of what passes for political discourse is designed to obscure, rather than clarify, the differences. Somebody doesn't agree with me, let them stand up and say what they think the differences are, but let's talk about the things that will affect other people.

Most people I've known in politics have been good people who worked harder than most folks thought they did and did the best they could to do what they thought was right. But we have honest differences here, in health care, education, the economy, human rights, gay rights, foreign policy. One side is for the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, and the other isn't. You talk about something that could have huge consequences on your kids' future.

So I am imploring you. I thank you for this money. We'll do our best to spend it well. We need it. They're going to outspend us, but we proved in '98 we could win at a $100 million deficit. But there's some deficit at which we can't win, because we've got to have our message out there, too. So we'll be less in the hole because of what you've done today.

But you just remember this. There are a significant number of undecided voters—that's why these polls bounce up and down like they do—and they're having a hard time getting a grip on the election, the undecided voters are, partly because there's not enough clarity of choice.

So I implore you. You wouldn't be here today if you didn't have a certain amount of political and citizen passion and courage and

if you didn't have clarity of choice about some issues that are very important to you. So I ask you, take a little time between now and the election, every day, and try to find somebody somewhere that will make a difference and give them the same clarity that you have.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:15 p.m. at a private residence. In his remarks, he referred to luncheon cohosts Chuck Marlett, Jim Vasilay, Julie Johnson, and Kay VanWey; Edward G. Rendell, general chair, and Andrew Tobias, treasurer, Democratic National Committee; Elizabeth Birch, executive director, Human Rights Campaign; Regina Montoya Coggins, candidate for Texas' Fifth Congressional District; and Molly Beth Malcolm, chair, Texas Democratic Party.

Message on the Observance of Rosh Hashana, 2000

September 27, 2000

Warm greetings to everyone celebrating Rosh Hashana.

The High Holidays, a time of serious prayer and self-reflection, begin with Rosh Hashana. Signaling the start of a new year, Rosh Hashana asks Jews across the globe to reaffirm their relationship with God and to discover how they might better fulfill God's commandments. But Rosh Hashana is a time for celebration as well, as Jews commemorate the creation of the world and welcome the gift of a new year.

The ten days from Rosh Hashana to the Day of Atonement, Yom Kippur, provide an opportunity to acknowledge past transgressions and resolve to learn from them. As the shofar sounds its stirring notes again this year, I encourage all Americans to reflect on how we can help make our world a better place. As we rejoice in our many blessings, let us remember the ways that God's gifts can be used to fulfill our obligation to help others and to create a brighter future for ourselves, our families, and our fellow citizens.

Hillary joins me in sending best wishes for a memorable celebration, a meaningful period of reflection, and a new year sweet with the promise of peace, joy, and prosperity.

Bill Clinton

Letter to Congressional Leaders on the Need for Reauthorization of the Violence Against Women Act

September 27, 2000

Dear Mr. Leader:

I am writing to urge you to bring the reauthorization of the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) to the Senate floor this week. This bill is a top priority for my Administration.

An estimated 900,000 women suffer violence at the hands of an intimate partner each year, demonstrating the urgent need for this legislation. Since VAWA was enacted, the Departments of Justice and Health and Human Services have awarded approximately $1.6 billion in Federal grants to support the work of prosecutors, law enforcement officials, the courts, victim advocates, health care and social service professionals, and intervention and prevention programs in order to combat violence against women. We must reauthorize these critical programs immediately.

As you know, yesterday, the House overwhelmingly passed VAWA reauthorization by a vote of 415–3. In the Senate, VAWA has similar bipartisan support with over 70 cosponsors. If Congress does not act this week, however, VAWA's authorization will expire on September 30, 2000. The Senate should not delay, and I urge you to pass a freestanding version of the Biden-Hatch VAWA reauthorization bill this week. The women and families whose lives have been scarred by domestic violence deserve nothing less than immediate action by the Congress.

Sincerely,

William J. Clinton

NOTE: Letters were sent to Richard K. Armey, House majority leader, and Trent Lott, Senate majority leader. An original was not available for verification of the content of this letter.