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Statement on the Death of John Cardinal O'Connor
May 3, 2000

Hillary and I were saddened to learn of the death of Cardinal O'Connor. For more than 50 years, he reached out with uncommon fortitude to minister the needs of American Catholics. From his first Philadelphia parish to soldiers on the battlefield, from the carnage of Bosnia to the tragedy of AIDS, he also sought out and served those most in need. His lifelong journey of faith was our Nation's blessing. From his distinguished career as a Navy chaplain, to his determination to give voice to the poor and marginalized in New York and across America, the courage and firm faith he showed in his final illness inspired us all.

Our thoughts and prayers go out to his family and all who loved him.

Remarks at Central High School in Davenport, Iowa
May 3, 2000

Hello. I think we should give Barb Hess another hand. She did a good job on her speech. [*Applause*] And your principal, Mr. Caudle, give him another hand. [*Applause*] And your great Governor, Governor Tom Vilsack, I'm glad to be here with him. Thank you. I also want to thank the Jazz Band and the Marching Band for playing. You did a great job today. Thank you very much.

I am glad to be here. I want to say I appreciated meeting at least two of your student leaders, Kelly Witt and Ricky Harris—thank them for—[*applause*]. And I want to thank Lieutenant Governor Sally Pederson, Attorney General Tom Miller, Secretary of Agriculture Patty Judge, and the director of education, Ted Stilwell, for joining us today. And Mayor Yerington, thank you for welcoming us back to Davenport. And the other Quad City mayors are here: Mayor Leach of Moline; Mayor Ward of East Moline; and Mayor Mark Schwiebert of Rock Island. I think I pronounced that properly, and if I didn't, he can reprimand me later. [*Laughter*]

I'd like to thank your superintendent, Jim Blanche, for making us welcome here. And since we're here for construction purposes, to talk about better school buildings, I'm glad to be joined by the president of the Building and Construction Trades Union, Mr. Ed Sullivan. So thank you all for making me feel welcome.

I love this community. I came here in late 1992 on a bus with Hillary and with Al and Tipper Gore right before our election. Then I came back in 1993 after the terrible flood, and I watched you come back from that. And today I want to talk about another kind of building.

I'm in the process of going around the country for 2 days; we just left Owensboro, Kentucky. And I want to do two things. I want, first of all, to make this trip an opportunity to show America how good the young people of our country are, and how much they are learning in our schools, and how bright their future is. But the second thing I want to do is to point out what challenges are still out there if every young person in America is going to have a world-class education.

And one of the things that we know is that you are not the only group of young people in school facilities that are either overcrowded or too old or both. And if we want learning to occur, we have got to give all of our students the facilities they need.

Now, this is a beautiful old school. It's even older than the high school I went to, which was built in 1917. I've been to the top floor. I've seen the physics lab. I went into a biology class. I went underneath the bleachers here, in the locker room. I saw where you have your meals in the cafeteria, which was built in the '85 extension. And I have been given a briefing by your principal on how you're going to handle the modernization.

But what you need to know is there are people all over this country who are in situations even more severe. In the city of Philadelphia, the average school building is 65 years old. In the city of New York, there are still buildings

heated in the winter with coal-fired furnaces, where people literally shovel coal into them like they did 100 years ago.

We have school buildings so old they can't be hooked up—they cannot be wired to the Internet. The Vice President and I have worked for 6 years to connect every classroom in America to the Internet. When we started, 16 percent of the schools were connected and 3 percent of the classrooms. Today, 95 percent of the schools and almost 75 percent of the classrooms are connected. But believe it or not, there are some which literally can't take a connection. And I saw some of your classrooms here today that have severe limits on what can be done in terms of electricity provision.

So what's all this got to do with what we're doing now? Well, when I became President, we could never have thought of doing anything for school construction or school modernization or repairs because we had a big deficit. Today, we're in the midst of our third budget surplus. By the end of this year, we will have paid off $355 billion of our national debt. And I'm proud of that.

We are in the midst of the longest economic expansion in history. And the big question before the voters this year, and all the adult citizens of America that you young people can have an impact on—and some of you are old enough to vote now—is what are we going to do with our prosperity? So we've got the lowest unemployment rate in 30 years and the lowest welfare rolls in 30 years and the lowest female unemployment in 40 years and the lowest African-American and Hispanic unemployment ever recorded, so what are we going to do with it?

A lot of times, in free societies, when times are good, people do nothing. They just sort of hang around and enjoy it. That would be a terrible mistake, because we still have challenges. And one of the challenges we have—and every one of you know it's true—education is more important than ever before. It's more important to you, and it's more important to your country.

We live in an information economy where what you know and what you can learn will determine in large measure the shape of your adult lives and the kind of lives you'll be able to give your own children. So one of the things that we have to do with our prosperity is to ask ourselves—let's take an inventory—where are we not giving our young people a world-class education? Why are we not doing it? And what are we to do about it?

Because if we can't do this now, if we can't make uniform excellence in education a reality in America now, at this time of historic prosperity, we will never get around to it. So we have to do it now.

One of the things that we ought to do is to make sure that we can put all our kids in facilities that are modern enough that they can be hooked up to the Internet, that people can learn, that we can do what we need to do here, not just the science classes, not just the labs but all the classes.

Let me just give you an example. I just talked to Senator Harkin about this before I came in, because he got some money for Iowa to do this; the first Federal money ever to help in school construction he got on the basis of a pilot project for Iowa. And now you heard the Governor say the State's putting money in. But 4 years ago, when we started to talk about this, the Government said it would take $112 billion to modernize schools for all of our kids. Today, they say it will take $322 billion.

The engineers of our country, the people charged with building things, a couple of years ago evaluated all of what we call America's infrastructure, our roads, our bridges, our railroads, our ports, our airports, our water systems. You know what? They said the worst system in the world that we had, the worst one in our country, was our school buildings, that they are too old and not ready to meet the challenges of the 21st century.

I have been to schools, elementary schools, in Florida—I went to a little town in Jupiter, Florida, and went to one elementary school. There were 12 housetrailers out behind the school, because the kids were so numerous, the school district had grown so much, that they couldn't go in there. Even in this school, where you've got a lot of rooms, you have a lot more students here than the school was built for. And it's one of the things the teachers talked to me about today.

So, why am I here? Because I hope that America will see this problem and this opportunity through you and your school, thanks to our friends in the media, and because I have given the Congress now for one more year my proposal, which basically would say: One of the things we ought to do with our prosperity is to help build or massively overhaul 6,000

schools, and we ought to give the States enough money to repair another 5,000 schools every single year for the next 5 years. The students of this country and their families deserve it.

Back in 1907 this high school was called, I quote, "a high school for the future." Back then the population of Davenport was 39,000, about a third of what it is today, and Central High had half the number of students it does now. It was a high school for the future. You have some new renovations planned over the next 2 years, which I hope will make it a high school for the future again. But I want every single school in America to be a school of the future. You need it. You deserve it. And if the Congress will pass my proposal, we will help you get it.

Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 6:27 p.m. in the auditorium. In his remarks, he referred to teacher Barbara Hess, who introduced the President, principal Henry L. Caudle, student body president Kelly L. Witt, and senior class president Frederick L. (Ricky) Harris III, Central High School; Gov. Tom Vilsack and Lt. Gov. Sally Pederson of Iowa; Mayor Philip Yerington of Davenport, IA; Mayor Stanley F. Leach of Moline, IL; Mayor Bill Ward of East Moline, IL; Mayor Mark W. Schwiebert of Rock Island, IL; and Jim Blanche, superintendent, Davenport School District.

Remarks at the City Academy in St. Paul, Minnesota
May 4, 2000

Thank you very much. Well, after Tom and Milo talked, I don't know that I need to say much of anything. I thank you for what you said and for the example you have set. And I want to say a little more about Milo and this school in a moment. I'd like to thank my friend Bruce Vento for not only doing a superb job in representing the people of his community and, indeed, the people of Minnesota in the United States House of Representatives but also being a wonderful friend and adviser to me these last 7 years and a few months. You should be very proud of Bruce Vento. He's a very, very good man. Thank you.

When Lieutenant Governor Schunk told me that she was going to visit every school district in Minnesota, I was wishing I were the Lieutenant Governor of Minnesota. That sounds like a good job to me. I thank you. And Mr. Mayor, thank you for being here today. It's good to see you again, and it's good to be back in your community.

There are a number of other people I would like to acknowledge, and doubtless I will miss some, but I'd like to thank Education Commissioner Jax for being here, and Superintendent Harvey, Majority Leader of the Senate Roger Moe. The mayor of Minneapolis I think is here, Sharon Sayles Belton; former Attorney General Skip Humphrey. I'd like to thank State Senator Ember Reichgott Junge, a longtime friend of mine, and former State Representative Becky Kelso, who were the original cosponsors of the charter school legislation; the Charter Friends National Network director, Jon Schroeder, who drafted the original Federal charter law, which we adopted; the Center for School Change director, Joe Nathan, a longtime personal friend of mine with whom I worked for many years.

And I'd like to acknowledge some people who came on this tour with me, some of whom who have been very active in the charter school movement for a long time: the president of the Progressive Policy Institute in Washington, Will Marshall; the president of the New Schools Venture Fund, Kim Smith; the policy director of the National Urban League, Bill Spriggs; and a longtime friend and city council member from New York City, Guillermo Linares. And they're over here to my right. They've come a long way to be with you, to see this first charter school in the United States. So I hope you'll make them—[*applause*].

When I was listening to Milo Cutter and Tom Gonzalez talk first about this school, how it got started, what its mission is, and then hearing Tom talk about his life and how his then-girlfriend and present wife got him into this