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NOTE: Identical letters were sent to J. Dennis Hastert, Speaker of the House of Representatives, and Strom Thurmond, President pro tempore of the Senate. This letter was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on October 19.

Remarks to the Democratic Caucus
October 19, 2000

Thank you so much for the wonderful welcome. I want to begin by saying that it has been a profound honor for me to work with this caucus over the last 8 years. I want to thank Tom Daschle, who has been wonderful; and Dick Gephardt, whom I knew well before I became President, but we have, I think, built a great friendship, a deeper one, in these last 8 years. And I'm so proud of him.

I want to say to all of you that I believe that in these last 2 weeks and 6 days before the election, the best politics is for us to get as much done as we can for America here in the Congress of the United States. And in the process of doing that, I think what we ought to seek to do is to bring clarity to this debate.

It looks to me like our friends on the other side in Congress have adopted their Presidential strategy. Their Presidential strategy—now their congressional strategy—is cloud the issues. Things are doing well. They will get by. Our strategy should be, clarify the issues, and we'll win big. That is clearly the difference.

I was very proud of the performance of the Vice President in that last debate. I thought he was great, trying to bring clarity. But you've got to give it to the other side. As hard as we try to bring clarity, they're real good at clouding up. I almost gagged when I heard that answer on the Patients' Bill of Rights in Texas. Could you believe that? Here's a guy who takes credit for a bill that he vetoed. And then, finally, the guys that were helping him say, "If you want to be President, you can't veto a Patients' Bill of Rights, or people will look dimly on it. So you'd better let it pass." And then he was bragging about how you have a right to sue in Texas. Did you hear that? Do you know how that got in? Without his signature. He sort of—so they're real good. They cloud. And I've been reading in the press, apparently no one thinks that was an exaggeration or something that was troubling, but it sort of bothered me.

And then there is their great argument that you've done nothing about health care in 8 years. Look, when we came in, Medicare was going broke last year. Now, we put 27 years on it—I think, the longest it's been alive in 35 years—not to mention the Kennedy-Kassebaum bill, the Children's Health Insurance Program, which is what has given us a decline in the number of people without health insurance for the first time in 12 years.

Then there was the education recession argument. You know, one of the things I admire about our Republican friends is that evidence has no impact on them. [*Laughter*] And you've kind of got to respect that. They know what they believe, and they know what they're going to say, and, "Don't bother me with the facts."

What are the facts? The dropout rate's down. The high school graduation rate's up. The college-going rate's at an all-time high. Reading and math scores are up. There's been about a 50 percent increase in the number of kids taking advanced placement courses, but a 300 percent increase in Latino children taking advanced placement courses, and a 500 percent increase in African-American kids taking advanced placement courses.

Then there was that argument that—the one that tickled me the most was, "Well, the wealthiest Americans have to get tax relief, because we're giving tax relief, and what do you expect us to do? I mean, I'd just be the President. I can't make decisions about this." [*Laughter*] That was their argument, wasn't it? I mean, "Who are we to make decisions? We can't make judgments and choices. I mean, if you're for tax relief, you just sort of put it out there, and people just kind of come along and get whatever they get. But we didn't decide to give it to them. We were for tax relief, and it just happened. I mean, how could we possibly make a decision here? I mean, whoever heard of a

President and a Congress making a decision? I never heard of such a thing."

What's the point of all this? What's the point of all this? They are really good at cloudiness. And we have to be good at a clear weather forecast. And we have to be true to what we said we showed up here to do. We've got to get everything done we can before the Congress goes home, and then what's left, we need to take to the American people with clarity.

But if you just keep this in mind—you know, you've got to have a lot of sympathy with them, because the country is so much better off than it was 8 years ago. And our economic policy, our education policy, our environmental policy, our health care policy, our welfare policy, our crime policy—there are big differences between ours and theirs. And we tried it our way, and it got better. We tried it their way, and it didn't. So they have no choice but to be cloudy. We have no choice but to be clear.

But you have to understand that it's quite a smart strategy on their part, and they're very good at it. So what we have to do is be clear. For example, they say they're coming back Monday night. We're going to work all day Tuesday, and we're going to work Wednesday. And if we don't quit, I'm going to one-day CR's, one day, every day. You've got to finish.

Can you imagine a Democrat going home and running for reelection saying, "Vote for me so that next year I can finish last year's business?" [*Laughter*] Now, we wouldn't do that. And we shouldn't let anybody do that. We need to stay here until we resolve this.

We want 100,000 teachers. We want the school construction funds. We want funds to turn around or shut down failing schools and open them under new management. We want the funds to double our after-school programs. We now got more information, just last week, another study on how much good they do. We've got 800,000 kids in those programs. If our budget passes, there will be enough for 1.6 million kids.

And we want the minimum wage, and we want the hate crimes legislation, and we want the immigrant fairness legislation. We want these things. I think they're important. And the American people ought to have no doubt when we leave here, if we don't get the Patients' Bill of Rights, it's not because we didn't break our backs for it. It's because their interest groups wouldn't let them pass it.

And let me just mention one other issue I think has gotten sort of swept aside in this debate. In addition to the minimum wage, we have legislation to strengthen the law to guarantee equal pay for equal work for women, and I think we ought to be out there talking to the American people about that.

And let me just say one or two other things. We worked hard here. We lost a lot of seats in 1994 because we worked hard to turn this deficit around. And we believed that we could get rid of the deficit, increase investment in education, and strengthen the economy, in no small measure, by keeping interest rates down, which would lead to higher growth.

Now, look, one of the things I think that all of you ought to do when you go home is to say—acknowledge very frankly that their tax cut is 3 times bigger than the one we're advocating, at least. Now, virtually all people with incomes of under $100,000 a year would be better off under our proposal, but still, theirs is 3 times bigger. But there's a reason for that. We do not believe we can possibly afford to go back to the kind of economic policies we had in the 12 years before we got here. We do not believe it is good for America to get back in the deficit ditch. And whatever you think this surplus is going to be over the next decade, I promise you it's going to be less than a $1.6 trillion tax cut plus a $1 trillion partial privatization of Social Security plus the $300 billion or $400 billion they've promised us to spend.

Now, I believe a careful analysis of both proposals will show you that if the Vice President and the Democratic plan passes, you'll have interest rates lower every year, probably about a percent lower every year for a decade. Do you know what that's worth? Three hundred ninety billion dollars over 10 years in lower home mortgages, $30 billion in lower car payments, $15 billion in lower college loan payments, never mind the lower credit card payments, never mind the lower business loan payments, lower farm loan payments, more people, therefore, going to work, more businesses doing well, a higher stock market.

Our tax cut for all Americans is lower interest rates, because we're not going to get out of the kind of trouble that they had. I just think you need to go out here and get everything done you can. I will stay here with you. If we don't finish by Wednesday, we're going to day-

by-day continuing resolutions. We'll do everything we possibly can to pass all this education agenda, to pass as much of our health care agenda we can, and to do it in a fiscally responsible way.

But when you leave here, you just think about this. Tell people to remember the way it was 8 years ago; to think about the way it is now; to look at the changes in crime, welfare, the environment, health care, and the economy; and to ask yourself not whether we're going to keep changing but what direction will we change in? The country's changing so fast and the world is changing so fast, change will be the order of the day next year and 5 years from now and 10 years from now. The issue is not whether we're going to change; it is, which direction will we take as we change?

And you just think about—think of yourself as America's weather corps. They want cloudy, and you want clear. [*Laughter*] And if you can bring clarity to this debate, you get more done here. Then I'll stay with you every step of the way, and we'll all have a great celebration in about 3 weeks.

Thank you, and God bless you all.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:46 p.m. in the Cannon Caucus Room at the Cannon Office Building. In his remarks, he referred to Republican Presidential candidate Gov. George W. Bush of Texas.

Statement on Congressional Action on Departments of Veterans Affairs and Housing and Urban Development, and Independent Agencies Appropriations Legislation

October 19, 2000

I am pleased that Congress today passed a VA/HUD bill that will open the doors of opportunity in America for those who need it most, improve veterans' medical care, build on our agenda for national energy security, and strengthen our commitment to the environment.

This legislation builds on my opportunity agenda with increased funding for economic development through empowerment zones and enterprise communities and community development financial institutions—all part of my new markets initiative—and with 79,000 new housing vouchers for low-income families. This agreement also increases support for the Federal Emergency Management Agency's emergency food and shelter programs, which work with States and communities to help the homeless and hungry. We are also strengthening our commitment to national service with additional support for the Corporation for National and Community Service, the first increase since the inception of this critical volunteer agency in 1993.

With this legislation, we also support the significant expansion of cutting-edge basic scientific research at the National Science Foundation. This includes research in nano-technology—the manipulation of matter at the molecular and atomic level—which holds the promise of scientific breakthroughs in a wide range of fields. It also advances scientific research through support for space exploration at NASA.

Especially at this time of elevated fuel prices, I am also pleased that this bill provides resources for technologies to increase fuel efficiency, an essential part of our long-term strategy to reduce dependence on oil. This bill also contains increased funding for enforcement of the Nation's environmental laws and for the cleanup of polluted waterways. In addition, it drops or fixes several objectionable riders that threatened to harm our environment. Yet, while we were able to ameliorate the impact of the remaining riders, we were not able to rid this bill entirely of objectionable provisions, in particular the rider relating to ozone.

This legislation also provides the additional $1.5 billion I requested for the Department of Veterans Affairs, the largest increase ever requested by any administration. This funding will support efforts to improve veterans' medical care and the delivery of key services, including disability benefits.

I also am pleased that, in response to my veto, Congress has dropped a rider on the Energy/Water bill that would have undermined key