

June 21 / Administration of William J. Clinton, 1995

Thank you, and God bless you all.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:10 p.m. on the South Lawn at the White House.

Remarks on Surgeon General Nominee Henry Foster

June 21, 1995

The President. Good afternoon. I'd like to begin by saying that I was quite pleased that 57 of the Members of the Senate today voted to allow a simple up or down, yes or no vote on the nomination of Dr. Foster. A strong majority, 57, voted to give him a fair chance and a full vote. But a small minority are using this nomination to dictate a litmus test to the rest of America.

That is wrong. And the American people are not going to understand it. The Senators who voted to deny Dr. Foster an up or down vote did a disservice to a good man. They also did a disservice to our whole system of democracy. And make no mistake about it, this was not a vote about the right of the President to choose a Surgeon General. This was really a vote about every American woman's right to choose.

Henry Foster is qualified to be our Surgeon General. He spent 38 years in medicine. He spent a lot of his time working to improve the health of women and children in poor and rural areas. He's delivered thousands of babies and trained hundreds of young doctors. His efforts to curb teen pregnancy have earned him high praise among Republicans and Democrats. He shares my view that abortion should be rare and safe and legal.

Don't you think it's interesting that we finally found a person in this country who's actually done something, actually done something to try to reduce teen pregnancy, actually done something to try to convince large numbers of young people that they should not have sex before

they're married, who's actually done something to deal with this problem, but because he cannot pass the political litmus test that has a stranglehold on the other party, they cannot even allow a simple vote? Did the Democratic Senate deny a simple vote to their controversial nominees for the Supreme Court, a lifetime job? No.

This man got 57 votes—43 people say no because they are in the grip of people who don't question my right to choose him but question American women's right to choose. It is wrong. What's fair is fair, and he ought to get an up or down vote. He's actually done something about the problem they all claim to be concerned about, and he ought to be given a chance to do something about it for the whole country.

[At this point, Dr. Foster made brief remarks.]

The President. Let me just say one other thing. Let me remind you that the committee approved Dr. Foster's nomination. This should be about whether the President has a right to make this decision if the person is qualified. The committee ruled that he was. The only other question worth asking and answering right now is, are we going to try for another vote? Yes, we are. Do I know what the outcome will be? No, I don't. But I'm not through yet, and we're going to do our best to win it.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:36 p.m. in the Rose Garden at the White House.

Letter to Senator Robert Byrd on Proposed Drunk Driving Legislation

June 21, 1995

Dear Robert:

Drinking and driving by young people is one of the nation's most serious threats to public

health and public safety. I am deeply concerned about this ongoing tragedy that kills thousands of young people every year. It's against the law

for young people to drink. It should be against the law for young people to drink and drive.

As you know, earlier this month, I called on Congress to make Zero Tolerance the law of the land. I support your amendment to the National Highway System Designation Act, which would achieve this goal.

A decade ago, we decided as a nation that the minimum drinking age should be 21. In 1984, President Reagan signed bipartisan legislation to achieve this goal, and today all 50 states have enacted such laws. Our efforts are paying off—drunk driving deaths among people under 21 have been cut in half since 1984.

But we must do more. Twenty-four states and the nation's capital have enacted Zero Tolerance

laws that consider a driver under age 21 to be “driving while impaired” after just one full drink of alcohol. These laws work—alcohol-related crashes involving teenage drivers are down as much as 10–20 percent in those states. If all states had such laws, hundreds more lives could be saved and thousands of injuries could be prevented.

I commend your efforts today, and I urge the Senate to pass your amendment.

Sincerely,

BILL CLINTON

NOTE: This letter was made available by the Office of the Press Secretary but was not issued as a White House press release.

Remarks at the Groundbreaking Ceremony for the Women in the Military Service Memorial in Arlington, Virginia

June 22, 1995

Thank you very much. Thank you, General Mutter. Thank you to all the fine active duty and veteran women, servicepeople who have just spoken—spoken! I can't even talk, I'm so excited. [*Laughter*]

I'll tell you, when our wonderful World War I veteran got through talking, I thought there's no point in my saying a word. It has all been said. I thank all the members of our military, beginning with the Secretary of Defense, the Service Secretaries, General Shalikhshvili, the Joint Chiefs, those who preceded them—I see General Powell and others here—for their support of this endeavor. I thank the Members of Congress who are here. General Vaught, I thank you for your determination. I don't believe that anyone in the United States could have said no to you on any important matter; I know I couldn't. And I congratulate you on this triumph of your vision and will.

To all the remarkable servicewomen who surround me here, out in the audience and on the podium, let me say to all of you: Thank you for your service to America. We are all proud to be here to break ground on a memorial that will recognize a contribution that you have made far beyond the call of duty.

Women have been in our service, as has been said, since George Washington's troops fought

for independence, clothing and feeding our troops and binding their wounds. They were in the struggle to preserve the Union as cooks and tailors, couriers and scouts, even as spies and saboteurs. Some were so determined to fight for what they believed that they masqueraded as men and took up arms.

Women were there during the two World Wars, and slowly, our military establishment that for decades had sought to limit women's roles brought them in to serve as WACS and WAVES, SPARS and WASPS and Women Marines. In our Nation's shipyards and factories, women helped to build democracy's arsenal. From the beaches of Normandy to the Pacific Islands, they endured bombs, torpedoes, disease, deprivation to support our fighting forces.

Despite this history of bravery and accomplishment, for very much too long women were treated as second class soldiers. They could give their lives for liberty, but they couldn't give orders to men. They could heal the wounded and hold the dying, but they could not dream of holding the highest ranks. They could take on the toughest assignments, but they could not take up arms. Still, they volunteered, fighting for freedom all around the world but also fighting for the right to serve to the fullest of their potential. And from conflict to conflict, from