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Exchange With Reporters in the Village of Xiahe, China
June 26, 1998

Q. Good morning, sir.

Human Rights

Q. Mr. President, the Chinese arrested a couple of dissidents, one apparently for intending to do an interview with an American journalist. I wonder, does such action make it more difficult for you to make the case to the American people that your policy of engagement is improving the lot of the Chinese people, is improving the human rights situation?

The President. No. I found the reports disturbing, and I've asked Ambassador Sasser to raise it with the Chinese authorities. And if true, they represent not China at its best and not China looking forward but looking backward.

One of the reasons that I came here was to discuss both privately and publicly issues of personal freedom. So I think it's very important for me to do that. But I think it makes the case—it makes it all the more important that we continue to work with the Chinese and to engage them.

Taiwan

Q. There have been some suggestions that you're going to sort of accept the Chinese insistence that during the press conference, that you're going to sort of declare the United States decision not supporting Taiwan independence, not supporting Taiwan's bid for the United Nations, and not supporting one China/one Taiwan but two Chinas. Is it going to happen?

The President. Well, first of all, you should come to the press conference to see what happens. But our position with regard to Taiwan is embodied in the three communiques and in the Taiwan Relations Act and in the facts of our relationship over the years. So I think it's obvious that there will be no change in our position one way or the other on this trip.

Susan McDougal's Release From Prison

Q. Mr. President, on a domestic matter, Mr. President, are you happy with the Susan McDougal—Mr. President, are you happy for Susan McDougal? Do you feel——

The President. Well, I'm concerned about her health, and I hope that she gets better now. I think it's a—I hope that the judge's decision puts her in a position where she can get over her pain and her difficulty.

Supreme Court Decision on the Line Item Veto

Q. Sir, the line item veto, sir, was struck down. What do you think about that?

The President. I'm disappointed. I think that having it has made it much easier to control spending, and I think that—and control special interest tax breaks. And so I hope very much that the Congress will not use this decision to move away from the path of fiscal discipline that we have followed the last 5 years that has gotten us to our present state of economic prosperity. I think it would be a mistake.

Thank you.

NOTE: The exchange began at 10:35 a.m. in the village. In his remarks, the President referred to Susan McDougal, Whitewater investigation figure, and U.S. District Judge George Howard, Jr.

Remarks in a Roundtable Discussion With Xiahe Area Residents
June 26, 1998

The President. Let me begin by thanking all of you for spending a little time with my wife and me today, and by thanking everyone in Xiahe for making us feel so welcome.

I'm sorry that I had to take a little time to answer some questions from our news media, but as you know, there's 12 hours time difference, and so, they're running out of time to file their stories, and thank you for your patience.

In America, there is a lot of respect for and interest in Chinese history and culture but also in the remarkable transformation which has occurred here over the last 25 years. For example,

many Americans are very interested in the fact that over half a million Chinese villages now have local elections, including this one.

They are interested in knowing more about the changes which have led to rising incomes and giving more people the ability to own their own homes and to make decisions about jobs. And they're interested in how small entrepreneurs start their own businesses and how villages like this have their own investments.

So we really have no set program today. I would like to just hear from each of you about what you are doing and how you personally have seen things change in China in the last few years.

Who would like to go first? Doctor, perhaps—the student?

Participant. Maybe it would be interesting in hearing about some of the changes that have taken place at the school.

The President. Yes, very much.

Participant. I think that education in China has achieved great progress during the past few years. And the economy and development of China has benefited education. I've been educated from elementary school through high school. It's very rich; there's been a lot of change. The life at university is very rich now, and we're learning a great deal now. It is very helpful for our future development.

Thank you.

The President. Thank you.

Participant. My name is Yang; I'm from the Xiahe village. I work in the local village clinic, and this is the lowest level clinic in China. We work according to the regulations from the Government, and we try to—one of our jobs is to prevent the common diseases in the countryside and report our work to the higher level Government. Another responsibility of the lower level clinic is to treat common diseases in the countryside. That's all for now.

Hillary Clinton. Doctor, have you noticed improvements in the health of the people here in the countryside during your time as a doctor?

Participant. There has been great improvement in the health quality in the countryside people, especially now we have more money and they do less physical work.

Participant. My name is Yao Linua, and I am the manager of the Terra Cotta Warrior. I own a little factory. I am the manager there, and I also manage old people's home. I am just a country woman, but ever since the reform, I now rent a factory and an old people home, and basically, the factory also supports the old people home.

Now the Chinese have become rich, but we shouldn't forget about old people. In the 20th century we have in China more older people. We really should do more for them, and that's my goal in my life. That's what I want to do.

Mrs. Clinton. May I ask, how did you start your factory? Where did you get the funds to start the factory and get the equipment and materials that you needed?

Participant. I used my own money and got some loan from Government. And actually, several of us work together, so I also collect some funds from my partners.

The President. The older people who stay in your home, how do they get the funds to pay to be in the home?

Participant. We get our funds—some of them get money from the Government, and the factory would pay for their expenses for their living in the old people home.

The President. And what is the average age of the people in the home?

Participant. Sixty-five years old is the average age. The oldest one is 89 years old.

The President. This is going to be a big issue in the future for every country. In our country, the fastest growing group of Americans are people over 85. There are still not many of them, but they're growing very fast. And every society will have to figure out an honorable way to take care of such people. So I appreciate the work you're doing.

Participant. My name is Yang Dongyi, and I am from Xiahe village. I grew up in this village. First I was a farmer, and now I rent a little company. Ever since the liberation in 1949, there are three big changes I experienced myself in this village. The first change I experienced was the life in the village after the liberation was better than before. Our life since 1982, the reform began, our life has improved compared to before the liberation. In 1992, our life experienced another improvement. Before 1989, the average income in the village was about—a little bit more than 100 yuan, and then in 1982, the average income in the village was more than 1,000 yuan. And now the average income in the village is over 3,000 yuan.

Before 1982, my whole family would only get about 100 yuan income per year. Now I and my wife and one daughter, the three of us,

we have more than 30,000 yuan income per year. I want to tell the President that the changes in my village and the change in my own family is also the change in the country.

My personal change, compared to some people in China, is still relatively small, and this place and Xi'an, compared to the coastal cities in China, is still a little backwards. But of course, compared to the U.S., this village is a lot more—even more backward, but we would be willing to work very hard.

The President. Let me say, first of all, that it's very impressive how much economic progress has been made in such a short time.

I wonder, what specific change do you think has been most important in helping you and your family to earn so much more money through your hard work?

Participant. The most important thing is we have a good policy in our country now. In the past, no matter what your abilities are, you are told to do what you are supposed to do. But after the reform, everyone can have the space to show their own talent and to work very hard.

The reason now the production improved so much is everybody can do what they're good at. Some people begin to do business; some people stay in the farmland; and some people begin to have their own company. They're all doing what they're good at. They are also paying more attention to learning the new technology, so their ability to work has greatly improved.

Another thing is they also learn from the foreign countries now. They borrow and they learn the advanced technology from the foreign country and use on their own production. And that's the main reason where they are now today.

The President. Thank you.

Participant. I am a primary school teacher. I feel that the whole society now respects a teacher a lot more. All the children who are school age now go to enroll in the primary school, and they have 9 years of Government-sponsored education. The issues associated with young kids have attracted a lot of attention from all aspects of the society. That's it.

The President. What percentage of the teachers are women and what percentage are men?

Participant. In primary school, female teachers are more. They're about 70 percent. I feel that it might be females are more suitable for this job.

The President. And after the children complete 9 years of school, how is it determined who goes on to more school? Like this young woman here is a university student; how is it determined who gets to go beyond the first 9 years?

Participant. In China, for the college entrance—there is a college entrance exam, so everybody has to pass the exam to go to the college. And others who didn't pass, then they might go to technical school to learn some special technique for their use.

Participant. My name is Xie Liming. I have benefited the most ever since—my kind of people benefit the most ever since the reform. I served in the Air Force for 15 years and worked another 8 years in the Government. In 1992, I opened a small restaurant with 80 seats. Now I have expanded my restaurant to 500 seats.

My restaurant is among the best in Xi'an and very influential. I really wish to invite both of you to go to my restaurant and enjoy my food. If you don't have the chance this time, you are still welcome after you finish your duty as President to come back. [*Laughter*]

The President. Thank you.

Participant. And I also want to ask what is your favorite Chinese dish? [*Laughter*]

The President. Well, now I understand how you fill a restaurant with 500 seats every night. [*Laughter*]

Mrs. Clinton. I would wonder whether any of you might have any questions for us, because one of the reasons that my husband made this trip is so that the Chinese people and the American people can learn more about each other and about our lives.

Participant. I want to ask the President why do you want to hold this roundtable discussion with ordinary Chinese people?

The President. For two reasons. First of all, I think it's important that people who are in positions like mine, in the United States and in China, in every country, understand how people live at what we call the grassroots level, and understand how the policies we make affect the lives that people live, because that's actually the purpose of leadership, to try to make a positive difference in the lives of ordinary citizens.

And secondly, because the American people are very interested in learning more about Chinese people as the result of my trip. So, when we do this, there will be pictures and reports of this meeting in America so people just like you in America will have a feeling for what

it's like to own a restaurant or teach a school or be a businessperson or be a student or a doctor or run a home for older people. They will feel these things in a different way because of this event we're doing here.

Participant. I believe a President who is looking to the facts of people's life must be a President who is supported by his people.

The President. Thank you.

Mrs. Clinton. Could I ask the student, what are you studying at the university?

Participant. I am now taking the basic college courses, but I want to major in electronics.

The President. And what do you want to do when you finish your degree?

Participant. I want to further my study after graduating from college, and then I want to have my own fields of interest in working.

The President. Do you believe that in China today young women have the same opportunities that young men do to do whatever they want with their lives?

Participant. I believe the answer is yes, even though they might have different choices, but the final answer is yes.

The President. We have to stop in a moment, but I'd like to ask the doctor one more question. What do you believe the biggest challenge is for improving the health care of the Chinese people now at the village level? What is the largest remaining challenge that would—any change that could be made that would improve health much more?

Participant. First of all, from my past experience, I believe the biggest challenge is to improve the environmental situation. Prevention is also very important.

The President. This is a very important point which has been made—important for China and important for the United States. When a country grows economically, you use more energy and you have more activity, and it leads to strains on the environment, especially air pollution, which can really affect people's health. So one of China's big challenges, and a continuing challenge for America, is to grow the economy but to clean up the environment at the same time. And we can do both, but we have to work at it, and we should work at it together.

Participant. I want to make one comment. All the businesspeople in Xi'an really want to improve the trade between the U.S. and China, and they would like to see that China become America's first biggest business partner. And I would, for myself, want to make more U.S. dollars. [*Laughter*]

The President. Well, I'll work on that, and I will also work on accepting your invitation to come to your restaurant when I'm not in office anymore. This is very nice, you know. Most people in my position wonder if anyone will want us to eat with them when we're not in office anymore. [*Laughter*]

Thank you all very much. Thank you. [*Applause*] Good luck to you. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:40 a.m. in a courtyard in the village.

Remarks to the People of Xiahe
June 26, 1998

Nin men hao, Xiahe.

Thank you, Yunlong, for your welcome. I thank all of the students for the greeting and for the wonderful music, and I thank all the rest of you for making all of us in the American delegation feel so welcome here.

My wife and I are delighted to be joined by our daughter, my mother-in-law, and Secretary Albright, Secretary Daley, Ambassador and Mrs. Sasser, and six Members of the United States Congress, Senator Rockefeller, Senator Baucus, Senator Akaka, and Representatives Dingell and Hamilton and Markey, along with a number of people who work with me in the White House. We are all very honored to be here. [*Applause*] Thank you.

I understand that soon, like nearly half a million other villages across China, you will be voting to choose your local leaders. I know what it is like to run for office. I have won elections, and I have also lost, too. I like winning better than losing, but whenever there is an election and the people decide, everyone wins.