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Statement on Secretary of Labor Alexis M. Herman
May 11, 1998

Secretary Herman has served me and this administration with distinction. She is a person of integrity, a dedicated public servant, and an asset to working families all over America. I know her well, and I am confident she will not be distracted from the important work she is doing. It is unfortunate that, despite no findings of wrongdoing by the Secretary, the Independent Counsel Act compels the Attorney General to recommend the appointment of an independent counsel in these circumstances. I look forward to the speedy resolution of this investigation. I am confident that in the end, investigators will also conclude that Ms. Herman did nothing wrong.

Letter to Congressional Leaders on Food Safety Legislation
May 11, 1998

Dear Mr. Speaker: (Dear Mr. Leader:)

The report to be released today by the General Accounting Office (GAO) calls on Congress to give the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) the authority to ensure that food eligible for import to the United States is produced under food safety systems that will provide the same level of protection as the safety systems in place in the United States. This report is further confirmation of the need for Congress to pass the Safety of Imported Food Act, which I called for in October 1997, which Senators Mikulski and Kennedy, and Representatives Eshoo and Pallone have introduced.

This important legislation will do what the GAO says is necessary: it will ensure that the FDA denies the entry of imports of fruits, vegetables, or other food from a foreign country or facility that does not meet U.S. food safety requirements or otherwise achieve the level of protection required in the United States. It will give FDA the authority it urgently needs, comparable to the Department of Agriculture's existing authority to prevent the importation of unsafe meat and poultry, to protect the safety of the food Americans eat. I have taken several further steps to begin implementing standards to ensure the safety of imported food. My FY '99 budget committed approximately $25 million to enabling the FDA to dramatically expand its international food inspection force in order to implement the pending legislation. In March of this year, I released a report on how the Secretary of Health and Human Services, in partnership with the Secretary of Agriculture, and in cooperation with the agricultural community, will develop guidance on good agricultural and manufacturing practices that will apply to both domestic and foreign producers.

There is no more important task our government faces than ensuring the safety of the American food supply. That is why last year Vice President Gore and I announced my comprehensive new initiative, "Food Safety from Farm to Table"—which detailed a comprehensive program including surveillance, outbreak response, education and research. The Safety of Imported Food Act is another vital step in protecting the safety of all the food Americans eat, and I urge you to pass it promptly.

Sincerely,

WILLIAM J. CLINTON

NOTE: Identical letters were sent to Newt Gingrich, Speaker of the House of Representatives; Trent Lott, Senate majority leader; Thomas A. Daschle, Senate minority leader; Richard K. Armey, House majority leader; and Richard A. Gephardt, House minority leader. An original was not available for verification of the content of this letter.