

June 30 / Administration of William J. Clinton, 1999

Message to the Congress on the Generalized System of Preferences June 30, 1999

To the Congress of the United States:

The Generalized System of Preferences (GSP) offers duty-free treatment to specified products that are imported from designated beneficiary developing countries. The GSP is authorized by title V of the Trade Act of 1974, as amended.

I have determined, based on a consideration of the eligibility criteria in title V, that Gabon and Mongolia should be added to the list of beneficiary developing countries under the GSP.

I have also determined that the suspension of preferential treatment for Mauritania as a beneficiary developing country under the GSP, as reported in my letters to the Speaker of the House and President of the Senate of June 25, 1993, should be ended. I had determined to suspend Mauritania from the GSP because Mauritania had not taken or was not taking steps to afford internationally recognized worker

rights. I have determined that circumstances in Mauritania have changed and that, based on a consideration of the eligibility criteria in title V, preferential treatment under the GSP for Mauritania as a least-developed beneficiary developing country should be restored.

This message is submitted in accordance with the requirements of title V of the Trade Act of 1974.

WILLIAM J. CLINTON

The White House,
June 30, 1999.

NOTE: An original was not available for verification of the content of this message. The related proclamation of June 30 is listed in Appendix D at the end of this volume.

Remarks at a Democratic National Committee Dinner in Chicago June 30, 1999

Thank you very much. First, let me thank the leaders of the Democratic National Committee who are here, Joe Andrew and Beth Dozoretz, and say to our former chairman and my 1992 campaign manager, David Wilhelm, and Deegee, I'm glad to see you and all my other friends and many of you who were formerly associated with our administration.

I want to thank Lew and Susan and Lou and Ruth Weisbach and Fred Eychaner for their work on this dinner tonight. This has been kind of an emotional day for me. I—Bruce and I and Hillary, we did drag in here one night about 7 years ago, and you know, I thought—I was totally out of gas when I got here, and I had virtually forgotten why I was even thinking of running for President; I just wanted to go to bed. And then I came in here, and I got all pumped up. I saw all this art that I didn't know anything about, and it certainly was interesting. [Laughter] And I sort of began to get educated. And then I went into the library and went nuts over the books, and I certainly approved of their

reading tastes. And then we got to talking about health care and first one thing and then another, and before you know it, we were sort of off and going and forming a friendship that has stood the test of 7 years' time. And I'm very grateful that you had us back tonight, and I thank you.

I want to thank all of the rest of you for being here, and I want to thank Chicago for being so wonderful to Hillary and to me and to Al and Tipper Gore, for giving us—for me, I basically won the Democratic nomination on Saint Patrick's Day in 1992. And I must say, I learned a lot from my friend Al Gore, who did well on Super Tuesday and then had difficulty going after that in 1998, so I later told him when I asked him to join the ticket, I said, "Now, don't ever forget what I learned from your campaign." I spent enormous amounts of time in Illinois and Michigan. Of course, it helped that roughly 30 percent of the primary voters in both States were born in Arkansas and couldn't make a living there

and had to come up here. [Laughter] That was of some modest benefit to me at the time. But I'm very grateful for that and grateful for the way that this city and this State have stayed with us through thick and thin in the life of this administration.

I appreciate something Joe Andrew said—apart from the fact that the party's out of debt; that's good news. I'm here tonight, in a way, because I can't run for reelection. But I believe in what I've spent my life doing, what Hillary and I have spent our lives doing, what Al Gore and I have spent 7 years working to do, and I believe in what still needs to be done.

I believe that politics is a good thing for America, not a bad thing. It is what makes democracy work. And it becomes public service when it is dominated by good values, good ideas, and the ability to turn those ideas into action. I enjoy a good contest if it is a contest of ideas. And I don't mind receiving the verdict of the electorate as long as I'm absolutely sure that everyone who opposes us actually know precisely what they're doing. And I think that is something that we all ought to have in mind as we approach this election season.

I say—I think I see Senator Carol Moseley-Braun smiling, and I thank her for her loyal support and leadership for her time in the Senate, the first 6 years of my administration. I'm glad to see John Schmidt here tonight. I thank him for his service in the administration and for still caring enough to be here after having run for office, which is, by any standard, an exhausting enterprise. And I thank Neil Hartigan and the whole Hartigan family for being here and always being there for me. And Billy Singer—I see all these people who do not presently hold elective office but have participated in this process.

I'm here for the same reason you are. And if the Democrats want me 10 years from now, I'll be there then, because I knew when I got into this that it was a temporary job. [Laughter] I never had any illusions that I could be President for life, although I confess that I love the job, even on the worst days. [Laughter] But what I want you to focus on just for a minute with me tonight is that I am grateful that time and circumstance and the wonderful help of my friends and a lot of gifts from the good Lord and my family gave me the opportunity to serve as President at this time of profound change in our country. And if I have contributed in

some way to what has happened that is good for America, I am grateful for that as well.

But I have to tell you something. I think that good things happen when good people establish good teams, and they have a good vision, they have a good strategy, they have good ideas, and they're good at turning their ideas into reality. And I used to tell our people all the time in the darkest days, in the early days when we were in Washington, don't worry about what they're saying about you today; worry about what it will look like 3 or 4 years from now. We need—the test of what we're doing is whether it improves the lives of the American people, whether it makes us a more secure, more humane country with a better future for all of our people.

And that's why I hope you're here, because we had certain ideas that our party held to that basically our friends in the other party didn't agree with. And one of the reasons I believe, I will always believe, that there was so much intense effort made in Washington to try to sort of go after not just me but many of us, personally, and try to divert the attention of the American people, was they were afraid they couldn't compete with our ideas, and they knew they were working. And the better the country did, sometimes their more partisan members—the better we did, the madder they got, and the better the American people did, the madder they got.

So let's step back from all that now, because I won't be a candidate in 2000. What were the ideas that were—that drove us, and what were the consequences? The first thing we decided is that the Democratic Party had to become the party of fiscal responsibility again. We could no longer participate in a kind of unspoken deal with the Republicans where we would both allow these intolerable deficits to go on because we wanted to spend money and they didn't want to raise any money. And they'd let us spend money and we'd let them avoid raising it, and the deficit would get bigger and bigger and bigger, and we were driving the country into the ditch. We quadrupled the debt in 12 years. And the Democrats in Congress, by the way, to their everlasting credit, tried to stop it. They actually spent less money than the Republicans asked them to, in the White House.

And we said, we're going to bring the deficit down; we're going to cut spending, but we're

actually going to increase our investment in education and in research, environmental protection, and things that are fundamental to our future. And most people didn't think we could do it.

Well, 6 years later, we've gone from a \$290 billion deficit to, in 1999, a \$99 billion surplus, \$142 billion next year. And we have cut the Government to its smallest size since Kennedy was President. But we have almost doubled investment in education and training for our children.

It was an idea, and it worked. And we've got the strongest economy in a generation, maybe ever, because the idea was right. And we had a lot of Members of Congress actually lay down their seats in the '94 elections because we didn't have a vote to spare when our party took the lead on that kind of economic policy.

Then we had an idea about crime, that the Democrats were for law and order. We wanted to save streets; we wanted to save schools. And we knew from what was already beginning to work in a lot of our cities that what we needed was more police on the street and more guns off the street and out of the hands of kids and criminals. And we knew we needed to give our children something to say yes to, not just something to say no to.

And so we fought for the Brady bill, and we fought for the assault weapons ban, and we fought for 100,000 police on the street. And the leaders of the other party said that it would have no effect on the crime rate, that nothing good would happen, that we would never see these police on the street, that no guns would be kept out of the hands of criminals because criminals didn't buy guns in gun stores anyway. I heard all that. And one of the reasons that our friends in the other party are in the majority today in the House is that they beat somewhere between 12 and 15 of our House Members, the NRA did, in 1994, scaring the living day-lights out of rural people, saying we were going to take their guns away.

Well, 6 years later, we've got the lowest crime rate in 25 years; we finished putting 100,000 police out there, under budget and ahead of schedule; 400,000 gun sales have been canceled to criminals, felons, fugitives, and stalkers. And this is a safer, better, stronger country. We were right about that. And it's an important issue going forward, just like the management of the economy is.

I'll give you just two other examples—I could give you 10—where we had different ideas. We believed we could grow the economy and not just maintain but improve the environment. And a lot of people don't believe that to this day. But compared to 6 years ago, the air is cleaner; the water is cleaner; the drinking water is safer; the food supply is purer. We have immunized 90 percent of our kids against serious childhood diseases for the first time in the history of the country and set aside more land in perpetuity than any administration except those of Franklin and Theodore Roosevelt.

And the economy is stronger. We did not hurt the economy; we helped the American economy by doing what was right by the environment. And we had to fight the other party to do that. There was an honest disagreement. That is relevant for us going forward.

In the area of education, we fought for tax cuts that would, in effect, open the doors of college of all Americans: \$1,500 tax credit for the first 2 years of college, other tax credits for other years. We fought for better student loans and more work-study positions. We fought to hook up all the classrooms in this country to the Internet.

And now we're fighting to have a national ratification of what you're doing here in Chicago, with no social promotion but not blaming the children for the failures of the system, and instead giving them all access to summer school and after-school programs. I want to this year say we are only going to give Federal aid to education to States and districts that end social promotion but don't dub the children failures, and give them the after-school or summer school programs and the support they need to succeed.

I'll just give you one last idea. We had an idea that we could best solve our social problems in this country, generally, not by asking the Government to do it and not by leaving the Government out of it but by forming new partnerships with the private sector and with individual citizens. So we started AmeriCorps, the national service program. We said, we'll give young people some money to go to college if they'll give a year or two of their lives to serving in their communities.

I believed the young people, the so-called Generation X-ers, were not selfish people, as

they were caricatured. I thought they were passionately committed to the future of this country. And in 4½ years, we have had 100,000-plus volunteers for AmeriCorps; it took the Peace Corps 20 years to get that many. And the man who started it, Eli Segal, is here with us tonight, and I thank him for that.

Then I gave Eli another job. I said, we're going to reform welfare, and we're going to say, "If you're able-bodied, you've got to go to work," but we don't want to hurt children. So we're going to say, "If you go to work, we will give you child care; we will give you medical care; we will give your kids nutrition; but you've got to go to work." And then I realized that not all these people would be able to go to work, because they had no real experience. No one had ever said, "Here's how you interview for a job; here's how you show up; here's how you relate to people at work." We had some serious problems there.

So I asked Eli if he would help me go out and challenge the business community of this country to actually take personal responsibility for hiring people off welfare. We started with 5 companies; then we had 100; then we had 1,000. In 3 years, he has gone from 5 companies to 12,000 businesses, hiring half a million people off welfare. And here's a little shameless plug. We're coming to celebrate this in Chicago on August 3d, and we need more help.

So what's the point of all this? The point of all this is, this country is doing well, but we all know there are still challenges out there. It seems to me that the Democratic Party is entitled to the benefit of the doubt of the American people. When we go to them in the Congress races, when we go to them in the Presidential race, we need to make it clear that there is a connection between the values and the ideas and the actions we have taken and the consequences we see in every community in this country.

And that is why we need your contributions and why we need your voice. This is not an accident. We cannot see this coming election as just sort of a—*independent of the reality of the last 6 years.* But our party also has a solemn responsibility between now and then in Washington to keep trying to get things done for the American people. We shouldn't be caught playing politics, waiting for the next election. Our belief is that we get paid by the American people every week, not just in the seasons

where there is no politics—every week. They pay us to show up and produce.

That's why you heard me say yesterday, "We've got the new surplus; all right, here's my plan for Medicare. We'll make it stable until 2027; we'll provide preventive services for free, screenings for everything from osteoporosis to cancer screenings and all kinds of other preventive services; we will employ modern means of competition, but we will have adequate funding to keep the quality up; and we will provide a prescription drug benefit for the first time in history to our seniors." I think that's a big idea.

I also think that it is a big idea to take this surplus and say to our friends in the Republican Party, "Can you have a tax cut? Of course you can. But first things first. First, let's save Medicare and save Social Security and pay the debt of the country off by 2015 so that our children and our children's children will have a stronger economy and a stronger society. Then there will be money left over; we can argue about what to do with it, and you'll have some that you can give in a tax cut. But let us save Social Security and Medicare and deal with the baby boom generation and pay the debt of the country off."

Now, these are ideas. These things have consequences. So when people ask you, "Why did you come tonight?" I hope you say, "Well, you know, Chicago took Bill Clinton to the race a long time ago." Or, "He made a pretty good talk." I hope you say that. But I hope you'll be able to tell people, "Look, I am a Democrat for the 21st century. Here are my ideas. Here is why I write checks to do this. This is what I believe in. And, oh, by the way, it works. It makes a difference. My children will have a better future."

And I could go through issue after issue after issue. But if you just look at—you just look at the issue of Social Security, Medicare, and paying off the debt. Why should a liberal Democrat be for putting America out of debt? Here's why: because we live in a global economy. And if we have no public debt, then the Government will not be competing not only with you but with every poor, blue-collar worker of all races in this country for money for a home mortgage, for a car payment, for a credit card payment, for a college loan, for a business loan. And if we don't have any public debt, interest rates will be lower in America, which means there

will be more investment, more jobs, higher wages, and less debt for ordinary people.

It means, furthermore, that the next time we have a global financial crisis like we had in Asia 2 years ago, the United States will be less vulnerable, and our friends in the developing countries will be able to get more money at a lower cost because we won't be taking any away from them. And that's good, because as they get richer, they can buy more of our stuff. So I'm making a good Republican argument for my position here.

This is a big deal. You need to go tell—this is a huge idea. Do you know when the last time the country was out of debt? 1835. [Laughter] This is a big idea. And we can do it in a way that saves Social Security and Medicare. But liberals, as well as conservatives, should be for it, for the reasons I said—big idea—matters. It matters.

It matters whether we close this gun show loophole. The same crowd that said nobody, no crooks, bought guns at gun stores—and now they know they were wrong, because we've got 400,000 sales were canceled in 5 years—now they say that we shouldn't do background checks where they admit the crooks do buy their guns, not just gun shows but also urban flea markets. And we're for it, and the leaders of the other party are against it.

This is an important issue; this is a big idea. Kids' lives are at stake—not just in scenes of carnage, like what happened at Littleton, but every day of the world, 13 kids die from gun violence—nameless, faceless kids you don't know because they die one and two at a time. A lot of them are poor kids in inner cities, that don't have any votes, any influence, nobody to speak up for them if we don't do it.

It matters. This is a big idea. This is not some trivial thing, that, oh, these parties are having a little dispute. This matters. And I believe we're right. And I think all the evidence is that they're wrong. And I could go through the environment and health care and the Patients' Bill of Rights and every other issue, and make the same case.

You go home tonight, and you just think about the three things I talked about. Think about the economy; think about Social Security and Medicare; think about education policy, what I said—what a difference it's made to Chicago that you've finally got your schools getting juiced up again because somebody believes that

all kids can learn, and somebody believes that kids should be held to high standards, and there are consequences, and you don't just get patted on the back whether you know what you're supposed to know or not—but we don't point the finger at kids and call them a failure when the system is failing them.

You just think about this stuff. It matters what you do in life. Politics is no different than your family life, no different than your business life, no different than your school life. This matters. And on the great ideas of the age, we have been right in preparing America for the 21st century. It's not Bill Clinton being President. It is, we have a party that is best for all the American people, that has become a party of permanent change, of restless, constructive, positive change.

And this is a better country because of that, because people like you are thinking about tomorrow. You know, nearly everybody here would be better off, in the next 6 months, in the next year and a half, going to a Republican fundraiser. I mean, they'll give you a bigger tax cut than we will. [Laughter] They will. You'd be better off in the next year and a half going to a Republican fundraiser. It wouldn't be—the house wouldn't be as interesting as this. [Laughter]

You know, the people that were good enough to serve us dinner tonight, they're the ones that we're going to help immediately. We're trying to make sure their parents can afford to have prescription drugs so they don't have to bankrupt their kids and their ability to raise their grandkids. We think we ought to raise the minimum wage. We think their kids ought to be able to go to college.

But most of you who paid to get here tonight would be better off in the short run if you were over with the Republicans. But you aren't because you know that in the long run and in the not-so-very-long run, people who think about what's best for all Americans and how we reach across the lines that divide us and how we think about our children's future—that is what is best for us.

If I told you—suppose you'd all been here with Lew and Susan, back in 1991, and I'd said, "Now here, folks, I want you to vote for me for President." Just keep in mind, 1991, we're in this big old creaking recession, and everybody is feeling bad, and there's about to be a riot out in Los Angeles in a few months.

And I said, "Now, I want you to vote for me, and in 7 years you'll have nearly 19 million jobs and the longest peacetime expansion in history and a \$100 billion surplus and trillions expected in the surplus over the next 15 years. And we'll be able to solve the problems the baby boomers present to Social Security and Medicare. And along the way, we'll have a 25-year-low in crime, and we'll cut the welfare rolls in half. And we will be a leading force for peace, from Bosnia to Kosovo to the Middle East to Northern Ireland. And we will have extra money to make sure we're working hard to be prepared for the security problems of the future. But we will double our investment in education, clean up the environment, and we'll be moving this country forward."

If I'd told you all that, you'd have said, "There's another lying politician, if I ever heard one." [*Laughter*] Wouldn't you? You would have said, "That kid needs to go home to Arkansas. He's, you know, he's not living in the real world." We did better than I thought we could. Why? Because we didn't do it alone. All we did was to unleash the incredible potential of the American people and give everybody a chance.

So I say to you, I thank you for being here. I thank you for what you've done for me, for Hillary, for Al and Tipper. I thank you for what you will do. But don't kid yourself; part of the

reason that we've done as well as we have is that people like you, with good values and good common sense, with an ability to see the future, had the right ideas. And you hired us, and we turned them into action. And when you go home tonight and you go about your business tomorrow, and people ask you why you came and why you're a Democrat, you tell them, "Because we've got good ideas, and they've changed America for the better, and here's what we want to do tomorrow and next year and in the new century."

Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 8:07 p.m. at a private residence. In his remarks, he referred to Joseph J. Andrew, national chair, Beth Dozoretz, national finance chair, Democratic National Committee (DNC); former DNC chair David Wilhelm and his wife, Deegee; dinner hosts Lewis and Susan Manilow; Lou Weisbach, chief executive officer, HA-LO Industries, Inc., and his wife, Ruth; Fred Eychaner, president, Newsweb Corp.; Bruce Lindsey, Deputy Counsel to the President; former Senator Carol Moseley-Braun; John R. Schmidt, former U.S. Associate Attorney General; Neil Hartigan, former State attorney general; and attorney William S. Singer, member, Presidential Advisory Commission on Holocaust Assets in the United States.