will ensure that our children inherit a living, breathing Earth, our most important obligation of all.

Thanks for listening.

Remarks at the White House Correspondents’ Association Dinner
May 1, 1999

Thank you very much, Stewart, Susan, Brian. You all were pretty tough on the Times for boycotting this dinner tonight. I understand they wanted to protest the increasingly circus-like atmosphere. Why are they doing it? I’m the guy who shows up every year and gets shot out of the cannon. [Laughter]

You really made me feel like I’m on the downhill slide—Brian spent all this time dumping on the Vice President. [Laughter] You know, you were really rough on him. That riff was pretty funny. I mean, you gave him credit for everything. I think since you pointed out that he went to the Kentucky Derby today, I should say, he claims no credit for siring the winner. [Laughter]

I know that this dinner has gotten out of hand in recent years, but I see a lot of familiar faces out here. And I want you to know that I really appreciate all these Hollywood celebrities inviting the work-a-day Washington press to join them tonight. [Laughter]

Now, you know I, on occasion, have my differences with the New York Times. But they’ve taken a principled stand. [Laughter] And I support them. In fact, I feel so strongly about it that I challenge the Washington Times and the Weekly Standard to follow their example next year—[laughter]—and the year after that, and so on. [Laughter]

I know there was some talk about my not coming this year, and I admit, the thought did cross my mind. [Laughter] But then I heard if I didn’t attend, Aretha might not attend, and that would break Brian’s heart, because we couldn’t bear the thought of having Scott Pelley sing “R-E-S-P-E-C-T.” [Laughter]

I hope you’ll all enjoy Aretha, but you know—and I love her, and I will certainly enjoy it. And I want to see you later—I like to come here because there are those other parties later on. Now, last year Sid Blumenthal swore he could get me into the Vanity Fair party. [Laughter] What a difference a year makes. [Laughter] This year I have to take him. [Laughter]

I love seeing all the White House correspondents in this room tonight. For me, it’s a rare treat to see you outside the White House gates—and notwithstanding what Susan said, get used to it. [Laughter] You know that the National Park Service is planning this long-range plan to relocate the White House Briefing Room to a larger facility, outside the West Wing—which I think is too bad. I mean, Helen was just starting to get comfortable. [Laughter] And she’s still mad about the last time the White House Briefing Room was moved—that’s when the Capital moved to Washington from Philadelphia. [Laughter]

But look, this is going to be hard on us, too. It’s going to be really hard on the White House if they move the Briefing Room because then the leakers will have to start dialing 10–10–321. [Laughter]

Speaking of big moves, I saw yet another journalist commenting today that if Hillary runs for the Senate, she’ll have to deal with the New York press, and that will be hard, because they’re even meaner than you are. I want you to know something: We are not scared of them; we’re scared of the co-op boards. [Laughter] Have you ever seen one of those applications? I’ve been filling one out—look, here’s my answer to some of the questions. You tell me what kind of chance we’ve got.

Lama, Steven Spielberg. [Laughter] Outstanding
debs? Williams & Connolly—[laughter]—and
the House Democrats. [Laughter]

I know these are really busy times for all
of you in the press corps. I appreciate your
hard work. But what I really appreciate is all
the commentary. I hope the NATO commanders
videotaped this morning’s briefing by retired
General Howard Fineman. [Laughter] I wonder
how in the world the Allies ever managed to
pull off D-day without “Talk Back Live.”

[Laughter]

Press coverage has really changed a lot over
the years. You know, during the Hundred Years
War, the European press corps didn’t even start
second-guessing until 1370. [Laughter]

Now, just imagine if today’s press corps cov-
ered yesterday’s wars. Here are a few headlines.
Paul Revere’s warning: “Too Little Too Late.”
[Laughter] Lincoln speaks at Gettysburg: “Fails
To Articulate Exit Strategy.” Teddy Roosevelt
leads charge up San Juan Hill: “GOP Divided.”
[Laughter] McArthur to Philippines: “I Shall Re-
turn—Refuses To Set Specific Timetable.”
[Laughter]

This is the last White House correspondents’
dinner of the millennium. Frankly, I’m surprised
you see any news value in all this millennium
stuff. I mean, after all, we’ve known about it
for 1,000 years now. [Laughter] I think history
will record that the world spent the last days of
this millennium compiling lists. You may have
seen a list compiled by the Newseum of the
top 100 news stories of the century, everything
from putting a man on the Moon to the polio
vaccine, ranked in order of importance.

I don’t mind telling you, I made the
Newseum list—something about the events of
last year, number 53–53! I mean, what does
a guy have to do to make the top 50 around
here? [Laughter] I came in six places after the
invention of plastic, for crying out loud. [Laug-
ther] And I don’t recall a year of 24-hour-a-day
saturation coverage on the miracle of plastic.
[Laughter] And I guess the strongest economy
in a century was number 101.

Ladies and gentlemen, I think it’s really good
for us to step away from the work we do for
an evening and laugh a little. I thought Brian
was really funny, and I like laughing at some-
body else for a change. [Laughter] But I hope
you’ll forgive me if I sort of stop it now and
say a few serious words, for these are not usual
times. While we’ve got a lot to be grateful for,
in rising prosperity, and falling unemployment,
poverty, welfare, and crime, you all know we
have real challenges.

All Americans are still hurting for the families
of Littleton and seeking ways that each of us
can help to give our children less violent, more
wholesome childhoods. And our thoughts are
in Kosovo, where America and our allies are
engaged in a difficult struggle for freedom and
human rights and against the destruction of
other human beings because of their ethnic and
racial heritage.

The roots of violence at home and ethnic
cleansing and racial hatred abroad are of great
complexity and difficulty. But we know that our
country is strong enough and good enough to
meet these challenges.

There was a reference to this before, but I
want to say a special word about the three serv-
icemen and their families. Our prayers have
been with them for the past month, and there
are indications that they may soon be released
to Reverend Jackson and his interfaith group.
We certainly hope that this will occur.

But let us remember tonight also what is at
stake for more than a million other people who
have been involved in Kosovo—a very great
deal. What is at stake there, what was at stake
in Bosnia, and what will doubtless be at stake
elsewhere in the world in the years ahead is
whether Mr. Milosevic’s vision of ethnic cleans-
ing, with its uprooting, its raping, its killing,
its destroying every record and remnant of cul-
ture and history—or our democratic vision of
ethnic tolerance and political pluralism—will
affirm our common humanity—whether his vi-
sion or ours will define the beginning of the
21st century. On this there can be no com-
promise. And therefore, our determination must
be unwavering.

I thank you, the White House correspondents,
for making the donation to help the refugees
of Kosovo. That is a welcome and valued con-
tribution. So are the reports you and your col-
leagues file every day, often at great personal
risk for those in the region.

As our prayers are with our military personnel
and our allies tonight, they’re with the
Kosovars—indeed, with all innocent people who
are caught up in this grievous affair. I again
ask Mr. Milosevic to let the Kosovars come
home, with the Serb forces out, and an inter-
national force in to protect all the people, in-
cluding the Serb minority who live in Kosovo.
May 1 / Administration of William J. Clinton, 1999

And I ask the American people to remember what it is we are fighting for: a world in which the dignity of humanity counts for more than the differences of humanity. For human differences, when celebrated but contained, can make life a lot more interesting, but when unleashed as weapons of war, soon make it unbearable.

The 20th century has seen altogether too much of this. If we and our allies, indeed, if you and I as citizens, and each in our official capacities, all do our job, the world of our children will be better. It will be not only more prosperous but more peaceful, not only more diverse but more unified, not only more human but more humane. Let that be our prayer tonight and our determination.

Thank you very much, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at approximately 10:20 p.m. in the International Ballroom at the Washington Hilton. In his remarks, he referred to White House Correspondents’ Association outgoing president Stewart Powell, Hearst Newspapers, and incoming president Susan Page, USA Today; dinner emcee Brian Williams, NBC News; Scott Pelley, CBS News; entertainer Aretha Franklin; Helen Thomas, United Press International; President Nelson Mandela of South Africa; movie director and producer Steven Spielberg; Staff Sgt. Andrew A. Ramirez, USA, Staff Sgt. Christopher J. Stone, USA, and Specialist Steven M. Gonzales, USA, infantrymen in custody in Serbia; civil rights leader Jesse Jackson; and President Slobodan Milosevic of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro).

Statement on the Release of American Infantrymen Held Prisoner by Serbian Authorities
May 2, 1999

I am pleased that our three American servicemen who have been held as prisoners by Serbian authorities have today been released and that they are now safely out of Serbia. I am grateful to Reverend Jackson and his delegation for helping to secure their freedom. All of America is anticipating their safe return.

As we welcome our soldiers home, our thoughts also turn to the over one million Kosovars who are unable to go home because of the policies of the regime in Belgrade. Today we reaffirm our resolve to persevere until they, too, can return with security and self-government.

NOTE: In this statement, the President referred to civil rights leader Jesse Jackson, whose personal appeal won the release of Staff Sgt. Andrew A. Ramirez, USA, Staff Sgt. Christopher J. Stone, USA, and Specialist Steven M. Gonzales, USA.

Remarks at the Welcoming Ceremony for Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi of Japan
May 3, 1999

Prime Minister Obuchi, Mrs. Obuchi, members of the Japanese delegation, my fellow Americans. Mr. Prime Minister, we welcome you to America and to the White House, and to greet you in the spring when the cherry blossoms every year remind us of the generosity and friendship of the Japanese people.

The cherry blossoms—or in Japanese, sakura—have made it through changing times, environmental challenges, and even most recently, the attention of our local population of beavers. [Laughter] They have endured, as our friendship has endured and will continue to endure forever.