

Oct. 9 / Administration of William J. Clinton, 1999

against the proliferation of nuclear weapons for more than four decades. If our Senate defeats it, we won't be anymore. If our Senate defeats it, what will prevent China, Russia, or others from testing and deploying new and ever more destructive weapons?

Some oppose the treaty because they say we still need to test nuclear weapons ourselves to make sure they're reliable. But this week 32 American Nobel Prize-winning physicists and other leading scientists told the Senate that America doesn't need to test more nuclear weapons to keep a safe and reliable nuclear force. After all, we stopped testing back in 1992. And now we're spending about \$4½ billion a year on proven programs, using our advanced technology to maintain a superior nuclear force without testing. Since we don't need nuclear tests to protect our security, this treaty does not require us to do anything we haven't already done.

It's about preventing other countries from nuclear testing; about constraining nuclear weapons development around the world, at a time when we have an overwhelming advantage.

I've told the Senate I would be prepared to withdraw from this treaty if our national security ever required us to resume nuclear tests in the future. And I've urged them to work with me to include safeguards in their ratification act, as they normally do.

Some also say these treaties are too risky because some people might cheat on them. But with no treaty, other countries can test without

cheating and without limit. The treaty will strengthen our ability to determine whether other countries are engaged in suspicious activity. With onsite inspections and a global network of over 300 sensors, including 33 in Russia, 11 in China, 17 in the Middle East, we could catch cheaters and mobilize the world against them. None of that will happen if we don't ratify the treaty.

That's why four former Chairmen of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the current Chairman have all endorsed the nuclear test ban treaty. So have a broad spectrum of religious leaders and many other leading Americans, both Republicans and Democrats.

So I say to the Senators who haven't endorsed it, heed the best national security advice of our military leaders. Hear our allies who are looking to us to lead. Listen to the scientists. Listen to the American people who have long supported the treaty. And since you're not prepared for whatever reason to seize the priceless chance to fulfill the dream of Presidents Eisenhower and Kennedy for a safer world, delay the vote on the treaty, debate it thoroughly, and work with us on a bipartisan basis to address legitimate concerns. And then you'll be able to vote yes for our country and our children's future.

Thanks for listening.

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:06 a.m. from the Lake Michigan Room at the Hilton Towers in Chicago, IL.

Remarks to the United States Hispanic Leadership Institute Conference in Chicago, Illinois

October 9, 1999

Thank you. Good morning. You know, I was a little sleepy before I came in here and saw you. *[Laughter]* And I'm ready to go now. I thank you very much.

Let me begin by saying a simple thank you. Thank you for your friendship; thank you for your support; thank you for bringing all of the children who are here in this audience today to remind us of what our deliberations are all about. Thank you, Juan Andrade, for your long

leadership and your friendship to me, and thank you, Rey Gonzalez.

Thank you for bringing the Juan Andrade Scholarship award winners outside for me to have my picture taken with them. I enjoyed that. They were great. People who are worried about America should take a look at those young people. They would worry a lot less and feel a lot more hope.

I want to express my appreciation to everyone at the U.S. Hispanic Leadership Institute for

working since 1982 on your noble mission of empowerment through education and voter participation. Your work has paid off. You see it in greater Hispanic participation in elections and in the growing number of Latino elected officials, like Congressman Luis Gutierrez. I think he is here today, and I thank him for his work.

I also want to thank the many dedicated Hispanic members of our administration, including my Deputy Chief of Staff, Maria Echaveste, who is here; our Director of Intergovernmental Affairs, Mickey Ibarra; the EEOC Chair, Ida Castro—I know she has been or will be on your program—along with George Munoz, Aida Alvarez, Henry Solano, Saul Ramirez, and Secretary Bill Richardson, and a number of other young people in our administration who I've seen wandering around here at your meeting, and some of whom have worked on my trip here.

Let me say that there is another mission that you have followed over the years. You have helped to forge unity among the diverse elements of Hispanic America. You remind us that there are actually differences of ethnicity, national origin, and even, occasionally, of opinion among Hispanic-Americans; but that you are united by common values of faith and family, hard work, and a common vision of a better America. That is America at its best, a diverse nation, now the most diverse in our history, and growing increasingly so.

In a global economy, in a global society, our diversity can be a godsend if we make the most of it, if we enjoy it, if we respect it, if we honor it, and if we believe that the common humanity that unites us is more important than all the differences among us. That thought was uppermost in my mind 6½ years ago when I became President.

Vice President Gore and I came into office determined to move away from the divide-and-conquer politics which had dominated our country for the previous 12 years. It had weakened and divided America, and it was wrong. We wanted to find a way to unify our country, to unify our thinking, to unify our action, and to move our country forward, based on values all Americans share: opportunity for all, responsibility from all, a community of all our people. With that in mind, we put in place a new economic plan, new crime and welfare policies, new education, environment, and health policies, new policies to empower the poor and elevate citizen service. I think the results speak for themselves.

We have the longest peacetime economic expansion in history; the highest homeownership in history; the lowest unemployment rate in 29 years; the lowest welfare rolls in 32 years; the lowest poverty rates in 20 years; the lowest crime rates in 26 years; the smallest Federal Government in 37 years; the first back-to-back budget surpluses in 42 years. Along the way we managed to pass the family and medical leave law, which has given millions and millions of Americans the right to take some time off when a baby is born or a parent is sick without losing their jobs. Ninety percent of our children are immunized against serious childhood diseases for the first time in our history. Our air and water are cleaner; our food is safer. We have opened the doors of college with the HOPE scholarship and other increases in financial aid. We have opened the doors of health care to 5 million children; 100,000 young Americans have served in AmeriCorps.

Just last week we learned that median household income rose 3½ percent last year, but for Hispanics it rose at an even faster rate of 4.8 percent in one year. Even though this community has serious challenges, including, I might say uppermost, a high school dropout rate that is too high, we now have the lowest Hispanic unemployment rate in history, the lowest Hispanic poverty rate in a generation, and a million new Hispanic homeowners since 1994.

In 1993 we doubled the earned-income tax credit for lower income working people. It now lifts over a million Hispanics out of poverty. We raised the minimum wage that directly benefits 1.6 million Hispanic workers, and I think it's time we raised the minimum wage again.

We increased the number of Small Business Administration loans to Hispanic entrepreneurs by 250 percent. We thank Aida Alvarez for her leadership there. And as the Vice President recently announced, the SBA has planned to expand lending to the Hispanic community even more. We revolutionized welfare in a way that allowed the rolls to be cut nearly in half, millions of people to move from dependence to the dignity of work, what with more child care, more transportation aid, guaranteed food and medicine to children; and we have succeeded in reversing the unfair cuts in the welfare reform law, restoring benefits to over 600,000 legal immigrants.

Under the Vice President's leadership, we've reduced the naturalization backlog at INS,

streamlining the process to make it easier for immigrants who play by the rules to become full partners in America. We have more to do, and I ask you to help us with that.

I'd also like to ask your help with one other thing. In the 1997 bipartisan balanced budget bill, we created the \$24 billion Children's Health Insurance Program. It was the largest expansion of children's health coverage since the enactment of Medicaid. It required all the States to file plans to use this money to enroll children without health insurance in the program. This year we finally got all the States enrolled. But the alarming thing is that we estimate there are at least—at least—4 million more children who could be covered by the money that is there waiting for them to provide health insurance who have not signed up yet.

So I ask you, when you go back home, make sure that in your community there is a systematic effort underway to get health care to every Hispanic child who doesn't have it, who is eligible for this program.

Like you, I believe in the concept of empowerment, so I will mention this one last issue. I asked the Vice President to lead our efforts to create over 100 enterprise zones and empowerment communities across our country, to generate billions of dollars in new private sector investment and public investment in these low income areas. You can see them operating from Chicago to Philadelphia to Cleveland to Detroit to south Texas to the Mississippi Delta to Appalachia. And you can see them working. I have asked for an increase in the number of empowerment zones and community development banks, and we're fighting for them now in the budget.

I want to talk to you about what we're going to do next. I thank you for your support. I am pleased by the progress we have made. But in America we must always be determined to change, to improve, to move forward. And we must honestly face the fact that there are still a lot of challenges out there that have not been met.

When I came up on this stage—I'll just give you one example—when I came up on this stage, one of the people back here said, "Mr. President, there are some people in our community with disabilities who are out there. Be sure and say hello to them on the way out." One of the important things I'm trying to get passed in this Congress is a bill sponsored by Senator

Kennedy and Senator Jeffords which would allow people with disabilities to move into the workplace and still keep their Medicaid insurance because they can't get health insurance in the workplace. That's the sort of thing we need to be doing.

I ask you to take just a few minutes and focus on the outstanding challenges—places where we haven't made enough progress and places where we haven't received enough cooperation from this Congress.

Let me begin with judicial nominations. I am proud that we have succeeded in appointing more Hispanics to the Federal bench than any administration in history. And I'm proud that, on the whole, the judges I've appointed are the most diverse group in our history: nearly half are women or minorities. More than half my current judicial nominees are women or minorities, and they are good judges. My appointees have garnered the highest ratings from the American Bar Association of any President in 40 years.

Now, I would also say that unlike previous administrations, there has been article after article after article saying that I have avoided putting ideological extremists on the court, unlike what happened in the previous decade or so. So these people are well-qualified, they're diverse. You would think the United States Senate would be falling all over themselves to confirm them.

Now, let's look at the facts. Earlier this week I said it was a disgrace that the Senate defeated on a straight party-line vote my nomination of Ronnie White, a highly talented African-American jurist from the State of Missouri that was the first African-American to serve on the Missouri State Supreme Court, who was endorsed by one of his State's Republican Senators, supported by Republican Senators on the Judiciary Committee, but when he came to the floor, for political reasons back in Missouri, 100 percent of the Republicans in the majority voted to deny his confirmation and distorted his record in capital punishment appeals cases. It was wrong. That's the kind of thing that's going on up there that ought to stop.

But unfortunately, it's not an isolated event. Listen to this: Richard Paez, the first Mexican-American ever to serve as a judge in the Federal district court in Los Angeles, I nominated more than 3½ years ago for a seat on the ninth circuit court of appeals. For more than 3½ years he

has been waiting for the Senate to confirm his nomination. Is it because he's not qualified? No. The American Bar Association said not that he was qualified, but that he was well qualified. He received the highest rating from the ABA. He has broad, bipartisan support back in California and in the legal community. Yet, he still has not been given a Senate floor vote. Why? Well, they don't want to vote him down because they hope that you will vote with them in the next election, but they don't want to vote for him. So this man has been hanging there for 3½ years.

Now, I don't know about you, but if I took 3½ years to make a decision, you wouldn't think I was a very good President. And most of you couldn't hold your jobs if you took 3½ years to do your assigned tasks. Can you imagine that? How many times has somebody been on you because you took 3½ hours? [*Laughter*]

Another fine candidate for the ninth circuit, a renowned appellate lawyer, Marsha Berzon, has been waiting for more than 18 months to receive a floor vote. That is, they put these people out of committee and they just never bring them up. They just disappear somewhere in the dark recesses of the calendar of the Senate. Now, I think the treatment of Richard Paez and Marsha Berzon is shameless.

We have also been working to get three other exceptional Hispanic nominees confirmed: Judge Julio Fuentes for the third circuit; civil lawyer Enrique Moreno for the fifth circuit; and Judge Ronald Guzman for the northern district of Illinois, here.

I am pleased to announce that Judge Guzman finally received his judiciary committee hearing last week for a vacancy here. But the Senate's treatment of Judge White and its failure to vote on the outstanding Hispanic nominees that are pending creates a real doubt about their ability and their willingness to perform their constitutional duties to advise and consent.

So I urge you to help me get a Senate vote on Judge Paez, Judge Fuentes, Judge Guzman, Marsha Berzon, Enrique Moreno. They should be confirmed. They should be confirmed. But they ought to be voted on one way or the other.

Now, let me say, in spite of the difficulties we have had with this Congress, they're capable of putting partisanship aside and putting the country first. We did it on the third try with the welfare bill in '96. We did it with the Balanced Budget Act in '97. We did it last year

when they voted right before the election for my program to put 100,000 teachers in the schools. And just last week, at the end of this session that just concluded, finally, after 2 years of work, a substantial bipartisan majority in the House of Representatives passed a strong, enforceable Patients' Bill of Rights.

Now, that bill is a long way from becoming law, but a lot of people never thought we could get this far. It gives you the right if you're in an HMO to see a specialist if your doctor says you should; to go to the nearest emergency room if you're in an accident; to keep your doctor through a course of treatment, whether for chemotherapy or a pregnancy; and to hold your health care plan accountable if you're injured.

So we're capable of doing this. I have asked the Congress to do more. I have asked them to keep our prosperity going by paying down our debt and getting America out of debt in 15 years for the first time since 1835. We can do that.

I have asked them to keep working until the prosperity of this moment reaches every community and every person willing to work for it. I have asked them to double the number of empowerment zones and enterprise communities. And I have asked them to adopt my new markets initiative, which would simply say we want the same incentives for people with money to invest in poor communities in America we give them to invest in poor communities around the world, because people in America deserve the chance to be a part of America's prosperity.

I've asked them to work with me to meet the challenge of the aging of America by saving Social Security and modernizing Medicare and adding a prescription drug benefit. I have asked them, now that we have the lowest crime rate in 26 years, to ask them to join me in making America the safest big nation on Earth by closing this gun show loophole in our background check law and doing more to keep guns out of the hands of children and criminals.

I have asked them to help me give all of our children—all of our children—a world-class education, demanding more from our schools, but also investing more. Our agenda is clear: Build or modernize 6,000 schools; there are too many kids in the schools and too many schools are run down or too many kids going to school in trailers. Put 100,000 teachers out there and focus on the early grades to give our children

smaller classes. Have more after-school and summer school programs like Chicago does, so that you can say, "Okay, we're going to have high standards; we're going to end social promotion, but we will not label children a failure when the systems fail them." We want them to have access to the help they need. Close the digital divide; hook up every classroom and every library in this country to the Internet at a rate even the poorest schools can afford. That's what we're doing.

I am proud that we won almost \$500 million in the 1999 budget for the Hispanic education action plan, to make sure Latino children get the tutoring, the after-school, the mentoring programs they need to help them meet higher academic standards, finish, not drop out of high school, and go on to college.

It will take time for these efforts to have an impact, but you can help at the local level. Hold up these young scholarship winners as an example to the young people in your communities. We cannot make America what it ought to be in the 21st century unless we dramatically reduce the 30 percent dropout rate among Hispanic-American children.

As many of your leaders have told me, not withstanding our best intentions in this administration, we have a lot more to do to make sure that the States and the school districts who accept Federal dollars actually spend those dollars in a way that reaches underserved Hispanic students, and we are working on that, as well.

Let me finally make this one point. I have always wanted an administration that looks like America. You've heard me say that a dozen times, I bet. More and more, America will look like you. More and more, there will be more people listening and more people performing like Ricky Martin and Jennifer Lopez. There will be more books. There will be more movies. There will be a bigger part of our culture.

And what I ask you to do as you rise in dominance and influence, not only in our political life but in our cultural life, is never to forget your roots and never forget the pain of discrimination or being ignored, and make sure that you are always a force for good, for building one America.

If you look around this old world today, the biggest problem I have faced as your President in my responsibilities around the world is dealing with the racial and the ethnic and the religious and the tribal conflicts where people occupy the same land and cannot get along; where they continue to believe what is different about them is more important than their common humanity; where they fear people who are different from them and get to the point where they look down on them and in some places—God forbid—they think it's even okay to kill them.

And if you look all over the world today, we celebrate the modern world—modern music, modern culture, the Internet, the decoding of the human gene—all these things that are going on. A lot of your young people probably want to go to work for these Internet companies, where there are dozens and dozens of young people in their twenties now worth \$50 million. That's chump change to some of them. It's all great, all this modern world, but don't forget the biggest problem is the oldest problem of the human heart—the fear and hatred of people who are different.

So I ask you to remember this. You are growing in numbers; you are growing in influence. You will grow in ways that are good and will make America richer, more alive, more textured, more exciting. And it's all going to be positive. But don't forget what you've been through. And do everything you can to stop it from happening within America and beyond our borders. We are still, for all of our modern advances, too much in the grip of the oldest fears of the human heart. And your community can make all the difference for 21st century America.

Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:36 a.m. in the Grand Ballroom at McCormick Place. In his remarks, he referred to Juan Andrade, Jr., president and executive director, and Rey Gonzalez, board chairman, U.S. Hispanic Leadership Institute; singer Ricky Martin; and actress/singer Jennifer Lopez.