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Letter to Senate Leaders on Social Security Reform Legislation
March 21, 2000

Dear Mr. Leader:

I am pleased that the Senate is moving forward with consideration of H.R. 5, a bill that would eliminate the retirement earnings test above the normal retirement age. On March 1, 2000, with strong Administration support, the House passed H.R. 5 by a vote of 422–0. I now urge the Senate to follow suit and quickly pass H.R. 5. This will ensure enactment of a clean, straightforward bill to eliminate the retirement earnings test above the normal retirement age, which I will promptly sign into law.

I called for the elimination of the earnings test for seniors in my State of the Union address in 1999. I believe that the test is confusing and outdated. As the baby boomers begin to retire, it is more important than ever that older Americans who are willing and able to work should not have their Social Security benefits deferred when they do.

Our work together on eliminating the retirement earnings test can help establish bipartisan momentum toward Social Security reform. We should build on this foundation to pass legislation that would extend the solvency of Social Security to about 2050 while taking significant actions to reduce poverty among elderly women. Last year, I transmitted legislation to Congress that would have used the interest savings earned by paying down the debt to make Social Security stronger. If we agree to this simple step, we can extend the life of Social Security to the middle of the next century while also modernizing Social Security to reduce poverty among elderly women.

These simple measures would be a substantial down payment on meeting the long-term Social Security challenge. I hope we can continue to work together on this issue.

Sincerely,

BILL CLINTON

NOTE: Letters were sent to Trent Lott, Senate majority leader, and Thomas A. Daschle, Senate minority leader.

Remarks at a State Dinner Hosted by President Kircheril Narayanan of India in New Delhi
March 21, 2000

Mr. President, Mr. Prime Minister, distinguished guests. First, on behalf of the American delegation, let me thank you for your warm hospitality, and indeed, I thank all of you for making us feel so welcome.

As you pointed out, Mr. President, it was 5 years ago next week when my wife and daughter first came to New Delhi. I confess I was a little jealous of them then because I wanted to come. And I am delighted finally to be here today.

One of my country's most beloved writers, Mark Twain, once wrote that India, and I quote, "is the sole country under the Sun that all desire to see, and having seen once, would not trade that glimpse for the shows of all the rest of the globe combined."

India has given profound gifts to the world for thousands of years now. Nearly half of humanity practices the four great religions that were born here, Hinduism, Sikhism, Buddhism, Jainism. The whole world has been influenced by Indian culture.

Indian thinkers have enriched every science known to humanity. And I welcome the presence of so many of your scientists here tonight. However, I must confess there are many American high school students who wish that "Aryabhatiya" had kept his work on trigonometry to himself. [*Laughter*] The computer age would hardly be possible at all without the decimal system invented in India. And appropriately enough, 30 percent of the world's software engineers today are Indian.

Every American who has been moved by the universal philosophy of nonviolence, every American whose life was transformed by the civil rights movement, owes a debt to India. Today I had the great honor of visiting the Gandhi Memorial. Two weeks ago, in my own country, I visited Selma, Alabama, which is one of the sacred sites of our civil rights movement, where the words of Martin Luther King and the marches of ordinary citizens both echoed the ideas of Gandhi.

My country has been enriched by the contributions of more than a million Indian-Americans, from Vinod Dahm, the father of the Pentium chip, to Deepak Chopra, pioneer of alternative medicine, to Sabeer Bhatia, creator of the free-mail system Hotmail, the free E-mail system.

Now, next Sunday when the Academy Awards are given out in Los Angeles, more than a few people, not only in India but in America, will be rooting for director M. Night Shyamalan and his remarkable movie "The Sixth Sense," nominated for best picture.

So we have gotten a lot from India, and we have neglected our friendship for too long. Today we are proud to be your partners, your allies, your friends in freedom.

As a President who has the good fortune to have been selected by an electorate that casts about 100 million votes, I can hardly imagine a nation with over 600 million eligible voters. I don't know how you please them all. Or should I say, 60 *crore*.

I didn't know what a *crore* was until I got here this time. Now I can go home and suggest to my Vice President that he have a new slogan: Four *crore* for Al Gore! [*Laughter*]

We have a lot to give the world in the richness of democracy. One of the great things about a democracy is, it is a system which allows us to resolve our differences through conversation, not confrontation. I've enjoyed the conversation that we began here today. I am grateful that we found common ground. I am convinced we have laid the foundation for a new respectful partnership based on our oldest and most enduring values.

In the days to come, may our two nations always remain examples of tolerance and the power of diversity. May we build societies that draw upon the talents and energies of all our people. May we preserve the beauty and natural richness of this small planet that we share. May we work together to make the difficult choices and the necessary investments, as Nehru once instructed, "to advance the larger cause of humanity." In the spirit of that partnership and that vision, I ask you all to join me in raising a glass to the President, the Prime Minister, and the people of this wonderful nation which has welcomed us.

NOTE: The President spoke at 8:55 p.m. in the Banquet Hall at Rashtrapati Bhavan. In his remarks, he referred to Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee of India. The transcript released by the Office of the Press Secretary also included the remarks of President Narayanan.

Interview With Peter Jennings of ABC's "World News Tonight" in New Delhi

March 21, 2000

India-Pakistan Dispute Over Kashmir

Mr. Jennings. Prime Minister Vajpayee said that you will conclude, now that you're here, that the situation—Kashmir, between India and Pakistan—is not as bad as they say it is. Is that what you conclude?

The President. Well, I think that I've concluded that he is going to do everything he can to avoid having it escalate into a war with Pakistan. And that is encouraging. But I still think it's a difficult situation, to say the least. I think it's important that they both show restraint. I think it's important that they respect the Line of Control, both sides do. And then, over the long run, I think what really matters, in terms of an ultimate resolution, is that the people of Kashmir feel that their legitimate interests are being addressed in some formal fashion.