

Now I ask you to step up to your responsibility and act, within your legal authority, to end the soft money system. The American people deserve nothing less.

Sincerely,

William J. Clinton

NOTE: An original was not available for verification of the content of this letter.

Remarks at a State Dinner Honoring Prime Minister Blair

February 5, 1998

Ladies and gentlemen, good evening and welcome to the White House. To Prime Minister and Mrs. Blair, members of the British delegation, to all our distinguished guests, let me say that the bad news is you have to listen to two brief toasts; the good news is it comes at the beginning of the dinner. We are delighted to have all of you here.

Tonight, in honor of the Prime Minister's visit, I would like to go over some of the highlights of the so-called special relationship between the United States and Great Britain. It began rather early in our history, this special relationship. [Laughter] In 1785 Thomas Jefferson, soon to be our first Secretary of State, insisted that the United Kingdom was an evil empire whose time was running out. [Laughter] "The sun of her glory is fast descending to the horizon," he said, with uncharacteristic myopia.

In 1814 marauding English soldiers gave new meaning to the term "global warming" when they torched the White House where we sit tonight—[laughter]—along with much of the surrounding countryside. My predecessor James Madison was lucky to escape with a very few belongings and a chastened view of our defense capabilities.

But Mr. Prime Minister, we are a forgiving people. And we learned a valuable lesson on that night in 1814: From now on let's get these guys on our side. That's been the core of our foreign policy ever since. [Laughter]

When we think over the challenges of the 20th century, it's extraordinary what our two nations have been through together, decade after decade, staring down the darkest threats in the history of humankind. We

would not have survived this turbulent century without the grand alliance joining our peoples. Through common values and a common language, we have forged an uncommon friendship.

Let me take this opportunity to announce that in honor of your visit, the place where you and Cherie are staying will now be forever known as Blair House. [Laughter]

Tonight, we look forward to a new millennium and a 21st century alliance for peace, prosperity, and progress. We have a rare chance to bring fruition to a century's worth of partnership. We can define the new century before it begins, escaping the 20th century's darkest moments and seizing the new century's most brilliant possibilities. We can stand together against tyrants. We can help peace flourish from Bosnia to Northern Ireland to the Middle East. We can continue to open our minds, our hearts, our societies to new ideas and new possibilities.

Mr. Prime Minister, you are breathing new life into politics and restoring faith in ancient principles of liberty so dear to every citizen of your realm. Throughout our history, our peoples have reinforced each other in the living classroom of democracy. It is difficult to imagine Jefferson, for example, without John Locke before him, difficult to imagine Lincoln without knowing that he read Shakespeare and Bunyan on the frontier.

In the new century, we must continue together undaunted—in the words of the Anglo-American poet W.H. Auden, "never beleaguered by negation, always showing an affirming flame." One of our most stubbornly affirmative Presidents, Harry Truman, felt that way. It's a rather closely guarded secret that this hard-nosed Missourian was shamelessly devoted to 19th century English sentimental poetry.

When he graduated from high school in 1901, at the dawn of the new century, Harry Truman copied his favorite poem onto a piece of paper. Throughout his life, he kept it with him, which required him to recopy it at least 20 times. Tennyson's "Locksley Hall" may seem an unusual choice, but the poem resonated with Truman's optimistic vision of the future, a future that then, as now, was limitless.

With a new century beginning, “Locksley Hall” still holds the promise of a better life for those of us glimpsing the new world just over the horizon. “For I dipped into the future, far as human eye could see, saw the vision of the world and all the wonder that could be.” We must realize the promise of that poem.

Our alliance is strong. Our personal friendship is strong. It is a pleasure and an honor for Hillary and for me to reciprocate the hospitality that you, Mr. Prime Minister and Cherie, showed to us last May. And so I ask you all, ladies and gentlemen, to join me in raising a glass to my good friend, the Prime Minister of Great Britain, to Cherie, and all the people who are here with them, who represent the best promise of our tomorrows.

[At this point, the President toasted the Prime Minister.]

Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:11 p.m. in the State Dining Room at the White House. The transcript made available by the Office of the Press Secretary also included the remarks of Prime Minister Blair.

The President’s News Conference With Prime Minister Blair

February 6, 1998

The President. First, let me say that it’s been a real pleasure to welcome my friend Prime Minister Blair here to Washington with the entire British entourage. It continues a great tradition of partnership between our nations, anchored by common values, driven by common vision, eager to meet the challenges of this new age.

Today we’ll pay tribute to that heritage with a visit to the FDR Memorial. Earlier in this century President Roosevelt and Prime Minister Churchill led the community of free nations that prevailed in world war. Now, on the eve of the 21st century, the Prime Minister and I seek to shape the peace in a world that is rich with possibility and promise but still not free from risk.

We have a very similar outlook on preparing our own countries for the future. And if I might just take a moment to talk about

the latest economic news, the strategy we are both working is to prepare all our people for the information age and the global economy. Today we have new evidence that that strategy is working here. In the last month America had 358,000 new jobs, over one million in the last 3 months. We are approaching 15 million new jobs in the last 5 years with the lowest unemployment in 24 years. Wages are rising, inflation is low. The role of Government has changed. We have the smallest percentage of these new jobs in the public sector and the highest percentage in the private sector in the United States since the 1920’s. By maintaining fiscal discipline, opening more markets, investing more in our people, we will continue to expand opportunity and promote prosperity.

We also share a common view of the changes that are occurring in the world and a belief in the importance of working together to harness them to the benefit of our people. We’ve reviewed our progress in building an undivided Europe; welcoming Hungary, the Czech Republic, and Poland into NATO; forging strong relations with the new democracies there, including Russia and Ukraine; helping the parties in Bosnia to fulfill the requirements of the Dayton peace accord.

Both our nations agree we should take part in a follow-on security presence when the SFOR mission ends in Bosnia in June. We reaffirmed our determination to combat modern cross-border threats like terrorism and the spread of weapons of mass destruction.

On Iraq, we stand together. Saddam Hussein must know that we are determined to prevent him from threatening his neighbors and the world with weapons of mass destruction. The Prime Minister and I would both prefer a genuine diplomatic solution.

The best way to stop Saddam from developing an arsenal of nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons and the missiles to deliver them is to get the inspectors back to work with full and free access to all relevant sites. But let me be clear: If Saddam does not comply with the unanimous will of the international community, we must be prepared to act, and we are.