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Week Ending Friday, October 23, 1998

Remarks at a Luncheon Honoring Senator Carol Moseley-Braun in Chicago, Illinois

October 16, 1998

The President. Thank you very much. I think the Senator has to go to a radio debate, so I'm going to let her off the hook. She's heard me speak a thousand times. You have an excused absence. Let's give her a hand. [*Applause*] You guys have got to stay with her now. Thank you. Goodbye.

I want to thank all of you who are responsible for this today. One of the things that Pat Arbor said to me—he said, ''You know, the Union League Club took longer than America did to open up membership to women, but they elected a President quicker.'' Isn't that right? There's the President of the Union League. [*Applause*] Thank you. Hope the country does that before too long.

Let me say to Pat and to all of you who are responsible for this event, I thank you very much. I'd like to thank all the people who provided our meal, and I'd like to thank this wonderful pianist for all the great music he gave us during lunch. Thank you very much.

I will be pretty brief here, but I want to make a very important point to you. The election in less than 3 weeks now will be very important in defining what kind of country we decide to be well into the next century, whether we ratify the course that we have been taking for the last 6 years. Carol Moseley-Braun talked a lot about it; I'd like to give you some sense of what the last few days have looked like to me.

First of all, they've sort have been a blur because I haven't had a lot of sleep. Our country was able to persuade our NATO allies to take a strong stand in Kosovo, and we have an agreement, which I think now will avoid mass starvation or freezing this winter and move that country on the path to peace.

We have been heavily involved in trying to stabilize the global financial system, which, as all of you know, has been very much in turmoil, and looking to the long-term need for reform, as well as what it takes to fix the short-term crisis.

Last night until well past midnight, I was talking with Prime Minister Netanyahu and Chairman Arafat, trying to make the next big agreement in the Middle East peace process. And I'm going to leave you after the lunch and one or two other things and go back to Washington to spend the weekend in intense efforts there. And I'm convinced they're both really trying to breach the gaps between them.

This morning I woke up to learn with a great deal of pride that John Hume and David Trimble had been awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for their role in bringing about the peace in Northern Ireland, something that my administration and our country have been heavily involved in. And of course, we reached agreement on the balanced budget yesterday.

Let me say, it's been a dizzying week but a wonderful week for our country. And I'd like to also say what I said just before I left Washington today: This budget would not have been possible unless the members of the Democratic caucus in Congress had been united behind me.

There is a reason that this budget looks like we wrote it and passed it, even though our party is in the minority. The Congress has to pass a budget. That's not an option. It's the first time in 24 years when there was no budget plan passed, but in the end, if you want to go home, you've got to pass a budget. And so by standing strong for the things we believed in and by having Carol Moseley-Braun and Glenn Poshard and other people in our party who agree with the course we're taking say so strongly, that's what made this

possible. And I'd like to just reiterate a couple of the things that Carol said.

This budget, which will continue our balanced budget policy that produced the surplus this year, first of all, beat back an attempt to provide a popular—or maybe not so popular, come to think of it—tax cut just a few days before the election that would have eroded the surplus, which I'm totally opposed to, until we save the Social Security system.

We have to reform Social Security. We've got a bipartisan effort working on it. We're going to address it early next year. And we owe a lot to the fact that our Members of Congress, in tough races, Carol Moseley-Braun and Glenn Poshard—you just think about it—it would be easy to say, ''Well, I've got a tough race back in Illinois, and I know it's wrong to squander the first surplus in 29 years on what would amount to a modest amount of money to most people in Illinois right before the election. I know that's the wrong thing to do. We've been in the red for 29 years. I know the right thing to do is to save this surplus until we reform Social Security. But, boy, I'm in a tough race.'' And both of them said, ''No, I'm going to do what's right for the people of my State, the people of my country, for our children, and our future.'' And on that issue alone, they deserve to be elected on election day in a couple of weeks.

And the second thing we did was to get not only 100,000 new teachers to bring average class size down to 18 in the early grades, which is a truly historic accomplishment—the National Government has never done anything like this before. And I might say, the people who opposed it in the other party are the same people that opposed me when I wanted to put 100,000 police on the street. A lot of them have come here to Chicago. And they said, ''Oh, the Federal Government is going to try to take over State and local government.'' It was ridiculous. All we did was give people the means to put 100,000 more police on the street. We now have the lowest crime rate in 25 years. And Carol Moseley-Braun strongly supported the crime bill that put that 100,000 police on the street; so did Glenn.

And what we did with the teachers was the same thing. We said, ''Look we're just going to make this available, so we can have well-trained, properly educated and examined teachers out there in these early grades getting this class size down.''

We also dramatically increased funding to make sure that we have a national reading program, to ensure that all our 8-year-olds can read. We put in funds to continue our efforts to hook up every classroom to the Internet by the year 2000. And perhaps most important of all over the long run after the 100,000 teachers, we have enough money to provide for after-school programs for a quarter of a million children, who live in tough neighborhoods, who come from difficult home situations, and who need to be in school and not on the street after the bell rings in the afternoon. This is a terrific thing.

The third thing we did was to protect the environment. You heard Carol talking about it. We not only protected the environment, we passed the clean water initiative I gave to Congress, which is designed to clean up the 40 percent of the lakes and streams in America that are still too polluted to swim or fish in. We passed my anti-global warming initiative, a program that is run by Dick Stern's son, Todd, in the White House, which was bitterly opposed by the entire leadership of the other party, but they know we're right. And in the end, we were able to fund it.

And finally, months and months late, but finally, we secured our own economic future by increasing our ability to take responsibility for the global economic crisis when the Congress funded America's contribution to the International Monetary Fund. All that happened in this budget. It is a great budget for the United States of America.

But I want you to understand, as President, even though I supported it strongly, I could not have done it, it would have not have happened, if Carol Moseley-Braun and Glenn Poshard, and the other members of our party in Congress hadn't stood foursquare with me and made it clear that was the condition of passing a budget and getting out of town. And we owe them all—every one of them—a great debt of gratitude. They have earned our support, and it's going to make a big difference for America.

Let me say, elections are always about tomorrow, and this one should be too. But yesterday is some indication of tomorrow. I'd just like to say I've been in Washington only as long as Carol Moseley-Braun has been in the Senate. And I hope earnestly that she'll be in the Senate longer than I'll be in Washington. But I have a different view of a lot of things than some people who live there. I tend to evaluate people based on what they do that affects the lives of people back home. And I'd just like to give you a few things that I think you ought to keep in mind, besides what I just told you about the budget.

The economic prosperity we enjoy today started in 1993, when my economic plan passed the Senate and the House by one vote. She could have said, ''Well, you know, I had a tough race in 1992. I'm going to have a tough race in 1996. I don't believe I'll cast a tough vote.'' But she did cast the tough vote. In 1997, when we passed the bipartisan balanced budget agreement, the deficit had already been reduced by 93 percent because of Carol Moseley-Braun's vote. The people of Illinois should remember that on election day.

In 1994 we passed the Brady bill. She was a cosponsor of the Brady bill. It's kept a quarter of a million guns out of the hands of felons, fugitives, and stalkers, saving who knows who many thousands of lives. She supported the crime bill that's put all those community police on the streets of Chicago and little towns in Illinois all across this State.

She supported the family and medical leave law, the first bill I signed. Twelve and a half million Americans have taken some time off from work without losing their jobs when a baby is born or a parent is sick.

So I believe she's been right on the issues all along. I know how important she was to this budget. One other thing I ought to mention about this budget is—it doesn't have much to do with Chicago, but there is a lot of agriculture in Illinois, and I vetoed the emergency farm legislation because I did not think it did enough for the farmers of this country that are in—many of them have been caught up in this global financial crisis and are in the worst shape they've been in in literally decades. And the support I received from Senator Moseley-Braun, from Congressman Poshard, and others, was essential in getting us a new farm bill, which is a big part of this final agreement.

Okay, that's my case for yesterday. Do you believe, if her opponent had been in the Senate, that he would have been there fighting with me for 100,000 teachers?

Audience members. No-o-o!

The President. Would he have voted for the Brady bill?

Audience members. No-o-o!

The President. Would he have voted for the crime bill?

Audience members. No-o-o!

The President. Would he have voted for the Family and Medical Leave Act?

Audience members. No-o-o!

The President. Would he have voted for my economic plan in 1993?

Audience members. No-o-o!

The President. Now, look to tomorrow. What's this election about?

Number one, we've got to come back in January and decide all over again if we're going to squander the surplus or save it and buckle down and fix Social Security.

Number two, the major education initiative that we did not adopt was to provide for 5,000 new or reconstructed schools so that we'll have thousands of classrooms for those 100,000 teachers to teach in. Carol Moseley-Braun was the first Member of the United States Congress to come out for that—the very first one. This has been her deal all along, and we are going to achieve that in January. We are going to pass the school construction program in January, because the American people are overwhelmingly for it, if they will just vote for it on election day.

Number three, among the many things we did not do in this session of Congress was to pass the patients' HMO bill of rights. That may not mean anything to some people. It basically means, if you're in an HMO, you have a right to see a specialist if your doctor says you need to see one; you have a right to go to nearest emergency room if you get hurt; you have a right to keep your doctor during a period of treatment, even if your employer changes health care providers; and you have a right to privacy in your medical records. The bottom line is that health care

decisions will be made by medical professionals, not by accountants.

It is no mean thing. It is a big, big issue. Over 160 million of us are in managed care. Carol Moseley-Braun was for our bill. It was defeated in the House. It was defeated in the Senate by the members of the other party who did not support it.

The third thing we have to do is to finally pass campaign finance reform.

The fourth thing we have to do is to pass the bill—all year long we waited—to protect our children from the dangers of tobacco, the biggest public health problem in the country today.

And finally, we should pass a minimum wage increase. It's hard to support a family on $5.15 an hour. The only reason we didn't pass it this year is that the other party was completely against it, even though the unemployment rate is low, inflation is low, and we can do this and actually help the economy. The last time we raised the minimum wage a few years ago, they told me the unemployment rate would go up and job growth would go down. Well, job growth went up, and the unemployment rate went down.

So that's what this is about. This Senator has a good record. I just mentioned all these issues, and I asked you if you thought if her opponent had been there, would he have voted with me. You said no.

Now, who is going to vote to save Social Security first? Who is going to be more likely to give the American people and the people of Illinois, for the very first time in our history, this innovative program to build world-class schools for the 21st century? Who is going to be more likely to pass campaign finance reform, to stand up for the health interest of our children, to stand up for the interest of working families? I think you know the answer to that. I think you know the answer to that.

What I want to say to you is that I'm grateful for your presence here. I'm grateful for your contributions. I thank you for helping her in this way. But it is not enough, because it is not enough in this election to persuade people that you have the better side of the argument. You heard what Carol said. You also have to persuade them that the argument is worth their going to vote on election day.

And every one of you, you have employees; you have friends who have employees; you have other people you know who have contact with large networks of people. This election will be determined not simply by who has the better side of the argument, or what people agree with in terms of what ought to be done, but who shows up.

And so I think here in Chicago—and this is what Hillary told me to say, by the say. She called me right before I got off the plane. She said, ''Here in Chicago you would understand that. The only poll that counts is the poll that's manifest when people actually move away from their telephone and show up at the polling place.''

So I ask every one of you to think about this. Believe me, we are shaping the future of 21st century America. Look at where we are now compared to where we were 6 years ago. Whatever anybody else tells you about the issues, on every single critical decision I have had to make for 6 years to affect the welfare and the future of America, that required a vote in Congress to support, Carol Moseley-Braun was there with me, standing with me, supporting me, trying to make this a better country with a better future.

She was the very first person in America in the entire Congress to say we ought to have a national school construction program for 21st century schools and smaller classes. She has supported all these other issues. She deserves—but more importantly, you deserve, your children deserve, this State deserves to be represented in the Senate by somebody who has that kind of vision and that kind of courage and that kind of willingness to put herself on the line.

So I ask you, don't give up, bear down. We can win if you do your part.

Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 3:25 p.m. at the Union League Club. In his remarks, he referred to Patrick H. Arbor, chairman, Chicago Board of Trade; Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu of Israel; and Chairman Yasser Arafat of the Palestinian Authority. This item was not received in time for publication in the appropriate issue.

Proclamation 7141—National Character Counts Week, 1998

October 16, 1998

By the President of the United States of America

A Proclamation

As Americans, we are a people full of hope, confident in our capacity to make life better for ourselves and others. We look forward to the promise of the future, and we have high goals for the 21st century: to remain the world's leading force for peace, freedom, prosperity, and security; to keep the American Dream alive for everyone willing to work for it; to come together across lines of race, religion, and other individual differences to become one America. But everything we hope to accomplish depends, as it always has, on the hearts and minds of the American people.

One of the greatest building blocks of character is citizen service. We must do more as individuals and as a society to encourage all Americans—especially our young people—to share their time, skills, enthusiasm, and energy with their communities. Whether we teach children to read, mentor young people, work at a food bank or homeless shelter, or care for people living with AIDS, citizen service calls forth the best from each of us. It builds a sense of community, compassion, acceptance of others, and a willingness to do the right thing—all hallmarks of character.

We can take great pride today in the numbers of energetic, idealistic Americans who are participating in service activities across our country and around the world. Almost 90,000 young men and women have served their communities through AmeriCorps during the past 4 years, tutoring students, mentoring children, building homes, fighting drug abuse. Through our America Reads initiative, Americans of all ages are volunteering their time to help children learn to read independently by the end of the third grade. Through Learn and Serve America, the Corporation for National and Community Service encourages America's schools to add service learning to their curricula so that all students—from kindergarten through graduate school—can develop their character, skills, and self-confidence while making their own unique contributions to the life of their communities. In the National Senior Service Corps and the Peace Corps, in religious, school, community, and charitable organizations, Americans strengthen the character of our Nation by volunteering to improve the quality of life for their follow human beings. During National Character Counts Week, let us reaffirm to our children that the future belongs to those who have the strength of character to live a life of service to others.

Now, Therefore, I, William J. Clinton, President of the United States of America, by virtue of the authority vested in me by the Constitution and laws of the United States, do hereby proclaim October 18 through October 24, 1998, as National Character Counts Week. I call upon the people of the United States, Government officials, educators, religious, community, and business leaders, and the States to commemorate this week with appropriate ceremonies, activities, and programs.

In Witness Whereof, I have hereunto set my hand this sixteenth day of October, in the year of our Lord nineteen hundred and ninety-eight, and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and twenty-third.

William J. Clinton

[Filed with the Office of the Federal Register, 12:05 p.m., October 19, 1998]

NOTE: This proclamation was published in the *Federal Register* on October 20. This item was not received in time for publication in the appropriate issue.

The President's Radio Address

October 17, 1998

Good morning. This week we reached an agreement on a balanced budget that invests in our people and our future. I'm proud of the results: 100,000 new teachers and funds for after-school programs for hundreds of thousands of children; new environmental protections and an advance in our clean water initiative to deal with the 40 percent of our lakes and rivers that aren't yet fit for