

Weekly Compilation of
**Presidential
Documents**



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Editor's Note: The President was in Cincinnati, OH, on July 23, the closing date of this issue. Releases and announcements issued by the Office of the Press Secretary but not received in time for inclusion in this issue will be printed next week.

WEEKLY COMPILATION OF PRESIDENTIAL DOCUMENTS

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Week Ending Friday, July 23, 1999

Remarks at Amos Hiatt Middle School in Des Moines, Iowa

July 16, 1999

The President. You know, when Tom Harkin said that anybody with any sense would take their coat off—[*laughter*—I didn't know whether that meant I didn't have any sense or he just gets hot under the collar quicker than I do. [*Laughter*] Actually, I think the answer is a lighter suit.

I am delighted to be here, and I thank you all for your wonderful welcome. And I don't mind that it's a warm one. I always love coming to Iowa, coming back here to this wonderful city. I want to thank Ruth Ann Gaines for her dedication and her remarkable remarks this morning. I want to say that as long as young people like Catherine Swoboda are exhibit A for Iowa education, this country is going to do just fine. I thought she was terrific.

I thank Secretary Riley for coming with me. Many of you in Iowa may not know it, but Dick Riley and I began our careers as Governors together 20 years ago this year, and we've been working at education for a long, long time. I think that history will record that he is the finest Secretary of Education this country has ever had. And I'm very grateful to him, and I thank him.

I would like to thank Superintendent Witherspoon and your principal, Gary Eyerly, for welcoming us to this school. And I want to thank all the public officials who are here. I know in addition to the Governor we have Lieutenant Governor Pederson, Attorney General Miller, Secretary of State Culver, and State Treasurer Fitzgerald. They're all over there. I thank them for joining me today. And Senate Minority Leader Michael Gronstal, thank you all for being here.

I'd like to say a special word of appreciation to my good friend Congressman Leonard Boswell, who is also a stout sup-

porter of education. And I think it is appropriate that he's here because he's here with his wife, Dody, and I'd like to her to stand, because yesterday she retired as a teacher after 31 years. Thank you very much, bless you. Thank you. [*Applause*]

And I want to acknowledge that Ruth Harkin is here with Tom today, and to tell you that for most of my administration she was a very valuable member of the Clinton-Gore team and played a major role in our economic programs. And I want to thank her.

And finally, let me say that, as you can see, every time he talks, there is no one in the United States Senate who is more passionate about what he believes than Tom Harkin. And he believes in the education of our children. It's easy to understand why, from his own experience. Most of you probably know that his father was a coal miner who didn't finish the eighth grade; his mother was an immigrant with little formal education. Thanks to an ROTC scholarship, he put himself through college. Now he sits next to a Rockefeller in the United States Senate. [*Laughter*] It's America, and Tom Harkin is the best of America.

You know, I must say, Jay Rockefeller always hates it when we do that to him. [*Laughter*] He is also a very good man. And you heard Tom Harkin say that because of his efforts, Iowa will receive another \$10 million this year to help renovate schools. But I want to do that for all our schools that need it.

I want to thank some people who are involved in this issue who are not here today: Congressman Charles Rangel, the House sponsor of our school bill; the many members of the AFT, the NEA, the Council of Great City Schools; the building and construction trades who have fanned out to Philadelphia, New York, New Orleans, Buffalo, Houston, Chicago, and Miami today to roll up their sleeves and help communities begin to repair their neediest schools.

You know, it is ironic that we're here talking about this school issue, because we are in America in the last year of the 20th century, in this millennium, enjoying the longest peacetime economic expansion in our history, nearly 19 million new jobs in the last 6½ years, the lowest unemployment rate in 30 years, the lowest crime rate in 26 years, the lowest welfare rolls in 30 years, the lowest minority unemployment ever recorded, the highest homeownership in history.

Here in Iowa, unemployment is a whopping 2.6 percent. Homeownership is almost at 75 percent. Wages are rising nationwide for the first time in 20 years for all classes of workers, and even faster here. I feel good about that. I feel good about the fact that compared to 6½ years ago the air and water are cleaner, the food is safer, and 90 percent of our children are immunized against serious childhood diseases for the first time in the entire history of our country.

I feel good about the 100,000 young people who have signed up to serve their communities in AmeriCorps and earn money to go to college. I am grateful, with the help of people like Tom Harkin and Leonard Boswell, that this administration has been able to preserve or set aside more land for the American people and our children's future, from the California redwoods to the Mojave Desert to the Florida Everglades than any administration in history, except those of Franklin and Theodore Roosevelt. I am grateful for all of that.

But what I came here to ask you is, what are we going to do with our prosperity, and what are we going to do with our surplus? This is a time of confidence and pride. But, as many people have said, the time to fix the roof is when the Sun is shining. And that is literally true in the case of school construction.

Are we going to develop some sort of collective amnesia and pretend that these times have always been here, always will be here, and we can do whatever we want to do that feels best in the moment, or seems most politically popular? Or are we going to think about the children here and the 21st century and what America will be like 10 years from now, 20 years from now, 30 years from now,

when they will have children in these schools?

That is what I want to say. You know, you folks should be glad to see me in Iowa. I'm the only guy that's been here in weeks that's not running for anything. [Laughter] What I am doing is trying to think about everything we can possibly do in these last days of this century. The Clinton-Gore administration is not running out the clock, hoping the good times will last. We are trying to push the ball down the field. We are trying to think about what it takes to build that bridge to tomorrow that all our children can walk across, what it would take to give opportunity to all of our people, to build a community of all of our people, to maintain our Nation's leadership for peace and freedom and prosperity around the world, to look at the long-term challenges.

I'll just mention three today, to get to the school construction issue. But you have to understand where the school construction issue is; you have to see it as a part of the big debate going on in Washington: What are we going to do with our prosperity? How should we handle this surplus, the one we have today and the one we're projected to have tomorrow? Otherwise, you couldn't begin to figure out why in the world we just don't do this. I mean, you must all be sitting out there thinking this is a no-brainer, just from what everybody else has already said before I got up here.

I believe that when you look at where we were just 6½ years ago, we had quadrupled the national debt in 12 years. The deficit was \$280 billion. It was projected to go to 380 this year. Now we have the biggest surplus we've ever recorded, and we're projected to be able to maintain those surpluses into the future, indefinitely.

Now, every farmer here knows that nobody can predict the future. That does not mean that every year we'll have exactly what is predicted. What it means is, if we have predictable economic performances, which is every so often we'll have a downturn, and then we'll have an upturn, then we'll have a downturn, then we'll have an upturn, on average, we will produce the surpluses we project to produce over the next 15 years. That's what it means. These projections are