

not based on everything will be hunky-dory every day of the next 15 years. So they're not unrealistic.

But we have to decide—since we haven't been in it—did you ever think when I was here running in '92 we would be back here having a debate about what to do with the surplus? [Laughter] This is a high-class problem. But it's just as important to get the answer to a high-class problem right as it is to one that you wish you didn't have to deal with. It's not like going to the dentist. But if we don't handle it right, we'll be going to the dentist and nobody will give us a shot to deaden the pain. We have got to deal with this issue in the proper way.

Let me just mention three things. We have to deal with the aging of America. Iowa has got a high percentage of people over 65. The number of people over 65 will double in 30 years. The older we get the more people that will be drawing Social Security and Medicare and the fewer people will be paying into it. This is not rocket science; this is basic math.

I believe before we pass a big tax cut we should save Social Security and Medicare and add a prescription drug benefit to Medicare for the 21st century so that—[applause]—why? That's going to save everybody a lot more money in the long run than a tax cut. What's going to happen? What's going to happen if we don't? This is not just about the elderly. I'm not just looking out for the baby boomers that are going to retire in a few years. You know what will happen.

How many family stories do you know right now where parents with little children are also taking care of their parents, because it's the right thing to do? But we have Social Security and Medicare so that we can balance the responsibilities of the generations and so that families can take of their own needs and look to their children as they go along. So this is not just about the elderly. This is about the children and grandchildren of the baby boom generation.

The second thing we ought to do is take care of the economy. And I would like to mention just two things, one of which you know very well. One is, there is still a lot of places in this country that aren't participating in the economic recovery. The big problem on the farm is we've had 4 years in a

row of worldwide record harvests for the first time in history and an economic collapse in 1997 in Asia, so markets shrink, the products go, prices collapse.

**Audience member.** Freedom to farm—

**The President.** Exactly right. As Senator Harkin and I warned—Congressman Boswell and I, we were all three laughing about it—we said, you know, the people who put in that “Freedom to Farm Act” acted like there never would be a bad year on the farm. And now last year we dealt with it. Today I'm going to meet with some of your farmers, and we're working on it. The Vice President called me after he had a chance to meet with some farmers here this week, and we talked about it.

But the point I want to make is, you have farmers; you have people in Appalachia; you have people in the Mississippi Delta; you have people who live on the Indian reservations; you have people who live in the inner cities; and even though we're doing better than we've ever done, there's still a lot of people who aren't part of this train. And there are ways to give everybody a chance who's willing to work to be a part of it. That ought to be something we do with our prosperity. We ought to give everybody who's willing to work a chance to be a part of that prosperity. And I think it's very important.

One thing we can do that will help the economy more than anything else is, if we adopt the plan I put out to save the majority of the surplus for Social Security and Medicare, since it's not needed now—while we save it we can pay the debt down so much that by 2015, in 16 years, for the first time since 1835, this country can be out of debt.

If you're a middle class person, why should you worry about that? Because if we're out of debt it means lower interest rates; higher investment; more jobs; higher wages; lower college loan, credit card, car payment, and home mortgage rates. It means a more stable world economy over the long run. It means a better environment for farmers and manufacturers and everybody else. It is a good thing to do.

Now, what I want to tell you is, we can do all that and still have a tax cut and still invest in education. But we cannot pretend that there are no consequences to proposing

a tax cut that will cut education and prevent us from saving Social Security and Medicare and mean we can't pay off the debt and we can't do these other things. There are choices to be made, and we should be thinking about the children and the future. And as we have proved the last 6½ years, when you do things that are right for the long run, often they turn out to be right for the short run, as well.

And so I say to you, this school issue is a part of this debate, this school construction issue. We propose a tax cut to help people save for retirement, take care of long-term care needs of their family, take care of their child care needs, and also to induce people to invest in more school construction with a big tax break. It is very, very important.

And you've already heard about Iowa's needs. You've heard Secretary Riley talk about America's needs. In spite of all—what you have to understand is, the school enrollments, as big as they are, are fixing to explode. And we've got to do some things about it. We've got to do what Governor Vilsack wants to do everywhere in America. Hardly anybody has done as well as he has. We've got to hook up all the classrooms in the country to the Internet. And we've got to have teachers to go into the classrooms—2.1 million are going to retire over the next few years. Dody is the beginning of a wave in America. And we've got to find young people to go in there and take their places. And we've got to have good facilities for people to visit, to learn in.

You know, I can still remember every schoolroom that I ever was in in my life. And a lot of old schools can be modernized, but when you've got kids—I've been to school districts, literally, literally, with one elementary school with 12 housetrailer out behind it. Not one or two. Twelve!

So we have to deal with this. And there are serious consequences to not dealing with it. Now, if our school construction initiative passes as a part of our tax cut proposal and our education program, it will help communities have \$25 billion over the next 2 years for school construction. That's enough to build or modernize 6,000 schools.

Now, if you compare that to the Republican proposal you will see that their plan is 644 schools. Ours is nearly 10 to 1. So some-

body can say, well, we have a school construction proposal—6,000 is better than 644.

We're having the same discussion about teachers. Last year I was thrilled—in the teeth of an election year, we had a bipartisan agreement to put 100,000 teachers in our schools, because the classes are getting bigger and it would allow us to lower class size in the early grades to an average of 18. We just had another national study come out the other day about how important that can be and how the learning gains can be permanent. And just 2 weeks ago Secretary Riley and I announced \$1.2 billion to help States and local school districts hire the first 30,000 of those 100,000.

But now the majority in Congress wants to back off from that. They have other ways to spend the money. They want to give the money out and not guarantee that it will go to hire new teachers. I feel that if you make a promise in an election year, you ought to keep it the next year, too. If it was a good idea last year, it's still a good idea.

So I say to you, these are two things that we ought to do. We need to do this school construction program. We need to finish the work of hiring 100,000 teachers. We need to finish the work that Governor Vilsack has done so much on here of wiring all of our schools. We need to finish these things. It all comes down to this: What do you want to do with this moment of prosperity?

And let me say one thing—you know, Washington tends to be a more partisan place than most places in America—maybe than anyplace in America. I've done what I could to try to unify this country. Most Americans, whether they're Republicans or Democrats or independents, that have kids in the schools want them to go to good schools.

I'll bet you there are a lot of school elections in Iowa where Republicans and Democrats vote the same way for school bond issues or on educational proposals. This is not always an ideological issue. This should be an issue that brings America together. But issues that unify people in the country have a way of dividing people in Washington. We had the same thing happen with the Patients' Bill of Rights; you probably saw that.

We had this crazy idea, we Democrats did, that everybody in a managed care plan in

America ought to be able to see a specialist if their doctor said they should see one. Or, if they lived in a big city and they got hurt in an accident, they ought to be able to go to the nearest emergency room, not be driven halfway across town. Or, if their employer changed managed care providers while a woman employee was in the middle of a pregnancy or a man or a woman was in chemotherapy, they ought to be able to keep their doctor until the treatment was over.

And if somebody hurts you with a bad decision, you ought to be able to get redress for it. Now those are rights that I enjoy under the Federal Health Care Plan and the Congress enjoys and every Federal employee enjoys. And the Congress—the Republican majority's own budget office said this would add at most \$2 a month to a managed care premium. In the Federal system, it added less than \$1 a month when I put them in.

Now, I don't know, but I believe in Iowa when you go to the doctor's office, they don't ask you if you're a Republican or a Democrat. [Laughter] And I don't believe when the children come to school here they ask you if you're a Republican or a Democrat. These are things that should unify us. And so I ask you to please, please do what you can to talk to all the members of this congressional delegation, ask them to support us on 100,000 teachers, ask them—it's still not too late to pass the Patients' Bill of Rights that gives the rest of you the protections we have in Congress and the White House and the Federal Government. And ask them to make a part of any tax cut plan a school construction initiative that will build or modernize 6,000 schools.

You think about this young woman who introduced me today. I have seen people like her all across America, marvelous kids in the poorest corners of this country—kids in schools that are 75 years old that haven't been fixed, where the kids walk up the steps and they see broken windows every day, where there are rooms, in some cases whole floors they can't even go on. They deserve better.

How in the world can we say to them, we had the most prosperous time in American history; we had the biggest surplus in history; we dug ourselves out of debt; but all we

thought of was ourselves and the next election; we didn't have the time or money or vision to think about you and your future? We are a better country than that. All of us are, without regard to party. Everywhere else but Washington, DC, you would never hear anybody discarding this argument. I implore you, help us to get this done this year. The children of America deserve 21st century schools.

Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:25 p.m. in the gymnasium. In his remarks, he referred to 1998 Iowa Teacher of the Year Ruth Ann Gaines, who introduced the President; incoming eighth grader Catherine Swoboda; Eric Witherspoon, superintendent, Des Moines Independent Public Schools; Gary L. Eyerly, principal, Amos Hiatt Middle School; Gov. Tom Vilsack, Lt. Gov. Sally Pederson, State Attorney General Tom Miller, Secretary of State Chester J. Culver, and State Treasurer Michael L. Fitzgerald and State Senator Michael Gronstal of Iowa; Representative Leonard L. Boswell's wife, Darlene (Dody); and Senator Tom Harkin's wife, Ruth, former President and Chief Executive Officer, Overseas Private Investment Corporation. The President also referred to the Federal Agriculture Improvement and Reform Act of 1996 (Public Law 104-127). This item was not received in time for publication in the appropriate issue.

## Exchange With Reporters in Des Moines

July 16, 1999

### *Patients' Bill of Rights Legislation*

**Q.** Mr. President, do you have any reaction to Senator Lott's comments—

**The President.** I can understand why he'd be uncomfortable about what he did. He denied the American people the right to the patient protections he has. So they feel uncomfortable. But it's not too late; they can still change their position. They ought to think about—it's not a matter of name calling. Their budget office told him it would only cost \$2 a month premium. They've ignored their own budget people; they've now ignored everybody, and they basically signed up with the health insurance companies against all the doctors and all the nurses and all the patients in America and denied other

people what those of us in the Federal Government enjoy. I don't think it's right. But it's not too late to do right.

NOTE: The exchange began at approximately 3 p.m. at Amos Hiatt Middle School. A tape was not available for verification of the content of this exchange. This item was not received in time for publication in the appropriate issue.

### **Statement on House Action on the Proposed "African Growth and Opportunity Act"**

*July 16, 1999*

I welcome and applaud passage today by the House of Representatives of the "African Growth and Opportunity Act." This historic initiative will set the foundation for a stronger partnership between the United States and Africa. I urge the Senate to act quickly so that we can strengthen the ties between our Nation and a continent on the verge of a new era of democracy and prosperity.

This legislation offers the opportunity for increased trade and investment between the United States and Africa—to the mutual benefit of both. By working with African nations to build their economies, strengthen democratic government, and increase opportunities for all the people of Africa, we will help build strong, capable partners with whom we can work to counter the growing threats of terrorism, crime, environmental degradation, and disease.

NOTE: This item was not received in time for publication in the appropriate issue.

### **Remarks at a Dinner for Senator Tom Harkin in Des Moines**

*July 16, 1999*

Thank you very much. First of all, thank you, Jerry, for having me in your home. The last time, he took me to his golf club; now, he takes me to his home. I can't wait for my third trip. *[Laughter]*

Thank you, Linda. Thank you all for being here. Governor, thanks for spending the day with me, with your Lieutenant Governor and your distinguished array of officials and the First Lady from the great State of Iowa. I

want to thank Tom and Ruth for giving me the chance to come down here and be with them. I want to say it's wonderful to see Congressman and Mrs. Smith. He did everything he could to educate me about agriculture before he left the Congress, and I did the best I could to learn. I'm a little slow, but he's working on me still. *[Laughter]*

Let me say to all of you, first, I want you to know that I wanted to come here to say thank you to the people of Iowa. We had a big crowd over at the middle school earlier today when we were promoting one of the many initiatives Tom Harkin is identified with, our efforts to get a modest tax cut through that will lead to \$25 billion in construction or modification or modernization of 6,000 schools in this country. And so we were over there, and there were, I don't know, a few hundred people there. And the air-conditioning was out, so the atmosphere was warm and friendly. *[Laughter]* Secretary Riley and I, having come from the Washington heat, felt right at home.

And so, anyway, we were there and having a good time. And I said, "You know, you folks in Iowa ought to be glad to see me; I'm the first guy that's been here in weeks that's not running for anything." *[Laughter]* And I must say, after 24 years, most of which—25 now—most of which time I was running every 2 years, it's a little awkward for me to say that. But I want you to know that I am profoundly grateful to the people of Iowa for being so good to me and Hillary and the Vice President and Mrs. Gore, for voting for us twice, for supporting our policies, for giving us a chance to serve.

And the second reason I wanted to come down here is I love Tom Harkin and I am profoundly grateful. You know, I'm not sure—and this is no offense to the people of Iowa—but I bet you could get elected and reelected Senator from Iowa without being the world's number one opponent of abusive child labor in foreign countries. He just did that because he thinks it's wrong and because he doesn't want children anywhere to suffer when children everywhere should be going to school and growing up to decent lives.

Yes, he's one of the greatest advocates for farmers this country has, and we've got an

earful again today about the terrible dilemmas that our farmers are facing. And there's a general consensus, I think, on what causes it. And Tom and I both said back in 1994 or '5, when they passed that freedom to farm bill, that without a safety net this would happen sooner or later; unfortunately, sooner came before later. And we have to act there, and we will.

He also is perhaps the foremost advocate for the disabled in the United States Senate, perhaps one of the two or three foremost advocates for research and development in new technologies in sciences. There is hardly anybody who serves in either House in the United States Congress that has the combination of wide interest, deep knowledge, genuine compassion, and effectiveness. I have rarely known anyone in public office that I thought was as truly good a person and as truly good a public servant as Tom Harkin. And you are very lucky to have him.

And I just want to say a couple of things. You're going to become—Iowa is once again at the vortex of America's political concerns. And everybody is coming here to tell you how great they're going to be if you vote for them. And one of the things I think we should posit is that most everybody who comes here will actually believe what they say. Having been criticized, as Tom noted inside, fairly mildly for a few years—[laughter]—it has been my observation that most people in politics in both parties actually pretty much believe what they say and believe in what they do and show up every day and try to pretty well do a good job.

Forty years ago this year, I took eighth grade science from a guy who was a coach and a science teacher named Vernon Dokey. Now, to be charitable, he was not the most handsome man I had ever seen. And he knew it. He was—he looked sort of like a grizzly bear that had been through a meat grinder, but walked out. [Laughter]

And he would come—it wouldn't be politically correct to do so today, but in those days it was bearable—he used to smoke these cheap cigars that he had in a cigar holder which he would grit in his teeth like that—[laughter]—and he had this sort of highly prominent, well-chiseled nose, and he was a big, burly guy. And he was not particularly

conventionally attractive. Interesting—he had a beautiful wife who was our social studies teacher, who had a beautiful sister who was my geometry teacher. [Laughter]

And we were 13, and we were crazy, and we were trying to figure out how the world works. So old Vernon Dokey says one day in science class, he says, "You kids won't remember a thing I teach you about science, but I want you to remember some things I teach you about life." He said, "Now, look at me." He said, "I want you to know something. Every morning, I get up, and I go in the bathroom; I throw water in my face; I put shaving cream on; I shave my face; I wash that shaving cream off; I look in the mirror, and I smile, and I say, 'Vernon, you're beautiful.'" [Laughter] And he said, "Now, if you kids remember that, you'll get a lot further in life." [Laughter]

Now, you think about that. Forty years later, I still remember. So if you notice when I fight with the Republicans, no matter how hard I fight with them, I don't question their motives or their patriotism or their love of country. When I think they're wrong, I say they're wrong.

Iowa and New Hampshire, because you go first, have a heavy responsibility to help to render judgment, if you will, for the country about not only candidates but issues. What I want to say to you is that I came to the Presidency in 1992, having been Governor of what my predecessor affectionately called a small Southern State. And I loved every day of it. And to me, politics was about ideas, action, and people. It was not about Washington rhetoric, personal destruction, and who looked good in the morning paper. It was about ideas, action, and people.

And we believed that we could bring new ideas based on old-fashioned Democratic philosophy that everybody who was willing to work for it ought to have opportunity in this country; that we had to change to meet the changes of the time; and that everybody who was a responsible citizen ought to be part of America's community. It was pretty simple, really.

But if that's what was guiding you, then we no longer believed that you couldn't, for example, balance the budget and still increase investment in education; that you

couldn't have a strong and effective Government and reduce the size and burden of Government. When you heard Tom say that the Vice President ran our reinventing Government plan—this is one of those—if you do a survey on this, people say, “I don't care, I still don't believe it.” People do not believe it, but we have the smallest Federal establishment since 1962 when John Kennedy was President. We have eliminated hundreds of programs, and you can't name one of them. I'll give \$5 to anybody in this audience who can name two of the hundreds of programs we have eliminated. And we have a more vigorous, more effective Government.

We've got the longest peacetime expansion in history, the lowest crime rate in 26 years, the lowest welfare rolls in 30 years, the lowest unemployment rate in 30 years, very high wage growth, high business startups, highest homeownership in history, the lowest minority unemployment in history—all that is only evidence of the important thing: All elections are about tomorrow. All elections are about tomorrow. And a good record is only evidence of what will be good in the future—however, very important evidence.

And many of these things we've had to fight with our friends on the other side, and Tom Harkin was always leading the fight. We said we could lower the crime rate, but you had to help these communities put police on the street and you had to take more guns out of the hands of criminals. Well, they said, “If you try to put 100,000 police on the street, it wouldn't make a lick of difference. And if we checked the backgrounds of people that tried to buy handguns in gun shows, all you would do is make the hunters mad, and criminals didn't buy guns at gun shows, anyway.” Well, years later, we haven't inconvenienced a single hunter, and 400,000 people—400,000 people—were not able to buy guns, because of their criminal backgrounds, at gun stores. So our arguments were right, and theirs were wrong.

They said we couldn't balance the budget, and we were going to provoke a recession. But we balanced the budget, biggest surplus in history, and we doubled our investment in education while we were doing it. So we have evidence here.

So I say to you as you think about the future of your State and Nation, there is evidence here. And what I want to say to you is, Tom Harkin and I—I'm not running for anything and he's not running for anything right yet—*[laughter]*—but we and all the people that are running who are in public office, we're still drawing a paycheck from you every 2 weeks, and we should show up for work, and we should do things. I tell all the Republicans and Democrats in Washington all the time, if we agreed on everything I'm asking us to agree on, there would still be stuff for us to fight about. There will always be something to have a next election on. But we get hired to show up for work.

Now, the big question we have before us today is: What are we going to do with the surplus; what are we going to do with this period of bounty we have? And I would argue—I don't want to repeat my whole State of the Union Address, but I want to tell you, I would argue three things for sure. Number one, we ought to do whatever we can to deal with the aging of America, because when the baby boomers retire, we're going to have more people retired and fewer people working to support them. And if you want the seniors of this country to be able to have their Social Security and their Medicare, and you want them to have it in a way that is secure and does not bankrupt their children so they can't afford to raise their grandchildren, now is the time to set aside most of this surplus to save Social Security and Medicare and provide a prescription drug benefit with Medicare. So I think that is a big deal.

The second thing I think we ought to do is everything we can to keep this economy going and then, to reach out and touch the people who have not been affected by the recovery. And let me just say on the first, the way I want to save Social Security and Medicare will keep us from spending that surplus and devote the interest savings on the surplus to making Social Security last longer, so we'll make Social Security last for more than 50 years, make Medicare last for more than 25 years, and make the country debt-free in 15 years, for the first time since 1835. Now, these are big things. We should not wait for another election to deal with these big things.