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Remarks at a Luncheon Honoring Representative Ruben Hinojosa in McAllen

February 9, 2000

Thank you so much. Well, Congressman, I'm afraid now that this meeting has been opened to the press, if the list you just read is widely published, every other Member of Congress will be angry at me for not doing as well. [*Laughter*] I want to say a special thanks to your Congressman Ruben Hinojosa and Marty, and a happy birthday to his little daughter, Karen. He has really done a wonderful job for you. And he makes it easy to be helpful.

I want to thank Zeke and Livia Reyna for their cohosting this event. And I want to thank Alonzo and Yoli for having me back in their beautiful little home here. [*Laughter*] I want you to know I agreed to come to south Texas—the first time I wanted to come to the valley before I had seen this place. So the first time I came out of the goodness of my heart. The second time I came because I wanted to come to this place again. [*Laughter*]

This is my third trip to the valley as President. And as the Congressman said, the Vice President has been here twice; Hillary was here recently; for all of you who were here I want to thank you, and thank you for giving her such a good hand. We had a great send-off on Sunday when she formally declared her campaign. And I think she's doing very well. I talked to her today, and if you can measure how well you're doing by how hard they attack you, which I've always thought was a pretty good measure—[*laughter*]—she's a cinch.

So I wanted to say to all of you seriously, there are many friends I have in this crowd today—the country judges, Senator Truan, others—that I have known for a long time. I first came to south Texas and then to the Rio Grande Valley, where I literally fell in love with this place almost 30 years ago now, before a lot of you in this crowd were even born. When I was a very young man, I realized that special quality of the people here, the special quality of the community. And I always thought if I ever had a chance to help, I would do it. You have given me a chance to help, and it's been an honor to do so.

I just want to say a few words as the only politician you'll hear from this year who is not running for anything. [*Laughter*] I want to talk to you not just as a President but as a citizen of this country. When I came here to this community on the last night of my campaign in 1992, some of you were there, and there was a great feeling of excitement. And we had a huge voter turnout the next day, and the Vice President and I were given a strong victory and a mandate to go in and change the direction of our country. We said then, we wanted to put the American people first, not Washington politics. We wanted opportunity for every responsible citizen. We wanted a community of all Americans, and we believed that Government was not the problem or the solution, but Government belonged to the people, and it was the job of Government to create the conditions and give people the tools that they need to solve their own problems and live their own dreams. And we've worked hard on that for 7 years now.

When I was here on that night in 1992, we had a stagnant economy and high unemployment. Today, we have the longest economic expansion in history, the lowest unemployment rate in 30 years, the lowest Hispanic- and African-American unemployment rates ever recorded, and the lowest poverty rates in more than 20 years, the lowest female unemployment rate in over 40 years. We have tried to do what we said we would do.

Our society was deeply divided. There was a riot in Los Angeles that year and great discontent everywhere. Today, we have the lowest crime rates in 30 years, the lowest welfare rolls in 30 years, over 2 million children lifted out of poverty, almost 7 million people off the welfare rolls. We have created empowerment zones around the country in places like the Rio Grande Valley to give people the chance to attract economic investment. The college-going rate is up by about 10 percent. The country is moving in the right direction.

And as I said, as the person you'll hear from this year who is not running for office, the great question that the American people have to answer when they vote for Congress,

for Senator, for President, is: Now, what? Now, what? What are we going to do with this truly magic moment? Every person in this audience today who is over 30 years old can remember some time in your life when you made a mistake because you thought things were going so well, you didn't have to think; you didn't have to work; you didn't have to plan; and there was no consequence for slacking up.

Every person here who has lived long enough can remember when you made a personal, a family, or a business mistake because things seemed to be so good that you really didn't have to do what we should all be doing every day with our lives, trying to get better, trying to do more, trying always to think about tomorrow.

Now, what I want to say to you is the last time America had these conditions was in the longest economic expansion in history before this one, between 1961 and 1969. When I graduated from high school in 1964, we had high growth, low unemployment; we were on the way to passing civil rights legislation; everybody thought we would be able to resolve a lot of those difficult issues in the Congress in debate. The country had been heartbroken by President Kennedy's assassination, but we had united behind President Johnson, and he had done a masterful job of leading us and trying to pass legislation through the Congress, and everybody thought it was going to go on forever.

Within 4 years, we had riots in the streets; the country was deeply divided over Vietnam; President Johnson announced he wouldn't run for reelection; and Martin Luther King and Robert Kennedy were killed. And in the Presidential election of 1968, a deeply troubled and divided people voted for someone who said he represented the silent majority, which is another way of saying, this country is divided between us and them. I'm with us, and you don't want them.

And we have labored under that for 30 years. And for 7 years, I've been trying to turn this around. And I feel now, the country is moving in the right direction. But I want to tell you this: I'm not running for anything. As an American, I have been waiting for more than 30 years for my country to have the ability for all of us to join together hand in hand and build the future of our dreams for our children. That's what this is about. And we dare not blow this opportunity.

You know, some people in life don't get a second chance, and those of us who do have to be grateful for it. Now, our whole country has been given a second chance, under even better conditions than existed more than 30 years ago before all the wheels ran off.

So I say to you, when I come down here and talk to people about how we can make the Rio Grande Valley an oasis of opportunity, to me that's part of the long-term challenge of America. We should look at every place in America where there is too much poverty and too much unemployment and say, "If we can't bring economic opportunity to these places now, when will we ever be able to do it?"

So every place in America that has not fully participated in this recovery should have dramatic incentives for people to invest there, to create jobs there, to put people to work there, to give people a chance to live their dreams there. Every place in America and all the people in America that don't have access to health care—we should do more to provide more people access to health care, until everybody has it.

That's why I said in the State of the Union I wanted to see another 3 million children enrolled in our health insurance program and over 5 million parents included in it. I want people, who are over 55 but not old enough to be on Medicare, who lose their health insurance, to be able to buy into Medicare. And I think they ought to have a tax credit so they can afford to do it, because we have to keep moving forward in health care. We have to keep moving forward in education. That's why I asked the Congress to put another billion dollars in Head Start and to provide enough funds for every troubled school in this country to give after-school or summer school programs to the kids who need it. That's why I want the Congress to provide enough money to repair 5,000 schools a year for the next 5 years and to build and modernize 6,000 more so all of our kids will have a chance to get a world-class education.

And that's why I have worked so hard to help people balance the demands of raising their children and doing their work. That's

why I want to increase the child care tax credit, why I want to pass an increase in the minimum wage, why I want to give families a $3,000 tax credit to care for an aging parent or a disabled member of the family—one of the biggest problems in America today—why I think we ought to be proud of the fact that we've opened at least 2 years of college to everybody with these HOPE scholarship tax credits. But I have asked the Congress to give the American people a tax deduction for college tuition at a 28 percent rate, even if you're in the 15 percent income tax bracket, up to $10,000. That would guarantee that everybody in America could afford to go to 4 years of college if they did the work and learned the things they need to learn to go.

These are important things that will bring us together. Now, let me just say one thing in closing. If you asked me to summarize what it is we did that was different over the last 7 years that worked, I could talk about our economic policy, which was different. We got rid of the deficit, and now I want to pay us out of debt for the first time since 1835, and if we do that, all the kids here will have low interest rates and a strong economy. We had a different welfare reform policy. We said, "Able-bodied people have to work, but we're going to take care of the kids. We're not going to punish them." We had a different crime policy. We said we ought to take—put more police on the street and take guns out of the hands of criminals.

But the most important thing we did was to say, "We've got a different philosophy. We don't want to divide the American people anymore. We believe everybody counts; everybody should have a chance; we'll all do better individually if we try to help each other do better together."

So if someone came to me tonight and said, "I am the angel sent from the good Lord, and even though you're having a good time being President, you can't finish your term. This is your last day, but I'll be a genie, you can have one wish," it would not be for all the things I talked to you about. It would be to create one America. It would be to create a climate in America where we genuinely respected one another, where we were genuinely committed to giving one another a chance.

I see our former attorney general, Mr. Morales, back there. Is there life after politics, Dan? [*Laughter*] I hope that in my lifetime we will see a Hispanic-American Governor of Texas, President of the United States, on the Supreme Court, doing all these things. I hope that will be true of all the ethnic groups that are coming into our country and enriching us.

But more important than that, even, I hope that all of our children will have a chance to define and live their dreams, whatever they are. Your Congressman is an unbelievably effective public servant. And it's not just because he can worry me to death until I finally say yes; it's because he proceeds from the right philosophy. Everybody counts. Everybody should have a chance. We'll all do better when we help each other. It's worked pretty well for America.

I just want to ask you from the bottom of my heart—you know how I feel about Vice President Gore, you know what he's done here in the empowerment zone and other things—but the main thing I want you to think about, for all of us, what happens to us individually is not as important as the direction the country takes. And I have fought very, very hard to keep the poison and the division and the animosity and the Washington political games to a minimum in terms of their ability to impact you and interfere with what we were all trying to do together.

Now it's up to you again. And all these elections, from the Presidency to the Senate and Congress races, the governorships, all these elections, they're like giant job interviews. And you have to decide not only who to hire but what are they going to do. And just remember, as they used to tell me when I was a kid growing up in Arkansas: When you see a turtle on a fencepost, chances are it didn't get there by accident. [*Laughter*]

Here we are. It didn't happen by accident. And we will never forgive ourselves if we blow this opportunity. So instead of relaxing, we should bear down and lift our sights and open our hearts and hands and make this election a time when we seize our deepest, fondest hopes and our biggest dreams for our children.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:35 p.m. at a private residence. In his remarks, he referred to Representative Hinojosa's wife, Martha Lopez Hinojosa, and their daughter Karen; Zeke and Livia Reyna and Alonzo and Yoli Cantu, luncheon hosts; Texas State Senator Carlos Truan; and former Texas State Attorney General Dan Morales.

Message to the Congress Transmitting a Report on the Extension of Normal Trade Relations Status With Albania

February 9, 2000

To the Congress of the United States:

I am submitting an updated report to the Congress concerning the emigration laws and policies of Albania. The report indicates continued Albanian compliance with U.S. and international standards in the area of emigration. In fact, Albania has imposed no emigration restrictions, including exit visa requirements, on its population since 1991.

On December 5, 1997, I determined and reported to the Congress that Albania was not in violation of paragraphs (1), (2), or (3) of subsection 402(a) of the Trade Act of 1974 or paragraphs (1), (2), or (3) of subsection 409(a) of that Act. That action allowed for the continuation of normal trade relations (NTR) status for Albania and certain other activities without the requirement of an annual waiver. This semiannual report is submitted as required by law pursuant to the determination of December 5, 1997.

William J. Clinton

The White House,
February 9, 2000.

Message to Congress Reporting on Rescissions and Deferrals

February 9, 2000

To the Congress of the United States:

In accordance with the Congressional Budget and Impoundment Control Act of 1974, I herewith report three rescissions of budget authority, totaling $128 million, and two deferrals of budget authority, totaling $1.6 million.

The proposed rescissions affect the programs of the Department of Energy and the Department of Housing and Urban Development. The proposed deferrals affect programs of the Department of State and International Assistance Programs.

William J. Clinton

The White House,
February 9, 2000.

Message to the Senate Transmitting the Rotterdam Convention on the Prior Informed Consent Procedure for Certain Hazardous Chemicals and Pesticides in International Trade With Annexes

February 9, 2000

To the Senate of the United States:

I transmit herewith, for the advice and consent of the Senate to ratification, the Rotterdam Convention on the Prior Informed Consent Procedure for Certain Hazardous Chemicals and Pesticides in International Trade, with Annexes, done at Rotterdam, September 10, 1998. The report of the Department of State is enclosed for the information of the Senate.

The Convention, which was negotiated under the auspices of the United Nations Environment Program and the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization, with the active participation of the United States, provides a significant and valuable international tool to promote sound risk-based decision-making in the trade of certain hazardous chemicals. Building on a successful voluntary procedure, the Convention requires Parties to exchange information about these chemicals, to communicate national decisions about their import, and to require that exports from their territories comply with the import decisions of other Parties.

The United States, with the assistance and cooperation of industry and nongovernmental organization, plays an important international leadership role in the safe management of hazardous chemicals and pesticides. This Convention, which assists developing countries in evaluating risks and enforcing their regulatory decisions regarding