

Statement on Opposition in the Senate to the Nomination of Enrique Moreno

May 6, 2000

Senators Gramm and Hutchison announced yesterday that they opposed the confirmation of Enrique Moreno, my nominee for a Texas vacancy on the United States Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit. Their claim that he lacks the necessary experience to serve on the fifth circuit is unconscionable. The American Bar Association, which has rated judicial nominees for Republican and Democratic Presidents since the Eisenhower administration, unanimously gave Moreno their highest rating. The son of Mexican-American immigrants and a graduate of Harvard Law School, Moreno was rated one of the top three trial attorneys in El Paso by State judges.

In rejecting Moreno's candidacy, the Texas Senators have ignored the strong endorsement of the United States Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, the Hispanic National Bar Association, and local law enforcement officials. This is not the first time that the Texas Senators have rejected an exceptional Hispanic candidate for this seat, which has been vacant for more than 3 years. Jorge Rangel was forced to withdraw after the Texas Senators refused to allow action on his nomination. By blocking qualified judicial nominees, Gramm and Hutchison have exacerbated the vacancy crisis on the fifth circuit. Their unjustifiable opposition to Enrique Moreno—an exceptionally well-qualified Hispanic judicial nominee—must not be allowed to stand.

Statement on the Northern Ireland Peace Process

May 6, 2000

I want to join Prime Ministers Blair and Ahern in welcoming the IRA's commitment to initiate a process that will completely and verifiably put arms beyond use and its decision to resume contact with the Independent International Commission on Decommissioning. This is a significant step toward realizing the full promise of the Good Friday ac-

cord. I urge the loyalist paramilitaries to do the same.

I express appreciation to Martti Ahtisaari and Cyril Ramaphosa for their willingness to take part in confidence-building measures involving third party inspection of IRA weapons dumps. I have great confidence in their ability to contribute to this important task.

These developments offer renewed hope to the people of Northern Ireland that politics will once and for all be pursued through exclusively political means. The United States remains ready to assist this process in any way we can.

NOTE: In his statement, the President referred to Prime Minister Tony Blair of the United Kingdom; Prime Minister Bertie Ahern of Ireland; former President Martti Ahtisaari of Finland; and former Secretary-General Cyril Ramaphosa of South Africa's African National Congress.

Remarks at a Reception for Hillary Clinton in Little Rock, Arkansas

May 7, 2000

Thank you very much. Vic, thank you for being here. Marion, thank you for being here. Vic Snyder was one of the bravest people in the Arkansas State Senate when I was Governor. When he ran for Congress, I told Hillary, I said, "I'm afraid he can't get elected. He's got too much guts. He'll say what he thinks about everything." But he got elected, and he got reelected. And I thank—when Marion Berry ran for Congress after doing a stint in our administration in the Agriculture Department, Dale and David and I really felt that he was entitled to be in Congress, almost as a conciliation prize for having hosted us at the coon supper in Gillette all those years. Anybody who could get us to eat coon for 10 or 15 years in a row should be given a seat in Congress, just as a matter, of course. But I thank them so much.

The other night when I was home, a couple of weeks ago—or maybe it was last week—to dedicate the law school here to Bill Bowen and to do the event in honor of our friend, Daisy Bates, Dale and David and I went to dinner alone, just the three of us. And we needed adult supervision. [*Laughter*]

If there were a tape of the conversation we had—we relived everything we had ever done together, and amplified it all in an unconscionable way. I don't know when I've had as much fun. And Barbara, you should have been there to give us a little civilizing influence, but we had a good time.

Today mostly is a day for us that is full of sentiment and gratitude. I want to thank you for all you've done for us over the years. I want to thank you for things large and small when I was Governor and for backing us in the two times I ran for President. Yesterday I did have a chance to travel the backroads of Logan and Franklin and Madison and Washington and Benton Counties and to relive my first race for Congress in 1974. We went to Stephanie Streett's wedding in the beautiful chapel in Subiaco. I thought about all my old friends, including a lot of them, unfortunately, who aren't around anymore.

And Hillary and I both agreed that if we hadn't had to start our careers in public life in a place where you actually had to go see people and listen to them, instead of someplace where you just spent all your time raising funds to run television ads, our lives would have been very different, and I never would have had a chance to be the President.

I also was reminded of the first time I brought Hillary to Arkansas, and I picked her up at the airport here in Little Rock, and instead of going to Hot Springs, I drove her up to River Valley, and then we drove down Highway 7, a fairly indirect way, but I wanted to give her a sense of what I hoped she was getting into.

I'm looking forward to building this library and policy center, and we're going to have big apartment on top of the library. We're finalizing the plans now. I'm trying to keep this library to a reasonable price, somewhere around \$125 million. But I want it to be a world-class building, a place that is beautiful and distinctive for our State, that will capture the imagination of the people and that will in some way, some small way, try to repay the people of Arkansas for all they have done for me. And we're going to have a nice apartment there, and I'll be there a lot. Even Senator Hillary will be there some, too, when I can work it out.

I want to say a few things that are more comfortable for me to say, I think, than Hillary, before I bring her on. When Senator Moynihan announced that he would not run for the Senate again and the New York Democrats were trying to decide, you know, what they were going to do, they didn't just want to give the Senate seat back to the Republican Party and to Mayor Giuliani, and they knew he would be a very formidable candidate, that it was a seat that had been occupied by Robert Kennedy and then by Pat Moynihan. And all these House Members started calling Hillary. Then they started calling me to lobby Hillary.

And we talked, and I had always hoped she would have a chance to run for office and to serve because I thought she would be so good. But we decided she needed to go up there and just visit people, just the way we did so long ago in all those communities I went through yesterday. Every town of any size, I had been in every store in town more than once that we went through. And so she did and came back and said, "You know, the stuff I've worked on all my life is really what they need. Someone who cares about the education of our children; how families balance work and child-rearing; somebody who knows something about health care; somebody who knows something about bringing economic opportunity to underdeveloped areas." If New York State, upstate—that's exclusive of the suburbs and the city—were a separate State, it would be 49th in job growth in my tenure as President, something that I have tried to help on. And much of what needs to be done there is what we've tried to do in the Delta and other rural areas of our State.

And she had so many people who wanted her to run and wanted her to do it that she really decided that she ought to try. And then I just practically beat her up time and time again, working on this announcement speech. She said, "I've given a zillion speeches. Why do you keep doing this?" I said, because an election is a job interview, and if you get the job, it helps to have decided in advance what you intend to do when you get there.

And one of the reasons I think that the people here were good enough to elect me

Governor five times is I always tried to be the candidate of change. I always tried to lay out what I wanted to do, and I always tried to be doing what I said I would do in the election. And one of the things I'm proudest of, a little known fact, is that in 1995, a Presidential scholar who at that time I had never met said that by '95 I had already kept a higher percentage of my campaign promises than the previous five Presidents. And I'm proud of that.

So she worked on that. And I thought she gave a terrific speech that day, with a wonderful program. And she showed that movie, which has a lot of Arkansas in it, as you saw.

Now, I want to make one general statement before I bring Hillary up here. This is a huge election. This election is just as important as what happened in '92, when this country was in terrible trouble. A lot of people have forgotten how bad it was in '92. And that's not good. It's just as important as it was in '96, when the American people decided to give me another chance to try to finish what I'd set out to do.

But we have worked so—I've tried hard to take good care of this, and Hillary has been involved in so many of the things we have done together these last 8 years. But so much of the time we spent—Dale and David were saying they were glad they were part of it—all we did was make unpopular decisions in '93 and '94, because we had to do hard things to get this country turned around again. Hillary made fun of me today. She said there was some article talking about that I had real good job ratings, and if they could just take out the first 2 years, they'd be perfectly astronomical. Well, in the first 2 years, I had to do all the hard stuff that made it better the last 6.

And so we got the country turned around. And the unemployment rate last month was 3.9 percent, for the first time in over 30 years. And that's good. The welfare rolls have been cut in half; 90 percent of our kids immunized for the first time, something I know is very important to Dale and Betty Bumpers. Today the statistics were to be released, or have already been released, showing that crime has come down every year, down another 7 percent across the board. Only about three dozen cities in the United States last

year, in the whole country, had an increase in the crime rate.

So things are going in the right direction. But the big test for a country is, what do you do when things are going well? What do we propose to do with our prosperity, with the fact that our social problems are lessened, with the fact that we've got the lowest African-American and Hispanic unemployment rate ever recorded? What are we going to do with this?

And in all fairness, one of the reasons that our adversaries in the other party, beginning with the Presidential nominee, are sort of trying to blur all these issues and say, "We care about all those things that Bill Clinton and Al Gore worked on for 8 years," is that they hope that people will forget what it was like in '92. But there are huge decisions before you.

And as sentimental as I feel today, elections are always about tomorrow. And what I wanted to do with all my heart is literally build a bridge for this country to the 21st century, so that when I left office, America would be in a position to build a future of our dreams for our children. To me, that's what this whole thing was about. And I was furious and disappointed in 1991, when I saw our country just paralyzed in Washington—nobody getting anything done, everybody fighting, partisan politics the order of the day, which, unfortunately, there's still too much of there.

And so we set about doing things. But it's important for all of you to focus—if you believe that the results were good, it's not just because you knew me and you saw I gave a good speech and I was a pretty good guy. What we did was—those were the right things to do. You can be as eloquent as you want, and if you advocate the wrong thing, you'll get the wrong result.

That's what—this election for the Senate is a big issue. It really matters who is in the Senate. The Republican Senators from Texas just announced a couple of days ago that they weren't even going to even permit a hearing on a Hispanic judge who was from El Paso, who graduated cum laude from Harvard and Harvard Law School and was endorsed by every single organization with an informed

opinion. Why? Because he wasn't ideologically far enough to the right.

This is a big election, and I can tell you who's in the Senate makes a huge difference, for good or ill. And you're going to have to decide, including in Arkansas, whether you want to build on the progress for the last 8 years or reverse the policies. Do you like this economic policy? If you do, you better stick with it and build on it. Do you believe that it's a good thing that the educational attainment is going up, the college-going rate is going up, more people than ever before can afford to send their kids to college? If you do, you've got to build on it, and the same thing with the environment and the same thing with health care and with national security. The other party is honestly opposed to the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty. And if they do what they say they're going to do, there's a real chance we could have a new arms race again in the world, which is the last thing in the wide world we need. We've got enough problems out there with the terrorists and the drug runners and the organized criminals, without setting off another arms race.

So, you know, I'd like to come home and just make this a perfectly happy thing, but I'm telling you, this is a big decision that the people will take. And this election of 2000 is every bit as important, even though I'm not on the ticket—and a lot of you did a lot for me. You went to New Hampshire. You did all the things in the wide world. What was going on in '92 and '96—that was important, but the 2000 election will determine whether we really like the direction of the country and we want to continue to change built on that, or whether we say, "Well, we feel so good now, what they say sounds good; I think we'll go back to their economic policy and their education policy and their health care policy and their environmental policy and their foreign policy." This is a huge, huge decision.

And that's why I thought it was a good thing for Hillary to run. Because I've been doing this a long time. I never—I don't think any State ever had two Senators working together that were remotely as good as Dale Bumpers and David Pryor. They were the best team I ever saw. I have—I served with

150 Governors, and I've seen another 100 run through the White House since I've been there. I've got—you know, I realize I am prejudiced in this, but I know a lot about public service and public service efforts. And I have spent the last almost 30 years now, having conversations with my wife about every conceivable issue.

I watched her when she started the Arkansas Advocates for Children and Families. I watched her when she ran this education standards program here, when a lot of our kids couldn't even get science and math courses in their schools. I watched her labor to try to get rid of all the ridiculous Federal barriers to people adopting children and to try to get us to adopt policies up there that would enable working families to afford health insurance and deal with a whole lot of other issues.

And in my whole life, I have never known anybody that had a better grasp of the issues, a better ability to organize, a better ability to get people who thought they would never get along to work together and could get up every day and just keep going, than Hillary, never—not a person.

So, I think the Senate would be a much better place if she were there. I think she would do a superb job for the people of New York. I think she would be great for America. I think you know that, and you will never know how grateful we are that you're here today. And I hope you'll make her feel welcome.

Come on up, Hillary.
Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:50 p.m. in Hall A at the New Statehouse Convention Center. In his remarks, he referred to William H. Bowen, former dean, University of Arkansas at Little Rock School of Law; Representatives Vic Snyder and Marion Berry; former Senator Dale Bumpers and his wife, Betty; former Senator David H. Pryor and his wife, Barbara; Mayor Rudolph W. Giuliani of New York City; Enrique Moreno, nominee, U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit. The transcript released by the Office of the Press Secretary also included the remarks of the First Lady.

Statement on the Federal Bureau of Investigation's Uniform Crime Report

May 7, 2000

Today the FBI released new 1999 statistics showing that crime is down for an unprecedented eighth year in a row, continuing the longest decline on record. The decline in crime has reached Americans living in communities of every size and in every region across the country. Data from the 1999 FBI Uniform Crime Report show that overall crime fell 7 percent, with crime down in every category of offense. Violent crime dropped 7 percent, including an 8 percent drop in murder, and property crime fell an additional 7 percent. In 1999 there were over 8,000 fewer murders than in 1992.

This good news confirms that our anticrime strategy—more police officers on the beat, fewer illegal guns and violent criminals on the street—is having a powerful impact. We know we can turn the tide on crime, because we have. But despite this success, we cannot let up on our efforts. Gunfire continues to claim the lives of nearly 12 children every day, and we need to work on every front to reduce gun violence. With Mother's Day approaching, I will continue to urge the Congress to put the interests of America's families over those of the gun lobby and pass commonsense gun safety measures to keep guns out of the wrong hands. Together, we can make America the safest big country on Earth.

NOTE: This statement was made available by the Office of the Press Secretary on May 5 but was embargoed for release until 6:01 p.m. on May 7. It was also made available on the White House Press Office Actuality Line.

Remarks Following a Meeting With Million Mom March Organizers and an Exchange With Reporters

May 8, 2000

The President. Hello, everybody. I just finished a meeting with Attorney General Reno and Secretary Shalala and Chief of Staff Podesta, and I have met with all these folks, these women and their men supporters

who are the organizers of the Million Mom March. They're going to be here and in over 60 other cities on Mother's Day, marching for commonsense gun safety legislation, asking Congress to act, building on the grassroots efforts that have brought success in the petition drive in Colorado and the Legislatures of Maryland, Massachusetts, and California.

And I think what they're doing is profoundly important. We in the administration want to do whatever we can to support them. They are taking a stand for their children. Many of them have lost loved ones. They have lost children. They have lost spouses. And there will be many more just like them who are here.

They want Congress to act on the commonsense gun legislation before it, and of course, they want Congress to go beyond that to licensing, registration. They have not proposed taking away anybody's gun. They have proposed making life a lot safer for the American people and their children. And I think what they're doing is a very noble and good thing. I hope it will prompt Congress to act.

It is unconscionable—it is now over a year after Columbine and over 10 months since they've had a chance to pass this legislation. And I hope their presence here will—and throughout the country—will be successful. I am quite sure they will succeed over the long run if they stay with it, because they represent the heavy majority of the American people, and they have borne a heavy burden in their own lives which they have been willing to put into this effort. And I'm very grateful to them.

Gun Safety Legislation

Q. What's stopping Congress from acting, at least pressure from the moms——

The President. Well, we'll see if this makes a difference. I think that the people in the gun lobby have historically been very effective. But I think that if you look at the specifics of the legislation before Congress, there's a huge majority of the American people for it. And I think what all these folks are going to remind them of on Mother's Day is that they're watching, and they want action.