

Reception honoring FLOTUS

Cazenovia, NY

9/2/99

PHOTOCOPY
PRESERVATION

THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary
(Auburn, New York)

For Immediate Release

September 2, 1999

REMARKS BY THE PRESIDENT
AT RECEPTION HONORING MRS. CLINTON

Private Residence
Cazenovia, New York

5:05 P.M. EDT

THE PRESIDENT: I would like to thank the Greens for making us all feel so welcome, and I would like to thank you for -- (Applause.) I have been overwhelmed by the kindness and the hospitality of the people these last few days, and by the sheer beauty of this place, everywhere we've been -- and I want to thank you all for sharing that with us.

I'd also like to thank the people of New York and the people of this area for your many kindnesses to me and to Al Gore and to our families and our administration, including the electoral votes of New York in two presidential elections -- (applause.)

I want to just make a couple of points. First of all, in terms of where our country is today, we are in a good place because we have tried to make decisions for six and a half years to think about what is best for America, for all Americans and for the future, and not just for the moment, for those that may have the most influence. And it's worked pretty well.

In this historic part of our nation I think it is fair to say that if you read the history of America closely, as I have tried to do, the continuing mission of this country is to always be working to widen the circle of opportunity, to deepen the meaning of freedom and to strengthen the bonds of our community. This is more and more important as we grow more diverse and as we get more involved with the rest of the world.

Now, if you look at what has happened in the last six and a half years, I don't think it's a subject of much debate anymore. And I am very grateful for the efforts that I have been able to make with so many others to improve the economy and lower the crime rate and lower the welfare rolls and strengthen the role of America in the world.

But the mission of the country is never open. And Hillary just mentioned a few things. One of the things that I think about all the time is that not every community and not every section of our country has participated fully in this astonishing economic recovery, and that bothers me. It bothers me that not every child in this country is getting a world-class education. It bothers me that there are people in Washington who really don't want to use this truly historic opportunity to extend the life of the Social Security trust fund out beyond the life expectancy of those of us in the baby boom. Any of you here who are baby boomers, like me, I'm sure you share my concern. I am determined that when we retire our children will not have to support us at the expense of our grandchildren. That's what Social Security is -- (applause.)

And in a global economy, believe me, if we were to pay off the debt of this country in 15 years, for the first time since Andy Jackson was President, then the children in this audience would be the economic beneficiaries. (Applause.) We would have a generation of lower interest rates and higher growth and stronger economies in every place in America.

And that brings me back to why you all came here. (Laughter.) When I met Hillary in law school, I was really afraid for her to go home to Arkansas with me, because I was afraid she would be wasting what I think is one of the greatest talents of public service I've ever known in my life. It turned out it hasn't been a waste, she's learned pretty well. (Laughter and applause.)

But when you hear her talking about all these issues I think it's important to note that she's not only had 30 years of experience as a child advocate, which puts her in a position to know more about education and family policy than virtually anybody who could run for the Senate; we worked together when I was governor for a dozen years, which is why she understands all these economic development issues and the things that you talked about, about the economy.

And then for the last six and a half years in the White House, she has been not only an advocate for health care reform and for our children, but she's literally gone all across the world looking for ways that people can come together instead of be driven apart by all the things that seem to be doing so much to divide people, both in the United States and around the world.

I know I'm heavily biased -- (laughter) -- but I also have more experience than most people do in this area. (Laughter.) I have known thousands and thousands of people in public service; I've never known anybody with the same combination of ability, experience, compassion and unrelenting dedication as my wife, and I thank you for being here. (Applause.)

END 5:10 P.M. EDT