

PHOTOCOPY
PRESERVATION

Sacagawea Coin
The White House
May 4, 1999

Sacagawea Dollar Coin Unveiling
Remarks by First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton

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It is a pleasure to have all of you here today for this historic occasion. I would like to extend a special word of thanks to the American Indian and Alaskan Native tribal leaders from across our great nation who have traveled great distances to be with us today.

I also want to welcome our distinguished members of Congress. And I would like the members of Congress to please stand so that we can show our appreciation of them. (Applause.)

I also want to recognize Treasury Secretary [Robert] Rubin; the director of the United States Mint, Philip Diehl; and today's keynote speaker and a friend to so many here today, LaDonna Harris. (Applause.)

Appreciation, as well, to Kevin Gover and Lynn Cutler for their tireless work in placing the issues that are important to our American Indian and Alaskan Native Americans at the forefront of today's national agenda. (Applause.)

I want to thank Zelda [Tillman] for that beautiful Shoshone prayer. I also want to thank the drummers and the dancers who have reminded us again of the enduring power of Native American culture to stir our imaginations and touch our hearts. And I want to pay tribute to the Color Guard of Vietnam Era Veterans whose presence here reminds us that Native Americans have one of the most distinguished armed services records in our entire society. (Applause.) We are deeply grateful for the many sacrifices and contributions that they and so many of you have made in defending America's freedoms.

Today we come from every corner of our country, from a rich diversity of backgrounds, to honor a common past and to imagine together a common future. We pay particular tribute today to Indian women whose cultural and spiritual contributions have enriched our lives and whose leadership have helped to change the course of history.

Almost 200 years ago, President Thomas Jefferson would meet with Meriwether Lewis here at the White House—often late into the night—to plan the great exploration of America's western frontier. But at the time they were talking and planning, neither man could have known that a young Shoshone woman would play a pivotal role in that historic endeavor.

When Sacagawea joined the Lewis and Clark expedition, she was only 15 years old, and she was pregnant with her first child. She would be the only woman, the only Indian, the only young person on that trip. Yet even as she cared for her baby, she demonstrated remarkable

courage and ingenuity, serving the expedition as an invaluable interpreter and guide. Her knowledge of edible and medicinal plants also contributed greatly to the physical health of the party. The tremendous respect and admiration she evoked over the course of the journey is evident throughout Clark's journals—journals which she saved from destruction when one of their adventures on a river ended in the boat capsizing. According to Captain Clark, her very presence in the party of men represented a token of peace for all who approached.

Sacagawea played an unforgettable role in the history of our nation. I am pleased that just recently the North Dakota Legislative Assembly has voted unanimously to place a statue of Sacagawea in the Great Hall of the United States Capitol where she will join almost 100 other leaders revered and honored by the people of this nation. (Applause.) Today we celebrate the decision to honor this remarkable Shoshone woman in another unique way—by placing her image on the first U.S. dollar coin of the new millennium. With this unveiling we celebrate not only the extraordinary contributions that American Indian and Alaskan Native women have made to our country over hundreds of years, but we also acknowledge the even greater role they will play in our future.

I want to congratulate and thank Secretary Rubin and the U.S. Mint for its landmark decision to set the tone and the very spirit of this new century with this moving image. Every day this coin will serve to remind us that we are a nation of many peoples and cultures joined together by a shared vision of freedom, justice, and respect.

And I want to thank the two artists who designed this beautiful coin for all of us—Glenna Goodacre and Tom Rogers. We are indebted to Secretary Rubin and Phil Diehl as well for creating the most inclusive coin selection process in the Mint's history, with its close consultation with the tribes and unparalleled public outreach. Literally thousands of Americans, from all walks of life and from communities nationwide, were involved over the past year to bring us the beautiful design we will unveil today. And many have expressed their pride in the final choice. One letter reads, for example, "As a woman, a mother, and a Native American, I am pleased that we are going into the year 2000 showing respect for the multiple roles women have been carrying out since the beginning of time."

I am also very pleased that we have with us today the 2nd graders from Spring Ridge Elementary School in Pennsylvania who voted in favor of the design, as well as students from Kelley Elementary from the Grand Tetons in Wyoming who wrote to Congress encouraging the Sacagawea coin. I'm also very, very pleased that this event is being cybercast so that young people in classrooms around the country can participate via the computer and the Internet.

Today as we honor and remember the life and contributions of Sacagawea, we pay tribute as well to other Native American women who have carried on her role as pathmakers and breakers—the artists and doctors, the educators and businesswomen, the tribal leaders who have enriched our lives and nation and upon whose shoulders we stand today. Leaders like Wilma Mankiller, who could not be with us but who we honor as the first Cherokee woman to be elected principal chief of her nation. I know we all join together to wish her a speedy recovery.

We recognize other leaders among us: Hattie Kauffman, the first Native American network news reporter; Luci Tapahonso, an internationally renowned writer and educator of the Navajo nation; Suzan Shown Harjo, a poet and curator who has helped Indians recover some of their most sacred lands and protect their ancient cultures; and LaDonna Harris, who has been such an inspiration for peace-loving people everywhere.

Last summer, I was privileged to experience the accumulated wisdom of generations of Native American women when I met with eight Iroquois clan mothers in upstate New York. They spoke to me about some of the lessons they pass down to their children and their grandchildren—that we must walk softly on the Earth, and that every decision we make, and every action we take, must be judged not only on its impact on us today, but on the impact it will make on the next seven generations.

This belief in the importance of giving gifts to the future can be seen in the traditional reverence for the land, and the close-knit family and tribal ties and the understanding that diverse peoples can come together to build one nation and yet protect the individual rights of all. And these are not just the values of Native Americans. They are deeply ingrained in the American spirit as well.

In two weeks I will have another opportunity to explore the extraordinary culture and heritage of Native Americans when I travel to the beautiful Southwest. I will visit the ancient cliff dwellings of the Ancestral Puebloans, such as those at Mesa Verde, as well as living communities like Acoma. And I will see some of you again, including members of the All-Indian Pueblo Council. This trip is part of the White House Millennium Council's Save America's Treasures program, which is helping to preserve the sites and artifacts and cultural and artistic heritage that tell the story of America.

Yet even as we celebrate the historic and ongoing contributions of Indians to the development of America, we have to recognize that we have not always lived up to our own legal and moral obligations. While some in Indian country have made remarkable progress, far too many remain stranded in a cycle of poverty—their dreams further diminished by poor health, inadequate employment opportunities, and dilapidated schools. I'm very proud of my husband's commitment to preserving and strengthening the sovereignty of Native American tribes. He and all of us in the Administration are also deeply committed to enhancing tribal economic development, investing in tribal schools, and enhancing the well-being of families.

At last year's first-ever White House Conference on Economic Development in Indian Country, the President announced several important initiatives to boost economic development and create much-needed jobs. The President's fiscal year 2000 budget request includes a "new markets" initiative that, through tax incentives and expanded access to capital, could have a dramatic impact on the quality of life in Indian country in the years ahead. The President is also seeking to expand health care coverage for Native American children and to end the unacceptable health disparities that so unfairly penalize poor and minority citizens, particularly

women and children. (Applause.)

But probably our greatest challenge—and surely the most meaningful and lasting contribution we can make to the next generation—is to strengthen the educational opportunities available for Native American children. I would like to thank the many leaders here today who are working to ensure that Native American children get the education and the skills they need to thrive in this new century. Leaders like Dr. Janine Pease-Pretty On Top, who became the first woman of Crow descent to earn her doctorate and who has worked tirelessly since then to open up the same doors of opportunity to others who would follow. (Applause.)

The President took on an important step last year when he issued an executive order directing federal agencies to improve Native American achievements in math and reading, to raise high school graduation rates, and to increase the number of Native Americans who attend college. This year's fiscal year 2000 budget takes another step forward, calling for the recruitment of 1000 new teachers for areas with high concentrations of American Indian and Alaskan Native students. The budget also calls for dramatic increases in construction funding for BIA schools and a new bond initiative to leverage private resources for BIA-funded schools. But we must do more.

So it is with great pleasure that I announce new legislation which will be shortly forwarded to Congress to further enhance education for Indian children. This legislation creates the American Indian Education Foundation, which will be a non-profit entity authorized to accept and administer private funding to enhance educational opportunities for Native students from early childhood through high school. Foundation funds can be used to support teacher development and family literacy programs, to help create "best practices," and to develop cultural programs for use in the schools.

I want to thank all of the Congressional sponsors of this important piece of legislation who are with us today: Senators Inouye, Dorgan and Conrad; and Representatives Kennedy, Kildee, Kolbe, Pomeroy and Udall. You have truly given a gift to the future.

You know, there are many members of Congress who have been strong supporters of the needs of people in Indian country. But I want to single out one man who has been the conscience and the voice for so many. I'd like to ask him to stand—Senator Daniel Inouye. (Applause.)

Today as we honor the past with this coin of Sacagawea and her baby, let us commit ourselves to a future where all children have the opportunity to be healthy, safe, and cared for. Where all children have the opportunity to receive the quality education they need. And as we build that common future, let's heed the words of the great Iroquois oath of the peacemaker: "You shall look and listen to the welfare of the whole people; and have always in view not only the present, but the coming generations of the unborn, of the future nation." That is our obligation and, I hope, our commitment.

It is now my great honor to introduce a Native American leader who has lent her remarkable talent to the cause of peace and to the delivery of justice. A leading citizen of the Comanche Nation and a passionate voice for Native American rights, she has devoted her life to civil rights, the women's movement, and world peace. Please join me in welcoming LaDonna Harris. (Applause.)

[HARRIS SPEAKS.]

Thank you, LaDonna. It is now my pleasure to introduce the man who has many mothers—Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs, Kevin Gover. He is an enrolled member of the Pawnee Tribe of Oklahoma, and has been instrumental in developing a greater understanding—within the Administration and across the country—about the challenges facing Native Americans today. We applaud his commitment to tribal sovereignty and his strong advocacy for increased attention to the needs of young people in Indian country. Please welcome Assistant Secretary Kevin Gover. (Applause.)

[GOVER SPEAKS.]

Thank you very much, Kevin. Now I would like to introduce the person who shepherded this whole process, and has not only made a contribution to our understanding of our past by this coin, but has contributed so much to the Administration and to our country in so many ways. And that is Secretary of the Treasury Robert Rubin. After his remarks, he will introduce Glenna Goodacre and Tom Rogers—the two artists—and U.S. Treasurer MaryEllen Withrow, who will join Secretary Rubin and Philip Diehl and myself in unveiling our new millennium coin.

I would like to invite to join us one additional person who has no idea I'm going to do this to her. But I would like, when the others come up to the stage, to ask Tahnee Rose Robinson, a young Shoshone woman, to come up. Because I think it would be a very fitting moment for us to be looking at the future while we honor the past.

So with that, please join me in welcoming Secretary Rubin. (Applause.)

[RUBIN SPEAKS AND UNVEILS COIN.]

It is my pleasure now to invite Joanne Shenandoah to close this memorable event with a song. A member of the Iroquois confederacy and one of America's foremost Native American recording artists, Joanne has transformed audiences around the world with the beauty and power of her Native American musical traditions. Together with her sister Diane and her daughter Leah, she will sing for us a song she has written in honor of Sacagawea—and as a tribute to all women who sustain life and serve as caretakers of our precious planet.

[SHENANDOAH SINGS.]

Thank you, Joanne, for that beautiful song. And I want to thank all of you for coming to

the White House to this historic celebration. Now will you please rise as the flags are removed from the Pavilion by the Vietnam Era Veterans Inter-Tribal Association? The Eyabay Drum Group will sing a traveling song to wish you well on your journey. But before you leave, I would like to invite all of you to visit the White House—the People's House. But first, I'd like to invite the elected tribal leaders to join me at the South Portico for a group photograph. Again, I wish every one of you a safe trip, and may God bless you all.

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