

Reception for FLOIUS
Little Rock, Arkansas
5/7/00

THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary

For Immediate Release

May 7, 2000

REMARKS BY THE PRESIDENT
AND MRS. CLINTON
AT RECEPTION FOR MRS. CLINTON

New Statehouse Convention Center
Little Rock, Arkansas

2:50 P.M. CDT

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you very much. Dick, thank you for being here. Dick 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 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 Gilette 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 him 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 the two times I ran for President. Yesterday I did have a chance to travel the back roads of Logan and Franklin and Madison and Washington Counties and relive my first race for the 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, 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 have to go see people and listen to them, instead of someplace where you just spent all your time raising funds putting on 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 Seven -- 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. (Applause.)

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 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 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. (Applause.)

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 -- and Hillary has been involved in so many of the things we have done together these last eight 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 two years, they'd be perfectly astronomical. Well, in the first two years, I had to do all the hard stuff that made it better the last six.

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. (Applause.) 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 3 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 trying to blur all these issues and say, we care about all those things that Bill Clinton and Al Gore worked on for eight 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 an 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 eight 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, the drug runners and the organized criminals, without setting off another arms race.

So 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. (Applause.) 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 backgrounds. 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 to 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. (Applause.)

MRS. CLINTON: Thank you so, so much. This is such an incredible experience for Bill and for me. And I just can't thank you enough for being here. As I was looking out at this audience, I was reliving so many of the times that we spent together and the things we did, the places we went. And I am so grateful to you that -- Bill and I, when I finish speaking, we want to greet as many of you personally as possible. So we're going to go and stand in a place so that everybody can come by and say hello, because we don't want to miss a person, so that we can thank each of you.

I want to thank Dale Bumpers and David Prior for their friendship and their good, wise counsel and assistance over all the years. They have been incredibly supportive to Bill and me. And I want to thank Barbara and Betty for their kindnesses and friendship. They've also been wonderful mentors -- thinking about all that we've done together, both before we were in the White House and in the years since.

I'm, too, grateful that Marion and Dick could be with us, and I thank them both. And I look forward to working with you in the United States Congress. (Applause.) And I especially look forward to working with Blanche. And I have just been so pleased that the career she's had and the work she's done, and it will be a great pleasure to join her in the Senate.

I want to thank Skip Rutherford and Sheila and Richard Bronfman and everyone who helped to make this such a success. I especially also want to thank Skip -- and I think Mayor Daley is here, and other representatives of the city -- for the exciting work that is being done on the library. We are so looking forward to it. And what Bill just said was just a tiny taste of how excited all of us are -- Bill and Chelsea and I -- because of what we think this will mean and the

work that can be done there. And we're very grateful to have such a strong partnership to make this happen.

When we were, yesterday -- first in Subiaco and then driving up the Pig Trail, which we wanted to do for such a long time and hadn't done for a while -- we told the Secret Service we were going to stop at Turner's Bend. And we said, you don't need to worry about it, it's just this little tiny general store. There won't be anybody there, you don't have to send anybody ahead or get out the dogs to sniff. Don't worry about it. So we were, oh, probably about a mile or two, going around one of those 10-mile-an-hour curves that you drive, when the lead agent in the front seat turned around and said, Mr. President, I've just been told there are 300 people at Turner's Bend. (Laughter.)

As you know, Bill and I looked kind of sheepishly at each other and -- how could there be 300 people at Turner's Bend? Well, it turned out it was the annual Arkansas canoe course -- (laughter) -- that some of you had gone to. We knew half of the 300 people who were in that crowd. And we were able to stand there and visit with people, and amazed at the transformation that had occurred at Turner's Bend in the years since we've started stopping there so long ago.

And then we went on up and stayed with our dear friends, Jim and Diane Blair, and did some more reminiscing. And certainly for me today, that is a very pleasant journey back in time, because here in this audience are people that I taught with at the law school in Fayetteville; that I worked with on starting legal services offices; that I made some of the best friends of my life in those early years in Fayetteville; and who attended our wedding, and even our reception I think are in the audience. I see people who worked with me to start the Arkansas Advocates for Children and Families. I think one of the first of its kind, if I'm not mistaken, of a statewide advocacy group for children and families. And the work we did about trying to raise the visibility of children's issues, and had such an incredible opportunity to work with so many experts, including our own Dr. Betty Caldwell, who is so world renowned.

I see people that I practiced law with and against, and I'm so pleased to see all of you. I think about those days that the Rose Firm were trying cases from Batesville to Elderado, and have some of the most vivid memories of what it was like to practice law and try cases back in the late '70s and early '80s. I also see people who are from the Arkansas Children's Hospital, with whom I started working so many years ago. You saw Dr. Betty Lowe in the film a few minutes ago, and she and I and the late Hershel Friday, and some others got on a small plane in January of 1980 to fly to New York, when I was seven and a half months pregnant, to convince the people in New York to give us a good bond rating so that we could build on to the Children's Hospital -- and all the telethons we did.

I think about the work I did with Betty Bumpers and others on immunization, and how we were determined that we were going to immunize as many children as we could possibly reach. The project we undertook on rural health in Bill's first term, where we were doing all that we could to expand and offer more health services in some of our poorest counties. And then, of course, the great event in our lives, with Chelsea's birth in 1980.

And many of you who are here became my dear friends because we had children together, and we spent a lot of time at school events, or ballet, or sitting in those stands at the softball games, watching little girls try to figure out how to play softball when none of them really understood the game, and their fathers were tearing their hair out -- people like Skip and Bill -- pacing back and forth.

My favorite -- Chelsea and one of her little friends -- we were in Alsa (phonetic) Park, and Chelsea's friend got on first base because she actually connected with the ball, and nobody could field it. (Laughter.) So then Chelsea was up next, and she also connected with the ball. So her friend stayed on first base, so that by the time Chelsea got there, they were jumping up and down hugging each other because they were so happy for each other -- (laughter) -- while meanwhile their fathers were screaming, "Run, run." And the girls are looking around, and not sure quite what they were supposed to do.

We spent a lot of time together with people in this room at First United Methodist Church and Emmanuel Baptist. And I'm so grateful for the support and the prayers that all of you have given to us over so many years. And then, of course, there are so many here who are part of Democratic politics, and all the races that Bill ran.

I once tried to add up how many contested elections he was in, because lots of times he would have a primary, a run-off, and a general election. And I lost count, and I figured that he had run in more contested elections than anybody in the history of the world by that time. But none of it would have been possible without your support and your kindnesses -- taking us into your homes and feeding us, and driving us, and taking such good care of us.

I also think about all the people who served over the years in the Governor's Office and the Governor's Mansion, and I'm so grateful for your hard work and your dedication and your friendship, and the extended family that was really created out of those experiences.

I thank all of you who were part of the education standards work that we did starting in 1983, people who served on the committee and who worked with me, members of the legislature who were willing to take those hard votes, and the difference that we were trying to make so that all of the children in the state had access to a world-class education.

There are so many issues that I have had my opinions and my commitment to strengthened and focused because of all of you and so many others throughout Arkansas -- whether it was foster care and abuse and neglect issues; domestic violence or women's issues; working on economic development to serving on the boards of Wal-Mart or TCBY; looking for ways to create microcredit loans in South and East Arkansas. You've given me the gifts of friendship and insight, of teamwork and team-building, and of a sense of accomplishment that we brought to our work together, for which I am eternally grateful.

And then many of you were with us throughout the '92 campaign, from that announcement in October of '91 at the Old Statehouse to the victory nearly a year later, back there. You believed in what could be done to change our country -- you heard Bill speak about that just for a few minutes -- and you have since then supported us with your prayers

and your good wishes, your letters, your calls, your visits. And you will never know how much all of that was meant. Whether you've come just to drop by and say hello, or come to spend the night, having that ongoing contact and that friendship has meant more than I can say.

I approach this race in New York with a lot of confidence and optimism because I believe that the issues that I've worked a lifetime on, that you worked with me on here, are the issues that really matter in people's lives. When I started on Senator Moynihan's farm back in July, I said I had a lot to learn, and I was going to be listening. I had no idea how true that was.

Because I have watched masters like Bill and David and Dale make a million speeches. I have watched them campaign; I have watched them as they've put forth plans and worked to make them realities. But it's a little bit like watching Michael Jordan play basketball -- you watch and you watch and you watch, but there is no substitute for getting out there and doing it yourself.

And I had and probably still have a lot to learn about being a candidate. And I'm trying to do the very best job I can, but I want to take back every time I ever said to Bill, you know, you could have said it like this. (Laughter and applause.) And there was that delicious role reversal when he was working on my announcement speech and making me practice in front of him, and saying, no, no, say it like this. And it was a great moment for both of us.

In this campaign, I've been staying in people's homes, I've been visiting with them on their back porches and in their living rooms and around their kitchen tables and in their backyards. I've been in workplaces and day care centers and senior citizen centers. I've been in as many different settings as you can possibly imagine, where people gather to talk about what difference politics makes anyway; who cares who the senator is; what are the votes that are going to impact my life?

And I've come away from all of those meetings and listening sessions more and more convinced that what really matters to all of us -- whether we are able to obtain and keep good jobs; whether our children are healthy and well-educated; whether we can diminish the amount of violence in our society; whether we can protect our environment while we grow our economy; whether we can continue America's leadership in the world -- those are the issues that people talk to me about.

And often, as I'm talking back and answering questions, I'm recalling and talking about things we did here, challenges we took on, changes we had to make. Because Bill's absolutely right -- this election, like all elections, is about the future. And it's an especially important one because, as David was reminding me, when those hard votes were taken back in 1993 on the economic plan that Bill put forth, there was not one single Republican vote in either the House or the Senate. Not one.

And if you go back and read what the Republican leaders were saying, they predicted that the deficit reduction plan, and the economic plan that the President put forth, that David and Dale voted for -- that it would be the ruination of our economy. They predicted recessions. They predicted great increases in unemployment. And of course, they've been proven wrong by time

and by the continuing dynamism of the American economy, and the hard work of so many people.

But now they're back with the same kind of proposals. They're now saying, let's have a big across-the-board tax cut; let's tie one or two hands behind our back in terms of dealing with Social Security or Medicare or the national debt; let's forget about investing in education and the environment. It is stunning that they would go back to what didn't work. It is *deja vu* all over again.

And if they are permitted to win these elections and implement these policies, it will be bad for New York, it will be bad for Arkansas, and it will be bad for America. (Applause.) And it is imperative that we continue the policies that the President and the Vice President and leaders like members of Congress and David and Dale have stood up for and fought for, because we are truly on the brink of consolidating the progress we've made, and building on it.

We now have more work to do to make sure our economic prosperity affects everybody, from the Delta of Arkansas to upstate New York. We are now knowing more about what works in public education. Why would we turn our back now on public education, and go for vouchers and other kinds of quick-fix gimmicks that don't work and would undermine our capacity to help our children learn? (Applause.)

And we have to continue working toward the day when we figure out how to provide quality, affordable health care for every single American. And you remember, I had a few things to say about that back in '93 and '94. (Applause.) And I'm going to keep working on expanding the Children's Health Insurance Program, on adding a drug benefit to Medicare, on trying to do what we can to lower the prescription drug costs -- something that David Pryor put on the map, politically, and fought for. And now, once again, David, drug prices are going up 10 to 15 percent a year, and you and Dale may have to be enlisted to start talking about what we can do to try to reverse that.

So we have work to do when it comes to health care. We have work on so many of the issues that have really seen progress made because of the good policies that our President and Vice President and the Democrats in Congress have championed.

I have believed all my life, as I said in that film, that politics is the art of making possible what seems to be impossible. There were many who thought it was impossible when Bill Clinton, in 1992, said, if you elect me and I implement these policies, we will see in our nation 8 million new jobs. And I remember, people said, don't say that, that's too much. Well, now we're at 21 million new jobs. (Applause.) And I want to be part of keeping that momentum going. I want to be part of building on that progress.

I am very grateful to you for your support today. It's wonderful for us to be able to come and see so many of you. And we want to thank you personally in a few minutes. But I believe you're here not only as a sign of personal support and friendship for me and for Bill, but because you, too, believe that the best days are ahead of us if we continue to do what works -- if we

continue to implement the policies that Bill championed here in Arkansas and took with him to the White House.

I think this election is as important as Bill has said. And I hope that I will be able to win the trust and confidence of the voters of New York, so that I can join my voice with those who will say over and over again, let's keep our country on the right track into the future.

Thank you all very much. (Applause.)

END 3:28 P.M. CDT