

## **THE WHITE HOUSE**

**Office of the Press Secretary  
(Hanoi, Socialist Republic of Vietnam)**

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### **REMARKS BY THE PRESIDENT TO EMBASSY PERSONNEL**

**Daewoo Hotel  
Hanoi, Socialist Republic of Vietnam**

7:00 P.M. (L)

**THE PRESIDENT:** Thank you very much. I want to thank Senator Kerry for what he said and for what he's done all these years, and for being a wonderful friend to Hillary and me in many, many ways. And I want to thank Sandy Berger, and our whole team in the White House and State Department for supporting this trip from the beginning. And I want to associate myself with what Hillary said -- now that she's going to be a senator, I can just let her give the speeches and I can say, "I completely agree." And that will save everyone from having to hear two speeches. (Laughter.)

But I do want to say a couple of things, if I might. First, I, too, want to thank you for the endless hours you have put in in preparation for this trip, and for the work you have done representing our nation here in Vietnam.

I want to thank especially the Vietnamese nationals who work at our Embassy, and who, therefore, embody this new partnership we have worked so hard to build these last several years.

We started this process of reconstructing our relationship a long time ago, and I have been working at it now, with the people on this stage and others, for at least eight years. And I'm very grateful to all of them. But I want to take my time tonight to say a special word of thanks to Pete Peterson.

Most everybody I guess in Vietnam knows that he was a fighter pilot here, that he was a prisoner of war here. You may know that his wife was nine months pregnant with their third child when he came here. He was supposed to fly 100 missions, and he was shot down two-thirds of the way through. And by the time he got home, his son was six years old.

What you may not know is that when I met him, he was a congressman from northern Florida, and he represented a district in which, I promise you, was the only American in my party who would have ever been elected from that district. (Laughter.) Otherwise, any normal person would have had to be a member of the other party.

And I remember the times we spent driving through his congressional district, talking about his commitment to public service, and talking about how desperately he wanted us to have a new relation with Vietnam, and how he wanted to embody that, going beyond.

So when the time came for a new ambassador to be named, I literally only considered one person. America has I don't know how many, 270-something-million people -- I only considered one person to be our ambassador to Vietnam, and Pete agreed to do it.

Now, he gave all those speeches about letting go of the past, and looking toward the future, and all we can change is the future. So he -- one thing I like about Pete is he always practices what he preaches.

So he comes to Vietnam, meets Vietnam and starts a new life. So you are the embodiment, madam, of the future for Pete, and we thank you, and we thank you for what you have done. (Applause.)

He traveled all over Vietnam, just like he traveled all over America, promoting this relationship. He worked on the POW-MIA issue. He worked to advance the economy of Vietnam. Three times he led the lobbying to get our Congress to support our Jackson-Vanik waiver. His enthusiasm is completely infectious.

I understand, Pete, today that CNN and BBC carried the signing of our bilateral trade agreement live at 3:00 a.m. Hanoi, and watch parties were held all over town. Now, that's pretty amazing.

I also want to thank him for the work he did to prevent injuries and accidents here with his safety campaign. And I want to express my sympathies, because I understand after you started this safety campaign, a mischievous television film crew caught you in a rare moment riding your motorcycle without a helmet. (Laughter.) Now, that's something all of us who have been in public life can identify with. (Laughter.)

I want to thank you for befriending the villagers in the area where you were shot down, and joining them to inaugurate a school. And I want to thank those of you who work in this Embassy, especially those of you who have extended your tours from two years to three. I want to thank the members of the American business community, apparently who have signed a resolution cautioning the new President not to change the Ambassador in Hanoi. (Laughter.) That's good advice to the new President. (Laughter.)

One of the most famous sayings of the Buddha is, "Never does hatred by hatred cease; hatred ceases by love alone." This is an eternal law. Even eternal laws have to be made real in the lives of particular people, and that is a law which has been made real in the life and service of Pete Peterson.

He doesn't know I'm going to do this today, but the Ambassador has been honored for his military service with the Silver Star, the Purple Heart and the Legion of Merit for heroism in the uniform of his country. I think his service as Ambassador to Vietnam is the most important service he has ever rendered to the United States. And so, in the presence of all of his co-workers and friends and many of their rambunctious children, which makes it even better, I am going to award Pete Peterson with the President's Citizen's Medal. And I would like the commander to read the citation and then bring the medal up here so I can give it to Pete. (Applause.)

(The citation is read.) (Applause.)

**AMBASSADOR PETERSON:** Well, I have been surprised before, but never so surprised -- and never so honored, may I add. President Clinton, I cannot tell you how much this means to me.

Working here as an American citizen, doing good things, after having been here doing things not so good at another time, is a rare opportunity for anyone. I really believe that America can help make Vietnam a peaceful, constructive nation for the foreseeable future.

No other nation has the compassion; no other nation has the capacity to do it. If America's not willing to do it, Vietnam would ultimately remain a third world country. And that's why this team is here, because they all share this belief. And we are deeply honored to have had the opportunity to serve our nation in carrying out that goal, but also to help the Vietnamese, the people -- you mentioned the FSN that we have -- they're so wonderful -- but the people of Vietnam who have their quality of life raised to new heights.

And so this medal means a great deal to me. But, believe me, I share it with all of my friends, and certainly all of our staff, both Vietnamese and American, because all of them have sacrificed in some way to make this relationship stronger, better, longer-lasting and creative.

So thank you very much for this incredible surprise. (Applause.)

**THE PRESIDENT:** Thank you all very much.

END 7:20 P.M. (L)