

important thing is to keep this going. Somebody—if there is the necessary commitment given by all sides, and then, later, any of those commitments are not kept, this thing can always be brought down because the commitments were not kept. But I think it would be terrible to let it come apart now, before we get to see and feel how it really works.

*Mr. Devenport.* Mr. President, thank you very much.

*The President.* Thank you.

NOTE: The interview began at approximately 11:50 a.m. at a private residence. In his remarks, the President referred to David Trimble, Northern Ireland Ulster Unionist Party leader; Prime Minister-elect Ehud Barak of Israel; Prime Minister Tony Blair of the United Kingdom; and Prime Minister Bertie Ahern of Ireland.

## Remarks at a Democratic National Committee Luncheon in Westport June 28, 1999

Thank you very much. Diane, you can give a speech for me anytime. [*Laughter*] That was really wonderful, congratulations, thank you.

I want to thank all of you for being here. Let me also join Joe and Beth in thanking Fran and Sandra for being so wonderful to us. I thank Martha and Romi and the others who helped to make this a success. I also want to say a special word of thanks to Fran and Sandra for being so wonderful to Hillary as well. It really means a lot to me, and I thank you for that.

You know, I always love to come back to Connecticut, and only a fool would not love to come to Westport. [*Laughter*] I'm very happy to see Barbara Kennelly; and my old classmate Dick Blumenthal, who has been so good to me; and Denise, we're very pleased for your success, congratulations. And Congressman Gejdenson, thank you for being so brave in tough election after tough election. You're always there to do the right thing any way, and I admire you so much.

And Senator Dodd, congratulations on having the good sense to marry Jackie; we're proud of you. No matter how much you may like Chris Dodd, if you have not gotten to know his wife, your estimation will go way up when you do—[*laughter*—and we're really happy for you. And Jessye, thank you for coming; Cicely, thank you for coming.

And I would like to say a special thank you to Connecticut for being so good to me and to Al Gore through two elections now. I don't feel that I'm on a victory lap or a final lap or—you know, I expect people to—they're be-

ginning to talk to me as if I'm—there is a sort of ring of eulogy about all of this. [*Laughter*]

As far as I can tell, I'm reasonably healthy; I still show up. I told Fran when—you've got to watch Joe Andrew, you know, as being a party chair. He hasn't been a party chair as long as Ed Marcus, but he's learned to stretch the truth creatively. He said that I got up earlier and went to bed later than anybody else. And I told Fran, I said, "Now, the second half of that statement is true." [*Laughter*] I do work late. I don't always beat everybody to the office.

I'd like to tell you, first of all, why I'm here and, secondly, why I hope you're here. If anybody wants me to show up at one of these events 5 years from now or 10 years from now and my party is still doing what I believe is right for America, I'll be there then, too. The fact that I was given the opportunity at a pivotal point in our country's history to serve as President is important to me, but it is incidental to my prior and enduring commitment to the ideas and values that I think are necessary to make this country all it ought to be.

You know, when you think back to the condition the country was in in 1991 and 1992 when I was running, it's almost unimaginable that we are where we are today. This morning, before I left to fly up here, I was able to make an announcement that at what is called the midsession review, which is when we recalibrate our economic assumptions, we now know that our surplus this year will be \$20 billion higher than we thought; it will be \$142 billion next year. It will be \$500 billion more than we thought it was going to be over 10 years, and

\$1 trillion more over the next 15 years. That's an amazing thing.

This year—you know, we have something called a unified budget, which means that we show a surplus even if we're spending more—like income and sales taxes and things—than we're taking in because of the Social Security taxes, because we're still taking in more than we're paying out. This year we will have a surplus without the Social Security revenues.

What this means is, among other things, is that we really can save Social Security by investing a modest amount of it in something other than Government bonds. We can do something about elderly women, who are more poor than the rest of the elderly population. We can take the earnings limit off, because we need elderly people to work more, if they choose to do so—not if they're required to but if they choose to do so—as we have relatively fewer young people and relatively more older people. And now we can actually pay the debt of the country off and be entirely debt free by 2015—in 15 years this country can be out of debt. That's unbelievable.

The debt of the country quadrupled in the 12 years before I took office—just 12 years. And there was no end in sight. The deficit was \$290 billion when I took office. We'll have \$142 billion surplus in the last year of my Presidency.

Why should that matter to people? To those of you who are liberals and want the Government to spend money, why should you care if we're out of debt? Because if we get out of debt in a global economy, it means lower interest rates, lower home mortgages, lower business loans, lower college loans, lower car payment loans. It means more business investment. It means more money for wage increases. It means a more stable economy. It means the next time there is a world financial crisis like we had in Asia a couple of years ago, we'll be less affected by it, and it means there will be more money out there for poor countries to borrow at lower interest rates or be given, because we won't be taking any of it.

In the global society, it is the socially responsible thing for the wealthy countries to be financially responsible. It is good for our people, but it is good for people around the world. And it is good for all income groups within our society. So I hope very much that we will be able to persuade the Republican majority in Congress to work with us to save Social Security, to re-

form Medicare, and to pay this debt off. It is something that no one could have thought imaginable just a few years ago.

Tomorrow I'm going to reveal the details of our plan to strengthen Medicare and preserve it for at least another quarter century and add a prescription drug benefit which will be affordable, which can be managed. But this is a big problem. I told those of you who came to the airport to meet me that one of the most stunning facts of life, if you're over 65 today and you're on Medicare, is that the average senior citizen is now spending a higher percentage of his or her income, out of pocket, for health care than they were spending in 1965, before Medicare went in. Why? Overwhelmingly, because of prescription drugs.

So if we can do something that is financially responsible to help our seniors deal with this burden, we ought to do so. We can now, and we should.

Because of the size of the surplus, we'll be able to pay the debt off over the next 15 years, and at the same time create a trust fund for children and education of over \$150 billion that we can use for after-school programs, to make sure all our kids have health insurance—for a whole host of other things that need to be done.

Now, let me come back to the general point. I'm here not as a candidate, because I think it matters that the ideas and the values that we fought for be continued; because it's important to me that Sam and Chris and people like them are in the Congress. And it's important to me that—we know the Republicans will always have more money than we do. Today they'll be saying, "Well, who cares if we pay the debt off. Let's have a bigger tax cut that will be skewed to most of you." Most of you would be better off, in the short run, being at a Republican fundraiser. [*Laughter*] You would be, and you know it. [*Laughter*]

But on the other hand, if you look at the performance of the stock market, if you look at the fact that we've got the lowest unemployment rate in 30 years, the longest peacetime expansion in history, the highest surplus as a percentage of our economy since 1951, there's something to be said for moving us all forward together. And there's something to be said for looking to the long run, as well as the short run. Everyone has to balance doing what is most pleasing to everyone today and thinking about what is best for the country over the long run.

I've tried to take this country into the 21st century with certain basic ideas: that we could balance the budget and increase our investment in children and education, health care, and the environment; that we could grow the economy and continue to improve the environment—and we have. The air is cleaner. The water is cleaner. The food is safer. We've got 90 percent of our children immunized for the first time in history. We've set aside more land in preservation than any administration in the history of America, except those of the two Roosevelts.

So because we had good ideas—not because Bill Clinton was President but because our ideas were right—I am glad I was given the chance to serve now. If my ability to speak, communicate, work hard, and take incoming fire had anything to do with those successes, I'm grateful.

But the most important thing is that what we stand for now, as a party, is a new direction, a departure from where either party was in the seventies and eighties, and the kind of thing that we ought to embrace going into the 21st century. And we have evidence that it works.

There are lots of issues up there in Washington that we're fighting for now. Sometimes we have agreement. We're going to agree on two things that I think are great. I'll give the Republicans a little pat on the back here. The Congress is going to overwhelmingly vote, apparently, to renew the disability on disabled Americans who go in the work force and lose their Medicaid coverage. And that can enable us to get hundreds of thousands of more workers to grow without inflation.

There are a lot of disabled people who want to work, but their medical bills are \$20,000, \$30,000 a year, sometimes more, and they're paid by the Government. If they make X salary, anything much above poverty, they lose that Government health insurance. And that's bad for you, because they won't take the job, and we're still going to pay for their health care, as we should. So this way we pay for their health care just like we were, but they take a job. They earn money. They pay taxes just like you do. And it helps the economy go. It's a good thing.

The other thing that there is apparently unanimous support on, at least in the House—and I'm thrilled about it; this is something that Hillary cares very much about—is continuing support for children who come out of foster

care at the age of 18 and today are cut off all support—and even though they have no place to go, they have no adopted families, they have nothing. This is a huge problem in New York, a bigger problem in New York than anyplace else because New York has the largest number. But I told someone the other day, the first person besides my wife who ever mentioned this to me was my cousin who runs the HUD office in the little town in Arkansas where I was born, population 11,000 now. So this is a national problem.

And here are two things where we agree. I'm hoping that we can get more of them to agree with us on some other things that are important. If you look at the Patients' Bill of Rights—the Republicans, on Medicare, want me to, in effect, force more people on Medicare into managed care, but they're against guaranteeing people in managed care the guarantees of the Patients' Bill of Rights.

I'm not against managed care. I've always thought that we ought to manage the health system like every other system, as well as we possibly can. But every system should be managed to deliver its mission at the lowest possible cost, not to compromise the mission. The mission is to give people quality health care at the lowest possible cost.

And if you need to see a specialist and you can't, that's bad. If you get hit in an accident in a big city and you have to pass three hospitals to get to the hospital with the emergency room that's in the plan, that's bad. If you work for a small business and they change their health care provider and your husband is in chemotherapy and it's a 6-month treatment and you're supposed to change providers in the middle of the treatment, that's bad. If the same thing happens and your wife is 6 months pregnant and you're supposed to change your ob-gyn because there's a different one in your new health care plan, that's bad. All these things happen today. Why? If it takes you forever and a day to get a decision because of the layers and layers of appeals, so that finally you get the right decision but it's too late to save your life, that's bad.

And that's why 200—200 organizations—the doctors, the nurses, health consumer groups, everybody, endorsed our Patients' Bill of Rights. There's one organization against it, the health insurers. And we have the votes to pass this, if the Republican leadership will give us a clean vote on it.

But it's a classic example of the difference in the two parties. We're not against managed care. If we said we're against change and they were for change and they didn't care what happened to people, that would be like an old-time debate—old-time. We say, okay, we're for managed care; we'd just like to have people protected.

Same thing on this gun issue. This is a huge issue. Thirteen kids a day get shot and killed—13. That's a lot of kids. You say it's a big country—pretty small country if it's one of yours. And we had this horrible carnage at Littleton—the whole country up in arms. The Senate passes this range of modest gun restraint measures: getting rid of the big ammunition clips on assault weapons that come in from other countries; saying that if a juvenile commits a serious crime, they shouldn't be able to own a handgun when they turn 18; closing the gun show loophole; putting the child trigger locks on there. And on the gun show loophole, which was the most controversial, the Vice President broke the tie in the Senate.

And we roll into the House, and there is this angst. So what happens? The NRA wants the vote put off, so they put off the vote until after the recess. And during the recess they wear everybody out, and they come back and deep-six stuff that is very modest. And their answer is, well, we should punish these boys because they broke the law, these dead boys.

You know, how would you feel if I gave the following speech: "I've served as President for 6½ years. I've done a searching inventory of my record, and I have decided that I have been deficient in standing up for the constitutional rights of America. In particular, we all have a constitutional right to travel, and I think it's absolutely terrible that you have to license your cars and have a drivers license and that we regulate travel in any way, shape, or form. It is an unconscionable burden, and we're going to get rid of all of it. We have 8-year-olds out there driving cars at 100 miles an hour, that's good. It's their constitutional right to do it." [Laughter]

You're laughing. That's their position, isn't it? I mean, you would think—if a politician stood up and said that, you would think they had a screw loose. [Laughter] But this is a huge issue. Now, we're not talking about confiscating anybody's guns. We're not talking about inter-

fering with anybody's hunting rights or sporting rights.

When we passed the Brady bill—Chris and Sam will remember this—their argument against the Brady bill was, "This won't do you any good, because no criminal ever goes to a gun store to buy a gun." You remember that? That was their big argument: "They're not dumb enough to do that." Okay? Five years and 400,000 rejected sales later, with a 25-year low in the crime rate and violent crime down even more than nonviolent crime, they no longer can make that argument.

But now we say, "Okay, there are more and more people, since we're checking on them, who are buying guns at the gun shows and the flea markets. We'll give you that much, so let's go check them." They say, "Oh, no, goodness, no, we couldn't do that." Or if the—"It's okay if it's over the counter at a gun show, but not if it's in the parking lot."

Now, you may have this image that there's a sort of a—maybe a convention center in Hartford where there's a gun show, and it's two blocks out to the parking lot, and you don't want to make the guy take the automatic check. That's not what goes on. Most of these gun shows, they're down little country roads, and you turn right, and you're in a little field. You know, you back up on both sides of the lane, and you open your trunk, and you get down your pickup. So if you're out in the parking lot, it means you're walking around to the front of the car. This is—this is just—it just doesn't make any sense.

But what I want to tell you is, we have—I think the defining difference between the two parties today is no longer what they used to say about us. We proved we're more fiscally responsible than they are. We've got a more fiscally responsible program right here. We have proved that we can grow the economy. We've proved that we're for sensible defense spending. We've proved that we can do the things that we're supposed to do in foreign policy that—it's really almost, the most important thing is how we define community and what our mutual responsibilities are to one another.

That's what the Patients' Bill of Rights is about. It's true. We'll have to pay out—you know, it'll be a buck or two a month. Our estimate is that the Federal health insurance program costs less than a dollar a month more, now that we have the protections of the Patients'

Bill of Rights. So that means that everybody that doesn't ever need the Patients' Bill of Rights—who's a Federal employee—is getting socked for about \$10 a year. I think it's worth it. I think it's worth it as a part of our shared responsibility to protect people.

So if you close this gun show loophole, 90-plus—95 percent, maybe more, of those people are honest as the day is long, and they'll have to hang around and wait for their background checks to be done. And sometimes it'll be a little bit of a pain—to increase the chances of saving 13 kids a day? I think it's worth it.

This is really what's going on. It's no longer—it's not a question even about tax cuts. We're for tax cuts. The questions is, how big should they be; what are our other responsibilities; how should they be structured? And what I want you to understand is that these ideas matter.

It matters whether we give out all this Federal money in education and tell the locals of the States, "Just do whatever you want to with it," or whether we say, "We think you ought to end social promotion but have mandatory summer schools for kids who fail. We shouldn't declare them fit. And we think we ought to have every school district that needs an after-school program ought to have one, and we're going to give you money to help you. It's our definition of community." It's not us telling them how to run the schools. This is what local research shows works.

So when you leave here, I hope you will be able to tell people why you came today. And I hope you will be able to tell them why I'm doing this, even though I'm not running for reelection. I've spent my whole life believing that ideas matter. It really matters what America does collectively.

And I have tried to get my party to change. We now have the smallest Federal Government since John Kennedy was President. We are not the party of defending every big Government program that was done yesterday. We are not the party that believes Government can do everything. We are the party that believes the Government has the responsibility to give people

the tools and to create the conditions so that as a community we can go forward and everybody has a fair chance. And every one of these issues embodies that.

So I thank you for being here. And I hope you'll come to more, and I hope you will stay with us. I'm grateful that I've had the chance to be President. And I'm nowhere near through. I've got a more ambitious agenda today than I did in my first year.

But the most important thing is to keep this going. The next elections matter. The people matter. The ideas matter. This is a better country than it was in 1992. We tried it their way. This is a stronger, better country. And every time we've had a fight about whose ideas were right and whose were wrong—if you measure up to what was the impact of our economic plan, our crime bill, the insistence we made in welfare that we not get rid of the guarantees of health care and nutrition for our children, all of these things—our approach turned out to be right for America. And I want you to go out and tell people that. When they ask you why you came, tell them I gave a pretty good talk, but the most important thing was we are right for our children and the 21st century.

Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:15 p.m. at a private residence. In his remarks, he referred to First Selectman Diane Goss Farrell of Westport; Joseph J. Andrew, national chair, and Beth Dozoretz, national finance chair, Democratic National Committee; luncheon hosts Francine Goldstein and Sandra Wagenfeld; event cochairs Martha Aasen, delegate, State Democratic Central Committee, and Ronni Ginott, State chair, Women's Leadership Forum; former Representative Barbara B. Kennelly; State Attorney General Richard Blumenthal; State Treasurer Denise L. Nappier; Senator Christopher J. Dodd's wife, Jackie Marie Clegg; soprano Jessye Norman; actress Cicely Tyson; Edward L. Marcus, chair, Connecticut State Democratic Party; and Myra J. Irvin, section 8 rental assistance program manager, Hope, AR, Housing Authority.