

Remarks to the Ace Hardware Convention in Denver, Colorado October 26, 1992

What a great welcome. Thank you very, very much. Thank you all. That was just first-class. Please be seated. Roger, thank you. My heavens, what a wonderful—I'm kind of glad I'm running against Clinton instead of this guy, I'll tell you. [Laughter] No, but when he was citing those values and what you all stand for about hard work, it really resonates. I'm very grateful to Roger Peterson. I want to thank your chairman, who just met me, greeted us out there in the hall, Richard Laskowski; say to your executive vice president, David Hodnick—thank him for, I'm sure, a lot of the arrangements in all of this. And I am just really pleased to be here.

I was accompanied here today by one of Colorado's Congressmen, Congressman Dan Schaefer, doing a great job for our country in the Congress, and also with Terry Considine, a great friend, who I'm convinced is going to be the next Senator from here. So we brought a little political clout to this nonpolitical meeting. Somewhere over here also is one of the unique characters in the whole United States Senate, a legend not only in this time but I expect will live forever as a great down-to-earth American. I'm talking about Wyoming's Al Simpson, who is here, one of the great, great U.S. Senators.

So I'm delighted to be here. And, you know, hardware stores are viewed—I listened carefully to Roger, but I knew it—hardware stores are viewed as the typical small business, literally the foundation of our economy. When you talk hardware, okay, I've heard it, "Ace is the place." So put it down this way: I'm the guy that's honored and I'm the one that's very, very pleased to share a few minutes here with you and to salute those men and women who really are the backbone of small business in this country.

I would say that my friends over there in the national media—we've got a little bit of a thing going here, because I like holding up a bumper sticker. It says "Annoy the Media. Reelect Bush." I say it with

total good humor but great conviction, I might add. [Laughter] So I'm sure some of them want to know why I stopped by this convention. And the truth is, I need a few tools. You see—[laughter]—I've got some work to do around my house, and I don't plan moving out for another 4 years.

Oh, heavens. But now let me just try to put things in perspective. One week from tomorrow, it's hard to believe that one week from tomorrow American voters are going to choose a President, not just the President of the United States but really the leader of the entire world, given the demise of international communism. In many ways we're going to be choosing a future.

I believe that this election comes down to three fundamental questions. Who has the vision for America's future? Who has the road map to get us to that future? And then, fundamentally, who can you trust when we hit those unexpected bumps, those crises that lie ahead, inevitably?

Let's begin by talking the question of philosophy. Whose vision makes more sense to you? My opponents say that this election is about change, and I agree. But being in favor of change is like being in favor of breathing. The real question is not who is for change, but whose change will make life better for all Americans.

A philosopher once observed that "those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it." And so let's see where we've been over the past 4 years. We won a 50-year cold war because we stood up for ideals, communism versus freedom. Freedom finished first. You know, the cold war was defined for half a century in ways large and small. It claimed literally millions of lives and crushed the spirit of millions of others. And here in America, the cold war defined us, financially, economically, even psychologically. My kids, and many of you out here, grew up crawling under desks in these "duck and cover" drills. In the sixties during the Cuban missile crisis, we stood on the brink of Armageddon. In the eighties, families huddled together in

fear to watch a TV movie called "The Day After." And always, the shadow of the cold war lingered right outside our windows.

You talk change, well, all that has changed with our leadership. And because of that change, our children go to sleep tonight without that same fear of nuclear war. We should be proud that we gave this gift to them. But if we were the cold war victors, we have yet to receive the spoils. There's little celebration in America today; instead a nagging anxiety, a feeling that it's time to turn our attention to challenges at home, to creating new industries and better schools and affordable health care. And whose philosophy should we follow to get there?

Well, we've seen in recent years the power of a tank or a gun, but the power of a simple idea is what we've really seen, an idea called freedom. In Asia, in Eastern Europe, South America, Mexico, people are coming to understand that government is neither superior nor savior. It is and must be their servant.

In the midst of a worldwide economic slowdown, our free-market economy remains afloat, while many nations are drowning. We are growing faster than Japan, faster than Germany, faster than Canada. But here's the irony. At the very moment when the rest of the world is moving our way, my opponent, Governor Clinton, wants us to move their way.

Governor Clinton says he is, quote, "different" than the old tax-and-spend liberals. But if you look at the details of what he offers, you see \$150 billion in new taxes, more than Mondale and Dukakis combined. You see at least \$220 billion already in new spending, just to begin to pay for all the promises.

With each program Governor Clinton puts forth, you see a philosophy where bureaucrats in Washington or some entrenched Members of Congress carve out the exact same programs to try and solve problems facing people in Denver and Dallas, or Dover, or Delaware. I believe Americans understand that these old liberal solutions are not right for our new postwar era.

It does not make sense that hardware store owners will somehow get richer by giving more of your money to the IRS. It

doesn't make sense that we will get this terrible deficit down by giving more money to the Government to spend. At a time when every organization is decentralizing power, why turn back to central bureaucracy in Washington?

And yet, saying that is not enough because, of course, we have real problems. Our children won't be able to compete unless our schools are literally reinvented. The cost of health care is skyrocketing. We have to get it down. So Government can't just keep the tanks running. Government must help people.

During this campaign, many have sought to portray the choice between a, quote, "activist" Government and a trickle-down approach to Government. But that is wrong. The real choice is not between activism and passivity. The real choice is between a liberal activist Government that seeks to impose solutions on individuals, families, and the private sector, and a conservative activist Government that gives individuals, businesses, and families the means to make their own choices through competition and economic opportunity.

We know one size does not fit all. We know the American people are individuals, each with their own needs and skills and, yes, dreams. So our activist approach gives more power to individuals, families, and businesses, so you can choose what is best.

Let me give you just a couple of specific examples here. Start with education. Governor Clinton worked with me, and I give him great credit for this, when we set six national education goals, the very first time in history that the Governors came together with the President to set these national education goals. And as I say, Governor Clinton deserves credit for that. But if elected President, Governor Clinton wants to pour more money into the same failed education system, a system where funds are controlled tightly by central bureaucracies, where powerful teachers unions block real reform, and where we spend as much per pupil as any nation but Switzerland, but don't get an adequate return on our investment.

If the system is broken, tinkering around

the margins won't do the job. So I want to use competition to improve our schools. I want to provide scholarships for elementary and high school students so that every parent, rich and poor alike, can choose the best schools for their kids, public, private, or religious. Give the parents a choice, and competition will make all these schools better.

This same principle, you live by this principle in your work. You see the same thing in health care. Governor Clinton has offered three plans in this campaign. One said to all of you, either offer care—small businesses, remember—either offer care on your own or pay a new payroll tax, at least 7 percent. Many experts said it was a back-door way to get Government directly involved in running health care.

Now he offers a slightly different plan, but he still wants to control the price of health care by setting up a gigantic board in Washington, not unlike what the Government tried to do with gasoline in the 1970's. I say we don't need to sock you with a new tax, and we don't want to tell you what doctor to see, and we don't need to inflict you with any more mandates from Washington, DC.

How about tax incentives for small businesses, so that you can afford to buy health care on your own, or let small businesses pool coverage, to get the advantage, so you can get the same price breaks as the AT&T's and IBM's. Government can't control prices by fiat, but competition can bring prices down. For people who are too poor to pay taxes, we will give vouchers. The poorest of the poor will receive vouchers so that they can choose the care that best suits them.

Freedom, power, choice for people: You see the philosophical difference in every area. I trust you to choose the best child care for your kids. My opponent says trust the Government. I trust you, with the right incentives, to figure out how to give your employees parental leave. My opponent says Government should tell you how to do that. I favor parental leave. I do not favor more mandates on small business. I trust entrepreneurs to place their bets on the growth industries of the future. You've got a big difference here. My opponent

thinks Government can do as good a job, if not better.

Governor Clinton talks about Government, and here's the word he uses, "investing" your money. I talk about cutting capital gains taxes, investment tax allowances to small business, because you know what to do with your money better than any bureaucrat; a big difference between Government investment and investment in the private sector.

Governor Clinton says we need professional politicians in Washington, who won't get anything done. I trust Americans' judgment so much that I want to limit the terms of Members of Congress and give the Government back to the people. The Republic's been able to survive with the Presidents having limited terms. I'd like to try it out on some of these old geezers in Congress; wouldn't hurt them a damn bit.

No, you see, here's my point, there's a conservative agenda for helping people. It's an activist agenda that empowers people, not the bureaucracies. It gives people power to make their own choices, control their own lives, create their own destinies.

I believe that even in these challenging times these ideas make more sense to the American people than the siren song of higher taxes, more spending, bigger Government in Washington. Now, it all sounds great, but how do you translate words into action? After all, people are sick and tired of gridlock, and they want to turn Washington into a "bicker-free" zone.

Well, many of the ideas that I've talked about are already underway. In child care, for example, we succeeded in passing legislation that literally allows parents to choose their kids' care, whether it's a government agency or a church down the street.

But with a new Congress—and it's going to be new not just in the sense of reforming; a new Congress is going to have 150 new Members maybe; certainly over 100—we have a historic opportunity to push this agenda even further, literally to renew America.

In September, I laid out what we call an Agenda for American Renewal. It's a comprehensive, integrated approach to fixing our schools, reforming health care, right-

sizing Government, and creating here in America the world's first \$10 trillion economy. My agenda includes 13 first-year priorities, but three really dwarf all others.

First, America needs jobs. Not 2 years from now, not next fall, we need them today. I understand what it takes to create jobs. I built a business myself, small business, met a payroll. I have a big difference here because Governor Clinton wants you to send more of your money to Washington, remember, to invest, and say the Government will invest it for you. I say, let's cut out the middle man. We don't need that. We'll put together a package to give you incentives to grow, to further cut—and I've got to do well on this one in the next 4 years; we've made some progress—but further cut redtape and regulation and make more credit available.

Right now, we have \$150 billion—one of the things we did get passed in the last Congress, Senator Simpson and Congressman Schaefer taking lead roles in this—\$150 billion in money for highways. We'll make sure that that money gets to the States just as soon as possible and get those steamrollers moving quickly, so that your customers will have more money in their pockets.

While we're strengthening our business, we must, and I will, open new markets for our products by winning congressional approval of our free trade treaty with Canada and Mexico. This is the bottom line: More trade creates more American high-paying jobs, jobs for all Americans. It is exports that have saved us in this global slowdown, global recession, and it is exports that are going to lead the way out of this with jobs for American manufacturers and American services.

Our immediate third priority is health care. I already mentioned some of the ideas, but the need for action is urgent. We simply cannot control the deficit, we can't make our companies even more competitive until we make health care more affordable and more accessible for you and for all that work with you.

As we are working on these priorities, we're going to be working on others. We'll take new steps to reform our education and legal system. Our children will not be able

to compete unless we reinvent, literally reinvent our schools, K through 12.

Our society will be drained of precious resources unless we start suing each other less and caring for each other more. It is a crying shame that these crazy lawsuits have gotten out of control. I have tried for 3 years to get the Congress to move on tort reform and on limiting some of these outrageous claims. Because when a doctor can't deliver a baby for fear of being sued or has to run the price of your health care up to protect against a suit, or when a Little League coach won't dare coach, or when a guy driving along the highway sees an accident on the side and says, well, I better not stop because somebody might sue me if I move this poor guy off the road, we've got to do something: Stand up to these trial lawyers, and get these lawsuits under control.

My plan includes reducing the deficit, not by raising taxes but by getting control of spending. We need a balanced budget amendment. We need a line-item veto. And we need to cap the growth of these mandatory programs, except Social Security. We need a check-off on your tax return, so you, the taxpayer, can earmark up to 10 percent of your taxes to be used for nothing but to get the debt off our children's shoulders.

Some of you are from urban America, and to you I say we must restore hope to our inner cities. So I will work with the new Congress to get tougher crime laws, to fight the drug problem, to reform the welfare system, and to attract and keep business, all using this principle of putting faith and power not in bureaucracies but in real people.

We will further expand free trade, using our stature as world's number one superpower, to reach new trade agreements with countries in Europe and Asia.

Perhaps most important, we'll reform and right-size the Government, subject it to the same discipline as every other large organization in America. We'll cut the White House staff by a third, and look to Congress to match our action. Until we get all these things under control, at the outset we will take 5 percent off the salary of the best-paid Federal employees. Unfortunately, that

includes the President, too, but I'll do my share. We will abolish these political action committees; get rid of them. We will limit the terms of Members of Congress, and we will try in every way to give the Government back to the people.

I know some of you come from communities that have been heavily impacted by defense cuts. One of the great things about our performance in the cold war, yours and ours, has been that we've been able to cut back on some defense. But a critical part of this reorganization will be to help our defense industry adjust now to a peacetime economy. Immediately following the election, I will assemble a defense conversion council. It will include every necessary Cabinet Agency and work closely with key Members of the United States Congress.

We're already directing more weapons research in our great labs, our great national labs, to civilian use and retraining military personnel. To support this plan, this effort, I plan to create in my next budget submission a fund for future generations. That fund would provide seed monies to help defense sector and civilian firms form joint partnerships to use the knowledge we've gained from building weapons to building a stronger economy.

That is my immediate agenda, and it builds on the foundation that we have laid for the last 4 years. It's what I've been talking about on the campaign trail and what I will fight for in my second term.

But I believe each candidate owes you more than his agenda, but what specifically will he do to get it done. As the support for Ross Perot has made clear, there is a strong desire for a new coalition in America, to overcome gridlock, to get the job done. With 150 new Members of Congress from both parties, we will move quickly to respond to the demands of the people. I plan to use the time from November 4th through convening of the new Congress to meet with all the new Members of Congress, regardless of party, and to shape a legislative package in a way that will guarantee swift passage.

You know, the best time to move is when you're reelected. No more elections ahead. No worry about the future politics. Just get the people's business done and do it fast.

A committee has been called a cul-de-sac down which ideas are lured and strangled to death. And if this is true, then the modern Congress has become a giant subdivision. Good ideas go in, and they never come out again. [Laughter] So we will seek agreement with the congressional leaders to form a steering group that can help ride herd over Congress, to make sure our legislative package does not get bogged down. We'll set deadlines for decisions, and we'll meet them. We can mobilize for war. We can mobilize for hurricanes. Let's mobilize for our economy, and get this country moving again.

If we need to, we'll go beyond Washington. Already, our American 2000 education reform effort involves parents, teachers, and business leaders in over 1,700 communities. This will be a model for other efforts. America's desire for positive change requires building new coalitions, taking advantage of grassroots power, and we will.

Now, that's the action plan. But what about Governor Clinton? Well, in June, he promised to present his 100-day plan even before the election. It's 8 days away; we have not had a sighting yet. [Laughter] No plan has been sighted. And here's why: His plan simply does not add up. He's promised too much. And his new congressional friends want to raise the ante even higher. The result will be much higher spending and taxes and a much bigger deficit or continued gridlock in Washington.

My agenda can break the gridlock without breaking the bank. It is ambitious, but it is doable. With it we can start to make progress on our fundamental challenges and match the peace of mind in the world, with the peace of mind right here at home.

Finally, a word about character. In the final analysis, it is my view that this election is going to be decided on character and trust. Horace Greeley—I mentioned this in the debate out in Michigan—Horace Greeley once said that character is the only thing that endures. I think that's especially true in the Presidency. Character matters, not just because of the plans you make but the crises that you never foresee. A friend of mine says character is real simple. He says it's acting alone the way you would act

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with a million people watching. As President, you're never more alone than at times of crisis. While nobody may be watching in the Oval Office, millions, literally millions, will feel the impact of your judgment.

It is easy in the aftermath of Desert Storm to portray the decision to go to war as an easy one, but it was not. It was not uniformly popular. The Democratic Congress had spent much of the fall parading experts up there, if you'll remember, to Capitol Hill, who said we'd get into, quote, "another Vietnam." The thing that hurt the most or that made me think the most was the horrible tales of the numbers of body bags that we would be responsible for if we made a commitment to send somebody else's son, somebody else's daughter to war. The critics said a war would kill any hope for peace in the Middle East. And the vote in the Congress, a cliffhanger, not overwhelming. Many said, "Let's give sanctions more time." But I made a decision to go to war because I knew it was right, not because I knew it was popular.

I remember well the cold, rainy February day at Camp David when ground war to liberate Kuwait began, and how fervently I prayed that our plans would work and our young men and women would return home, victorious and alive. This is an awesome responsibility to ask our young people to knock early on death's door. It is a responsibility I have tried to fulfill with honor

and duty and, above all, honesty, integrity to the American people. But that's your call.

That's the wonderful thing about this system. And yes, I confess it's been an ugly year. But that's the wonderful thing, because it is your call on November 3d. Then the polls and all these deadly talking heads we see on these Sunday television shows, each getting 500 bucks to tell us what we think, it doesn't matter anymore. They don't matter anymore. It's up to the American people.

When you enter that voting booth, ask yourself three common sense questions: Who has the right vision for America's future? Who can get us from here to there? Which character has the character? And who would you trust with your family or with the United States of America in a crisis?

Ideas, action, character: I have tried very hard to demonstrate all three. So I came out here to Ace to ask for your support on November 3d.

Thank you, and may God bless our great country, the United States of America. Thank you very, very much.

Note: The President spoke at 10:55 a.m. at the Colorado Convention Center. In his remarks, he referred to Roger Peterson, president and chief executive officer, Ace Hardware.

Remarks to the Community in Albuquerque, New Mexico

October 26, 1992

The President. Thank you, New Mexico. And thank you especially to one of the truly great, decent, honorable, committed United States Senators, Pete Domenici. And, you know, you've got a great Republican delegation to the Congress in Steve Schiff, the local Congressman; Joe Skeen is with us here today. Former Governor Garrey Caruthers is over here. I want to thank our New Mexico State chairman, John Lattaudio, and our special guest, my dear friend Ricky Skaggs, just back from Russia,

one of the great entertainers and a really decent guy.

Let me say I am very, very pleased to be in Albuquerque. And let me tell you this: Ignore the pundits, annoy the media, and let the people decide who's going to win this election. We are going to win the election.

Let me tell you why. There's a clear choice before the American people, a vast difference in experience, a vast difference in philosophy, and a vast difference in char-