

Oct. 23 / Administration of William J. Clinton, 1993

ise real and for all you will do in the tomorrows to come, on behalf of all the people of the United States, I say a profound thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 8:45 p.m. at the Jefferson Memorial. In his remarks, he referred to Kent Schiner, international president, and Jack J. Spitzer, former international president, B'nai B'rith.

## Remarks at the National Italian-American Foundation Dinner October 23, 1993

Thank you very much, President Guarini; Foundation Chair Stella; Director Rotondaro; my friend Art Gajarsa; my good friend Congressman John LaFalce, who wanted Hillary to speak tonight, I'm going to tell this on her—and John, you know John was reported in the paper saying, "I know I shouldn't say this, but every time I see Hillary I just want to hug her." [Laughter] So we came here tonight so he could do it in front of 3,000 people and it would seem perfectly legitimate.

Mr. Ambassador, I thank you for your eloquent remarks, and I hope you will tell the Prime Minister that I value his friendship and the friendship of your nation. I know there are about 300 of your country men and women here tonight. I thank them for their presence, and I look forward to going to Italy next year to the G-7 meeting. Hillary and I went there in 1987. It was one of the best trips we have ever made as private citizens, and I dare say, we won't have a chance to do quite as many things the next time as we did then.

You know, I was really looking forward to this tonight. I mean, last year when I came I was as nervous as a cat in a tree. It was close to the election; I had no idea if I were going to win. They put me up against Barbara Bush who had an 86 percent approval rating. [Laughter] I knew at least half the people here weren't going to vote for me anyway, and all I could do was think about how awful it would be if I messed up. So I thought tonight will be a gem; I'll show up as President. It'll be wonderful. First thing I have to do is take a picture of Dom DeLuise and Danny DeVito. I'm about six seats from Gina Lollobrigida and DeVito sits in my lap. [Laughter] This whole thing has been incredibly humbling. I'm kind of getting used to it, you know. I mean, look at this, Al Gore gets to go on David Letterman;

Hillary speaks to the Congress and a poll, taken in bad taste by USA Today, says that after she addresses the Congress for 3 days, virtually without notes, 40 percent of the American people are convinced that she is smarter than I am. I practically don't know how the other 60 percent missed it. [Laughter]

It was so bad the other day, I was being so humbled, I went to California seeking respite, and when I got there I thought, well, at least here they said I would go to L.A., and I would stay in the Beverly Hilton Hotel. And I knew it was kind of a jazzy place and Merv Griffin owned it, and I thought, well, I'll get there and Merv Griffin will come shake hands with me, and they'll take me up and put me in some gorgeous suite and I'll feel like the President again. This is a true story, now; I'm not making any of this up. I show up, and Merv Griffin is there and he shakes hands with me. He says he's got a gorgeous suite, and I'll feel like the President. But he says, "Before you get on the elevator, I want you to know that I've been following your activities very closely, and I've put you on a floor which does have one permanent resident. And I thought it was a place that would really fit for you." And I'm getting really excited, you know? I'm in Hollywood, I mean my mind is going crazy. And I get on the elevator, I go up to the whatever floor it was, the elevator opens and there, standing there to welcome me, as God is my witness, is Rodney Dangerfield who gives me a dozen roses with a card that says, "And a little respect." [Laughter]

Well anyway, there are a few good things happening tonight. I mean, Justice Scalia is to my left. And I'm about to have a victory that is the equivalent of Ronald Reagan's successful invasion of Grenada because Jack Valenti picked a fight with Janet Reno. [Laughter] I don't think

they know about that, Jack. Yes, you did, but you'll do well.

I want to say just a few words. We've been here a long time, and you've all had a wonderful time, and I have been deeply moved by this, as I was last year. But I want to thank the honorees for what they said and who they are. Because every one of them reminded us, in a different way, of why we should be grateful to be Americans and why we should be grateful for the contribution of Italian-Americans. I want to thank Richard Grasso, and Phil Rizzuto and my good friend and supporter Danny DeVito, who shouldn't have been so shameless in expressing that, but I loved it. I want to thank our dear friend Matilda Cuomo, for everything she has been and done. I want to say to all of you, you've made me really proud just to be here tonight as a citizen of this country. Proud of what our country has been to you and to so many millions of people like you.

Most of the Italian-Americans in my administration have been mentioned: Leon Panetta and Laura D'Andrea Tyson. Matilda mentioned her wonderful son, Andrew, who has done a terrific job for us at HUD. We have a lot of other folks here tonight who are in the administration. And I won't mention them all, but I do think that I should say that I have decided to name my good friend Geraldine Ferraro as a permanent member to the U.N. Commission on Human Rights. This administration cares a lot about human rights, and so does she, and she will be terrific.

I also would like to thank a person that, in a few days, I will formally name the Executive Director of the White House Conference on Aging, someone a few of you may know, Bob Blancato.

I must say, I may be reaching the limit of the number of Italians I can have in my administration. I don't know if there's a de facto quota. I do know that when I flew out to Denver to see the Pope recently, I tried to gather up every Catholic on my staff. And I asked the Pope, I said, "Your Holiness, may I introduce you to all the Catholics on my staff?" And he said, "Yes." And practically got arthritis of the elbow shaking hands with them all. And he looked at me and he said, "Have you no Protestants and Jews for me to convert?" [Laughter]

You know, it's funny to me how much one of you—Danny made a joke about being from

the south of Italy and not being much different from being from the South. I don't know that that's quite right, but there is something to be said for the common experiences that those of us who grew up in relatively modest circumstances in small towns in the rural South and Italian immigrants who came here. I must tell you, when I travel this great land I never feel any more at home than I do in south Philadelphia or the north end of Boston. And the other day when Hillary and I went back to New Haven for our 20th law school reunion at Yale, I was so thrilled when we drove through those Italian neighborhoods in East Haven, and all the people were still out there—this is 1993, folks—waving their American flag, not because of me but because the President was there, not me, the institution, the office and Nation. It was wonderful.

And when they asked me what I wanted to do while I was in New Haven, I said, well, I'm glad I'm going back to Yale, but I want you to call Congresswoman Rosa DeLauro and take me down to the neighborhoods again where I really feel at home. And I went down to see hundreds of people who have the stories that we've heard tonight. I say that to you because I want to make just one serious point briefly that embraces all the issues that I have sought to deal with.

In my life, when I was a child, when I was born, almost half the people in my State lived below the poverty line. Now, whatever that means, almost all the Italian immigrants, at one time in this country when they first came here were, by definition, below the poverty line. But when I was a child, we all knew, when I was being raised by my grandfather who had a fourth-grade education, all the people that moved to town—town was 6,000 people—still had a little plot of land out in the country to grow vegetables on. And all the little children could still be taught to farm, even if they weren't going to be farmers anymore. No one doubted that they were loved, that they were part of a coherent family and community, and that if they worked hard and played by the rules they would do okay.

The same is true—I have heard Mario Cuomo talk about his father, his family. I wept, like you did, when Danny DeVito told that story. Every one of you in this audience probably has a story. There was a structure of support, of love and discipline, rooted in some pretty basic

ideas. Family, work, how you do in life depends more on effort and what kind of person you are than IQ and income. Just basic things. If you ask me what is wrong with this country today, I'll tell you what. Millions of people don't think it works that way anymore, and for millions of people it does not work that way anymore.

We have a whole generation of children growing up who will not be able to tell these stories, who shoot each other on the street, who have access to guns in a way they would not have access in any other country in the world. We say we're a law and order country. We're the most religious, big country in the entire world, by far, and we're the only ones that let teenagers be better armed than police, who have no structure, order in their lives, who have no identity with a future, who impulsively do things that destroy others and themselves.

When I was Governor of my State, I kept a little picture on my wall. I looked at it every day when I was 6 years old, laying on my back with a broken leg above the knee, at a time when they couldn't even figure out how to put a cast on it, so I had a steel pin put through my ankle, and my leg was hung up. And I'm there, holding hands with my great-grandfather, who lived out in the country in a house built up on stilts, hardly ever got out of overalls, and had no education at all. But he worked hard, he loved me, he did his job, and it worked, whatever it was in our family, it worked.

There are millions of people in this country today who will never even know who their great-grandparents were, who will have no pictures, who will have no nonreading parents who make sure they have books, who run them to the library. You ask me what is amiss in this country today. Well, there are a lot of changes we have

to make, and we're going to make them. We're going to adjust the global economy.

Did you see what the Prime Minister of Germany said the other day? America has got it. They're working. They're going to be productive. They're going to grow again. But it won't work unless the dream that brought your families here is rekindled; unless our diversity, our religious and racial diversity becomes a strength again, not a weakness; and unless we can figure out a way to bring all those other kids back into the life that we take for granted so the future has a claim on them, just as it did on all of us when we were growing up.

So I ask you tonight when you go home, think of how Matilda Cuomo's family felt the first time they heard her give a speech. Think of what Phil Rizzuto's family felt like the first time he put on a Yankee uniform. Think of what Mr. Grasso's family felt like when they thought, "My God, he's the head of the most important financial exchange in the entire world." Think of what Danny DeVito's relatives felt like when he made it in Hollywood. Think about that. Think about what together we can do to make the children of this country have those feelings.

God bless you, and good night.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11 p.m. at the Washington Hilton. In his remarks, he referred to foundation officers Frank Guarini, president, Frank Stella, chair, Alfred Rotondaro, director, and Anthony J. Gajarsa, vice chair; Jack Valenti, CEO and president, Motion Picture Association of America; Richard Grasso, president and vice chairman, New York Stock Exchange; Phil Rizzuto, former baseball player and sportscaster; and Matilda Cuomo, first lady of New York.

## Exchange With Reporters Prior to Discussions With President Hosni Mubarak of Egypt

October 25, 1993

### Haiti

*Q.* Mr. President, all these reports are coming out of Haiti that there could be a breakthrough in the process that would bring Aristide back in. Is that optimism justified?

*President Clinton.* Well, there's been some movement over the weekend. I've learned in dealing with Haiti not to be optimistic ever. But there has been some movement, and it's hopeful, and we'll keep working on it.