

Remarks at the Kennedy-King Dinner in Alexandria, Virginia October 21, 1994

The President. Thank you very much, Governor Wilder, especially for that introduction. You know, you mentioned the PLO-Israel signing. It put me in mind of Arafat and Rabin when you and Chuck were shaking hands then. Peace is breaking out all over. [*Laughter*]

Let me thank Margo Horner and Mame Reiley and Mark Warner for their leadership and for having us here, thank my good friend Jim Moran for that magnificent speech from the heart. Leslie Byrne had to go and win her debate, but I ask you to help her come back. She is a fine woman and wonderful Congresswoman. And Don Beyer, thanks for reminding everybody how we're doing in auto sales and—[*laughter*—]—how well we are doing in our heart. You were great tonight, and I thank you for that. He can really give a talk.

You know, I want to say a few words about two friends of mine, people I serve with, Governor Wilder and then-Governor Robb. And I want to try to get you to think about this election beyond the cheerers here. First, let me say that I thank Doug Wilder for what he said about our administration and our efforts. I thank him for being a longtime friend and colleague and a worthy adversary when we were campaigning in the snows of New Hampshire. I thank him for being an example to a lot of young people in this country, that you really can get there if you have real big dreams and you work hard and you do what you ought to do. Maybe that's the most important thing of all. And I thank him for being here tonight, because what he said here tonight is a genuine expression of love and concern for the future of the people he had served for so many years in the Commonwealth of Virginia.

Let me say to Chuck and Lynda Robb, I am really sorry they've had to take so many licks for being friends of mine. [*Laughter*] That goes with the territory, I guess, but I'd never have believed it if you'd told me a year or two ago that it would have happened. I can tell you that I have known them a long time. We served together. We've been overseas together. We've been up and down together before. And I have watched Chuck Robb go through this campaign. I have watched him attacked, vilified.

I've seen his record distorted and outright falsified. I've seen him labor on in good cheer in the face of the richest campaign in the history of the United States to buy the hearts and minds of the people in any State. He had a magnificent record as a marine officer in Vietnam. He was a terrific Lieutenant Governor and a wonderful Governor of this State. Under Republican Presidents, he was telling people of both parties we had to do something about this awful Government deficit that was robbing our children of their future. But this is his finest hour.

Anybody can run and do well in the good times. Anybody can keep on going when you know you are solidly anchored in the spirit of the people. But when a tidal wave comes along, venom and anger and misrepresentation fueled by unlimited money, to stand strong, to not cut and run, to be brave enough to defend what you know is right, to risk it all for the people you really love, those of you who are voting for him and the people who ought to be voting for him who aren't yet, that is his finest hour.

You know, I've been giving a little bit of thought about this election that's going to come up and all the stuff's being said and how I have become the poster boy for Mr. Gingrich and his crowd. [*Laughter*] Now they don't even sort of sneak around about it, you know. The other day after they killed the lobbying bill and one of their number walked off the floor of the Senate and was cheered by the throngs of lobbyists for killing the lobbying bill on a Saturday—on Monday they met with the lobbyists and said, "Okay, we share your values and you better give us money, and don't give the Democrats money, or else." And then the next day, the House leader, Mr. Gingrich, said that their goal, the Republican goal, was to convince the American people that I was the enemy of normal Americans. I always thought my problem was I was too normal, you know. [*Laughter*]

I know Virginia is modernizing and growing and diversifying and all of that stuff. And it's magnificent. When I was a Governor and I served with Doug and Chuck, I used to resent how rich Virginia was getting. [*Laughter*] But I applaud your successes, and I have now con-

tributed to them with some of the defense decisions that have been made in this administration.

But to get right down to it, this is a Southern race, this whole deal. You think about it. Most of us remember—going back to what Jimmy said—where we were on April 4, 1968, and June 6, 1968, when Martin Luther King and Robert Kennedy were killed. It was like somebody tearing a big piece out of our heart because they made us better than we would otherwise have been, not because they were, as they are now painted by our adversaries, the apostles of some liberal, insensitive big Government. Quite the contrary. Read what they said. Both of them wanted Government's power to be used to help ordinary people without regard to their race. But both of them preached the gospel of personal responsibility and cautioned against over-reliance on Government.

Robert Kennedy went into Indiana and talked to blue-collar workers who thought they were for George Wallace and got them to be for him because he was both tough on crime and compassionate on civil rights. Martin Luther King didn't say, "No matter who you are, you're entitled to a handout." He said, "No matter who you are, you have to do your job as well as you can. And if your job is to be a street sweeper, you ought to sweep the streets like Michelangelo painted the Sistine Chapel"—not an apostle of some sort of overweening Government but to use the power of the people to help ordinary folks without regard to their race to live up to the fullest of their God-given potential. And each of them confronted people who tried to demonize them.

Now, let's face it, folks, I'm a son of the South, and they have tried to demonize me in the South. And they've done a pretty good job of it, haven't they? [*Laughter*] They've done a pretty good job of it.

Let's think tonight about the next 17 days and who is not for Chuck Robb for the Senate, and why. What is it that they object to that we have done together that is not normal? Let's talk about it. Let's talk about it. And I want you to think about it, because it's not enough for you to stand up here and shout hallelujah. You've got to go out and get some other folks when you leave here. So you talk about it.

Now, I want you to think about this. I came to Washington to revive the American dream, to do three things: to put the Government back on the side of ordinary Americans, to bring the

economy back, and to make the world more peaceful and prosperous for Americans to live and work in. Now, what is it that they object to that is not normal? Is it that we honored work and family with the family and medical leave law? Is it that we're going to immunize all the kids in this country under the age of 2 by 1996? Is it because another 200,000 kids are going into the Head Start program over this period? Is that what they don't think is right? Is it the fact that we gave tax cuts to 15 million working families because they're working 40 hours a week and they've got kids in the house and they still live on modest wages and we don't think that anybody that works full-time and is raising kids should live in poverty? Is that not normal? What is it that they object to about that? Well, their leaders opposed every single one of those initiatives. And I think that is not normal. Most normal Americans want it.

This is Virginia. Do you know what's on Thomas Jefferson's tombstone? "Author of the Declaration of Independence, the Statutes of Religious Freedom for the State of Virginia, founder of the University of Virginia." Now, were we abnormal to totally revamp the expensive and inefficient college loan program, saving over \$4 billion in tax money, saving students \$2 billion in excessive fees so that we could loan college money to more students, to middle class students at better terms and lower interest rates, so that by the time we're done we will have 20 million more Americans eligible for lower interest college loans? In the State of Virginia I say to you, that is normal. And every single one of them opposed it.

Is it abnormal to recoil in fear and disgust and horror at the crime and violence that is gripping our people and to say, "You folks have been talking about a crime bill for 6 years. Why don't we do something strange and surprise the American people and actually pass one, instead of talking about it?"—to put the police on the street—and we've already started in Northern Virginia putting police on the street—to build more prison cells, to have those prevention funds to give the kids something to say yes to, to have tougher penalties. Is that abnormal? I think that was normal.

What is abnormal is that you could convince the people that it wasn't normal in this strange time. Tell the truth. This was a good thing for the people of Virginia.

What about the way we ran the Government? They say that we're too liberal and they're so conservative. They quadrupled the debt in 12 years. For them, 2 and 2 was always 5. [Laughter] They railed against the Government, and they railed against the deficit, but they could not afford to do anything about it because it required a decision instead of tough talk.

So was that abnormal that we're bringing the deficit down, that we're actually reducing the size of the Federal Government they always complained about but never did anything about? Was it abnormal when we passed the procurement bill that changes the way we buy goods and services and will save billions of dollars—the end of the \$500 hammer and the \$50 ashtray—a Democratic initiative, not a Republican initiative? I think that is normal, and we should be for it.

This State is supposed to be pro-business. You ask any business person that's dealt with the Federal Government over the last 20 years, and they will tell you that this administration has done more to help people sell their goods and services all around the world, done more to expand trade, done more to create jobs, done more to revitalize manufacturing, done more to help defense conversion than any administration in recent history. That's why we have 4.6 million new jobs. I don't think that's abnormal. I think that is normal and good and right for America.

Let me ask you this: If Chuck Robb were a Republican—now, listen. No, don't boo; think. [Laughter] Remember, you've got to leave here and reach somebody that's not for him yet. Now, listen to this: If Chuck Robb were a Republican and he had voted to shrink the Federal Government to its smallest size since Kennedy, to get rid of the \$500 hammers and the \$50 ashtrays, to reduce the Federal deficit to its smallest size in a long time and to do it 3 years in a row for the first time since Truman, to support economic policies that created 4.6 million new jobs, to pass a crime bill that had the toughest penalties in the history of the United States, the Republicans in Virginia would be erecting a statue to him tonight.

So what is their beef? Why are we too liberal? Because we have more minorities on the Federal bench and in the Cabinet, more women on the Federal bench and in the Cabinet? Because we have—look at the world. Is it abnormal that for the first time since the dawn of the nuclear age Russian missiles are no longer point-

ing at American children at night? I think that is normal, not abnormal. Is it abnormal that we have worked so hard to get North Korea to now commit to be inspected, to say, "We're going to freeze our nuclear program; we're going to give it up"? Here's one thing our kids won't have to worry about if we implement the agreement that was signed today. I think that is normal and good and wholesome, and I think we ought to be supporting it. Were we abnormal by proving that Mr. North was wrong and the American military could, yes, lickety-split, get into the Gulf and stand up to Saddam Hussein and stop aggression again? I don't think so.

What is going on? I'll tell you what's going on. I am a Southerner. I love this part of the country. I love my roots. I love my family. I can take you into every county in my State and to every country crossroads and show you something that I know personally. I like to hunt ducks in duck season, in spite of what the NRA thinks. [Laughter] I like to ride horses and go to rodeos. I like country music. I am a Southerner. But I know one thing. You look at our past, the past that Doug Wilder had to overcome. How have we lived through these contradictions all this time? Sometimes we were like Thomas Jefferson, we faced the truth and we moved forward. Sometimes we had to go into a shell because we couldn't live with the challenges of the moment. And the way we did it was by finding somebody to demonize. And a lot of the time, before it became unfashionable, we demonized black people. Now, we elect them Governor.

What are we demonizing? We're demonizing liberals. Never mind if it doesn't fit. Never mind if the facts aren't right. The people are upset; they are exercised. They're anxiety-ridden; they're cynical and skeptical about the Government. So spend \$17 million and tell it to them anyway. If it's not true, who cares? That is what is going on, isn't it?

Audience members. Yes.

The President. That is what is going on. They say they are strong and we are weak. They say they are for conservative principles and we are liberal. But we reduced the Government. We reduced the deficit. We made your money go further. We stuck up for ordinary working people. We began to grow this economy again and to bring this country together again.

Now what they want to do is to put in this contract—oh, but it sounds so sweet. In all the

crossroads where they think we are not normal, they say, "Here is what is normal: I'll give everybody a tax cut, I will raise defense spending, I will bring back Star Wars, and I will balance the budget. But it costs a trillion dollars." How will you pay for it? "I'll tell you about that after the election." [Laughter] You know how they'll pay for it, don't you? The same way they paid for it before. We will explode the deficit and put it right on our kids and lower their standard of living. We will cut Medicare. We will cut veterans benefits. We will never fund the police in this crime bill. We will start shipping jobs overseas again. We will put this economy in the ditch. But they won't care. They'll have the election.

You know, it's 17 days until the election. Chuck Robb's in a tough fight. I'd love to be able to stand up here with him here and make you a trillion dollars' worth of promises. If I could write you a trillion dollars' worth of hot checks, I could show everybody in this room a good time. [Laughter] But it is not the responsible thing to do. It is wrong, and you know it's wrong. It is wrong to treat voters like they are children and make them promises that will undermine their own lives and the future of their children. That is not right just because it sounds good. And it is wrong to say that your opponents are not normal Americans just because they've done things you wish you'd done when you had the chance and you can't think of any way to get around it. [Laughter]

Now, I'm going to tell you what I really think is going to happen in this election. What I really think is going to happen is that sometime in the next 17 days the psychological balance inside the heart and spirit of the people of Virginia will be set, either by the spirit we come here to honor tonight that animated the lives and the sacrifice of the lives of Robert Kennedy and Martin Luther King, or by that old, dark spirit that often grabs us in the history of those of us who are Southerners, where we are compelled to identify ourselves against someone else, to see other people as our enemies, alien, not normal.

Folks, that's what this is all about. And what you have to do is not just shout here. We've all got our good lines against Oliver North. And

I do think it's more important—more important than that he doesn't consider me his Commander in Chief was that he didn't act like President Reagan was his Commander in Chief. That is more important.

But what is really at stake in this election is what is in the heart of the people of Virginia. Are we going to go forward, or are we going to go back to trickle-down economics of the eighties? Are we going to empower people and challenge them to assume responsibility, or are we going to make them a bunch of cheap promises in a power grab? Are we going to bring out the best in each other, or are we going to keep right on dividing people and letting them vote their fears? That is what is at issue.

This is a period of profound historic change for America. You cannot blame people for being upset and angry and confused. And frankly, it's hard for them to get the facts about what's going on half the time. And what you have to do in the next 17 days is not so much to bash your adversaries, although, goodness knows, you need to answer them back. You need to turn the light on in Virginia and let the light shine and let people feel the future flowing through their veins, in their hearts, in their minds, and their spirits.

If you will give the people of Virginia the vision of the future that is symbolized by the lives of the people we come here to honor tonight, Chuck Robb will win, Jim Moran will win, Leslie Byrne will win. But that's not what's really important: the Commonwealth of Virginia will win.

Go do it. Don't leave a stone unturned. Don't leave a person untouched.

God bless you, and goodnight.

NOTE: The President spoke at 8 p.m. at the Radisson Hotel. In his remarks, he referred to Yasser Arafat, Chairman, Palestine Liberation Organization; Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin of Israel; Margo Horner, Eighth Congressional District chair, Democratic National Committee; Mame Reily, chief of staff and campaign manager for Representative Jim Moran; Mark Warner, chairman, Virginia Democratic Party, and Lt. Gov. Don Beyer of Virginia.