

May 7 / Administration of William J. Clinton, 1996

duced the President; William Hait, director, Cancer Institute of New Jersey; New York Giants football player Dave Brown and former New York Gi-

ants football player Harry Carson; and John Slade, professor, Rutgers University Medical School.

Remarks at a Democratic Dinner in Jersey City, New Jersey

May 7, 1996

Thank you very much. Thank you so much. Ladies and gentlemen, thank you for the warm New Jersey welcome. Whoopi Goldberg, thank you for what you said and what you've done and for all the time you have given and the time you're willing to give because you never forgot where you came from and never stopped caring about how other people are doing who aren't as fortunate as you are. Thank you, and God bless you.

I want to thank all the dinner chairs and Chairman Fowler and your State chairman, Tom Byrne, and my former colleagues Jim Florio and Brendan Byrne, and Peter Duchin, who I've been enjoying for a year or two now, since I was a younger man. I want to say a special word of appreciation to Ray Lesniak because it's his birthday tonight, so I know we're all glad—[*applause*].

I want to thank Senator Lautenberg for what he said and for what he's done in Washington, for standing up especially for the environment under a period of incredibly intense assault from the majority in Congress. [*Applause*] Yes, you ought to clap for him because he did that.

And as he leaves the United States Senate, I'd like to thank Senator Bradley for his 18 years of service to New Jersey and to America, for many, many years of friendship, counsel, and advice to me, and for the support that he gave this administration in the last 3½ years. I know we all wish him well, and we know that the next chapter of his life will doubtless be just as exciting as the ones that have gone before. Thank you very much, Bill, and God bless you.

You know, there have been a lot of sort of asides tonight about why Congressman Torricelli is not here. I think he is here for you, because he's down there voting on something you care about. And I have a message for those—if there was some designed effort to keep him from coming up here tonight, guess what? He's still going to get the contributions, and we still know

where he is, and we know what's at stake, and we're going to elect him in November, so it doesn't make any difference.

One thing you know about Bob Torricelli is that he will stand up and fight for you with every fiber of his being. He doesn't do anything halfway; he is full of passion. He will fight for the water you drink, the land you live on, the air you breathe, the education of your children, the safety of your streets, and the example of your country as a beacon of freedom and democracy.

He's been leading the fight to protect Sterling Forest here, the watershed for most of northern New Jersey. He wrote a section of the Superfund act that is focused on the chemical sites that are polluted here, something I am determined to see us finish the work on and another reason I don't want to see any further attempts to erode our investment in environmental protection. Bob Torricelli will protect all that.

So I ask you to do what you can for the next 6 months to send Bob Torricelli to the United States Senate. Bill Bradley's shoes may be impossible to fill, but the people of New Jersey deserve someone fighting for them who is on their side and fighting for their future, not someone in the grip of an ideological theory that will only undermine our ability to go forward together. So I ask you again, do what you can, send him to the Senate. Do what you can for yourselves and your children and your future. We need Bob Torricelli, and I'm going to depend on you to deliver New Jersey for us.

Ladies and gentlemen, I don't want to keep you a long time tonight, but I want to just give a speech that in some ways is not particularly political. And after, I'm going to ask you to do something that is intensely political. Usually these fundraisers—we all know that our political system wouldn't work without them, but

a lot of times I think you come and go and you have your blood stirred, but I wonder if, when you leave, you think you have done your part and that's all there is to it.

I want to talk to you tonight about what I believe is really going on in this country now, what I think is really at stake in this election, and why I hope you believe your financial contributions are only the beginning of your responsibilities as citizens for the next 6 months.

We are clearly living through a time of change as profound as any the United States has endured in a hundred years in terms of the ways we work and live. Every so often our country is confronted with huge challenges, either to our very existence or at least to the ideals with which we started, that all of us are created equal and that we have inalienable rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, and that the Government is instituted to promote the general, the common welfare.

We had a lot of trouble getting started in working that out. Then we had to fight a great Civil War to hold the country together and to redeem the promise of equality by extending it when it had to be extended. And then, 100 years ago, we faced a period of change rather like today, when we moved from the farm to the factory, from the country to the city. There were vast new opportunities, but there was a lot of uprooting; a lot of people's lives were dislocated. And the progressive era began, with Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson saying that the power of the United States Government should be used to curb the abuses of that era and to make sure its benefits could be extended to all Americans. They had the antitrust laws, the child laws, the environment protection laws, all designed to let us have the benefits of the new industrial age without being broken by it, without having our identity as a nation, our character as a people, our ideals as expressed in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution savaged. That's what it was all about.

And then we underwent the Depression and World War II, and President Roosevelt and the Congress and the leaders of that time had to, first of all, defeat the opponents of freedom who would have killed our way of life beyond our borders and rally the American people to overcome that profound Depression and find a way to build a safety net under this country so that we could manage our economy in ways

that didn't permit it to crash again and break the lives of so many millions of people.

Then we had to gird ourselves for the cold war, which we did, and wait for our victory to come, because communism was always founded on a total misunderstanding of human nature and the human condition.

Now we are going through another period of change, economic and social change and the way we relate to the rest of the world, sort of like what happened 100 years ago. Now we've moved from a cold-war world to a global society, not just a global economy. Now we've moved from an industrial age to one in which all work is dominated by information and technology and has vast ramifications which New Jersey has felt for the organization of work: big companies dramatically downsizing; new companies starting at a rapid rate; a lot of people doing exceedingly well; other people left behind; other people feeling uncertain about their future.

When I ran for President in 1992, I got into that race because I was convinced we could no longer just sit by and let it happen, that we needed an aggressive response. And I said then what I repeat to you now: I still believe our vision for the future should be animated by three things:

One, the desire to give the American dream of opportunity to every person in this country without regard to their race, their gender, their station in life, where they live, and what they're up against. That ought to be the first thing.

Two, the understanding that we cannot achieve that in the world in which we are living unless we find a way to come together to respect our diversity, to bridge all those gaps of race and religion and region and ethnicity. This country now has, more or less, 200 different racial and ethnic groups. It's an astonishing thing that we can find ways to come together around our core values and our respect for one another's differences. And I am sick and tired of seeing elections used as wedges to divide people one from another, to try to get people who are in the majority to look down on those who aren't, and then hope we can pick up the pieces after the election. We should be uniting the American people and going forward together.

And the third thing we have to do is continue to be the world's greatest force for peace and freedom and prosperity. And as I have said many times, that sounds great and everybody

is for that in general, but often in particular they're not.

When I took the action I did in Haiti and Bosnia, in becoming the first President to try to do something in Northern Ireland, all of the things we have done in the Middle East, what all the polls said was the most unpopular decision of my administration, trying to keep Mexico from collapsing, everything I did, I did because I know that our country has got to try to be the world's greatest source of energy for peace and freedom and prosperity, and because I know that 20 years from now we can be the strongest country in the world, but others will grow stronger, and we have to work with Russia, we have to work with China, we have to work with a uniting Europe, we have to work with emerging countries, to have them define their greatness in a way that helps us all to go forward in peace and prosperity.

How will these other countries define their greatness? Will it be as we do, by how well they educate their people and what their economic achievements are and what their cultural achievements are and whether they can help their less fortunate neighbors? Or will it be by whether they can bully people just because they are smaller than they are? This a big issue. We cannot walk away from this. You cannot live in the world we are going toward and pretend to stay within your own borders.

So that's what I tried to do in 1992. And ever since I have been in this office, everything I have done can be explained in terms of either trying to create opportunity or to bring us together around our basic values and respecting our diversity or maintaining our leadership for peace and freedom. And you heard Senator Lautenberg talking about it. It is true that we are better off today than we were 4 years ago, 8½ million jobs better off. The deficit is less than half of what it was. The crime rate is down. The welfare rolls are down. We are moving in the right direction. That is true.

It is also true that there are a lot of challenges out there. In the economic arena, we have at least three big challenges, don't we? In New Jersey, you know what one of them is. We have to figure out what to do about all these people who get downsized from big companies but who still have a lot of good years left. And we're working on that. In the next few days, I'm going to have a lot of companies in the country come in, and we're going to highlight the companies

that have been able to avoid that and have been able to do things that really help their employees if they have to leave.

We have got to find a way, secondly, to give all of our working people a greater sense of economic security. I have heard Senator Bradley talk about this. If you can't guarantee somebody the same job with the same company for a lifetime, then they have to know if they work hard and play by the rules, they will always be able to get new training for new work, they will always have access to health care, and they will always be able to have a pension they can carry around with them, even if they change jobs. They have to be able to know that.

And lastly, we have to remember that here in New Jersey and throughout this country, in spite of the 8½ million jobs, there are vast expanses within our inner cities and in our rural areas that have not felt any new investment opportunity. And don't kid yourself, when you have new jobs and growth, you also drive down the welfare rolls, you drive down the crime rate, you drive down the despair that people feel. So we have to find a way to bring free enterprise back to the inner cities and back to the rural areas of America. I know we can do it. If we can do it for other countries, we can do it for our own.

If you look at this great country of ours, and you ask, how can we come together instead of be driven apart, you have to start with our basic values. We need to build up families and the integrity and strength of childrearing, not tear it down. That's why I've said many times, I'm all for welfare reform that's tough on work if people can work, but I don't want to hurt the children. We should be supportive of good parenting and work. All of us try to succeed as workers and parents. That's what we should want poor people to do, too. Everybody should be able to succeed in that way. That should be our goal.

We have to create an educational system that gives everybody genuine opportunity. And that means, among other things, what I was doing here in New Jersey a couple of weeks ago, which is ensuring that we hook up every classroom and every library, even in the poorest schools in America, to the information superhighway in the next 4 years. We can do that, and we can revolutionize education if we do it.

We have got to continue our work to lower the crime rate by having more police on the street, more prevention strategies, being tough in keeping the assault weapons ban in the Brady bill and not giving them up, and by actually doing something to give our young people something to say yes to as well as something to say no to. We can bring the crime rate down; we can make our streets safe again; we can make our neighborhoods whole again. We know how to do it. The question is whether we will.

We have to continue this fight to protect the environment. It is woefully short-sighted to believe that we can walk away from our obligations to clean up the messes we've made and protect ourselves from making further ones and gain anything economically by it. Yes, we have to find smarter ways to do it. Our administration has worked hard to find ways to grow the economy and clean the environment. But if we walk away from that, we will not go into the 21st century as a country that is stronger with stronger families and stronger communities and a stronger future. All of these things we must do.

We have to keep working and reaching out to the rest of the world, even when it's frustrating, when there are no easy answers. And to do it, we have to have an idea of Government that is fundamentally different from that embraced by the congressional majority. If you listen to them, what they say is, Government is the source of all of our problems; this new world is going to be so wonderful; if we could just get Government out of the way, all of our problems would be solved; what we need is empowerment defined as more choice and freedom from Government.

If you listen to our crowd, what do we say? We're not for big Government anymore where it's not necessary. Just remember, folks, when election time comes, they bad-mouth the Government, but we're the ones that reduced it. It's 240,000 smaller today than it was the day I became President. But we did it in a way that treated those Federal workers with dignity. We gave them generous early retirement packages and severance packages and time to find other jobs. And we didn't try to make some big thing out of it. We just did it because it needed to be done. But we believe that there is a different sort of empowerment. We believe that real opportunity means not only choice but the ability to exercise the choice.

You remember the great French writer Anatole France said the rich and poor are equally free to sleep under the bridge at night. Now, that's what choice is without the capacity to exercise it. We believe our job in Washington is to give people the ability to make the most of their own lives as individuals, workers, as citizens, in families, in communities, and as citizens of this great Nation. That's what we believe, the power to make the most of their own lives. We cannot guarantee results for people, but if we don't make sure everybody has got a chance to do the most that they can with their lives and live out their dreams, this country will never be what it ought to be in the 21st century. That is the main choice you face in 1996.

And let me say, in terms of the election, why you have to work at it. This is a complicated time. There is a lot of kind of paradox out there. And you have to talk to people about what the nature of this time is, what the nature of this period of change is, and what should we be doing. And every one of you who can afford to be here tonight has a voice, a mind, a spirit that can be brought to bear on your friends and neighbors. And you need to take this opportunity to use this election as elections should always be used, as a genuine educational opportunity to learn about where we are. And every question then becomes, how do we do this in a way that gives everybody a chance to make the most of their own lives? How do we do this in a way that brings the American people together and doesn't divide them? How do we do this in a way that maintains our leadership in the world for peace and freedom?

So it is not a question of whether we balance the budget. We have reduced the deficit more than our predecessors. The question is, how we balance the budget, not whether we do it. So in every case, I ask you to think about this. And you're quite fortunate now, you don't have to guess. You don't have to guess. You know what the choices are. You can look at the budget of 1995, which I vetoed, at the environmental initiatives, at the differences between us. And you don't have to guess.

Who is right about family and medical leave? Were we right to say that you shouldn't lose your job if you've got to take a little time off when a baby is born or a parent is sick or a child is in the hospital? Or were they? We said yes, and they said no. We now have gotten

a bipartisan study of the family and medical leave law that says one in six American workers covered by the law have taken advantage of it, and about 90 percent of the businesses say it didn't cost them any money to comply and didn't cause them any problems.

I think that's what we're about. All we did was to empower people to succeed at work and at home. That's what we should be doing. I think we were right.

Were we right? Were we right to fight for the 100,000 police and the assault weapons ban and the Brady bill? Were we right? I believe we were. All I know is that the crime rate is down all across America now for 3 or 4 years in a row because of more police and prevention. All I know is that no lawful hunter has lost his or her weapon, but there are 60,000 people who did lose their weapons, the 60,000 people with criminal records who tried to buy a handgun and couldn't do it because of the Brady bill in the last year and a half.

Were we right to fight for national service, to give people a chance to serve their community, solve the problems, work with people of different backgrounds, and earn some money to go to college, or were they right to say that's a luxury we can't afford? Were we right to change the student loan laws so that more people could borrow money to go to college on better terms and pay it back as a percentage of their income so that if you have a high tuition cost but you want to be a schoolteacher, a police officer, a nurse, or somebody else doing public service and you know you're not going to be rich, you still can always borrow the money to go to college, and you can still always pay it back? I believe we were right about that.

And in every case, there was no big Government guarantee. All we were trying to do was to give people the means to make the most of their own lives, to seize the American dream, to come together instead of being divided, to stand up for the things we believe in around the world. That's all we did, and it makes all the difference.

So I say to you, this is not like 1992 when the question was the status quo or change. There is no status quo option. There are two very different views of change. They can be well-known and completely understood. The question is, which road will you walk into the 21st century? And I tell you, I see pictures

in my mind all the time that give me the answer.

The other day I was at Eastern High School in Washington, DC, where all of the students are African-American except the Russian exchange students, a program you've done a lot of work on. There they were, reaching for unity over diversity. There they were, struggling to come out of poverty. There they were, asking not for a guarantee, but just for a good education and a chance at the American dream. And if I've got anything to do about it, they're going to get it. That's what they're going to get.

I got two letters from two married couples I got to know not very long ago because they had desperately sick children. I know as the father of only one child, there must be no greater pain in the world than having a child die before you do. And both these couples lost their children, but they got to be good parents because of the family and medical leave law that they helped us fight for. I think we were right, and I think that's the kind of change we want.

I got a letter that I signed today back to a man who is now in his mid-sixties who lost a job 4 years ago at an aerospace plant, didn't know where to turn. But he wrote us, and because we found him the kind of training program that others are trying to eliminate, that man started his life over again in his early sixties and is working again and has dignity and is supporting himself and his family. That's what I believe we ought to be doing.

This is not complicated. It is not about big Government programs. It is not about yesterday's ideas. This is about which road we will walk into the future. It is about whether we will walk it together.

Today in Woodbridge, basically your good—anybody here from there? I was over there today at the high school. We were at the high school; Senator Lautenberg talked about it. We did this antismoking program. And I was talking to the mayor on the way in about what kind of community it was. He said, it's sort of a standard New Jersey blue-collar community, and it was. It was, except they had not only Christians and Jews among the student body, they had Hindus and Muslims among the student body, even there.

America is changing. I'm telling you, this business of trying to drive a stake between people in this country based on their race, their ethnic

background, or their religion has got to stop. We have got to stop it. We have got to stop it. Now, you don't have to guess about this; look around the rest of the world. Which road do you want to walk into the future? And I know that either I or my successors will make some mistakes in our judgments about what the United States should do around the world. But basically, it is right for us to continue to reach out to other countries. It is right for us to support peace and freedom and to try to expand our own prosperity by expanding that of others. It is right for us to be partners with other countries, even when we're tired and we want to lay our burdens down, because it's the only way to fight terrorism, the only way to fight drug dealing, the only way to fight organized crime; it is right to do that. So you get to decide about that, which road will you walk into the future.

And I want to ask you when you leave here tonight to think about what else you can do for the next 6 months. I appreciate the money you've given Bob Torricelli and the Democratic Party and our efforts. I am grateful for that. But it is not enough, because the American people are trying to get a grip on this period of change. They're trying to understand what's going on, and you can help.

And it's exciting. You should feel privileged to live in this time. Believe me, there's a lot

more good than bad in it. Believe me, if we do the right things, the children that are here in this audience will have the opportunity to live out their dreams more than any previous generation of Americans ever has. You should be happy and proud to have the responsibility of citizenship at this time.

And so I ask you as you leave tonight to think about it: What do you want America to look like for your children and grandchildren, and what are you willing to do to make it happen? And what do we have to do in Washington to help everybody have their chance at the American dream in a country that's going forward together? That is what is at stake.

I think I know what road the American people will walk into the future if they understand what the choices are. You must help your fellow Americans understand the choices.

Thank you, God bless you, and good night.

NOTE: The President spoke at 8:30 p.m. in the Old Central New Jersey Railroad Terminal at Liberty State Park. In his remarks, he referred to comedienne Whoopi Goldberg; Donald L. Fowler, national chairman, Democratic National Committee; James E. Florio and Brendan Byrne, former Governors of New Jersey; jazz musician Peter Duchin; and Raymond J. Lesniak, chairman, Clinton/Gore Campaign Committee, New Jersey.

Remarks on the Legislative Agenda and an Exchange With Reporters May 8, 1996

The President. Good afternoon. Today I want to make a brief statement about the work that Congress and I can do together in the next 90 days. The next 3 months can be a time when we sign into law measures that will truly help us to meet our challenges, protect our values, and move our country forward together.

But right now, Congress is facing a logjam. The Democrats and I believe we must raise the minimum wage, which is nearing a 40-year low. The Republicans want a temporary reduction in the gas tax. There's only one fair way to break this logjam. Congress should pass the minimum wage increase clean, and if Republicans want a temporary reduction in the gas

tax, then Congress should pass that clean. That is how we can break the logjam and then get on with the other crucial work at hand.

There's still time for us to balance the budget while protecting our basic values. We can reform welfare, cut taxes, double the size of our Border Patrol, and make sure our people are able to keep their health insurance if they change jobs or if someone in the family gets sick. All this legislation is ready to go right now. Much of it passed with broad support and by large margins. All Congress has to do is send it to me, and we'll be in business. But Congress must send it to me clean.