

Remarks at a Campaign Concert for Senator John F. Kerry in Boston September 28, 1996

Thank you. You know, I just was looking at Senator Kerry giving his speech. He gives me a beanpot. [*Laughter*] Whoever said he didn't have a sense of humor? Do you believe that Governor Weld would have the guts to stand up here and say he couldn't believe that we had all those people from the sixties playing and everybody kept their clothes on? [*Laughter*] Next thing you know John Kerry will be doing the macarena with Al Gore.

Ladies and gentlemen, thank you for the warm and wonderful reception you have given me tonight. Thank you for being here. Thank you for being here for John Kerry, who richly deserves your support for reelection because he has been fighting for your future, for the future of Massachusetts and the future of the United States for a very long time. And he has consistently been on the right side of that future.

You know, I remember in 1993, when we had a stagnant economy and high unemployment and the country was dividing economically and socially and people were becoming more and more cynical, and I put an economic plan forward to the Congress and not a single person in the other party voted for it. And they all tried to terrify our side and say, "Oh, this is a terrible plan. It will raise the deficit; it will increase unemployment; it will bankrupt the country." Well, John Kerry and Senator Ted Kennedy stood with the President. And now we know; 10½ million jobs later, we know that John Kerry was right and they were wrong.

I remember in 1994, after crime had bedeviled so many of our communities and people in Washington had talked about the need for a crime bill for 6 years and I had run on the promise of putting 100,000 more police officers on our streets to prevent crime, to make our streets, our schools, our neighborhoods safer—I remember that the leaders of the other party said, "Oh, this is a terrible thing." And they won a lot of their elections in '94 by convincing hunters in places like my home State they'd lose their guns. But John Kerry stood firm, and we got that 100,000 police. We got the Brady bill. We got the assault weapons ban. And this is a safer country with 4 years of declining

crime. Thank you, John Kerry, for being on the right side of history.

When Christopher Reeve spoke tonight, it reminded me so clearly of everything he said at a time when we were faced last year with the budget—"take it or leave it or we'll shut the Government down"—it cut education, cut the environment, cut our investments in research and technology, weakened our commitments to Medicare and Medicaid. I said no, and so did Senator Kennedy and so did John Kerry. And we did get more for medical research because he asked for more for medical research in the spinal cord area. And let me tell you, folks, lest you think that's a pipedream, just a few days before Christopher Reeve spoke at the Democratic National Convention, for the first time ever a laboratory animal with its spine completely severed got movement back in its lower limbs because of a nerve transplant to the spine. We are going to solve that problem and many others if we keep people like John Kerry who are on the right side of history. He deserves your support.

And I can't let this moment go without saying, after all the fights we had over the budget over the last 2 years, it was a wonderful thing to see in the last few weeks, after the American people made their voices heard, Senator Kennedy taking the lead in passing a health care reform bill he's worked on for years that says you can't be denied insurance anymore if you change jobs or if someone in your family has been sick. Twenty-five million Americans will be better off because of that, and that's on the right side of history.

Tuesday, October 1st, 10 million Americans will get a pay raise when the minimum wage goes into effect because Senator Kennedy worked and Senator Kerry helped him and we got a minimum wage increase. It was the right thing to do.

Well, we've been here a long time, and I know you want to go home. And I don't want to take a lot of your time, but I want to say something especially to the young people here tonight. I want to tell you something about being on the right side of history, and I want you to think about it seriously just for a minute.

Once in a generation or so our people in our long march of democracy have been confronted with a set of decisions that are so profound that they will affect how we live and how we relate to each other and the rest of the world for a very long time. This is that sort of time. We are being asked, basically because of the differences between ourselves and our opponents, to decide two fundamental questions about what we're going to be like when we go roaring into the 21st century. No matter what happens, those of us that are well-prepared, especially our young people, will have more chances to live out our dreams than any generation of Americans has ever had.

But the two great questions we have to face that will shape what we are as a country and what we look like 50 years from now are, number one, do we believe that we have to build a bridge to the future that every American is given the ability to walk across? I think the answer to that is yes, but not everybody does. Whether you believe that or not determines how you answer questions like whether you're for the Family and Medical Leave Act, whether you believe it should be preserved and expanded so that people can succeed at home and at work. Whether you believe that or not depends upon whether you think we should be providing an opportunity for every person who wants to go to college to go, through tax credits and tax deductions and savings programs. I believe we should, and John Kerry believes we should. And that is the right side of history.

The other great question we have to face is whether this incredible mosaic of diversity that is America, all the differences that you can see here just by looking around this great hall tonight, will be a source of strength and sustenance to us that will add to our prosperity and more to the richness and quality of our lives or whether we will be bedeviled, divided, and weakened by the differences among us.

Look all around the world today. How much of your time as President do I have to spend—from the Middle East to Northern Ireland, to Bosnia, to Rwanda and Burundi, to so many other places around the world—how much time trying to get people to stop defining their lives in terms of who they can hate, whom they can look down upon because they are different because of race or religion or region or gender or tribe? It is wrong. It is wrong. And we have

to decide whether we're going to beat the odds. These are the two great questions.

I don't like bumper stickers much, but the truth is it's pretty good to say the question is, are we going to build a bridge to the future or try to reach back to the past? I think you know the answer to that. You can also say, as my opponent did in all candor and completely honestly when he spoke at the Republican Convention—he said he really thought that the First Lady was wrong, that we were better off being left to ourselves and our families to make our way. But I think she was right. I believe it takes a village to make the most of all of our lives. And I believe that you think that, too.

And so I ask you—I ask those of you, especially those of you who are young—some of you may have indulged all of us who were singing our old songs here tonight; some of you now know them as well as we do and love them as well. But all of you, I ask you to think about this. This great choice is going to affect how you live. Those of you who have most of your tomorrows in front of you, this choice will affect them, because of the profound changes going on in our country and in our world.

Whether we decide to build that bridge to the future that enables everyone to make the most of their own lives, whether we decide to stay with the idea that we are a village and we have to respect one another and bond together and be stronger and richer because of our differences, these things will determine what America looks like when we cross the bridge to the 21st century, when our children are our age and in 100 years when people write back their histories about what we did in our time.

And do not underestimate the weight of this decision. This is a huge decision. These are big questions. They will define the United States of America for a long time to come. This is a decision that comes along once in a generation, maybe once every 50 years. Think how different the world would have been when the Founding Fathers in Massachusetts and the other 12 States had made the other decision they were asked to make: Don't make this one country, make this a club of 13 different States, just sort of a social organization; you can come and go as you please. I wouldn't be here because there would never have been a Louisiana Purchase and I wouldn't be an American.

Think how different this country would be if Abraham Lincoln had not been President

when the States said, “Well, hey, we formed this country; we’ve got the right to get out.” And Abraham Lincoln said, “I don’t think so. I don’t think so.” [*Laughter*] And he was willing to give a half a million lives, including his own life, to keep this country together, and then to face the next question: “Well, if we’re going to stay together, don’t we have to quit lying about who we are? How can we have a Constitution that says all of us are created equal and keep slavery? So we’ve got to get rid of that.” Think how different this country would be if we hadn’t made that decision 130-odd years ago. Think how different. Would all the other immigrants be here today? Would this place look like it does today? I don’t think so.

Think how different this country would have been when Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson had to manage our transition from being a rural country of small farmers to an urban country of great cities like this one, which Mayor Menino leads so well today. Think how different it would have been if they had answered these questions differently. They had to say, okay, now we’re an industrial country. Are we going to let a few monopolies run out all the small-business people, or are we going to preserve free enterprise? They voted for free enterprise. Are we going to let these big companies destroy our natural heritage, or are we going to preserve things like the Grand Canyon and other national parks and keep something for all generations to come? Are we going to let our children work 70 hours a week in coal mines and sweatshops as they were doing then, or are we going to stop that and give our children their childhoods back and their education? Think how different America would be if we had answered those questions differently.

These are the questions that are being asked of you and your generation. These are the kinds of questions that we are facing. When you ask which budget do you want, it’s really about what kind of people are we. Are we going together, respecting our differences, building a bridge? Or are we going to say, “It’s every person for himself; I wish you well”?

I believe I know the answer. And I ask those of you who are young—you have 38 days. John Kerry has earned the right to be reelected Senator from Massachusetts, because he has been on the side of your future—on the side of your future.

You do not have to believe one bad thing personally about his opponent. You do not have to make this a negative race at all. All you have to do is to look at the fundamental choices before you. And for those of you who are young especially, I say, imagine in your mind what you want this country to be like in 4 years when we go roaring into a new century and a new millennium, what you want our country to be like when your own children are your age. What do you want the history of America to be 100 years from now? What will they say about what we did now? I hope they’ll say America decided it takes a village, and we’re going to build a bridge to the 21st century that we can all walk across.

Thank you. God bless you. Bear down and bring home a victory for us. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:11 p.m. at the Fleet Center. In his remarks, he referred to Gov. William F. Weld of Massachusetts, actor Christopher Reeve, and Mayor Thomas Menino of Boston.

Remarks Announcing the White House Middle East Summit and an Exchange With Reporters *September 29, 1996*

The President. Good morning. The loss of life and the tragedy of the violence in the Middle East this week have been a terrible development for the Israeli and the Palestinian people, a blow to all those who work for a lasting peace, an

encouragement to those who oppose a lasting peace.

Earlier this week I called on Israelis and Palestinians to end the cycle of violence, to restore calm, to recommit themselves to the hard work of building peace through negotiations. There