

worked with him for the benefit of the people of Israel and all the Middle East. I'll always remember the first time we met at the White House. He told me that he had a mandate from the people of Israel to take calculated risks for peace. And I told him that I would be his partner in advancing peace and in minimizing those risks. That was my pledge to him, and that remains my commitment to the people of Israel. I will do all I can to preserve Yitzhak Rabin's legacy by helping Israel to make a secure peace with its neighbors.

A year has passed. The wounds of loss have not yet healed. But the memory of Prime Minister Rabin remains a powerful inspiration to me and to people the world over. In March I visited Har Herzl. In keeping with the Jewish tradition of only adding to the memory of those who have died and never detracting from it,

I put a small stone from the South Lawn of the White House on his grave. That stone symbolizes the depth of my feeling for my friend Yitzhak Rabin and the unshakable bond between our two nations, which he did so much to strengthen.

Today, on the anniversary of his death, I ask all men and women of good will to join me in adding to the memory of this remarkable man by carrying on the struggle for security and peace for Israel and reconciliation for the peoples of the Middle East. Yitzhak Rabin made that struggle his last work. Now it is our responsibility to make good on his legacy.

NOTE: The President's remarks were videotaped at 5 p.m. on October 17 at the Sheraton Universal in Los Angeles, CA, for broadcast on October 24.

Remarks in Birmingham, Alabama

October 24, 1996

Thank you very, very much. Thank you. Hello, Alabama! Can you hear us all the way back down there to the road? Thank you for coming.

Ladies and gentlemen, I promised Howell Heflin I would come to Alabama and ask the people of Alabama to support our efforts to build a bridge to the 21st century. It is such a beautiful day, and the crowd is so large, maybe Alabama is going to come along with me on that bridge to the 21st century.

Let me say first of all to Dr. Berte and all the people who are here from this wonderful, wonderful school, I thank you for hosting us. I've looked forward to coming here for a long, long time. I have two great friends who teach here at Birmingham Southern, Mark Lester and Jeanne Jackson; I thank them. And I have heard about what a great place this is. Senator Heflin told me he had lifetime tenure on the board here, and he was going to continue to serve, even after he left the Senate. He didn't ask me for permission to leave the Senate, or I wouldn't have let him do that. *[Laughter]*

I want to tell you how honored I am to be here with all the people on this program today: the candidates for Congress; the officials of our Democratic Party; the distinguished mayor of

Birmingham, my longtime friend Richard Arrington; Chief Johnson; the leaders of the Alabama Teachers Association, the Alabama Federation of Teachers, the Education Association; the Birmingham Southern College Young Democrats; all the others that are here.

I want to thank Congressman Earl Hilliard for being here with us and for his service. I want to thank another distinguished Alabamian who is retiring, Congressman Tom Bevill. I'd like to ask him to stand up, Tom. He's back there with his partner, Bob Wilson, who's trying to succeed him. I thank him and Mary Lynn Bates and Bob Gaines and Judge Ingram. Thank you all for being here with us today.

I'd like to say a special word of thanks to Lieutenant Governor Don Siegelman, who's been our friend a long time. And I'd like to say too that I'm very, very glad to be here with another distinguished Alabamian, the President's Special Assistant for Public Liaison and the highest ranking African-American ever to serve in the White House, Alexis Herman, from Mobile, Alabama, who's here with me today. Thank you, Alexis.

The last thing I want to say is that—by way of introduction—is that I met Howell Heflin

21 years ago, when he was the chief justice of the Alabama Supreme Court and I was a former candidate for Congress and a loser, I might add. He came in the law school at the university, and I thought that he was the darnedest fellow I ever met in my life. He had a wonderful sense of humor, a great sense of compassion, a fine mind, and a lot of country commonsense wisdom. And as he leaves the United States Senate, I can tell you that Hillary and I have come to know and love both Mrs. Heflin and Senator Heflin. We will miss them. They have been a treasure for Alabama and a treasure for America, and I want you to bring them home and lift them up and make their days happy and warm and good.

Folks, we are on the verge of a new century. All of you students here in this crowd—and I thank all of the young people for coming today—you are moving into a time with more opportunities for people to live out their dreams than any period in human history. You are moving into a time where things will change more rapidly in how we work and live and relate to each other and the rest of the world. And you have to decide how we're going to walk into that 21st century.

This is the last election for President of the 20th century and the first election for President of the 21st century. And you have to decide. Many of you young people in this audience, in a few years you will be doing jobs that haven't been invented yet. Some of you will be doing work that has not even been imagined yet. And you have to decide, what kind of America do you want? From all the way over here to way back yonder down the street, I want to ask you to do something when you go home tonight. Before you go to bed, just take a few minutes with a piece of paper and a pencil and see if you can write down the answer to this question: What do I want my country to look like when we cross that bridge into the 21st century? What do I want my country to be like when my children are my age?

You know, if you ask the right question, America nearly always gives the right answer. We only get in trouble when we let ourselves get confused and start asking the wrong question. That's the right question. And when you ask that question—I tell you, I've been asking myself that question since before I made the decision to run for President in 1991. And for me the answer is simple but profound. I dream

of an America in the 21st century where every person, without regard to race or region or income or religion or gender or background, who is responsible enough to work for it, can have a shot at the American dream.

I want an America that is still leading the world for peace and freedom and prosperity. And I want an America which is coming together, not being driven apart by our differences. And that is important. How long did we live in the shadow of our differences in the South? How much do we see around the world today, from Bosnia to the Middle East to Northern Ireland to Africa and Rwanda and Burundi, everywhere around the world, to the problems of terrorism and people sending each other dangerous weapons. What is driving it all? Racial, ethnic, religious, and tribal hatred. That's why I said the church burnings were wrong. That's why I said we couldn't go back down that road again. When we respect each other and work together there is no stopping America. There is no stopping America.

Now, that's my vision. You ask yourself tonight what your vision is. If you ask the right question, you'll get the right answer. What I have tried to do is to expand opportunity, increase responsibility from all citizens, and bring us together in an American community. And even though our friends on the other side don't like to admit it, we are better off than we were 4 years ago. And we are moving in the right direction.

The unemployment in Alabama has dropped from 7½ to 4½ percent. We have 10½ million more jobs. The other side said they were fiscal conservatives, but our administration, with the help of Howell Heflin, reduced the deficit in all 4 years. That's the first time a President's done it in every year of his administration in the 20th century. We're moving in the right direction.

Incomes are on the rise again. The typical family income is up \$1,600 in the last 2 years. And we're growing together again. The inequality of incomes among working people, which had become so deep in the last 20 years, had the biggest drop in 27 years last year; the biggest drop in child poverty in 20 years; the lowest rate of poverty among senior citizens ever reported since we've been keeping statistics. We are moving in the right direction to that 21st century.

You heard the police chief and the mayor talk about it, but we've had 4 years of declining crime rates. We've also had 4 years of declining welfare rolls. We have almost 2 million people fewer on welfare and more at work than we did 4 years ago. And child support collections have been increased by 50 percent in 4 years. People are paying for their kids more.

Just in the last few weeks, we raised the minimum wage for 10 million working Americans because they couldn't live on \$4.25 an hour. We made 25 million working Americans eligible to keep their health insurance by saying that you can't lose your insurance anymore just because you change jobs or someone in your family has been sick. If somebody like Roger Bedford gets sick and has a spouse working, they ought not to have their insurance taken away from them; that's what health insurance is for, and that's what we have done. We also said that insurance companies can't make hospitals kick new mothers and their newborn babies out of the hospital after 24 hours anymore.

So we're moving in the right direction. And you have to decide whether you like this direction, whether you want to build a bridge to the future wide enough and strong enough for all of us to walk across, or whether you want to say, "There's the future. You're on your own. I hope you make it; good luck." You've got to decide whether we're all in this together or we're just a swarm of isolated individuals. You've got to decide, in short, whether you think it takes a village to raise a child and build a community and build a future.

You know, there is a lot of talk here about these labels. You know, our adversaries love labels. I'll bet you there are good professors here at Birmingham Southern who would tell you that you start throwing labels at people and calling them names when you don't have anything to argue about any more and you can't win. When the evidence is not on your side, when all else fails, call somebody a name. Maybe it'll work. That's what Senator Bedford's up against.

I am proud to be running on the same ticket with a person like Roger Bedford who supported our efforts to lower crime and improve education and who would represent good, old-fashioned mainstream Alabama values and modern Alabama economic, educational, and environmental interests in the United States Senate.

But you have to decide. When they call names, you've got to look at the facts. I want

to balance the budget. I want to finish the job. We have cut that deficit 60 percent in 4 years. I want to finish the job. But we can do it while protecting Medicare and Medicaid and investing in education and investing in environmental protection. They want to pass this big, risky tax scheme that will increase the deficit, require bigger cuts than I vetoed when they shut the Government down, raise taxes on 9 million hard-working people, and allow companies to raid their workers' pension funds.

You have to decide. I don't think you need a label on that. You don't need to call anybody any names, just say, "I'm for the right kind of balanced budget, and I'm for targeted tax cuts." We can afford tax cuts, but they need to be targeted to help you pay for education, childrearing, buying a first home, paying for health insurance. We can afford that, and we can pay for it in our balanced budget plan. But you have to decide. Will you help us build that bridge? You have to decide.

Everybody is for family values, but do we value families? You heard Roger Bedford talk about the Family and Medical Leave Act. Twelve million families have benefited from that, taken a little time off from work when a baby was born or a family member was sick.

The other day I was down in Longview, Texas—no hotbed of liberalism—[laughter]—and I'm shaking hands in the crowd and this woman's there with tears in her eyes, saying, "Mr. President, my husband had cancer, and I was the only one in our family working. And he was desperately ill. Because of the family and medical leave law I did not lose my job, our family was not ruined, and we were able to keep going." That was a good thing for America. That's not against American values; that's for American values.

The other side led the fight against it. My opponent still says it was wrong. I say it ought to be expanded to let parents go see their children's teachers once a semester and take their kids to the doctor. You have to decide.

You have to decide what we're going to do in health insurance. We worked hard for the Kennedy-Kassebaum bill to expand that health coverage. Now we want to say in our balanced budget plan, paid for, if you lose your job, you're between jobs, we're going to help you keep your family's health insurance for 6 months. We're going to add another million kids in low-income working families to the ranks of

those who have health insurance. We're going to help families who are taking care of their parents with Alzheimer's get a little respite care so they can care for their families and still survive and keep their sanity and keep going. We're going to help women on Medicare get regular mammograms. And we're not going to turn away from medical research.

We're going to put a billion dollars more in medical research. Why? In the last 4 years we've doubled the life expectancy of people with HIV. We've uncovered two genes that cause breast cancer, two genes that will enable us to detect it earlier and maybe to prevent it. We have used technology that we use in space and intelligence for imaging that will help us to detect all kinds of cancers early. We have detected unbelievable things about strokes; for the first time we've got some treatment for strokes, all from medical research. We now have for the first time in history seen movement in the lower leg of laboratory animals whose spines were completely severed, because nerves were transferred from the rest of the body to the spines. We must continue to pass legislation that pushes the frontiers of knowledge and have medical research. Will you help us build that bridge to the 21st century? [Applause] Will you help us, way back there, build that bridge to the 21st century? [Applause]

Most important of all are two things to me. One is education. We are living in a world—let me just give you one example, one tiny example of how fast knowledge is exploding. We've just signed a contract, the United States did, to do a research venture with IBM to build in the next couple of years a supercomputer that will do more calculations in one second than you can do on your hand-held calculator in 30,000 years. Now, I would say in a world where knowledge is increasing like that, education is pretty important. I just want to talk about three things today.

Number one, kids can't learn if they can't read. Forty percent of the 8-year-olds in America today cannot read a book on their own. I have a proposal to mobilize 30,000 people—reading tutors, AmeriCorps volunteers—to get a million volunteers to go in and help parents and teachers teach our young children to read so that by the year 2000, every 8-year-old in America can pick up a book and say, "I can read this all by myself."

Secondly, I want to hook up every classroom and every library in every school in the United States to the information superhighway by the year 2000, with computers, with educational materials, with trained teachers, on the Internet, on the World Wide Web. Now, for all of you older folks like me who are not great computer geniuses, let me tell you what that means in practical terms. It means that for the very first time in history—and this is important to us in the South—for the first time in history, the children in the poorest inner-city schools, the most remote rural schools will have access in the same way at the same time at the same level of quality to the same learning that the children in the wealthiest school districts in the United States have. It has never happened before. Will you help me build that bridge to the 21st century? [Applause]

And finally, as Senator Bedford said, we are going to make college education available to every single American of any age who needs it. I want to be able to say in the year 2000 that we've made 2 years of education after high school just as universal as a high school diploma is today. And I propose to do it not by a big, bureaucratic program but simply by saying to every American, if you want to go to a community college for 2 years, you can deduct from your tax bill, dollar for dollar, the cost of a typical community college tuition. It will revolutionize opportunity.

I want to say to people, you can save in an IRA, and more families can save in an IRA, but they can take the money out without any tax penalty if they use that money to educate their children or themselves, to buy a house, or take care of medical care. And yes, I'll say it again: I want to make for every form of college tuition a tax deduction of up to \$10,000 a year from now on. Will you help me build that bridge to the 21st century? [Applause]

And finally, will you help me build an environment of security and good values for our children? We have to make our children safe from gangs and guns and violence and drugs. And for our children, it is illegal for them to be exposed to tobacco as well, and I'm proud that our administration has tried to stop that.

We are putting 100,000 police on the street. We supported the safe and drug-free schools program so that our children could hear early that drugs are wrong, drugs are illegal, drugs can kill you. We have done what we could to

strengthen our control of our borders more than any administration ever has. We have also supported, as the mayor said, local initiatives like school uniforms for younger children, truancy law enforcement, curfews at night.

You know why? Because the crime rate was going down all 4 years I was President, but the crime rate among juveniles, people under 18, only started going down last year; because the violence rate has been going down all 4 years, but the rate of violent crime among juveniles only started going down last year; because drug use in America has dropped dramatically in the last 4 years, cocaine use down 30 percent, but drug use among children under 18 is still going up.

There are too many of our children out there raising themselves on the street. We need to take them back into our bosoms, into our homes, into our hearts, and give them a chance to live good, positive lives. Will you help us build that bridge to the 21st century? [Applause]

I said the other day, and I expected to get a lot of grief from it from a lot of young people in America, that even though 90 percent of our children were clearly drug-free and had never experimented with drugs, I wanted to ask them to do something really responsible to help us find the other 10 percent before it's too late and they're too much trouble. I think we ought to have a drug test as part of the driver's license process in America to find those kids and help them before they're in trouble and before it's too late. Will you help us build that bridge to the 21st century? [Applause]

Now, folks, my opponent has a different vision, and I don't want to get into what they said. You don't have to believe anything bad about him to disagree. I was raised to respect people. I told somebody the other day—they started doing all this, "He's a better person"—I said, "I don't know, but where I was raised, my mama would have whipped me if I ever said I was better than anybody else." We were taught never to look down on anybody but to look up to everybody and try to lift everybody up. We were taught it in church and at home.

This has nothing to do with who's a good or a bad person.

I've been in this business for some time now, although I've only lived in Washington 4 years. Let me tell you something, folks, nearly everybody I've met in public life works harder than average and tries to make a difference. This is not a question of who's good and bad, it's a question of what's right and wrong for our future. I was for the 100,000 police, and he was opposed to it. I was for the Family and Medical Leave Act, and he led the fight against it. I'm for making college education tax deductible, and he wants to eliminate the Department of Education, so that there will be nobody to speak for education in the President's Cabinet as we stand on the brink of the 21st century.

Our economic policies are working. Our crime policies are working. And our partnership with America for opportunity and responsibility is working. So I want to say to you, Alabama has to decide. Go home tonight, ask yourself, "What do I want my country to look like when we cross that bridge to the 21st century?" I know what the answer will be. Will you help us build that bridge? [Applause] Will you help us build it wide enough and strong enough for everybody to walk across? [Applause] Are you proud to be an American on the brink of America's greatest days? Do you believe we can make America even greater? Then you be there on November 5th, and we'll do it.

Thank you, and God bless you all. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:18 a.m. in the Academic Quadrangle at Birmingham Southern College. In his remarks, he referred to Neal Berte, president, Birmingham Southern College; Johnnie Johnson, Birmingham police chief; Mary Lynn Bates and Bob Gaines, candidates for Alabama's Sixth and Second Congressional Districts, respectively; Kenneth F. Ingram, candidate for reelection to the Alabama Supreme Court; Elizabeth Ann "Mike" Heflin, wife of Senator Howell Heflin; and State senator Roger Bedford, Alabama senatorial candidate. A portion of these remarks could not be verified because the tape was incomplete.