

July 26 / Administration of William J. Clinton, 1997

We are becoming by far the most diverse democracy in the history of humanity. We cannot be forced to choose between not only respecting but celebrating our diversity and still saying, we are one America, after all, bound together by shared values and a common future for our children. We can't be forced into that division. If you wonder what happens when you do that, you have only to look at Bosnia, the Middle East, Northern Ireland, and countless other places around the world. We don't want to make that choice.

So I can now go all across America and point to what I have seen in Lake Tahoe and how people at the local level came together across lines that divided them for years to do something that was good and noble and, by the way, in their self-interest, to create a better and a brighter future for our children. And that's how we ought to do other things in America. That's why I appreciate the citizen service of these young AmeriCorps volunteers. And that's why I am determined to stay on this path. That's why the people working for the Vice President and me are back on this beautiful Saturday laboring away with Members of the Congress, try-

ing to reach an accord that will both balance the budget and give Americans a tax cut we can afford and invest more in education and the health care of our children than we've done since 1965. Because I believe if we're willing to really think in new ways and reach out to people across the lines that divided us, the best days of this country are still ahead. I want you to believe that. I want you to work for that.

I want you to do your part to save Lake Tahoe. It's not enough to stop the degradation; we have to reverse some of it. And we can do that if we all work together. And I want you to commit yourselves to take the model that is working for Tahoe into other areas of your lives, because I want to be able to go around this country and say, don't tell me that we can't get along and work together and do better; I have seen it in Lake Tahoe.

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

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:55 p.m. at the Village Green Soccer Field. In his remarks, he referred to Jim Nakada, board of trustees chairman, Incline Village General Improvement District.

## Remarks at a Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee Dinner in Westwood, California

July 27, 1997

Thank you very much. One of two things is about to happen: Either this is working, which is good for you, or it's not working, and I will be the company that misery loves for the previous speakers. [*Laughter*]

I thank Mark and Jane and all those on the committee who are listed here for your work tonight. I thank Martin Frost for his tireless efforts. I thank Dick Gephardt for his leadership and his willingness to continue this fight.

I must say I used to get discouraged in the last couple of years when occasionally I would hear a Democratic Member of the Senate or the House complain that it wasn't any fun anymore to be in the minority. And when I thought of what the stakes were for our country, it didn't seem to me that fun was a very important issue. And Dick Gephardt has continued to fight and

continued to lead, and I'm very grateful for that, and the country should be, too.

Let me thank all the members of the California delegation who are here. And I particularly want to thank Vic Fazio for his leadership in the House. I thank Maxine Waters for her leadership of the Congressional Black Caucus and Xavier Becerra for his leadership in the Hispanic Caucus and so many others for the things that they do on particular issues. When I looked at the Members whose names were called, standing up here tonight, I thought, that's why I'm a Democrat. This delegation looks like America, this delegation acts like America, and this delegation is making the America of the future that I want my child and my grandchildren to be a part of. And that's one of the reasons why I'm here.

Let me say to you, I think all of you know that we are in the throes of trying to finish a budget agreement with the Republicans in the Congress that can command the support of an overwhelming majority of our caucus in the House and in the Senate as well as of the Republicans. And we are trying to get an agreement that will finish the job of balancing the budget. Now, it will be much easier now because it's clear that this year, when the books are finally tallied, as Congressman Gephardt said, the deficit will be about 85 percent less than it was when I took office. And that was brought to you by these Democratic Members of Congress, and I thank them for that.

But we have a great opportunity here, and I want to just talk about it just for a second and then try to put it in a larger context. We are fighting for a budget that will balance the budget but also contain the largest increase in funding for children's health since Medicaid was enacted in 1965—the largest increase—and enough to insure 5 million kids who don't have health insurance today; the largest increase in investment in education, from Head Start through access to college, since 1965; the largest increase in helping people to go to college since the GI bill was passed 50 years ago. That is what is in this budget.

And in addition to that, this budget restores now virtually all of the egregious cuts made last year by the Republican majority in aid to legal immigrants who come to this country, which is a very important thing for the State of California. And it contains \$3 billion to give to the places in this country with the highest unemployment rate to help people move from welfare to work. This is a very good budget, if we can resolve the remaining problems.

There is a tax cut in it. The tax cut ought to be fair to working families. It ought to put a primary emphasis on education. It ought to help the economy grow. And it shouldn't explode in the later years so we go right back to the deficits that we just worked ourselves out of. And that's what we're working hard to achieve, and our team has been back working over the weekend. If we stay in a positive frame of mind and we all work in good faith, I think we have an excellent chance to get there.

But I want you to understand, this is a historic thing. Yes, there is a tax cut in it. But the tax cut, in the aggregate, will only be about one-tenth—in today's dollars—the size of the

tax cut that was enacted in 1981 when we adopted the whole trickle-down economics and got ourselves in the trouble that we were in. So we're working hard to give people an appropriate tax cut without allowing it to explode the deficit.

So this is a great thing. And it will help us to continue the path of economic growth. It will help us to continue the path of fighting crime by finishing the job of putting 100,000 police on the street. It will help us to continue the historic drops in the welfare rolls we have had, not by punishing poor people but by helping them to support their children and to go into the workplace. It will do a lot of good things for this country. We'll also continue to fund our vigorous efforts on the environment.

But what I want to say to all of you is we need to see this in a larger context, because that's really what I'm convinced the two parties are all about today. I just came—yesterday I was in Lake Tahoe—you may have seen the press on it—and I went to Lake Tahoe because it's a precious, wonderful, worldwide resource. It's one of the two bluest big lakes in the world. You can still see down 65 or 70 feet clearly. Forty years ago, you could see over 100 feet clearly; now we're losing about a foot of visibility a year there. That's the troubling part. And I announced—and Congressman Fazio was there with me, and we announced an initiative. And your two Senators, Dianne Feinstein and Barbara Boxer, were there; the two Nevada Senators; the Governor of Nevada and Congressman Miller and one of the Republican Congressmen from northern California and two from Nevada were there. It was an interesting thing.

But here's the point I want to make. That is a very conservative area of Nevada, and it is the overwhelmingly Republican portion of the State. But in Lake Tahoe now they have finally figured out one of the things we have to figure out as Americans, which is that we cannot grow our economy indefinitely at the expense of the environment; we have to figure out a way to replenish the environment as we grow the economy. So that now we have, in Lake Tahoe, the most hide-bound traditionally conservative business people sitting in a room and not just talking to but working with, on a common agenda, the most ardent environmentalists, because they have finally come to the realization that they have to stop setting up these false choices.

And that is really what this whole debate is about now. When we have the budget balanced and we have reaffirmed our commitments to education, to our children, to health care, to these other things, we have to then look ahead and say, "What are the remaining challenges this country faces? How are we going to get into the 21st century? Who offers us the best chance to get there?"

And I can say this with some level of detachment, even though I plead self-interest as a member of my party by heritage, instinct, and conviction, but at least I'm not running anymore—[laughter]—which, for those of you who have been supporting me for the last several years, I'm sure you're grateful for that. [Laughter] But let me just ask you to think about that. Just imagine, what is it that you would like this country to look like 25 or 30 years from now? I saw at least two women in the crowd, with their spouses, who are about to give birth. What do you want this country to look like when the child you're about to bear is your age?

That's what we ought to be thinking about. We're coming to a new century and a new millennium, in a time that is highly dynamic, when the way we work and live and relate to each other in the world is very different and changing. And we have a chance to make sure that our children will live in the best time in all of human history. But it is not a time free of challenge.

Since 1991 I've been going around the country like a minstrel with a broken record, saying that I have a simple vision for this country: I want every child, without regard to race or condition of birth, to be able to live out his or her dreams if they're responsible enough to work for it. I want this country to be able not only to respect but to celebrate its diversity and still be able to say, but here are the things that bind us together, that are more important, that make us one America. And I want us to continue to lead the world for peace and freedom and prosperity, because I think it's important as you look at the rest of the world that we not withdraw. That's what I want.

And I think a lot of what we have to do goes way beyond any specific program or specific issue or specific budget; it requires us to think differently. And we have to get beyond being forced to make bogus choices. And we have to get beyond embracing yesterday's con-

flicts. And that's what I think the Democratic Party is about now.

For example, when I took office, they said, there is no way you can reduce the deficit and increase your investment in education, but we did. They said there was no way you can reduce the size of Government and still make it more effective, but there are 300,000 fewer people working for the Federal Government today than there were the day I took the oath of office, and it is more effective in a whole score of ways. They said that you couldn't improve the environment and continue to grow the economy, but we have made aggressive efforts to clean the air, to have safer drinking water, to take chemicals out of the air, and we're moving forward on that. And we have to do more.

And I could give you example after example after example of this. But as you look ahead, let me just focus on the specific issue of the environment. We know now that we are putting greenhouse gases into the atmosphere at a breathtakingly rapid rate. We know we're 4 percent of the world's population, we're 20 percent of the world's wealth, putting in more than 20 percent of the world's greenhouse gases. We know that if the Chinese get rich the same way we did, since they are 4 times as many of them, we're all going to have a hard time breathing sometime in the next century. Yet we can't tell them if you work hard and you're industrious, we don't want you to make a good living and be able to support your children and educate them. So we have to build cars that give triple or quadruple the mileage that we're getting. We have to find whole different ways to get around, to move around, to do these things. We have to do this.

Now, which party do you think is more likely to say that over the long run we have got to find a way to balance our commitment to economic opportunity with our commitment to preserving our God-given natural heritage? The party that says we can do both? Not that there will never be any tough decisions, not that there will never be any hard choices, but that we have to do both. It's a huge deal.

Issue number two: We have a good economy now. It's the best it's been in a generation, and it's the best in the world. And I'm happy about that. But you can go not very far from here tomorrow morning, Monday morning, and drive down the street, and you'll see a lot of young men standing on the street who don't

have jobs. And we have—20 percent of the children in this country are living below the rate of poverty. And there is still a lot of people who are more likely to get in trouble because they don't have very much to say yes to. And a lot of our schools are still not working at the level they should.

That's why I've said I'm going to spend the rest of my time here doing everything I can to try and modernize and upgrade our schools and trying to increase their performance and trying to have high standards of excellence. And I was told for years by people who thought they were experts in education that I was whistling an idle tune because we had too many poor children, too many minority children, too many children whose first language was not English to achieve international excellence in education; and that I should stop trying to set high national standards and measure people against it because I was just setting people up for failure. It seemed to me we were setting people up for failure if they came from difficult circumstances by giving them substandard education which made sure they would never get out of their difficult circumstances. That's what I always thought.

Now, finally, for the last 13 years, since—almost 14 years now, maybe more—since 1983, when the "Nation At Risk" report was issued, there have been large numbers of people seriously working to improve our schools. And we have been subjecting ourselves steadily to various international competitions and measurements. We have never scored above the international average, ever, until this year, when on the third international math and science test our fourth graders scored well above the international average on math and science. Now, only a few thousand took the test, but they were representative by race, by income, by region, and they were well above the international average. Now, that's the good news.

The troubling news is our eighth graders still scored below the international average. And that is not surprising because they have to deal with adolescence, the fact that middle schools were organized when our society was more stable than it is now, and we're not functioning as well as that level. But the point is, we can—all of our kids can learn, and they can do well and they can learn what they need to know to achieve international standards of excellence. And if you don't want, even in a strong econ-

omy, tens of thousands of people standing around on the street, vulnerable to gangs and guns and drugs and violence and costing you money, if you just want to be narrowminded about it, then we had better rededicate ourselves to a national commitment to excellence for every child in education.

Now, which party do you believe is most likely to commit itself to international excellence in education for every child in this country without regard to race or region or background condition? That's why I'm here tonight.

Let me just give you one final issue that is terribly important. And I said this yesterday—one of you quoted this back to me when you went through the line; this was quoted on television. I said, when I saw Lake Tahoe and I saw all these people working together, I told them, I said, this is a model not just for the environment; this is a model for how we ought to behave, because this country has got—we're all so different, but we have common challenges. And yet we're taught, almost from the crib, that we're supposed to fight with people who are different from us. And many of us are raised actually to look at ourselves as something special by being able to look down on someone else. And the truth is, there is not a person in this audience tonight that at least at some point in your life did not think better of yourself by thinking, "Well, thank God I'm not that person; I may not be perfect, but at least there is a flaw I don't have." [Laughter] We've all done that.

But consider what I have to deal with as your President: Bosnia, the Middle East, Northern Ireland, Rwanda, Burundi. I had the President of Georgia in to see me the other day. Georgia is a small country. They have a separatist movement there. All over the world there are still people—they're fighting in Bosnia. For God's sake, they were killing each other. They stopped killing each other; now they're fighting about what their currency is going to have on it. It would be good if they had something to buy with the money. Why? Because we teach people and we lead people to look down on each other and fight each other.

We're going to have a conference on hate crimes at the White House this fall. Why? I mean, this is 1997. Why are gay people still getting beat up in public? This is 1997. Why are we doing this? Because we still—first of

all, everybody is vulnerable to our darker impulses. And secondly, we have not ingrained in ourselves a way of dealing with each other that requires us to be honest and forthright and mutually respectful and that actually says, we can work this out together.

I mean, it's great that they're doing it at Lake Tahoe, but why aren't they doing it everywhere? Why can't I finally remove the threat of the gold mine at Yellowstone? I could give you lots of other examples. But the most serious challenge is our racial and ethnic diversity, which is why I went to San Diego and gave that speech a few weeks ago and why we're going to spend at least a year working on this. But we have other kinds of diversity in this country as well. And if you look around the world, it is consuming people.

Now, we have a chance in the 21st century to be not only the most powerful, not only the wealthiest but clearly the most diverse democracy in the world in every way, still being bound together as one America. But we have to work at it, and all of us have to do our part. And it will not happen by accident. The people in Sarajevo lived together in peace for 70 years. Mr. Karadzic, the Serb leader, lived in a highrise apartment where the majority of the people in the apartment house were in different ethnic groups. And I mean, within 2 months they were shooting each other's kids.

Now, do I think that's going to happen here? No, I don't. But is it guaranteed? How long ago was the Los Angeles riot? Five years. Is it guaranteed? Look around this room. Is it guaranteed that all the people in this room and everybody you represent that we're all going to be able to work these things together and get along? It better be, because it's an incredible gift for our country to have people from everywhere living here.

We just announced a big initiative on Africa. Why? Well, 30 African countries had positive growth rates last year. Seven of them grew at more than 7 percent. We got all these people interested in it; they want to do business with us. Why? Because of who we are and who lives here. We have 600 Jewish-American and Arab-American business people who have promised to invest in Gaza and the West Bank if they will ever resolve their differences there. And

they want us to. Why? Because we are tied there.

This is the only country where we have people from everywhere. And it is a great gift. But if you believe that it will just happen by accident, as a matter of course, that we will preserve one America, I suggest that you haven't looked around the world enough and remembered our recent history closely enough. Which party do you believe is more likely to bring this country together as one America?

So I'm happy tonight. I'm honored beyond belief that I was elected and reelected President. I'm grateful to the people of California for making it happen for me. I'm glad that there are 12½ million more people who get up and go to work every day and can go home with a paycheck and take care of their children. I'm glad we had the biggest drop in violent crime in 35 years. I'm glad we had the biggest drop in the welfare rolls in history. I'm glad we've got the smallest percentage of people on welfare we've had in 30 years. I'm glad about all that.

But this is a journey. There is no destination. I want us to make this balanced budget agreement tomorrow that I hope 90 percent plus of the Democrats will vote for. But even so, it's just another step on a journey. And I believe that the Democratic Party and these people that you are here to support today has demonstrated that it can be trusted to lead this country on this journey, to get beyond the bogus choices, to get beyond the false conflicts, to create the kind of country and the kind of world that you want your children and your grandchildren to inherit. That's the larger question that I believe has brought you here and that I think proves that you did the right thing by coming here tonight.

Thank you very much, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 8:45 p.m. at the Regency Club. In his remarks, he referred to Mark and Jane Nathanson, hosts of the dinner; Representative Martin Frost, chairman, Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee; President Eduard Shevardnadze of the Republic of Georgia; and former Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadzic.