

Desert Inn. In his remarks, he referred to Gov. Bob Miller of Nevada; Carol Pensky, treasurer, Democratic National Committee; Shelly Berkeley, candidate for Nevada's First Congressional Dis-

trict, who introduced the President; Cassandra Williams, reception chair, Women's Leadership Forum; and Mayor Jan Laverty Jones of Las Vegas.

Remarks at a Democratic National Committee Dinner in Las Vegas November 14, 1997

Thank you. Thank you very much. We've had such a nice evening, it seems a shame to spoil it with a speech—[laughter]—but I'd like to say a few words. First of all, I want to thank Brian and Myra for once again welcoming me into their homes and for being my friends, and for being my friends when I was the fifth-best known candidate for President in the New Hampshire primary. When the only person in America who thought I could be elected was my mother—[laughter]—they were my friends.

I also want to thank them because we share something else in common. In addition to the fact that Brian and I went to college together, our family and theirs, we're both parents of only daughters who are reasonably important to us. And I had Amy with me for a long time, and I miss her terribly, so I'm glad to see her here tonight. It was wonderful having her in the White House for the years that we had her.

I'd like to thank Governor and Mrs. Miller and Senator and Mrs. Bryan and Senator and Mrs. Reid for being here tonight. And I'd like to thank the people of Nevada for voting for Bill Clinton and Al Gore twice.

When we ran, I was told that there were all these States that I could never carry, among which were any between the Mississippi River and California. And that seemed to be an irrational thing to me, to give them all up. And most of them we did lose, both times—[laughter]—but Nevada was here for us both times. And I never will forget that, and I'm very grateful.

I would like to tonight just ask you to think about where we are as a country on our journey, what we're going through as a people, and what we should be doing about it together.

If you look at—now that I have been President for 5 years, I tend to have a little bit of detachment and see a lot of the specific struggles and contests and efforts we're making

as part of the broad sweep of American history and as sort of human drama of our generation, in terms of how people work and live and relate to each other, relate to the rest of the world. And one thing I've learned from studying our history and from living it for the last 5 years is that whenever we go through a period of real sweeping change where our working patterns change, communications patterns change, living patterns change, and in our case the very composition of our population is changing—we're becoming much, much more diverse with these new waves of immigration—and then our relationships after the cold war to the rest of the world is changing—whenever something like that happens and all the balls get thrown up in the air, there is not only the need that individuals feel to know what the deal is—how am I going to constitute my life; how am I going to constitute a stable family life; how are we going to keep our community together; what's our future like?—we also engage in redefining the Nation.

You know, when we started as a country, we basically defined ourselves as a bunch of people that didn't want to be under British control anymore. So then we had years where we really argued about what ought to be in our Constitution and, once we had a Constitution, what did it mean—what did it mean to be one Nation of associated States.

And we pretty well worked it out, and then things rocked along fine for a while. And then finally we had to come to grips with slavery, and whether slavery would be extended or restricted or done away with altogether; and how were we going to accommodate that within the Constitution; and could we do it and keep the country together. And half the country said no, half the country said yes, and we fought the bloodiest war in our history with each other. The casualties in the Civil War were slightly

greater than the casualties in World War II with a much, much smaller population. But we once again wound up defining the Nation. We fought a war to do it, and then we had to pass a bunch of constitutional amendments. But essentially America, by 1870, was what Abraham Lincoln said it ought to be in the Gettysburg Address.

Then we became a great industrial country, and we had to do this all over again. Wasn't it wonderful? We had all these factory jobs. But wasn't it terrible that 9-year-old kids were working 9 hours a day, 6 days a week in some of these factories? What were we going to do about that? And so through the leadership of Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson, we did it all over again. We defined what the Nation was. And we found a way to get the benefits of a new era and still meet its challenges and kind of come together as one people. Then we had to do it again during the Depression and the Second World War. And we had to do it all over again for the cold war.

Now we have to do it again, because we're moving into a truly global society, bound together more than anything else by shared technology and communications, where the movement of money and ideas and people is more rapid than ever before; where the security threats we will most likely face for the next 20 or 30 years are not animosities between two nations, although there may be some of that—we see that in the press today; there may be some of that—but far more likely it will be terrorism, the spread of weapons of mass destruction into the hands of organized crime or drug dealers, shared international environmental problems, or new diseases crossing national borders—new problems we share with people who are living in different countries because they cross national borders and require a much higher level of cooperation than before.

So there's a lot of change in the air. And when I ran in 1992, I attempted to address that and what I thought the Nation was. I said, "Look, I want to build a country in the 21st century where everybody who's responsible enough to work for it has the opportunity to live out his or her dreams. I want to build a country that's still the strongest force for peace and freedom and prosperity in a new world. And I want to build a country where, in spite of all of our differences, we're still coming together as one America."

It wasn't the end of the debate; it was the beginning of the debate. In '94, the Republicans won the Congress. They said, "We've got a different idea. We think Government is the problem, and we will be a nation if we just say we believe in the same things and we get the Government out of the way, and the international market is a wonderful thing, and so vote for us and we'll drastically diminish the role of the Government, and that's the real problem." And people liked it when they heard it. But then when they saw it in action in 1995 and 1996, they didn't like it so well. And we fought them over that.

But you need to see all this not just as an isolated political event. All of you are present at another moment of creation for America. We are in the process of once again redefining what it means to be an American and what we want our country to do. And my idea is that we have to be faithful to our oldest values and then be highly pragmatic and aggressive about what the challenges are.

What are the challenges we face in this country today? First of all, you can't do very well in this world unless you've got a decent education. So it's more important than ever before to give a world-class education to every child in the country.

Secondly, with more and more people in the work force, men and women—over half the children in this country under one have mothers in the work force—way over half. We have to recognize that even for upper income people and certainly for lower income working people, we have to work very hard to enable people to balance the demands of work and family, because if we have a society where you have to choose whether you're going to be a good parent or successful in the workplace, we are defeated before we begin. The most important work of any society is raising children. There is no more important job. It is the most significant work we ever do. But if people who want to be—and indeed we need to be—in the work force can't be successful parents and get the kind of supports they need and still succeed at work, we're in deep trouble.

And so that's what the—when you see a specific issue like family and medical leave, or we cut taxes more for lower income working people with a lot of kids, or we're working on trying to broaden the child care system of the country, or I wouldn't sign welfare reform until we put

\$4 billion in it so Governor Miller and his colleagues could figure out how to give these lower income parents who go from welfare to the workplace adequate child care for their kids—all of that is really part of a big issue, which is that a decent, good America will reconcile the conflicts of work and family. That's what Harry Reid and Dick Bryan have to deal with every week in some form or fashion.

We have to prove that we can make our streets safe, and we have to prove we can make our communities coherent. We have to have a system that brings the benefits of free enterprise to places that it hasn't reached yet. We have to prove we can grow the economy and preserve the environment, a huge issue.

A big difference between us and the Republicans in '95 and '96 was whether you could actually increase environmental protection and increase economic growth at the same time. I always believed if you did it right, you'd make more jobs with the proper kind of environmental protection, because that would be the new technology of the future and there will be more demand for it in the future. And I think the evidence is on our side. I believe that's exactly what we've done. The air and water is cleaner. We're making our food safer. We're cleaning up toxic waste dumps. And we're creating jobs like crazy in all those areas. And it's very good.

But when you strip it down, what we believe is that in order to be bound together as a nation, we must do certain things as a nation: to create opportunity, demand responsibility, bring us together as a community, and preserve our leadership. And if it works, America will once again be, in effect, reborn as the strongest country in the world and a beacon of hope to people.

And so far the evidence is pretty encouraging. We've got the lowest unemployment rate in 24 years, the lowest inflation rate in 30 years. The crime rate has been dropping for 5 years. We've got the lowest—biggest drop in welfare rolls in history. We're moving in the right direction. We have average incomes that are rising now. And our environment is significantly improved. We are moving in the right direction.

This year we had a good year. We passed the balanced budget law, with the biggest increase in investment in education since '65, the biggest increase in investment for children's health since '65. The American Diabetes Association says what we've done for families with

diabetes is the best thing since insulin was discovered 70 years ago.

And the most important thing, I believe, over the long run is, I think with the latest tax credits, scholarships, work-study funds, we can honestly say we have now opened the doors of college to every American who is willing to work for it. This year we had the biggest increase in assistance to people to go to college since the GI bill was passed 50 years ago. This was a good year for America.

Are there problems? Of course there are. You read about them in the paper every day. But I just want you to feel good about this because when I started this little odyssey 6 years ago, when I spent my first night at this house, I would go from place to place in America, and I would really meet a lot of people who weren't sure that we could—this country worked anymore. They didn't know if we could get the economy going again. They didn't know if we could bring the crime rate down again by working together. They didn't know if we could ever really kind of break the culture of poverty again. They weren't quite sure how we were going to relate to the rest of the world again.

We're in better shape than we were then. And all we need to do is to remember this. We just are fortunate to be living in a time of truly breathtaking change. It makes it more interesting. But it also imposes on all of us as citizens higher responsibilities because you have to figure out how are you going to make the economy work for everybody again, how are you going to keep the society together again, how are you going to help families again.

We also have a lot of new challenges, particularly in the environmental area, that no one has ever had before. And finally, we have to figure out how to relate to all these other countries around the world when we're not all divided up into Communist and non-Communist camps, and we have to figure out how to build new alliances for cooperation all the time. It's almost as if you abolished the two-party system in the world and now nations were just trying to figure out where they're going to organize themselves issue by issue. So it's fascinating; it's endlessly complex; but in the end, it's pretty simple. If you're expanding opportunity, if citizens are being more responsible, and if we're pulling people together instead of driving them apart, this country is going to be fine.

And I am gratified beyond measure, but I can also tell you this: We have a lot left to do. When the baby boomers like me retire, we have to have reformed Medicare and Social Security enough so it will be there for our children and so that we're not going to bankrupt our children as they raise our grandchildren to pay for our retirement.

We still have to work through the big tobacco settlement issue next year to guarantee that we protect the health of our children. It's still the number one public health problem in America. Illegal smoking among children will lead to bigger health care bills and more problems than anything else.

We have a number of exciting issues to deal with in the environment and on climate change. But the general thing is people now believe that we get it in America. You should all have a very high level of confidence that our country

can function, that it can succeed, that we can meet any challenge.

And I just am so grateful to have been given the chance to serve and to play a role in once again proving that America will always be a young nation if at every time of challenge it can redefine what it means to be an American. That's what you're doing, and I hope you're very proud of it. And I hope, so far, you're very pleased with the results.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:32 p.m. at a private residence. In his remarks, he referred to Brian and Myra Greenspun, dinner hosts, and their daughter, Amy; Gov. Bob Miller of Nevada and his wife, Sandy; Bonnie Bryan, wife of Senator Richard H. Bryan; and Landra Reid, wife of Senator Harry Reid.

Memorandum on Importation of Modified Semiautomatic Assault-Type Rifles

November 14, 1997

Memorandum for the Secretary of the Treasury

Subject: Importation of Modified Semiautomatic Assault-Type Rifles

The Gun Control Act of 1968 restricts the importation of firearms unless they are determined to be particularly suitable for or readily adaptable to sporting purposes. In 1989, the Department of the Treasury (the Department) conducted a review of existing criteria for applying the statutory test based on changing patterns of gun use. As a result of that review, 43 assault-type rifles were specifically banned from importation. However, manufacturers have modified many of those weapons banned in 1989 to remove certain military features without changing their essential operational mechanism. Examples of such weapons are the Galil and the Uzi.

In recent weeks Members of Congress have strongly urged that it is again necessary to review the manner in which the Department is applying the sporting purposes test, in order to ensure that the agency's practice is consistent with the statute and current patterns of gun use. A letter signed by 30 Senators strongly

urged that modified assault-type weapons are not properly importable under the statute and that I should use my authority to suspend temporarily their importation while the Department conducts an intensive, expedited review. A recent letter from Senator Dianne Feinstein emphasized again that weapons of this type are designed not for sporting purposes but for the commission of crime. In addition, 34 Members of the House of Representatives signed a letter to Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu requesting that he intervene to stop all sales of Galils and Uzis into the United States. These concerns have caused the Government of Israel to announce a temporary moratorium on the exportation of Galils and Uzis so that the United States can review the importability of these weapons under the Gun Control Act.

The number of weapons at issue underscores the potential threat to the public health and safety that necessitates immediate action. Firearms importers have obtained permits to import nearly 600,000 modified assault-type rifles. In addition, there are pending before the Department applications to import more than 1 million