

Remarks at a Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee Dinner in
San Francisco
February 25, 1998

Thank you. You know, that was a better speech than the one I was going to give. [Laughter] Thank you, Bill. Thank you, Sally. I am delighted to be here; this is a beautiful, beautiful place. It's been a great dinner, interesting people. Thank all of you for being here and supporting these fine candidates.

Thank you, Congressman Miller, and thank you, Nancy Pelosi, for being here and for your leadership. I told some people—we were just at a larger reception over at the Fairmont, and I told the people there that the thing I really liked about Nancy Pelosi was she'd been in Washington a long time, and she still had not managed to become cynical. She's still full of energy and passion and conviction. And we need more of that there.

I want to thank Mike and Lois for running for Congress. They are prepared to make a not insignificant sacrifice in the quality of their life to go there and serve you. And they will serve us well.

Thank you, Mr. Mayor, for coming here, and thank you for going on "Politically Incorrect" and sticking up for me tonight. [Laughter] It's truly strange that that would be politically incorrect to do, but that's all right. [Laughter]

I have a lot of friends here, but I want to say I'm especially glad to see Bill and Lee Perry. Bill Perry is one of the finest public servants that has served the United States in my lifetime, one of the greatest Secretaries of Defense we've ever had, and I thank him for being here.

I'd also like to thank all of you in this room who have helped me and Hillary and Al and Tipper in our wonderful journey these last several years. And the people of California and the people of this community, in particular, have been very, very good to us, and I'm profoundly grateful. And to those of you who've helped us, especially on the technology issues over the last 5 years, I thank you, too.

I was trying to think of what I ought to say tonight that you haven't already heard. One thing I thought, when Bill talked about what a meritocracy Silicon Valley was, and it didn't matter where you came from as long as you could program a computer, you know, you could

become a partner. I thought, my God, if I had made my career there, I'd be starving now. [Laughter] Never has one so technologically challenged tried so hard to do so much for high technology in America.

Our country is in good shape tonight, and I'm very grateful for that. When you made that crack about how could you still be a Republican—I used to kid Bob Dole about every time the stock market would go up another 100 points, I'd say, "Here I am working to get you more money for your campaign." [Laughter] It was against my self-interest, but I did it anyway. It was good for the country.

The country is in good shape. I hope that doesn't mean that we are feeling complacent or that we're going to take our eye off the ball and become more small minded when we ought to become more large minded and more visionary. And that's basically what I was trying to say in the State of the Union. And I feel—I'm glad that my fellow Democrats can go into this election cycle and say we proved that you could reduce the size of Government and balance the budget and still invest more in education and health care and the environment. We proved that you could have a partnership with business and still be compassionate toward working people. We proved that you could be for creating more jobs and still for giving people the support they need to succeed with their families at home, with child care and things like that. I'm glad we can say that. Or we can just reel the numbers off and say we've got the lowest unemployment rate in 24 years, the lowest crime rate in 24 years, the lowest, smallest welfare rolls in 27 years, the lowest inflation in 30 years, the highest homeownership in history.

But all that means is that more people have good life stories to tell. And yet, if we think about the dynamism of this time, it's not true that the society is changing as fast or as profoundly as the Internet is growing, for example. But it's changing about as fast or as profoundly as a human organism can change. And therefore, we need to be thinking always about the future and what we're doing to prepare for this new

century we're about to enter. And I'd just like to mention three or four things tonight that I think are terribly important.

First of all, it's important to keep the economy growing. It may be that technology with good economic conditions will permit a higher level of growth for a longer period of time at lower levels of inflation than previously we had thought. That may be true. It will only be true if we are responsible. And one of the things that to me has been most gratifying has been the public response to my insistence that we not start spending the surplus before it materializes. We've had a deficit for 30 years, and you know, as soon as the new year came around everybody had great ideas for how to spend the projected surplus.

Now, I do believe we have eliminated the structural deficit, and I believe we'll get a balanced budget this year—if not this year, certainly next year. And then it's projected that we'll have surpluses for several years thereafter, more than a decade. And I hope that happens. And because there's no structural deficit in the budget—that is, even if the economy slows down, and you know, when the economy slows down, you get less tax money, and you have to put more out because there are more people unemployed—but over time, if there's no structural deficit, we'll still have a balanced budget to a large surplus, depending on how much we're growing.

There are a lot of people who want to start spending that right now in tax cuts or spending programs, and we should do neither. We certainly shouldn't do it (a) until it materializes—the bird is not in hand yet—and (b) we should not do it until we have dealt with the long-term financial problems with the Social Security system. We have some significant decisions to make. And I think it's very important.

Now, what my goal is, is to spend this year having a nonpartisan national process by which we discuss all the alternatives that are out there available, and then early next year we'll pass legislation which will basically take care of the long-term stability of the system. Simultaneously, no matter what option we choose, by 2029, when the present Trust Fund is expected to run out of money and start costing more money than the people are paying in every year in taxes, we will have to do some significant things. But no matter what we do, not now and not then will Social Security be enough for most

Americans, the vast, vast majority of Americans, to maintain the standard of living they enjoy, once they retire. Therefore, we also have to find ways for people to save more and to prepare more for their own retirement. So we're going to be looking at a lot of interesting ideas in the Social Security system. And I hope all of you will enter that debate.

But as I said in the State of the Union Address, it's literally true, there was a public opinion survey done last year which showed that most people under 25 thought it was more likely that they would see a UFO than that they would ever draw a penny of Social Security. I don't want to discourage young people from watching "The X-Files"—[laughter]—but I think we have to somehow reverse that perception. So that's the first thing I want to say.

And by the way, we have a simultaneous effort going on now with Medicare. We have more than a decade of life on the Medicare Trust Fund. But again, the pure demographics of the baby boom retirements and the fact that we're living longer and accessing more high-tech medicine mean that we're going to have to make some changes in Medicare if we expect it to sustain itself well into the next century.

It is well not to underestimate the good these programs have done. In 1985, for the first time in the history of our country, the poverty rate among people over 65 was lower than the poverty rate of people under 65. When Social Security was inaugurated, over 70 percent of the American people over 65 were living in poverty. Many of them were living in abject poverty. This is a terrific achievement for our country. And while I have emphasized putting more emphasis on the children in this country in poverty and more on their health care, their education, their nutrition, their well-being, we do not want to give up this signal achievement that is really a mark of a decent society. And yet, in order to avoid it, we're going to have to plan for it and deal with the fact that my generation, the baby boomers—and I'm the oldest of them—when everybody from my age to 18 years younger crowds into the Social Security system, the Medicare system, all this is going to change everything substantially.

And we owe it—and I don't know anybody—and most of the people I grew up with are middle class people; more than half of them don't have college educations, the people I went to high school with. And I was with a bunch

of them not very long ago, and we all sat around the table, and every one of them is haunted by the idea that when we retire we would have to impose an unwarranted financial burden on our children and on their ability to raise our grandchildren in order to take care of us. Nobody wants that. And we have an opportunity now, by acting now, to make relatively modest steps that will have relatively huge impacts in the years to come if we do it. So that's the first and very important thing I want to say.

The second point I'd like to make is that we have a lot of work to do in this country on education. And many of you have helped us in our goal of hooking up every classroom and library to the Internet by the year 2000. We're making good progress on that. But consider the anomaly in the United States—one of the things that I could just feel, during the State of the Union, resonating with people at home was when I went through all the things we'd done to increase aid to people who go on to college. Basically, now, most Americans qualify for a \$1,500 tax credit, tax reduction for the first 2 years of college and a tax credit for junior and senior year and graduate school. And there are more Pell grant scholarships at higher income levels. There are education IRA's. You can deduct the interest on the student loan. The people that are in our direct loan program can get cheaper college loans with better repayment terms. All of these things—there are 300,000 more work-study slots out there.

It's literally true today that if you're willing to work for it, you can go to college. And community college is virtually free now. For people who go to community colleges, that \$1,500 tax deduction covers all the tuition for about 80 percent of the community colleges in the country. And there's a great sense of achievement there. Why? Because people know it really means something to have higher education in America. And they know we have the best system of higher education in the world.

No one believes we have the best system of elementary and secondary education in the world. We just got the results of the Third International Math and Science Survey, which is given to several thousand—I think about 20,000—but a representative sample of our high school seniors. And of 21 countries, we scored 19th. Now, in the eighth grade we're in the middle; in the fourth grade we're near the top

now; we tied for second in the fourth grade test.

What happens? There are lots of reasons for what happens. But we've been trying to unpack that. But I do not believe it is any longer acceptable to say, "Well, what do you expect, because we have so many poor kids. Twenty percent of our kids are in poverty, and we have so many minority kids," and all that. That is all a bunch of bull. This is not rocket science. I mean, Sally just introduced us to that magnificent young woman who's a student at Stanford. I believe all kids can learn. I believe 90 percent-plus of us can learn 100 percent of what we need to know to make a society go; otherwise democracies would all fail. And it would have happened long ago.

I have supported the charter school movement and school choice and a lot of other things. But we have got to have also more standards and more emphasis on teaching and a lot of other reforms in the schools. We've got a big program out there now to lower class sizes and do a number of other things in this session of Congress. But I intend to spend a huge amount of effort in the next 3 years to do what I spent the 20 years before I became President working on in public life, and that is trying to give us the best elementary and secondary system in the world. Because we're kidding ourselves if we think we can really build a truly meritocratic society if a bunch of people are stunted coming out of the blocks.

The next issue I'd like to mention that I think has great relevance to the future is the environment. This year the two major—I'm very proud of this; I didn't mention this before, but compared to 5 years ago, the air is cleaner; the water is cleaner; there are fewer toxic waste dumps; and the food supply is safer. And we have set aside more land in trust to be saved than any administration in the history of the country, except the administrations of Theodore and Franklin Roosevelt. And I'm very proud of that. We're working on saving Lake Tahoe now, and I'm very proud of that.

But there is still a great deal to be done and on two issues in particular which will affect the quality of life in California. The first is with regard to clean water. The Clean Water Act, which was passed 25 years ago, was designed to deal with pollution mostly coming out of sewage systems and out of industrial activities, so-called point source pollution. Bad stuff comes

out of a pipe, goes in the water. Clean it up. Forty percent of our waterways in America are still not pure enough to swim and fish in because of non-point pollution, things that run off from the land. We have got to do more on that. We have a major initiative on that, a new clean water initiative.

The other thing that I think is imperative that we get on is—and you're dealing with it right now with El Nino—the climate change phenomenon is real, and we must do what we can to meet America's responsibility to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. We can do that and still grow the economy. Every time we've had to face a clean air or clean water issue people have said, "Oh, if you do this, it's going to shut the economy down." And every time we've done it, it has given the economy a boost because it's opened up a whole new area of high-tech jobs that we didn't have before.

Now basically, a third of all these CO₂ emissions come from transportation, a third come from buildings, homes, and office buildings, and a third come from manufacturing plants and electric generators. And the technology is now available, right now, to reduce substantially our greenhouse gas emissions, with available technology that pays out in 2 to 3 years, with regard to buildings, office buildings, homes, manufacturing facilities, and electric generators. And with the new fuel injection engines that are being developed for automobiles, with the hybrid electric and fuel and gasoline engines and a lot of the other things that are going on, within 2 or 3 years you're going to look at automobiles that have literally one-fourth to one-fifth the greenhouse gas emissions of today's automobiles. This is an imperative thing to do, and I hope all of you will support this, because we have a good program going through Congress, and I think we'll pass it. But it's important.

The last thing I'd like to say is, Bill talked about research. Hillary gave me the idea of trying to have a part of our program this year be a gift to the millennium that would be part respecting the past and part imagining the future. The respecting of the past part, we're going to try to restore the Constitution, the Bill of Rights, the Declaration of Independence, and the Star-Spangled Banner and get people in every community in the country to do an inventory of what they have.

For example, there's a place called the Old Soldiers' Home in Washington, DC, that was built before the Civil War. And on the Old Soldiers' Home there is a cabin which is almost totally dilapidated now, where Abraham Lincoln's family lived every summer—and other Presidents. It wouldn't cost that much to restore it. It's a Washington, DC, facility. Every single community in this country has places in it that tell the part of America's story, and they have to be preserved.

But we also have to recognize that in the years we were running these huge deficits, we wound up underinvesting in a lot of things we should have invested more in, principally research. So we've also offered the biggest research budget in the history of the country in this balanced budget. And I hope we can pass it, and I hope all of you will help us pass it because it's a big part of our future.

The last thing I'd like to say is this: I have tried very hard to change the political culture of Washington with, you would have to charitably say, mixed results. [Laughter] I don't even understand it half the time. I realize I'm afflicted by the fact that I had a real life for too long.

But I will say this: I think that the work we're doing in this race initiative, the campaign against the employment nondiscrimination—for the "Employment Non-Discrimination Act," the efforts to bring America together across all the lines that divide us and to have everybody judged based on their merit and to give everybody a chance and to build an America that basically is a stunning contrast to the racial and ethnic and religious conflicts that are beleaguering the world—how much of your time as President—because my time is really yours—has been spent in my Presidency on the problems of my people in Northern Ireland, my people, still arguing over things that happened 600 years ago, or the continuing torment in the Middle East or what happened in Bosnia or trying to save all those children from the horrible fate they were facing in Rwanda and all these places? We're supposed to be living in this great modern world—you can hook everybody up to an Internet—but if they still have primitive impulses, then they just have modern technology to give greater vent with greater intensity to primitive impulses.

I want us to have a strong economy, and I want us to always be on the forefront of every

new thing that happens. But in the end, we have to prove that we can be one nation together. And I try to end all my talks now by just reminding everybody that the people that came here to start this country came here because they literally deplored the unlimited, arbitrary, abusive exercise of power over the lives of citizens. And they had a better idea. They said, "We want to be free, and we want to be free to pursue happiness—not have it guaranteed to us; free to pursue it—and in the process, we will work to form a more perfect Union."

Now these people you're supporting here and the party we represent—yes, we've modernized the Democratic Party. Thank you, Bill. And yes, they can't say all those bad things about Democrats they used to say. But if you look at the whole 20th century, if you go right back to Woodrow Wilson forward, our country has always been for those things. We've always been for more freedom, more opportunity, and a

stronger Union. Which means, even when we haven't been right on the issues, we've been on the right side of America's history. And I'm proud to be here with you, Mike. I'm proud to be here with my good friend Lois. And I'm proud to be here with a party that I think can lead America to a better place in the new century.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:20 p.m. at a private residence. In his remarks, he referred to William and Sally Hembrecht, dinner hosts; State Senator Mike Thompson, candidate for California's First Congressional District; Lois Capps, widow of the late Representative Walter H. Capps and candidate for California's 22d Congressional District; Mayor Willie L. Brown, Jr., of San Francisco; and William J. Perry, former Secretary of Defense, and his wife, Lee.

Message to the Congress on Continuation of the National Emergency With Respect to Cuba

February 25, 1998

To the Congress of the United States:

Section 202(d) of the National Emergencies Act (50 U.S.C. 1622(d)) provides for the automatic termination of a national emergency unless, prior to the anniversary date of its declaration, the President publishes in the *Federal Register* and transmits to the Congress a notice stating that the emergency is to continue in effect beyond the anniversary date. In accordance with this provision, I have sent the enclosed notice, stating that the emergency declared with respect to the Government of Cuba's destruction of two

unarmed U.S.-registered civilian aircraft in international airspace north of Cuba on February 24, 1996, is to continue in effect beyond March 1, 1998, to the *Federal Register* for publication.

WILLIAM J. CLINTON

The White House,
February 25, 1998.

NOTE: This message was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on February 26. The notice is listed in Appendix D at the end of this volume.

Message to the Congress Transmitting the Report of the Corporation for Public Broadcasting

February 25, 1998

To the Congress of the United States:

As required by section 19(3) of the Public Telecommunications Act of 1992 (Public Law

102-356), I transmit herewith the report of the Corporation for Public Broadcasting.

WILLIAM J. CLINTON