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The President's Radio Address
May 9, 1998

Good morning. Tomorrow is Mother's Day, a special moment to express the gratitude, respect, and love we feel all year round. Our mothers give us life; they offer us unconditional love, strong guidance, and the sense that we can grow up to do anything we can dream of. From our first moments, mothers are our best teachers and most selfless friends. And like my own mother, whom I miss very much, especially on Mother's Day, they rarely ask for thanks. A mother's main wish is to see her children grow up healthy and happy.

Today I want to talk about a few ways we, here in Washington, can give all mothers that peace of mind, whether they work in an office, a factory, a hospital, or at home. To make that tribute to motherhood, we must all take responsibility for the care of our children. For many mothers who work, as my mother did, peace of mind requires affordable, quality child care. Millions of American women have full-time jobs outside the home. Three of five mothers with children under 6 are working to meet their obligations to their children and their employers. Juggling those responsibilities is even more difficult when quality child care is either hard to find or too expensive to afford.

That's why I've included in my balanced budget a significant new investment in child care. I urge Congress to join me in making child care better, safer, and more affordable for those who need it.

To help parents find the best care for their children, today I'm releasing a report by the Department of Health and Human Services. It's a consumer guide to child care quality that recommends four steps for parents: One, interview the potential caregivers; two, check the references; three, evaluate how the caregiver meets your child's needs; and four, stay involved. As Mother's Day reminds us, governments don't raise children, parents do. There is no substitute for a mother's love or a parent's responsibility.

We, too, in the National and State Governments, however, have a responsibility. A big one is to protect America's children from abuse and neglect. Nothing gives mothers peace of mind like the knowledge their children are in safe hands. Today I'm also releasing a new Justice Department set of guidelines for screening child care workers and other caregivers. And again, I urge Congress to act on a proposal I've put forth to facilitate background checks on child caregivers. There is strong bipartisan support for this proposal, and I'm hopeful that members of both parties will move quickly to give America's children the care they deserve.

There is one other thing I'd like to talk about that we must do to protect our children. Fathers must take their share of responsibility, too. Children deserve to be raised by both parents, but when that's not possible, children must still receive the support they need. The unfortunate division of families cannot mean the end of child support. That's why we have worked so hard to toughen enforcement of child support laws, and since 1992 we've raised collections by 68 percent a year.

We've worked too hard for too long toughening enforcement of child support laws to let our progress be accidentally undone. But that could happen if Congress goes ahead with one part of bankruptcy reform legislation now under consideration. I'm willing to work with Congress to pass responsible and fair bankruptcy reform. However, under one leading proposal, when a father declares personal bankruptcy, a mother may have to compete with powerful banks and credit card companies for the money they're owed. That's not the law now, and if that competition starts, we all know who will lose the contest: our children.

Parents have to step up to their responsibilities, and so does Congress. Some changes to consumer bankruptcy laws are in order, but mothers and children should keep their priority under the child support laws. They shouldn't have to stand in line for the support they need.

America's mothers hold a special place in our hearts. In return, we owe them the love and respect they have given us. On Mother's Day, we do so with cards, bouquets, and gifts. But today and every other day, we should also do everything in our power to give our mothers the peace of mind they deeply deserve.

Thanks for listening.

NOTE: The address was recorded at 9:56 a.m. on May 8 in the Oval Office at the White House for broadcast at 10:06 a.m. on May 9.

Remarks at a Democratic National Committee Dinner in Boston, Massachusetts

May 9, 1998

Thank you very much. Ladies and gentlemen, thank you for the warm welcome. I thank Elaine and Gerry more than I can say. This has not been the easiest couple of weeks in their lives, and the fact that they continue to work and to have this event means an especially great deal to me tonight, and I thank you so much.

I'd like to thank all the people who are here tonight. Senator Kerry, thank you for coming, and thank you for your leadership, especially on behalf of our Nation's children in the Capital. I thank Mayor Tom Menino and Angela for being here. When you said that Tom Menino's approval ratings, Steve, were in the eighties, my reaction was what the other 20 percent could possibly be thinking about. [*Laughter*] I don't know how anybody could do a better job as mayor than Tom Menino's doing; I don't think it's possible.

Everywhere I go in America now, when I talk to serious people who care about dealing with our challenges, people want to know how Boston went over 2 years with no child under 18 being killed. And I said it did not happen by accident. And I guess that's part of what I want to say tonight. Of course, this evening didn't happen by accident either. So I want to thank not only Elaine and Gerry but all the other cochairs: Jim and Kathy Daley; Sherry and Alan Leventhal—Alan and Fred have been through the fires for me for a long time, and I thank them for that; Lyle Howland and Jack Manning. And I'd like to say a special word of thanks to Alan and Susie Solomont; Alan did do a fabulous job for us at the DNC. And Steve and Barbara Grossman, thank you. And you can see from Steve's speech tonight that he is not beaten down from the rigors of his job and he's doing a wonderful job. Massachusetts should be very, very proud of him.

I also appreciate Lester Thurow coming tonight. I wish he could give the speech, and I could learn about how to improve the economy some more. [*Laughter*] And my good friend James Taylor, thank you for being here.

You know, when I was standing in front and we were taking pictures, one of you came through the line and said, "You know, Mr. President, Boston has become your ATM machine." [*Laughter*] But she said, "That's okay. We like it; we like it." [*Laughter*] I am profoundly grateful to the people of this city and this State for being so good to me and to Hillary and to the Vice President, to our administration. You all know we've got the highest percentage of the vote we received in any State in Massachusetts in 1996. We had an all-Democratic sweep in our congressional elections. And some of them were quite tough, indeed. And I am profoundly grateful to all of you. And that didn't happen by accident.

You heard all the things that Elaine said. I feel an enormous amount of gratitude for the strength of our economy, for the lowest unemployment rate since 1970 and the lowest inflation rate in 30 years and the lowest welfare rolls in 27 years and the lowest crime rates in 24 years. I'm grateful for that. I think the question is, what do we intend to do with that? And that really is the great question sort of looming over Washington. In that sense, I rather like the fact that the El Nino gods were not too nice to us tonight. It keeps us humble. If you like this, you'll love it if we don't do anything about climate change.

And that makes the point I want to make. When times are really good—in political life when times are good you can have, it seems to me, three responses. You can sort of play more golf and relax, which is appealing to me. [*Laughter*] Or you can think you can afford to be petty and mean and self-serving and groping and divisive politically, which is appealing to some. Or if the times are dynamic and things