

we can have the security to relish them and make our lives more interesting because underneath we know that what binds us together is a whole lot more important than what's different about us.

And I want to close with this story. Tom Daschle told you that we had these tribal leaders come to the White House. And he didn't tell you the whole story.

We had the heads of 19 Indian tribes from the high northern plains, from the two Dakotas and Montana. They asked for a meeting at the White House through Senator Daschle and his colleagues. And then they came into the Roosevelt Room at the White House, which is in honor of Teddy, Franklin, and Eleanor Roosevelt, and Teddy Roosevelt's Nobel Peace Prize is hanging on the mantelpiece.

And so the tribal leaders said, "Well, could we sit in a circle? That is our custom." So we sat in a circle. And each in their turn, they stood up and said, "Well, here's what we'd like to have help on. Here's our education concerns, our health care concerns, our economic concerns." And I came into the middle of the meeting, listened to it all. It was just fascinating.

Then at the end, the guy who was sort of their main spokesman, the tribal leader, whose name was Tex Hall, interestingly enough, stood up and said, "Well, there's one other thing we want to do." He said, "Mr. President, we want to talk to you about Kosovo." He said, "You see, we know something about ethnic cleansing. And our country has come a long way. And we believe what you are doing is right. And so the chiefs have signed this proclamation supporting it."

And then at the end of the room, another young man who was a tribal leader stood up, and he said, "I would like to speak." He had

this beautiful silver necklace on. And he was very dignified, and he said, "Mr. President," he said, "I had two uncles. One landed on the beach at Normandy. One was the first Native American fighter pilot in the United States military." He said, "My great-great-grandfather was slaughtered by the 7th Cavalry at Wounded Knee." He said, "We have come a long way from my great-great-grandfather's time, to my uncles' time, to this time." He said, "I have only one son, and I love him more than life. But I would be honored if he went to Kosovo to stand up for the human rights of people who are different from the majority."

That is the journey America has made. That is the journey I hope we can help the world to make. And if we do, you will take care of the rest of our challenges.

Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:20 p.m. in the Courtyard at the Greystone Mansion. In his remarks, he referred to event cohosts David Geffen, Steven Spielberg, and Jeffrey Katzenberg, founders, DreamWorks SKG studios; Italian tenor Andrea Bocelli; Gov. Gray Davis of California and his wife, Sharon; Senator Robert G. Torricelli, chair, Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee; Representative Patrick J. Kennedy, chair, Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee; Mayor Sandra J. Levin of Culver City, CA; actress Goldie Hawn; Norm Pattiz, chair and chief executive officer, Act III Productions; Renee Mullins, daughter of murder victim James Byrd, Jr.; Judy Shepard, mother of murder victim Matthew Shepard; Tex Hall, chairman of the Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara Nation (the Three Affiliated Tribes); and Gregg Bourland, chairman, Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe.

Remarks at a Democratic National Committee Luncheon in San Diego, California

May 16, 1999

Thank you very much. I was hoping that no one in California had heard that joke I told. [Laughter] They liked it in Albany, however. [Laughter]

Let me say to Irwin and Joan, first of all, I want to thank you for opening this wonderful home and for giving me a tour of the art and a tour of your family. [Laughter] What a wonderful, big, beautiful group they are. And I

thank you for your philanthropy and for your commitment to so many good causes, and for bringing all of us together today. A lot of my old friends are here and some people that I've never had the honor to meet before. I appreciate that.

I'd also like to say how glad I am to be here with Bob and Jane Filner. You know, I deal with a lot of Members of Congress—on occasion, even Members of the other party deal with me. I can honestly say that I have never met and dealt with any Member of the House of Representatives who was more consistent and persistent in trying to get me and the White House to respond to the needs of his district than Bob Filner. There isn't anybody else who works any harder at that, and you can be very proud of that. He's done a very fine job.

I want to thank Assemblywoman Susan Davis for being willing to run for Congress; it's an arduous endeavor. It takes a lot of time, a lot of money, and a lot of heart.

When I was 27 years old in 1974, I ran for Congress, and I lost. I wonder if I'd be here today if I'd won. [Laughter] But I remember, I ran against a man who had 99 percent name recognition and 85 percent approval. And I ran for 11 months, and 6 weeks before the election, I was still behind 59 to 23, and I lost—I got 48½ percent of the vote. I say that just to encourage you. Every election has a certain rhythm, and my instinct is, if you go out there and talk about the things you have done so well in the assembly, the passion you have for educating our children, the role that Federal Government needs to play to support our local schools, and the other issues, I think you'll do very well. And I hope we can be of help.

I want to thank Joe Andrew and Beth Dozoretz and all the people on our team for working with the Democratic Party. And I'd like to say a word of appreciation to everyone in San Diego who is responsible for the selection of my friend of 30 years Alan Bersin, the new superintendent of schools. I thank you.

When I saw Alan today—he's got a great gift for one-liners, which I have appropriated over the last 30 years. And so he came through the line today; he looked at me and said, "And I thought you had a hard job." [Laughter]

But let me also say I have a very special feeling about this community. I've had some wonderful days here. I've had some wonderful family vacation days here. As you noted, Hillary

just got back from Macedonia and a trip to Northern Ireland—a brief trip to Northern Ireland, where we're working to try to close the last gaps in the peace process there—and couldn't be here. And I talked to her this morning on the way down, and she was quite jealous that I was coming back to San Diego. We have nothing but wonderful memories of this great place.

Also, in 1992, when the Vice President and I carried this county, it was the first time since Harry Truman had carried it in 1948 that a Democrat had carried it—and looking at the signs, pro and con, on the way in today, I would say there's still some disagreement about what ought to happen. [Laughter]

Let me say, you're here at a fundraiser for the Democratic Party. And I'm grateful for that. I'd like you to know why I'm here. I mean, I'm not running for anything. Maybe I'll try to get on a school board someday, but I won't be on the ballot in the year 2000.

I am here because I believe in what I have done and because I believe that whatever good has come of the country because of my Presidency, I should be grateful for. But I am under no illusion that the most important thing was me. The most important thing was the vision that we shared for America and the ideas we pursued. And I believe it needs to continue. That's why I'm here. And when you leave, I hope you'll be convinced that that's why you were here.

When I ran for President in late 1991 and '92, it was not something I had intended to do until just a few months before in that year. I was very concerned about the problems that our country was having and that there didn't seem to be any driving vision. And I don't think you can run any great enterprise without one.

I also believed as a Governor—as President Bush said, a Governor of a small southern State—that most of the rhetoric I heard in Washington, unfortunately often from both parties, bore so little relationship to the world I was living in and the problems I was facing and the way I was having to deal with them. And it seemed to me that we needed to change the nature of the debate and to come up with some basic ideas that were not then driving policy in Washington, that were new but rooted in the very old-fashioned vision of our country.

I have always believed that when Americans widen the circle of opportunity for all responsible citizens, when they deepen the meaning of freedom, when they strengthen the bonds of community, we do well. And so I went out and said I want a 21st century America where every responsible citizen has the chance to live out his or her dreams, where across all of the differences we have we are bound together more closely as one community and where we are still the world's leading force for peace and freedom and prosperity. And I think to get there we have to think about things in a different way.

For example, I think that we have to think about rewarding entrepreneurs in a way that expands the middle class and gives more poor people a chance to work their way into the middle class. I think we have to believe that we can grow the economy and preserve and even improve the environment. I think we have to believe that we can create a country in which people can succeed, not only at work but at home, in the most important job of any society, raising children. I think we have to believe that we can reduce the welfare rolls and put people in the work force in a way that does not require them to stop being good parents to their children. I think we have to reduce the crime rate, not only by doing a better job of enforcement, but a better job of prevention—something Mr. Bersin did in his previous incarnation as your U.S. Attorney.

Anyway, those are just some of the ideas. I believe that we had to be a much more active force for peace in the world, but I thought we had to be willing to use our power to stand up against terrorism, weapons of mass destruction, and ethnic and religious cleansing and killing. And most of the last 6 years have been an effort by the Vice President and our administration, our Cabinet, and all the rest of us, working with me to try to find ways to put those ideas into concrete policies and make them come alive in the country.

Along the way, we've given the American people the smallest Government they've had since John Kennedy was President. Federal establishment is now the smallest it's been since 1962. But it is more active in trying to create the conditions and give people the tools to solve their own problems. And I believe that these ideas resonate pretty well with Americans, whether they're Democrats or independents or

Republicans, because they make sense and because they are related to the world toward which we are moving.

Now, there is a lot of the future present in this room in what you all do. It seems to me that the two most dominant elements in the world of the 21st century toward which we're moving, are the explosion of technology and the increasing interdependence of people across national lines. Even our biggest threats grow out of that. We are increasingly vulnerable because of the openness of our society and the openness of our technology to people who would use this for destructive forces.

And what we have to do now is to look ahead to the unmet challenges of the country and bring sort of the same sort of commonsense commitment to that vision. It means politically we have to have good candidates properly financed to have a good message to run in the year 2000 for all of our positions. They have to know why they're running.

You know, whenever anyone comes up to me and asks me if they should run for office, I always say, "Why do you want the job?" And you better be able to tell a total stranger in 30 seconds and then have a 5-minute version on why you want the job. And if you can't answer that question, you shouldn't run. And if you can, ignore the polls and run.

And so I think it's important that we do that. But in the last election, where we had a historic victory in the House of Representatives, you should know that we were out-spent by \$100 million. But we still won seats in the House and didn't lose any in the Senate—a truly historic election—because we had a message. We knew what we were for; we knew what we were against; and we had enough to get it across. So it's very important that you're here.

Now, as we look ahead, let me say that in the next 2 years, with all the energy I have, I'm going to do what I can to get our country to reach across party lines to deal with the aging of America, to reform Social Security and Medicare and do something about making long-term care more available, and helping people save for their own retirement more. I'm going to do what I can to make sure that we finish our work of modernizing our schools, help to modernize facilities; make sure we hook all the classrooms up to the Internet; provide more opportunities for more charter schools, like you have in this school district; and other things that will

raise standards; and dramatically increase the resources we provide to local schools for after-school programs, summer school programs, mentoring programs, the kind of things that will help our kids, so that we can have more uniform standards of excellence in education. And there are many other things that I intend to do.

The Vice President has a livability agenda we worked very hard on that we're going to try to pass to try to help all of our communities deal more with traffic problems, with having the need for more green space, as well as setting aside more land in reserve.

I'm very—by the way, just parenthesis—I'm very proud of the fact that our administration has protected more land in perpetuity than any administration in the history of the Republic except those of Theodore and Franklin Roosevelt. And I think 50 years from now people will be very grateful—even the people in the red rocks area of Utah, who are still kind of mad at me about it, I think they will be grateful.

So there are a lot of things that still have to be done. But I have to tell you, if you ask me to describe in a sentence what I think is the most important outstanding work of the country, I would say it is an attempt to get people to define community in terms of our common humanity instead of our evident differences, both at home and abroad.

And if you look at what happened in Littleton, there are many tragedies. And doubtless, a lot of the elements, as it's all unpacked, will turn out to be highly peculiar to the two young men in question and the whole psychology of murder-suicide. But there is also clearly an element of—part of what drove them over the brink was the fact that they were in a group that was disrespected, and they developed a grievance against those they thought were disrespecting them. And then since they thought they were disrespected, they looked around and they found another group—the minority students in the schools, in this case—that they could then look down on.

I was just in Texas with the daughter of James Byrd, Jr., the African-American who was dragged to death and virtually dismembered by people who killed him because he was black—you remember, about a year ago. I was, the other night in Washington, at the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights dinner with the mother of Matthew Shepard, the young man

who was killed in Wyoming not so very long ago because he was gay.

And I say this to point out, if America wants to do good around the world—I appreciate what Congressman Filner said about Kosovo, and I want to come back to that—but if you want to do good around the world, we've first got to try to be good at home. And we have to recognize that there is something deep within all of us that represents the oldest curse of human society, which is the propensity to hate the other people who are different from us.

And if you look, isn't it ironic—here we are, you and I were talking about how we had to break everybody's mindset of believing that in order to grow the economy, you had to have industrial age energy use patterns. We had to modernize energy use. But if you look at what they're fighting about in Kosovo or what they fought about in Bosnia or what they slaughtered over in Rwanda or what the continuing turmoil of the Middle East is about or Northern Ireland, they're not arguing about who is going to get the franchise to sell solar panels or who gets to represent Microsoft.

Interesting, isn't it? We're thinking—look at all the high-tech activity in this room. We're thinking about a 21st century in which we want our kids to have pen pals in every conceivable country of the world, travel around, you know, do unimaginable things because of all these technological wonders. We all expect to live to be 125 because by—within the next couple of years the human genome will be totally unpacked and the intersection of computer technology and biomedical discoveries will doubtless lead to breathtaking and, at present, unimaginable discoveries that will enable us to prolong life, prevent disease, cure disease.

But the biggest problem we've got is the oldest problem of human society. First, people are scared of people that are different from them, and their fear leads them to hate them, and their hatred of them leads them to dehumanize them, and then that legitimizes killing them. And this has been a factor in human relationships since people first joined together in tribes—before there was any writing or any language or anything else. And here we are, on the edge of this great modern age, beleaguered with this.

And so I say to you, to me that is very important. One of the people at our table was telling me that she was a native of Sarajevo and that

these are old and deep differences here. That is true.

I do not believe—if I could move to Kosovo for a minute—I don't believe the United States can intervene in every ethnic conflict. I don't think we can ask people to like each other. I don't think that can be a requirement of international law or a justification for military intervention. We can't even ask people not to fight each other if one group wants to secede and the other doesn't.

But we can say that in the international arena there ought to be certain limits on this. And what is now euphemistically called "ethnic cleansing"—when you unpack it, what does that word mean? That means you look at people who are of a different—in the case of the Balkans, religious group, and therefore—and with a different ethnic history—and you say, "I'm afraid of you; I don't like you; I hate you; I dehumanize you, therefore, I can kill you; I can rape your daughters; I can blow up your mosques; I can blow up your museums; I can destroy your historical records; I can take your own property records, and I can burn them up. I can take the young people of military age and wrap them up and set fire to them while they're still alive. I can do these things because this is my land, and our greatness depends upon our ability to get rid of you."

And in the most benign form, "We'll burn all your villages and run you by the hundreds of thousands off your land, because we can't share this land with you, because you're Muslims and we're Orthodox Christians; you're Albanians, and we're not. And, oh, by the way, 600 years ago the Muslims came through here and had a big battle in Kosovo, and we've hated you all ever since."

Now, what our position ought to be in this is not that we're telling other countries how to live; not that we're telling them how—what their governmental arrangements have to be, but that in Europe—and by the way, I think, anywhere else that the United Nations or others have the power to stop it—we say we know there will be ethnic conflicts; we know there will be civil wars. There's a terrible, regrettable conflict going on right now between Eritrea and Ethiopia, who once were one and then split, and now they're, in effect, having their tribal conflict over the border.

No one has suggested—10,000 people have been killed there—no one has suggested that

some third party should intervene and fight both of them. That is not what is going on in Kosovo. That is not what Bosnia was about. That was about ethnic cleansing; it's a mass killing of people because of their ethnic and religious background. And if we can't stop that in the underbelly of Europe on the edge of the 21st century, then we're going to have a very difficult world ahead of us, because there will be a lot more of it. They will get aligned with organized criminals, with terrorists, with people who have access to weapons of mass destruction. They will use all this technology and all these open airports and all this other stuff, and these conflicts will not stay confined to the land on which they occur.

So this is in America's interest, but it is also morally the right thing to do. Think about these children who were here today. What do you want their children's America to be like? What do you want their children's world to be like? The 21st century can and should be the most interesting period in all of human history, in a largely profoundly positive way. But it will not happen unless we find ways to deal with our differences which, after all, as we see in America, make life much more interesting if they can be respected and celebrated but limited in their impact.

When there is no limit to what you can do to somebody else who's different from you, life quickly becomes unbearable. That is really what is at stake here. Yes, there are many difficulties in this endeavor we have undertaken, we and our NATO Allies, in Kosovo. And you may have many questions in your mind.

But let me ask you this: How would you feel, in this gorgeous setting today, with the birds singing outside and the ocean before us, in all of our comfort, if I came here asking you to give money to the Democratic Party, and I was having to explain to you why we were sitting on our hands and not lifting a finger while those people were killed and uprooted and dislocated? I prefer to answer the hard questions about what we're doing than the hard questions I would never be able to answer to you if we had done nothing in the face of this travesty.

But, remember what I said: We should have a higher standard for ourselves at home. Abroad we are simply saying, "You can have your fights; you can have your arguments; but we're against ethnic cleansing and the slaughter that goes

along with it—and if we can stop it, as an international community, we ought to.” At home, we have to do better than that. We have to say, “The differences that we have make us stronger, make us better, when we respect and celebrate them, but when we’re not consumed by them.”

And therefore, I want to say again what I said yesterday and the day before. We need a national campaign to protect our kids from violence. We will never get there unless we first of all teach people respect for one another and, secondly, find a way to connect with every one of our children in a very personal way. A lot of people are strangers in their own homes, and they are lost to their parents, to their classmates, and to others. This is a very hard job.

And we will never get there unless all of us ask not, “Who is to blame?” but “What can I do?” That’s what the entertainment industry ought to do, not because any movie or television or video game caused those young men or others in these other school killings to do what they did, but because the average 18-year-old sees 40,000 murders by the time he or she is 18, because there are 300 studies now—300—which show that sustained exposure to violence diminishes—and it diminishes one’s sensitivity to the consequences of violence; and because we know that we have a higher percentage of kids who spend more time in front of various media and less time with their families, or with their friends doing other things, than virtually every other country, and we have a higher percentage of kids who are at risk. And we don’t give families the support we should give to balance family and childrearing—work and childrearing.

So if you have more kids at risk, more vulnerable, and you bombard them with things that will desensitize them, you will increase the number who will fall over the line. It’s just like the guns. The NRA slogan is actually, of course, literally true, that guns don’t kill people, people do. That is literally true. But people with guns kill more people than people without them. [Laughter]

And again, I say if you have more—if you have more vulnerable people and it’s easier for them to get assault weapons, or other weapons they have no business getting their hands on, then more of them will fall over the line and you’ll have more violence. A lot of you have been involved in that, and I would just close

with this—the Government has its responsibility in this crisis, too. And one of our responsibilities is to give both law enforcement and citizens the help they need by having sensible gun restraint measures.

There was a police officer out at the airport today when I stopped at the marine base on the way over here. And when he said, “Mr. President,” he said, “I’m a police officer; I’m off duty today; I came out here with my family, and I just want to thank you for taking on that gun fight.” He said, “We need all the protection we can get out there and so do the kids.”

And all we’ve done—look what I’ve asked them to do. I’ve asked them to close this gun show loophole so you can’t buy a gun at a gun show if you can’t buy it in a gun shop. We’ve asked them to—and the Senate has voted to close the loophole allowing big, multiple-ammunition clips to come in from foreign countries, and to raise the handgun age to 21.

We’ve asked them to strengthen the Brady bill and reinstate the 3-day waiting period. We’ve asked them to do a background check on people who buy explosives—which, after Littleton, you will see, is very important—very, very important—and do some other common-sense things that help us to trace and keep records on these weapons. This is crazy, that we would permit our society to put more children at risk than any other society in the world would when we already know we’ve got more of them that are fragile.

Now, we don’t have to point fingers at each other. We should all sort of say, “Forget about who’s to blame. We’re showing up for duty tomorrow. What can I do?” That’s what everybody ought to be asking. But the Congress of the United States needs to pass this legislation, and I was very encouraged that some of the Senators, after the American people expressed their feelings, have begun to change their votes.

But I want to see this as a part of our struggle to be one community. Most of the people—there was a great article in the Los Angeles Times today about a woman from Colorado, rural Colorado, who had her rifle and used it to run off wild wolves that were going to kill her livestock, and who felt so threatened in her way of life by all these city folks, like us, trying to regulate her guns. Well, of course, nobody’s trying to regulate her guns. She’d just been told that. And if she needs something other—that

she has to do a background check on, she's got nothing to fear.

But I understand, there is that whole other culture out there of people who are law abiding; they pay their taxes; they show up for duty when we need them to fight for our country, to defend us, to do whatever else; and a lot of them just think that this is some big urban conspiracy to take their guns away. Well, it isn't. And we all need to be talking to each other. We need to quit this sort of—you know, trying to make this chapter 57 in the culture war for someone's political benefit.

So I say that to you—hey, if you ask me, yes, I hope we get—before I leave office, I will be very disappointed if we haven't reformed Social Security, committed ourselves to pay down the debt over the next 17 years, reform Medicare, pass my education and my environmental agenda. But the American people will get the rest right if we decide to do what it takes to be one America, if we decide to do

what it takes to reach out across all the lines that divide us and say, "You know, our common humanity is more important than our interesting differences."

And if we do that, then we will be able to lead the world to a better place and give our children the future they deserve. That's what I think my party represents. That's what I've worked for 6 years to bring to the American people. And when you leave here today, I hope that's why you believe that you came.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 3:15 p.m. at a private residence. In his remarks, he referred to luncheon hosts Irwin and Joan Jacobs; Joseph J. Andrew, national chair, and Beth Dozoretz, national finance chair, Democratic National Committee; Renee Mullins, daughter of murder victim James Byrd, Jr.; and Judy Shepard, mother of murder victim Matthew Shepard.

Statement on National Crime Statistics

May 16, 1999

Today the FBI released preliminary data showing that crime fell another 7 percent in 1998, with an 8 percent decline in murder and an 11 percent decline in robbery. Crime is now down for a remarkable seventh year in a row. More community police on our streets and fewer guns in the hands of criminals have helped make our communities the safest they have been in a generation.

But tragic events like the Littleton shooting remind us that our work is far from done. We

in Washington have a responsibility to support law enforcement officers and pass commonsense gun legislation. We should start by closing the gun show loophole that allows criminals and juveniles to buy guns at gun shows without so much as a background check. In this way, we can keep the crime rates coming down.

NOTE: This statement was embargoed for release until 6 p.m.

Remarks at a Democratic National Committee Reception in Las Vegas, Nevada

May 16, 1999

The President. Thank you very much. First, I would like to say to Elias and Jody, we're grateful to be here, and thank you for turning the Muzak off. [Laughter] And all the televisions—I couldn't compete with them. [Laugh-

ter] And I thank you for being my friend for so many years, when I was up and when I was down, and for being my mother's friend, something I will never forget, and for having me into your home for the second time.