

are many questions about it. I wish I had time to spend 3 or 4 hours here and answer your questions. But I can tell you this: I would far rather be here today, where we are, standing up against ethnic cleansing, standing for the rights of a different people not to be exterminated—because they happen to be Muslims and they happen to have Albanian heritage and they happen to have no guns—than if I were here asking you to give money to me and to our party, and we were sitting on our hands enjoying the sunshine, and I had not lifted a finger to stop it.

And so I leave you with that thought. I have tried to make our party a party where all people of good will could feel at home and, more importantly, our country.

Life is infinitely more interesting because it's more different, more various. Look around this room. This is an incredible group of people from all over, everywhere. And if we can respect and celebrate our differences, our lives are literally more fun and almost always more profitable. But if there are no limits on the importance to which we give our differences, life can quickly become unbearable. So I ask you to think about that and help us.

I thank you for your contributions. I thank you for your support. I thank you for your friendship to Elias and Jody. I thank you for helping me be President.

But remember, what has made these last 6½ years, and what will keep America going for the next 220 years, is not any one leader, but it's having the right vision and the right ideas and working together. And we need more of that.

Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 6:35 p.m. at a private residence. In his remarks, he referred to reception hosts Elias and Jody Ghanem; Senator Richard H. Bryan's wife, Bonnie; Representative Shelley Berkley's husband, Larry Lehrner; Mayor Jan Laverly Jones of Las Vegas; former Gov. Bob Miller of Nevada and his wife, Sandy; former Representative James H. Bilbray; Joseph J. Andrew, national chair, Democratic National Committee; impersonator/comedian Rich Little; Renee Mullins, daughter of murder victim James Byrd, Jr.; and Judy Shepard, mother of murder victim Matthew Shepard.

Remarks at a Democratic National Committee Dinner in Las Vegas

May 16, 1999

Well, thank you very much. First of all, we've already had a wonderful conversation. I want to thank all of you for that. I want to thank Brian and Myra for taking me in; and I want to thank Amy for coming back to work for me. [Laughter]

Brian was up here talking, and I was thinking, you know, the only thing that has been sort of a required part of our friendship—besides his mentioning of the nuclear waste issue—is a regular golf outing. And I nearly never beat him. But I was thinking—after all, this is probably the fifth or sixth event we've done here in the last 6 years—I'm the most expensive golf partner he ever had. [Laughter] He would probably dearly like to reconsider this whole deal.

But we've been friends for 30 years now, and then some, and I'm very grateful to be here. Every time I come here and I spend the night

here, I feel a renewed gratitude. I also know that all of you felt as I did tonight, all of you who are from Las Vegas were delighted that Elias and Jody came over here and that they threw the reception over at their house, and we had a wonderful time with their children and their friends, and our prayers are with them. And I was very glad that they came over and spent a few minutes with us tonight.

Since we've been talking at the table and because it's quarter to 11, which for us three from the east coast over here is a quarter to 2 in the morning on our body, I'll be quite brief. But I'd like to just ask you to think about a couple of things.

The first is that our country has done very well these last 6½ years, economically and socially: crime rate's down; the welfare rolls are down; homeownership is at an all-time high;

minority unemployment, the lowest ever recorded. A lot of things are going well. What I would like to say is that I first feel grateful that I've been able to be President, and I hope I have had something to do with that. And I believe we have.

But the reason I'm here tonight, since I'm not running for anything anymore, is that I know that the reason we were able to follow good policies and do good things is that we started out with a vision and ideas that have now been embraced by my party, by the Democratic Party. And they make a difference. And they're different. They're different from what we were doing before, and they're certainly different—as you can tell if you just pick up the paper in the morning—from what the other party believes in Washington.

Whether the issue is how to take the first big step to get rid of the deficit, or whether we should have a Brady bill or an assault weapons ban, or whether we should target a tax cut so that we can honestly say we've now opened the doors of college to all, because we've got—we've got some friends from Georgia here; we've got a national version of Georgia's HOPE scholarship now—or whether the issue is, now, in the aftermath of the terrible tragedy at Littleton, whether we should have a law passed that closes the loophole that allows, now, people with criminal or mental health histories to buy guns at gun shows they couldn't buy in gun stores or we should also require a background check for people who buy explosives, since we now know that's a very serious problem—we have had two examples, one at Littleton and one in Oklahoma City, which makes, I think, a very compelling case that it's hard to justify a background check on handguns and not have a background check on explosives. And I could give you lots and lots of other examples, but the point I want to make is that ideas matter and vision matters.

And what we've been trying to do, Al Gore and our Cabinet and everybody associated with me for the last 6½ years, is to make real what we pledged to the American people in 1992, that we wanted a country where every responsible citizen would have opportunity and where we would be coming closer together, across all the lines that divide us, into a stronger community and where we continue to be the world's leading force for peace and freedom and prosperity. And we have largely been able to do that. So ideas matter, and that's why parties

matter. And that's why I'm grateful for your presence here.

The second point I would like to make is that it's very important for the Democrats to do two things: one, to keep working every day between now and 2000, and not to just get into the same-old, same-old in Washington I used to see, where the two parties fight all the time and nobody shows up for work. I sometimes think that everyone who works in Washington should be required to spend a week, a month somewhere else, because no other enterprise could survive if people spent all their time fighting and never had to do anything.

So we need to produce results. We need to deal with the aging crisis, the educational challenges we face. I think we ought to pay the debt down dramatically. I think it will really add to our long-term economic health. There are lots of challenges out there. I'm going to work until the last hour, the last day I'm President to try to get things done.

And the third point I want to make is that it's very important that we have good candidates adequately funded to implement these ideas in the 2000 election. Which is why I'm glad you're here and why I'm here.

I said something over at the Ghanems' I'd like to close with. If tonight in the middle of the night I were to wake up and God were standing over my bed saying, "I'm sorry, you can't do all this stuff for the last 2 years; I'm just going to let you do one thing—what do you want to do?" In the aftermath of Littleton and what I've seen in Kosovo, I would say, "Well, I think it's pretty ironic that in this glitzy, high-tech global economy age where we're about to uncover the mysteries of the human genome so we may all be able to map out our future and live to be 125, that the biggest problems we've got in the world today come from the hatred of the human heart and people's—rooted in our fear of people who are different from us, with religious or ethnic or racial or any other kind of differences."

And if you just think about America's most traumatic moments in the last several years—Oklahoma City, Timothy McVeigh, a government hater, whatever that is; think about poor Matthew Shepard in Wyoming, killed because he was gay, at the outset of his life; James Byrd in Texas, dragged and torn apart because he was black; even in Littleton there were suggestions that these young men felt disrespected

by the athletes in their school and therefore they wanted to get even with them, but by the way, they needed to find somebody they could disrespect, so they disrespected the minority kids in their school and they targeted them, too.

And I just want you to think about this. The oldest demon of humans living together begins with fear of people who are not in your clan—literally, when we came out of the caves—people who are different from you. And once you fear somebody, it's not very far until you hate them. Then it's not very far from that until you can dehumanize them. Then it's not very far from that until you can justify killing them—not very far.

We've had a lot of experience in that, in America. We had people who thought God told them to throw the Indian tribes off their lands. We had people who seriously preached in this country from the pulpit that God ordained the slavery that enslaved African-Americans here. We've had experience with what we now see going on in the rest of the world today.

But what I want to say to you is it is not endemic, in the sense that it's inevitable. You know, when the Hutus and the Tutsis fought in Rwanda, and 700,000 people died in 100 days—almost all from machetes—I heard people say, "Well, you know, those are African tribal wars, and the countries are all wrongly drawn, and everything." That's not true. In Rwanda, the borders have been pretty well the same for 500 years. And most of the time people got along.

Now I hear in the Balkans, "You know, those people always fought. They just can't get along." That's not true, either. For most of the last 600 years, those people did get along. They did work together. They managed their ethnic and their religious diversity.

And I just want you to think about that. I want you to think about—you know, we think about, we want our kids to know about computers and speak foreign languages and zip around the world and uncover all these great biological mysteries, and what a wonderful world it's going to be. And that's the world I've been working for. It is threatened by the most primitive impulse in human society, fear of people who are different from us.

And if we want America to do good around the world, we have to be good at home, first. Second, if we want to lead the world for peace

and freedom, we've got to stand up against ethnic cleansing and mass killing. That's what Kosovo is about. I know it's a thorny, complex problem—you and I, we talked about it around the table tonight. All I can—I can't answer every question, maybe, but I can tell you one thing: I'd a lot rather be answering the questions I'm answering tonight and sitting here having dinner with you, looking at those people being run out of their country and being killed and all that stuff, than with America and Europe sitting on its hands and not doing anything to help them. I prefer to answer the questions I'm answering tonight than the questions we would be answering had we done nothing.

And I'll just close with this little story I've been telling the last few days. Last week, when I got back from Europe, and then I got back from Oklahoma, seeing the folks after the hurricane—I mean, the tornado. We had a fascinating meeting at the White House with 19 tribal leaders from the northern high plains. I've spent a lot of time with the Native Americans since I've been in office, trying to work through a lot of their challenges.

And Senator Daschle, our leader, Democratic leader, and Senator Johnson and the two Democrats in North Dakota and Senator Baucus from Montana, they said, "Well, would you please meet with these 19 tribal leaders from these three States, because they're the poorest Indian tribes in America; because it's very hard to get any investment up there, and it's cold and there's a lot of problems?" If you don't have—not all Native American tribes have casinos and make fortunes; that's a big myth. So they said, "You've got to meet with these people."

So we had our—a lot of our Cabinet people came. Then the tribal leaders said, "Now, can we sit in a circle; that is our custom." So we're in the Roosevelt Room at the White House, which has Teddy Roosevelt's Nobel Peace Prize in it and a wonderful bust of Eleanor Roosevelt. It's a great little room. So we get rid of the table, and we all sit around in a circle.

And they talked, you know, each in their turn about their—you know, it's the education issue or the jobs issue or the housing issue or the health care issue or whatever. And then at the end their spokesperson stands up—and his name was Tex Hall, which I thought was an interesting name for an Indian chief. But anyway, he said, "Mr. President," he said, "I have this proclamation here that our tribal leaders have signed,

May 16 / Administration of William J. Clinton, 1999

endorsing what you are trying to do in Kosovo.” And he said, “You see, we know something about ethnic cleansing.” And he said, “We’d like—and here we are in the White House today, and we can’t turn away from this.”

And then this young man across the room in the circle stood up, and he said—he had this beautiful Indian jewelry around his neck. And I mean, when this guy started talking, it just took all the oxygen out of the room. He was very dignified, and he said, “Mr. President,” he said, “My two uncles—I had two uncles. One was on the beach at Normandy. The other was the first Native American fighter pilot in our history.” He said, “My great-great-grandfather was slaughtered by the American 7th Cavalry at Wounded Knee.” He said, “We’ve come a long way from Wounded Knee, to my uncles, to me standing here in the Roosevelt Room, talking to the President.” He said, “I just have one child. He means more to me than anything. But I would be honored to have him go to fight against the destruction of the people of

Kosovo, so they don’t have to go through all that we have been through.”

And I thought to myself, I just wish every American could see this. This is what I ran for President to lift up.

So remember that. If we can learn to get along together and work together and stand for our common humanity, then you and talented people like you all over this country, you’ll figure out how to solve the rest of this stuff. It’s the most important thing.

Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:45 p.m. in a private residence. In his remarks, he referred to dinner hosts Brian L. and Myra Greenspun, and their daughter, Amy; Nevada State Athletic Commission Chairman Elias Ghanem and his wife, Jody; Timothy McVeigh, who was convicted of bombing the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City, OK; Tex Hall, chairman of the Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara Nation (the Three Affiliated Tribes); and Gregg Bourland, chairman, Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe.

Statement on the Election of Ehud Barak as Prime Minister of Israel

May 17, 1999

On behalf of the American people, I want to extend my warmest congratulations to Ehud Barak upon his election as Israel’s new Prime Minister. The people of Israel have given the new Prime Minister a strong mandate.

I have just spoken with Prime Minister Netanyahu to thank him for his dedicated service to Israel. I also spoke with Prime Minister-

elect Barak to congratulate him and reaffirm our Nation’s steadfast support for Israel and its people. I will continue to work energetically for a just, lasting, and comprehensive peace that strengthens Israel’s security. I look forward to working closely with Ehud Barak and his new government as they strive to reach that goal with their Palestinian and Arab partners.

Remarks Prior to Discussions With King Abdullah II of Jordan and an Exchange With Reporters

May 18, 1999

President Clinton. Well, let me just begin by saying how delighted I am to have His Majesty here today. The United States values our relationship with Jordan very much. We hope to have a discussion about the opportunity and the obligation we have to continue the peace proc-

ess in the Middle East. I think we’ve both talked to Prime Minister-elect Barak about that.

And we are also very much committed to Jordan’s economic renewal. And the supplemental appropriation bill now working its way through the Congress has, among other things,