

Remarks at a Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee Luncheon in
Las Vegas, Nevada
October 1, 1999

Thank you very much. Senator Bryan, Senator Reid, Senator Baucus; Mr. Mayor, Mayor Jones, and Senator Bernstein—that sounds pretty good, doesn't it? [Laughter] Sounds pretty good. [Laughter] And my good friend Arthur Goldberg—I had a wonderful day with him in his home in New Jersey, and now he's brought me to Paris.

I went to Paris for the first time 30 years ago this year as a young man. And not very long ago, on my way to Bosnia to talk about our humanitarian efforts there to save the people of Kosovo from ethnic cleansing, I stopped in Paris for a day to see the President of France and the Prime Minister, and I had a chance to walk again as I did a young man, along the Tuileries and look again at the Eiffel Tower. I've already had more dreams fulfilled than I could have asked for in 10 lifetimes, but I never dreamed I'd actually get to give a speech in the Eiffel Tower. [Laughter] So I thank you, Arthur, for one more milestone in my life, and I congratulate you on this magnificent creation and the success it's enjoying.

I was thinking about all of you here today, and I was thinking, one of the things that I like about Arthur Goldberg and a lot of the others of you who have been my longtime friends here, is that you have a sense of enlightened self-interest. You're intelligent enough to support Democrats so you can continue to live like Republicans. [Laughter]

And I told someone the other day, I saw how much money Governor Bush had raised—you know, I'm thinking of putting that down as one of the economic achievements of my tenure in office—[laughter]—that we didn't discriminate; we allowed the Republicans to make money, too, in this economy. And it's not our fault if they decide to spend it in a way different than we would like.

Let me say, just seriously—I'll be rather brief, but I want to first thank you for coming here; and second, to try to give you some sense of what is at issue in this coming election year in all of the elections, and certainly in these elections for United States Senate, every one of which is of genuine national significance.

First, when Al Gore and I moved to Washington in 1993, into the White House, and we started our administration, we had a few very definite ideas about how we ought to change our policy, how we ought to change our economic policy, our crime policy, our welfare policy, our education policy, what our priorities in foreign policy ought to be, and we generally were trying to prepare America for the global economy and the global society in which we're living for the post-cold-war world, with a view to give every person in this country a chance to live up to his or her God-given abilities; trying to bring an increasingly diverse country closer together, instead of allowing it to become more and more torn apart and fractionalized, as so many countries in the world are today, over differences of race, religion, and other things. And we wanted to try to maintain America's role for peace and freedom and prosperity in the world.

And after 6½ years, the results, I think, speak for themselves. We do have the lowest unemployment rate in 29 years and the lowest welfare rolls in 32 years and the lowest crime rates in 26 years. We just had back-to-back surpluses in our budget for the first time in 42 years. And yesterday we learned that we have the lowest poverty rate in 20 years, the longest peacetime expansion, and the highest homeownership in history. These are things we can be proud of. And I am grateful that I had the chance to serve and to be a part of these historic developments. And for all of you that had anything to do with that, I thank you.

But every country must always have its eyes pointed toward tomorrow. And it may seem strange to you, since I can't run again, but I almost wish that the theme song of this year's election—the millennial election next year, I mean—were the one that we used in 1992, that great old Fleetwood Mac song, "Don't Stop Thinking About Tomorrow."

The question is not whether America will change; it is how America will change and whether we will build on what we have done that is working to meet the large, long-term

challenges the country faces in this new millennium or whether we will basically veer off and go back to an approach that got us in an awful lot of trouble before. The economy has been good so long, most people have forgotten what it was like in 1992. Most people forgot what it was like to have year in after year out of crime rates rising, welfare rolls rising, and intensifying social divisions.

So I say to you, the question—and I hope you'll keep this in mind between now and November of 2000—the issue for every citizen, without regard to party, is not whether we will vote for change. The issue is what kind of change we will embrace. That is, America is always changing. That's why we're still around here after over 220 years, because we've always been in the business of recreating ourselves based on our bedrock principles. And what difference does it make who's in the Senate? It will determine whether we use this moment of prosperity to save Social Security so that the baby boomers don't, in effect, bankrupt our children with our retirement. It will determine whether we lengthen the life of Medicare and add a prescription drug coverage, which is of pivotal importance to millions of Americans. Three-quarters of the retired people in this country today do not have access to affordable prescription drugs, and a lot of the hospital bills that they run up are because they did not have the preventive medications that they need.

It will determine whether we make a commitment to what is now the largest, most ethnically and religiously diverse group of people we've ever had in our schools, and whether we really believe that they can all learn and we're determined to give them a world-class education.

Yesterday I went to New York, to the IBM Center, to meet with Governors and business leaders of both parties to talk about the absolute imperative of having world-class standards and genuine accountability for all of our school children; the need to end social promotion but to give our children the schools they need; to turn around failing schools or shut them down; to give kids the after-school and summer school and mentoring support they need; but to keep pushing for higher standards in education. These are just three big questions.

I have asked the Congress to adopt a plan that would take Social Security out to 2050, beyond the life expectancy of all but the most fortunate baby boomers. I'd like to be around

then, but it seems sort of unlikely. I have asked them to add more than a decade to the life of Medicare and to deal with the prescription drug issue. I have asked to adopt some truly groundbreaking educational reforms, and I have asked them to do it in a budget that would allow America over the next 15 years to pay down the debt, so that by 2015 we'd be debt-free for the first time since Andrew Jackson was President in 1835. Now, those are changes worth fighting for.

Now, in every case, there are differences among the parties on this. I also have to tell you that there are differences in other areas. I'm fighting now to get the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty ratified in the Senate. Virtually all the opposition we have is coming from the other side of the aisle. A dream that was first embraced by Dwight Eisenhower, a Republican President, and proposed by John Kennedy, a Democrat, who gave us the first temporary test ban treaty.

It is profoundly important because we are trying to stop countries that do not have nuclear power now, and terrorist groups who do not have nuclear power now, from getting it. And it will help us not only to restrain people who have nuclear weapons from using them ever in the future but from seeing the proliferation of these things. Every Senator's vote makes a difference. The treaty has to be ratified by two-thirds of the Senate.

I'm trying to get the funds from the Congress to implement the agreement I made with former Prime Minister Netanyahu and Mr. Arafat, with the help of the late King Hussein, at the Wye peace accords. It's absolutely imperative that America do its part if we want the Israelis and their partners in the Middle East to keep making peace. It could have a huge impact on the life our children lead in the 21st century. And the congressional majority so far has been unwilling to fund it. Every Senator's vote makes a difference.

And I can go on and on and on. You know this; you've seen it. But it's easy to forget. This State has been profoundly well served by Dick Bryan and Harry Reid. And Arthur said he wished I could run again; I wish Dick would have run again. [*Laughter*] I told him, I said, "He's too young to quit. He doesn't even have gray hair, unlike some people."

So when you pick someone to succeed him, you have to think about this. The person you

pick to succeed him is going to lengthen the life of Social Security or try to let it wither on the vine, hoping that it will be privatized, not really thinking about what's going to happen not to the baby boomers; most of us will be fine. What happens to our children and their ability to raise our grandchildren if we leave a significant percentage of our people who are my age and younger, in the baby boom generation, unable to sustain themselves in retirement?

What if we don't continue to push to raise standards in education? You know, our children have picked up nearly a full grade in reading levels in the last 2 years. It didn't happen by accident. Four years ago only 16 States had enforceable standards; today, 50 do. Four years ago only 11 States had real accountability—that is, for schools, teachers, and students; today, only 16 do.

Now, I can tell you, the Democrats are more likely than the Republicans, by a factor of five or six, to continue to push to raise standards in education. It could change the whole future of America. We are more likely to push for things like the hate crimes legislation and other things that are designed to bring us together across all the lines that divide us, and certainly more likely to think about our responsibilities in the world.

You know, people come here to Las Vegas, from all over the world. And I know that for many Americans, maybe people living in small towns in this State, they'd just as soon, just thinking about it for 30 seconds, that we not invest any money anywhere else in the world. But with the end of the cold war, a modest investment in our diplomacy can keep American men and women in uniform out of wars for decades to come. It will save lives; it will give us a more peaceful world. It will also protect the international economy, on which our own prosperity depends.

All this will be determined not only by the Presidential race but by the races for the Senate and the races for the House. And it seems to me, when you think about the things everybody used—not everybody, at least our friends in the opposition—the Republicans used to say about the Democrats that they were weak on crime, weak on welfare, weak on the budget, weak on foreign policy, all those things they used to say about us—“you can't trust them to run the country.” Our crime policy has helped communities have the lowest crime rate in a generation.

Our welfare policies have given us the lowest welfare rolls in 32 years, without doing what they wanted to do, which was to cut the kids out of federally guaranteed food and medical care and to give more child care so people can succeed at home and at work. Our economic policies have benefited not just those of us in this room who can afford to be here, but we've also got the lowest poverty rates in 20 years.

And our continued commitment to fulfilling our responsibilities in the world have given us a safer world and will give us a safer world in the 21st century, which means a more prosperous world, which is critical to a more prosperous America.

I'd just leave you with this thought: We are 4 percent of the world's population; we have 22 percent of the world's income. We cannot sustain 22 percent of the income with 4 percent of the people unless we have a constructive relationship with the other 96 percent of the people in the world. It is of pivotal importance.

So it is not only for humanitarian reasons that I have sought to end the slaughter in Kosovo and Bosnia, to try to bring peace from the Middle East to Northern Ireland, to try to deal with the test ban treaty. It's also very much in the immediate daily interest of the people of this city, this State, and this Nation. This is a different and a better country than it was in 1992, and I'm grateful that I had a role to play in it. But don't be deceived here. It wasn't because of me; it was because what we did was the right thing to do. It is the ideas, the policies, the direction, the conviction of where we're going—that's what counts.

And you can keep America changing in the right way with the right decisions in all these elections in 2000. After those elections, I'll just be a citizen again, but I look forward to bearing this message for the rest of my life. And I thank you for being here to help make America work.

Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:10 p.m. in the Eiffel Tower Restaurant at the Paris Hotel. In his remarks, he referred to Mayor Oscar B. Goodman and former Mayor Jan Laverty Jones of Las Vegas; Senatorial candidate Ed Bernstein; Arthur M. Goldberg, president and chief executive officer, Park Place Entertainment; President Jacques Chirac and Prime Minister Lionel Jospin of France; Gov. George W. Bush of Texas; former Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu of Israel;

and Chairman Yasser Arafat of the Palestinian Authority.

Statement on Vouchers To Provide Rental Assistance

October 1, 1999

The Department of Housing and Urban Development yesterday released \$280 million in rental assistance vouchers to help 50,000 families in 35 States move from welfare to work. These housing vouchers are an integral part of our efforts to reform welfare, reward work, and provide affordable housing for low-income families. They will help families move close to a job, reduce a long commute, or secure more stable housing that will help them get or keep a job.

Today, our economy is strong, incomes are up, and poverty is at the lowest rate in 20 years. But there are still more than 5 million low-

income families who need affordable housing. That is why I have asked Congress for an additional 100,000 rental assistance vouchers to meet the critical housing needs of families moving from welfare to work, the homeless, and the elderly. As Members of the House and Senate meet in conference to debate this year's budget for the Department of Housing and Urban Development, I want to underscore my strong commitment to this initiative. Congress should not turn its back on families that are playing by the rules and moving from welfare to work. A budget without new vouchers would shortchange the American dream.

Statement on the Fire at the Department of Commerce

October 1, 1999

I am relieved that today's fire at the Department of Commerce was extinguished quickly and apparently without any serious injuries. The DC Fire Department and all those who worked to put out the fire deserve credit for ensuring the safety of the Department of Commerce em-

ployees who work at the Herbert Hoover Building. I hope that the damage can be repaired quickly and that Secretary Daley and his entire team can be back to full speed as soon as possible.

Statement on Proposed Legislation on Nuclear Waste

October 1, 1999

Yesterday's nuclear accident in Japan is a tragic reminder that we must do everything in our power to ensure safe, responsible handling of radioactive materials. Upon reviewing Senate bill 1287, regarding potential nuclear waste disposal at Yucca Mountain, I have determined that it would not adequately ensure the protection of public health and safety. If this bill is presented to me in its current form, I will veto it.

I am encouraged that this latest Senate bill, the "Nuclear Waste Policy Amendments Act of 1999," does not seek to authorize interim storage of nuclear waste at Yucca Mountain before a thorough scientific analysis of the site has been completed. That would be an unconscionable mistake, and I have consistently opposed such proposals in the past. However, the bill would take away the existing authority of the Environmental Protection Agency to protect public