

## Remarks at an Anti-Defamation League Dinner in Atlanta October 29, 1999

*The President.* Thank you so much.

*Audience member.* I came to kiss you, Mr. President!

*The President.* Well, if you came to kiss me, if you'll wait until I finish, I'll be right down there. [*Laughter*] Don't you go anywhere. I'll be right there. [*Laughter*] That sort of cuts the atmosphere, doesn't it? That's great. [*Laughter*] What was I going to say? [*Laughter*]

Howard, thank you for your introduction and for your many years of friendship and support and for your leadership. Abe Foxman, thank you for your long leadership of the ADL. Glenn Tobias, thank you for your service.

I know the president of the city council, President Pitts, is here; and De Kalb County Chief Executive Levetan is here. I thank them for their presence. And I'm especially grateful to be here with my friend and I believe one of the greatest living Americans, Congressman John Lewis. And Lillian, hello. Lillian, it's nice to see you. Thank you.

More than anything else tonight, except to get my kiss—[*laughter*]—more than anything else tonight, I came here to say thank you. Thank you for nearly 7 years of working with me and Hillary and the Vice President and Mrs. Gore, year-in and year-out. Thank you for your commitment to genuine peace in the Middle East. Thank you for fighting anti-Semitism and terrorism and for promoting religious freedom throughout the world. Thank you for developing a model hate crimes statute, which is now the law in 40 of our 50 States. Thank you for helping us to organize the first-ever White House Conference on Hate Crimes. Thank you for standing with us to promote excellence and diversity and equal opportunity with the appointments of people like Bill Lann Lee and Jim Hormel. Thank you for your pioneering work to filter out hate on the Internet, which lamentably was a part of the poison that led to the tragedy of Columbine High School. Thank you for making a world of difference, through your World of Difference Institute, to teach tolerance on campuses and to law enforcement officials across our land. I thank you for all that.

The Talmud says, "Should anyone turn aside the right of a stranger, it is as though he were to turn aside the right of the most high God." Well, that passage carries special meaning in the world in which we live, because the great irony of this time is that we stand on the threshold of unbelievable discoveries in science and technology, amidst the greatest revolution in telecommunications the world has ever known.

I was in Silicon Valley the other night with a bunch of people that started this great company, eBay. You ever buy anything on eBay? Nearly everybody has now. What you might find interesting is that over 20,000 Americans, including many former welfare recipients, are now making a living on eBay, not working for the company but trading on eBay.

I was talking the other night, just a few months ago, at one of the millennial lectures that Hillary put together, with the brilliant Cambridge physicist Stephen Hawking, who wrote a book called, "A Brief History of Time" which I pretended to read. [*Laughter*] And we were talking about how the new century will bring with it the discovery of millions, perhaps even tens of millions of new galaxies, and perhaps the capacity to pierce the black holes in the universe, to see what is there.

We had an evening the other night, about which I'll say more later, a fascinating evening at the White House that Hillary sponsored, with a man named Vint Cerf, who essentially developed the architecture of the Internet and gave the first E-mail, 18 years ago, to his profoundly deaf wife—he thought about the E-mail as a way to communicate with his wife while he was at work, because she was so deaf even hearing aids could not help her; she now hears, by the way, because of deep implanted computer chips in her ear canals—and Professor Lander from Harvard, one of America's most prominent scholars of the human genome. And they were saying that in a matter of a few years, children will come home from the hospital with a genetic map and with the genuine prospect of a life expectancy of 100 years or more.

Isn't it interesting that in this most modern of all imaginable worlds, with even more breath-taking discoveries just around the corner—that

I believe will also include cures for many of the most severe forms of cancer and the ability to give people with severed spinal cords the capacity to walk again, all these miracles—that the biggest problem the world faces is the oldest problem of human society, the fear of the other? We all still continue to turn aside the rights of a stranger, people we do not know, therefore we do not understand, therefore we easily fear, therefore we easily dismiss and pretty soon dehumanize them after that. How easy it is to justify violence.

And so, the most urgent task, as we stand on the threshold of the new millennium, is not to plumb the depths of outer space or the inner depths of the human gene, but to follow the oldest admonitions of our Scriptures, and to build what Congressman Lewis, in his marvelous autobiography, and before him, Dr. King, called “the beloved community,” one in which we genuinely love those even with whom we disagree because we do not fear those who are different. The ADL has always stood for that. And most of all, I say thank you.

You know, I’ve spent a lot of time now going around to political events to try to stir the party faithful, and I feel like a beast of burden since I can’t run for anything anymore doing that. I kind of hate that. But I do it—[laughter]—but I do it happily because I want to say to people, I think we’re leading the country in the right direction. And it’s nice for me, after these years of work and labor and often bitter disputes, to say to the American people that we have the longest peacetime expansion in history, 19½ million new jobs, and highest homeownership ever, and a 29-year low in unemployment, a 30-year low in welfare rolls, and a 30-year low in the crime rate and a 30-year low in inflation and a 20-year low in the poverty rate and the first back-to-back budget surpluses in 42 years achieved by the smallest Federal Government in 37 years. That’s pretty good, and I like saying that.

This week I was able to say we had gone from a \$290 billion deficit to a \$123 billion surplus. In the last 2 years, we paid \$140 billion down on our national debt. That’s the most we’ve ever done on that. I like saying that.

But what I want to say to you tonight is that the real issue is not the marvelous way America has come in the 7 years that I’ve had the privilege to be President. The real issue before the American people is, what are we

going to do with this moment of great good fortune? And again, you can plumb the depths of our Scriptures to find ample evidence that sometimes a good time can be a great hazard to people.

A nation is no different from a family or an individual or a business. Sometimes you’re most prone to mess up when things are going well. And I often think that some of the bitter partisanship and sort of shortsightedness we’ve seen in the last 2 years have occurred because people think they have the luxury to do that, because things are going so well, they can’t imagine there could be any adverse consequences to not paying the U.N. dues, or contributing our fair share to the alleviation of the debt of the poorest countries in the world, or adopting the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, or moving to clean up the environment, or any of the number of other issues.

And what I have tried to say to the American people is I think this is an enormous responsibility that we have, not just me as President or the Democrats and Republicans in Congress, but as a people. I’m 53 years old. And in my lifetime, not once, not even once, have we had the combination of prosperity, social progress, and the absence of emergency necessary to allow a people to literally imagine the future of their dreams and build it for their children.

We had an economy maybe almost this good in the sixties, but we had to deal with the awful realities of the civil rights revolution and then with the burden of the Vietnam war. Before that, it was the cold war; and before that, World War II; and before that, the Depression. We have never had a time like this in my lifetime.

And I have asked the American people to meet the challenge of the aging of America, save Social Security, save Medicare, add a prescription drug benefit to it; meet the challenge of the largest and most diverse group of schoolchildren in our history, give them all a world-class education, turn the failing schools around or shut them down, but give the kids the after-school programs, the summer school programs, the modern schools, the Internet, the small classes they deserve; to meet the challenge of—now that we have a 30-year low in the crime rate, no one thinks it’s as safe as it ought to be in America—make our country the safest big country in the world.

And do the things we know will help us to do that: do more to keep guns out of the hands

of criminals and children; do more to put police on our streets in the most violent neighborhoods; do more to make our communities more livable and meet our international environmental responsibilities and still grow the economy; do more to bring economic opportunity to people in places left behind.

The other day, I was in South Dakota, where the unemployment rate is 2.8 percent, on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation, where the unemployment rate is 73 percent. I think we ought to give all of you the same incentives to invest in poor areas in America we give you to invest in poor areas in Latin America, or Africa, or Asia, because if we don't, if we can't bring enterprise and opportunity to our poorest Americans now, we'll never get around to dealing with it.

That's why I've asked America to guarantee our long-term prosperity by adopting a long-term plan for the budget that by the year 2015 will have us completely out of debt for the first time since Andrew Jackson was President in 1835, because I believe it'll bring long prosperity to us.

But I would say to you all, as important as those things are, there are two things that relate to the irony I mentioned at the beginning: the fact that we enter a new millennium with all these modern possibilities bedeviled by the oldest failing of human society. But there are two other issues without which we cannot proceed successfully.

One is to meet our responsibilities around the world as the world's leading force for peace and freedom and reconciliation, against terror and the other forces of destruction, including proliferation of nuclear and chemical and biological weapons. That's why we ought to pay our debt to the U.N. That's why we ought to make our contribution to alleviate the debt of the poorest countries in the world. That's why we ought to continue to fund the program begun by former Senator Sam Nunn from Georgia, to take down these nuclear weapons in Russia, that they want us to help them destroy. And that's why we ought to pay our commitment, made at the Wye peace talks pursuant to 25 years of bipartisan—bipartisan—efforts for peace in the Middle East, to contribute to the success of the Wye talks, and the modified efforts under Barak and Arafat.

On Sunday night I will leave for Oslo to honor the memory of my friend Yitzhak Rabin

and to continue his mission. We're now at a critical moment in the peace process. Prime Minister Barak and Chairman Arafat have made some real movement forward. They've made some hard decisions. They're working hard on preserving security and fighting terrorism, and they're making progress in implementing the provisions of the Oslo agreement.

We actually have a chance within the reasonably near future for peace for Israel and its neighbors, for security so necessary for progress and prosperity and freedom and justice all across that region.

But like all chances in life, it is fleeting. It will require hard choices and hard work within a short timeframe. And it cannot be done without the support of the most determined friends of peace, like those of you in this room.

I still believe that we're either going to go forward or drift backward. We can't just freeze this moment. The region could reverse course. There's still plenty of extremists and terrorists out there. There's still people all over the world who represent the forces of destruction and the enemies of the nation-state—not simply Israel, but everywhere—working to develop weapons of mass destruction that can be miniaturized and carried around and used at a moment's notice. And the same technology that gives you a tiny, tiny cell phone that guys with big fingers like me can hardly dial these days will lead to the miniaturization of weapons in the 21st century.

Make no mistake about it. Our problems with the enemies of peace, with the terrorists, are far from over. And I'll make you a prediction. Within 10 years, it will be normal to see a very sophisticated alliance all around the world between terrorists, drugrunners, and organized crime, maximizing the same modern technologies that we all seek to access to do good.

This is the moment that we must seize. It is so important for America to support the peace process and to provide the resources to make peace work. I don't know how many times I have heard one of my leaders at the Pentagon say, "Mr. President, the most expensive peace is far, far cheaper than the cheapest war." It is inexcusable that we would not fund a national security budget for peace, necessary to meet our responsibilities in the Middle East.

Congress sent me a foreign aid bill without the \$800 million I requested this year, or the \$500 million for next year to fund our part of

the Wye River agreement. The bill sent a terrible signal to our friends in the Middle East, the strongest possible encouragement to the enemies of peace that there will be no immediate rewards for peace. That's why I vetoed it, and I'll veto it again if it doesn't provide for the funding of our obligations around the world.

I ask you to support the other provisions of the bill, the funds necessary to reduce the nuclear threat from Russia, to provide debt relief to the poorest countries as the Pope and so many others have asked us to do in the millennial year, to meet our obligations to the United Nations, to do the other things that promote democracy and opportunities for trade and investment.

We must sustain America's leadership. I want you to know, on a subject I know you care a lot about, I have urged the Russian leadership not to allow the current challenges they face to undermine respect for human rights and individual liberty and opposition to anti-Semitism in Russia. If we want—I will say again, if we want to have influence with other countries, none of them are asking us to buy our way into their favor. But as the wealthiest, most powerful country in the world at the moment of our greatest success, for us not to even pay our fair share when already we spend a smaller percentage of our income on nonmilitary national security measures than any major country in the world is inexcusable.

So for all of those other challenges I mentioned, we must be a force for good around the world. And we cannot do that for free. We get a lot out of our interdependence with others. We contribute to the United Nations so that when something happens like Kosovo—yes, our planes flew the bulk of the mission, and yes, we bore the bulk of the financial burdens to save those 800,000 people from ethnic cleansing, and I'm glad we did it.

But today, as they work to rebuild, the bulk of the burdens in manpower and in money is being borne by our allies in Europe. Yes, it was necessary for the United States to take a strong position on the problem in East Timor to stop the terrible slaughter there as a result of their vote for independence. But now the bulk of the load is being carried by our friends, like Australia and Malaysia and others there, because we live in an interdependent world where we share responsibility.

Yes, we spend some money in Africa to train troops, but that means the next time a horrible slaughter like Rwanda comes along, it can be handled by the Africans and we can give them support, and they won't have to look at us and say, "Why didn't you send 100,000 Americans to stop this before it started?" We get a lot out of being good neighbors and responsible parties, and we need to continue to do it.

The last point I want to make is one the ADL well knows. We can't be a force for good abroad unless we are a force for good at home. And while, thank God, we have been spared the ravages in the modern age of mass conflict based on religion as in Northern Ireland, or religion and ethnic differences as in the Middle East or the Balkans, or tribal bloodshed as in Rwanda, Burundi, and other places in Africa, we see in these hate crimes—the murder of young Matthew Shepard in Wyoming, the horrible dragging death of James Byrd in Texas, the killing of the postman, the Filipino postman; and the shooting of the children at the Jewish community center in Los Angeles, the murder spree in the Midwest that took the lives of the African-American basketball coach outside Chicago and a young Korean Christian as he walked outside his church, those perpetrated by a man who claimed he belonged to a church that did not believe in God, but did believe in white supremacy—we see that we are not immune from this. And why is that? Because it is a part of human nature. Why was it in the Torah in that provision I read earlier? Because of the knowledge from God that in us, there is all the tendency, in all of us, to turn away from the right of a stranger.

Every one of us, I believe—maybe you don't; maybe you guys are perfect—I wake up every day, and I know—I sort of think of my life and my attitude toward the world and of its people as being governed by an internal scale, and on one side of the scale there is light and on the other side there is darkness, and you always want it tilting toward the light, but not so much as to be naive, but enough to have a genuine charitable view toward others, a genuine respect, a genuine humility, and understand that you may not always be right but you have an obligation to recognize the integrity and the common humanity of others.

But it's easy to get that scale out of balance. Even all of us have our good days and our bad days. When it gets badly out of balance,

then the fear and the dehumanization of the other drives people to these terrible, tormented acts of slaughter. Sometimes there's a political patina on it, so people can actually act as if it's justified. Sometimes it's just some poor, demented, twisted soul, acting out of pain and fear and anger and blindness. Nothing is more important to our future than flushing that not only from the killers but flushing that feeling in its less violent manifestations from all of our hearts.

If I could leave America after my Presidency with one wish, it would be to be one America, to revel in our diversity, to respect it, to celebrate it, to enjoy it, to make it interesting.

It can only happen—you can only have fun—in a diverse country. You can only find it interesting to examine whether someone else's religious perspective or cultural heritage has some validity for you, something you can learn. You can only really revel in it if you believe that our common humanity is more important than the things which make us different.

Now, that means, it seems to me, we need to stand against manifestations of our inhumanity, and we need to do more to reaffirm our common humanity. That's why I was so disturbed when the Republican majority on the relevant committees of Congress took out the hate crimes legislation in the form of the bill that had already passed the Senate. I vetoed the bill that came to me, in part because it didn't contain those hate crimes provisions.

And I think it's very important that we say, "Look, it's not that the victims of these hate crimes"—you know, the people that say we don't need these things are saying, "You're saying those victims are more important than other victims." That's not true. What we are saying is that hate crimes victimize not only the victim but they victimize society as a whole in a special way, because they contradict the very idea of America we are trying to build. We're not letting somebody else off the hook. We're saying we want a clear and unambiguous stand against things that contradict the very idea of the America we want to build.

The other point I'd like to make is, it's not enough just to be against things. We need to be for things that will enable us to live up to our full potential. That's why I'm also for strengthening the equal pay law, for the employment nondiscrimination act or the so-called Kennedy-Jeffords bill to let people with disabili-

ties go into the workplace and keep their Government health care through Medicaid, so that they can work and be a part of our society. We need to be for things that bring us together.

I want to close with these two stories. I told you earlier we had this millennial evening at the White House, with the genome scholar from Harvard and Vint Cerf, who was one of the architects of the Internet. And we were talking about—they were talking about how the mysteries of the human gene could not have been solved without the advances in computer science. And then they put them all up on the screens, the formula for what our genes look like. And I pretended to understand that. [Laughter]

But I did understand the point they were making. So I said to them, I said, "Look, with these 100,000 sequences and all the possibilities and permutations, how much are we alike or different?" And Professor Lander said, "The truth is that all people, genetically, are 99.9 percent the same." That confirms your philosophy, right?

Here's the next point he made, which is more interesting to me. He said if you were to get groups of people together by ethnicity or race—let's suppose you've got 100 European Jews together, and you've got 100 Arabs, and you've got 100 Iranians, and then you've got 100 people from the Yoruba Tribe in Nigeria, and you've got 100 Irish people together—and you put them all in a room with their groups, here's what they said. They said the genetic differences among the individual groups—that is, among the Yorubas, among the Irish, among the Jews, among the Arabs—the genetic differences within the groups would be greater than the genetic differences between any one group and any other group. Now, think about that.

When you look at a profile of any sizeable ethnic group—Hispanic, African, you name it—the genetic differences of the individuals within the group are greater than the group genetic profile of one group as compared with another. In other words, the most advanced scientific knowledge confirms the wisdom of the Torah and tells us not to turn aside a stranger. Because it turns out a stranger is not so strange after all.

In the summer of 1994, as I remember, it was just before we went to the Wadi Araba to sign the peace agreement between Israel and Jordan. The late Prime Minister Rabin and the

late King Hussein addressed the United States Congress. Near the end of his speech, Rabin turned to Hussein and said, and I quote, "We have both seen a lot in our lifetime. We have seen too much suffering. What will you leave to your children? What will I leave to my grandchildren? I have only dreams," he said, "to build a better world, a world of understanding and harmony, a world in which it is a joy to live. That is not asking for too much."

That dream has united those of you in this organization for 85 years now. That dream in our time requires us to build one America and requires America to be a force for peace and harmony in the world. Think of it: Rabin gave his life so that we might build a world in which it is a joy to live. It is not asking for too much, but it will require all we can give.

Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:25 p.m. at the Grand Hyatt Hotel. In his remarks, he referred to Howard P. Berkowitz, national chairman, Abraham H. Foxman, national director, and Glenn Tobias, national executive committee chairman, Anti-Defamation League; Atlanta City Council President Robb Pitts; De Kalb County Chief Executive Liane Levetan; Representative John Lewis' wife, Lillian; Vinton G. Cerf, senior vice president of Internet architecture and technology, MCI WorldCom, and his wife, Sigrid; Eric Lander, director, Whitehead Institute/MIT Center for Genome Research; Prime Minister Ehud Barak of Israel; Chairman Yasser Arafat of the Palestinian Authority; and Pope John Paul II.

## The President's Radio Address

*October 30, 1999*

Good morning. Two weeks ago I reaffirmed our Nation's commitment to environmental protection and announced our plan to protect more than 40 million acres of roadless area in our national forests. Today I'm announcing new actions we're taking to protect our air, our water, and some of our most precious lands.

One of the simplest but most potent tools in our fight against pollution is public information. By requiring industries to tell communities how much they pollute the air and water, we empower citizens to fight back and create a powerful incentive for industry to pollute less. Remarkably, in the decades since the public's right-to-know about chemical releases became the law of the land, industry's toxic pollution has fallen nearly 50 percent.

Today, my administration is again expanding the public's right-to-know. We're acting to protect families against some of the most dangerous chemicals ever known, including mercury, dioxin, and PCB's. These chemicals are troubling for two reasons. First, they don't break down easily; instead, they build up in the environment and in our bodies. Second, many of them heighten the risk of cancer or other illness, even at very low doses.

Right now companies are required to disclose their uses of these chemicals only if they handle huge quantities. Beginning January 1st, we'll require companies to inform the public even if they're using much smaller quantities, in some cases just 10 pounds a year. In the case of dioxin, a chemical that can cause harm even in minute quantities, companies must report if they produce as little as a tenth of a gram.

By posting this information for all to see, we can speed the day when families no longer need worry about hidden dangers in the air they breathe and the water they drink.

As we step up our fight against pollution, we must work as well to preserve lands across America that are still pristine. Today I'm announcing a new effort to protect the incomparable California desert so future generations can enjoy it in all its splendor. Five years ago I signed the California Desert Act, preserving millions of acres of stark but fragile landscape, rich with history and precious wildlife.

Today, to mark the anniversary, the nonprofit Wildlands Conservancy is donating to the Federal Government an additional 14,000 acres within the Joshua Tree National Park, lands that