

around here after over 220 years? Look at all the stuff we've weathered. I mean, we had these Founding Fathers who said we're all created equal, and they were slaveholders. And even white guys couldn't vote if they didn't own property, never mind the women, right? We worked it out. So now we just kept on working at it, and we worked it out. But what is the signal measure of our progress? We kept finding ways to bring more and more and more people into the circle of freedom and opportunity. And then their minds figured out how to maximize the benefits of the industrial revolution, how to provide mass education, how to integrate immigrants from all over the world into the mainstream of American life.

This one America deal is much bigger than just sort of, feel good; let's all be nice; don't anybody be prejudiced or say anything at a dinner party you'd be embarrassed by. [Laughter] And, to be serious, it's much more than being tough on people who commit hate crimes, although I badly want that hate crimes legislation to pass. It is an understanding about the way we should live if we all want to do well. It is in the nature of the American idea and the core of what it means to be a human being.

Isn't it interesting to you—I mean, do you ever think about this? We continue to have these horrible hate crime incidents in America, and then we see these other countries convulsed by the tribal slaughter in Rwanda; the awful, terrible treatment of the Kosovar Albanian Muslims in Kosovo; the treatment of the Bosnian Muslims in Bosnia; the continuing conflict among the Catholics and the Protestants in Ireland which we're trying to bring to an end; the continuing conflict in the Middle East. What is the common element in that and the hate crimes?

It is that, for all of the wonders of the modern world, we're most bedeviled as societies by the

oldest problem of folks living together: We still have a hard time with people who aren't like us, you know, have a hard time with people that aren't like us. And yet, the truth is, when we get over it and let it go, we find that life is a lot more interesting than it used to be. I told somebody last night, the first time I went to a Cinco de Mayo celebration in San Francisco, I thought, where has this been all my life? [Laughter] Man, I like this. Where has this been? I like this. So, we're laughing, but there's a grain of truth here. Why do American Christians buy books by the Dalai Lama in record numbers, about the ethics of the new millennium? Because he has a very important piece of the truth, and he's very important peace inside.

So I say to you, look for the unifying vision and continue to work for it. And be clear and focused on the magic moment in which we live. Be humble enough to know it will not last forever; it is not in the nature of human affairs. And if you really want to honor what you have done and the spirit of this award, which you have so kindly given me, make the most of this moment. It is the chance of a lifetime to build the future of our dreams.

Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 8:16 p.m. in the Corcoran Ballroom at the Four Seasons Hotel. In his remarks, he referred to James F. Garrett, chair, and Weldon Latham, general counsel, National Coalition of Minority Business; Melvin E. Clark, Jr., president and chief executive officer, Metroplex Corporation; civil rights leader Rev. Jesse Jackson; former Assistant Attorney General for Civil Rights Deval Patrick; Ernest Green, one of the Little Rock Nine; attorney Vernon Jordan, long-time friend of the President; and Miguel Lausell, chair, Hispanic Leadership Council.

Remarks at a Ronald H. Brown Corporate Bridge Builder Award Dinner November 10, 1999

I was just sitting here—out there—wondering, Michael, if I need to stand up here and announce that I'm changing parties, so that you don't lose your tax-exempt status for the founda-

tion. [Laughter] I'd do nearly anything for Alma and you and Tracey and Ron. I don't think I can quite get there, but—[laughter].

You know, I had a feeling—the reason I asked for the children to speak—they're young adults, I guess—is that after Patrick spoke so beautifully, and then after Sol spoke so powerfully, I figured, well, what the heck, they've already heard the best speeches of the night anyway. [Laughter]

I wanted you to hear them because I think it's important that you see flesh-and-blood examples of why Mr. Trujillo and his company were honored tonight. And I think it's important that you see examples of the work of the Brown Foundation as embodied in Patrick's remarks, and the work that Mr. Trujillo has done as embodied in those two young people, because that's really what we're here about.

I want to thank all of you for being here, and many members of the administration who are here: Secretary Slater; Secretary Herman; Maria Echaveste, my Deputy Chief of Staff; Minyon Moore, my Political Director; Ben Johnson, who runs our One America office; Dave Barram at the General Services Administration; and maybe many more people. I know Fred Humphries is here, who now works for US West but once worked in my campaign. I'm glad that didn't disqualify him for employment in your company. [Laughter]

Most of what needs to be said has been said. I'd like to be very personal, if I might. I have just to the right of my desk in the Oval Office, right behind the commemorative pin that was issued for Nelson Mandela's 80th birthday, a picture of Ron Brown and me sharing a funny moment. We shared a lot of funny moments, and we're laughing. And sometimes I find myself almost talking to this picture. I confess that there are a lot of times when I just miss him terribly.

Yesterday we gave—Ernie Green is here—yesterday we gave a Congressional Gold Medal to the Little Rock Nine. And Ernie and I have been friends for more than 20 years. All the Little Rock Nine, because I was Governor of Arkansas, I've known for many years. And it was an incredibly emotional moment. And I was sitting up there on the little stage at the White House, with tears in my eyes. And one of the things I was thinking is, gosh, this is another thing I wish Ron were sitting here for. He ought to be here for this.

And I was thinking when I saw Mayor Dinkins out there, who was a great friend of Ron Brown, how we all got started in New

York in '92. You brought Nelson Mandela to meet me the first time. You remember that? And what great friends we all became. And I was thinking before I came over here tonight; I called the Speaker of the House and Senator Lott and pleaded with them—and I don't use that word lightly—to do whatever we could possibly do to pass the Africa trade bill and the Caribbean Basin initiative before this Congress goes home for Thanksgiving and Christmas. And that issue wouldn't even be on the agenda if it weren't for Ron Brown.

I was thinking about the incredible conversation I had when I talked Ron into being Secretary of Commerce. He thought it was a backwater for political appointees who wanted something else. [Laughter] And I said, "You don't understand." I said, "I made up my mind that I'm not going to give any of these political jobs to people who can't do them." And if you—one of the—I believe—let me just back up and say, I believe that when the history of this administration is written, one of the things even our critics will give us credit for is having not only a good economic policy but a good way of making economic policy.

And I discovered when I became President—we have Jim Harmon here, the head of the Export-Import Bank—that all these little orbits were out there. You had the Treasury Department here, and you had the Commerce Department there, and you had the Export-Import Bank and the Overseas Private Investment Corporation over there. You had all these things spread out. And so it was just like sort of a roll of the dice whether you had somebody who was really good and then whether that person ever got the President's ear.

And so we organized a National Economic Council. And Bob Rubin was the first leader of it, before he became Treasury Secretary, when Senator Bentsen was Treasury Secretary. And we put all these people together, including Secretary Herman's Labor Department, to make sure that working people were not cut out. And we all worked together. And Secretary Slater's Transportation Department was part of it, because that's a huge impact on our economy.

And the Commerce Department is this vast Department. And once Ron Brown got a hold of that empire, he found that he liked it right well. [Laughter] And he discovered that there were a lot of things he could do with it. And it was truly a thing of beauty, for those of us

who love public service and politics, to see Ron run the Commerce Department and to see it come alive and to see it reach out for America all around the world and to see it reach deep into America to minority business people who had been left behind and to see this great, sort of unifying vision and all this energy he had make the thing fly. It was an amazing thing to see.

And as Sol pointed out in his ungracious reminder of that basketball game in Los Angeles—[laughter]—we had a lot of fun, too. And so I really miss him in ways large and small, at the strangest times. I just do.

But tonight I come here, and I see these pictures, and I want to smile, not cry. Because if we all live to be 100, it's just a brief blink of the eye in the whole sweep of human history, and none of us knows whether we have tomorrow or not. And if we do, it's a gift. And most of us, or we wouldn't be here tonight in the first place, most of us, whatever happens to us from now on, we're going to go out of this world ahead.

And so I think the most important thing I can say to you tonight is that he'd be very pleased that we're here honoring his legacy by, number one, permitting this foundation to bring young people into politics because he thought it was good—politics and public service—and it is—and if it weren't good, we wouldn't still be here after over 220 years—and number two, because he believed in commerce, and he thought that economic growth and economic opportunity was something more than mere materialism.

The fact that we have the lowest unemployment rate in 30 years and the lowest welfare rolls in 32 years and the lowest crime rate in 25 years, those things are not unrelated one to the other. The fact that we are moving in the right direction on all fronts is, in part, the result of the expansion of economic opportunity to the lowest African-American poverty rates and unemployment rates ever recorded, the lowest Hispanic unemployment rate ever recorded, and the lowest Hispanic poverty rate in a quarter century. Those things are not unrelated.

He understood the dignity of work, the dignity of enterprise, the dignity of achievement, and the importance of giving everybody a chance at the brass ring. And those of us who have been left behind have tried to carry on that work in various ways.

I just want to say one thing here. Our leader, Senator Daschle, is here, our Democratic leader in the Senate. Not a thing I have done could have been done if he hadn't been with me every step of the way—not a thing.

So we honor young people and the work of Ron Brown and this foundation. And we honor this great company because most people in America don't work for the Government, and most of the economy is not the Government. And I'm very proud that in addition to having the longest peacetime expansion in history, we have the highest percentage of jobs created in the private sector, not the public sector, in the last 50 years of any economic expansion.

But in order to make it work, we have to have corporate leaders who either have the vision, just because they do, of a unified America, or have both the vision and the personal experiences that this great leader has shared with us tonight from his own life. And that's a good thing.

So I ask you to think just about three things before we all go home tonight. We have the most prosperous time in my lifetime and the only time in my lifetime we've ever had this level of prosperity and this level of confidence and no pressing domestic crisis or foreign threat to disturb our daily endeavors. So the question I have for you—this is one time when I miss Ron and his energy—is what are we going to do with this? Because we know from the ups and downs in our own lives that nothing lasts forever. Nothing bad lasts forever. Nothing good lasts forever. Nothing lasts forever. So we have this moment, the only time in my lifetime we've ever been like this. What are we going to do with it?

I have been saying to the American people, if you sit around and think about it, how many times had you had a moment like this in your personal life or your family life or your business life, where things were just rocking along great, and then something bad happened because you didn't make the most of the moment. Instead, you indulged yourself or you got distracted or diverted, or you thought you didn't really have to deal with these things that you knew were out there.

We know what's out there for us. We know the big challenges. We know the big opportunities. These children's lives have told us some of them tonight. We know we're going to double the number of people over 65 in the next 30

years, and we haven't made sure Social Security will take care of the whole baby boom generation. We know that Medicare is going to run out of money, and 75 percent of our seniors don't have prescription drugs.

We know we've got the biggest group of school children in history, and they're more diverse than ever before. And while we've opened the doors to college to all Americans now with the HOPE scholarship, the increased Pell grants, the deductibility of student loan interests, nobody thinks that every child in America is getting a world-class elementary and secondary education, and we know they need it.

You heard that very powerful presentation by Shayla about going to the computers after school because of what you did. We had a percent of our classrooms connected to the Internet 4 years ago. We have a member of the FCC here, Susan Ness; thank you for the E-rate which allows poor schools to afford to get into the Internet. And now we're up to 51 percent. We're going to try to get to 100 percent. But there are a bunch of these kids that will never get their schools connected because the schools are so old and decrepit, they cannot be wired.

In Mayor Dinkins' hometown, 40 percent of the schools are 70 years old or older. We have schools in New York City that are heated by coal in the winter, still. So we know these things.

We know we've got a big environmental challenge in global warming. We can deny it all we want to, but we've got the technology to grow economics without burning up the environment, and we're either going to do it or not.

So what I want to say to you is, this is a moment where we have to decide. And we need people of high energy and vision to remind us that we have to decide. You ought to go home tonight and ask yourself, what do you think the no fewer than 5, no more than 10 biggest challenges are our country will face in the next 30 years? I bet if we could all gather tomorrow night, there would be 80 percent congruence in our list. We know what the big opportunities and challenges are out there. The issue is, what are we going to do about it?

Are we going to just sort of rock along and say, "Boy, this is peachy-keen, and I'm glad?" Well, I'm not going to rock along. I've got 430-some days to be President, and I'm going to hit it every day I can. But I won't be President after that. But what I want to say to you is,

in the coming election season and in the coming years of work we have here ahead of us, and in your own work, you have to decide. You know, if you just stop and think, you know what the big challenges and the big opportunities for America are. This is the only time in my lifetime we've ever had the chance to build the future of our dreams without a pressing domestic crisis or a threat to our national security. And if you believe in what Ron Brown lived for, you will do that, and you won't blow the chance.

The second thing I'd like to say is—I want to say this out of respect particularly to what Beau said when he was up here talking about his people from Montana. We now have the chance, and maybe the only chance, in our lifetime to extend economic opportunity to the people in places that have been left behind. Yes, we've got the lowest unemployment rate and the lowest minority unemployment rate we've ever recorded. That's the good news. The bad news is you know as well as I do that there are people in places that have been totally left behind.

Alma, you talked about New York. You know, if you took away New York City and the suburban counties, and you only had upstate New York, it would rank 49th in job growth of all the States in the country. That's hard to believe. You don't think that about New York. We're talking about Syracuse, Rochester, Buffalo, Albany, places with great infrastructures of education and talented people but where a lot of the economy moved, and it's not been replenished—Hawaii, a place that we all think of as a place where we go for fun and everything is peachy-keen, the only State in the country that hasn't had economic growth in the last 2½ years because of the collapse of the Asian economies.

That's why I started this new markets initiative, to build on the employment zone program that Vice President Gore has so brilliantly run the last few years that's brought a lot of economic opportunity to discreet places in America. But what I want to do with this new markets initiative is, two things: I want to point up all these places in America that we ought to be investing in, and I want to give Americans the same incentives to invest in developing areas in America we give them to invest in developing areas in Latin America and Africa and Asia. I want you to invest overseas, but our first and biggest and best new markets are here at home.

You know, Senator Daschle and I were in South Dakota the other day, and we went to the Pine Ridge Reservation. And I was—a lot of the tour I made through the reservation I was escorted by this beautiful 17-year-old Native American girl, who was just as articulate and intelligent and very wise, I might add, because she had a very tough life. I mean, a very tough life. But I thought to myself, why shouldn't this child have the same opportunities that my daughter's had? And if she had them, what in the world could she do with them, not only for herself but for her people?

Do you know what the unemployment rate on the Pine Ridge Reservation is? Seventy-three percent. Now, the national unemployment rate is 4.1 percent. I think it's even lower in South Dakota. The female unemployment rate of the 4.1 percent is the lowest it's been in 46 years. But you still have these pockets.

And if Ron Brown were here, I know what he'd be telling you. He'd be saying, "Now, I want you to hustle up some investment for these areas, and we're going to try to get you a tax break, but you ought to do it whether you get one or not because it's a huge opportunity, in the inner cities, in Appalachia, in the Mississippi Delta, on the Native American reservations."

You would be amazed how much time we spend now with our economic team sitting around thinking, how can we keep this good ride going; how long can we push this expansion out? We know that technology gave us greater productivity than the economists know, and that's part of the reason for the expansion. We know we got 30 percent of our growth out of technology, another 30 percent out of exports. How long can it keep going?

All other economic expansions have ended in one or two ways. Things get so heated up that there's inflation; then you have to stop the inflation, and the price of breaking the inflation breaks the recovery. Or it just runs out of steam. This thing just is chugging along. How can we keep it going?

If you invest in these areas that have been left behind, you create new businesses, new jobs, and new consumers. And when you do that, you don't have any inflation because you've got new production and new consumption. This is a big deal.

The third thing I'd like to say—and I can't say it any more eloquently than Sol Trujillo already said—is—and I told the group next

door—if someone said to me, "You've got to go now. You've had a good time being President, but your time is up. And we'll give you one wish," and the proverbial genie showed up. But I didn't get three wishes. I just got one. [Laughter] I'd probably mess it up if I had three, you know. [Laughter] I got one. I would say, remember these children tonight, all three of them. Remember the powerful example of this great corporate executive and what he said about how he got his start and how many times he could have been stopped.

I would say the most important thing would be for us to genuinely build one America. Not just to tolerate one another, not just to avoid saying insensitive things, things that would embarrass you at a cocktail party or something, and on a more serious note, not even to eliminate all the hate crimes—although I dearly want to do that and I hope to pass the hate crimes legislation—but I mean an America where we looked at each other and we thought: Hey, look around this room; this is one great deal here; we're not tolerating each other; we're celebrating each other.

Do we have honest differences? I certainly hope so. It's the only way you ever learn anything. But we manage them instead of letting them drive us apart. And we actually believe that what enables us to tap the benefits of our diversity and have more fun in life is a shared understanding that our common humanity is the most important thing.

If you really strip away what everybody says about Ron Brown, everybody that really knows him just liked him because they thought he loved life. If you see somebody that loves life and loves people, it's hard to dislike them, because it's contagious.

And if I could just have my little one wish, I would say, if you look at the whole history of America, we kept on going because we kept on widening the circle of opportunity and deepening the meaning of freedom and moving closer toward one America.

When we started, we had all these guys that wrote this Constitution say, "We're all created equal, and God made it so. But, oh, by the way, we've got slavery, and it's unthinkable that women could vote, and we're not even going to let white guys vote unless they own land." We've come a long way since then, right? I mean, we started—even I couldn't have voted; my people wouldn't have been landowners.

We'd have been hired help. So we've come a long way.

But if you look around the world today, if you look at these horrible hate crimes in America, and you look around the world today, from Kosovo and Bosnia to Rwanda to the Middle East to Northern Ireland, the whole world is still bedeviled in this high technology age by the most primitive problem of human society: We're still kind of scared of one another. We don't deal with people who are different from us as well as we should. And we might rock along doing all right for years and then turn on a dime. That's what happened in Rwanda. Just turn on a dime.

So I say to you, I want you to think about this. When you go home tonight I want you to think about what it would be like in 20 years to hear Patrick standing where Senator Daschle is. I want you to think about what it would be like if Shayla headed a program that gave every single child who didn't have a computer in his or her home—every single one in the country—access to the Internet, so there was no digital divide.

I want you to think about what it would be like if Beau Mitchell were the elected president of his tribe, and they celebrated the first time in American history that all the Native Americans had unemployment rates as low as the country and incomes as high. Just think about that. And think about how much better off all

the rest of us would be, just by going along for the ride and doing our part.

I'm telling you it's the most important thing. And it's the hardest thing in life. And the reason we all felt good seeing these young people up here talking tonight is they represented our better selves and our hopes for tomorrow.

If you want to do something to honor Ron Brown, number one, keep supporting this foundation because they'll bring those kids up, and they'll give them a chance. Number two, keep supporting companies like US West because they can really change the face of the future. And number three, do whatever you can as citizens to make sure we do not squander the chance of a lifetime to build a future of our dreams.

Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10 p.m. in the Dumbarton Room at the Four Seasons Hotel. In his remarks, he referred to Alma Arrington Brown, widow of Ron Brown, and their children, Michael Brown, Tracey Brown, and Ron Brown; Solomon D. Trujillo, chairman, president and chief executive officer, and Frederick S. Humphries, Jr., executive director of public policy, US West; Ernest Green, one of the Little Rock Nine; former Mayor David Dinkins of New York City; former Treasury Secretary Robert Rubin; and dinner speakers Patrick Lespinasse, Shayla Barnes, and Beau Mitchell.

Remarks at a Veterans Day Ceremony in Arlington, Virginia *November 11, 1999*

Thank you very much, Secretary West, for your eloquent remarks and your leadership and your many years of devotion to our country. Commander Smart, thank you for your leadership this year. Chaplain Cooke, Lee Thornton, thank you for always being here for our veterans.

The leaders of our veterans' organizations; Members of Congress here; Deputy Secretary Gober and members of the Cabinet; General Ralston, members of the Joint Chiefs; General Davis and other Medal of Honor recipients. To the former POW's, the families of those still

missing in action, to our veterans and their families.

Let me begin by offering a special word of appreciation to the Army Band and Chorus for their magnificent music today and for making us feel so important. And I want to say a special welcome today to a person you may have read about in the morning papers. Captain Earl Fox is the Senior Medical Officer at the Coast Guard Personnel Command here in Washington. He also happens to be the last World War II veteran still on active military duty. Now, next week he will retire at the tender young age of 80. I think he has earned his retirement.