

States—Refused”—and step up our policy of destroying imported food that poses a serious threat to people’s health.

Food safety is part of our citizens’ basic contract with the Government. Any food that fails to meet clear and strict standards for safety should not make it to the marketplace; it’s just that simple. With the actions we’re taking today, our families can have the peace of mind they deserve every holiday season, and, indeed, every day of the year.

Thanks for listening.

NOTE: The address was recorded at 6:35 p.m. on December 10 in classroom 57 at the Earle Senior High School for broadcast at 10:06 a.m. on December 11. The transcript was made available by the Office of the Press Secretary on December 10 but was embargoed for release until the broadcast.

Remarks to the Florida State Democratic Convention in Orlando, Florida

December 11, 1999

Thank you very much. Thank you. Now, folks, you all sit down now. Can you sit down? I’m a little hoarse, so I can’t shout you down, and you won’t be able to hear unless you sit down and relax here.

First of all, I want to thank my good friend Charlie Whitehead for inviting me here and for being willing to take the reins of this party again. I came here in 1981, 1983, 1987, 1991; only Arkansas have I visited the Democratic Convention more than I have in the State of Florida, and I thank you very much.

I want to thank Representatives Hastings, Brown, Meeks; former Congressman Smith; the wonderful Lieutenant Governor of Maryland and I think the finest Lieutenant Governor in the United States, Kathleen Kennedy Townsend, who spoke to you earlier today. And I want to say how proud I am that a person who has been a friend of mine a long time is going to be your next United States Senator, Bill Nelson. And Grace Nelson, thank you very much for your interest.

I also asked if Rhea Chiles was still here. It was almost exactly a year ago that Lawton Chiles passed away, and like his family and his friends and his beloved Floridians, I want you to know I still miss him. He was my friend. He was my mentor. He was my ally. His legacy is alive and well in the good things he did in Florida and the good things that we’re doing in the United States. And I’m honored to be here.

Now, let me tell you, I know you probably noticed we’re about to get into an election sea-

son here—[laughter]—and you may have noticed that I can’t run for anything this year. [Laughter] So I want to tell you how come I came down here.

First of all, it was almost 8 years ago exactly when the Democratic Convention of Florida in December of 1991 put my campaign on the map. And I came to say thank you. With your help, when I was running fifth in the polls nationally, we won a decisive victory over a majority in the straw poll here in 1991. It was the first evidence that Democrats were ready to take America in a new direction. And I got to thinking about that last night and this morning. You were very wonderful to me, but I also want you to know you were a hard sell. [Laughter]

I don’t know how many times I’ve talked to Jeff Eller and Craig Smith, who were among those who worked this convention for me, and Hillary and I remember how dog-tired we were when we got back to our hotel room after the speech, and then we had to go and visit all these caucuses. We must have gone to a dozen caucuses. And we were asked the most detailed questions over the most wide array of issues, and I just hope you’re putting this crowd this year through this. That’s all I want to say. [Laughter] It was unbelievable.

But I must say, you know, I had been coming here—I remember when then-Governor, now Senator Bob Graham invited me in ’81 and ’83 and ’87—I loved this convention, and I loved that experience in ’91. I love your energy, your intensity, your commitment, your caring about the issues and the future of this State and this

Nation. And if you can keep this energy—don't forget, we won in '92, and in '96 we won again, and in '96 we carried Florida for the first time in 20 years—you can win again here, and you can do it.

Every time I try to take a walk down memory lane, some of the political press says, "Oh, well, he's thinking about his term being over." Well, I'm not, either. I've got 14 months left, and I'm going to give it to them every day until I go. But since this is an election year, I think it's worth taking a little walk down memory lane.

In the 12 years before Al Gore and I took office, irresponsible policies in Washington piled up deficit after deficit. We quadrupled the national debt in 12 years. We had high interest rates, high unemployment, stagnant wages, growing inequality. By 1991, when I entered the race for President, we had economic distress, social decline, political division, and government was entirely discredited. And don't let anybody forget it.

Now, what a difference 7 years of working for opportunity, responsibility, and community with all Americans make. We are ending the century on a high note. And you can take great pride in it because you had a not insignificant amount to do with it.

Just last week we crossed a truly remarkable threshold: 20 million new jobs since January 1993. And more and more, they're good-paying jobs on which you can support a family, buy a home, take a vacation, save for college and retirement.

So I just want to take a minute here, and I'm going to give you a capsule of the last 7 years. I want you to know it; I want you to take pride in it, because you were a part of it; and I want you to share it with your fellow citizens. The Republicans can have all the rhetoric they want. Let people choose between their rhetoric and our record.

Number one, economically, we have the longest peacetime expansion in our history. In February it will be the longest economic expansion in the history of our country, including that in World War II. We have a 30-year low in unemployment, a 32-year low in welfare, a 20-year low in poverty rates. We have the highest homeownership ever, the largest surplus ever, the first back-to-back budget surpluses in 42 years, with the smallest Federal Government in 37 years.

There's more. We have the lowest Hispanic and African-American unemployment rates ever

recorded, the lowest Hispanic poverty rates in 25 years, the lowest African-American poverty rates ever recorded, the highest rate of small business starts in history, the highest rate of minority business ownership in history, the lowest female poverty—unemployment rate in 40 years, the lowest single parent household poverty in 46 years. We're going forward together.

Now, I might say—I was going to save this for later in my speech, but I think we ought to insert it here—and we've done it with the most diverse administration in history, the most diverse appointments to the judgeships, to the Cabinet, to the administration. And I think that the record, not me, the record America has established in the last 7 years proves that Mr. Connerly is wrong in wanting to end affirmative action.

Look, it's interesting, you know, affirmative action actually began under a Republican administration, back when both parties were really committed to civil rights. And like any system that went on for years unexamined, there were some problems with it and it needed to be fixed. And we worked very, very hard on a "mend it, don't end it" policy that I'm proud of. But you cannot look at the record the American people have established in the last 7 years—where we made an effort to include everybody, and we made an effort to make sure our economic policies benefit everybody, our political policies benefited everybody, our social policies benefited everybody—and make a serious case that we'd be better off if we were growing more divided by walking away from one of the tools that has helped to bring us together as a nation. Don't give up on affirmative action, and go out there and defend it.

Wait a minute. We're not done with the record yet. You all just relax. [Laughter] I want you to remember this. I'll send a copy of this to Mr. Whitehead, and he can send it out. We have—listen to this—we have the lowest crime rate in 25 years; 470,000 felons, fugitives, and stalkers have not been able to get a handgun because of the Brady bill. All the things the NRA—let me tell you—but the NRA was wrong. There's not a hunter in Florida that's missed a day of the hunting season because of the Brady bill, but there are a lot of little kids in the inner city alive because of the Brady bill today. It was the right thing to do.

Wait a minute. Over 20 million people have taken advantage of the family and medical leave

law, a bill which was vetoed by my predecessor. And it hasn't hurt the economy. Over 10 million people benefited from the minimum wage increase. It hasn't hurt the economy. Over 7 million people right now have claimed their HOPE scholarship tax cut to pay for community college or the first 2 years of college so that we can open the doors of college to everyone in the United States of America.

Over 2 million more kids have been insured since the Balanced Budget Act passed in 1997 under the Child Health Insurance Partnership between States and the Federal Government—2 million more kids. Over 90 percent of our children are immunized against serious childhood diseases for the first time in the history of the United States. Over 150,000 young people have served their communities in Florida and throughout the country in AmeriCorps, our national community service program. It took the Peace Corps 25 years to get the number of volunteers we've achieved in 5 years in AmeriCorps.

Now, these are just some of the facts. Let's talk about the environment. The air is cleaner. The water's cleaner. The food is safer. We have the lowest production of waste materials in our country in 20 years, and 20 years ago we had 50 million fewer people. We've cleaned up 3 times as many toxic waste dumps as the Republicans did in the 12 years before we took office—3 times as many. And we have protected more land, from the Florida Everglades to the California redwoods to the 40 million roadless acres in the national forests, more land than any administration in the history of this country except those of Franklin and Theodore Roosevelt.

Along the way, we made a contribution to peace and humanity and democracy in Northern Ireland, in the Middle East, in Bosnia, in Kosovo, in Haiti. We expanded trade with Latin America. We're trying to do so with the Caribbean. We're trying to be a good neighbor to our friends in the Caribbean and to our friends in Africa.

We have reached out to reduce the nuclear threat, from Russia to North Korea; to establish a decent relationship with China, which is important to our future. And the world is a safer, stronger place than it was 7 years ago.

Now, I say this to you to say not how great we were, but that we had good ideas, focused on giving the American people the conditions

and the tools to make the most of their own lives; focused on creating opportunity for every responsible citizen; focusing on creating a community of all people in this country who are willing to work hard and be good citizens. And the American people did it. And I am very grateful. Hillary is very grateful. We are all very grateful.

But I want to say to you, I could not have done it, not any of it, without the Democrats in the Congress. And we need more of them, not fewer of them. Send Bill Nelson up there.

And I want you to know that it would not have happened without the Vice President. Again, I want you to listen to this, and you can see, I'm a little hoarse, so I can't—this is from the heart. Now, these are facts. From his vote to break the tie on the '93 budget—which is what gave us the ability to balance the budget, got interest rates down, got the economy going—to his vote to break the tie on the Senate's consideration of commonsense gun legislation to close the loophole in the Brady bill so we could also cover the gun shows—something you voted to do in Florida—from leading our efforts to connect every classroom to the Internet—let me tell you what we've done: 5 years ago, when Al Gore and I started working on this and I asked him to take it on, only 4 percent of the classrooms in the country were connected, and they were in 14 percent of the schools—5 years ago; today, over 50 percent of the classrooms are connected to the Internet in over 80 percent of the schools; I think he's done a good job in helping this to happen—from running our empowerment zone program to bring economic opportunity to poor areas to supporting our policies and developing so many of our policies to strengthen the American family to leading our reinventing Government effort—which has given us, I will say again, the smallest Federal Government in 27 years with a higher level of support for the American people—to supporting every tough decision I have had to make as President, from guns and tobacco to Bosnia and Kosovo, I can tell you that in the history of the country, he is the most effective and influential Vice President who has ever served.

He's got a lot of good ideas for the future, too, and now I want to talk about that. I just signed the first budget of the 21st century. Charlie said we had a do-nothing Congress. Well, that's not quite true. They tried to do

something; they tried to pass a tax cut so big that it would have kept us from ever paying down the debt and fixing Social Security and contributing to our children's education. And I vetoed that, and the Democrats stayed with me. That was a major achievement of the last Congress.

And then, when they got ready to go home, that's when the President and the Democrats acquired a little influence in the debate. So when we came out of the budget, even this year, we had a continuing commitment to 100,000 teachers, to 50,000 more police, to 60,000 housing vouchers to help poor people move from welfare to work. We doubled the funds for after-school programs. We got the first money the Federal Government has ever appropriated for States to turn around or shut down failing schools, so that we can help all our kids get a good education and still support the public schools and public school reform.

We had major advances on the environment, and we beat back major assaults on the environment. And we've paid our United Nations dues and agreed to help alleviate the debt of the poorest countries in the world. And we fixed some of the too-severe cuts in the Medicare law from the 1997 balanced budget, restoring funding to hospitals, to nursing homes, to other medical providers, needed to help the 29 million elderly and disabled Medicare beneficiaries.

We also passed a landmark bill I am immensely proud of, which allows people with disabilities to keep their Medicaid if they move into the work force so people can go to work, because they can't get private insurance.

Now, there's a lot of things we didn't do, and I'm going to be working to get it done. We didn't pass the Patients' Bill of Rights, and we should. It's wrong; everybody should be guaranteed quality care. We didn't raise the minimum wage again, and we should. We didn't close the gun show loophole and require child trigger locks, and we should. We didn't pass the hate crimes legislation or the employment nondiscrimination act, and I believe we should. We didn't pass my new markets initiative, which would give Americans the same tax incentives and loan guarantees to invest in poor areas in America they get to invest in poor areas in Latin America or Asia or Africa, and I think they should.

I hope that they will agree to let China join the WTO and give them normal trading status.

Why? Because you already know we've got a big trade deficit with China. This bill, this agreement I made gives more options for American farmers, American manufacturers, American investors. All they get out of it—and it's not insignificant—they get to be in the World Trade Organization, where we'll all have to live by the same rules. But we get dramatically greater access to their markets. It means big, big jobs and incomes for farmers and workers in America. And I hope it will pass.

Most importantly, I hope we will find a way next year to protect Social Security and Medicare in the face of the baby boomers' retirement. Now, I want to talk a little more about that. And this is what I want to tell you about the election. We've got a great record. We—you and me, all of us—we've got good ideas. We ought to be winning every poll by 20, 25 points in every race. Why aren't we? Well, they always have more money than we do. And they've been talking to a certain sector of our electorate for so long and telling them how terrible we are, some people probably believe it and forget to think before they vote. [Laughter]

But you can change that. So I just want to leave you with this. This I want to be my gift to you. I will do everything I can for the next 14 months, but you have to be good citizens in this election season. And the future of America is riding now on how the Congress' races and the Governors' races and the President's races and these other things come out.

Let me begin with a story. Over Thanksgiving, I got my whole family, my extended family, I gathered them up and took them to Camp David. Then after we stuffed ourselves on Thanksgiving, we had some more of our friends come up, and they had some little kids, too, to play with my two little nephews. And on the Saturday after Thanksgiving, this beautiful little 6-year-old girl looked up at me, and she said, "Now, Mr. President, how old are you anyway?" [Laughter] So I said, "Well, I'm 53." And she said, "That's a lot. That's a lot." [Laughter] So I said, "Yes, it is a lot."

And let me tell you, from the perspective of those years, in my lifetime, in my whole lifetime there has never been a time when America had this much prosperity, this much social progress, this much national confidence, with the absence of a crisis at home or a threat abroad.

Now, what does that mean? [*Applause*] Wait, wait, wait, wait. We're done with the record. [*Laughter*] I want you to think about this. What that means is that for the first time in my lifetime, on the edge of this new millennium, we actually have a chance to shape the future of our dreams for our children in a way no previous group of Americans in our whole lifetime has had. And that imposes on us a terrific responsibility. You know, anybody can concentrate when their backs are against the wall. The great British essayist Samuel Johnson said, "Nothing so concentrates the mind as the prospect of one's own destruction." Your back's against the wall; you can focus.

When things are rocking along, hunky-dory, it's easy to get distracted. I was so proud of the American people for sticking with me when I vetoed that tax cut. I said, you know, you can understand it if people said, "Hey, man, we've been working hard out here. The eighties were tough; the nineties were tough. Cut us some slack, here." But they said, "Uh-uh, no; we don't want to go back to those old bad days. We'll stay on the path we're on." That was good.

So I ask you—here's what will determine whether we win this election or not, from the White House to the Senate to all the other elections. What will determine whether we win is, what is it about? And if it is about our common responsibility as a people to meet the big challenges of the 21st century, because we ought to and because we can now, for the first time in our lifetimes, then we will win.

What are they? We've got to deal with the aging of America. The number of people over 65 will double in 30 years. I hope to be one of them. [*Laughter*] It is unconscionable that the baby boom generation will walk away again from the opportunity to take Social Security out beyond the life expectancy of the baby boomers and to push the life of Medicare out there and to add a prescription drug benefit for the people who cannot afford their medicine today.

Second, you look around Florida; we've got the largest and most diverse student population in our history. We cannot walk away from our obligation to give all of these children a world-class education. We ought to pass my initiative to help people build or repair thousands of schools. We ought to keep on going until we connect them all to the Internet. We ought to give every child access to an after-school pro-

gram. We ought to make sure the teachers are certified and well-trained and well-compensated. We owe that to these kids. Nothing is more important.

Third, we ought to do more to help people balance work and family: more child care; insure all the kids with health insurance; equal pay for equal work for women. We ought to do that.

Fourth, we ought to make sure that we can grow the economy and still improve the environment. The world is in a grip, still, of a very bad idea that's wrong. All over the world, including in Washington, DC, people believe you can't get rich unless you put more coal and oil into furnaces or machines and burn them and pollute the atmosphere. It's not true anymore. It's not true anymore.

The farmers in Florida, I predict to you, within 15 years, will be saving all their waste products for biomass fuel. You'll be able to use a gallon of gasoline to make 8 or 10 gallons of biomass fuel with no greenhouse gas emissions. When that happens, the whole future of that will change. You can buy windows right now that let in 5 times as much light and keep out 5 times as much heat and cold.

We have undertaken to green the White House, and we have saved the equivalent of almost 700 cars on the highway by energy conservation at the White House. And it's working just fine. We're all warm in the winter and cool in the summer. It's a big deal. It will be a bigger deal to the future; you mark my words. If you don't want the Everglades to flood because of global warming, we'd better deal now with this. And we can do it.

Let me just mention one or two other things. We've got the crime rate down to a 25-year low, good; murder rate down to a 31-year low, good. Does anybody think America is as safe as it ought to be? No, of course not. Now, when I took office, most people didn't believe you could drive the crime rate down. We all thought the crime rate just went in one direction, up. So now we know it can be brought down.

So I say to you, the reason I fight hard for this, these commonsense gun measures and the 50,000 more police in the high-crime areas and more programs to keep kids out of trouble in the first place is I don't think it's good enough to say we've had crime go down 7 years. I think the Democrats ought to say, okay, now

we know we can do it; we have a new goal. We want America to be the safest big country in the entire world, and we're going to keep working until we do it.

Now, I want to say something about the economy. I think it is terribly important that we keep our party front and center on keeping this economy going. How are we going to keep it going? Number one is, don't forget what brought us to the dance. We need to keep paying down this debt. You know that we can be out of debt in 15 years if you stay on my budget path. For the first time since 1835 America will be debt-free. And we ought to do it.

Second, we've got to keep working within our party, within our country—with labor, environmentalists, and businesspeople—until we finally get it right on trade because, I am telling you, the world is better off today because there is 50 years of increasing trade. We are only 4 percent of the world's people; we've got 22 percent of the world's income. It just stands to reason that you can't hold that unless you sell something to the other 96 percent.

Furthermore, let me say something about imports. They are unpopular in general and popular in particular. We don't like imports in general, but we all have them: we wear them; we drive them, you know. [Laughter] What do they do for you? They keep inflation down with competition. That's why we've got the longest peacetime expansion in our history, because inflation didn't destroy it. So we've got to keep working until we get this right.

The third thing we've got to do—and this is something I feel so strongly about—if we can't bring economic opportunity to the poor areas of America that have not participated in this recovery now, we will never get around to doing it, never—to Appalachia, to the Mississippi Delta, to the poor rural areas of America, to the inner cities, to the Native American reservations. We've got to do it.

And with economic opportunity we also have to keep our focus on doing everything we can at home and around the world to get people together, to get people over these conflicts they have over race and ethnicity and religion and sexual orientation. It's crazy.

Let me just ask you to think about this. Don't you think it's interesting that whenever you read something about the new millennium, they talk about the wonders of the human computer, the wonders of the human genome? Hillary had

some people at the White House the other night, one of the guys that founded the Internet and one of the principal scientists working on the human gene. And the Internet guy actually sent the first E-mail 18 years ago, because he had a profoundly deaf wife, and he wanted to talk to her at work, and she couldn't take hearing aids. And he said, "The intersection of the study of the gene and the study of computers means we can do things that we never could do before." And he had his wife stand up, and she started speaking, and because she has a minor little computer chip stuck way down in her ear, she can hear for the first time in 50 years.

Now, last year we transplanted nerves from the legs to the spine of a laboratory animal for the first time and got movement in the lower legs. Some people think we'll be able to take a picture of spinal cord injuries and just design a computer chip to go in and replace the electronic impulses that the spine used to provide. This is the kind of stuff we're talking about.

In a couple of years, young mothers will come home from the hospital with their babies, and they'll have a little genetic map. And it will be a little scary. It will say, you know, your daughter has one of these genes that are predictors for breast cancer. That's the bad news. The good news is you know it now, and here are 10 things you can do that will cut her risk by 80 percent. A lot of my friends who are experts in the field really believe that, sometime early in the next century, American newborns will have a life expectancy of nearly 100 years.

Now, a lot of my other friends in the space program think we'll find out what's in the black holes in the universe. A lot of other people believe we'll continue to fight against war because we'll be more connected to the Internet around the world.

Let me ask you something. Don't you think it's interesting that in this most modern of times, the biggest problem in the world today is the oldest problem of human society: We don't trust people who are different from us. We fear them. It's easy to go from fear to dislike, from dislike to hatred, from hatred to dehumanization, and then to violence.

There was a picture yesterday morning in one of the big newspapers of a young gay soldier that was beaten to death with a baseball bat and, right next to him, the young soldier that

beat him to death—one 21, one 18. I was looking at these two kids thinking, you know, they're young enough that they could be my children. And both these young men put on the uniform of our country, and I could have sent them someplace to die. They both swore to go wherever I told them to go and do whatever I told them to do. And I was aching for the young man who had died and for the young man whose life is now destroyed, who wasn't born hating that way; somebody had to teach him to do that.

And so I say to you, you want to know what makes us different? The best politics in 2000 is doing right by the big challenges of the country. If people believe the election is about who's got the best record and who's got the best vision for the big challenges, lifting us up and pulling us together, listen, our crowd's going to do fine.

If we talk about the aging of America and Social Security and Medicare, if we talk about the education of our children, if we talk about growing our economy and helping our agricultural and manufacturing sectors while improving the environment, if we talk about balancing work and family, if we talk about bringing economic opportunity to poor people and getting this country out of debt for the first time since 1835, and if we talk about the most important thing of all, which is manifested in the hate crimes in America and in the continuing conflicts from the Balkans to the Middle East, and thank God, in the peace agreement in Northern Ireland, and we hope there will be one between Israel and Syria soon, because they're coming to meet next week—people have to find a way not just to tolerate but to celebrate their differences, and to be secure in doing it because they believe, down to the core of their being,

that what we have in common is even more important. We've got to let a lot of this stuff go. Our party can take the lead in doing that.

So go out there and talk to people about what's happened in this country in the last 7 years. Even more important, go out there and say, "Do you really believe in our lifetime we've ever been in this kind of shape before? And if you don't, what are we going to do with it?" Go up to total strangers on the street and say, "You're a citizen; what do you think we ought to do with this time? I think we ought to make the most of it." And ask them about the aging of America. Ask them about the children of America. Ask them about their parents struggling to balance work and family. Ask them about the economy and the environment. Ask them about bringing economic opportunity to poor places. And ask them about building one America. You make this election season about that, and we'll have another celebration next year.

Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:10 a.m. in the Empire Room at the Wyndham Palace Resort. In his remarks, he referred to Charles A. Whitehead, chairman, Florida State Democratic Party; Senatorial candidate Bill Nelson and his wife, Grace; Rhea Chiles, widow of former Gov. Lawton Chiles of Florida; Jeffrey L. Eller, former Deputy Assistant to the President and Director of Media Affairs; Craig T. Smith, former Assistant to the President and Director of Political Affairs; Ward Connerly, chairman, California civil rights initiative; Vinton G. Cerf, senior vice president of Internet architecture and technology, MCI WorldCom, and his wife, Sigrid; and Eric Lander, director, Whitehead Institute/MIT Center for Genome Research.

Statement on Turkey's European Union Candidacy *December 11, 1999*

It is with great pleasure that I welcome the European Union's offer on Friday to Turkey and Turkey's acceptance of EU candidate status. The United States has long supported Turkey's bid to join the EU, in the belief that this would have lasting benefits not only for Turkey but also for all EU members and the United States.

On Friday the EU and Turkey took a big step toward bringing that goal to fruition.

I would like to congratulate Turkish Prime Minister Ecevit for his government's decision to accept the EU offer. Under Mr. Ecevit, Turkey has launched an impressive array of political, economic, human rights, and other reforms that