

I'm not a genie, you don't get three wishes. I'll just give you one," I would wish for us to be one America, genuinely one America, because we've got hundreds of stories in this room that illustrate there is nothing that we cannot achieve if we're given a chance, a fair chance, and if we understand that everybody matters, everybody has got a role to play, and we all do better when we help each other. It's a simple little formula in the digital age, but it will carry us right where we need to go. And you can make sure it happens.

Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:20 p.m. at the Capitol Hilton. In his remarks, he referred to former Representative Norman Y. Mineta, chairman, Asian Pacific American Institute for Congressional Studies; Virgin Islands Delegate Donna M.C. Christensen; and Dolly M. Gee, nominee for U.S. District Judge for the Central District of California. Executive Order 13125 of June 7, 1999, on increasing participation of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders in Federal programs was published in the *Federal Register* at 64 FR 31105.

Remarks at the Sons of Italy Foundation Dinner May 25, 2000

Well, thank you for the warm welcome. I am delighted to be here. I'm sorry to be late. I got here in time to see Mario Andretti's film, or at least to hear it. And I want to begin by congratulating Mario Andretti and Connie Stevens on their award and congratulating you on honoring them.

I was, today—the reason I had to be a little late tonight is, I'd been forced to go to Rhode Island; I had to go to a memorial service today for a friend of mine. And then when I came back, I stopped by the Asian-Pacific American dinner tonight. And I brought Mary Beth Cahill, my Director of Public Liaison. Now, she's Irish. I'm Irish. We went to the Asian-Pacific dinner, and then we came to the Sons of Italy dinner. Is this a great country, or what? *[Laughter]*

I want to thank all the Members of Congress who are here: Michael Capuano, Rosa DeLauro, Peter DeFazio, Nick Lampson, Dave Weldon. And I know John LaFalce was here, and since he's from New York, I think I'll mention him anyway. *[Laughter]*

I want to—I see Ambassador Salleso back there. Thank you, sir, for representing your country so well. And our U.S. Ambassador to Hungary has come all the way back, Peter Tufo, thank you. Thank you, Paul Polo. Thank you, Phil Piccigallo. Thank you, Phil Boncore. And I'd also like to recognize one of my heroes, since I'm a baseball nut, Tommy Lasorda, and Vic Damone. And Vince Panvini, the Sheet Metal Workers' president, thank you.

You know, I do a lot of these dinners. And I never come so late, but normally by this hour, people are beginning to flag. But you look pretty lively to me tonight. *[Laughter]* And I don't think it's me; I think, the espresso, maybe. *[Laughter]*

I am going to follow tonight the admonition of one of the greatest of all Italians, Cicero, who was a pretty fair speaker. He said this: "Brevity is the best recommendation of a speech." So I agree with that, except when it comes to the State of the Union. *[Laughter]* And Cicero never had to give one of those, so I forgive him.

Let me begin by saying that obviously this is the last one of these dinners I will attend as President. Many of you have helped me and the Vice President and our administration family over 7½ years, especially when it comes to advancing the cause of education. I thank you for what you do for the young people every year, and I hope to meet your young honorees tonight, which you've given the scholarships to. And I thank you very much for what you've done for us over these last 7½ years.

I'd also like to say how profoundly indebted I am to the host of Italian-Americans who have served in this administration: today, my Chief of Staff is John Podesta, the second Italian-American chief of staff I have had; my Deputy Chief of Staff, Steve Ricchetti; the Counselor to the Chief of Staff, Karen Tramontano; my Director of Communications, Loretta Ucelli; my

Deputy Press Secretary, Jennifer Palmieri; and that's just the beginning. I used to joke with them that someday, someone would file an affirmative action suit against me for having too many Italians in the administration. [Laughter] But I'm very glad also to have Secretary Andrew Cuomo, who's done a terrific job, and I want to thank him.

I want to also thank the Italian-American community for the contributions that so many millions have made to the progress of America these last 7½ years, to the economic progress, the social progress, bringing the values of immigrants, of hard work, faith, and family, to the forefront of America and bringing us together.

And I want to make basically just two points, very briefly, that I think are consistent with what the Sons of Italy have done for 90 years now and more. First of all, you may have noticed that this is an election year. It's the first time in 26 years I haven't been on the ballot, so I haven't paid much attention to it—[laughter]—but I'm told that this is an election year. Most of the time, I'm okay about not being on the ballot.

But what I want to say to you is this: I've done everything I know to do to help our country deal with the challenges that have faced us at the end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st. We are now in a once-in-a-lifetime position, in terms of the strength of our economy, in terms of the strengthening of our social fabric, in terms of our security position in the world, and I believe the great question in this millennial year is, what are we going to do with this good fortune?

And those of you, at least in this audience, who are over 30 can all remember at least one time in your lives when you made a mistake—a personal mistake or a professional or a business mistake or, if you're in politics, a political mistake—not because things were going so poorly but because things were going so well you thought there were no consequences to a lapse in judgment, to taking the immediate path rather than the long view.

The whole history of Italian-Americans is the history of people who overcame obstacles, strengthened their families, made sacrifices today for the benefit of tomorrow. And what I hope and pray for Americans, without regard to whether they're Democrats or Republicans or independents, is that we will take advantage of this precious opportunity. We have to ask

ourselves, what are we going to do with this good fortune to build the future of our dreams for our children and our grandchildren? How are we going to meet the big challenges still out there? What about the people in places who have been left behind by this prosperity?

A couple of days ago we had what is, to me, one of my most moving days as President, when we had a large number of Members of Congress, including a couple who are in this room tonight, join the Speaker of the House and me to announce that we had reached a bipartisan agreement that I hope will pass the House and the Senate unanimously to give investors, like some of you in this room, the same tax incentives and other incentives to invest in poor neighborhoods in urban and rural America and our Native American reservations we give you to invest in poor areas overseas and around the world. That's a big issue.

What are we going to do to make sure all of our children have world-class educations and they can all go on to college? What are we going to do to reward work and help people balance work and family, the most important question many people face?

How will we manage the aging of America? What's going to happen to Social Security? What's going to happen to Medicare? What about the families that are taking care of their parents in long-term care? How are they going to deal with that?

The average life expectancy of anybody that lives to be 65 today in America is 82, and it will soon be a lot higher. When we get the full decoding of the human genome sometime later this year, it will spark the most amazing revolution in the biological sciences we have ever seen. And I wouldn't be surprised if there are young people in this audience today who will have children over the next 20 years who literally will be able to look forward to a life expectancy of about 100 years.

Now, that is a high-class problem. But it means we have to do more to prepare the way. We've got to give seniors prescription drugs so they can live healthier and better as well as longer. We've got to deal with this. If a family's going to take care of a loved one, an elderly or disabled loved one, we've got to help them do that. They ought to have some sort of tax break to do that.

I think these things are very important. But they're big questions, and they don't have any simple partisan answers. They're people issues.

How are we going to deal with the new security challenges from terrorists and rogue states and narcotraffickers? Someone told me the Ambassador from Colombia is here tonight. The next big national security challenge we have is getting the Congress to pass America's share of helping to save the oldest democracy in Latin America, in Colombia, and I hope all of you will support that. We have got to prove that a free system of free people can defeat narcotraffickers and civil war and terrorists. We've got to prove that.

But to me, the most important thing of all is, as we become more and more a nation of immigrants, how shall we remain one America? How will we celebrate our diversity? I don't believe in tolerating difference; I think it should be celebrated and enjoyed. This is a more interesting country, don't you think—that it's growing more diverse?

You know, when I was over at the Asian dinner tonight, there are people from at least 25 different national groups, speaking over 75 different native languages, from hundreds of different ethnic groups, just in the Asian-American community alone. Across the river here, in Alexandria, there is one school district that has children in it whose parents speak over 180 languages as their first language.

Now, in a global economy and an increasingly global society, this is a godsend. But we don't have time anymore, or the luxury, for people to endure some of the prejudice and discrimination that the Italians and the Irish went through when they came here; that the Japanese felt when they were put in the internment camps in World War II; that we still see in the hate crimes around this country.

So I hope you will help us to support the hate crimes legislation, the "Employment Non-Discrimination Act," and even more important,

genuine efforts in every community and every school to expose our children to all the differences that make up America today, to let them appreciate them and respect them and celebrate them and recognize that the only way we're ever going to hold our ship of state together is to find that incredible balance between loving our ethnic diversity and understanding that our common humanity is even more important.

It's probably too late in the evening for such heavy stuff, but this is my last shot, and I thought I'd take it. [*Laughter*]

Again let me say, I thank you. I've had a wonderful time. The country's in good shape. You have to decide what to do with it.

You want to be able to tell your children and your grandchildren that when the century turned and when we started a new millennium, America was not just in good shape but you made the most of it, that we were a good friend and a good neighbor to the rest of the world and that we built a new future for all our people. That's what you want to be able to say.

And so whatever your political background, whatever your predisposition, be Italian this election year. Think about family. Think about work. Think about the future. Think about your grandchildren. And give it all you've got.

Thank you, and God bless you all.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:20 p.m. in the Great Hall at the National Building Museum. In his remarks, he referred to former professional race car driver Mario Andretti; entertainers Connie Stevens and Vic Damone; Ferdinando Salleo, Italian Ambassador to the United States; Paul S. Polo, president, Sons of Italy Foundation; Philip R. Piccigallo, national executive director, and Philip R. Boncore, national first vice president, Order Sons of Italy in America; former Los Angeles Dodgers manager Tommy Lasorda; and Luis Alberto Moreno, Colombian Ambassador to the United States.