

June 10 / Administration of William J. Clinton, 2000

he meant it when he said he had made a strategic choice for peace. I regret that that peace was not achieved in his lifetime, and I hope that it can still be achieved, in no small measure because of the commitment he made.

I think today, rather than speculating about the future, it would be best for all of us just to send our condolences and our best thoughts to his family and to the people of Syria.

Thank you.

Q. Mr. President, since he was such an integral link in the process, is this going to delay the future of the process? How is it going to affect the expediency of the process that you've been trying to jump-start recently?

The President. Peter, [Peter Maer, CBS News] I think it's premature to say. There will be a period of mourning in Syria. There will be a period of sorting out, and the Syrian people will make some decisions, and then we'll see what happens. But you know, we've been at this now for years because of the decision that he made to go back to negotiations and try to move away from conflict, and it's certainly a path that I hope the country will stay on.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:17 p.m. on his arrival at the Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport. In his remarks, he referred to President's al-Asad's son, Bashur Asad.

Statement on the Death of President Hafiz al-Asad of Syria

June 10, 2000

I am saddened by the news of President Asad's death and want to offer my condolences to his family and to the Syrian people.

Over the past 7 years, I have met him many times and gotten to know him very well. We had our differences, but I always respected him. Since the Madrid Conference, he made a stra-

tegic choice for peace, and we worked together to achieve that goal. Throughout my contacts with him, including our last meeting, he made clear Syria's continued commitment to the path of peace.

We look forward to working with Syria to achieve the goal of a comprehensive peace.

Remarks at a Democratic National Committee Luncheon in Minneapolis

June 10, 2000

Thank you very much, Vance. Thank you, Darin. And thanks for being my friend for such a long time, and thank you for giving us a little walk through memory lane. [Laughter] I'm still proud I was a child of the sixties. [Laughter]

I never have known what I was supposed to be embarrassed about. I remember President Bush used to refer to me as the Governor of a small southern State. I was so dumb, I thought it was a compliment. [Laughter] I still feel that way.

I want to thank my friend of more than two decades, Joan Mondale, for being here, and for all the years that we've shared together. I'd also like to thank your former secretary of state, Joan Grove, for being here. Thank you, Joan. Sandy Novak, thank you. And I'd like to thank the

people here from the Minnesota Teachers Group for their leadership in this event and for sticking with the Democratic Party and for their support of education reform.

Let me say, first of all, I am glad to be standing here, because in the last week I have been to Portugal, Germany, Russia, Ukraine. I came back to the United States to meet with the King of Jordan, and then I flew to Japan to the funeral of Prime Minister Obuchi, then came back to meet with the President of Mexico. And now I'm here. [Laughter] I feel like a character in that H.G. Wells novel, "The Time Machine." [Laughter] But if by some chance I should slip a word or two here, you'll just have to make some allowances for me. [Laughter]

I would also like to thank Mayor Rendell. He didn't really plan on leaving the mayoralty of Philadelphia and taking this little part-time job that I talked him into.

One other, just—thing I want to say preliminarily, I've been to Minnesota three times in the last 5 weeks—[laughter]—and it's really funny, because I was screaming to the point of irritability at my scheduling staff for months before that. I said, "Look, here's three places that I have not been in 2 years, and I'm really upset," and one of them was Minnesota. I said, "I really want to go." [Laughter]

So then, they said, all right, you know. So Fritz Mondale and I went to a farm in David Minge's district to talk about the China vote. And then I went to St. Paul on my education tour, to the first charter school in the United States. There are now over 1,700, thanks to our administration pushing that, and they're working well. And today I got to speak at Carleton about the importance of opening the doors of college to everyone. It's been a really rewarding thing.

The people of Minnesota have been so good to me and to Al Gore and to Hillary and to Tipper. You know, I still remember when we rolled into Minneapolis on the bus tour in '92, we were about an hour and a half or 2 hours late, and there were over 25,000 people in the streets. And I think Vice President Mondale kept the crowd there—[laughter]—by hook or crook. So I'm very grateful to you.

I just want to say a couple of things briefly— one other thing. I want to thank Vance for helping Hillary, too. She's doing well. You'd be proud of her. I think she's going to win that race, and I'm very, very proud of her.

When we took office 7½ years ago—Al Gore and I and our whole team—we were animated by some fairly basic ideas. One is that we could have good economics and good social policy, but to do it, we'd have to get rid of the deficit and have to go through the fire of doing that. The second was that we could grow the economy and improve the environment. The third was that we had to stop the politics of personal destruction and the kind of old rhetoric that had paralyzed Washington and try to find some way to bring the American people together as a community. And the fourth was that we had to abolish the distinction between domestic and foreign policy, that in the 21st century in a globalized society, it really wasn't going to be as—there are some things that are clearly, dis-

cretely foreign policy-oriented, like what we did—this is the one-year anniversary of our victory in Kosovo over ethnic cleansing, something I'm very proud of. But by and large, we needed to begin to look at the world more in terms of how it affected us here at home and look at how we were—what we were doing at home in terms of its impact around the world.

So, for example, I think that it helps America that we're trying to relieve the debts of the poorest people in the world, that we now treat AIDS as a national security problem. I know Senator Lott made fun of me the other day when our administration announced that we considered the AIDS problem to be a national security problem, but I think it is. Seventy percent of the AIDS cases are in sub-Saharan Africa. There are countries there that are now routinely hiring two people when there is a job vacancy because they expect one of them to die within a few months. And this could wreck whole societies, wreak havoc on the continent, just at the very time when Africa offers the promise of new partnership to so many of us.

Anyway, we had these ideas, and so we set about trying to make them work. And lo and behold, they did. And I'm grateful for that, and I thank you. But I just want to make a couple of points very briefly, because somebody might ask you why you were here. And if you say, "Well, I wanted to shake hands with Bill Clinton," that's a good answer, but that won't get any votes for us.

The first thing I would like to say is that ideas matter in politics, and they have consequences. And while we have had our fair share of good fortune, it flowed from a set of ideas and policies that we implemented. The second thing I want to say is, there was, 8 years ago, there was, 4 years ago, and there is today a significant and honest difference between the two parties. It is not necessary for us to do to them what they worked so hard to do to us, to convince the American people they're bad people, and they're no good, and we should tar and feather them and run them out of town. There are differences.

The previous administration vetoed the family and medical leave law as being bad for the small business economy. I signed it and said it would be good for the small business economy if parents weren't all agitated all day every day about whether their kids were sick at home. And now, in each of the last 7 years, we've

set new records for small business formation. The debate's over, but the American people may not know it.

The previous administration vetoed the Brady bill on the grounds that it was an infringement on the constitutional right to keep and bear arms and wouldn't do any good because crooks didn't buy guns at gun stores, they bought them at gun shows. That's what they said. Now they say they don't buy them at gun shows, but anyway—[laughter]—back then they said they did, and that it was an incredibly burdensome thing, and so they vetoed it.

We passed it and signed it, and it turned out 500,000 people who were felons, fugitives, and stalkers did buy guns in gun stores, and we stopped them. And gun crime is down 35 percent; homicide is at a 30-year low; overall crime is at a 25-year low, and not a single hunter has missed a day in the deer woods. So the debate is over. We won that debate. We were right, and they weren't.

And we raised the standards for air quality, for water quality, for land conservation. We set aside more land permanently in protected areas than any administration except those of the two Roosevelts. And I think we've proved you can grow the economy and improve the environment at the same time.

I say that not to be self-serving but to say that they are ideas; they have consequences. We need to tell people this. And if you look at the debate today, you see the same sort of debate unfold. That's the first thing I want to say.

So what are the issues today? Well, first of all, there's a big issue, huge issue: What do you think we ought to do with this situation we've got in America today?

Now, in my lifetime, we have never had at the same time an economy this strong, so much progress on the social issues, and the absence of domestic crisis or external threat. The last time we had an economy this strong and a lot of the social indicators were beginning to look good was in the 1960's, and it came apart because of the civil rights challenge at home and the Vietnam war abroad. So I'm not sure it's ever happened in the history of America, but in our lifetimes, it had never happened before.

The last longest economic expansion in history, the one that consumed the 1960's from '61 to '69, and it ended because we couldn't reconcile our external problems over Vietnam,

our internal problems over civil rights, the economics associated with it, and the social fabric came apart, and I remember how it ended. I graduated from high school 9 weeks after Martin Luther King was killed, 2 days after Bobby Kennedy was killed, 9 weeks after Lyndon Johnson said he couldn't run for President anymore because the country was too divided. A few months after I graduated from college, the last longest economic expansion in history ended.

So these things don't last forever. This is highly unusual. So the big question in this election year is, overshadowing everything else, is: What do you propose to do with this? I have done everything I could do to turn this country around, to prepare this country for a new century, a new millennium. And it's your turn now. You get to decide. That's what this election is about: What are we going to do with all this prosperity? Ideas have consequences. It matters.

What I think we should be doing is taking on the big challenges and the big opportunities. I think we ought to say, "If we could create the future of our dreams for our kids, what will we do?" I can only tell you what I think. I think we ought to extend opportunity to the people and places that aren't part of the recovery. I think we ought to make a commitment to ending child poverty and giving every family the time and tools it needs to succeed at home and at work.

I think we ought to make a commitment to giving every kid a world-class education in the public schools and opening the doors of college to all Americans. I think we ought to have a commitment to roll back the tide of climate change and the environment, and to deal with the challenge of the aging of America, so we baby boomers don't burden our children and our grandchildren.

I think we ought to commit to stay on the cutting edge of science and technology not only to reap the benefits but to deal with the most troubling potential burdens that are coming up, including the invasion of our privacy by the explosion of information technology.

I think we ought to commit to continuing to work for one America across all the lines that divide us, and I think we ought to be more involved, not less involved, in all kinds of non-military ways with the rest of the world. I think the trade agreements we made with Africa, with the Caribbean Basin, with China, trying to alleviate the debt of poor countries, the money

we're trying to raise to develop vaccines for AIDS, TB, and malaria—these things are all good, and they would directly benefit the United States by giving us a more peaceful, more free, more decent world to live in. That's what I think we ought to be doing.

Now, how do you tell what to do in an election, if you've decided that? So you've got to decide what you think of it, that's what I think. Because I don't know if this will ever happen again in my lifetime, and I'd like to see America not relax, not lay down but say, "This is an unbelievable gift, and we're going to make the most of it."

So what does that mean? That means that you've got to decide who's going to be the President, who's going to get elected to these Senate seats, who's going to get elected to the House seats. What are you going to do if you decide that that's what you want?

Now, there are the following almost certain consequences to the election, based on the differences and ideas. And you don't have to believe that the two candidates for President are anything other than good people. Yes, I think you should believe they're both going to do what they say they're going to do. But you have to believe they're going to do what they said they would do in the primary as well as the general election. *[Laughter]*

But there's a lot of studies on this, by the way, which show that by and large, even though our friends in the press try to convince you that we're all a bunch of slugs in politics, that Presidents historically have a pretty good record of doing what they say they're going to do. And when they don't, we're usually glad they didn't. *[Laughter]* I mean, aren't we glad Franklin Roosevelt didn't balance the budget in the Depression? Aren't we glad Abraham Lincoln didn't keep his promise not to free the slaves? I mean, once in a while, it doesn't happen. But, mostly, people do. An historian did an analysis that said I'd kept a higher percentage of my commitments than the last five Presidents. I was proud of that. But people do that.

Okay, so what will happen? What is the difference in the economic policy? Well, there will be a difference. Al Gore will be for a tax cut that still enables us to invest in education and health care and science and technology and keep paying the debt down to take care of the aging of America. And if you both have a big tax cut and privatize a part of Social Security and

guarantee the benefits to all the people that are older, you spend all the surplus and then some right there, before you spend a nickel on anything else. So we're going to have a different economic policy; we're going to go back to see if we can do without these surpluses and balanced budgets. And if you believe both candidates are honorable, that's what's going to happen. And I do.

There will be a dramatic difference in environmental policy, if you believe that both candidates will do what they've been doing. In the primary, the nominee of the other party promised to reverse my designation of over 40 million acres of roadless areas in the national forests, which the Audubon Society says is the most significant conservation move in the last 50 years. So there will be a real difference there in their attitudes, in clean air, clean water, how do you reconcile these conflicts.

There will be a huge difference in the crime policy. You saw what Mr. LaPierre at the NRA convention said, that if they could just get us out of the White House and the Republicans won, they'd have an office in the White House. Now, I don't know if literally he will; they would probably be a little too red-faced to do that. But that's what will happen. You can book it; that will happen.

And it's not like we don't have any evidence here. You've got evidence. You put more police on the street. You do things to keep kids off the street. You keep the economy strong. You try to keep going into these neighborhoods that are in trouble trying to change the texture of them, and do more to keep guns out of the hands of criminals and kids. The crime rate goes down, and more people live. This is not complicated.

And they keep talking to me about gun control. I get tickled—I asked one of these—I was at a debate the other day. I said, "You know, there was a constitutional right to keep and bear arms." I said, "I don't think you interpreted it right, but let's just assume you did." I said, "There's also a constitutional right to travel." And I've exercised it. *[Laughter]* I said, "Now, when I travel around, I look, and I see there's speed limit laws, seatbelt laws, child safety restraint laws. I never hear anybody talking about car control. Do you? Now, if I go get your car and put it in my garage, that's car control." *[Laughter]* "But otherwise, it's highway safety."

There's a huge consequence here. You've got to think about this. There are consequences.

In health care there are consequences. We're for the Patients' Bill of Rights, and they're not. And I've been for managed care. My record on this is pretty clear. I've said that we couldn't sustain what we were doing in the health care system; we'd have to manage the system better. But I still think the critical decisions ought to be made by the professionals and the patients.

And the court system will change dramatically, because there will be somewhere between two and four appointments to the Supreme Court. And if you think *Roe* against *Wade* should be repealed and that's an important issue for you, then you should vote for them, because that's what's going to happen. And if you don't, and that's an important issue for you, then you should vote for us. So there are consequences.

The last thing I want to say is this, to follow up on what Vance said. I know Al Gore better than anybody but his wife, I believe—maybe his mother, who will chide me if I claim to know him better than her. [Laughter] She is an astonishing woman, once practiced law in Arkansas, 70 years ago—an amazing woman. Here are some facts you need to know.

He supported me on every hard decision I ever had to make, whether it was going into Bosnia or Kosovo or Haiti or helping Mexico when they were about to go bankrupt. And we had a poll that morning that said by 81 to 15, the American people didn't want me to do it. There was a real winner. [Laughter] But I knew it was the right thing to do. We had to do it.

He cast the deciding vote on the economic program, without which we wouldn't all be standing around here today. Then he cast the tie-breaking vote on the—to close the gun show loophole and put child safety locks and ban large capacity ammunition clips when the Senate voted on that. And in between, he's done a lot of other things.

He ran our reinventing Government program, giving us the smallest Federal establishment since 1958. The Democrats did that, not the Republicans—eliminated more positions and more programs. And I'll give anybody here \$5 who can name three of the programs I eliminated. [Laughter] There are hundreds of them. We put the money—and we doubled investment in education with the money.

He's managed our environmental programs, including our Partnership for a New Generation of Vehicles. He ran our very successful program to establish empowerment zones in poor areas which have created thousands and thousands of jobs. Ask Mayor Rendell; one of them is in Philadelphia.

He managed a big part of our foreign relations with Russia, with South Africa, with Egypt, with a number of other countries.

And you heard what Ed said about the Vice Presidency; I've actually done a study of this. Jimmy Carter and Walter Mondale were the first two people that ever took the office systematically seriously, in the whole history of America. I love Franklin Roosevelt, but as sick as he was, it's unbelievable he didn't take any more time picking Harry Truman and didn't tell him anything. Harry Truman didn't even know about the bomb when he became President. Jimmy Carter and Walter Mondale were the first two people who ever took the job systematically seriously.

If you look at the whole history of the office, Vice President Nixon and Vice President Johnson had more influence than their predecessors. And then here's Mondale up here. And to President Reagan's credit, he gave Vice President Bush a lot to do, and they had more of a systematic relationship. And then when—and Al Gore and I actually made a study of this, what had happened throughout history. And I decided that this was crazy; that, first of all, this guy might be President any day now, especially with the kind of mail I've been getting the last—[laughter]—and secondly, why have a person with a lot of energy and intelligence just hanging around waiting to go cut ribbons?

And so, I put him to work. And I nearly broke him a couple times. I never saw anybody work any harder; he's the only guy I ever met who worked harder than me. But you need to know that there has never been anybody in that job who had more of an impact on more issues across a broader range of areas, and that a lot of the success we enjoy today would not have been possible if it hadn't been for him. So there's nobody that's any better prepared, not only by virtue of past service but by virtue of future orientation.

So I realize this is not a big campaign speech, but you need to think about this. If somebody says tomorrow, "Why did you go there?" say, "Well, but first, I'm really concerned about what

we're going to do with this prosperity. It's just as stern a test of the country's character, what you do with good times, as what you do with bad times. It's not as if you've got a lot of options when your back is against the wall. Second, ideas matter, and there are honest differences between the candidates and the parties. Third, I think based on the evidence and the argument, I agree with the Democrats, and here are some examples."

Now, I hope you can all do that, because this is going to be a close election. And part of it—in a funny way, we're almost disadvantaged by how well things have gone. There are young people who are voting in this election who can never remember a bad stock market, never remember high unemployment, never remember the kind of social discord and rising crime and those kinds of things. They just think it happened. It didn't just happen.

And I don't mean by any stretch that I am solely responsible; that's not what I mean. America changed in the nineties. We became more community-oriented; we became more civically responsible; we became more interested in op-

portunity for other people as well as for ourselves; and we began to think about tomorrow as well as today. It wasn't just me. I was just a part of it.

But you need to really keep that in your mind between now and November. This is a big election. It's about what we're going to do with our prosperity. It's a stern test, ideas matter, and you think we're right—if you can sell that, I'll feel pretty good about the outcome.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:30 p.m. in the Atrium Room at Key Investment, Inc. In his remarks, he referred to luncheon hosts Vance K. and Darin Opperman; Joan Mondale, wife of former Vice President Walter Mondale; State Senator Steven G. (Sandy) Novak; President Ernesto Zedillo of Mexico; King Abdullah II of Jordan; Edward G. Rendell, general chair, Democratic National Committee; Gov. George W. Bush of Texas; Wayne LaPierre, executive vice president, National Rifle Association; and Vice President Gore's mother, Pauline.

Remarks at a New Leadership Network Reception in Minneapolis June 10, 2000

Thank you. Wow! [*Laughter*] I started off today at 5 o'clock this morning in Washington—that's 4 o'clock your time—and I came out to Carleton to give the commencement address. And I came here, and I went to another event. It's just getting rowdier as I go on. You guys are doing great.

I would like to thank my friend and partner Mayor Rendell from Philadelphia, the chairman of our party, for coming out here with us. And I want to thank Mike; you and Mary and all the people have done a great job with this party—all the sponsors. This is just fabulous. And I'm delighted to be here.

And I want to thank the Fine Line Music Cafe folks and all the people who provided the music. And I want to thank Senator Paul Wellstone and Sheila and their kids and grandkids—the whole Wellstone family is here today; and Representative Martin Sabo, whose daughter is also a candidate here today. Your

State auditor, Judi Dutcher, I want to thank her for being here.

Look, this is a good way to spend Saturday afternoon. [*Laughter*] And I realize I, in a way, don't need to give a speech because I'm sort of preaching to the saved here. [*Laughter*] But I would like to say a couple of things anyway, if it's all the same to you. I mean, since I'm the only one in my administration or in my house who is not running for anything this year—[*laughter*]—I'm afraid I'll get out of practice if I don't get to kind of work out a little. So you all just relax; I want to give you a little bit.

First of all, I want to thank the State of Minnesota for voting for Bill Clinton and Al Gore twice and giving—[*applause*]. Secondly, I want to thank you for fielding competitive candidates for the House and the Senate to help us win back the majority in the United States Congress which we—we could do.