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although I prefer it to the alternative—[*laughter*]—and from my reading of American history, a time like this comes along at the most once every 50 years or so, sometimes maybe once every 100 years. We have economic prosperity, social progress, national self-confidence, no overwhelming domestic or foreign threats to the fabric of the Nation's life. And those of us who are older, particularly those of us who have lived most of our lives, have a heavy responsibility not to squander this, to make sure that people understand what a profoundly important gift this election is.

And I tell people all the time, I don't want this to be a negative campaign. I don't want to see people trying to attack the character of their opponent. We've had too much of that. And there's a verse in the New Testament that says that they who judge without mercy will themselves be judged without mercy. And we don't have to have that kind of campaign. What we ought to have is an old-fashioned debate. We ought to have civics 101. Because you should assume that we have good people who in good faith will attempt to do exactly what they say, and then we can identify the differences, clarify them, and say, "We want to build the future of our dreams for our children. Which choice is better?"

Now, believe me, if that's what the election's about, if people understand it's big, that there are real choices, and they understand what the choices are, then on January the 20th, Al Gore will be inaugurated President. Dianne Feinstein will be overwhelmingly reelected, and she'll have a lot more Democrats helping her. Dick Gephardt will be the Speaker of the House, and I'll be a member of the Senate spouses club. [*Laughter*]

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:20 p.m. at a private residence. In his remarks, he referred to brunch host Ron Burkle; Roz Wyman, chair, Feinstein 2000; and Steve Cloobeck, president and chief executive officer, Diamond International Resorts, and his wife, Chantal.

Remarks to the Association of State Democratic Chairs in Los Angeles
June 24, 2000

Thank you very much. First, I thank you, Joan, for 8 years of friendship and for the remarkable support that you and the State of Massachusetts have given to me and Al Gore and our whole team.

Thank you, Governor Davis, for your friendship and for the extraordinary example you've set here in California, with your education legislation, your crime control legislation, and your devotion to our party. And we thank you, and we thank you for the day you had with the Vice President up in northern California yesterday. I liked reading about it. It was good press, and we thank you.

Thank you, Joe Andrew, for leaving their ranks and coming to ours. It's hard for me to say—I thank Bill Daley for leaving my Cabinet. [*Laughter*] But he might take it wrong. But I thank him for his willingness to assume the chairmanship of the Vice President's campaign. And I thank you, Donna Brazile. And thank you, Johnny Hayes, who is my political memorabilia partner. I thought I had a lot of it until I met Johnny.

I want to thank Maxine Waters, who had me in her home in 1992 to meet with people from Los Angeles after the riots here, to deal with the economic and the social problems. And we walked down the streets together, burned out streets, and talked to people in a very different Los Angeles, a very different California, and a very different America than we have today.

I thank Dennis Archer and Kathy Vick and Bill Lynch and Lottie Shackelford and all the rest of you, so many of you I've known a long, long time. When you were introduced, ma'am, as having been at every convention since '36, I've been at every one since 1972 and that makes me pretty creaky, I guess. [*Laughter*]

But I'd like to say a few things. First, I just got off the phone with the Vice President, and he told me to tell you hello and to thank you. Secondly, I don't think you can possibly know how grateful I feel to all of you for your loyal

support in '92 and '96 and in the all the times in between, in the good times and the bad times. I've had a real good time doing this job, and I'm glad it has worked out so well for the American people.

But I want to have a brief but serious conversation with you now. We have to win. We have to win the White House. We have to win the Senate. We have to win the House. We have to win these governorships. We need to get some more of them back. And to win, we have to make sure that the election is about the right subject. People ask me all the time, "Who's going to win this or that election?" I say, "It always depends on what the voters believe the election is about." Very often, the answer you get depends upon the question you ask.

And for me, it is a pretty simple matter. I have worked as hard as I could to turn our country around, to get us going in the right direction. You know, you didn't have to be a genius in '92 to figure out what the election ought to be about. The economy was in the tank. All the social indicators were going in the wrong direction. Washington politics was basically a matter of lobbing rhetorical bombs, or, as I like to say, "I got an idea, and you've got an idea. Let's fight. Maybe we'll both get on television tonight." [*Laughter*] And it often got people on television, but it didn't often change the way we were living.

This country is in good shape now. But there are some huge challenges out there still and huge opportunities. And I would argue to you that how a country deals with its prosperity is at least as big a test of its judgment and its character as how a country deals with adversity.

For me, it's not even close, because I know that a time like this comes along maybe once every 50 years, where you have a strong economy and improving society, a lot of national self-confidence, the absence of crippling domestic or foreign threats. And those of us who have lived most of our lives have a profound obligation to make sure that this election is about building the future of our dreams for our children.

What are they going to do, when all those baby boomers retire, about Social Security and Medicare? How are we going to make aging meaningful in terms of helping people to work who want to work, making sure people have affordable prescription drugs who need it? What about the largest and most diverse group of schoolchildren in our country? Will they have world-class educations or not? Will they all be able to go on to college or not?

What about the environment? Will we continue to improve it as we grow the economy, or will we go back to the old idea that you can't improve it and grow the economy? Will we really seriously take on this problem of global warming and climate change that Al Gore has been talking about for years and years and years now, and now everybody recognizes it's real, and he was right all along? Or are we going to continue to deny that it's a real problem until we see the flooding of the sugar cane in Louisiana, and the Everglades in Florida and a lot of farmland dry up and blow away?

What about all the people that have jobs but still have problems raising their children and doing their work? Are we going to do more for child care, for after-school programs, for long-term care for elderly and disabled relatives? Are we going to do more for family leave? Are we going to do more, in short, to help people balance work and family? What about people like a lot of the people who work in this hotel that are doing the best they can, but they need some help to reward their work so they can raise their kids, too? We're going to take account of them in the tax policy of the country, in the education policy of the country.

What about the people in places that have been left behind? Are we going to bring them into the free enterprise revolution or not? What about the digital divide? Are we going to close it or let it gape open? What about our responsibilities around the world? What about here at home, where people still get hurt and unfortunately sometimes killed because they're black or brown or Asian or gay or they work for the Federal Government or some other reason? We may never get another chance in our lifetime to take on this big stuff.

So the first thing you've got to do is to convince people back home that this is a huge election. It is just as important as the election of '92 or '96—every bit as important. Point number two, there are real differences. Point number three, only the Democrats want you to know what they are. [*Laughter*] Now, you laugh, but it's true, isn't it? Do you ever hear them talk about their primary campaign? They want America to develop amnesia about their primary campaign—who was on what side, who said what,

what commitments were made. You don't see them passing out copies of that Texas Republican platform, do you? [*Laughter*]

I was down in Texas the other night when that thing came out, with a bunch of my old friends. And one of them said that it was so bad, you could get rid of every Fascist tract in your library if you just had a copy of the Texas Republican platform. [*Laughter*] And I noticed their leader didn't go to the convention, and he didn't repudiate it. He just said, well, he was talking about other things. I say that in a good-natured way.

But let me say this. I don't believe we have to have a negative campaign this year. I don't think we should. I'm sick and tired of these campaigns where this vast amount of money and effort is spent to try to convince people that there's something wrong with their opponents. How many elections have we had in the last 20 years where basically the whole deal is designed to put everybody into a white heat, including our friends in the press, to convince the voters that your opponent is just one step above a car thief? Now, we don't have to do that this year. This country is in good shape. And what we ought to do is to have a real debate here. We ought to say, "Let's assume that everybody is honorable. Let's assume that they're pretty much going to do what they say they're going to do."

That's what history indicates is the case, by the way. Most Presidents do pretty much what they say they're going to do. And when they don't, we're normally glad. Aren't you glad Lincoln didn't keep his campaign promise not to free the slaves? Aren't you glad President Roosevelt didn't keep his campaign promise to balance the budget when unemployment was 25 percent? But basically, Presidents do what they say they're going to do, so we can have this debate. So you've got to go out and say, "Folks, whatever your take on this is politically, this is a huge election. We may never get another chance in our lifetime to actually vote to make the future of our dreams for our children."

Secondly, we have real differences. I'll just mention a few. We think we ought to raise the minimum wage, and they don't. We think we ought to pass a Patients' Bill of Rights—if somebody gets hurt, they ought to be able to sue—and they don't. We think we ought to have a voluntary prescription Medicare drug benefit available to everybody who needs it, and they don't.

We think we ought to close the gun show loophole, require child trigger locks, and not import large capacity ammunition clips that make a mockery of our assault weapons ban. And we don't believe anybody is going to miss a day in the deer woods if we do that. But they're not for it. We think we ought to put 50,000 police on the street in the highest crime neighborhoods, because the 100,000 we put on worked so well, and they disagree.

We think we ought to build 6,000 new schools and modernize another 5,000 a year for the next 5 years, and they don't. We think that we ought to require schools to turn around or shut down failing schools, school districts in States, but we ought to give them enough money so that every child who needs it can be in an after-school or a summer school program, and they don't. We think we ought to put 100,000 more teachers out there in the early grades to lower class size, because it has a direct impact on student achievement, and they don't.

We think we ought to keep trying to clean up the air and the water and deal with climate change and develop alternative sources of energy and support the development of cars that get better mileage, and they voted against that stuff every year I put it up. They just don't agree. If you're buying gasoline in Chicago and Milwaukee now, you probably wish we'd move faster to develop alternative sources of fuel and higher mileage vehicles.

So in all these things, I think we're right, and I think they're not. But they ought to be given a chance to have their piece—say their piece. Most important of all, on how we're going to keep the prosperity going, they think that we ought to have a tax cut that costs over half of the projected new surplus, which is real big, and that we ought to spend the rest of it on—the projected surplus—on the partial privatization of Social Security, on a big national missile defense system, and on whatever else they promise to spend money on, even though all that together is more than even the new surplus projections.

Now, we're taking a more politically risky position at a time when people feel kind of relaxed. The Vice President says, "Why don't we not spend all our projected surplus." What's your projected income for the next decade, folks? Are you ready to spend it all tomorrow?

Everybody that wants to spend your entire projected income for the next decade should seriously consider changing parties, because that's their position. And everybody that doesn't, who's not in our party, should seriously consider changing parties.

So what does Al Gore say? He says, "Why don't we just start by saying there is at least 20 percent of this projected surplus we are not going to spend, because we're getting it from your Medicare taxes, anyway. So we'll put it over to the side, and we'll pay the debt down with it. And then we'll take the money we save from doing that and put it into Medicare so when the baby boomers retire, we can keep Medicare alive, we won't bankrupt our kids. And, by the way, we're not going to spend all this projected surplus.

"And why don't we have a generous tax cut that helps working people, especially at modest incomes, to set up their own retirement accounts and invest, if they want, in the stock market and generate wealth, while we don't mess up Social Security; and then help others with the cost of child care or long-term care or paying for our children to go college, so we can open the doors of college to all; and one that gives wealthy people the same incentives to invest in poor areas in America to create jobs we give them to invest in poor areas in Latin America or Asia or Africa. And why don't we do that, and then we'll still have some money to invest in the future."

I know what I think is more likely to keep this prosperity going. People ask me all the time now that I've just got a few months left, 7 months left. They say, "What was the secret of your economic policy? What was the genius that Bob Rubin and Lloyd Bentsen and all of them brought to Washington?" And I look at them, and I say, "Arithmetic." [*Laughter*] The Democrats brought arithmetic back to Washington. If we didn't have it, we didn't spend it. We made a commitment to cut out programs that we didn't have to have, so we'd have more to invest in education and technology and the future.

But I'm just telling you, these are big issues, and you ought to clarify them. But if the public believes that this is a big election and it's about building the future of our dreams for our children, and if the public believes that there are real differences—and I only touched on a few of them. There are real differences in our position on what it really means to include women and gays and people of color, people of all different backgrounds in the Government and in the life of America.

The next President is going to get two to four appointments to the Supreme Court. They've made different commitments about what their heartfelt positions are on the right to choose, for example. And I think you have to assume that both these people now running for President will do what they have promised to do on this. You have to assume that they are honorable and they will. So you have big differences. And we can have a great debate.

Let me just say one other thing I want you to know. I think I know Al Gore about as well as anybody alive except his family. And I've seen him at every conceivable kind of circumstances, in good and bad times for him, good and bad times for me, good and bad times for our administration. There are three things that I think you ought to know—or four.

Number one, this country has had a lot of Vice Presidents who made great Presidents. Thomas Jefferson was Vice President. Teddy Roosevelt was Vice President. Harry Truman was Vice President. Lyndon Johnson was Vice President. But we have never had anybody who, while he was Vice President, made so many decisions and did so many things that helped so many Americans remotely compared with Al Gore. He has been by far the most important Vice President in the history of the United States of America.

Whether it's breaking the tie on the economic plan or leading our empowerment zone program to bring economic opportunity to poor people, or leading our efforts in technology, or our efforts to reinvent Government that has given us the smallest Federal Government since Kennedy was President, or our efforts to continue to improve the environment while we grow the economy, or our efforts with Russia or South Africa, or our arms control policy, or sticking by me when I made very, very tough decisions in Haiti and Bosnia and Kosovo, in financial aid to Mexico—a lot of them some of you didn't agree with me on—he was always there.

The second thing I want you to know is, it's my opinion, based on a lifetime of experience with this economy and some fair understanding of it, that our economic policy, the one he has embodied, is far more likely to keep

this economic expansion going and get the most out of it.

Thirdly, and in some ways most important of all to me, I think that we ought to have a President in a time of prosperity who is genuinely committed to helping all families participate in it, to giving all people a sense that they belong in America, and to giving everybody a chance to express their opinions and to be part of the future.

And fourthly, I think it's quite important that we have a President that really understands what the future is going to be like, that really gets it. I don't know how many people I've said—heard tell me that Al Gore is the first person that ever talked to them about the Internet. He said when we took office that someday the whole Library of Congress would be on the Internet, and I thought it was something that would happen in 20 or 30 years, and it's just about there right now.

He was the first person I ever heard talk about global warming. The first lunch we ever had, in January of '93, he was showing me his charts. Now everybody says it's real. I had to listen to 8 years of some people saying it was some sort of subversive plot to undermine the American economy. [*Laughter*]

I'll give you another example, something really important in the future. We're going to have all of our medical records and all of our financial records on somebody's computer somewhere. I think it's important whether you have privacy rights. I think you ought to be able to—you ought to have to give specific approval before somebody goes into somebody else's computer and gets your financial records or your medical records in ways that can affect your life. I think that's important. That's a big issue.

I could give you lots and lots of other examples. I'll give you one chilling one. The same things that are working in the information technology revolution that are going to give you little computers you can fit in the palm of your hand, with a screen that works just like the Internet so you can bring up things—you'll even be able to watch CNN news or something on a little screen you're holding in your hand—all that's going to happen in weapons systems. The biggest challenge we're going to face in the future, I think, over the next 20 years will be from the enemies of the nation-state, from the terrorists, the drugrunners, the weapons peddlers, and people who will have miniature weapons of mass destruction, chemical, biological—God forbid—maybe even nuclear weapons. We need somebody who understands this stuff, somebody that's worked at it for years and years, somebody that gets it.

So that's my pitch. We've got—our nominee is the best Vice President the country ever had. He is clearly the person who is offering an economic strategy most likely to keep the recovery going. He has a clear commitment to help all the people to make sure nobody gets left behind. And he understands the future and can lead us there.

Now, if the public understands, if the people we represent believe that this is a huge election, that it's a chance of a lifetime to build the future of our dreams for our children, if they believe there are real differences, if they understand what the differences are, then he will be elected President, and Hillary will be elected to the Senate, and so will a lot of others, and we will win the House back, and we will be celebrating.

Now, that's your job. You've got to make sure people understand what the deal is. That's what our job is. This is a happy job. You never have to say a bad word about a Republican. All you have to do is go out and say, "Here is where we are. Here is where we want to go. Here are the honest differences, and at least our party would like you to know exactly what they are."

Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:30 p.m. in the Century Room at the Century Plaza Hotel & Spa. In his remarks, he referred to Joan M. Menard, president, Association of State Democratic Chairs; Gov. Gray Davis of California; Joseph J. Andrew, national chair, Kathleen M. Vick, secretary, Bill Lynch, vice chair, Dennis W. Archer, general co-chair, and Lottie Shackelford, vice chair, Democratic National Committee; William M. Daley, general chair, Donna L. Brazile, campaign manager, and Johnny H. Hayes, finance director, Gore 2000; former Secretaries of the Treasury Robert E. Rubin and Lloyd Bentsen; and Gov. George W. Bush of Texas.