

Remarks at a Democratic National Committee Dinner in New York City
February 24, 2000

Thank you very much. Thank you very much, Doug. I want to thank you and Traie for hosting us, and all the rest of you, thank you so much for coming tonight. I thank my good friend Mayor Rendell for agreeing to become the chair of the Democratic Party, a little part-time job that he can do on the side. [Laughter] Thank you, Carl McCall, for being here. And thank you, Carolyn Maloney, for being here and for always being there for me and for our country in Washington.

I would, just following up on what Doug said, I want to say to all of you who have made such immense contributions to the economic prosperity and to the quality of life our country has enjoyed over the last few years—I want to express my gratitude to you. For me, it's been a great privilege to serve. As I've told all the young people who work for us, even the bad days are good days if you have a chance to do something good for our country, and a lot of the static should be looked at as part of the cost of doing business in the modern environment in which we all labor. But it's been a wonderful thing to see our country grow and prosper and deal with a lot of our non-economic challenges over the last few years.

And I would just like to ask you briefly to think about how you would answer the question tomorrow if someone asked you why you came here tonight and spent all that money to hear Bill Clinton give a speech, since you could have heard a much longer one at the State of the Union for free on television. [Laughter] And you need to have an answer for that, for yourselves and because this is a long year. There will be a big election, and there will be many ups and downs and twists and turns in the road, not only the Presidential elections but in the congressional elections, the Senate elections, and others, one of which I have a particular interest in here. [Laughter]

The central question before our country today is, what are we going to make of these unprecedented good times—of the longest peacetime expansion, the longest expansion in our history, including wartime, now, the longest economic expansion ever; of a 20-year low in poverty and a 30-year low in welfare rolls and a 40-year

low in female unemployment, and a 40-year low now, Doug, in the size of the Federal Government. What are we going to do now?

It seems apparent to me that one of the ways we got to where we are is that the Government has followed policies that created the conditions and gave people the tools and removed the impediments so that the incredible creative enterprise of America could flourish. And we did it by understanding that we live in a very, very dynamic time, fueled principally by globalization and the explosion of technology, particularly information technology, but also in the biomedical area, in material science, and a whole array of other areas. That seems to me to make the argument that what we need is to change, to keep changing, to be very dynamic, but to do it consistent with the principles and the direction that we followed for the last 7 years.

I say all the time, and it normally gets a laugh, that if someone were running for President this year and said, "Vote for me. I'll do just what Bill Clinton did," I would vote against that person because we're not standing still; we're moving.

But I think, just to pick up on some of the things you said, among the questions I think that should be asked and answered, that I tried to answer in the State of the Union are: How are we going to keep this economic growth growing? And how are we going to spread it to people in places that haven't been part of it? We have a moral obligation to do that, and it also will help to keep the economy growing. We've got some people here today who don't live in parts of New York City that have flourished, who live in other parts of New York that haven't participated fully in the economic expansion. I think we ought to continue to pay this debt down, to keep the economy going. And I think we ought to give special incentives and make special efforts to get people to invest in the areas that have been left behind.

What are we going to do to give all of our kids a world-class education? What are we going to do to open the doors of college to all? I think we ought to, at a minimum, do what Senator Schumer and Hillary have suggested and give people a tax deduction for college tuition.

We've got the college-going rate up 10 percent over the last 6 years. It needs to go up some more, and we need to make sure when people go, they stay.

What are we going to do to help people balance work and family better? We saw Doug and Traie's beautiful daughter here tonight. I just signed cards for five kids over here, that said, "My Dad had dinner with the President," and I affirmed that that, in fact, happened and signed my name. And I hope my penmanship will not be taken as a model for the children. [Laughter] But most of you who can afford to come here tonight may not have to worry about that. But the truth is that most families in this country today have to work for a living, both parents or a single-parent household. And even if they make good incomes, they worry about where their children are when they're working, particularly if they're in preschool years. Do they have adequate care? What happens if the parents can't get off work to go to the parent-teacher conferences at school? What do they do if the children get sick? What do they do if they have a sick parent? And we haven't done enough to help people balance work and family.

What are we going to do to help to continue to grow the economy and meet these big environmental challenges that are out there? The truth is, this is a gold mine if we'll look at it as an opportunity, not a problem. There's a \$1 trillion global market for environmental technology to defeat global warming, if we embrace it instead of run away from it.

What are we going to do to continue to be a force for peace and freedom and against terrorism and weapons of mass destruction around the world? And do we understand that our economic interests around the world and our national security interests are increasingly merging? I believe China, for example, should be taken into the WTO because it's great economics for America in the short run, but I'm convinced it's the only way to really assure a stable, peaceful Asia and a stable transformation within China over the long run.

What are we going to do to maintain and improve the basic fabric of life here at home? I think it's interesting, as I say continually, that in this most modern of ages, where we talk about the wonders of the Internet and bridging the digital divide, which is very important, that we continue to be bedeviled by the oldest of human society's problems, people who can't get

along with people who are different from them. We're horrified when we read about the tribal wars in Africa, the continuing problems in the Middle East, the killing in the Balkans, and on and on and on. But in this country, in just the last couple years, we've had people killed because of their race, their religion, or their sexual orientation. How are we going to get beyond that?

I think part of it is passing legislation like the hate crimes legislation and the Employment Nondiscrimination Act. Part of it is enforcing the laws, but part of it is setting the right tone and showing a devotion to the differences among Americans and relying on our common values.

You mentioned the court appointments. That could well be—I'll just mention two issues that I think are very important, about how you strike the balance between individual liberties and community responsibilities. The Democratic candidate for President will support maintaining a woman's right to choose and will act accordingly. The Republican candidate for President, whoever it is, won't and will act accordingly, according to both political obligation and conscience.

You know, it's fashionable now, and it has been for several years, unfortunately—probably two decades now—for people who run against one another basically to try to convince the voters that their opponents are bad people. I just don't believe that. I think you here have a difference of conscience. But you should not be naive and expect that if someone who differs with us and whose political allegiances are different gets elected, that they will abandon their conscience. And we shouldn't ask them to.

And the next President is going to appoint somewhere between two and four judges on the Supreme Court, and it will have a huge impact on America. And so the American people should think about that.

On the other hand, there's another big party difference that's very important to me, where, in effect, we've changed sides, where they believe individual liberty means that they shouldn't adopt even the most commonsense measures to keep guns away from children and criminals. And we believe our common responsibility to one another means that we ought to close the gun show loophole in the Brady bill, means that we ought to do other things. For me and for the Vice President and for Senator Bradley, we

believe at least we ought to license handgun owners. That's what we believe. We license cars and drivers. Somebody steals your car while you're here tonight and they drive it to New Jersey and leave it in the parking lot and you call the police, you can be notified within a minute or two, once it's found, because we have records of it.

And I think we have—and I say this as someone who comes from a culture where half the people have a hunting or a fishing license or both. I'm proud of the fact that we've got the lowest crime rate in 30 years. And don't kid yourself, one of the reasons is the Brady bill, which has kept a half a million felons, fugitives, and stalkers from buying handguns. I signed the bill. The last President vetoed it. I've tried to strengthen it. That's what our party believes. They don't believe that. They actually agree with the NRA. I'm not going to tell you that I think they're bad people. That's what they think. They are willing to pay a price, in a country that's less safe, that I'm not willing to pay. And I don't think it has anything to do with individual liberties. And I do not believe the 2d amendment says that you ought to be able to get an assault weapon with a huge magazine that we ought to continue to import. We have differences here, and you can see it in the votes of the last 7 years. And these are big decisions the American people ought to make.

But what I want to say to you tonight is, we have an unusual responsibility, all of us in this room, individually because we've been successful and blessed, but also as a nation. And a lot of people have heard me say this, and they may think I'm a broken record, but one of the nice things about not running for office is you can just say what's on your mind. [*Laughter*] I have thought a lot and done many interviews, and you've seen some of them, about why this expansion has gone on as long as it has. And I think there are many reasons. I think our economic program had a lot to do with it, but I think the unbelievable impact of high technology on productivity throughout the American economy kept it going longer and stronger than anyone had imagined. And there are lots of other reasons.

The important thing to me, though, is not what caused it but what are we going to do with it. And I told the group that I was with earlier tonight, and I try to say this everywhere because I think it's important for you to think

about. Some of you, like Doug and Traie, are a lot younger than me; some of you about my age; some of you a little bit older. The last time we had the longest economic expansion in history was in the 1960's, 1961 through 1969.

When I was a child, a young man graduating from high school, 1964, John Kennedy had just been assassinated. Lyndon Johnson was the President of the United States. Unemployment was low; inflation was low; growth was high. The country had rallied behind a new President. We were passing civil rights legislation. Most people, in spite of the heartbreak of the loss of the President, felt pretty good about things. They thought we were going to solve our civil rights problems peacefully. They thought this economy would go on forever. They thought we would prevail in the cold war, and they didn't think Vietnam would tear the country apart.

Within 2 years, we had riots in some of our streets. And within 4 years, when I graduated from college, it was 2 days after Robert Kennedy was killed, 2 months after Martin Luther King was killed, 9 weeks after Lyndon Johnson said he couldn't run for reelection. Washington, DC, was in flames. The country was split right down the middle over the Vietnam war. The expansion was a few months away from being over, and we had our first presidential election based on—in modern times—based on the politics of real division, the Silent Majority. That means that those who weren't in it, like me, were in the loud minority—"us" and "them."

And we've been "us-ing" and "them-ing" ourselves to death for a long time now. And when I ran for President in '92, I said I wanted to create a country of opportunity for all, responsibility from all, and a community of all Americans. I have tried to end the politics of division. I think I've been more successful outside Washington than inside, but nonetheless, I think we've made a lot of headway.

The reason I'm telling you this is, we thought it was going to go on in 1964. If anybody had told most Americans that within 4 years the wheels would have completely run off, no one would have believed it. And as an American citizen, not President, as a citizen, I have waited 35 years for my country to be in a position for us to build the future of our dreams for our children—35 years.

And we've got a second chance. We should be happy about it, but we should be humble.

And we should understand that life is a fragile and fleeting thing. Nothing lasts forever—nothing good and, thank God, nothing bad. And if somebody asks you why you came here tonight, you tell them, because you like what happened but because you feel a heavy responsibility to make sure that we make the most of a truly magic moment.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:05 p.m. at the Four Seasons Restaurant. In his remarks, he referred to dinner host Doug Teitelbaum, his wife, Traie, and their daughter, KateRose; Edward G. Rendell, general chair, Democratic National Committee; New York State Comptroller H. Carl McCall; and former Senator Bill Bradley.

Remarks on Funding for Native American Programs and an Exchange With Reporters

February 25, 2000

The President. Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. I am delighted to be joined today by Senator Akaka and Senator Johnson; Sue Masten, the president of the National Congress of American Indians; Kelsey Begaye, the President of the Navajo Nation; and other distinguished tribal leaders from all across our country.

I'd also like to thank a few Members of Congress who are not here today but who have been vital to our efforts to increase support for Native Americans: Senators Daschle, Domenici, Bingaman, Inouye, Nighthorse Campbell, and Dorgan; and Representatives Kildee, Kennedy, and Hayworth.

Before I leave to give out the Baldrige Awards, I just want to say a few words about the importance of bringing the promise of prosperity to Indian country.

Nearly four centuries ago, not far from where we stand today, the Powhatan Confederacy enjoyed a prosperous trading partnership with the newly settled European colonists. As our country grew, many tribes gave up their land, water, and mineral rights in exchange for peace, health care, and education from the National Government. They formed solemn and lasting pacts with our country, agreements the United States, to be charitable, has not always lived up to.

While some of today's tribes have found success in our new economy, far too many have been caught in a cycle of poverty and unemployment. Too many have suffered from Government's failure to invest proper resources in education, infrastructure, and health care. The facts, of course, are all too familiar. American Indian

unemployment remains unacceptably high, reaching 70 percent on some reservations. One-third of American Indians and Alaska natives still live in poverty and many lack decent health care. Indians are the victims of twice as many violent crimes as other Americans. Nearly half the roads and bridges on reservations are in serious disrepair. Many schools are crowded and crumbling. More than 80 percent of the people in Indian country are not connected to the Internet, and one-third of Indian children never finish high school.

These facts are discouraging, but clearly not irreversible. That's because of something no statistic can measure accurately, the potential of the more than 2 million members of tribal nations in the United States. I am confident that with the right tools and the right support we can, together, bring new opportunity with new investment to Native Americans and to Indian reservations. That's something I made clear back in 1994, when I met with leaders from over 550 federally recognized tribes in our first government-to-government meeting here at the White House, and when I visited the Pine Ridge Reservation last summer. I want to make that even more clear today.

We're in the midst of the longest, strongest period of economic growth in our history. There is no better time than now to make sure Indian country has the tools to succeed in the new economy. If not now, when will we ever step forward to bring the hope of a good job, decent health care, safe communities, quality education,