

of that stuff, that poison, that venom, that need we always seem to have to be divided one from another.

But I tell you this because when I was 18 in 1964, times were just about like they are now, and I thought it would all be fine. And in next to no time, all the wheels ran off, and by 1967 everything was divided. And within a few more months in 1968, within a few more months our expansion came to an end.

I say this to you not as your President but as a citizen. I have waited for 35 years for my country to be in a position to build the future of our dreams for our children that all of us could be a part of, not just those of us that are wealthy enough to come here but the people that were good enough to serve us tonight, not just those of us that are doing great and have lived most of our lives but those of us that are just beginning.

But I remember. Don't you be overconfident. Don't you be overcasual. You know, in life we're always lucky when we get a second chance, and most of us are lucky enough to have had more than one. But a country is indeed graced by God to get a second chance. I'm glad I helped to build America's second chance these last 7 years. We've got it now. I've waited 35 years to see it.

That's why I'm for Dianne Feinstein. That's why I'm traipsing all over the country trying to get people to think about this. And when

this political debate goes on, don't you get caught in all this little stuff. You lift this country up; lift the people in your community up. Tell the people why they ought to vote. Remind them of how we lost our last expansion. Think about all the possibilities for the future. Be big. Be big and remember: We all do better when we help each other, and the only way to keep doing well is to be committed to doing better.

Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 7:50 p.m. in the Peacock Court at the Mark Hopkins InterContinental Hotel. In his remarks, he referred to Stewart Boxer, husband of Senator Barbara Boxer; dinner chairs Robert J. and Suzanne McCarthy; Richard Blum, husband of Senator Dianne Feinstein; Kayla Rolland, who died after she was shot by 6-year-old classmate Dedrick Owens in Mount Morris Township, MI; Ronald Taylor, who allegedly went on a deadly shooting spree in Wilkinsburg, PA; and West African immigrant Amadou Diallo, who died after being shot in the Bronx Borough of New York City by four police officers, who were acquitted of all criminal charges on February 25 in Albany, NY. The President also referred to California's proposition 26, School Facilities Local Majority Vote, to permit a simple majority for school bond issues as opposed to the super majority currently required; and proposition 22, Limit on Marriage Initiative, to ban gay marriages in California.

Remarks at a Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee Dinner in San Francisco

March 3, 2000

Thank you very much. Well, first of all, I want to thank Sandy and Jeanne for having me back in this wonderful old home, which I love so much. And I thank the Staglins for cohosting this event and for the wine, which I could not resist tasting even though I've been up since 3 o'clock in the morning your time. And I was glad Dianne sort of gave you a little profile of my day, so that if I collapse while speaking, you will be generous enough to make a few exceptions for me. [Laughter] And thank you, Eric, for the great time we had earlier in the day with the Aspen Institute over at Novell.

Tonight I'm—here and at the next stop I have to make, I'm trying to help the people who, unlike me, will be running for office in 2000. And I normally get a laugh when I tell people that. Sometimes I wonder why I'm doing this; I'm not running for anything anymore, and most days, it's okay with me.

But I'm here tonight because I want to see the work we've done for the last 7 years and a couple of months continue. I'm here because I remember what California was like in 1991 when I came here, and I see what it's like today. But I also see underneath that the

continuing challenges that Dianne mentioned and others, but let's just take the two she talked about: the challenges of the children in the schools and how it manifests itself, ultimately, in your needing 280,000 high-tech workers you can't get; and the challenge of the safety of our streets and our neighborhoods, our homes and our schools.

Let me say, I'd like to make a couple of points very briefly. With regard to education, I've been working on this stuff for over 20 years now, proudly. I was first elected Governor—in 1979 I became a Governor. And I just had the Governors to the White House. It was my 20th Governors' conference, as both a Governor and a President. I never got tired of being Governor, either. I loved it. But when we started out, I think it's fair to say that we didn't really know what it would take to turn these schools around. We don't have that as an excuse anymore.

Dianne talked to you about Chicago. In the Robert Taylor Homes project, which is the poorest part of Chicago, there is an elementary school that has had all the things you talked about, where the district—you heard her say the district has increased its scores by 12 and 14 percent. The poorest schools in 2 years have doubled their reading scores and tripled their math scores. And they were at a very low base, but the point is, that's quite astonishing.

And it is true that in Los Angeles—it's not practical to just ban social promotion anywhere unless you can find the resources to give every child who needs it an after-school program and every child who needs it a summer school program. In Chicago, if they tell you—if you fall within the social promotion standard and you can't be promoted, you do have the option of going to summer school. And you, in all probability, based on their experience, won't be held back if you go to summer school. The summer school in Chicago is now the sixth biggest school district in the United States of America—the summer school.

Now, the point I want to make is that, simply—or let's take—Dianne mentioned the charter schools. When I became President, there was one charter school in all America, in Minnesota. And we began to promote them, and we began to provide funds for States to start them. And now, there are about 2,000. And my goal was to have 3,000 in America by the

end of this year; I think we're going to make it.

But we also know we're going to have 2 million teachers retire. What she said about paying the teachers more is absolutely right. There is a National Board of Professional Teaching Standards that certifies master teachers. My goal is to get one in every school building in America. If we could do that, we could change the culture of teaching. But they should be paid much more.

When I started the NetDay, the effort to hook all the schools up to the Internet—the Vice President and I were out here in '94—only 3 percent of our classrooms were hooked up to the Internet; today, 63 percent are; 11 percent of our schools then, today 90 percent of our schools. But there are schools so old and decrepit they can't even be wired. And there are other schools—I visited an elementary school in Florida that had, count them, 12 house trailers out behind it—12, not 1 or 2, 12—full of kids.

That's why it's so important that you pass this proposition 26. We need to do more at the national level, but you do, as well.

Now, what's all that got to do with this election season? Because we could talk about all this stuff until the cows come home. The important thing about every election is that it is a job interview. But the difference is that the people have to redefine the job at every election. So that, in a way, the person they select for the job depends upon how they define the job.

Whenever anyone comes to me and says, "Mr. President, should I run for this, that, or the other job?" I say, "Why do you want it, and what would you do?" It's a job interview. That's what an election is. And when you get it, it's a job. I told the group that we were with earlier that one of the reasons I'm a huge fan of Senator Feinstein is that she really thinks she has a job to do. You heard her up here talking. She is what they derisively refer to as a policy wonk in Washington, as opposed to a talk show maven. And that's what I love about her. That's why the first—you know, she's been in the Senate just a couple of years, and she succeeded in passing that California desert protection legislation and saving the redwoods and passing the assault weapons ban—because she works.

So the first thing I would like to suggest to you, the most important thing you can do as citizens this year is to figure out what you want to do with all this prosperity we have. What

do you think the big challenges of America are? What do you think the big opportunities are? If somebody asked you tomorrow why you came here, are you going to say that “the sponsors made me,” or “I owed it to them,” or “I wanted to see this house,” or “I want to see Clinton one more time before he rides off in the sunset”? [Laughter] I mean, what reasons will you give?

Think about this. This is very important, because the movement of democracy through time depends upon people taking these moments at election time to be heard. And the choice of the American people for President, for Senator, for Representative, for the Governors, it depends upon what you think it's about.

And the whole reason I ran for President in '91 and '92 is I thought that Washington had become clueless. It had become sort of turned in on itself, obsessed with who was up, who was down, who was in, who was out. You had to have a liberal position or a conservative position or a Republican position or a Democratic position, never the twain will meet. “For goodness' sake, don't confuse me with new ideas, and just give me my 15 seconds on the news at night.”

And it might have been very satisfying for the people who played the political game inside the beltway, but it wasn't working very well in California or Arkansas or any place else I could see. So we did some really dramatic things. We put arithmetic back into the budget. Somebody asked me what was the main economic contribution I made to America in this high-tech age. I said, “I restored arithmetic to Washington.” [Laughter]

But I think it's very important that you think about this. And what I would like you to at least think about saying to people, if they ask you tomorrow why you came, is that you care about what happens in this election and you believe in some ways this election is more important than the two that preceded it, because of our prosperity and because our prosperity has given us the opportunity and the responsibility to define and build the future.

I mean, in '92, let's face it, folks, we just had to stop the ship from sinking. It took 2 or 3 years to quit bailing out of the ship and then to turn it around, to turn the ship of state around. But no one seriously thinks our country will become—so just take the two issues Dianne talked about—until we can give all of these kids

a world-class education, have some standards, have some accountability, have adequate support. We know what works. We don't have an excuse anymore. It's just a question of whether we're going to do it.

No one seriously thinks we'll be what we ought to be as a nation until we're much, much safer. And we have to face the fact that a big—and I have worked hard to put 100,000 police on the streets. I'm trying to put 50,000 more out there today in the high crime areas. Dianne and I had an announcement out here in California several years ago on zero tolerance for guns in schools. We've spent fortunes of your money helping schools establish school safety programs.

But it is not rational that we continue to be in the grip of an ideology and a political interest group that says that you can't even put child trigger locks on guns; that you can't extend the background check law, that applies if you go to buy a handgun in a gun store, to gun shows that occur on the weekends at these urban flea markets; that we can't have automatic, large capacity ammunition clips made in America, but we can import all the ones we want and hook them up to our guns; that you have to get a license that proves you can drive a car, but you don't have to get a license that proves you've got a clean background and you know how to use a gun. I mean, these things don't make sense, not if you really want a safe country.

But the larger generic question is, what do you propose to do with our prosperity? And I'm as interested in this election as a citizen as I am a President, because I'll be a citizen after the next election. And I feel very privileged to have served, to have played a role in this, to have had something to do with establishing the conditions within which so many of you have built a new economy. You're trying to give Americans the tools to succeed in that new economy, to balance work and family.

We've at least pointed the Congress in the direction of what it would take to get the country out of debt, to save Social Security and Medicare for the baby boom generation so we don't bankrupt our kids and our grandkids, to grow the economy and improve the environment and meet the challenge of global warming, to maximize the impact of science and technology, to deal with the challenges I talked about out at Eric's place today, to the Aspen Institute,

about how do you preserve privacy and security of certain records and still lead to entrepreneurial genius, the Internet—all these big questions.

But I hope you will say, “Look, I’m more interested in politics than ever, because I think we have a special obligation to make the most of this prosperity and a special opportunity to do this.” I mean, aren’t you proud that you’ve got a Senator that could go all the way to Chicago, look in a poor school just to see whether what works there might work for kids in California? I mean, see, that’s what Senators are supposed to do, not scream at people at 9 decibels and—it’s like a version of space aliens, some of these talk shows here. [Laughter]

I mean, that’s what public service is all about. So I hope you will say that. It’s obvious, I think, to you what I—I believe our approach is good. I think saying the role of Government is to provide conditions and give people the tools to make the most of the new economy, to keep us moving forward, to help balance work and family, to get rid of poverty among children, to make this the safest big country in the world, to prove we can improve the economy and improve the environment, and indeed, that we have to, that the two will become more and more interdependent.

You think I was right in Kosovo? You think I was right in Bosnia? What do you want the next President to do about that? What are our obligations to stand against racial and religious and ethnic and tribal hatred and slaughter? Think I did the right thing to send helicopters to help those people clinging to life on those trees in Mozambique? If you do, that’s all part of your world view, what you want America to be like in the 21st century.

And Dianne talked about what I said before. I won’t try to replicate the speech I gave, but what moved the audience—and I will say it in less eloquent terms here, because I want you to think about this. The thing that bothers me about this election, I listen to the Republican debate, you know, and I think all four of the candidates that are left in this race crossed the real threshold, the first threshold, which is, could you look at these people and imagine them being President? The answer to that is yes. I mean, these are people with some achievement and some real seriousness, and they lived lives that are worthy, nearly as I can tell, you know, even the ones that say bad things

about me because they have to, to get votes on the other side. [Laughter] Okay, so they crossed the threshold. Then the whole issue is, your employment decision here is based on what you think this election is about, because in theory you could hire any of them.

And I’m telling you, the point I tried to make earlier tonight—I’ll just leave you with this—is that I think this should be a time of urgency. I think it should be a time where the American people say the only way we can keep doing well is if we keep trying to do better, if we keep trying to expand the circle of opportunity, to deepen the meaning of freedom, to strengthen the bonds of our community. That’s the only way we can keep doing well because the times are dynamic and because everyone who has lived any length of time knows that life can get away from you in a hurry.

And what I said that got the crowd’s attention was that when we were celebrating this last month, in February, the fact that this is now the longest economic expansion in our Nation’s history, I said, “Well, I want to go study the last longest expansion, you know, the one whose record we broke.” And it was the 1960’s, 1961 through 1969.

I graduated from high school in ’64. President Kennedy had been killed; the country was heartbroken. We united behind President Johnson. There was enormous optimism. We were passing civil rights bills right and left in the Congress. The Vietnam war was not yet dividing our people, and everyone assumed that the economy would go on forever, high growth, low unemployment, low inflation. Everybody assumed we’d solve civil rights in the Congress. And of course, everybody assumed we’d prevail in the cold war without dividing the country.

A year later, Watts; 2 years later, demonstrations in every major city in the country. Four years later, I said, when I graduated from college, it was 2 days after Bobby Kennedy was killed, 2 months after Martin Luther King was killed, 9 weeks after Lyndon Johnson couldn’t run for reelection. Every city in the country was divided right down the middle over the Vietnam war. Richard Nixon got elected then a few months later, as the candidate of the Silent Majority, which meant those of us that weren’t for him were in the loud minority. It was the first election between “us” and “them,” a tactic that people have perfected since then, dividing the electorate between “us” and

“them.” No more “we” in American politics; you “us” and “them.” That was the salience of this whole Bob Jones University thing in the primaries—for those of us that are southerners, anyway, that went through that.

And what’s happened? We’ve been living with that legacy ever since. And one of the reasons that I ran for President is I didn’t like “us” and “them” politics. I didn’t mind disagreeing with the Republicans, but I don’t think I should have to demonize them, and I don’t think I should ever shut my door to them. And if they’ve got a good idea, I don’t think I ought to run away from it. And I believe we ought to build this country with anybody’s new ideas, as long as you believe everybody counts, everybody should have a chance, everybody’s got a role to play, we all do better when we help each other. That’s what I think.

And the point I was trying to make today, I’ll just make it to you—I want you to think about this tonight. I’m telling you in 1964 when I graduated from high school, we thought we were on automatic. We thought that sucker was going to fly. And it came apart. The wheels came off in no time. And every one of you, if you’ve lived long enough, can remember a personal incident in your life or your business life when the wheels came off because you thought everything was going so well, nothing bad could happen.

This is a time for vigilance, for devotion, for patriotism in the best sense. I’ve waited for 35 years for this, and I’ve worked hard for 7 years to give you the chance to finish building this bridge to tomorrow, building the future of our dreams for our children. But just as a citizen, I think America got a second chance in my lifetime. That’s what this election is about. That’s why you want people like her in office, people that know it’s a job; it’s about ideas; it’s about work; it’s about people; it’s about giving everybody a chance.

And if you define the election in the right way, with a sense of urgency, you will predetermine the winner. This election cycle—you mark my words, from President through all the congressional races down to every other one, the winner will be determined by how the employers—that’s you, now—define the job.

Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:40 p.m. at a private residence. In his remarks, he referred to dinner cohosts Sanford R. and Jeanne Robertson and Garen and Sheri Staglin; and Eric Schmidt, chief executive officer, Novell. The President also referred to California’s proposition 26, School Facilities Local Majority Vote, to permit a simple majority for school bond issues as opposed to the super majority currently required.

Remarks at a Democratic National Committee Reception in San Francisco March 3, 2000

Thank you. I want to—you’re looking here at a medical miracle. I got up this morning at 3 o’clock in the morning your time, and I’m still going. [Laughter] I’m glad to be back with Susie and Mark, and I’m glad to be here with all of you.

The major thing I would like to do tonight is have a chance to visit with you, so I think I’ll forgo the speech and come around and just visit, and we’ll all talk about whatever you’d like to talk about.

And Mayor Rendell, thank you for being here. Let me say, I’ve had a great night tonight. I made two appearances for Senator Feinstein and the Democratic Senate Campaign Committee,

and we had very good crowds, and we talked a lot about what’s going on in America today. So maybe we can have some visits about it, and I look forward to it. Thank you very much for coming.

And give us some more music. I love that. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:29 p.m. at a private residence. In his remarks, he referred to reception hosts Susie Thompkins Buell and Mark Buell; and Edward G. Rendell, general chair, Democratic National Committee. A tape was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.