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to tell you is, I have a memory, and I have waited for 35 years for my country to be in a position once again to be free to build the future of our dreams for our children, to be responsible citizens of the world, to lead the world toward peace and freedom and security. That's what this is all about. And we can't afford to let a single American treat this election in a casual fashion because of the evident responsibilities we have and because of the opportunities we have.

I know Pat Leahy is not on the ballot this year, but I'm glad you're out here helping him, because I told you the truth. In 25 years, he's one of the finest people and one of the ablest, most visionary public servants I've ever known. That's what you need to think about all year long. And tomorrow if people ask you why you came here, you need to be able to give them this answer. And if you're around my age, you need to remind them of what happened to the last longest economic expansion in American history, when we were casual and careless enough to think it was on automatic. There's nothing we can't do. But we have to work at it, and we have to work together.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 8:20 p.m. at a private residence. In his remarks, he referred to reception hosts Robert Muller and Solange MacArthur; singer Emmylou Harris; Marcelle Leahy, wife of Senator Leahy; former Senator Dennis DeConcini; Foreign Minister Lloyd Axworthy of Canada; and Gov. George W. Bush of Texas.

Remarks at a Democratic National Committee Dinner

April 4, 2000

Thank you. First of all, let me say, Carol, I am very grateful for those words and for your friendship, and I thank you and David for opening your beautiful home. Nancy, thank you for being my true friend, and I thank you and Harold for being here.

People are always asking me what I am going to do when I leave office. I think tonight would be an appropriate time for me to make the announcement: David and Harold and I are going to open a consulting firm for political spouses. [*Laughter*] We're reasonable but not free. [*Laughter*]

I want to thank Joe Andrew, who came out here from Indiana and gave us a real boost of energy. He took over the leadership of the Democratic Party when most people thought it was not much of a prize. And then we got Ed Rendell to come help us, and a number of other people. But Joe was there, working day-in and day-out, and he was indefatigable, and he was enthusiastic when even someone as optimistic as me wasn't sure he should be enthusiastic. So we owe you, and we're grateful, and we thank you.

I want to thank all the people here in our administration family: Carrie, thank you for being here; Minyon; and I thank Molly Raiser for being here, my former Protocol Chief; and Ann Lewis, who has defended me better than anyone else—I think—just about—on television consistently, which is a job from time to time. [*Laughter*]

I would like to make two or three points about why I think what you've done is important and why I want to urge you to continue to support the Democratic Party, to broaden our base, to reach out to new people, and to be especially vigilant in this election year.

First of all, there is a real difference between these two parties. There is a difference on specific issues. Look at what we're debating today, gun safety. Last night I called Governor Glendening and Lieutenant Governor Kathleen Kennedy Townsend in Maryland to congratulate them on passing their legislation regarding child safety locks and other protections. It didn't have anything to do with people hunting in Maryland. They'll still have a duck hunting season this fall in Maryland, I'll bet you anything. And all the dire predictions of the NRA will be wrong, but kids will be safer. Massachusetts did the same thing.

We're different: We think we ought to close the gun show loophole. We think if you buy a handgun at a gun store and you have to get

your background checked, if you go to a gun show on the weekend you ought to do the same thing.

And it reflects—and we believe in child safety locks, and we believe in building safe guns that can only be fired by the adults who buy them. We believe in banning the importation of large capacity ammunition clips, which make a mockery of the assault weapons ban. And there are differences there.

We're different on the Patients' Bill of Rights. I don't oppose managed care myself; I think it's saved America a lot of money. But I think that, ultimately, health care decisions ought to be made by medical professionals and the patients themselves. And I think that this system ought to be priced and structured to support that. So we're for that, and we still can't get it out of this Republican Congress. We're for a minimum wage increase, and they're not. These are just the things that are being debated today.

Look at their budget. We're for continued big investments in education, hiring more teachers in the early grades, repairing 5,000 schools a year, building or doing major reconstruction on another 6,000 so that we can have excellent facilities. And they don't support that.

We're for a tax cut that is affordable and is targeted to what real working families need. We want to increase the earned-income tax credit because we think low income working people with kids ought to not have their children in poverty. We want to increase the child care tax credit. We want a $3,000-a-year long-term care tax credit, because so many people are having to take care of their parents or their disabled relatives. We think the cost of college tuition ought to be tax deductible, because we think 4 years of college ought to be universal. That's our tax program. Theirs is a lot bigger and a lot different, and most of you in this room would be better off under theirs than ours in the short run. You are here because you disagree with that, because you want us to go forward together. So the first thing I want to say is, there's a difference.

The second point I want to make is, it's not like we don't know which one works. That's the amazing thing. This ought to be an easy election for the American people, because their nominee for President, even though he says he is for education, is for a tax cut even bigger than the one I vetoed. And all of them have endorsed him, so you would have to conclude that they are serious.

I vetoed a tax cut last year because it would force us to run deficits again, and we could never save Social Security and Medicare, and we couldn't increase investment in education and science and technology and all of these things. So now, they are going to the American people saying that "President Clinton made a mistake. He doesn't know what he is doing in his economic program, and the Vice President is wrong, their nominee. Elect us, and we'll give you an even bigger tax cut than the one he vetoed."

Now, they also are going to appoint between two and four members to the Supreme Court. And they are clearly on record as being against *Roe* v. *Wade* and wanting to reverse it. And there are big differences on the environment. There are big differences on all these other issues.

Now, what I want to say to you is, it is not like you don't know which one is right. It's not like the American people don't know. We've got now—we have 8 years of doing it our way after 12 years of doing it their way. And you can look at the difference in the consequences. You have got to be able to tell people this in real blunt terms. There is an economic difference, and you have evidence. There is a social difference.

They were against—my goodness, most of them were against the family medical leave law. They said it would really hurt the small-business economy. We've got 21 million new jobs, and 21 million people are taking advantage of family and medical leave. And I think you could argue it's made our economy stronger, because having people secure at work, knowing they can also be responsible in their family life, is a good thing, not a bad thing.

So there is a different economic policy. There is a different social policy. By and large, they were against our 100,000 police. They were against the Brady bill, against the assault weapons ban, except for a handful of them. Now we've had evidence: We now have half a million felons, fugitives, and stalkers couldn't get handguns under the Brady bill. We've got a 25-year low in crime, a 30-year low in gun crime. So the question is, are we going to build on our successes, or change course?

We have proved that you can improve the environment and grow the economy. We've got

cleaner air, cleaner water, safer food. And now we want to take on the big challenges like global warming and getting us a more secure energy future, which the American people should want after this last scare with the oil prices.

But if you look at what I've had to deal with since 1995—and they are trying to weaken our environmental protections and impose further burdens on our ability to protect the environment. They think that's what is necessary to grow the economy. Now, it's not like—we don't have any excuses here. We know, we've tried it their way; we've tried it our way. We've got a stronger economy and a cleaner environment.

So point number one: There are big differences. Point number two: We've had a test run, a long test run, 12 years for them, 8 years for us. The results are better under our way.

Now, the third point I want to make, to me, is more important than that. And it goes beyond just whether the country is better off, to the larger question of, how do you want to live, and how do you want to relate to each other and to the rest of the world?

Basically, I think the reason we have succeeded is that we've had a good philosophy that works, that everybody counts; everyone should have a chance; everyone has a responsible role to play; we all do better when we help each other. Simple ideas; they work.

We had a big press conference today—a couple of you there—on closing the digital divide. It's an empowerment device that I think is very important. I think the computer and the Internet—yes, they could make American society more divided, but they give us the chance—the chance—to lift more people out of poverty more quickly than ever before in all of human history, not only in the United States but all around the world—if we do it right.

But we have to be governed by the right philosophy, the right values. And that is weighing on my mind a lot. A lot of you have been hearing me talk about this—you know it is. But I believe that our attitude, our basic approach to life and public life and citizenship, determines in large measure how we make the most of this world we are living in.

I'm very grateful—I went this morning—I started off the day at the Building Trades, and there were 2,500 people there. And Bob Georgine, the head of the union, is retiring after 29 years. And it was wonderful, and they were all saying, "Thank you very much." And it was great for me. You know, you always want to think one or two people will miss you when you are gone.

But the truth is, I feel much more strongly about what we are going to do with this election and with our future than I do about the achievements of this administration for the last 7 years, and what I am going to get done in this last year, because I've worked very hard to try to help the American people turn the country around.

But this is what counts, because now we are in a position to really take all this success and do big things with it. We can get the country out of debt for the first time since 1835. We can make sure no kids grow up in poverty. We can give every child a world-class education. We can deal with the challenge of climate change, deal with our energy security, and actually create jobs doing it. We can bring economic opportunity to the places and people that have been left behind. We can be a stronger force for peace and freedom throughout the world because of all this success we've had. We can make America the safest big country in the world. There are big, big things we can do. We can save Social Security and Medicare for all the baby boom generation—big things.

But we have to have the right attitude. We have to really believe that everybody matters; everybody ought to have a chance; everybody has a responsible role to play; we all do better when we help each other. We've got to really believe that. And we've got to act on it. That's what this whole election is about.

It's weighing on my mind now, because today is the 32d anniversary of Martin Luther King's death. Five days ago was the 32d anniversary of Lyndon Johnson telling us he couldn't run for President again because the country was split right down the middle over the Vietnam war.

Now, I'm not trying to be a downer for any of you; there is not a more optimistic person than me in this house tonight. But I'm telling you this to make you sober, because we're celebrating the longest economic expansion in history. And in February, when it happened and we were all patting ourselves on the back—probably a little too much—I asked my economic team when the last longest economic expansion in history was, and they said, 1961 to 1969.

And I remember it very well, because I was coming of age. And when I finished high school

in '64, we had low unemployment, low inflation, high growth. We thought, oh, this thing was going to go on forever. We had President Johnson uniting the country after President Kennedy had been killed. We thought he was going to get rid of poverty. We thought all the civil rights problems would be handled in the Congress and the courts, not in the street. We thought everything would be fine.

And a couple of years later—so I come to Georgetown, to college, this big-eyed kid, believed in America and the promise of America and living the American dream, and everything was going to be great. And all of a sudden, we've got riots in the streets, and people are fighting over the Vietnam war. And by the time I graduated from college, it's 2 days after Senator Kennedy was killed, and 2 months after Martin Luther King was killed, and 9 weeks after Lyndon Johnson couldn't run for reelection, and a few weeks before President Nixon was elected on a very different idea from the idea I just gave you.

My idea is unite and lift; theirs was divide and conquer. That's what the Silent Majority was all about. Do you remember the Silent Majority? If you weren't part of it, you were part of the loud minority. That was me. [*Laughter*] I remember that. But it was "us" and "them," not "us" together. And just a few weeks after that election, poof, the longest economic expansion in American history was history, over.

Now, what's that got to do with today? Well, today, we're blessed. We have less internal crisis and external threat, but we're not free of those things. And all of life, every day, is a gift. We should be humble, humble in the face of this great prosperity of ours and absolutely determined to make the most of it.

So what I want you to do—thank you for your money. Thank you for helping us to be able to compete. And don't be discouraged when you see they have more than we do. It doesn't matter; they outspent us $100 million in '98, and we won anyway—in historic terms. All that matters is that we have enough to get our message out. But you need to be messengers. You need to say, "I'm for them, because there are differences between these two parties." You don't have to badmouth them; you don't have to demonize them. You don't have to do what they so often do.

You just have to say, "Look, there are differences between these two parties, and I agree with our position on the economy, on crime, on social justice, on individual rights, on the concept of community. I'm for hate crimes legislation. I'm for the "Employment Non-Discrimination Act." I don't believe we ought to single out racial minorities or women or gays or anybody else and run them out of our community. As long as they're law-abiding citizens, they ought to be protected and be a part of our future." There are differences, number one.

Number two, we tried it their way; we tried it our way. Our way is better. We've got the evidence. We've got a stronger economy, a cleaner environment, a lower crime rate, a more cohesive society, and a strong role in the world for peace and freedom.

Number three, this can get away from us, and we have to make the most of it. And the most important thing of all is how we feel about ourselves and one another. And we really do believe we all do better when we help each other. So we don't want to go back to divide-and-conquer; we're for unite-and-lift.

I've waited for 35 years for a day like this. I'm sorry I won't be around to keep on doing it. [*Laughter*] But I'm quite confident that if we make the right decisions in this election, the best days of this country are ahead.

The thing that matters is not all that we have done. The thing that really matters is what will we do with it and whether we'll all benefit. That's why I'm a member of this party. That's why I'm here tonight, and why I implore you to be messengers every day between now and November.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:29 p.m. at a private residence. In his remarks, he referred to dinner hosts Carol and David Pensky; Nancy Zirkin, director of government affairs, American Association of University Women, and her husband, Harold; Joseph J. Andrew, national chair, and Edward G. Rendell, general chair, Democratic National Committee; Director of Presidential Scheduling Correspondence Carrie Street; Assistant to the President and Director of Political Affairs Minyon Moore; Counselor to the President Ann F. Lewis; Gov. Parris N. Glendening of Maryland; Gov. George W. Bush of Texas; and Robert A. Georgine, president, Building and Construction Trades Department, AFL–CIO.