

Remarks at a Reception for Congressional Candidate Mike Ross September 12, 2000

The President. Thank you very much. Well, this is a special way for me to end what has been a special day, here in the home of my oldest friend in the world. The older we get, the more we want to say, longest standing—[*laughter*]—or some phony substitute. Mack and Donna Kay have been so wonderful to me, and I'm very grateful that they did this for Mike, because it's particularly important, and I want to say a little more about that.

I want to thank Senator Bumpers and Senator Lincoln and all the Members of Congress who are here from Arkansas and throughout the country and former Members who are here and all the members of my administration who are here and all of you who are here without whom I would not be here myself and those of you who have worked so hard to make our last 8 years successful for America.

You know, Mack was my first Chief of Staff, and then he was my Envoy to the Americas. And I think he now feels as at home in any South American country as he does in south Arkansas—[*laughter*]—because he's done such a great job for our country, and I'm very grateful for that.

And I'm grateful for all of you who've served in this administration, one way or the other—those of you still here to the bitter end and those of you that got out when you can still make some money. [*Laughter*] Look at old Billy laughing. [*Laughter*]

Now, I want to say a few things about this race. On the way down, Mack looked at me, and he put his arm around me, and he said, "Now, you know, you can't go down there and say what you really think." [*Laughter*] "Show a little restraint." So I'll try.

I want you to know a couple of things about Mike Ross and a couple things about south Arkansas. This district runs the whole length of the southern part of our State. It includes not only Hope, the place where I was born, but Hot Springs, the place where I grew up.

It includes a big chunk of the Mississippi Delta, one of the poorest parts of America. In fact, it's the poorest part of America, outside of the Native American reservations. It is an unbelievably wonderful place. I don't know that

I ever had so much fun in my life as I did campaigning down there. It's a place where personal contact matters a lot, and it's a place where I got 63 percent of the vote in the 1996 Presidential election. It is, therefore, the most Democratic seat in America presently held by a Republican, a genial person and a person who, wherever two or more gathered, was always happy to go, and that's good politics in south Arkansas. I know. I've been there. I never lost since they stood with me through thick and thin.

And it's a long way from Washington to the piney woods of south Arkansas, a long way from those soybean fields. And it's sometimes hard to get the message clear over the transom that exists between here and there. But all I can tell you is, I think that part of our State and our entire State are better off because of the economics, the education, the health care policies we've pursued, and whenever the chips were down, the Representative from south Arkansas was always on the other side.

Whenever the people down there needed one thing and the party leaders up here of the Republican Party said another, another always won. Over and over and over again, for 8 long years. It was just as hard politically for Blanche Lambert to stand up there 8 years ago and vote for that economic plan, as it would have been for the Congressman from the Fourth Congressional District. She did it, and he didn't, because they told him not to.

And when they said, "Now, here's this budget with the biggest education and environmental and health care cuts in history, and, oh, by the way, we're going to abolish the Department of Education," he stood up there and said, "Yes, sir, count me in."

And I'll bet you there never was a speech given about it at any country crossroad in south Arkansas. More to the point, when they—when we finally got out of debt and started running surpluses and started paying down an accumulated national debt which had quadrupled in the 12 years before we came here, when they controlled the economic policy of the country, then they were up here voting for tax cuts, most of which would go to a lot of people in this room that don't need it as bad as they

need—[laughter]—as bad as you need lower interest rates in a strong economy and a good stock market that will give you a better future.

[At this point, a member of the audience collapsed.]

The President. We've got a doctor here. It's just hot. Can we get my doctor back there? Yes, open the door. Get the air in here. Oh, Vic's back there. Doctor Prince is there. Well, we should have opened that long ago; look how breezy it is. You can't do any good by staring, so just come back here. Let him go to work.

Now, let me tell you just two other things that are more important. All these elections are always about the future.

Can you get through? We now have three doctors. [Laughter] We observe the Patients' Bill of Rights in practice, even though it's not law yet. [Laughter]

I want to tell you just two other things. I've known Mike Ross, as he told you, since he was a teenager. And when I heard he wanted to run for Congress, I told everybody that would listen that he could win if he won the nomination. You know why? Because he'll go to every country crossroads, too. He'll be working when his opponent quits, and when he gets elected, he'll actually vote for the people that he said he was going to try to help.

This is not a complicated deal here. This is simple, straightforward, but hard. The reason he needs your money is, the people have got to understand what the consequences of their vote is, not in south Arkansas but in Washington.

I can't help just making one other point. You know, I can't believe—the other day I got questioned by a reporter from a paper that had always opposed me when I was down there, asking me if I didn't feel bad that I hadn't delivered more pork barrel to Arkansas like Lyndon Johnson did to Texas. And I thought to myself: Well, if we had a Democratic majority in Congress and all the Representatives and Senators from Arkansas were Democrats, we could have done a lot better on that one, once the economy turned around.

The last thing I want to say is, elections are always about the future. I worked really hard to turn this country around, and we're in better shape than we were 8 years ago, but I believe what I said at the convention. The best is still out there. I've waited since I was a boy for

my country to be in a position to build the future of our dreams for our children. All the best is still out there.

So even though my party has a new leader, whom I believe will be the next President, and his Vice Presidential partner is a man who's been a friend of mine for 30 years, and a very, very good person; even though my family has a new candidate—and I had one of the great thrills of my life voting for her this morning for the first time—I have decided to assume the role of Cheerleader in Chief in this election. [Laughter]

What I want you to know is, the best is still out there, but it depends on what decisions the American people make for President and Vice President, the Senate races and the House races. I'm just telling you, you need—those of you from Arkansas need to go home and lay the bacon down to all those people.

When I passed that economic plan by a single vote, they said it was going to wreck the economy. Like Mike said, time has not been kind to their prediction. When I signed the Brady bill, when Mike and I got that done, I thought half the hunters in Arkansas were going to write us off the list, and the Congressman from down there was telling everybody, "Oh, this is going to end hunting, and it's going to end the way of life in Arkansas." I want every hunter that missed a single day, an hour in the deer woods, to vote against Mike Ross for Congress, and every other one ought to vote for him, because the crime rate has gone down for 7 years in a row in this country, because we put 100,000 police on the streets.

If you look ahead—let me just mention two or three of the issues. If they win, they're going to give those of us who are in good income groups—and finally, maybe I'll be making at least half what Mack does next year—and we'll get some sort of short-term satisfaction, but they'll put this country back in debt.

I'm telling you, by the time you add up all the taxes they passed last year—this year, that they promise to pass again and all the ones their nominee promised to pass and the trillion dollar cost of partially privatizing Social Security—\$1 trillion—and all their other spending policies, you're back in deficits again.

If you want to know—you know what it would mean—I just got an economic analysis that said that if the Vice President's economic program passes and we keep on track to get this country

out of debt in 12 years for the first time since 1835, it will keep interest rates one percent lower for a decade than it would if the other nominee's program and the program of this Congress, the congressional majority, passes.

Do you know what that's worth? Listen to this: \$390 billion in 10 years in home mortgages; \$30 billion in car payments; \$15 billion in college loan payments. In other words, a \$425 billion tax cut to ordinary working families, like the people that live in south Arkansas.

Now, that's just one example. They promised to get rid of the 100,000 police program, and the other 50,000 we're putting on, even though crime has gone down 7 years in a row because we're preventing more crime. There are consequences to this.

They're not for a Patients' Bill of Rights, because HMO's don't want it. I don't know about you, but I want more young people not only to run for Congress but to want to be physicians, want to be in general practice, and want to know if they'd make a referral to a specialist, because somebody desperately needs it, they're not going to be second-guessed.

I don't like the fact that most health care plans won't let people who aren't in so-called high risk groups get tests for colon cancer, when we know that if 100 percent of us, after we got over 50, did the test, we'd cut the death rate by 50 percent in 2 years. I don't like that. There are consequences to this.

They talk about how they're for Medicare drugs, and they want to help the poor people first because this plan might be so expensive. My Medicare drug program—and they've got that ad on, talking about how we want the Government to take over health care. We want Medicare to run a drug program. Medicare has lower administrative costs, by far, than any HMO in America.

Even the insurance companies—God bless them; I've got to give them this—even the insurance companies have tried to tell the Republicans they can't offer drug insurance at affordable rates, and nobody will buy it. And in Nevada, they tried it, and they couldn't get a single company to offer it. And the Republican majority says, "I don't care. They're going to offer it, or you can't have your drugs. But we're going to give it to the poor people."

What they don't say is, half the people in this country, half the senior citizens who need medicine and can't afford it and don't have in-

surance, are not covered by their program. They're above 150 or 175 percent of the poverty line. Do you know what 175 percent of the poverty line is? Fourteen thousand seven hundred dollars for a senior citizen. So if you make \$14,800 and you've got a \$200 drug bill a month, which is small compared to what some people in that age group have, you get nothing.

Now, there are consequences to this, and what you are doing here, if you're not from Arkansas, is giving him the money to make sure that we can run ads down there, so that people understand when he shows up at the country store, they'll get somebody who'll come home every weekend and work for them but who will go back to Washington and work for them, too.

I've talked longer than I meant to, but I think—I think that in these 8 years, I've earned the right to say what I think about the next 4 years. *[Laughter]* So I'm telling you, all of you that come from Arkansas, or any of you that have any friends down there, we needed your money, and we're glad you gave it. But it's not enough.

Clarity is our friend in this election. Why did Vice President Gore move up and stay up after his speech? Governor Bush gave a beautiful speech in Philadelphia. It was beautiful. It was very well written. It was eloquent. It was compelling in a personal way, and people liked it. But it didn't have any legs. Why? Because they couldn't afford to say, "Hey, we're not for a real Patients' Bill of Rights. We're not for real Medicare drug benefits, and we do want to have tax cuts so big that when we privatize Social Security, we'll be back in debt." They couldn't say that. *[Laughter]* So they had to sort of blur everything over. Believe me, old Mike's in there running against the guy that's a master at that blurring. This seat was held by David Pryor and Ray Thornton and Beryl Anthony. This seat should be held by Mike Ross.

I'm just pleading with you. The other side is going to pour a lot of money into it, and there's going to be a lot of good backslapping and a lot of people remembering when I showed up at your chicken supper or this, that, or the other thing. And I care a lot about that. But I know this district. They're mostly just hard-working, small business people, factory workers, farmers, people doing their best to obey the law, keep body and soul together, and figure out how to live together.

The district is about a third African-American. It is a beautiful, wonderful place. It deserves to have a wonderful Congressman. If you can give him some more money for the election, you ought to do it. If you can't, you ought to call somebody down there or go home and work. I'm telling you, clarity is our friend. If the people know what the choice really means for them in their lives, he will win this thing in a walk. But he's not going to win it in a walk, because they've got a lot of money for—[inaudible]—but we've got to go down and fight for clarity for 56 more days. He's been out here

for 15 months. The rest of us ought to do whatever we can for him for 56 days.

Thank you very much. God bless you. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:45 p.m. at a private residence. In his remarks, he referred to reception hosts Thomas F. (Mack) and Donna Kay McLarty; former Senator Dale Bumpers; and Republican Presidential candidate Gov. George W. Bush of Texas. Mike Ross was a candidate for Congress in Arkansas' Fourth Congressional District.

Remarks on Hate Crimes Legislation September 13, 2000

Mr. Holder, thank you for your leadership. Commander O'Malley, thank you for coming back and for being the embodiment of someone who has changed his position on this and been courageous enough to say so.

And Mrs. Byrdsong, I cannot even imagine the courage it must take for you to have made this journey from your home, to stand up in front of us, to say what you have said. I thank your pastor for joining you here. And I think I speak for all of us and for all Americans: We thank you for trying to turn your pain into a positive gain for America. We thank you.

I'd like to thank Justin Dart and Mary Frances Berry and so many other advocates of human rights and civil rights for being in this room today. I would like to thank the members of the Interfaith Alliance who are here and, of course, the members of our DC city council.

Many Members of Congress wanted to be here, but they are actually voting now, and in the House they're voting on this, on amendments to this very proposal. So we're here at a very important time. The first-ever vote on comprehensive hate crimes legislation is scheduled in the House of Representatives for later today after the amendments have been dealt with. That would enable us to clear the last legislative hurdle to final passage of hate crimes.

In June, with the Vice President standing watch in case a tie had to be broken, the Senate passed a strong bipartisan hate crimes bill. I was very moved by many of the things that

were said there, but I want to say a special words of thanks publicly to Senator Gordon Smith from Oregon, an evangelical Christian Republican, for the speech that he gave on that occasion, reminding us that this is not a partisan issue. I hope the House will follow suit.

As I have said many times over the last couple of years, it is for me a sad and painful irony that at the beginning of a new century I have done so much to try to fill with opportunity for the American people and to bring full of hope to the rest of the world, with all the modern gadgets we enjoy, we are still bedeviled by mankind's oldest failing, the fear of the other, which so quickly can lead to distrust, then to dehumanization, then to the kind of violence that ended the lives of Matthew Shepard and Ricky Byrdsong far, far before their time.

We may not ever fully conquer the disease that seems to afflict human hearts everywhere, the compelling need to define ourselves up by defining someone else down. But at least we can do more to make sure that no one in our country is violated simply because of who they are. That's why we're here today. I would also like to point out that there is a connection between the two ways that throughout history, and if you just look at the last century, hate crimes have manifested themselves.

Here we talk about sad people, twisted inside, who somehow felt they could fill a hole in their own lives by taking the lives of other people away, people who had somehow been convinced