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In Washington today we are having the debate of the century about what kind of people we are and what kind of future we're going to have, what our obligations to each other are, and whether we really believe in opportunity for all and responsibility from all, whether we really believe we have an obligation to help families stay together and to take care of our parents when they're sick and our children when they're growing up, whether we really believe that we are, as our motto says, from many one.

David Pryor is the embodiment of what I want our country to keep at and to become and to do. Senator Bumpers quoted de Tocqueville. He said a long time ago that this is a great country. ''America is great,'' he said, ''because America is good. And if America ever ceases to be good, she will no longer be great.'' David Pryor has been a great public servant because he is fundamentally good.

William Wordsworth said the last best hope of a good man's life are the little, unremembered acts of kindness and love. David Pryor, over more than 30 years, every person in this room and every person in our State has been embraced by your kindness and love, and we thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 8:25 p.m. in Governor's Hall II in the Statehouse Convention Center. In his remarks, he referred to Jimmie Lou Fisher, Arkansas State treasurer; Maurice Mitchell, attorney in Little Rock; Skip Rutherford, former State Democratic chair; Bynum Gibson, State Democratic chair.

Remarks to the Florida State Democratic Convention

December 10, 1995

The President. Thank you. Thank you for that warm and rousing welcome. I've enjoyed listening through my earphone here to what's going on down there. I see that Senator Dodd has almost lost his voice in the enthusiasm and so has your State party chair, Terry Brady. But I want to thank both of them for their leadership and for what they have done and for stirring everybody up and getting you excited over the election we're about to have and the stakes there.

I want to say hello to Attorney General Bob Butterworth. I'd also like to send kind greetings to all of my friends down there, especially to Governor Chiles, Lieutenant Governor MacKay, Senator Bob Graham.

I am very pleased to be able to speak with you today at this very important convention. As we move into the Presidential campaign season, you know, I can't help but recall that it was almost 4 years ago to the day that Florida and the Florida Democrats, at this meeting, put our campaign on the map, when you helped me to win a decisive straw poll victory on December 15th, 1991. I remember that day so well, for that victory convinced me that the American people were serious about wanting new leadership in Washington and a new direction for our country.

You know, I have many things I want to say, but the most important thing I can do is to say a simple thank you. Thank you for helping me and Al Gore to the White House, to give us a chance to advance the economy and to honor the values that are critical to moving our country forward into the 21st century.

So, even though we have to talk a lot today about the future, let me say one more time: Thank you for your faith in me and in Vice President Gore; thank you for your support for these past 3 years.

Today, my fellow Americans, I come to you with a simple and straightforward message. We live in a great country in a time of very great change. We are moving forward from the industrial age to an age of technology. We are moving away from the cold-war era into the era of the global village. We know that. I ran for President to change things in this country, to take advantage of this time of absolutely enormous, enormous possibility so that we could make the most of the lives of every American and give all Americans back their future. And so that we would make sure that our country would still be able to lead the world toward peace and freedom and prosperity. We have done that.

Our country is in better shape today than it was 3 years ago. Our economy is stronger, we are coming back to our basic values, and we are leading the world toward peace. But to continue to be true to those values, we

have to have a clear vision of the future, and we have to stick with it. You know that.

When I ran for President in 1992, I was committed to restoring the American dream for all our people and to make absolutely sure that America would go into the next century still the most powerful country in the world, the greatest force for peace and freedom and prosperity the world had ever known. I said we would do it by having an economic policy that produced jobs and growth, that expanded the middle class and shrinks the under class by giving us a modern Government that is smaller and less bureaucratic and more entrepreneurial, and most important of all, by being true to old-fashioned American values at a new time: responsibility from all and opportunity for all; the value of work; the understanding that we have to help families stay strong and stick together; and a sense of community that we're all stronger when we work together and we're all in this fight to the future together; also, the strong sense that we do have obligations to our parents, to our children, to one another, and to those who, through no fault of their own, need some help to make the most of their own lives. Let me say again: This country is in better shape than it was 3 years ago. We still have challenges, and we have to keep going in the right direction. But America is on the move.

We've reduced the deficit in 3 consecutive years of this administration. It's now been cut in half. Over 7 years, that works out to about $15,000 of reduced Federal debt for every family of four in Florida. In the past 3 years, we've also seen more than 7½ million new jobs created, more than 590,000 of them right there in Florida. We've got a record number of new businesses, 2½ million more homeowners. Home-building in the State of Florida has increased 6 percent a year after dropping 4 percent a year during the previous 12 years.

And America is safer and stronger today than we were 3 years ago. For the very first time since the dawn of the nuclear age, there is not a single Russian missile pointed at an American child. And American leadership is opening the door to peace and reconciliation all over the world, from Northern Ireland to the Middle East to Haiti and to Bosnia.

The United States is leading the world toward a more peaceful future. We've got a chance to end the misery in Bosnia for good. It was our diplomacy, backed by NATO's resolve, that brought the leaders of the Balkans to the peace table in Dayton, OH. And now they have made a commitment to peace. Our responsibility truly begins now. If we walk away from their request to us to help them preserve their peace, our allies will do the same, and the peace will fail. The slaughter will begin again, and that conflict could spread like poison throughout the region, drawing us in, in much greater risk to our own soldiers.

NATO, the alliance of democracies that has preserved our security for half a century by working with our strong European allies, would be shaken to its core if we walked away from their request to help preserve the peace in Bosnia. And American leadership, not only in Europe but all around this world, will pay a terrible, terrible price. For all of those reasons, we must help to preserve the peace.

This Bosnian peace mission is clearly defined. It has realistic goals to be reached in a definite period of time. Our force will be strong, and they will have strong rules of engagement so that they can protect themselves and pursue the mission. I am convinced that the risks to our troops have been minimized to the maximum extent possible. After all, we're not going to fight a war but to wage a peace. We do it for the people of Bosnia, for the stability of Europe, for American leadership, and for the values we hold dear. We also have a special interest in promoting peace and democracy in two nations just off your shore, in Haiti and in Cuba.

Just over one year ago, our diplomacy, backed by military muscle, forced a brutal military regime in Haiti to surrender its power. We gave democracy there another chance. You know better than people in any other State that this has been good for America and good for Haiti. The tide of refugees from Haiti, which stood at about 16,000 in the months prior to the intervention, has been dramatically reduced. The people of Haiti, with help from the international community, are slowly building a democracy and a working economy. And President Aristide,

as he said he would, has been a force for reconciliation.

Now all of this takes time, and there may be setbacks along the way. But just a week from now, Haiti will hold Presidential elections which will freely transfer power from one democratically elected President to another for the very first time in the nation's history. This is an extraordinary achievement. America, and particularly Floridians, where so many Haitians live, should be proud that we helped to restore democracy to Haiti.

Cuba, of course, is still a different story. It's now the only country in our hemisphere which continues to resist the powerful trend toward democracy. Our administration is working to encourage its peaceful transition to a free and open society. We will continue to do everything we can to promote peaceful change, protect human rights, and move Cuba into the camp of democracy.

With all of the progress we've made, both here at home and abroad, the thing that I am most proud of, I think, is the tangible evidence that our country is coming back together around our core values. Because we not only have economic progress, we not only have the lowest rates of unemployment and inflation in 27 years, but in almost every State in America and almost every major community, the crime rate is down, the murder rate is down, the food stamp rolls are down, the welfare rolls are down. For 2 years, the teen pregnancy rate has dropped, and the poverty rate is down.

We are coming back together, and we're moving forward together. And as you know, I believe we can only move forward if we do it together. We're moving in the right direction, but now we have to make some decisions that will keep us on that track. That really is what this big budget debate in Washington is all about. It isn't just about dollars and cents, it goes to the heart of who we are as a people, what we believe, what we stand for, what kind of America we want our children and grandchildren to inherit in the 21st century.

Last Wednesday, using the pen that was used to sign Medicare and Medicaid into law in 1965, I vetoed the Republican budget. I did it to preserve our commitment to our parents, to protect opportunity for our children, to defend our public health and environment, and to stop a tax increase that undercuts the value of work for the hardest pressed working families and their children in this country. The very next day, I gave Congress a budget that does balance in 7 years without their devastating cuts in Medicare and Medicaid, in education and the environment, and one that does not raise taxes on working families.

Let me tell you again why I vetoed their budget. Americans have always believed we owe a duty to our parents. The Republican budget that I vetoed would turn Medicare into a second-class system. The Medicare system that has served older Americans so well for 30 years would be over, and I'm not going to let that happen.

My 7-year balanced budget secures the Medicare Trust Fund into the future without imposing new costs on hard-pressed seniors. And it preserves Medicaid's guarantee of quality health care for poor children, pregnant women, disabled Americans, and older Americans.

There are many differences between the Republican budget that I vetoed and the one I presented last week. But perhaps the starkest one of all is the different treatment of Medicaid. As I told Governor Chiles in a White House meeting with Governors on Friday, the Republican budget would be a disaster for States like Florida that depend on Medicaid. Medicaid is a guarantee not only to seniors who might need nursing home care, it's also a guarantee to their families against having their financial security threatened if an older parent falls seriously ill. This Republican plan would change all that. Families tomorrow could find themselves forced to pay large sums for quality nursing home care that Medicaid guarantees today. It would force those working families to choose between quality nursing home care for their parents and quality education and health care for their own children. We shouldn't force our working families to have to make that type of choice.

Now, I want to work with the Republican Congress. I want to work to get a balanced budget. But I will not—I will not permit the repeal of guaranteed medical coverage for senior citizens, for disabled people, for poor

children, for pregnant women, for people with AIDS. That would violate our values. It would undermine our families and, therefore, even weaken our economy. And what's more, it's not necessary. So if they continue to make this a part of their budget, I'll veto it again and again and again.

My fellow Democrats, we're going to win this battle; we have to. Nothing less than the heart and soul of our Nation are at stake. That's why I'm asking for your continued support now more than ever. All of us who share the same values, whether we're Democrats, Republicans, or independents, all of us who share the same vision for our country and our future, we have got to stand together now for the American people. We need to stand together on behalf of the elderly, the disabled, the pregnant women, and poor children to protect Medicare and Medicaid. We need to stand together on behalf of the millions and millions of young people in this country who would be denied the chance for a better education if the Republicans are successful in slashing Head Start, slashing the college loan options, slashing the college scholarships.

We need to stand together to reward hard-working families by providing the child care mothers need to move from welfare to work and by refusing to raise taxes on 8 million working families. We have to build on the successes of the last 3 years. But we must not turn back the clock.

Some Republicans in Congress have made clear their strategy of trying to force through harmful health care, education, and environmental cuts, that would be very damaging to Florida, by threatening to shut our Government down once again. They did it a month ago, but the threat failed.

Now, as the holidays approach, I sincerely hope that there will be a spirit in the Congress that will make it possible for us to bring good faith to our negotiations. We are now engaged in negotiations on how best to balance the budget consistent with our values. And I proposed the 7-year balanced budget, and even proposed a specific compromise so that we could finish our work on this year's budget and keep the Government open.

We have serious differences on Medicare, Medicaid, education, and the environment, on tax fairness and also on research and technology that I know are critical to our future. But we ought to be able to agree on this: Nobody, nobody, should threaten to shut the Government down right before Christmas.

Let me close by reminding all of you how far we've come and what I hope you will do in the year ahead. Remind your fellow citizens in Florida that America is in better shape than we were 3 years ago and Florida is in better shape than it was 3 years ago. We do have a 27-year low in the combined rates of unemployment and inflation. We do have progress in crime and welfare reform, in reducing many of the social problems that still continue to plague us. We do have progress in making the world a more peaceful place.

And Florida has received the attention it deserved from our administration. The Southern Command is moving to Florida. The Summit of the Americas was held in Florida. The defense budgets of the country have been kept strong in the way it has preserved the military presence in Florida that will help us to be secure in the future. Our trade policies, our technology policies have helped Florida.

But if you look to the future and you think of America and what you want it to be like 10, 20, 30 years from now, you know we still have a long way to go. The answer is to redouble our efforts in the direction we are heading, not to derail this train of America's progress. We have to have a vision, and we have to have policies that prepare our children for the vast challenges and opportunities of the 21st century; vision and policy that promote life-long learning so our workers can meet the demands of change; vision and a policy that empowers communities to solve their own problems, that ensures the safety of our citizens on our streets, in our schools, and in our homes, that helped us to come together as a country and as one big American community. That's the vision we all share for America.

America is now in the best position to lead the world into the 21st century as well. And you know, with our common security threats, of the proliferation of dangerous nuclear, chemical and biological weapons, with the problems we have with terrorism and drug-

trafficking and organized crime, you know we have to put our values into action around the world and come together in that same spirit.

I want you to promise yourself that when you walk out of this room today and for the next year, you are going to walk up to your fellow Americans in every possible venue, and talk about these fundamental values, these fundamental issues, this shared vision that you and I have for our future and for our children. If we will do that, if we will bring the same enthusiasm I heard from you today into our daily lives, into our daily contacts with the kind of people who never have the opportunity to be in a convention hall, we will prevail. But far, far more important, America will have the future that our children deserve.

Thank you, and God bless you all.

Audience members. Four more years! Four more years! Four more years!

[*At this point, the moderator thanked the President and introduced the first questioner, who asked how proposed budget cuts will affect Medicare and Medicaid.*]

The President. Well, first of all, I thank you for the way you ask the question, because I do think a lot of Americans think that it's just bickering and may be just another political fight. But that isn't right.

There is an argument in Washington over the fundamental responsibility of our National Government in the area of health care and whether we do have an obligation to preserve Medicare as it has worked for our seniors for the last 30 years and to preserve, through the Medicaid program, a guarantee of health care for the elderly, for the disabled, for poor children and pregnant women.

Now, let's talk about the facts on Medicare. On Medicare, we do have to find a way to strengthen the Medicare Trust Fund. I've been saying that for sometime now. But the Republican cuts in Medicare are more than twice as great as are necessary to secure the Medicare Trust Fund well into the next century.

What they're doing is a number of things. Let me try to be as specific as I can so you'll understand. They say they want to encourage more seniors to take their Medicare benefits in managed care plans. I'm all for giving people the incentive to do that. But I am against forcing people into managed care plans.

If you look at their budget, what they do is, they charge elderly people much more, not just in premiums but in copays and deductibles, to stay in Medicare. And they fund the traditional Medicare program at such a lower level that they're going to wind up trying to force seniors to pay more for less medical care in managed care plans. And the way the plan is now drafted, it is actually toughest on the oldest, the poorest, and the sickest seniors in the country. It is unconscionable, and it is wrong.

If you look at the Medicaid program, what they do is to cut the Medicaid program so much and to put the States under so much pressure, especially a State like Florida, that we think it is clear that millions of people will lose Medicaid coverage, hundreds of thousands of seniors who now get Medicaid help to stay in nursing homes would be denied it, millions of poor children will lose their coverage, and we will have, in a State like Florida especially, where you have a lot of poor children needing Medicaid coverage and a lot of seniors who are entitled to it, an unbearable burden placed on the States and a lot of human suffering. And it is unnecessary to balance the budget.

So I guess the facts in short are, number one, we need to save the Medicaid Trust Fund, but they're doing too much and it's going to hurt too much and it's going to really turn Medicaid as we know it into a second-class system. Number two, the Medicaid program would be devastated. And number three, and this is the most important thing of all, it is not necessary to do this to balance the budget.

I just want to remind the Democrats there that we cut the deficit in half in 3 years with only Democratic votes. We didn't get a single, solitary Republican vote in the Congress to do it. When we passed our program in 1993, they said it wouldn't reduce the deficit; they said it would bring on a recession. And they were wrong. They were wrong. The Republicans say they're against big Government. I want to remind you of something else. Since I've been in office, we're reduced the size of the Federal Government by

200,000. It's now the smallest it's been since John Kennedy was President, and as a percentage of our civilian work force, it's the smallest it's been since 1933. The Democrats did that. We did it by treating our Federal employees humanely, giving them good retirement and severance packages. We did it by increasing the productivity of the fine Federal employees that are left. We reduced the burden of big Government. We're eliminating 16,000 pages of Federal regulation. Those were Democratic reforms.

This is not about the problems of big Government. They want to strip the National Government of its ability to protect and advance the interests of the elderly and the children and the disabled people of this country. That is what is going on here.

[*The next questioner asked the President what he had done to give children a better education and brighter future.*]

The President. To answer your question in the way you posed it, the most important thing we have done is to give this country a comprehensive education policy focused not only on greater educational opportunities but on higher standards and higher quality education. And I'd like to give you some specific examples.

We have increased the number of our young people in Head Start programs by tens of thousands. For the public schools, we have written into law the national education goals and said to every State we will give you extra help if you will commit to try to reach these goals and if you will commit to a system which holds you accountable so that we can see whether you're making progress toward reaching these goals. We will give you extra help, and we will give special help to districts that are poor or that have a lot of poor children, but we all have to have the same high standards and we all have to be willing to be held accountable.

For young people who aren't going to college, we have launched a national school-to-work program to help every State give young people good training so they can get good jobs even if they don't have 4-year college degrees. Then, for young people who are going to college, we've launched a new direct student loan program that has lower cost college loans available to more kids with better terms of repayment.

One of the most successful things we've done—I've talked about it a lot in Florida—we have dramatically increased the number of student loans and the possibility of earning money through college through our national service program, AmeriCorps. Every single one of those things is at risk in the Republican budget, and I am fighting for every single one of them.

But we have a comprehensive education strategy based on national standards and grassroots reforms and more opportunity. That is what I think we ought to be pushing for. No company in the world and no country in the world would go into the 21st century by cutting its investment in education and technology and research. But this budget cuts our investment in education, technology, and research. It is a prescription for bad economics. That's the other thing I want to say to people: This Republican budget is not just bad in human terms, it's going to be bad for the economy. It will undermine the economic strategy that we have pursued that has given us the world's strongest economy again, and I want you to stick with us on the education issue.

NOTE: The President spoke by satellite at 10:17 a.m. from the Dempsey Thomas Film Studio in Little Rock, AR, to the convention meeting in Miami Beach, FL. In his remarks, he referred to Gov. Lawton Chiles and Lt. Gov. Buddy MacKay of Florida, and President Jean-Bertrand Aristide of Haiti.

Statement on the Nomination of Kweisi Mfume as Chairman of the NAACP

December 10, 1995

I was delighted to hear about the nomination of Representative Kweisi Mfume to the leadership of the NAACP. In his distinguished career as the Representative of Baltimore's 7th District, Congressman Mfume has been an outspoken advocate for working Americans, an articulate voice on race relations and a tireless fighter against crime. His was a voice in the Congress that sought not to be divisive but to find common ground