

Remarks at a Democratic Luncheon in Detroit, Michigan

March 4, 1996

Thank you very much. Thank you so much. Thank you, Senator Levin, for that kind introduction and for your service in the Senate. I'm depending on all of you to make sure he continues that service in the Senate. We need him.

When you remember in 1996 what the other party attempted to do in 1995 to our budget and to our country, remember that the President alone could not stop it. If we had not had a veto-proof Senate and House, it would not have been possible to stop. So I ask you to reelect Carl Levin and John Dingell and David Bonior, and all the other members of the Democratic caucus of Michigan who are here. I see Sandy Levin and I think John Conyers is here. I see Bart Stupak out there, and I'm sure Lynn Rivers is here. And we need more people. So I want you to work hard in these races because they matter. They matter to you. They matter to our country.

It was a pretty long, lonely, cold fight for the last year, until the American people began to be heard loud and clear to make it possible for us to do some positive things which I hope will come forward in 1996. But I'm telling you it really matters not only to Michigan but to the entire United States for these people to be reelected and for you to send others of good will to join them.

So I thank you, Senator. And I thank you, David, for your leadership. And I want to say a special word of thanks to John Dingell. When Democrats lost the House for the first time in a long time, a lot of Members announced their retirement. And it wasn't so much fun anymore if you were a committee chairman or you had a nice subcommittee. And one day Hillary and I were sitting alone in the White House talking—this is a true story—we were talking, and some senior Member of the House had announced his retirement. And I looked at her and I said, "You know what, I'll bet you a hundred dollars John Dingell won't quit. He doesn't think you should quit when you're down, you ought to keep fighting until you get up again. Then you can quit." And I thank you for that.

Thank you, Ed McNamara, for that subtle reference to the airport and the funds you want. [*Laughter*] We were sitting there, and Ed in his nice Irish charm said, "You remember when you started running for President and nobody knew who you were, but I was there for you?" [*Laughter*] I said, "Yeah." He said, "Didn't you remember when everybody said you were just dead as a doornail and you were dropping like a rock and I didn't quit you?" [*Laughter*] I said, "Yeah." He said, "I've always been there, haven't I? Well," he said, "the bill's come due. [*Laughter*] I don't want anything for myself, but my airport needs \$15 million a year for the next 10 years."

If every public official asked for the bill to come due only for the public interest, this country would be a better place. Thank you, Mr. McNamara. Thank you.

I want to say it's nice to see Ambassador Blanchard here. I had occasion last week to talk to the Prime Minister of Canada, who is a remarkable man. And he was helping us to maintain our mission of peace and freedom and democracy in Haiti. And just in passing he said, "You know, you need to know that Jim Blanchard is the best Ambassador to Canada in my lifetime." He has done a remarkable job. Thank you.

I want to thank all the former Members of Congress who are here, the leaders of labor, the leaders of the teachers organizations, the business leaders, and all others who have come here for the Democratic Party today. And I want to thank all these folks here at our table who helped to sponsor this event for the work that they did. And I want to say a special word of thanks to Mayor Archer for proving that the empowerment zone could work, because Detroit has set the standard for the rest of the country.

The other day we had a meeting in Washington of all the communities who had participated in our empowerment zone enterprise community initiative. And for a modest investment of cash and a modest cluster of tax incentives, it is remarkable what is going on. But in no community in America can it be said that Detroit has been matched by taking this roughly \$100 million in cash, and about that much, perhaps a little more, in tax incentives and turning it into a \$2 billion

private commitment. I thank all the business community who participated in that and the fact that everybody is working together here. But, Mayor, more than anything else, it's a tribute to your leadership, and I thank you for what you have done.

I also want to thank the mayor for introducing everybody. He did a good job of introducing everybody. It reminded me of—he kept on introducing people, you know; it reminded me of the very first speech I ever gave as an elected official—was when I became attorney general of my State almost 20 years ago. And I was very nervous, and there were 500 people at a Rotary Club installation banquet in Pine Bluff, Arkansas—I never will forget this—January 1977. The banquet started at 6:30 p.m. I got up at a quarter to 10 p.m. to talk. *[Laughter]*

There were 500 people there and everybody had been introduced in the entire audience, except three people, and they went home mad. *[Laughter]* And the guy that got up to introduce me looked out at the crowd and said “You know, we could have stopped here and had a real nice evening.” *[Laughter]* And I thought, now, that's not what he meant, but that's what he said. *[Laughter]* Ever since then I've been more careful about what I said.

I also want to thank David Bonior for telling that joke. I used to tell jokes, but they told me it wasn't Presidential, so I had to quit. *[Laughter]* So now I just have to laugh at other people, and I'm always grateful when I get one.

Let me say a special word of thanks to the DNC Chairman, Don Fowler, who is here with us, and to Terry McAuliffe and Laura Hartigan for the work they've done. I'm very grateful to them. And let me say to all of you, again, I don't want to give a long talk today, but I want you to understand exactly what is at stake.

In 1992 when I ran for President and the people of Michigan were good enough to vote for me, the real issue was whether we had to have a change or stay with the status quo; whether we would adopt an aggressive approach to the challenges facing America, the economic challenges and the social challenges, or whether we would basically say that the Government could kind of stand pat

and wait for things to get better. And so the American people, both those who voted for my candidacy and those who supported Mr. Perot, voted for change.

In 1996 there is a different issue. It may be papered over from time to time, and people may claim they're more moderate or whatever you will hear. But the truth is that the choice will be between two very different changes, two very different approaches to the future. And you will have to decide, along with all our fellow Americans, which approach you favor. At least now, as I think the mayor said or the Senator said—somebody said—you have some basis for comparison that goes beyond rhetoric.

When I became President I was basically driven into the race by the conviction that this country could not sit by and permit the American dream to be squandered for a generation of Americans, permit the leadership of 50 years to be squandered for the future of America, and permit this country to be divided and to come apart when we ought to be coming together. I had a very simple, straightforward vision for the country that I still think about every single day. I believe we have to go into the next century with the American dream alive and well for every person who is willing to work for it; with America the world's leading force for peace and freedom and prosperity and security; and with America coming together around our basic values of work and faith and family, of responsibility along with opportunity, and more important than anything else, of a sense of community—that we are going forward together if we are going forward at all—and that we don't need to become a place and not a country. We don't need to become a swarm of isolated individuals. We don't need to become a group of people who think that we can only advance if our neighbors fall back, who think that we can only be important if we can somehow diminish the significance of others who share this land with us.

The ultimate, terrible, extreme tragedy of that point of view we saw once again in the Middle East today where a fanatic blew himself to smithereens for the pleasure of killing innocent children. Why? Because if you believe those who are different from you are the embodiment of the devil, then they de-

serve whatever they get. And then life's animating purpose is continuing the division, turning up the heat until it becomes hatred, and making sure that nothing good or positive ever happens. And in a fundamental way, when you go through a period of change, like we are—thank God we don't face that in that dimension—but when you go through a period of change like we are, when it can be very disorienting, you have to decide, am I going to define myself in terms of who I am or who I'm not; in terms of what I'm for or what I am against; in terms of what I intend to do or in terms of what I want someone to do for me. These are great and fundamental questions.

Now, there has always been a healthy political debate in this country, and there always will be, and well there should be. No one has a corner on the truth. No one has a market for the future. I understand that. But when we decide what kind of change we want, it depends fundamentally, more importantly than anything else, on whether we believe we have to go forward together or whether we think we ought to be left to fend for ourselves, because all of us in this room are more successful than most and we'll do just fine. That is the fundamental change question the American people confront today.

If you look at this period through which we are going, it explains much of the ambivalence, sometimes the outright confusion people have about the present moment. How could we have almost 8 million new jobs after 4 years of having virtually no new jobs, how could we have a growth in manufacturing jobs after 4 years of losing manufacturing jobs, how could we regain the lead in automobile production for the first time in a decade and a half, how could we be voted the world's most productive economy 2 years in a row after having been ranked fifth or sixth or something when I took office? How could all this happen and still half or more of the American people are working harder for the same or lower pay in terms of purchasing power? How could that happen?

How could it be that we created this many jobs, but there would still be isolated pockets where no new opportunities were coming and children were on the street raising them-

selves and, therefore, the crime rate would be going down nationwide, but it would still be going up among juveniles in certain areas? How could this happen?

How can it be if the stock market is at 5,700, big companies are laying people off and downsizing them and people my age, 50-year-old men, are being told that they're not important anymore; thank you very much for the last 25 years; you figure out how to send your kids to college? How do all these things happen at once?

How could we have 3 years in a row where we have more new businesses started than ever before, and 3 years in a row where we have more new self-made millionaires—a great thing; not somebody being given an inheritance, making a million dollars in work for themselves in this system—how could that happen at the same time these other things are happening? How could all the news be overall so good, and then there be these specific stories of people riddled with anxiety?

The answer is, it always happens when you totally change the rules in a society, and when a period of profound change comes along. And the reason a lot of us cannot understand it is there's nobody here old enough to remember the last time it happened because the last time it happened was 100 years ago.

But you think about what built Michigan. One hundred years ago people started moving from the rural areas to cities and towns. A hundred years ago people stopped having most of their work being on the farm to most of their work being in the factory, or in shops serving the factory, or serving people who made their living in a factory. And it changed everything. And then after the Depression, there was this great explosion of people out of places where they made their living on the farm, running to places like Detroit and Flint and the suburbs to make a living in the factory. I mean, I'm convinced that one of the reasons I won the Michigan Democratic primary is that every third voter had a grandmother from Arkansas. [*Laughter*]

I mean, why? Because this great exodus that started 100 years ago continued right through until after the Great Depression, the end of World War II, and after World War

II. This sea change—from farm to factory; country to city and town. What is the comparable change today? From industry to information and technology. From an American market to a global market for goods, for services, and for money. Changing the nature of work; there's more mind and less muscle, even in the factory.

It's amazing how many factories you go into today and watch either work being done by robots or workers working on computers calculating what the machine should do with ever greater precision. And the change in the workplace—we all know about all these people being downsized, but what we never hear because it's happening in the little places is—in a thousand little places—is that in the last 3 years there were more new jobs created by businesses owned by women alone than were laid off by the Fortune 500. So there's a change in the workplace. The workplace is becoming more numerous and smaller, by and large.

And when all that happens, you have all these new possibilities created. But when you disrupt the established order of things, a lot of people who have worked hard, done everything they should do all their lives, find themselves on the short end of the stick. So the challenge for us today and the challenge America faces is how do we keep the dynamism going? You know, we've actually gotten a modest increase in wages in the last 3 years for the first time in a decade. How do we keep the jobs coming? How do we keep the new businesses being formed? How do we keep the kind of empowerment efforts we see in Detroit going? How do we keep the good things about the economy and still give more and more people their shot at the American dream so that we can say, if you work hard, if you play by the rules, you've got a chance to live up to your God-given potential? That is the challenge.

And I argue to you that the way we do it is not by turning around and going back, because that's denial and we can't get there. As all the kids in my daughter's class say, denial is not just a river in Egypt. *[Laughter]* That is not an option. We have to work all the way through this. But if we're going to do it, we have to do it together. We cannot proceed in a country where people believe

they're not going to be treated fairly, that no matter how hard they work they'll never get ahead, that no matter what they do they'll never have their shot at the American dream.

Now, that's the point I was trying to make in the State of the Union when I said—and I believe—that we have to have a program to meet the challenges of the future that focus on what we can do together to make our families stronger, to make our streets safer, to make our environment cleaner, to continue our leadership for peace and freedom and prosperity; what we can do together to have a Government that is smaller and costs less, but does more; not a weak Government, but one that's effective at being a partner with the American people; and in terms of reviving the hopes of all Americans, what we can do together to guarantee a world-class educational opportunity to every single American, starting with our children in Head Start and going through every single adult worker for a lifetime; and what we can do together to create an environment in which people can find a measure of economic security for home and family while we keep the dynamic economy going.

Those are the challenges. And I believe we have to do it together. I believe this idea that we can go back to the era when everybody was left to fend for themselves; that we can say the Government is intrinsically evil and everything it does is wrong, and they mess up a one-car parade, is foolish at best.

Let me tell you something. My friend, James Carville, has just written a book, which I commend to all of you—it's a little paperback book—but in it he points out that in the last 30 years we have spent one-half of your tax money on three things: defense, Social Security, and Medicare. Now, did you get your money's worth? We won the cold war. We cut the rate of poverty among elderly Americans in half. And with Medicare, if you live to be 65, you are in the group of seniors with the highest life expectancy in any country in the entire world. I think we got our money's worth by working together, and we will in the future, as well.

So as we go back to Washington today I want to challenge the Congress to continue to work to keep the dynamism of the economy going, but give people a greater sense

of security and a greater sense of opportunity. And there are lots of things that we can do. We ought to pass a balanced budget plan consistent with the values we've been fighting for for the last 15 months. We can get lower interest rates, which means lower rates to borrow money for businesses to put people to work. It means lower home mortgage rates, lower car payment rates, lower credit card rates. But we ought to do it without undermining our commitments through Medicare, through Medicaid, through education, through environmental protection. We do not need to do what some of the extremists urged us to do last year, which is to make money by raising taxes on the hardest pressed working families and giving people the right to raid their employee's pension funds. We do not have to do that to balance the budget. We ought to do it in the right way.

If we have a tax cut it ought to be targeted to families raising children, to give them a chance to participate in the American dream. And the most important tax cut we could give is a tax deduction for the cost of college education. That is the most important thing we could do. We ought to pass welfare reform that is very tough in terms of requiring people to move to work, but understands that people have to succeed at home and at work, so we shouldn't punish innocent children. We should lift up children and strengthen families even as we have the right kind of welfare reform.

And I cannot believe that there is even a debate in Washington about whether we ought to raise the minimum wage. You know, we're having a nice time here today. And I've heard every time somebody says we ought to raise the minimum wage they say, oh, that's just going to cost a lot of jobs. It's interesting that the last time the Congress voted to raise the minimum wage most of the people in the other party were for it, maybe because they had a President of the other party in the White House. But the people out there working on the minimum wage don't much care who is in the White House. It's all they can do to keep body and soul together and pay the bills. There are millions of people out there today working 40 hours a week, raising their kids on \$4.25 an hour. Now, you

want the mayor to go into inner-city Detroit and tell these kids they ought to stay off drugs and stay out of gangs and work hard and they'll amount to something in life and they can have a good life, and oh, by the way, here's \$4.25 an hour. Raise three kids on it.

This is wrong. The minimum wage will be at a 40-year low in terms of what it will buy if we don't raise it by the end of the year. We do not have to grow the American economy by keeping the minimum wage as low as possible. And I have just reviewed the last 15 studies on this, and all but two say that there is no significant loss of jobs with a modest raise in the minimum wage. Indeed, it may increase jobs because you'll have more people wanting to move from welfare to work if you pay them a living wage. We ought to raise the minimum wage. We ought to do it this year. We ought not to wait until the election.

We ought to have another round of empowerment zones. There ought to be another 100 communities that become empowerment zones or enterprise communities that have a chance to do what Detroit did. There are other cities in Michigan that need a chance to do this as well.

We ought to pass the bill that has now been voted out of the committee in the Senate unanimously, has 50 Republican and Democratic cosponsors nearly—simple little bill—it says you shouldn't lose your health insurance when you change jobs or when someone in your family gets sick. Surely, if we believe in work and family, we can say that you shouldn't lose your health insurance when you change jobs or when someone in your family gets sick. We ought to pass that bill right away.

And finally, let me say, we should pass the education appropriations that is now months and months late. We ought to fund the programs for high standards in our schools. We ought to fund the programs that will help us to bring high technology into our poor schools. We ought to fund the programs that will help our schools be safer and more drug-free.

Let me just give you one example. I was in a school in New Jersey about 2 weeks ago, in a neighborhood that is very modest income, where a significant percentage of the

children are first-generation immigrants, where the test scores were so low and the performance was so bad that the State was about to go in and take over the schools. And Bell Atlantic came in with others in the community and put computers in all the classes, made sure they had good educational software, and then they put computers in the homes.

I met a man who came here from El Salvador in 1980 who is now—he and his wife e-mail the principal at school to find out whether their kid is doing the homework and how they're doing. And let me tell you what's happened since they did that in that poor school. And New Jersey, I believe, is the second or third richest State in America. That school district in that poor neighborhood now has a higher attendance rate, a higher graduation rate, and most important, higher test scores than the New Jersey State average, because they were given a chance to be a part of something good and noble. That's what we ought to do for everybody.

Now, that's what I stand for. If we had no Government there would be a lot of good things happening in America. You can see it is some of these countries that we compete with that change governments two or three times a year just to kind of stay in practice. [Laughter] And their economies continue to grow. But their unemployment rates are higher. They suffer terrible inequalities of opportunity.

You just have to decide. It's your country; it's your future. And I'm telling you, if we can get our people that agree with us to break through their skepticism and break through their cynicism, and break through all the political rhetoric that dominates too many of our elections, and show up, stand up, and be counted this year, I know what decision America will make. I do not believe the American people want to continue to go down a road where we are divided for cheap, short-term political purposes at every election. I think the American people understand that when we are divided we defeat ourselves, and when we are united we never lose.

So I ask you, in Michigan, where we have to win to move the country forward, stand up with us and fight with us, and reelect

these Members of Congress and elect some more, and help us so that we can make the right decision. The issue is no longer change versus status quo. There are two dramatically different views of change on the agenda for America, and one of them has us going forward together. That's the right one. That's the one we need to bring to the American people.

Thank you, and God bless you all.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:22 p.m. in the Cobo Conference and Exhibition Center. In his remarks, he referred to Ed McNamara, Wayne County executive; James J. Blanchard, Ambassador to Canada; Prime Minister Jean Chretien of Canada; Mayor Dennis W. Archer of Detroit; and Terry McAuliffe, finance chairman, and Laura Hartigan, finance director, Clinton/Gore '96. A portion of these remarks could not be verified because the tape was incomplete.

Statement on Representative Sam Gibbons' Decision Not To Seek Reelection

March 4, 1996

Congress has lost a tenacious champion of America's elderly and an unrelenting fighter for health care reform, open markets, and free trade with today's decision by Representative Sam Gibbons not to seek reelection.

From his days as a hero on the beaches of Normandy through his 34 years in Congress, Sam Gibbons has served his country and fought for what he believed. As a Congressman, Representative Gibbons has been a leader in domestic policy, particularly in the defense of America's senior citizens and the protection of their health care. In recent years, he has worked tirelessly on efforts to provide health care coverage to all Americans.

The American people are grateful for Sam Gibbons' long service. His deep dedication to the Congress and to the American people will be sorely missed.