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Remarks and a Question-and-Answer Session at a Democratic National Committee Luncheon in Palm Beach, Florida

October 31, 1997

The President. Harriet got on a roll, I didn't want her to stop. What did you say? No, I was just thinking Harriet was on a roll. I didn't want to stop her.

Thank you, and thank you, Jerome. We are old friends. And I want to thank Sidney and Dorothy for having me back in their wonderful home. I was here a little over 5 years ago. They look much younger even than they did then, and I have all this gray hair to show for the last 5 years, but I've enjoyed it immensely.

You mentioned the St. Mary's Hospital Board, and for those of you who don't know, that was the hospital that took care of me when I tore my leg off by falling 8 inches here a few months ago. I visited the little school in Jupiter that I was supposed to visit that day when I couldn't go. And I'm delighted to be back here.

We're in Florida, among other things, pushing the fast-track legislation. There's going to be a vote in Congress next week. And Secretary Daley, the Secretary of Commerce, and my Special Counselor, Doug Sosnik, who has a wife from Argentina, the three of us just got back from Latin America. And I came back even more convinced than ever that it's the right thing to do for our country.

Let me just be very brief. What I'd like to do is to talk a minute or two and then, if you have a couple of questions maybe I could hear from you. That would help save my voice, and it will be more interesting for you.

We learned today that growth in the last quarter—this quarter, is 3.5 percent, and growth has averaged almost 4 percent over the last year, the highest in more than a decade. I think that has come about because we both broke political gridlock in Washington in 1993 with the economic plan and in 1997 with the Balanced Budget Act, and because, perhaps even more important, we broke an intellectual gridlock.

Harriet mentioned that she knew me a long time before I became President. Most Americans didn't. And one of the things that never ceases to amaze me is when I read things written about our policies and they say, ''Well, he's adopted this Republican policy and that Democratic policy and just making it up as he goes along.'' I was reading the other day—last night, getting ready to come down here, an article I wrote in 1988 that basically sounds like the speeches I'm giving today. But if you're a Governor out in the hinterland, you don't exist for people that interpret you to America until you move to Washington. So I thank Jerome and Harriet for being my old friends.

But what I wanted to do when I came to Washington 6 years ago was to get people to stop thinking in these sort of outdated, left-right terms, and start thinking instead about what we were trying to do, what is the mission of America. And if you think about it in that term, it helps you to pick the proper course.

Without economic policy, it seemed to me there was a huge fight between whether we should run a huge deficit and cut taxes or whether we should run a slightly smaller deficit and spend more money. And I thought both of those were wrong for the modern economy. And people laughed at me when I went to Washington and said, ''Here's what we're going to do. We're going to reduce the deficit, balance the budget, and spend more money on education and the health care of our children and empowering our poorest communities.'' And they said, ''Yeah, and the $3 bill is coming back.'' But that's what we've done, and it worked.

On crime, it seemed to me we were having a phony debate in Washington about whether we needed to talk tougher and have harsher sentences or do more to help prevent crime in the first place. The sensible thing to do is to sentence more harshly people who should be and prevent everybody you can from committing crimes and also work on the environment. That's what the Brady bill, the assault weapons ban, 100,000 more police on the street were about. And we've contributed to a dramatic decline in crime in the last 5 years.

On welfare, the debate was, ''It's an unfortunate system, but don't you have to take care of these children,'' or ''These people don't really want to work, so you have to make them work''—sort of polarizing debate. My experience as a Governor was that nearly every person I ever met on welfare was dying to go to work; that the system penalized them because they generally didn't have the education and skills they needed on the one hand, or on the other, if they took a job that was a minimum wage job, they lost Medicaid health coverage for their kids, and they didn't have the money to pay for child support.

So we said, ''Let's be tough on work, require people that can work to work, but take care of their children, because everyone's most important job is taking care of their kids.'' We've had over 3 million people drop off the welfare rolls, the biggest decline in history, the smallest percentage of Americans on welfare since 1970, after 20 years of high levels of immigration.

I guess what I'm saying is, what I think works is saying, ''The Government can't sit on the sidelines. The Government can't be a savior. The Government's job is to create the conditions and give people the tools to make the most of their own lives and to build good communities and families.''

And I believe we're much closer than we were 5 years ago to my dream of the 21st century America where there's opportunity for everybody responsible enough to work for it, where we're still leading the world for peace and freedom, and where the country is managing its diversity, even celebrating it, but coming across all those lines into one America. And for all of you who have helped me to do that, I'm very grateful.

Now, we still have some challenges. One of them is this fast track bill. A third of our growth in the last 5 years has come from trade. This bill gives me the power to negotiate trade agreements. If the Congress doesn't like them, they can vote them down. It has all been caught up in, I think, worries of uncertainty and instability among certain workers, because not everybody wins when there's more trade, although most job loss in America, 80 percent, is due to technology.

So what should we do? We ought to provide more education and better transition for people who lose their jobs through trade or technological changes, not walk away from trade. These jobs pay more on average. And we have no choice. Latin America is going to grow on average 3 times the rate of America. We're 4 percent of the world's people. We've got 20 percent of the world's income. If we want to keep it, we better sell more to the other 96 percent. So the fast-track debate is a big debate.

We had a big meeting with China this week; the President of China was here. We have severe disagreements over human rights, political rights, religious rights. But the best way to advance those issues, in my view, is to work with China and try to make a partner out of China in the 21st century, not create a new cold war with a different country on the other side. If it comes out that way, it ought not be our fault. We ought to have the sure knowledge if there is a polarizing situation in the 21st century that it's not our fault, that we did everything we could to create a responsible, international system of free trade, peace, common efforts against terrorism, weapons proliferation, shared environmental and disease problems, and respect for democracy and human rights. So I think we're doing the right thing.

We've got a number of other challenges. I'm in a big debate with the Congress—in some ways, the most fateful one—over whether the United States should have national academic standards in the basics in schools and an exam—voluntary—to see if our children are meeting those standards. And I suggested we start with a reading test in the fourth grade and a math test in the eighth grade. Just had another study this week that said that kids who take algebra in

the eighth grade are far more likely to stay in school and far more likely to go to college and far more likely to do well in college. We're the only major country without any kind of national academic standards, and I think it's crazy not to do it. I'm still fighting that out.

We were thwarted this year in our efforts to pass campaign reform, but I think we've got a good chance to pass it next year. And I might say, I appreciate the fact that all of you who are here at this event are giving us what in the current jargon is called ''hard money'' and what also will be provided for under the new campaign finance reform law. We need to change the finance system.

But I would also point out, those of you politically active a long time know this, the money has not driven the cost up, the costs have driven the money up. It's like every other endeavor in human life: The cost of communicating with voters has exploded exponentially. So if we really want to get a handle on this problem, we also have to say, ''If you observe the campaign finance limits, you should get free or reduced air time and access to voters.'' If we do that, we can also change the nature of debates and elections.

You look at a British election, for example, where each party gets a certain amount of time in different time blocks, and where people have reasoned debates, and they're much more like the Presidential debates are here, and almost nothing else is like that. And I'm convinced if we have free and reduced air time, more citizen participation like the debates we did in '92 and '96, that our campaign insisted on to bring real people into the debates, the voting record of the country would go way up.

Well, anyway, these are just a few of the things I wanted to talk about. The last thing I wanted to say is, in the '98 elections going forward, people will not be able to paint this sort of gnarled, twisted picture of Democrats anymore. You can't say we're weak on foreign policy and national defense. You can't say we can't be trusted to manage the economy. You can't say we're spending the country blind. You can't say we're against responsible tax cuts or that we're not strong for welfare reform or sensible criminal justice policies.

If you look ahead to the future, the major issues that will affect the lives of ordinary Americans—education, the environment, health care, the overall strength of the country—these are issues that our party, with its new direction, is strong on. And you are helping to contribute to that, and in doing it, I think you'll help make America a better place.

Thank you.

I've got time for one or two questions if anybody wants to ask a question.

Education

Q. It's really not a question. It's just sort of a comment and sort of a personal anecdote—when people have talked about the public schools and a lot of criticism about it. My daughter is in seventh grade at the School of the Arts here, and recently was sick—in St. Mary's Hospital, actually—missed 3 weeks of school. And in the public schools where I would expect very little to happen, every one of her teachers called her to find out how she was. Her principal sent her balloons to cheer her up—been involved in the School of the Arts and I guess the foundation quite a bit.

There are some really good stories, and it would be nice if they got out somehow. This is just one that I know personally. And I never would have dreamed—as my daughter had gone to private school until this year—and for whatever it's worth people ought to try to find out more success stories from the public schools.

The President. Ninety percent of our children are in public schools. If most of them weren't doing a good job, they wouldn't be there. That's the first point. Second thing is—it's very important to make this point because I've been working at this now since, seriously, since 1979, and I think I've been in enough schools and looked at enough data and talked to enough people to know, the schools are better than they used to be, and they're getting better.

The real problem is there are some that aren't good at all. And what do they need? You can do one of two things. You can say, ''Okay, well we ought to just make it possible for people to abandon them.'' The problem

is, only a portion of the people would abandon them and the people that are left will be even worse off because they'll have less money, and a lot of them are in financial trouble now. Or you can do what I think should be done: You have to have high standards; you have to have accountability; you have to have reform; and then you have to have adequate investment.

Now, this school you mentioned—one of the things that I think every school district ought to do is, I think they ought to give the parents of the children a choice of the schools they attend within the districts, and I think every district—I hope some day before too long every district will have what educators call a charter school, which is a part of the public schools but it's created. For example, suppose there were no art school here, where teachers can get together and create a whole new school with a separate mission, with fewer rules and regulations, and it only stays in existence as long as the parents and the students are satisfied that its's fulfilling its mission. There are now 700 of these schools. In our budget, we're going to create 3,000 more. Once you get enough of them to be in every district in the country, and if we can get more people to give choice to the parents within the school districts, you're going to see dramatic improvements.

We need the national standards. We also need—I have been a very strong supporter of the national board for teacher certification to get board-certified teachers as master teachers, one in every school in the country. There are only about 1,000 now. Our budget contains funds to help train 100,000 in the next 4 years, and they are dramatically better trained than most people.

So I'm with you. They're getting better. They can do a good job. Most of them are doing better than they used to.

Iran

Q. What is your position on the growing tension between the Malaysian French oil group that is hoping to get financed by Goldman-Sachs to mine new oil fields in Iran and will increase Iran's economy by about $400 million under 20 years?

The President. Well, you know what my position is: we don't like it. We're in an intense debate within the administration now about exactly what we ought to do about it. I just have a different view of—the United States generally has a different view than most of our allies. They all think we're all wet. But I just believe that we should not be conducting ordinary business with a country that funds, trains, and supports terrorists. I don't have the same opinion. They can have a different religion than we do. They can have different politics. They can attack me on the evening news every night—whatever they want. But I don't think we should be doing business with a country that funds, trains, and supports terrorists. And I don't think we should be bashful about telling our friends that we think that's wrong. And if we're the only country in the world that thinks that, I think that's still what we ought to say.

Now, what we have to decide within the parameters of the law which was passed—which I signed because I support that position—what the appropriate action is in the case. And frankly, I haven't gotten a recommendation from my administration yet, and I haven't had a lot of time to even talk to them about it because we've been so preoccupied with what's going on and with our relationship with China in the last couple of weeks.

But I keep hoping that Iran will take a different course. It's a very old culture. It's a very great country. There are still a lot of people there that were educated in our country. And the people voted in the last election, obviously, at least for relaxation of their ordinary lives at home. And I would like it very much if they would take a different course. But until they do, I think we have to be quite firm, even if we're all by ourselves.

Child Care and Brain Development

Q. [*Inaudible*]—in terms of diverse programs. Recently it has come to our mind that at the University of Miami we conducted a study with rats and it has to do with the warehousing of our children at day care centers. And the rats that were brought up in a non-stimulating environment versus the

rats that were stimulated had a profound effect, once those brains of those rats were dissected. And it's something else to know that the Life Foundation has become extremely interested in because I'm a mother of six and grandmother of nine. This is the future. And these rats that were not stimulated became violent, did not live as long; and brains, when dissected, were atrophied, versus the brains of the rats who lived in a stimulating environment, lived a longer life, were more productive in every way, and had brains with arteries that were clear to the brain and obviously were happier rats.

So, therefore, it goes to say that the children—our children that are being warehoused, this is a very big problem in America, and I really believe that it's not just the Government's obligation and responsibility to take care of these children and to help out. It's our responsibility as well.

The President. Well, let me say it's both our responsibilities. And given that the budget realities of where we are now, that's the way it has to be attacked. But very briefly, this year Hillary and I hosted two conferences at the White House. One was on early childhood and brain development and the other one, last week, was on child care.

We now know, scientists know that an enormous percentage of the brain's capacity develops in the first 3 years of life. We also know that children in supportive environments, whether it's from their parents or in a child care facility where they get not only love and affection, but I mean, actually stimulating environments, have an average of 700,000 positive interactions in their first 4 years of life. Children who are left to sit in front of a television, even by a loving parent, or at a child care center where they're not being stimulated, have an average of 150,000 positive interactions in the first 4 years of life—700,000 to 150,000, while the infrastructure of the brain is being developed. It's not rocket science.

Now, the child care thing—the basic fundamental problem is lower income parents spend as much as 25 percent of their income on child care. And if you want to raise the standards for the child care centers and make sure that a higher percentage of them have more stimulating educational programs, the money has to come from somewhere. Now, we may be able to increase the child care tax credit. I'm working on some options of things we can do. We can help to actually fund the training of more child care workers. But we also have to do more to make child care, that is quality care, affordable. It's a huge issue for the country.

Q. I'd like—if we could, I know that you're having a little problem with your voice——

The President. [*Inaudible*]—to lose my voice. I lost it once. It was pretty scary. [*Laughter*]

Q. ——ask that you sort of try to—I know you'd like to go on—but if we could call off the questions now if you don't mind, Mr. President——

The President. Thank you. I enjoyed being with you. Thank you so much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 3 p.m. at a private residence. In his remarks, he referred to Harriet and Jerome Zimmerman and Sidney and Dorothy Kohl, luncheon cohosts. This item was not received in time for publication in the appropriate issue.

Remarks at a Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee Dinner in Boca Raton, Florida

October 31, 1997

Thank you very much. You may or may not have already noticed that I don't exactly have all my vocal capacities. The good news is you'll get a shorter speech. [*Laughter*] The bad news is you'll have to listen harder to what does come out.

I want to start by thanking John and Peggy for bringing us into their magnificent home and even more for their commitment, which was so powerfully expressed in what John said.

You know, I tell people all the time that I have been in public life now almost continuously since 1974. I have been in public office all but 2 years for the last 20 years. Most of the people I've known in politics were good, honest people who worked a lot harder than they had to work and fought for what they believed in and tried to make this