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Remarks at a Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee Dinner in Miami, Florida

July 9, 1998

Thank you very much. First let me thank my friend Dick Gephardt for his leadership of our party in the House of Representatives, for his wonderful remarks tonight. I thank Martin Frost. We were together in Texas, Martin's home State, a couple of weeks ago, and I was trying to be helpful and funny at the same time when I said that I named my dog Buddy, but I had considered naming him after Martin Frost because Martin Frost is like a dog with a bone; when he asks you to do something, you might as well just go on and say yes, because it's the only way to get him to let your leg go. [*Laughter*] And he has had a very thankless job, which he has performed magnificently for our people, and I thank him for that.

I thank all the Members of Congress who are here tonight from Florida and from around the country, and the leaders of Florida in our Democratic Party here, including Buddy MacKay and his newly announced running mate, Senator Dantzler. I'm delighted that they're here, and I'm for them, strongly.

Mayor Penelas, Attorney General Butterworth, Commissioner Crawford; and we also have here the mayor of Akron, Ohio, Don Plusquellic. I don't know what he's doing here, but I'm glad to see him. [*Laughter*] He's a good friend of mine, and I'm delighted that he and his wife are here. He may be running for Congress in Florida for all I know. But I'm glad he's here.

I'd like to thank the Paxsons and all the other major sponsors of this event tonight. And Sylvester Stallone, thank you for having us at your home and for giving me those boxing gloves. I can use them. [*Laughter*] I think I have established that I can take a punch. Now the time has come for me to deliver a few. And I would like to have a few.

Let me say to all of you in this magnificent home tonight that I always love coming here, and I feel so deeply indebted to the people of Florida and especially to my fellow Democrats, because it was in December of 1991, at the Florida Democratic Convention, that I won the first victory of any kind when I was out trying to become the nominee of my party. And in 1996 you brought Florida back to a Democratic candidate for the first time in two decades, when your State voted for me and for Al Gore. And I'm very grateful to you for that, and I thank you.

I want to make a brief case tonight. It's late, and all of you know that my family and many members of our administration just got back from China. And they say if there's a 12-hour time difference, it takes you 12 days to get over it. I don't know about that, but for the last four nights, sometime between 9 and 10 o'clock, I hit the skids. And I'll be all right, so if I fall asleep up here in this speech, if you'll just wait about 5 minutes, I'll be fine and I may go on to 3 in the morning after that. [*Laughter*]

But I've given a lot of thought to what I might say tonight. You know, a lot of you come to a lot of these dinners, and you wonder—I wonder, what could I say that would really animate all the people that were here, that would make them say, ''Boy, I made a good investment tonight, and I want to go out and talk to my friends and neighbors about this tomorrow, and I'm still going to feel good about this in October, and I want to talk about it some more''?

You know, when I was in China, I thought it was so fitting that, after I was given this incredible opportunity on your behalf to speak for the American people in China and to try to listen to the Chinese people and their leaders, that I was coming home for the Fourth of July. It was a wonderful feeling

to think about being on Air Force One, having worked as hard as I could to press America's cause, our interests, our values, our desire to have a genuine, constructive friendship with the Chinese in the 21st century, and that I was coming home for the Fourth of July; that Hillary and Chelsea and I would be able to see the fireworks on The Mall from the White House and celebrate with a lot of people who work hard all year for us. And so I was thinking, what is this election about?

You know, I'm not on the ballot, and I can't run anymore. I'm here for others and for things in which I believe. In 1992, when I started running for President, I believed that our country was in trouble and that Washington was paralyzed by partisan politics and old ideas. I wanted to try to modernize our party and come up with some new ideas without violating our most deeply held principles. And I've tried to do that.

I tried to stick with the things that made us a great party and the things that made us a great country: opportunity for all, responsibility from all, an American community of all people. And I said to the American people, if you will elect me, here are the policies I will pursue in the economy and welfare and education and crime, health care, foreign policy.

As Dick said, I would never say that I, as President, or our party were completely responsible for a lot of the good things, all the good things that have happened in this country in the last 5½ years. I appreciate very much what Bud said about the telecommunications bill, because we worked very hard to create opportunities there. But I will tell you this, there is a connection between the decisions made by the leaders in this country and the consequences that flow from them and the options that are available to Americans. And there are profound differences between the two parties in the House of Representatives about whether we've been right and what we should do going forward.

And when I was coming home and I made a list of all the things I'm grateful for for America—I mean, I'm very grateful for all of us that we have the lowest crime rate in 25 years, the lowest unemployment rate in 28 years, the lowest welfare rolls in 29 years. We're having the first balanced budget and surplus in 29 years. We have the lowest inflation in 32 years, the smallest Federal Government in 35 years, and the highest home ownership in the history of the United States. I am grateful for that.

I am grateful that we're giving 5 million children, who couldn't afford it otherwise, health insurance, that we have the highest rate of childhood immunization in our country's history, that we've proved you can clean the environment and grow the economy. The air is cleaner; the water is cleaner; the food is safer; there are more toxic wastes cleaned up. We've made a big step toward helping to save the Everglades and protect Yellowstone Park from a gold mine and done a lot of other things to try to prove that we can have a healthy economy in America and honor our responsibilities to the environment.

And you should know, when you're asking yourself, "What am I doing here?" number one, that I think the evidence is we were right on the economy. And Dick Gephardt and these other Members here supported us, and the other party said that if my economic policy were implemented, it would lead to a recession in America. Well, we now have some evidence; we know they were wrong.

I think we were right on crime, to try to put 100,000 police on the street and to stop selling handguns to people with criminal records and mental health histories. And they went out there and told everybody we were trying to take guns away, but I think they are wrong.

I think we were right to say, okay, we're going to require able-bodied people to go to work if they're on welfare, but we're not going to punish them in their most important job, which is taking care of their children. So we're going to give them money for child care, and we're going to support their kids with health care. I think we were right. And I think that's one of the reasons we've got the lowest welfare rolls now in 29 years.

And there was a difference of opinion on this between the two parties. I think we were right to say we're a nation of immigrants, and we ought not to discriminate against immigrants who are here legally. We're proud of that. And we had a difference of opinion on that.

When I was up at Daytona Beach today, I saw a lot of young AmeriCorps volunteers from all over America who had come here to help fight these fires—young people who were giving up a year or two of their lives to serve their country in local communities and earning credit for college. I did AmeriCorps because I thought it would help us to make one America in the 21st century if we got more young people serving in their communities, dealing with people that were different from them in terms of income and background and race and religion, and proving that people who worked together and learned together and served together can live together, because we then appreciate each other's differences instead of being afraid of them. And we know that we've got more in common than we have dividing us.

I think we were right to set up that AmeriCorps program. I saw those kids today, happy, proud after fighting those fires, and I realized we had a big difference between the two parties on that. They thought it was a waste of money. Well, I think we were right, and they were wrong.

And I think that—I say that not to be partisan, because I'm grateful for the handful of Republicans that supported us on the crime bill, that supported us on our immigration position, that support our education position, but because I think it's important that you understand this is not just another dinner where you pick your politician and take your choice and listen to a speech. There are real differences and ideas with real consequences for the life and future of America. And you can see it in the last 5½ years.

And if you look up the road, which is more important, you can see more. And again, I'm not here telling you that we deserve credit for every good thing that's happened in the country. But it's not an accident, and we had something to do with it. And I'm proud of what we did, and I think our ideas were right.

But every election—as I learned when I was a Governor, every election is about the future. I'll never forget, after I had been Governor 10 years, I was thinking about running again for another term, and every year in Arkansas we had this great State Fair. And I would go out to the fairgrounds and have Governor's Day at the fair. And I'd sit in a little booth, and anybody in the State could come up and talk to me about anything they wanted.

And this guy came up to me one day in overalls, and he said, "Bill, you going to run for Governor again?" And I said, "Well, I might. If I do, will you vote for me? He said, "Yeah, I guess I will. I always have." And I said, "Well, aren't you sick of me after 10 years?" He said, "No, but nearly all my friends are." [*Laughter*] And I said, "Well, don't you think I've done a good job?" He said, "Yeah, I do, but you drew a paycheck every two weeks, too, didn't you?" [*Laughter*] He said, "That's what we hired you to do. Why do you want credit for that?"

So I say to you—I mentioned all these things about the record only to point out that there are differences between the parties. But if you look ahead, there's first a question of attitude. You know, when times are good after they haven't been so good for a while, we're tempted to just relax—especially in a place like Florida—and kind of sit in the Sun. But this is a very dynamic time in which we live. There are lots of changes going on. And if you think about the confidence the American people have now, it seems to me self-evident that, as Mr. Gephardt said, this is a time when we ought to be saying, "Hey, what are the remaining challenges facing this country as we move into the 21st century, and what should we be doing about them now?" And that, I would argue, is the most important reason to support the candidates who are here and our congressional committee.

And let me just give you a couple of examples about the future. Number one, in the House of Representatives, only our party is clear and unambiguous that we don't want to go around spending this surplus until we have saved Social Security for the 21st century and fixed it so the baby boomers don't bankrupt our children and our grandchildren.

You know, sometimes I think I'm lost in a funhouse in Washington; people start talking about spending a surplus that hasn't materialized yet, after we have punished ourselves for 29 years of profligate spending. We have a Social Security challenge out there because the baby boomers are a very big

group—and I'm the oldest one of them, so I know. And none of us, people I grew up with in my hometown, most of whom who are middle class people, none of them want to think they're hurting their children or their children's ability to raise their grandchildren by having Social Security become unbearably expensive. We have to reform it in a way that keeps the country together and moves the country forward.

The second thing we have to do is to give America the best system of elementary and secondary education in the world. No one doubts that we have the best college education system in the world, and no one doubts that we do not have the best elementary and secondary education system in the world. We have some money to do something about it now. And we have a program in Washington: smaller class sizes, modernize schools, 5,000 new and improved schools—big deal in Florida, where you've got school district after school district after school district, with people—kids going to school in trailers because they've grown so much—connecting all the classrooms to the Internet, higher standards, reading programs for children so they can all read independently in English by the end of the third grade.

We have an agenda there. If you look at how the Republican majority in the House has voted in their committees on the budget, they have consistently voted against our education agenda. They don't want to do any of it, and they want to undo some of the things we've done. It's a choice you have to make.

If you look at the environment, which is very important to me—look at these wildfires in Florida. You know what the background of it is; most of you know. In the fall and winter, you had 4 of the wettest months—the 4 wettest months consecutively in the history of Florida, followed by 3 or 4 of the driest months in the history of Florida, followed by June, the hottest month in the history of Florida—ever—hotter than any July or August ever in Florida's history.

When I was in China, I was reminded that one of the reasons we have weather records going back hundreds of years is that the Chinese weather people—what we now call the meteorologists—have literally been keeping detailed records since the 15th century. And we now know that the 5 hottest years recorded since the 1400's all have occurred in the 1990's—every one of them. Last year was the hottest year ever recorded. This year is going to be hotter if present temperature trends are maintained through December.

Now, the overwhelming opinion of scientists is that the climate is getting warmer at a rate that is unsustainable. The overwhelming evidence is that we can slow it down without slowing down the growth of the economy. Why? Well, greenhouse gas emissions, CO_2 basically warm up the climate. A third of it comes from automobiles and trains and trucks and other travel. A third of it comes from buildings, residential and commercial. A third of it comes from factories and powerplants.

In every case, there is presently available technology—or in the case of automobiles, now-being-developed technology—that will dramatically cut these emissions, slow the rate of climate change, and move our children and grandchildren's Earth away from potential disaster without hurting the economy.

So I presented a program to the Congress of tax incentives and investment, nothing in the way of regulation to slow down economic growth; every bit of it rejected by the Republican majority. And they're now trying to pass a bill to stop me from even doing what is now legal to do to try to protect the economy for our children and grandchildren, in spite of the overwhelming majority opinion of scientists all over the world that this is happening and the commonsense experience of people like those firefighters in Florida.

The first time I met Mr. Stallone was last summer up in Massachusetts at a party for a friend of mine, and he said—I'd never met him before—and he said, "You know, I think I have seen the climate change, just because I'm outside every year—every day for the last 10 years."

Now, you have to decide. They act like it's an act of faith to destroy everything I'm trying to do to raise the awareness of the American people about this major environmental issue.

When I was in Shanghai speaking to the American Chamber of Commerce—this is

hardly a liberal Democratic group, the American Chamber of Commerce in Shanghai—I got two rounds of spontaneous applause, and one of them was when I asked them to work with the people of China so that they could take a different route into the future in terms of their energy use, so we could save the planet, and that we did not have to pollute the environment of China by seeing them make the same mistakes we'd made to grow economically. And the business people starting applauding. Why? Because they knew I was telling the truth, and because they've seen it with their own eyes in China, because the number one health problem of the children there are lung problems, bronchial problems, because of air pollution.

If you look at something that's closer to home in Florida, I'm really proud of the fact that we had what I thought was a bipartisan commitment to invest lots of Federal money in the Everglades to help to save the Everglades. It was part of our bipartisan balanced budget agreement.

But in this year, as the present Republican majority prepares their budget for next year, they have so far rejected my call for more investments in the Everglades, and they have cast some votes which imply that they're going to walk away from the commitment made last year to save the Everglades. Marjorie Stoneman Douglas once said, "The Everglades is a test; if we pass, we get to keep the planet." So far, Dick Gephardt and the Democrats pass the Everglades test, and the members of the other party, this year, have so far flunked it. It's not too late, and I hope this dinner will send them a message to shape up and do their part on the Everglades.

But these—I say this to you because I wasn't a particularly partisan person when I went to Washington. I was a Governor. I was used to working with Republicans and Democrats. I was a Democrat by heritage, instinct, and conviction, but I wanted people to work together. And I thought I could learn something from everybody. The atmosphere in Washington is too partisan, and we have blinders on—some of the decisionmakers not doing what is plainly in the long-term best interest of this country.

So I'm here today for these people because they will choose progress over partisanship, not because they all agree with me all the time. Every Member of the Democratic caucus in the House here tonight, every single one of them has disagreed with me about something that I felt fairly strongly about. I don't ask them all to be rubber stamps for me. All I ask them to do is to be builders, not wreckers; unifiers, not dividers.

And so I want—when you leave here tonight, I want you to leave with some of these issues that I have raised in your mind. If you want a health care bill of rights and you want us to be able to have managed care but still protect the quality of health care, if you want high-class education and you want the National Government to do its part, if you don't want us to squander this balanced budget until we have fixed Social Security, in short, if you want us to build the country for the 21st century and put progress ahead of partisanship, then you have made a very good investment here tonight.

And when people ask you tomorrow morning or a month from now or 2 months from now, why you did it, tell them you did it because you wanted the schools to be better, because you wanted health care to be better, because you wanted the environment to be protected, because you wanted to build your country for the 21st century. And if you prevail, and if they prevail, I promise you this country will be a better, stronger place.

Thank you, and God bless you all.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:30 p.m. at a private residence. In his remarks, he referred to Lt. Gov. Buddy MacKay, candidate for Governor of Florida, and his running mate for Lieutenant Governor, former State Senator Rick Dantzler; Mayor Alexander Penelas of Metro-Dade County; State Attorney General Bob Butterworth; State Agriculture Commissioner Bob Crawford; and dinner cohosts Lowell (Bud) Paxson, chairman, Paxson Communications Corp., and his wife, Marla; and actor Sylvester Stallone. This item was not received in time for publication in the appropriate issue.

Remarks on the 200th Anniversary of the United States Marine Corps Band

July 10, 1998

Thank you, ladies and gentlemen. Please be seated. Thank you so much, General