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Week Ending Friday, March 5, 1999

Remarks at a Saxophone Club and Women's Leadership Forum Reception in Los Angeles, California

February 26, 1999

Thank you. [*Applause*] Thank you. Thank you very much for the standing ovation. [*Laughter*] I want to thank Janice Griffin and Joe Andrew for their service and their speeches. I want to thank Trudi Loh, the Women's Leadership Forum southern California chair. And the Sax Club cochairs, Lara Brown and Paul Krekorian, thank you very much. I'd like to thank Kathleen Connell and Representatives Waters and Sanchez for being here, and Speaker Villaraigosa for being here. And I'd like to thank Governor Davis and Sharon for being here.

You know, Governor Davis has decided that he will sort of cultivate this ''gray'' image. [*Laughter*] And it is so bogus, I can't believe it. [*Laughter*] We were standing up here—you know what he said to me when I came here? I said, ''Gray, that was a wonderful introduction, and I really appreciate it.'' And he said, ''Well good, you can give me two strokes the next time we play.'' [*Laughter*]

Let me say to all of you, first of all, a profound thanks. Thank you for the support of the WLF and the Saxophone Club. The Saxophone Club's been going now for several years, and the biggest one we have in the country is right here in southern California. And I thank you. I thank the people of California for being so wonderful to Hillary and to the Vice President and to me, all along the way. It has been an amazing journey.

I'm thinking today about a trip I made almost exactly a week ago—I guess it was a week ago yesterday—to a place that superficially is very different from California. On February the 18th I went back to New Hampshire, on the 7th anniversary of the New Hampshire primary in 1992. And everywhere I went, it was cold and rainy and just the antithesis of today. And New Hampshire only has about a million people, and California has a few more. [*Laughter*] It has a lot of people living in small towns and in rural areas. But on this cold, rainy day, everywhere I went, there were schoolchildren standing out in the rain, and people standing there. I hadn't been there in a good while. They normally vote for Republicans. They voted for Al Gore and me twice there, and I'm very grateful for that.

But the reason I was thinking about it tonight is that when I traveled around the country, beginning in 1991 and throughout 1992, I think the two places that, in some ways, most clearly embodied the anxiety, the difficulty, the frustration of America, were New Hampshire and California. Because while you were very different, both places were used to being on the cutting edge of economic progress. Both places believed in hard work and opportunity, and both places were pretty devastated by what was going on.

In New Hampshire, five of the seven biggest banks had failed. I met people who had their business loans called even though they weren't delinquent. I met children whose parents became seriously depressed, clinically depressed, simply because they couldn't stand coming home at night to dinner not being able to work and provide for their children.

And I saw a lot of incredible things. But when I came back to see New Hampshire, with one of the lowest unemployment rates in the country, and a great deal of self-confidence, one of the things that touched me, because it was such a small State, is that all these people said, ''We want you to know, Mr. President, we're for you not only because we're doing better, but because you did exactly what you said you would do when you ran for President.'' And that meant a great deal to me.

So increasingly over these next 2 years, as I travel around America to events like this, I will be here advocating the agenda that I

intend to pursue until the last hour of my last day in office. But I will also be reminding the American people of the ideas and the ideals, which are bigger than any administration and bigger than any person, that we have tried to bring to bear in American public life for the last 6 years.

In 1992 I came to California and I said this country needs new ideas. We can't stand inaction. But these new ideas have to be premised on fulfilling the historic mission of America: opportunity for everybody who is responsible enough to work for it; a community of all Americans, not just some; and the leadership of the whole world for peace and freedom and prosperity.

And we have been about that business, and guess what—it worked. It worked. And sometimes I think—and I say that in all humility. I don't take full responsibility for all the good things that have happened—neither should anyone else. America has produced this. This has been an American achievement.

But I do say this—because our administration and because our people from the Vice President and the First Lady to the Cabinet, to all of our people—because we believe in things that clearly distinguish ourselves from our friends in the other party, we have made a difference.

We believe that every single person deserves a chance to live out his or her dreams. And we believe that none of us can be all we would like to be unless we recognize that all of us are part of one community and one family, and we have to help each other in order to make the most of our own lives. And we believe the purpose of political life is to bring out the best, not the worst, in people; to unite this country, not to divide it; to lift people up, not hold them back. That's what we believe.

And after 6 years, with the longest peacetime economic expansion in history and the lowest unemployment rate in peacetime since 1957, the welfare rolls cut in half, homeownership at an all-time high, record numbers of new businesses every year, over 200,000 new jobs in technology areas alone in the last couple of years, half in just 3 years, half of all of our classrooms connected to the Internet, so we're going to make that goal of all of them connected by the year 2000, with over 90 percent of our children getting their basic immunizations for the first time in American history, I think we can say America is on the right path to the future and moving in the right direction.

Tonight I want you to remember basically just two things: Number one, I believe that for our party and our supporters, the best politics is doing the right thing. And that means trying to get as much done as we can this year to take advantage of our prosperity, to take advantage of our confidence, and not to simply relax and enjoy it.

California, of all places, with all the diversity and all the change and people here from everywhere else, aware of conflicts and troubles and instability in other parts of the world—this State knows that we have to look to the long-term challenges facing our country. And that is why I have asked the Congress to join me now in dealing with the challenges that the baby boomers will present as we age and solve and save Social Security and Medicare for the 21st century.

That is why I've asked the Congress to join me now to keep this economic recovery going by doing three things: Number one, I have proposed a new markets initiative in recognition of the fact that in Los Angeles County, in New York City, in rural areas in the Mississippi Delta and Appalachia, on Native American reservations all across the country, there has been no economic recovery. If we cannot, through tax incentives and loan guarantees, get free enterprise investment into the poorest areas of America and make them part of our prosperity now, we will never get around to it. Now is the time to bring opportunity to all Americans.

The second thing we ought to do is save about three-quarters of this surplus of ours for the next 15 years to fix Social Security and Medicare, and in the process, pay down the debt. If you pay down the debt—now, this is not something any of you ever thought about—if I told you in '92 vote for me and I'll come back here in 6 years and tell you I'll pay down the debt after it had quadrupled, you would have said that man is too unstable to be president; we can't have him here. [*Laughter*]

But I want the young people here to listen to me. You don't know what's going to happen in other parts of the world. I am doing my very best to stabilize the global economy, to put a human face on the global economy, to avoid the kind of churning disruptions we've had in Asia and the threats to Latin America so we can continue stable growth.

But let me tell you this: If we pay down that debt, in 15 years, debt will be the smallest percentage of our income it's been since before we got into World War I. We'll only be spending 2 cents of every dollar you pay in taxes servicing our debt. Interest rates will be lower. Business loan rates will be lower. Home mortgage rates, car payments, credit card payments, student loans will all be less expensive. There will be more investment, more jobs, and higher incomes. If we have tough times around the world, America will have it better. If we have good times, America will have it great. Help me to convince the American people all to tell the Congress to secure our economy for the next 15 years.

A lot of you younger people, you've brought young children here tonight. One couple came through about to have their first child—maybe before I finish this speech. [*Laughter*] That's not a comment on how long the speech is going to be. [*Laughter*] But one of the things that worries me about the 21st century is one of the things that I joy in. And that is that more and more people are going to work, more and more people are having the opportunity to work, and I want that. But the most important work of any society is raising the children well. And we have to find a way to do better in the United States in helping people balance the demands of child-rearing and work.

That's why I fought so hard for the family leave law. It's why I think it should be expanded. It's why I have given a child care initiative to the Congress that would help another million children get affordable quality child care while their parents go to work. And it's why we need to more vigorously enforce the law when it comes to equal pay for equal work for women and for men.

I want us, in the 21st century, to live in real community, not only with our neighborhoods in our State but around the world. That means we have to protect the environment, whether it's dealing with traffic congestion and green space and clean air and clean water or the challenge of climate change. It means that we ought to give more people the chance to serve, whether in the Peace Corps or AmeriCorps, here at home. It means that we ought to make sure that no person is subject to unfair discrimination, which is why I am determined to pass the employment nondiscrimination act this year. These are the kinds of things we need to be pushing, that all of you need to support.

And finally, let me say, in San Francisco this morning, the place where the United Nations was launched, I gave a speech saying that the United States still had to care about peace in Kosovo, in the Middle East, in Northern Ireland; that the United States still had to care about the proliferation of chemical and biological weapons, even if they were at most risk in other countries far from our shore; that the United States still had to care about poverty from Africa to the Caribbean, about democracy in Central America; that we cannot say we love to get on the Internet and talk to people around the world, we love to sell our products in Asia and Latin America, and pretend that economic globalization will take care of all the problems in the world.

The inexorable logic of our growing closer together is that we are in an interdependent world. And just as we as Americans cannot fulfill our own dreams and destinies unless we work together, we cannot fulfill the dream and destiny of America unless we reach out to our friends and neighbors around the world.

And so I say to you, these are the basic ideas for meeting the biggest challenges the United States faces. We've come a long way in the last 6 years. We've had a good time. We've had a better time, year-in and year-out, because there have been fewer people subject to abject anxieties. And I want to get off the stage and bring back Big Bad Voodoo Daddy. And I thank them for playing.

But if you don't remember anything I say, you remember these two things: Number one, the best politics is to do the right thing by the American people. That's why we're where we are tonight, and we need to take advantage; we need to take advantage of

these good times to deal with the big long-term challenges we face. And number two, if somebody asks you why you're a Democrat, why did you come here tonight, tell them, because that's the party that believes that no matter where you come from and what your circumstances, you ought to have an equal chance to live out your dream. That's the party that believes that no matter what our differences, what unites us is more important than what divides us, and we want an American family. And that's the party that believes that the purpose of our public life is to elevate the spirits and the vision and the heart of the American people.

Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 7:55 p.m. in the Los Angeles Room at the Century Plaza Hotel. In his remarks, he referred to Janice Griffin, national vice chair, Women's Leadership Forum; Joseph P. Andrew, national chairman-designate, Democratic National Committee; Lara Brown and Paul Krekorian, cochairs, Saxophone Club, Los Angeles chapter; State Controller Kathleen Connell; State Assembly Speaker Antonio R. Villaraigosa; and Gov. Gray Davis of California and his wife, Sharon. This item was not received in time for publication in the appropriate issue.

The President's Radio Address

February 27, 1999

Good morning. One of Government's first responsibilities is to keep our people safe. And one of the most successful Governmental efforts to protect the public is in the area of auto safety. Hundreds of thousands of lives have been saved, thanks to laws requiring safety features such as bumpers, seatbelts, and airbags.

Today I want to talk about our latest efforts to make car travel even safer for our smallest and most vulnerable passengers. Over the past 20 years, child car seats have become a fact of life for millions of parents. Where once small children bounced around freely and dangerously in our cars, today the majority ride in car seats, whether for quick errands to the grocery store or long cross-country journeys. Those car seats have made a difference. Since 1975, they've saved the lives of about 4,000 children in motor vehicle accidents.

But all too often car seats don't protect our children as well as they should. The National Highway Transportation Safety Administration estimates that more than 70 percent of all children riding in car seats are at risk of injury because their seats have not been properly installed. Now, anyone who has ever struggled to get a car seat to fit snugly into a backseat knows exactly what I'm talking about.

Most seatbelts were not designed to hold car seats, and not all 100 models of car seats can fit all 900 types of vehicles on our road today. For Joe Colella's family, the consequences were tragic. Five years ago Joe's 3-year-old niece, Dana Hutchinson, was killed in a head-on collision because her car seat was incompatible with the seatbelts in her family's car. Ever since, so that no other family has to suffer this tragedy, Joe has worked full-time to improve car seat safety and to alert parents to the dangers of poorly fitting car seats.

A few years ago, my administration appointed Joe to a blue-ribbon panel of parents, consumer groups, medical professionals, and auto and seat manufacturers to find ways to make car seats safer and easier to install. Today I'm pleased to announce that their top recommendation, a simple, universal system for attaching car safety seats, will become the standard for every new car and light truck sold in our country.

By the year 2000, the Department of Transportation will require every safety seat to have three standard attachments designed to fit three standard anchors in the backseat of every car. With this new rule, and with these three simple attachments, we can save lives and prevent up to 3,000 injuries a year.

But the challenge of keeping our children safe in our cars and on our roads is never ending. We must continue to encourage all drivers and passengers to buckle up, to use booster seats and seatbelts for their older children. We must work to make airbags safer for children and smaller adults. And we must press forward in our fight to keep more drunk drivers off our roads by lowering the national drunk driving standard to .08.

Together we can work to make sure more Americans traveling on our roads, especially