

challenges ahead, strengthen our partnership with Europe's newly democratic nations, and reaffirm our commitment that NATO's newest members will not be the last.

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Remarks at a Dinner Honoring Representative Sandlin in Texarkana
March 12, 1999

Thank you very much, ladies and gentlemen. I'd like to begin just by thanking you all for giving me such a wonderful, warm welcome tonight, coming up, saying hello, shaking my hand, seeing if I still knew how to write my name—[laughter]—taking the pictures. It's wonderful to be back here. I have had a lot of incredible times in this community over the last 24 years or so. And I've seen a lot of old friends here tonight, and I'm delighted to see you.

I came here for a lot of reasons, but I want to begin by just thanking Truman and Anita and the Joyces, the Youngs, the Pattersons, everybody else who had anything to do with this. When I was Governor, and when I started running for President, no one but my mother thought I could win. [Laughter] Maybe on a good day, Hillary did. [Laughter] I don't know if anybody else did. Truman Arnold was there for me. The people of Miller and Bowie Counties were there for me. And I have never forgotten it, and I never will.

I was sitting here looking at Truman, you know. I just want to tell you it's little things that mean a lot to me. I go all over the country, and I do these events. And I'm paying more attention to them, I think, than I ever have, maybe because they're not for me anymore because I can't run for anything. He thanked more people who worked for me who never get acknowledged by anybody, anywhere, tonight than anyone in the United States of America ever has at one of these events. And I appreciate that. That means a lot.

I also want to thank Molly Beth Malcolm, even though the Congressman ragged her a little bit for agreeing to be head of the Texas Democratic Party. No matter what you think,

it is alive and well, and we have a majority of the House delegation, and I hope we increase the numbers next time. And I thank you very much.

I'd like to thank the people who served the food, the people who cooked the food. This is the most I've gotten to eat at one of these things in a long time. [Laughter] And the people that let me eat, I appreciate that, too, although I really didn't need to. I enjoyed it. I'd like to thank the band. They were great.

You know, I wanted to be here tonight for a number of reasons. You know, I came home to Hope today, and we dedicated—we had a formal dedication of my—they call it my birthplace. I was actually born in a hospital, as near as I remember. [Laughter] But I lived there from the time I was born until I was 4 years old. And they restored this wonderful old house that was built in 1917, and the last time I saw it before they started in 1990, it needed condemning. But the people have done a wonderful job. And my kinfolks from all over here have given them memorabilia and things, and other people have contributed. A lady came from the Midwest today and stood out in that cold, driving rain, drove all the way from Iowa, I think, to give them a Lionel train, because she read that when I was 4 years old, I had a little Lionel train there. And she had one that was made in 1950, and she gave it to them. It was a wonderful thing for me. And I came here because I wanted to help Max Sandlin. And I'd like to tell you something about the connection between the two things.

As I said, I feel incredibly grateful to have had the chance to be President. I'm grateful for the people here who have supported me, I'm grateful for the people from Arkansas who went to Washington with me. Truman recognized Bob and Janis and Nancy Hernreich, and my good friend Mack McLarty's here, and we may have some more Arkansans here with me tonight.

But I want you to know that I hope that the good Lord gives me good health for a few more years, and I can spend my time being a citizen, trying to help other people I believe in stand up and fight for causes that I believe in. And after over 20 years in public life, I am acutely mindful of the fact

that while every politician would like to have you believe that he was born in a log cabin that he made himself—[laughter]—the truth is that all—any of us, even a President, can hope to do, is to be a part of setting a direction of taking the chains off people, creating the conditions in which people can make and live their own dreams.

But I'm here for Max, in part, because I think it's not only something I want to do; it's something I think would be good for the children of this district and this State and this country. I said today at the dedication of my birthplace that when I was born in Hope yea long years ago, right at the end of World War II, it wasn't a perfect place. It was still segregated, and we had our fair share of flaws in that little town. And as Mack McLarty reminded me today on the airplane, we even had a gossip or two, God forbid. [Laughter]

But the children in the blush of optimism and national unity after World War II were basically raised to believe at least two things in little towns all across America like the one that I came of age in: One was to believe they should be personally optimistic, that they should have their dreams and live them and believe that they could; and the second was to be acutely sensitive to and respectful to other people, to never forget that they were part of a community, that the good news was they belonged to something bigger than themselves, but they also had a responsibility to care for people besides themselves.

And one of the biggest reasons that I ran for President in 1991 and '92 was to give the young people of this generation that feeling back. All these young people working for us tonight, you don't have any idea what they do when they're not serving you food. But unlike me, they've got most of their lives ahead of them. I want them to believe that they can live their dreams. I want them to, in fact, have a chance to do it.

I want them to also believe that in this country that is incredibly diverse—I told somebody today the little grade school named after me in Hope, Arkansas, now has 27 kids who are first-generation immigrants, whose first language is not English. The school district across the river, the Potomac River, from Washington, DC, now has chil-

dren in one school district from 180 different national, racial, and ethnic groups. We had better remember that we are one community, and that if any of us hope to do well, we ought to want our neighbors to do well, too. And we ought to be willing to go to some trouble to see that they have that chance.

And so that's what I said today at my little dedication in my home. I said I learned that lesson as a little boy in Hope. And if I hadn't learned it, we wouldn't be here 50 years later.

I came here tonight because I like Max Sandlin and because I admire him and because he has already had an unusual impact for a person that hasn't been in the House any longer than he's been there and shown an unusual amount of personal courage and responsibility. And I will just give you three examples—[applause]—the other people also like him; otherwise my Congressman, former member of my administration, Marion Berry, the Congressman from eastern Arkansas, would not be down here tonight in the cold and the rain. You don't do that just out of some sense of obligation. And there are three reasons.

Number one, I want you to know he does his work for the district. On far more than one occasion, he has personally lobbied me about a specific issue relating to this district. That's part of his job. But you would be amazed at how many people—so has Marion Berry—[laughter]—but he took me to race 20 years ago, so he feels he has a right to. But you would be amazed how many people get around the President, and then they say, "Oh, I'd better not bother him with that. He's probably thinking about Kosovo." Well, I probably am. But the only reason I have a right to think about Kosovo is that people from Miller County and Bowie County gave me the vote to put me there to do it. And he never forgets that.

Second thing is, he really, deeply believes in the things we're trying to do. You could look at him when he was up here talking; he wasn't faking it. He believes we were right to fight those who oppose us, to put another 100,000 teachers in the classroom so every child in this country has a chance in the early grades to be in a small class with a teacher that can give that child individual attention so that all our kids learn to read and to speak

and to be able to learn for the rest of their experience. He really believes that we ought to have a Patients' Bill of Rights to protect the patients and the right of medical professionals to practice medicine, even as we try to manage the health care system.

We shouldn't manage people's right to a specialist away. We shouldn't manage people's right to the nearest emergency room away. We shouldn't manage people's right to continue treatment even if their employer changes their health care provider in the middle of a pregnancy or chemotherapy treatment or something else. He believes that. It's just not something he's saying because it happens to sound good this year. And he really believes, and this is important, because the Democratic Party used to have an image as the party that had promoted the deficits. It was never true.

Even in the 12 years—and remember, I'm not running for anything, so I'm entitled—and we've had a pretty good economy, so all I'm asking you for is the benefit of the doubt. But I'd like to put this down. Even in the 12 years before I became President, when the Democrats had a majority in Congress and we quadrupled the debt, the Congress actually spent less money than my predecessors asked them to spend. So what I wanted to do was to prove that you could be progressive: You could believe in community; you could believe in raising the minimum wage; you could believe in helping working families with child care; you could believe in opening the doors of college with more scholarships and tax credits and first make the economy work by bringing the deficit down, balancing the budget, getting interest rates down so people would invest their money, run the stock market up, start new businesses, put people to work and raise wages. I thought good economic policy and good social policy would go hand in hand. It turned out to be right. Well, I'm only going to be there 2 more years. Max Sandlin believes that. He wasn't kidding when he said we ought to pay down the debt.

If I had come to you in 1992 and said, "Now listen, before I'm done, I'll be coming back here telling you we can pay off the national debt," you'd have said that guy's too unstable to be President. [Laughter]

Wouldn't you? Nobody would have believed that. We just took it for granted. You know, the deficit would always go up; crime would go up; welfare would go up; the country would grow unequal; working people would never be able to get ahead again. It turns out not to be true. If you do the right things and work at it, consequences flow from that.

So I'm telling you, I don't want to give you a whole policy speech tonight, but if you watch every elected official in Washington, DC, for the next year, there will be a zillion issues. You may think I'm wrong about some of them, but some of them will determine how the children in this room and their children live, way into the 21st century.

One is, how are we going to handle the fact that America is aging. The Second World War baby boom generation, everybody born from 1946 to 1964, when we all get into the retirement system, there won't be but two people working for every one person drawing Social Security. Even before that, within 10 years, because life expectancy is going up and the older you get the more you need to have medical treatment, Medicare will run out of money under the present system, unless we put some more money in it and make some changes.

Now, that's a high-class problem. The older I get, the higher class problem that is. [Laughter] But if you think about it, that's a high-class problem. It's because of advances in medical science, advances in basic health care, things like clean water and immunizations, and because people are taking better care of themselves. But it will bankrupt the country and the Social Security system unless we make some changes.

So now we've got this chance. Why? Because we've got a surplus and because you've got a President who is not running for office and is not afraid to tell you a few things you might not like to hear about the changes we need to make to make sure this is going to be there 75 years from now. And this is not an issue for the elderly. Everybody over 60 in this audience, Social Security will be there if you live to be 85. Don't worry about it. It's not a problem. It's a problem for people my age and the nagging worry we have that if we don't fix Social Security, then our children will have to take care of us in a way

that undermines their ability to take care of our grandchildren. That's what this is about.

And it's a big issue for America. And it's very easy for politicians to get out there and tell you, "Oh, we'll take care of this down the road, and I'm going to give you this surplus back right now in a tax cut." Well, we ought to have a tax cut this year, but we ought to save three-quarters of that surplus until we fix Social Security and Medicare. We ought to do that. And we have given the Congress a way to do it that will enable us for the next 15 years to buy down the national debt while we're making future commitments for Social Security and Medicare.

Now, you know, this is an alien subject in America. We had—as Max said, we hadn't balanced the budget in 30 years, now we're talking about buying down the debt. But I've been thinking about this. I just got back from Central America, one of the places in the world we actually have a trade surplus with. That's why I want to help them get over the hurricane and because they're our neighbors and our friends.

A lot of people say, "I wish we didn't have so much illegal immigration." Well, a lot of people down there love their children and can't make a living for them. That's why they come up here. If we help them get over this hurricane and help them make a living down there, they'll be good trading partners, and you won't have to worry so much about illegal immigration.

But I got to thinking about it. I'm also trying to do it because we're trying to keep the world economy going. But if you talk to any farmer that grows crops or raises cattle or hogs, you know this is a very tough time to be a farmer. We may have 18 million new jobs; we may have the best American economy in history; but you couldn't prove it by the grain farmers in the high plains of America. You couldn't prove it by most farmers.

Now, why is that? A big reason is, half the world's in a terrible recession because of the Asian financial crisis and because it gave the financial flu to a lot of countries in Latin America, and they can't buy our stuff anymore. Now, I've got to worry about how to keep this economy going.

So here's the good news: You can save Social Security and Medicare and because we'll

be paying down the debt, we'll keep interest rates down, and we will be better off if things go bad in the world, and we'll do even better if they go well in the world. If you pay this debt down, it means business loans will be cheaper; therefore, there will be more taken, more businesses started, more jobs created.

It means your kids' college loan will be cheaper. It means your car payment, your house payment, and your credit card payment will be cheaper. It means America will grow more. It means when Max Sandlin goes to Congress every year from now on, every year he'll have to take less and less and less money off the top to pay interest on the debt.

When I became President, 14½ cents of every dollar you pay in taxes had to be taken off the top to pay interest on the debt that had been accumulated in the 12 previous years before we could invest in education, invest in highways, invest in the environment, invest in health care, or give you a tax cut. In other words, when you hire a Congressman, you're basically getting 86 percent of a brain—[laughter]—or a capacity, because he can't think about 14 cents; 14 cents, he plunks down off the top end. Now, it's not always bad to go into debt. It's not always bad for a nation to do it. But it is a terrible thing for a nation to do what we did for 12 years and borrow money every year just to keep up with current expenses.

You build a new building in Texarkana, you borrow the money, build the building, advertise it, pay the debt off. You're making a long-term investment so you can make a long-term payment on it. But to keep borrowing money to go to dinner every night, which is what America did for 12 years, is a terrible mistake.

And I am telling you, we can be out of debt in 17 years. In 15 years, if you will do this, we will be down to where only 2 cents of every dollar you pay in taxes goes to debt service, and the rest can then be spent for Social Security or Medicare or education or for a tax cut if that's what the people in Congress want then. But let's secure the American economy for the long run.

Let's say—I'm doing my best to help Asia, to help Latin America, to ward off wars that can wreck the economy, to keep things going.

But we have limited control over events beyond our borders. Maybe I'll get this done. Believe me, I am trying. But I want America to be as strong as possible no matter what. If it rains, I want us to have a good roof up. If the Sun shines, I want us to be able to fly higher. This is the right thing to do. Max Sandlin believes that. You saw him up here tonight. He wasn't just giving a speech; that's what he believes.

And the third reason I'm for him is that at a time in the last year when a lot of people just worried which way the political winds were blowing, that guy was telling people to read the Constitution of the United States of America.

And so I thank you for coming here. I thank you for raising all this money. I thank you for sending a signal that you understand that good civic leadership is important, and you'll stay with it. I thank you for everything you've done for me in two races for President and times in-between and many of you for many, many years before.

But I ask you to think mostly about tomorrow and all the tomorrows of the 21st century. I ask you to remember that in a time this dynamic we cannot afford to sit back and rest on our laurels. Yes, we've got a great economy. Yes, we've got the lowest crime rate in 30 years. Yes, the welfare rolls have been cut in half. Yes, we seem to be making advances toward peace and security in the world. But things are changing in a hurry out there. We don't control everything. Therefore, it is very important, with all this prosperity and all this confidence we have, that we act on what we can control which is what we do and what we care about and what kind of dreams we've got for our kids.

And you know, we're having a good time tonight, and I didn't really mean to get this serious, but I don't know if I'll get to talk to you again personally before I leave office. And I'm telling you, we've got a chance to make the next 100 years better for America than the last 100. But it will be a very different world, and it will move in a hurry. And we will have to work hard always to ask ourselves: Is what I am going to do going to make it easier for every kid to dream big dreams and have a chance to live them; and is what I'm going to do going to make it easier

er for us to come together as a community—in our community, in our State, in our Nation and with our friends around the world?

And I'm telling you, you can boil all this stuff down to that: Are we going to make it easier for people to live their dreams? Are we going to make it easier and more likely that people will get along together and understand that for all of our differences, God made us more in common than different? And if the answer to those questions is "yes," then that's probably the right thing to do. I trust Max Sandlin to find that answer.

Thank you, and God bless you all.

NOTE: The President spoke at 8:05 p.m. in the Truman Arnold Center at Texarkana Community College. In his remarks, he referred to event cohosts Truman and Anita Arnold, Cary and Lois Patterson, Gene and Mary Kay Joyce, and Damon and Doris Ann (D.A.) Young; and Molly Beth Malcolm, chair, Texas Democratic Party. This item was not received in time for publication in the appropriate issue.

The President's Radio Address

March 13, 1999

Good morning. I'm joined here at the White House today by Members of Congress, Deputy Attorney General Holder, Acting Assistant Attorney General for Civil Rights Bill Lann Lee, representatives from law enforcement and civil rights groups, all here to talk about what we must do to strengthen the bond of trust between police officers and the communities they serve, and make our streets safer than ever.

Six years ago I took office committed to lowering the crime rate and to raise the levels of trust and cooperation between police and the communities they serve. Working with law enforcement and community leaders, we put in place a comprehensive crime-fighting strategy with more police and better prevention, more positive activities for young people, and fewer guns in the hands of criminals. The strategy is working even beyond our expectation. Nationwide, crime is down to its lowest level in decades. In communities all across America, families feel safe again.

Community policing has been at the heart of our success, by giving police the chance to get to know the people on their beats and