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NOTE: The President spoke at 11:50 a.m. in the Jefferson Ballroom at the Washington Hilton Hotel. In his remarks, he referred to Gov. Roy Romer of Colorado, general chair, Representative Loretta Sanchez and Mayor Dennis W. Archer of Detroit, general cochairs, Joseph J. Andrew, national chair, Andrew Tobias, treasurer, and Beth E. Dozoretz, national finance chair, Democratic National Committee; Lydia Camarillo, chief executive officer, and Donald J. Foley, chief operating officer, 2000 Democratic National Convention; and Mayor Edward Rendell of Philadelphia.

Remarks at a Democratic Business Council Luncheon

September 24, 1999

Thank you. You think that story John told was true? [*Laughter*] I just—you better keep that Republican's name secret, or they'll subpoena him before a committee, before you know it. [*Laughter*]

I want to thank all of you at the DBC. I want to thank my long-time friend John Merrigan, and Mitchell Delk, and my good friend Jan Jones, and all the others who have been involved with the DBC. I want to thank our finance people, starting with Beth Dozoretz and Frank Katz, and going through all of the people who have worked on this event.

I want to thank all of you who give so consistently to our party, to give us a chance to get our message out. Thank you, Joe Andrew; thank you, Lou Weisbach, Lottie Shackelford, Janice Griffin. Thanks, Secretary Slater, for being here and for being there for me for nearly 20 years, now. And I want to say a special word of thanks to Roy Romer for his wonderful service to our party. Thank you very much. Thank you.

Our former chair, Don Fowler, is here. We've got a lot of other good folks here. But I wanted to say to all of you that I think it's quite important how you think and how you talk about were we are, where we've been, and where we're going. So if you will forgive me, I will get down to business. I'm sorry I'm a little late, but I had to spend an extra amount of time at the DNC, because they had a big crowd there, and I wanted to make sure they were thinking right about the moment. And I feel the same way about you.

In 1991, I asked the American people to give me a chance to be President. And I said, ''If you'll vote for me, I'll do my best to change our party, to change our national leadership, to change the direction of our country. I think we need new ideas for the new economy and all of the new challenges in our society and the world at large. But they have to be rooted in old values of opportunity for all, responsibility from all, and a community of all Americans.''

And I asked the American people to give me a chance. And I made an argument for them about what I would do. Then, when the Vice President joined the ticket, we reissued our economic plan and asked the American people to give us a chance to put people first. And I would like to ask you to think about that.

John said we brought the economy back and brought the Democratic Party back to the center. I think we did bring it back to the center, but I prefer to think of it as pushing the Democratic Party forward into the future, by getting out of making what seemed to me to be completely false choices. If you hang around Washington long enough, you learn that putting people and issues into categories—I'm sympathetic with people in Washington because they have to deal with so many people and so many issues—if you put everybody and every thing in a little box, it saves you the trouble of having to think. But it's a very poor way to run a country and to make decisions about the future of the country.

So we said, ''Hey, give us a chance. We believe that the Democratic Party can be probusiness and prolabor. We believe we can be for family values and be against discrimination against women or gays or anybody else. We believe we can be for one America and still celebrate our diversity. We believe you can grow the economy while you improve the environment, not degrade it. We believe that we'll have a better work place if we also help workers to succeed at home in their parental responsibilities. We believe these things. We believe we can prevent crime and be tough on criminals who should be punished.''

And so, we made this argument. And the results speak for themselves. But I want to

make just a couple of points. Number one, we've got to take a little longer walk down memory lane, because the economy's been so good now that people can't remember when it wasn't. I saw a poll the other day where people think the economy was good when President Bush was here. I think they think it was good when Herbert Hoover was here. [*Laughter*] It's been good a long time.

But it's important to point out that in 1980, when the Reagan revolution occurred, the premise of the Reagan revolution—there were two premises. One is, Government is your enemy and the cause of all of our problems, and you should dislike it and make it as small as possible unless it's building defense or pouring concrete. That was the first one. The second was, the way to have a strong economy forever and a balanced budget forever is to increase spending and cut revenues. Let me repeat that. You don't have to laugh, but I want to make sure you heard it. [*Laughter*] The way to balance the budget and have a strong economy is to increase spending and cut revenues. That was their whole deal, and we proceeded to try it for 12 years. And it got him elected and then reelected and then got President Bush to become only the second Vice President in American history to become directly elected after the President.

But did it work for a while? As I told the DNC today, my former senior Senator, Dale Bumpers, in talking to the Reagan years used to say, ''Of course it worked. If you let me write $2 billion of hot checks, I'll show you a good time, too.'' [*Laughter*] So it worked.

But by the third incarnation of it, between '88 and '92, the quadrupling of the national debt put us into a position of permanently high interest rates, which gave us stagnant growth, high unemployment, stagnant wages, and the longest, deepest recession since the Great Depression. That was the reality we confronted. And we kept getting out of these recessions, but every time we'd get out, we'd go right back in because of the high interest rates.

So Al Gore and I said, ''Hey, give us a chance. We're going to try this other thing here.'' And we went in. And it was an argument in the beginning; that is, the ordinary voters couldn't know who was right because they hadn't tried our way. And then we got in and we found the most partisan atmosphere in modern American history, and my economic plan passed with not a vote to spare and not a vote from a Republican. The Vice President broke the tie in the Senate. And we had only a two-vote victory in the House, which means if one had changed it would have been even and it wouldn't have passed.

Now, we've been through several incarnations. We also put our crime program through. And we passed the Brady bill, which the previous President had vetoed. We passed the Family and Medical Leave Act, the first big leg in our work and family bill, which the previous President had vetoed. We proceeded to clean up toxic waste dumps, clean the air, clean the water, make the food safer. The economy kept getting better, not worse, in spite of their fears.

And they said—when we passed our economic program they said the world would come to an end. They said, ''We're going to try it the other way. We're going to cut expenses and increase revenues, until we get this deficit out of our hair.'' And they said, ''Oh no, this is a terrible idea. It will bankrupt the country.''

When we passed the crime bill and said we were going to put 100,000 police on the streets, they said, ''You'll never do it. Even if you did, it won't bring the crime down.'' And when we said we could ban assault weapons and do background checks on handgun buyers, and we would keep more guns out of the wrong hands, they said, ''Oh, the criminals will have guns, and all you're going to do is unduly burden hunters and sports people.''

You remember all these debates. We did one thing; they said another. And so, now, after 6 years and 8 months, we're not having an argument anymore. We can still fight, but it's not an argument over the facts.

Our economic plan has unleashed your energies with low interest rates, and we now have the longest peacetime expansion in history, a 30-year low in unemployment, a 32-year low in welfare, and a 26-year low in the crime rate. We have the highest homeownership in history; the lowest minority unemployment rate ever recorded. And each year,

we've set a record for new small business startups.

But the air is cleaner; the water is cleaner; the food is safer. We have done away with 3 times as many toxic waste dumps as they did in 12 years and set aside more land in perpetuity protection than any administration in history except those of the two Roosevelts.

Along the way, we got 100,000 young people to serve their communities in AmeriCorps and immunized 90 percent of our kids against serious childhood illnesses for the first time, and opened the doors of college to all with the HOPE scholarship. It's been a pretty good run, but it's not an argument anymore. There are facts.

I never will forget—and the voters returned us to office in 1996. But let's look at these elections, and this one in connection with the others. So in '92 we won because people thought times were tough and they gave us a chance. In '94 we got beat bad. Why? Well, they ran with this contract on America, and they had a plan and a message and it sounded good. And they said that we had raised everybody's taxes, although we hadn't. We raised all of yours, but we didn't raise everybody's taxes. [*Laughter*] Over 90 percent of the people didn't have their taxes raised.

One of my friends who runs a Fortune 100 company—endangered species in that crowd, he's a Democrat—is going all over New York saying, ''If you paid more in taxes than you made out of low interest rates in the stock market in the last 7 years, you ought to be for George Bush, but if you didn't, you ought to stick with us.'' It's a pretty good argument, isn't it? You might try it. [*Laughter*]

So anyway, in '92 they took a chance on us. In '94 we lost big. Why? Because people were told we'd raise their taxes, even when we didn't, and they hadn't felt the good economy yet and because we had just passed the crime bill and they terrified everybody saying we were going to take their guns away and because we didn't pass anything on health care, so the people who wanted something done were disappointed, and the people who believed their propaganda that we were trying to have the Government take over the health care system believed it. It was the worst of all worlds and election results showed it. And our obituary was written. Remember that now when you read the papers in the next few months. Our obituary was written: hopeless, helpless, terrible situation. But in '96, we roar back in, bigger victory than '92. Why? Because there was no argument anymore. People had evidence.

And then in '98, we had a plan. In a midterm election, we said, ''Hey, we're not tired. We're not burned out. Vote for us, and we'll give you 100,000 teachers. We want to save Social Security and Medicare before we spend the surplus. We want to pay the debt down. We want to pass a Patients' Bill of Rights. That's our national plan.'' And all over America we said it.

And you know what they said in '98. And they said and all the experts said, ''Well, are they going to lose five, six, or seven Senate seats? Are they going to lose 20, 30, or 40 House seats?'' And instead, while we were being outspent by $100 million—$100 million in 1998—we lost no Senate seats in the worst year I can remember for Democrats, in terms of whose we had up and whose was vacant, and we picked up five House seats. And it's the first time since 1822 that the party of the President had gained House seats in a midterm election in the 6th year of the Presidency. And only the third time since the Civil War it happened in any midterm election. Why? Because we decided what we were for. We decided ideas matter. Because we put them in, and they made a real difference in people's lives. And people who make the real decision, the voters out there, once they got a chance to take a look at our crowd said, ''I think they care more about me than the other guys do.''

And one real problem almost all people have sooner or later, if they stay in politics long enough, is they spend so much time with other people in politics, and commentators and experts and pollsters and people writing articles, that they forget that this is not about any of us. Most of you are going to be all right, no matter what—otherwise you couldn't afford to be here. This is about the great mass of people. And I hope that you're here because you believe, as I do, that all

of us do better when the country as a whole does better.

You know, my economy has made it possible for those Republicans to give George Bush all that money. [*Laughter*] Al Gore told me the other day, he said, ''If I'd known this economy was going to make so much money for Bush, I'd have voted against your economic plan.'' [*Laughter*] I may start listing that as one of the achievements of my administration. [*Laughter*] See, it just depends on how you talk about this stuff—[*laughter*]—and how you think about it. We're all laughing, but I have a very serious purpose here.

So now we come to 2000. And we're first in this year. I believe that the Democratic Party has gotten a long way by being willing to work with the Republicans to get something done. We worked with them in '96, passed the welfare reform bill that's given us the lowest welfare rolls in a generation, but we didn't let them cut off medical care and food to those poor kids. And we made them come up with more child care so that when people go to work, they can still take care of their kids.

I believe we were right when we worked with them in '97 on the balanced budget bill, because it's continued this remarkable low interest rates and recovery of the economy. And I think we still ought to work with them, if they'll work with us, to save Social Security and Medicare and modernize Medicare with prescription drug coverage, to continue to invest in education, to invest in giving people—here's a tax cut I'm for: I'm for giving people the same incentives to invest in poor areas in America we give them to invest in poor areas around the world, so that we can go national with the empowerment zone program that the Vice President's done such a brilliant job of supervising in Mayor Archer's city of New York and other places.

But we need to take care of business. We need to do that. And if my plan were adopted, we would have the ability to save Social Security and Medicare, invest in education, defense, and the other things we need to invest in, still have a tax cut we can afford, and get this country out of debt for the first time since 1835, which would give us a generation of low interest rates and long-term recovery for our children.

Now, that's why I vetoed their tax bill. And once again, I did the Republican candidates for President a favor. Every one of them running on the other side is for this Republican tax bill, and if I had signed it, it would have made a lie to of every campaign speech they're going to give between now and the election about what they'll do, because they wouldn't have any money to do it.

I noticed one of them yesterday said, ''Vote for me, and I'll give you new weapons and higher paid soldiers. And everything the Defense Department wants, I'll spend more money on''—ignoring the fact that we're just about to pay a big pay increase and build new weapons. And I thought to myself, this is a nice speech, but if I sign this tax bill that he's for there won't be any money for the promise he just made. I need to quit helping these Republicans this way.

But anyway, I vetoed the tax bill because if their bill passes, it wouldn't add a day to Social Security, not a day to Medicare—not a day. So when the baby boomers retire, all those risks would still be out there. It would force big cuts in education. We'd never get the debt paid off. It really had no special effort to get economic growth into the areas that have been left behind by our prosperity. So I vetoed it. But I still want to get things done. And I still want you to help us going forward.

And here's the point I want to make—I just want to make two or three points. Number one, the American people say they want a change. Guess what? I agree with them. If they polled me in all those polls, and said, ''Do you think we ought to change?'' I'd say yes. This country only works when it's in a perpetual state of creation and recreation. That's how it works. That's why we're still around here after all this time.

Why do you think I worked so hard so that we could just fix this country again so then we'd be free to look at these big, long-term challenges and seize the big, long-term opportunities, none of which were possible to deal with in the shape we were in, in 1992. So I'm for change, too. The question is going to be, what kind of change are you for?

Are we going to build on all the good things that are going on now to deal with the outstanding big problems and to seize

the outstanding big opportunities, or are we going to turn around and go back to the approach that got us in so much trouble in the first place? That's the question before the American people.

Do you want to save Social Security, or privatize it and worry later what happens to the people that lose in that deal? Do you want to save Medicare, or force everybody into a managed care plan even though you won't pass the Patients' Bill of Rights? Do you want to keep on with this program that's given us the lowest crime rate in 26 years, until we have the safest big country on Earth? Or do you want to give crime policy back to the NRA?

These are the questions we have to face. Meanwhile, there is a lot we can do now. But there are big questions. Do you really believe America's diversity is its strength and we can come together in our common humanity? Or do you agree with them that we shouldn't pass the hate crimes bill or the ''Employment Non-Discrimination Act?'' You've got to decide. There are big issues here.

And these economic issues—would we be better off if their tax bill passed, or would they be better off if my modest bill passed and we took care of Social Security, Medicare, our investments in our children, their education, and got the country out of debt for the first time since Andrew Jackson was President? Because even if we voted for everything I want now, it could all be revisited next year.

So these are decisions worthy of a great nation. And I just want to say two or three things about the politics of this. Number one, what you do is terribly important. It's okay if they have more money than we do if we have enough. I will remind you they outspent us by $100 million last time, if you take all their third party committees and all that stuff, and we won anyway. Why? Because we had enough, because the people out there knew what we stood for, because we had clear, sharp, unambiguous message and people heard it.

Number two, it's very important that you stay in the right frame of mind—you know how to talk about this. My philosophy, all the years I ran for office—now, I can say this since I'm not running anymore; I get to sound like a wise man. I've had a lot of young people come up to me and say, ''Mr. President, I want to run for office. Have you got any advice?'' And I always say one thing. I say, ''You know, every time I was on the ballot, my goal was to make sure that every single person who voted against me knew exactly what he or she was doing.'' Now, you think about that.

That's why your role is important. Because in a free society, if the people who vote against you know exactly what they're doing, you have no beef. None of us have a right to be here, for goodness sake. And the reason the money is important is so we can get the message out and to have enough. But you need to make sure when you go home and you start talking to other people, that people that aren't for us know exactly what they're doing and why.

You know, the American people nearly always get it right if they know. One of my favorite stories of what's happened to me, I went back to New Hampshire to run for reelection in '96. You know, I love that little place with all my heart. They kept me alive when the Republican Party and the pundits told them I was dead, and the voters of New Hampshire said, ''I don't think so. We're not letting you tell us how to run our lives, thank you very much.''

And then I went back in '96. And they gave Al Gore and me a majority of the vote in '96. Unheard of. Both Republicans and independents, I believe, have larger numbers of registered voters than the Democrats do there. They've been real good to us. But in '94, they participated in a whipping we took, and they beat one of their Congressmen because he voted for the crime bill.

So I go back to New Hampshire in '96, and I want you to think about this when you read all about this election, now, and all the experts, and what all they're telling you about. And we got a big crowd of people in Manchester. And I said, ''Get me a bunch of redneck hunters there.'' And we had a bunch of big muscle-bound guys, in their plaid shirts, you know, waiting for deer season. [*Laughter*] And so we had them all up there, and I said, ''Listen, guys. In 1994, your Congressman voted for the crime bill, which banned assault weapons, and voted for the

Brady bill. And you beat him because of it.'' They all started kind of nodding their heads and shuffling their feet, you know. And I said, ''Here's what I want you to know. I feel terrible about it, because he did it for me. And he did it because I needed his vote, and I pleaded with him to do it.'' So I said, ''If a single person here has suffered any inconvenience in hunting or sport shooting in any way, if all the stuff they told you about how we're going to come get your guns and mess with your lives, if it was true, then I want every one of you who experienced that to vote against me, too, because that guy did it for me.'' But I said, ''If that didn't happen, they lied to you, and you need to get even.'' [*Laughter*]

And so in Republican New Hampshire, we got a majority of the vote. Why? Because people got to think about what they really felt and what really counted and what had really happened. So I want to remind you of something else as you read the paper as happily for the next few months. This is September of 1999, a year and 6 weeks before the election.

In June of 1992, 3 months before the election, on June 2d I won the primaries in California, New Jersey, and Ohio and became the first-round—the certain nominee of the Democratic Party. And the next day, the only thing in the press was, ''But who cares if he won all these things. We polled in the exit polls the voters in the California primary, and they're really for Perot. They don't care anything about this guy. We told them that he was no good, and the voters agree with us. We laid it out to them, and they ate it, and they're doing exactly what we tell them to do.'' That's what they said. This was 3 months, 3 or 4 months before the election. I was in third place—not second, third. It's not a horse race; you don't get any money if you show. [*Laughter*]

Let me tell you something. They're thinking about this race in Iowa, and they're thinking about it in New Hampshire, and they're thinking about it in the headquarters of all the candidates. At the sale barn at Conway, Arkansas, they're still thinking about the price of cattle. And both parties would do well in Washington to remember that if most people still think they're giving us a paycheck up here and they want us to keep working for them for a little while longer, instead of dissolving into political indulgence.

But don't you believe all these people who write our epithet because of the money they have or because of what they say about this, that, or the other thing. I'm living proof that they can chisel a lot of tombstones for you before you have to lay down. [*Laughter*] And you don't understand, half of this stuff is designed to break your heart and your spirit anyway.

Now, here's what I want to tell you. Who knows what's going to happen next year? My gut is we win because we've done a good job for America, because we had an argument over ideas and we turned out to be right and because I know what the differences are going to be for the issues going forward, and I think we're right about that. That's what I think.

But what I really want you to believe is the American people nearly always get it right. And they have an extraordinary sense of enlightened self-interest. And if sometime during this whole process their minds will kick in and then their hearts will kick in and they'll do what they really believe is right. And they'll give everybody that wants a vote a fair hearing. They'll try to be fair.

And what we owe to them is to make sure that however they vote, they know what they're doing. And then whatever happens, none of us have any gripes. But people who get caught up in politics as an end in itself, who want the power, the position rather than the purpose, forget that no matter how much power you have and no matter how long you serve—and I've laughed at people, I said I'm glad we've got this two term limit because if I could run three or four more times, I probably would. That's true. But no matter how long you serve, in the grand sweep of things, it's like a minute or two.

I went to a memorial service for Lane Kirkland yesterday. He was over 75 years old; he seemed like a young fellow to me, because he kept his spirit young. But none of us are around here for very long. We don't get to live very long. We don't get to serve very long. And we need to remember that this is all about the people that served us lunch today. This is all about children that Hillary

and I were with this morning who got adopted because we used the power of the Federal Government to end the rules and the bureaucratic snarls that kept foster children from moving quickly into adopted homes.

This is really all about the American people, and it is a gift to be able to serve. And I believe it's a gift to be fortunate enough in this country to have resources to give. And I think we should walk out of this room, thanking our lucky stars that we could be here today, thanking God we got the chance to serve and test our ideas, and being absolutely determined that we are going to be of good cheer, of strong confidence, and we're going to make absolutely sure the American people know why we stand for what we stand for and exactly what we intend to do in the 21st century.

Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:40 p.m. in the York Room at the Hyatt Regency Hotel. In his remarks, he referred to John Merrigan, chair, Democratic Business Council; Mitchell Delk, vice chairman, Federal Home Mortgage Corp.; Mayor Jan Laverty Jones of Las Vegas; Beth E. Dozoretz, national finance chair, Frank Katz, national finance director, Joseph J. Andrew, national chair, and Lottie Shackelford, vice chair, Democratic National Committee; Lou Weisbach, chief executive officer, HA–LO Industries, Inc.; and Janice Griffin, national chair, Women's Leadership Forum.

Statement on Signing the Organ Donor Leave Act

September 24, 1999

Today, I am pleased to sign into law H.R. 457, the ''Organ Donor Leave Act,'' which would enhance the Federal Government's leadership role in encouraging organ donations by making it easier for Federal employees to become donors.

Currently, more than 65,000 Americans are awaiting an organ transplant. Last year, almost 5,000 Americans died while waiting for an organ to become available. This amounts to an average of 13 citizens each day. Many of these deaths could have been prevented if there were a sufficient supply of donor organs. H.R. 457 is a valuable tool to help address the needs of Americans waiting for organs by encouraging donations by Federal employees.

In 1997, my Administration launched the National Organ and Tissue Donation Initiative, which included new efforts by the Federal Government to increase awareness among Federal employees of the need for organ and tissue donation. The Department of Health and Human Services, in partnership with the Office of Personnel Management, has implemented a Government-wide campaign to encourage Federal employees to consider organ donation and, as the country's largest employer, to set the example for the private sector as well as other public organizations.

H.R. 457 builds on my Administration's long-standing commitment to increasing organ donations nationwide. Under current law, a Federal employee may use up to 7 days of paid leave each year, other than sick leave or annual leave, to serve as a donor. Recent surveys of doctors and hospitals indicate that the current 7-day limit is clearly insufficient for recovery from organ donation surgery. This bill increases the amount of paid leave available to Federal employees who donate organs for transplants, providing up to 30 days of paid leave, in addition to annual and sick leave, for organ donation.

In addition to our current efforts, my Administration will go forward in the coming weeks with the framework for an organ allocation system that will serve patients better. Our approach, which has been validated by the Institute of Medicine, calls for improved allocation policies to be designed by transplant professionals, not by the Government, and would ensure better and fairer treatment for patients. We need an organ allocation system that is as good as our transplant technology, and it is time for sound allocation policies to go into effect.

It gives me great pleasure to sign H.R. 457 into law. I welcome the opportunity to help Federal employees participate in this life-saving effort.

William J. Clinton

The White House,
September 24, 1999.

NOTE: H.R. 457, approved September 24, was assigned Public Law No. 106–56.