

doing a good job. I feel as if I'm hearing a eulogy and I pinch myself—[*laughter*]—and I feel perfectly alive and still very much in harness. But you do have to think to the future. You are having elections. You are planning for the future.

The reason I like this Governor and the reason my wife, who wishes she could be here tonight, told me—when most people thought he had no chance to win, she said, “He'll win, because he's serious about the job, and he has thought more about what he would do if he got it.” And Vice President Gore and I, we've worked hard to be serious about the job, to do things that would advance the values that we share.

And so I say to you, I thank you for your help. We'll do our best to invest your contributions wisely. But I hope you will continue to talk to your friends and neighbors. If somebody asks you tomorrow or the next day or the next day, why were you here tonight, don't say, father made me come. [*Laughter*] Tell them you came because you understand that this good fortune has to be nourished. You understand that it carries with it responsibilities, because you want every American to have the same chances that you have had, and because we all do better when we work together.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 8:46 p.m. at a private residence. In his remarks, he referred to Gov. Gray Davis of California; reception cohosts Neil and Dora Kadisha, Pauran and Pariz Nazarian, and Leon and Debbie Farahnik.

Remarks at a Democratic National Committee Dinner in Los Angeles

March 4, 2000

Thank you very much. I don't know about you, but I've been to one or two of these events in my life—[*laughter*]—and I had a wonderful time tonight. This is a marvelous restaurant. I've never been here before in all my years of traipsing around L.A. And I think we ought to give them a hand for making us feel so welcome.

I want to thank Mayor Rendell and our national finance chair, Joel Hyatt, for coming out here with me. I especially want to thank

Chuck and Elizabeth and the Zimons, the Nathansons, all the others who have worked so hard. I want to thank all the people from the entertainment community who came. Kenneth and Tracy, thank you for being here. I want to thank especially Gregory and Veronique Peck for being here. And all the rest of you.

Mac Davis, thank you. I'm sure you remember this, but your show was on in Washington about the time I became President the first time. And in the last year of her life, my beloved mother got to go, and she thought you were the best thing since sliced bread. And I will always be grateful to you for the joy you gave to my mother when she was very ill, and I thank you for that.

And Olivia, I did my best not to sing along with you tonight. [*Laughter*] But when you started singing, I looked at Marc Nathanson; I said, “How many of her albums do you have? I mean, the old albums.” [*Laughter*] I said, “I've still got that one where she comes up out of the water.” [*Laughter*] And I still look at it every now and then. [*Laughter*]

So I want to thank you not only for your work as an artist, but especially because of my family's experience, I thank you for your continued fight against cancer, for children, and for being a role model for women all over this country by going on. Thank you very much.

And I don't know what to say about Governor Gray Davis, except I think we ought to maybe change his first name to “Red Hot” after tonight. [*Laughter*] You know, it's okay for you to get a little funny, but if you get any better, your shtick won't work anymore. [*Laughter*] That was a pretty good rap. But you're also—I might add—Hillary and I were talking about the California Governor's race when it started, and we knew his primary opponents and liked them. But I had known Gray for years and years.

And I said, “Hillary, what do you think is going to happen in that race?” She said, “Oh, I think Gray Davis will win.” And I said, “Why?” She said, “Well, because he really wants to do the job, and he has a really good idea of what he would do if he got there, and that will communicate itself over the course of the campaign and build a lot of

confidence among the voters.” And I think that pretty much says it, and I think the confidence of the voters has been well placed.

I’ll try to make this fairly brief tonight, but I want you to think about why you came and what you’ll say tomorrow if somebody asks you why you came. And I want to begin by telling you what I’m going to do tomorrow. About 4 o’clock tomorrow morning I’m going to get out of bed here in L.A., and at 5, I’m going to leave, and I’m going to fly to Selma. And I’m going to walk across the Edmund Pettus Bridge at Selma on the 35th anniversary of the great march that led to the passage of the Voting Rights Act in America, with Congressman John Lewis, my friend and brother who was there 35 years ago.

And for me, as a southerner, it will be the experience of a lifetime to be able to go there as the President of my country, having lived through it as a young boy. I don’t even have the words to say to you what it means to me. But I would like to remind you that people actually died to get the right to vote, in my lifetime. It’s a big deal.

And so we’re going to have this millennial election this year, at a great time of prosperity and progress. And if I have had any role in all of that, I am profoundly grateful for the chance I’ve had to serve. This will be the first election just about in over 25 years that I haven’t been on the ballot somewhere. [*Laughter*] Most days I’m okay about it. [*Laughter*] But I care a great deal about how it comes out.

And I have learned something about this mystical process of democracy. This is basically America’s greatest job interview. You’re going to hire a President. You’re going to hire Senators. You’re going to hire Members of Congress. A few Governors will get hired. And what I have learned is that the difference in this job interview and a lot of things is that in every election, the bosses—the employers, you, the people—you’ve got to define what the job is. And the decision in terms of what the election is about will determine who wins, assuming all the candidates cross what I always thought of as the basic threshold.

And the four that are left, they cross that threshold. That is, if you look at them for a couple of minutes, can you imagine them

being President? And if the answer to that is no, you can spend \$500 million and campaign for 30 years, and you’ll still never get there.

But half of them have to say bad things about me because that’s what their party requires of them, but the truth is, they all pass that threshold. They are people that have lived good lives. They’ve accomplished things. They have things they can say they’ve done as public servants that they’re proud of, and they have honest differences. So how this comes out depends on what you think the election is about.

And so I want to begin by saying, tomorrow morning, I want you to think about this tomorrow, and I want you to watch for it on the news. And I want you to see us all walking across that bridge and remember 35 years ago when people did it, they were risking their lives just to be able to vote. So you ought to do it, and you ought to take it seriously, and it matters what you think it’s about.

Now, what I think it’s about is, what are we going to do with this magic moment. I worked as hard as I could. You remember what it was like here in California in ’91 when I showed up here. How in the world did I carry this State? I would have never had a chance to carry this—I was just the Governor, as President Bush used to affectionately refer to me, as the Governor of a small Southern State. And I rather enjoyed being the Governor of a small Southern State, and I learned a few things about human nature and basic economics that have stood me in pretty good stead. But I worked hard to help you turn this country around.

And so what do you think we ought to do? That’s the most important thing. What I believe with all my heart is that we have this opportunity that is also a big responsibility. People—listen to the speeches these people are making in this election. They could have never even talked about this stuff 8 years ago. Why? Because we can now make the future of our dreams for our children. We can be a systematic, consistent force for good and decent things around the world, for freedom, for democracy, for liberating millions of people from disease in Africa and Asia and throughout the world. We can do things.

You know, what I think it's about is keeping the economy going. Gray talked about how I changed the way people thought about Democrats. I'm passionately committed to social justice, but the best social program is still a decent job and being able to support your family and letting poor people work their way into the middle class. And it matters.

So how can we keep the economy going? Should we pay the country out of debt for the first time since 1835? I think we should, because it keeps interest rates low, investment high, more businesses being started, and more people being hired, more wealth being spread more widely. I think we should.

Should we take this moment and for the first time maybe ever bring economic opportunity and enterprise to people in places that have been left behind? On the Indian reservations, the unemployment's as high as 70 percent. There are urban neighborhoods and rural areas in this country in the Mississippi Delta where I come from, or in the Rio Grande Valley of south Texas where the unemployment rate is still 2, 3, 4 times the national average.

I want to give people like you the same incentives to invest there you have to invest in poor areas around the world, because if we can't bring those people economic opportunity now, we will never get around to it.

And I'm telling you, I grew up in a place like that. Intelligence is equally spread. There are people down there just as smart as anybody anywhere who can do anything anybody, anywhere, can do, and who are dying to have a chance to do it, and we need to bring economic opportunity to the places that have been left behind. That's what I think this election ought to be about.

For over 20 years now I have had a serious interest in education. And I can tell you that I now know something I didn't know over 20 years ago when I started. And when Hillary and I started going around to all the schools in our State, trying to figure out how to improve them, we didn't really know how to do it. We do now. I could take you to schools in the poorest, most dangerous neighborhoods in this country that are performing at a world-class level. We know how to do it.

But we have never figured out a way to systematically replicate educational excellence. One of the things that I promoted were these charter schools that California has been a leading proponent of. There was one when I became President. There are 2,000 today, and there are going to be 3,000—I hope—before I leave office, because that was my goal for the country.

The main thing I want to say to you is, it's one thing to talk about it, and another to do it. But you don't have to be skeptical anymore. We can turn around failing schools, and all kids can learn. You have to have high standards. You have to have accountability. I believe we should stop social promotion, but not until we can give every kid who needs it after-school programs, summer school programs, and mentoring programs to make sure they can succeed.

Chicago stopped it, but they didn't make the kids failures. Instead, they created a summer school that is now—listen to this—the 6th biggest school district in the United States of America—the summer school of Chicago. Needless to say, as a peripheral benefit, the juvenile crime rate dropped like a rock because people were doing positive things.

I think everybody that wants to go to college ought to be able to go and stay 4 years. We gave a tax credit called the HOPE scholarship that allows basically 2 years of community college to be made available universally in America. Now I want to allow tuition to be tax deductible. And if I don't pass it, the next President ought to, because we ought to make it possible for people to go 4 years. You've got to decide whether you think that's what this election is about.

We have a remarkable opportunity to help families balance their responsibilities to their children and at work. Equal pay for women, increase in the minimum wage, more child care, doing something to lift all of our children out of poverty—I think that's what this election is all about.

I think we can grow the economy and improve the environment for the first time in history. The digital economy means you can get rich without burning up the air. And we now have cleaner air, cleaner water. We've set aside more land than any administration

in history, except those of the two Roosevelts, in the continental United States. And the economy keeps getting better. And yet, some people in Washington think my crusade against climate change is some dark conspiracy to wreck the American economy. You have to decide. I think you ought to vote for somebody who is a committed environmentalist who also believes you can grow the economy. I think it's a big issue. You have to decide that.

These are just some of the issues that I think are important. But you have to decide what you think. I think it's a good thing that America has been a force for peace from the Middle East to Northern Ireland to Kosovo to Bosnia to the tribal wars in Africa. So I disagree, respectfully, with one of the Republican candidates who said we had a feckless foreign policy. I think when we sent a million people home who were run out of their homes just because they were Muslims in Kosovo, without losing a single American soldier in combat, that was not feckless. That was a moral, good, decent thing to do. But you have to decide whether you agree with it. You've got to decide.

And you know, I do think a lot of my Vice President. And I didn't come here to make a campaign speech, and the nominating process is not over, but you have to decide whether you believe this is a job. One of the reasons I wanted to go to Washington is that I thought Washington had become turned in on itself. I thought it was dominated by talk show mentality instead of a show-up-for-work mentality.

I did an event for Senator Feinstein last night, and I said, "You know, even when Dianne gets mad at me, I like her because she has this idea, this crazy idea that being in the Senate is a job—[laughter]—and that she's supposed to show up for work and say, 'Here's what I intend to do,' and then she goes out and does it." So as a first term Senator, she passes the California Desert Protection Act, the assault weapons ban, and then we saved the redwoods. Why?

I'll tell you why, because she was more worried about passing those bills than her 15 seconds on the evening news or who was up or who was down or who was in or who was out. You realize that you can actually go

crazy on your own initiative now. You can watch talk shows 24 hours a day, and you won't ever learn anything because to get on one you've got to take one position, and you can't ever say you might be wrong, and you can't ever change your mind. And you've got to be talking real loud by the time the other person's making a good point so no one can hear it. [Laughter]

Now, this is true. Now, you watch these things. Now, if you ran your business that way, if you made movies that way, if you made records that way, if you ran your home that way, everybody would be bankrupt, the divorce rate would be 100 percent, and every kid would be a school dropout. I mean, I wanted to change that.

So you've got to decide whether—you know, Gray makes fun about this charisma quotient business—I think it's pretty charismatic when children learn more. Children are going to learn more because of what he did in the California Legislature. That gets my blood going.

You know—but you have to decide this. I just want to leave you with this thought, because people are going to ask you, "Why did you come here?" And I'm thinking about it because of tomorrow. But in February we celebrated the longest economic expansion in the history of the country and the only one of anything like this duration with no war. And I was profoundly proud of that. But I was feeling sort of reflective, so I did a little research into the last longest economic expansion, the one whose record we broke. And some of you in this audience, you're old enough to remember it. It was 1961 to 1969. Now, I want to tell you something about that expansion, how it came to end, and what happened. And I want you to think about it in terms of your responsibility in this election.

I graduated from high school in 1964. My President, John Kennedy, had been murdered. But our country rallied around President Johnson. He was overwhelmingly re-elected; we passed a civil rights law; the next year we passed the Voting Rights Act. And when I finished high school, we were all happy as clams. We thought the following things were true: We thought this economy would go on forever, low unemployment, low inflation, and high growth; we thought we

would win the cold war just in the ordinary course of things; and we thought we would solve our civil rights problems in the Congress and the courts, and we would become a just and decent society in the course of things.

So I finished high school. It wasn't too long that we had riots in Watts. It wasn't too long after that we had demonstrations in every city in America against the Vietnam war. By the time I graduated from college on June 8th, 1968, it was—the Republicans got hold of the mike. [*Laughter*] Listen to this. I want you to listen to this. I graduated from college. In '64, everybody thought things were just going to be on automatic.

In 1968, I graduated from college; 2 days after Robert Kennedy was killed; 2 months after Martin Luther King was killed; 9 weeks after Lyndon Johnson, who won with the biggest majority in modern history, couldn't run for reelection. The country was split right down the middle over the Vietnam war, and we had an election for President that was determined on a slogan called the Silent Majority. Do you remember that? And if you weren't in the Silent Majority, you were in the loud minority. That was me. [*Laughter*] And there was something wrong with the loud minority. It was like "us" and "them." And we've been having those "us" and "them" elections ever since. We've been "using" and "them-ing" ourselves to death.

And I tried to end that. But I haven't entirely succeeded, not when these Jewish kids get shot going to their school in Los Angeles just because they're Jewish, or Matthew Shepard gets stretched out on a rack and killed just because he's gay, or James Byrd gets dragged to death in Texas because he's black, or a white supremacist in the middle of the country kills a Korean Christian coming out of a church, and the black former basketball coach at Northwestern, and he says he belongs to a church that doesn't believe in God but does believe in white supremacy. We haven't gotten rid of all that.

What I want to tell you is, I say this as a person, not a President. I have waited for 35 long years for my country to be in a place to build the future of our dreams again. And it's easier for us now, because we don't have the civil rights crisis at home. It's easier for

us now because the cold war is behind us now. It's easier for us now because we're a nation of many, many nations growing more diverse every day, with California leading the way.

But the stakes are still very high. And we should be humbled, as well as happy, by this good fortune. And we should feel responsible, not entitled, as a result of this prosperity. I'm telling you, I lived through it before. It can go away in the flash of a moment. We should cherish this. And you should understand—and I want you to think about it tomorrow when they walk in Selma. People died for the right to vote. You've got to go vote. You've got to go get your friends to participate. But you've got to make the right decisions about what is this about.

And I'm telling you, we've got a second chance as a country in my lifetime. Most of us have gotten second chances as people. Most of us are darn grateful for it. That's the way we ought to feel as citizens. And if we do, everything will turn out just fine.

Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:50 p.m. at the Cafe des Artistes. In his remarks, he referred to Edward G. Rendell, general chair, Democratic National Committee; Chuck and Elizabeth Meyer and Richard and Daphna Zimon, dinner hosts; Marc Nathanson, chair, Mapleton Investment Corp., and his wife, Jane; singer Kenneth Edmonds, popularly known as Babyface, and his wife, Tracey; actor Gregory Peck and his wife, Veronique; singers Mac Davis and Olivia Newton John; and Gov. Gray Davis of California. A tape was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

Remarks on the 35th Anniversary of the 1965 Voting Rights March in Selma, Alabama

March 5, 2000

Thank you. This is a day the Lord has made for this very purpose. Congressman Lewis, Mrs. King, Reverend Jackson, Reverend Harris, Congressman Houghton, and Congressman Hilliard, and all the Members of the Congress who are here. I thank all the members of my administration who are here, especially Harris Wofford, the head of our AmeriCorps program who was here with