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suffering unnecessary declines in health; millions of working families missing out on a long-overdue raise. These are just some of the everyday costs of failing to do the people's business. So let's get back on track. Let's work together to protect the health, the safety, the welfare of the American people. Let's safeguard their financial security, and in so doing, our national security. And let's do it now.

Thanks for listening.

NOTE: The address was recorded at 3:00 p.m. on April 7 in the Oval Office at the White House for broadcast at 10:06 a.m. on April 8. The transcript was made available by the Office of the Press Secretary on April 8 but was embargoed for release until the broadcast.

Remarks at a Democratic National Committee Luncheon in New Orleans, Louisiana

April 8, 2000

Thank you. Well, thank you very much, Arnold. And Celia, thank you. We would have all come here today just to see your beautiful home. And unless you're lucky, half of us may take a swim before we leave. [*Laughter*] But I thank you so much for opening your home and for reminding me of that speech that I gave. It seems like a long time ago in one way, and another just like yesterday.

I want to thank my good friend Sheriff Harry Lee, who proved to me that you could get bad press and the people would stay with you. [*Laughter*] So I simply decided to test the theory, and it got a little out of hand. [*Laughter*] Now, that's a crack I probably wouldn't make anyplace in America outside of Louisiana. [*Laughter*]

I got tickled when Mayor Rendell said he'd never met anybody like Ray Reggie. I thought, that's true, but if you stayed down here long enough, you'll meet 4 or 500 people you never met anybody like before and never will again. [*Laughter*]

So Ray, thank you. Thank you, David Young. Thank you, Mary Lou Winters. I want to congratulate our young State representative, Karen Carter. Her father has been a friend of mine forever. And once Karen came up and accosted me and chewed me out over something she thought I was wrong about, and then she later thought maybe she'd gone too far. And I told her daddy that I'd be proud if my daughter could talk to the President that way. [*Laughter*] Not because—because she wasn't disrespectful; she was just aggressive and articulate. And I'm glad to see her being so successful.

And Mrs. Morial, it's nice to see you. I want to say a special word of thanks to Bill and Andrea Jefferson for being here. Bill Jefferson was for me when only my mother thought I could be elected President. [*Laughter*] In our immediate household, it was a close call. So I thank him for all of his friendship and support over the years.

And I thank all of you who worked so hard to raise these funds for our party. I want to thank all the young people who worked on this event. And my friend Mayor Rendell—you know, when I first met Ed Rendell, we went to Philadelphia. I was running for President, and he took me to a neighborhood where he had worked to eradicate gangs and drugs, in a very poor neighborhood. And we walked down the street, and I could see his evident pride that he had helped to change the lives of people who were very often overlooked by other public officials. And then we got to the end of the street, and he challenged me to shoot baskets. There was a little park there. And even though he knew I might become President, he beat me anyway—[*laughter*]—which I sort of respected. And we've been friends ever since. And I have been waiting for 8 years for a chance to get even. And when I talked him into becoming chairman of the Democratic Party I said, "You know, it's just a little part-time job; it won't take much work." [*Laughter*] He had a full head of hair when he took this job. [*Laughter*]

But he's really been wonderful. And I think it's a great thing to have our party headed by someone who's actually been elected to something, served people at the grassroots level, understands the problems and the promise of all different kinds of people. And Philadelphia is a magnificent city that's been very good to me and to the Vice President. So I want to thank him.

I've been to Louisiana a lot since I've been President, about half as many times as I would have liked to have been. And I want to thank you all, and through you and the media here, to all the people of this State, for voting for me twice for President and for giving me the chance to serve.

I am a little perplexed some days that this is the first time since 1974 they've held an election and my name hasn't been on a ballot. [*Laughter*] I like to joke that most days I'm all right about that. So today I'd like to talk to you from the perspective of someone who is not a candidate but is profoundly grateful for what this country has given to me and for what this State has done for me. I'm grateful that I had the chance to serve at a very crucial moment in American history, when we were in need of making some difficult decisions about what kind of country we were going to be and how we were going to prepare for a new century.

And I guess I want to make just two or three brief points, because when you come to a deal like this I'm sure maybe for a few days afterward people say, "Well, what was it like? And what did the President say? And was it really worth all the money it cost you to go? And why did you do such a stupid thing?" [*Laughter*] I'm sure you get asked all those questions. So I'd just like you to think about a few things.

First of all, this country is in a lot better shape than it was in 1992. We had high unemployment, high interest rates, low growth, almost no new jobs, our social problems like crime and welfare were getting worse, and we didn't seem to have any governing vision for taking us into the new century. And I think ideas matter a lot.

You mentioned—Ed Rendell made the remark about what a diverse group we have here, and he made a remark about the contributions of people who have brought lawsuits on behalf of injured people that I agree with, but I—sometimes I get criticized from the other side because I want to pay America's debt off. One columnist, a couple of weeks ago, who is a friend of mine, a man I admire very much, accused me of embracing Calvin Coolidge economics. I'll explain why; I'm going to do it in a minute. But the point is, when I ran in '92, I had been, as President Bush said, the Governor of a small southern State, somewhere to the north of here. And I was so dumb, I thought he was complimenting me when he said that. [*Laughter*] I was kind of proud of it, myself. I still am, to tell the truth. And the way Washington worked didn't make a lick of sense to me. I mean, there was a liberal position and a conservative position; there was a Democratic position and there was a Republican position. And the one thing that you couldn't do without being accused of heresy is try to unlock the differences or come out with a third position that would go beyond both of them. And it looked to me like it was a very serviceable setup for politicians who needed to get on the news for 15 seconds every night, because only conflict will guarantee you a place on the airwaves. But it wasn't doing very much good for the American people.

And so I asked the people to give me a chance to try a different way. I really believed we could have a country that could get rid of the deficit and still increase our investment in education and our children and their future. I believed we could grow the economy and improve the environment. I thought we could be pro-business and pro-labor. I thought we could get rid of unnecessary Government bureaucracy and still be more vigorous in the pursuit of those things we saw to be pursued. I believed all that.

And I remember when I first started giving these talks, the people who had been covering politics for years looked at me as if I were some sort of heretic or it was just political gobbledy-gook.

But first I want to say, ideas matter. Because after 8 years, we have—instead of record deficits and a debt that was quadrupled under the previous administrations and their theories, we've got the first back-to-back surpluses in 42 years and the longest economic expansion in history and the lowest minority unemployment ever recorded and the lowest overall unemployment in 30 years, the lowest female unemployment in 40 years.

So we did it by being pro-business and pro-labor. We did it by getting rid of the deficit, and we've about doubled our investment in education and training for our children and dramatically increased access to college and

raised the standards for education. So, you can do these things.

The air is cleaner; the water is cleaner; the food is safer. We've tripled the number of toxic waste dumps we cleaned up over the previous two administrations. And the economy is stronger. So it makes sense.

We've got a stronger Federal Government, but it's the smallest Government since 1960. We've eliminated hundreds of programs, and I will give anyone here the ticket price here—I'll give you your money back if you can stand up right now and name three of them. Any takers? [*Laughter*]

I say that because I didn't think it was anti-Democratic or anti-progressive to recognize that we had programs on the books that were no longer serviceable, that just kept getting funded because people couldn't think of anything better to do with the money. And we were up to our ears in debt, and we had to get out. And we needed the money for education; we needed the money for health care; we needed the money for the environment; we needed the money for helping poor people move from welfare to work.

So that's the first thing I want to say to you. Ideas really matter. I've learned that in over 20 years of public life and over 7 years of being your President. One of the reasons that I support the Vice President is that he understands the future. He understands the importance of ideas; he knows how to get us there. These things aren't just slogans to him. I've spent too many hours with him doing too much work, making too many difficult decisions.

The second thing I want to tell you is, our adversaries are smart, and they want back in in the world's worst way. And they figured out the way to do it is to try to blur the differences within the party until they get in and they start appointing their judges and passing their bills and doing their thing. But in the meanwhile, they'd like to blur the differences.

So I want to tell you there are differences. Let me just cite a few. We worked hard to turn this deficit around and start running these surpluses. And we're paying off the debt at a rapid rate. Now, I'm not against a tax cut. I'm actually for a tax cut if it's small enough to enable us to save Social Security, reform Medicare, and add a prescription drug benefit to the 70 percent of our seniors that can't afford it today; continue to invest in education, health care, and the environment and science and technology and research; and pay the debt off. We can get out of debt, for the first time since 1835, in 12 years. And I think we ought to do it, not just because it sounds good, but because if we keep paying the debt down, we'll keep interest rates down, and there will be more money for people to borrow to start businesses, to hire people, to invest in their equipment, to move the economy along. That's what I think.

Now, in spite of all that, I still have offered a tax cut, and the Vice President has offered one, I think, in the campaign, in the same range. We could give people a $3,000 tax credit for long-term care costs for their parents or disabled relatives; let people deduct the cost of college tuition for their kids, up to $10,000 a year; increase the child care tax credit; increase the earned-income tax credit for lower income working people. Nobody who works for a living and has kids at home should be in poverty. The tax system ought to take them out. That's what I believe.

We still have a sizeable tax system. We could even give them some relief on the marriage penalty, an issue where our Republican friends say they're interested. But I don't think we ought to do that at the expense of what got us here. We've got the longest economic expansion in history because we said we're going to get rid of the deficit, invest in education and technology, and sell more American products around the world. That's how we got here. And so there's a big difference.

What's the difference? The other party wants a tax cut even bigger than the one I vetoed last year. Even bigger. Now, they'll tell you they're for education; they're for the environment; they're for this, that, and the other thing. The truth is they're not going to have any money. They promised this huge tax cut and even bigger increases in defense than I've advocated, and the money won't be there. Or if they do spend this money, it means that we won't be able to save Social Security for the baby boom generation's retirement. Or it means we go back and start

running a deficit again, and we'll have all the same problems we had the last time we did that.

Now, so I would say to you, I don't think this is rocket science. What they're running on—now, they're using different words and blurring the distinctions, but what they're running on is the exact same economic program they pursued for the last 12 years the last time. And so the American people—when they ask you why you're here, you say, "Well, I think we're better off than we were 8 years ago, and we've got a choice that's the same choice we had before about which economic strategy we're going to follow." Except in 1992, you took a chance on me, but in 2000, you now have evidence about how their system works and how ours works. And you need to tell people about this.

Because every day all these folks are going to be saying different things. All the ones running for Senate and Congress and President, they're all going to be emphasizing this issue and that. But I'm telling you, I've been there. You can make promises until the cows come home, but if you're going to deliver the promises, there is a price tag on it, and it all has to add up in the end. Or if it doesn't add up, you're going to cut something else or start running deficits again.

The central thing you need to know about the economic differences between the parties is, after I vetoed that huge tax cut last year to keep the economy going—and I might add, after I did it, the economic growth in the last quarter of last year was 7.3 percent, the biggest in a coon's age. Nobody can remember when that was—[*laughter*]—forever and ever. Nobody can remember that.

Now, they come back and say, "That tax cut he vetoed wasn't big enough; we want a bigger one." And let me tell you what's on the other side. The number of people over 65 in this country is going to double in the next 30 years. I hope to be one of them. There will be two people working for every one person drawing Social Security. The baby boom generation—that's anybody here between the ages of 54 and 36—and I can only tell you about the older baby boomers, because I was born in the first generation of them—we are panicked about the prospect that our retirement might undermine our children's ability to raise our grandchildren.

Now, we've got the money right now, if we don't throw it away, we have the money right now to pledge the interest savings from paying down the debt to the Social Security Trust Fund and take it out to 2054—54 years from today—beyond the life of all but the most fortunate baby boomers. We ought to do it. And it's more important to your long-term financial health than a tax cut we can't afford.

If we were starting Medicare again today—now, we're for that; they're not—if we were starting Medicare again today, we would never design a Medicare program without a prescription drug component. When Medicare was set up 35 years ago, it was basically a critical care program, the fund covered doctor and hospital bills. Now, anybody that lives to be 65 years old has got a life expectancy of 83 years, and it's going to keep going up.

There needs to be more attention to preventive care, to chronic problems, to all kinds of things that medicine can have a big impact on. And literally, almost three-quarters of our seniors either don't have any or don't have an adequate and affordable prescription drug coverage. It's a big deal. You overdo the tax cut, you can't cover enough people. And we have differences on how many people we want to cover with them.

In education, it's fine to say you want to have higher standards for our schools and all these other good programs, but you've still got to pay for them. They've still got to be paid for. Our program is, repair our schools that need repairing, build thousands of new schools, hook them all up to the Internet, put another 100,000 teachers out there—2 million teachers are going to retire in the next few years, and more kids in the schools than ever before. So I think we ought to help put more teachers in the early grades. Have higher standards, but give schools the help they need for after-school, for summer school, for the reading, the mentoring program, so that you don't blame kids for the failure of the system. I've got no problem with ending social promotion and having higher standards, but if you're going to do it, you've got to

give the kids a chance to succeed. And I think most people believe that. So there are differences. And it all starts on the economic front with this.

There are also differences on a lot of other issues. I'm trying to raise the minimum wage a buck a year over 2 years. And they won't just pass a clean minimum wage bill; they're trying to get a humongous tax cut out of it. But you know, the last time we raised the minimum wage, about 6 years ago, they said, "Oh, boy, this will drive up unemployment." Twenty-one million jobs later, we know that if you've got a good economic policy and a strong economy, paying people a decent wage who are working hard does not hurt the economy. And it's time to raise it again.

And do you know, if we raise it again, it would still be, in real dollar terms, we'd still only be back where we were about 30 years ago, in terms of the purchasing power? So we ought to raise it. We're for it; they're not.

On the gun issue—I grew up down here. I grew up in a culture that valued hunting, sport shooting. When I signed the Brady bill there was the awfulest commotion you ever heard in the assault weapons ban. People said, oh, they were going to lose their guns and all that. We heard all that stuff. Well, nobody has missed an hour in the deer woods. But 7 years later, 500,000 people—felons, fugitives, and stalkers—have not gotten handguns, and it could be a reason why we have a 30-year low in gun death rates.

So now the issue is, should there be child trigger locks on the guns; should we ban the import of large capacity ammunition clips, which makes a mockery of the assault weapons ban because you just import the clips, then you adjust the gun to take the new clip; and should we do a background check at the gun shows?

Now, when we passed the Brady bill, the people that were against it said it won't do you any good to do a background check of people who buy guns from gun stores because all the criminals buy their guns at the gun shows. I said, "Oh, surely some buy their guns at the gun stores." And sure enough, a half-million did anyway. [*Laughter*] So now I go back to the same people and I say, "You remember when you told me 7 years ago all these people were buying their guns at the gun shows? Well, we have the technology to do these background checks now, they're not particularly burdensome, let's do them." They said, "Oh, my goodness, we couldn't do that. It would be the end of civilization as we know it." [*Laughter*]

And all I can tell you is, I think it will keep kids alive. And I have never done anything, to the best of my knowledge, not one thing in my public life that interfered with the legitimate rights of hunters and other lawful gun owners. That is not what this is about. It's not about scare tactics and slogans.

Somebody asked me the other day what I thought about all the mean things Charlton Heston has said about me. I said, "I like his movies very much." [*Laughter*] And I actually—he came to the White House a couple of years ago for the Kennedy Center Honors—I liked him very much. This is just a difference of opinion here.

I think it's really unfair to even say the Republicans are sort of in the pocket of the NRA, as if they're doing something they don't believe. I think they believe that. We think differently about this. This is a difference of opinion.

They believe that basically this is the one area of our national life—guns—where there should be no prevention, all punishment. They do say—and I've increased gun prosecutions and want to increase them some more, and they're going to support me on that, I think—give us more prosecutors and all that. But they believe the only answer is wait until somebody breaks the law and throw the book at them. But this is the one area of our national life where we can't have prevention.

Well, you think about that. We have prevention everywhere else. We've got crosswalks for walking across the street, trying to keep people from getting run over. We put seatbelts on when we get in the car, trying to keep our heads from going through the dashboard. We put our kids in these child safety seats, trying to keep them from flying around if we have to slam on the brakes. We've got speed limits. We have airport metal detectors. Why do we have all this stuff? Most people are law-abiding, sensible, careful, and safe, in every endeavor. But you still do what you can to stop bad things from

happening in the first place, right? I mean, that's what you do. When it's your family and your life and your kids, that's what you do. And that's what smart societies do. All this is about is whether we're going to do sensible things to prevent bad things from happening.

I said it in my press conference the other day—I don't know if any of you saw it—I said, what do you think the country would think of me if I said, "You know, I'm really worried about how many people are crowding in our airports and how hot they are and tired they are and pushed together they are. And 99.9 percent of them are the best people you ever want to meet in your life. They're totally law-abiding; they would never think of doing anything. And it drives them nuts to be late for an airplane and go through one of these metal detectors; and they've got a rodeo belt on or a big, old, heavy money clip, and they go, 'bing, bing, bing, bing, bing, bing.' They have to go out, and you take everything out of your pockets, you go through it, it goes off again, and you have to go out and do it again. It just drives them nuts. And I just think it's so burdensome, and since almost all of them are law-abiding, let's just take them all out. And the next time a plane blows up, we'll throw the book at them." [*Laughter*]

Now, that is the logic. That is the logic behind not doing these background checks. But man, this has got nothing to do with the deer season. It's got nothing to do with the gun shows. It's got nothing to do with anything. It's a question of whether you believe there should be prevention in this area of our national life.

See, I believe America could be the safest big country in the world. When I got elected President, nobody even thought the crime rate could go down. I did because I'd been out to places like Philadelphia. I'd seen this. I believe America can be the safest big country in the world now. And if I were running the NRA, I would have a whole different take on this. I'd say, "I'd like to prove that you can have the safest big country in the world and still have people who like to go hunting, go to these shooting contests and have a good time, own guns lawfully, be trained carefully, that use them." I'd like to prove that. I wouldn't be against all this prevention stuff. I think prevention is an important part of life. But there are differences here. And you know what the other differences are.

So the first thing I want to say is, the country is in better shape. Ideas matter. We've tested ours; we've tested theirs. On the economy, they want to do what they did before. And if you do it, you'll get the same consequences you got before. And all the other things they talk about, all of them running for all these offices, you have to view in view of their commitment to a tax cut even bigger than the one I vetoed.

The second thing I want to say is, I think these other issues matter: what you do in education; what you do with the environment; what you do with crime and how you do it.

The last thing I want to say is this. The Democrats have lost some votes since I've been in here, I'm quite sure because we take a very inclusive view of society, and we don't believe that people ought to be discriminated against just because they're female, just because of their race, just because they're handicapped, or even if they're gay—in the workplace—subject to hate crimes or anything else. That's what we believe. And some people are threatened by that, and they don't think we're good Americans, and they won't vote for us. But I think most people are with us on this.

My view of this is real simple. I think if you get up every day and you show up for work and you go about your business, you obey the law, you pay your taxes, you're a good citizen, you ought to have a chance to live in this country and live up to the fullest of your ability, and nobody ought to get in your way doing it. That's what I believe. That's what I believe.

And I believe that—I think that we define our sense of community in terms of how we live. They, I think, believe we define our sense of community more in terms of whether we say we believe the same things. And all I can tell you is, if you think about the time I've spent since I've been President working on peace around the world, what's the problem in the Middle East, in Northern Ireland, in Bosnia, in Kosovo, in the tribal wars in Africa, all these places? People killing each other because they're different—racial,

ethnic, tribal groups, or religious groups. Different, right?

Why did that guy in Los Angeles shoot those kids at the Jewish community center and kill that Filipino postman? Why did that guy in the middle West, who said he belonged to a church that didn't believe in God but did believe in white supremacy, shoot the black former basketball coach at Northwestern and the Korean Christian when he was coming out of church, and three or four other people? Why was young Matthew Shepard stretched out on a rack in Wyoming? And why was James Byrd dragged to death in Texas? And what has all this got to do with us?

I really believe one of the great challenges every person's life faces—every person, even people who themselves have been discriminated against—is figuring out how to get it right when it comes to how to deal with people who are different from you, and how to find a way to appreciate other people's differences, enjoy them, and still somehow feel that what we have in common is more important than what is different about it. And that's hard to do. And the more I try to make peace around the world, the more I understand how much progress we've made in this country, for all of our problems. It's hard to do.

And all over the world, people are raised to believe that they can identify themselves as good by having somebody else to look down on, that their religion only has meaning if somebody else's doesn't. They were raised to have pride insofar as it's set off against, in conflict with, somebody else. It's not just American. This is everywhere. And in this most modern of worlds, we are bedeviled by this old conflict.

So I just want you to think about that. If somebody gave me one wish today, they said, "I'm sorry you can't finish your term; you've got to check out tomorrow"—and God came down to me and said, "I'm no genie. You're not getting three wishes. I'll give you one"—I would not wish for prosperity or even a Democratic victory in November. I would wish that this country could truly be one America, across all the lines that divide it. Because we're smart people; we're good people; we work hard. If we could ever get our hearts and minds right about this stuff, the rest of it would work out. That's what I believe.

And I'll just leave you with this thought. The most important question of all in this election is, what are we going to do with our prosperity? Are we going to make one America? Are we going to give everybody a chance to be a part of it? And are we going to meet our big, long-term challenges? The biggest danger for the Democrats in this race is that people will do what they often do when things are going along well; they'll get relaxed. They won't concentrate. They won't feel a sense of urgency. And they'll either stay home, or they won't be sharply focused on what this could be about.

How many times—everybody here over 30, how many times have you ever made a mistake in your life, not because you were under the gun but because things were going along so well you didn't think there were any consequences to what you did today? Now, that's the big question here. What will we do with this unique moment of prosperity?

In other words, all these differences only matter, that I just went through to you, if we're going to do something about it. And the only thing I'd like to tell you about that is, the older I get, the more my friends pass away, the faster time goes, and the more I realize nothing lasts forever. And I say that not to be morbid. I'm the most optimistic person you'll ever meet. I believe in the promise of America. I believe no one is irreplaceable. I believe in our country only freedom is irreplaceable. I don't believe there is anybody, including me, who's irreplaceable. But I believe moments come and go.

And the last time we had an expansion like this was in the 1960's. It was the last time we had the longest economic expansion in history. And it's when I graduated from high school, in 1964, where everybody thought the economy would go on forever; we would never get mired down in Vietnam; the cold war would be over before you knew it because we were good and strong; and civil rights would be solved in the courts and in the Congress—1964, middle of the big expansion.

When I graduated from college 4 years after that, it was 2 days after Robert Kennedy

had been killed, 2 months after Martin Luther King had been killed, 9 weeks after Lyndon Johnson said he couldn't run for President because the country was too divided over the Vietnam war. Mr. Nixon got elected President. He was a very able man, but he got elected President on one of these "us" and "them" divisive campaigns. He represented the Silent Majority, and those of us that were on the other side, we were in the loud minority. We were kind of out of the club there. And a few months later, the longest expansion in American history was over, boom! And we blew a chance to solve a lot of our problems in a wholesome, peaceful way.

Now, I'm not running for anything, but as an American citizen, I want to tell you, I've waited 35 years for that opportunity to roll around again for my country, where we could build the future of our dreams for our children. Ideas matter; there are differences. We've got to do this together.

The most important thing right now is that we focus on the importance of this election. Do not take our prosperity for granted. Do not take our social progress for granted. Do not take your ability to even come to something like this for granted. We've got to make the most of this. If we do, we'll be proud for the rest of our lives. If we don't, we'll never forgive ourselves. This is a moment for making tomorrow. That's why you came today. If somebody asks, you tell them that.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:05 p.m. at a private residence. In his remarks, he referred to luncheon hosts Arnold and Celia Lupin; Harry Lee, sheriff, Jefferson Parish, LA; Edward G. Rendell, general chair, Democratic National Committee (DNC); luncheon cochair Ray Reggie; David Nelson Young, Louisiana DNC national committeeman; Mary Lou Winters, vice chair, Louisiana State Democratic Party; Louisiana State Representative Karen Carter; Sybil Morial, wife of Mayor Marc H. Morial of New Orleans; and Representative William J. Jefferson and his wife, Andrea.

Proclamation 7288—Pan American Day and Pan American Week, 2000

April 8, 2000

By the President of the United States of America

A Proclamation

This year on Pan American Day and during Pan American Week, we celebrate the springtime of a new century in which the fundamental ideals of democracy and human rights are blossoming across our hemisphere. We stand at the threshold of a new era of economic development and prosperity with a common determination to meet the challenges and seize the opportunities that face the Americas.

Building on the agreements forged at the last two Summits of the Americas in Miami and Santiago, we are witnessing unprecedented cooperation within our hemisphere. Efforts such as the negotiations on a Free Trade Area of the Americas, now progressing toward a concrete agreement in 2005, exemplify our commitment to building a self-sustaining and widely shared prosperity. We continue to work creatively through the Organization of American States to encourage constitutional solutions to political crises such as those that occurred in Paraguay and Ecuador. And we have witnessed elections in our region that were models of civic participation and a testament to the strength and vibrancy of democratic government in the Western Hemisphere. Such achievements illustrate that the well-being of our neighbors is fundamental to our own security and prosperity. We look forward to the Third Summit of the Americas in Quebec City, where the democratically elected leaders of 34 nations from North, Central, and South America will gather to review our progress, identify new challenges, and further enhance our cooperation.

Even with our significant progress, however, challenges remain. The 34 free and democratically elected nations of this hemisphere must work together to ensure that