

**Remarks at a Reception for
California State Senator Adam Schiff**

June 27, 2000

Thank you very much. Thank you, Adam. I want to say, first of all, I am delighted to be here with you and your entire family. I must say, when you introduced your wife, and made that crack—you know, I just came back from California, where I was working to raise funds for our Democrats. And I had a fundraiser in Los Angeles in a place called the “Garden of Eden.” [Laughter] I don’t recommend you do that until after the election—[laughter].

But anyway, I am delighted to be here. I want to thank Representatives Waxman and Pelosi and Lofgren and Farr for being here, and of course, Congressman Kennedy, who has done such a great job as head of the Democratic campaign committee and is working me to death. [Laughter] I told him that we were just five votes short of a majority, and I would do anything I could to see that he succeeded, and he has more than taken me up on my offer. [Laughter] He acts like he thinks I’m still as young as he is. [Laughter]

Let me say to all of you, there’s several reasons I wanted to be here tonight. First of all, I admire this man, and I appreciate the fact that he is willing to run against an incumbent Congressman. It is not easy to beat an incumbent Congressman, especially when they have vast national networks to finance their campaign. And I also appreciate the fact that he’s established a record as a State senator and a prosecutor that, I believe, highlights the differences.

There’s Congressman Conyers, thank you for being here. Michigan has a great interest in the outcome of this election. [Laughter] John does—Adam’s election is going to make him chairman of the House Judiciary Committee. [Laughter]

He mentioned Tom Umberg—Adam was also a Federal prosecutor, as well as a State senator. He’s worked for commonsense gun legislation. He’s worked for smaller class sizes in our schools. He’s worked for a better environment and sustainable development. He’s worked for a Patients’ Bill of Rights.

He supports our efforts to help seniors and disabled Americans get prescription drugs.

And the one thing that I want to say to you tonight is that there really are significant differences between the parties on the major issues. I’ve done everything I could for nearly 8 years now to try to turn our country around, to get things going in the right direction, not only to improve the economy but to help the social fabric and to change the nature of politics and to give our people a sense of self-confidence and a sense of greater unity. And the Members who are here have been indispensable to that effort.

The Senate finally passed hate crimes legislation a couple of days ago. Henry Waxman just won a great victory in the House against the tobacco interests, who tried to stop us from bringing litigation to recover for the taxpayers the damage caused from health-related illnesses due to smoking. And we congratulate you for your long and, originally, a lonely battle, but we thank you for that.

But basically—you know, I’m not running for anything. [Laughter] I do have more than a passing interest in a Senate race—[laughter]—in New York, and all the others, as well. And there’s a fellow running for President I think ought to be elected. But what I want to see us to do is to sort of make the most of this unbelievable opportunity we have. And those of us who are not so young anymore know that it may be 50 years before America has a chance like this again. And that we dare not squander it.

So it’s important to know that there are differences, honest differences. You don’t have to run a real bad campaign in this election. You know, I’ve seen so many elections over the last 20 years that just made me sick, where both candidates looked like they were trying to convince people that their opponents were just one step above a car thief. [Laughter] And you don’t have to do that now. You can just run on the differences. But there are real differences.

And one key to who’s right is, only the Democrats want you to know what those differences are. You can just look at it—I’ve been telling you, and I’d just like to run through a few, just the issues I mentioned. We have a class size reduction initiative and a school construction initiative and a school

repair initiative. And the leadership of the other party is completely opposed to all of them.

In the area of law enforcement, we put 100,000 police on the street, and we passed the Brady bill and the assault weapons ban. The leadership of the other party was against them all—even tried to undo, in the House, the 100,000 police, and now opposes our efforts to put 50,000 more police on the street in the highest crime neighborhoods, as well as the commonsense gun safety measures: closing the gun show loophole, child trigger locks, banning large capacity ammunition clips. These are important issues. It makes a big difference who is in Congress.

The Patients' Bill of Rights: We support it, and they don't. And then they all go around saying they do, because they voted for one that had no teeth in it. They got permission from the people that didn't want a Patients' Bill of Rights to vote for one that had no teeth in hopes of confusing the voters about whether there was a real difference between the two parties.

And the biggest issue now that's commanding our attention is the question of whether our seniors and disabled Americans who are on Medicare should have access to affordable prescription drugs. Now just yesterday or today, there was a big article in the press—come on in, Representative Sherman, come on in—we're going to have a quorum in California here before you know it. [Laughter] There was an article in the press showing that in the last year the price of prescription drugs—and the overall inflation rate was 3 percent—the price of prescription drugs went up 17.4 percent.

Now, huge numbers of seniors and disabled Americans who need these drugs to maintain their quality of life, and sometimes to maintain their very lives, cannot afford this. If we were designing a Medicare program today, no one would even think about having one without a drug benefit. But in 1965, when it was established, it was basically a doctors-and-hospital program, because that's what happened—people got sick, they went to the doctor; if they were sick enough, they went to the hospital.

Today we know prescription drugs can dramatically reduce the cost of hospitaliza-

tion, whether you have to go at all, or if you have to go, how long you have to stay; and can maintain the length and quality of life far beyond anything that was imagined 35 years ago. And we have the money to do this now. Not only that, this is a gift not just to the seniors and the disabled Americans but to their families, who will have to support them, or try to, if the rest of us don't through the Medicare program. So this is a big deal.

So what's our position? Our position is, we ought to have an affordable prescription drug program through Medicare that all seniors can afford to buy into but that is not mandatory for anybody. What's their position? Well, they hired a pollster to actually tell them what words and phrases to use to make you think they're for our position. I'm not making this up. I read it. [Laughter] I don't believe everything I read in the press, but since they didn't deny it, I assume it's true.

And now they've got a proposal, which is: Let everybody buy private insurance; we'll subsidize some people. And their proposal—even the insurance companies have said—with all the fights I've had with the insurance companies, I've got to take my hat to them; they've been honest on this—even the insurance companies have said this is not real. There are too many people that can't afford this insurance policy. What is the deal here?

And they're going to vote on it, I think tomorrow. And I just was told before I came in here they're not even going to allow the House to vote on our proposal. Why? Because it might pass in an election year—[laughter]—because there are just five seats in the majority. And they figure there might be six or seven of them that might figure out that the voters back home may not just buy the words and phrases; they might actually look at the vote.

Now, what should we do? Well, first of all, we ought to do what the Vice President recommended and set aside the Medicare taxes and not spend it for tax cuts or spending. Because that will take Medicare out to 2030, and that's good for the people on Medicare and good for their kids.

Then we ought to fund a real prescription drug benefit, the kind that we would have funded 35 years ago if medicine had been as advanced as it is today. And I offered that

to the Republican leaders yesterday and said that I would work with them on their tax relief package. But we should not be under any illusion here. There is a huge difference. Our plan benefits the people who need the drugs. Their plan benefits the people who make the drugs, who are afraid if we buy all these drugs in bulk, we might get a decent price for the seniors.

Now, I'm not against America's pharmaceutical companies. They do a great job in developing drugs. And I'm not even against our paying some sort of a premium to do that. But I am against any effort that's trying to keep our seniors from getting these prescription drugs. And if we were in the majority, this deal would have been done 4 months ago.

If we were in the majority, we wouldn't be debating here about whether we should close the gun show loophole. The people that are against it are saying it won't do any good. They used to tell me in '93 that the Brady bill wouldn't do any good, because all those people were buying their guns at gun shows. [Laughter]

If they were in the majority, we wouldn't be debating whether we were going to have smaller classes or whether we were going to modernize our schools or what we were going to do to make the most of this moment.

Now, they can make their case. I'm not saying anything bad about them. I'm sick and tired of all that. But there are differences. And don't you be fooled. And the whole country is looking at this, because here's this fellow who is a State senator, so he represents more people in California—a State senator represents more people than a Member of the House of Representatives. He's got a perfectly nice life, and he's putting his neck on the line to try to represent us. And we ought to help him. We ought to help him because of his background, because of his experience, because of his vision, but mostly because America needs to make a clear-headed choice here.

All I want—I've found that the American people nearly always get it right, if you give them enough time and enough information. Otherwise, we wouldn't be around here after over 200 years. They nearly always get it right. Sometimes it takes us longer than we

should. You mentioned Frederick Douglass and Abraham Lincoln—Abraham Lincoln, when he was running the first time, had to promise not to free the slaves. Aren't we glad he didn't keep that campaign commitment? [Laughter] But finally, the people caught up to where they needed to be, and he just kept leading us on and leading us on.

Now, we know what the issues are, and we know where the people are. I'm convinced if the voters of his district know Adam Schiff—if they know where he stands, if they know the honest differences between him and his opponent—this race will be victorious. And I'm convinced that will happen in two dozen other places across America where we have seats in play.

So I want you to think about that. The problem with all these fundraisers is, you're always preaching to the saved. [Laughter] But when you leave here, you will, between now and election day, be talking to people all over America, including a lot of people in California.

And it's important that you not just come to these fundraisers; it's important that you take every single opportunity you have between now and November to tell people that. We have the chance of a lifetime. We have great opportunities. There are real and honest differences. We don't have to have a negative election. We can have a positive election that's an honest debate. But we can't get there by pretending that there aren't differences when there are. On every difference that makes a difference, Adam is on the right side, and we've got to send him to Congress.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 7:20 p.m. at the Frederick Douglass Museum. In his remarks, he referred to Senator Schiff's wife, Eve; and Tom Umberg, committee member, California Delegation to the Democratic National Convention 2000. Adam Schiff is a candidate for California's 27th Congressional District.

Remarks at a "Salute to Bruce Vento"

June 27, 2000

Thank you very much. I've got my "Vento" button and my "Hillary" pin. [Laughter] And