

honor for me to work with so many of you. If our country is better off because of anything I did, I am grateful. But all the best stuff is still out there if we can learn to preserve what is special about us and our clan, our tribe, and our faith, and do it while affirming our common humanity. Do that for America, and the best is still out there.

Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:50 p.m. at the Renaissance Mayflower Hotel. In his remarks, he referred to actor Jimmy Smits; Felix Sanchez, president and founder, National Hispanic Foundation for the Arts; Sara Martinez Tucker, president and chief executive officer, National Hispanic Scholarship Fund; and actress Rita Moreno. A tape was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

### Remarks to the Church of God in Christ Bishops Convention

September 20, 2000

**The President.** Thank you. Well, if I had any sense at all, I would quit while I'm ahead. [Laughter] I know I'm not running for anything this year; otherwise, I would never agree to speak behind all those folks. [Laughter]. Bishop Owens and Bishop Smith and Bishop Brooks, Bishop Haynes. Let me say hello to Bishop Clark, the General Board of Bishops. I thank the choir. I was pretty transported during all that, weren't you?

**Audience members.** Yes, sir.

**The President.** If I could sing like that lady, I'd have been in a different line of work. [Laughter]

I want to say a special word of thanks to Bishop Walker, who has been my friend for so many years, and his colleague in Arkansas, Bishop Lindsey. I hope the Lord won't think it's sacrilegious, but in a figurative way, they helped raise me from the political dead 18 years ago. Otherwise, I wouldn't be here today. And I thank them for that.

I also want to say how grateful I am to those in our administration who have helped me to work with you—Ben Johnson, who is here. You mentioned Alvin Brown, representing the Vice President. He also represented all those empowerment zones, where we've created jobs for people who

have been left out and left behind. The Vice President and I thank him for that.

And I, too, want to pay special privilege to the man, Bishop Owens, who was where you are now when I started. Bishop Ford—I loved him. He was my friend, and I'm honored to see you, sir.

In Timothy, it is written that, "If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work." Now, I thought I would come here and talk about that, because unlike me, you aren't term-limited—[laughter]—except, of course, in the sense that we are all term-limited.

And so as we pass through this fleeting life, I wanted most of all to thank you for your good work. I want to thank you for your friendship to me and to Hillary and to Chelsea, for sticking with our family through thick and thin, and for being a part of America's family as we have moved forward.

It seems hard to believe it's been almost 10 years since I spoke to about 20,000 members of the Church of God in Christ in Memphis, at the convention. Then, Bishop Owens and I were reminiscing. I went back to Memphis, to the Mason Temple in 1993, to speak where Dr. King delivered his last sermon. And as he pointed out, some people thought it was my best sermon as President. [Laughter] In 1996 I addressed the Women's Convention in New Orleans.

We've had a wonderful relationship, a friendship, a partnership. And much of what has been said today has been deeply personal, and for that I am grateful. But I think it's worth remembering that you do your jobs, and I have done mine, not primarily for the personal but for the others, that we are supposed to be serving. And if we take a hit now and again along the way, that's just part of the cost of service.

And the Scripture says we should simply not grow weary; that in due season, we shall reap. I have to admit, there were times when I thought the winters were too long, and I thought we'd never get to the reaping part. [Laughter]

But we have. We have the longest economic expansion in our history, and we've all been a part of it. We have the lowest welfare rolls in 30 years, the lowest violent crime

in 27 years, the lowest African-American unemployment ever recorded, the lowest poverty rate among African-Americans ever recorded, the highest homeownership and business ownership among minorities in America ever recorded.

The teen birth rate is at the lowest level ever recorded. For the first time in history, African-American children graduate from high school at the same rate as the white majority. We saw a report just a few days ago saying that the last couple of years the percentage of African-American children taking advanced placement courses in high school—which means they're going to college; otherwise, there's no point in going through all that grief—has increased by 300 percent in just the last 3 years.

And I do think a little of the venom is draining out of our national life. You know, there are people that try to start up and get everybody mad, but it's not getting a lot of traction this year. I saw, just the other day, the Church Arson Task Force said that church arsons today were less than half what they were 4 years ago. Maybe the American people are coming home to their better natures. I think they are. I hope they are.

And I guess that's the most important thing I want to say. I'm grateful that we've been able to make this progress, and I'm grateful that you believe I kept my commitments to you. I certainly tried to. But after all, we are all just passing through. If you serve 4 years or 8 years as President, or 4 years or 40 years as Bishop, we're all just passing through. And we add our little bit to humanity's work, and then we go on.

Now, what I want you to think about now is, what have we done all this work together for in the last 8 years? What have we fought all these fights for in the last 8 years? What do we intend to do with this great unusual moment of peace and prosperity?

When I came to you 10 years ago—I said this at the Congressional Black Caucus the other night, and I got a laugh, and I think some people thought I was being a bit irreverent, but I wasn't—I said, "You know, people took a chance on me in 1992. I can just imagine all those people going in the polling place and saying, 'Do I want to vote for this kid? He looks so young.'" I didn't have any

gray hair then. [Laughter] " 'And his opponent refers to him as the Governor of a small southern State. I can't even find that place on the map. Should I do this?' " I just hear all those conversations. And I said, "Look, give me a break. It wasn't that big a chance because the country was in the ditch, and we needed a change, right?" We needed a change. [Laughter]

But now we're doing well, and we have a lot of self-confidence, and there are a few little storm clouds on the horizon at home and abroad. But people basically know that we're moving in the right direction, and we're doing it together. So now we have a decision to make in the absence of that kind of pressure we felt in '92.

**Audience member.** Al Gore.

**The President.** Yes, I'm getting to that. [Laughter]

But it's not that easy. Why? There's an African proverb which says, "Smooth seas do not make skillful sailors." Sometimes it's harder to make a good decision in good times than bad times. Everybody in this room who's over 30 years old has made at least one big mistake in your life, not because times were so tough at the moment but because they were so good, you thought there was no penalty to the failure to concentrate. Is that right? Isn't that right?

**Audience member.** You're right. You're right.

**The President.** If you live long enough, you'll make a mistake like that. Is that right?

**Audience member.** Preach, Mr. President!

**The President.** Okay, that's where we are now. That's where we are.

Now, here's what we could do with this good fortune. If we wanted to, over the next 10 years, we could get rid of child poverty—if we wanted to. We could give all our kids a world-class education. How do I know that? Well, I just told you some of the statistics.

The reason is, we now figured out what works: small classes, well-trained teachers, preschool, after-school programs, high standards; you turn around failing schools or put them under new management. Let me just give—I was in Harlem the other day in a school, elementary school. Two years ago—2 years ago—80 percent of the children were

doing reading and math below grade level. Two years later, today, 74 percent of the kids are doing reading and math above grade level—at above grade level.

So we can do that. But it won't just happen because we have smooth seas. We'll have to decide. We could bring economic opportunity to the neighborhoods in the cities, the small rural towns, the Indian reservations, places that have been left behind.

We can take Medicare and Social Security out beyond the life of the baby boom generation so we don't bankrupt our kids and grandkids when we retire. We can give the seniors on Medicare a prescription drug benefit. We could have a tax cut that would continue to open the doors of college, that would help you pay if you're caring for an elderly or disabled loved one, long-term care, help you with child care.

We could have the right kind of tax cuts. We can do all that and still get this country out of debt over the next 10, 11 years, for the first time since 1835. We could do those things.

We can continue the initiatives—I hope we will—that our country has made reaching out to the world, to fight AIDS and TB and malaria. Those three things kill one in every four people who die every year in the world. We can continue to work to lift the burden of debt off the poorest countries in the world—in Africa and Latin America and in Asia—so we can have genuine partnerships with free people and help the rest of the world lift up.

You know, we're only 4 percent of the world's people, and we've got 21 percent of the world's wealth. So if we want to keep doing well, you don't have to be a rocket scientist to figure out we've got to sell something to the other 96 percent, and therefore it's good for us if they do better. It is not only the morally right thing to do to lift up people who are trying to help themselves in Africa and Latin America and Asia, throughout the world, it also turns out to be good for us. So we can do these things, but we will have to decide.

Now, that's what the race for President is all about. That's what the race for all these Senate seats are all about. Of course, I have a particular interest in one of them. [*Laugh-*

*ter*] I told a group the other day, I said, "This is an interesting time for me. This is the first time in 26 years I haven't been on the ballot. I've got 120 days, more or less, to be President. My party has a new leader. My family has a new candidate. My title now should be the Cheerleader in Chief of America." [*Laughter*]

But I'm glad to do it. We're all term-limited, but we've got to keep working. Right? So I ask you to think about that. Think about how thrilling it was when we started this in '91, '92, how concerned we were about all the problems of the country. Think about how troubled we were in 1993 in Memphis, talking about all these kids shooting other kids. That's what I said—Martin Luther King didn't live and die for the right of some African-American children to shoot others on the street and kill them, put drugs in their veins. That's not what it was about.

And what a long way we have come. But what I want to say to you is, for our country and our world, all the best things are still out there. We had to work so hard just to turn the old ship of state around. It was just like the country is like a big old ocean liner, and when you get going in one direction, it takes it a little while to turn that sucker around. [*Laughter*] That's why they hit—that's what the *Titanic* was all about. Sometimes you can't turn it quick enough; you hit an iceberg, right? [*Laughter*] So, thank God we got her turned around, and now it's going in the right direction. But if we keep going, all the best things are still out there.

This election is not about whether America will change. Of course, America will change. The world is changing every day. The little girls in your congregation will soon become young women, and they'll get married, and they'll have babies of their own. And before you know it, when they come home from the hospital with their babies, they'll have a little gene card, coming out of the human genome project, that will tell them basically what their little babies' whole life history is likely to be like.

And they'll have some scary things on there. It'll say, "Well, your daughter has this little gene problem and, therefore, she's at greater risk of getting breast cancer in her thirties. That's the bad news. But the good

news is, if you do these five things, you can cut the risk by two-thirds.” That kind of stuff is going to happen. We’re going to change.

And then our life expectancy, I think, in the next 20 years will go from 77 years to over 90. And it’ll change. So, what are all these old folks going to do? I hope to be one of them. [*Laughter*] What are we going to do?

We’ve got to show up for some kind of work every day. How are we going to be useful? How are we going to avoid being—how will this change your life and the way churches work and communities work? Yes, of course, it’s going to change. And there will be more different kinds of people elected. You see, California, our most populous State, no longer has a majority of people of European ancestry. It’s a polyglot State, and America soon will be.

It will change in other ways. I say this along toward the end of my talk, but one of the two people who really started me—introduced me to the African-American churches in general and to your church in particular, is Secretary Slater, our Secretary of Transportation, who has been with me for 18 years, and I want to introduce him.

Won’t be long until Rodney and people like him will be getting elected, and they’ll be calling people like me to serve in their Cabinet. And that will be good, too. [*Laughter*] That will be good, too. Things will change. Things are going to change.

So the issue is not whether we’re going to change; it is how we’re going to change. And so if you feel all those things that I feel coming from you, all the wonderful things the Bishops said, if you think I was your faithful servant, then you hear me now: The best is still out there, and all we have done is basically set the table for America’s feast.

But you’ve got to serve it up. You can’t leave the food in the refrigerator and the stove and expect the banquet to be enjoyed. But the best is still out there. This is a good country. We’re learning to live with each other a little better. And it’s changing so fast.

I’ll just tell you one little story. I got a call a couple days ago from Denzel Washington, a great actor. He’s in a new movie. I don’t know if you’ve seen it advertised, about football, about high school football and

the integration of T.C. Williams High School, and having a black football coach, in the sixties—

**Audience member.** A Church of God in Christ brother.

**The President.** Yes, a Church of God in Christ brother—right across the river here, in Alexandria, Virginia.

So here, just in a generation, how far we have come. There is this wonderful, beautiful story—I hope it will be a smash movie—about how all these white southerners found football heaven with a black coach and black players, right? [*Laughter*] It’s a story that has played itself out pretty well now. It’s going to be a great movie.

But to give you an idea of how you can’t stop change, I’ve been to T.C. Williams High School, more than once, as President. It probably has the best violence prevention program than any big high school I’ve ever seen. But it’s not a black-white high school anymore. Ain’t no telling how many people are there from how many countries. And that school district now has students—the high school is the anchor of a school district that has students of 180 different ethnic and racial groups whose families speak over 100 different native languages.

So this is not just about you and me anymore, is it? America is about a whole lot of other people, too. And our future is about a whole lot of other people.

So that’s the last point I want to leave you with. The Vice President and Senator Lieberman are good people, and they’re good servants. And my wife has the best combination of mind and heart and knowledge and ability to get things done in the context of a forum like the Senate of anybody I’ve ever known. They’re both better than me at some of the things that are important for people in public life to do. So nobody’s got all the skills, and everybody needs to be lifted up, first by the Lord and second by the people.

But you just remember what I told you. All we’ve done in the last 8 years is set the table. And the feast is still out there. And you’ve got all these little kids growing up into a world that would have been unimaginable 10 or 15 years ago. They’re going to be on their little computers, talking to kids in Africa

and Japan and Ecuador, first one place and another. It's going to be a different world.

And this is the last point I want to make. The most important thing of all is still the struggle to get people to be proud of their own racial and ethnic heritage, proud of their own religious heritage, but absolutely convinced that our common humanity is the most important thing of all.

If I could have one wish at the close of my service, it would not be for your continued prosperity—if I only had one—although I dearly hope you'll have it. It would not be even for every one of your children to get a college degree, although I deeply hope they will. If I could only have one wish, it would be that somehow, we could lay down enough of our demons to be one America and live together as brothers and sisters.

So you have been good to me. I love you. I'll never forget you. When I'm not President anymore, I'm still going to try to be a good citizen. I'm going to try to use all the things I've learned and all the things I've done to be of some use in the world. And if I can be of some use to you, all you've got to do is call.

But you remember, meanwhile, I'm going to give you 120 hard days. I'm going to try to finish the peace process in the Middle East. I'm going to try to get as much done in education and other things as I can with this Congress, and I'm going to do what I can to take my case on America's future to people who wish to listen to it.

But the most important thing is to realize we are all term-limited. It's what we do, not who we are as individuals, that matters. Now, if you can help the agents of positive change, we'll build one America. And you recognize that the table is set, but the feast has to be put out there, and it's still out there. That would be good for you, good for your children, good for our country, and good for the world. Meanwhile, if you ever need me, just call.

I love you. Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:43 p.m. in the Grand Ballroom at the Renaissance Hotel. In his remarks, he referred to Bishop Chandler D. Owens, presiding Bishop, Bishop J. Neul Haynes, first assistant, Bishop P.A. Brooks, secretary of the general board, Bishop Melvin E. Clark, director,

Second Ecclesiastical Jurisdiction of Pennsylvania, and Bishop Donnie Lindsey, former director of the Arkansas jurisdiction, Church of God in Christ; Bishop Felton M. Smith, Jr., pastor, Temple of Faith Deliverance Church of God in Christ, Chattanooga, TN; Bishop L.T. Walker, pastor, Holy Temple Cathedral Church of God in Christ, Little Rock, AR; and Alvin Brown, Senior Adviser to the Vice President for Urban Affairs.

### **Statement on the Adoption Bonus Awards**

*September 20, 2000*

Today's award of nearly \$20 million in adoption bonuses to States demonstrates the dramatic success of our efforts to move more children from the foster care system to loving homes they can call their own. With this second round of awards by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, all 50 States, as well as the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico, have now earned bonuses for increasing the number of children adopted from public foster care. Last year alone, 46,000 foster care children were adopted, an increase of nearly 65 percent since 1996. This puts us well on the way to meeting my goal of doubling the number of adoptions from 28,000 in 1996 to 56,000 by 2002. I commend the States for accepting the challenge to more rapidly move children from foster care into permanent homes and the many loving families who have opened their hearts and their homes to adopt children from the foster care rolls.

I also want to thank the First Lady for her commitment and leadership on this issue. Hillary spearheaded my administration's effort to transform our child welfare system and promote adoption by leading the administration's Adoption 2002 initiative, which served as the blueprint for the Adoption and Safe Families Act that I signed into law in 1997. The adoption bonus awards were included as part of my our Adoption 2002 initiative, and were enacted as part of the Adoption and Safe Families Act, establishing the first-ever financial incentives to States to increase adoptions of children waiting in the foster care system.