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Remarks at a Reception for Representative Max Sandlin in Houston, Texas

September 27, 2000

Well, first of all, Max, I appreciate your thanks for the great effort I've made to help you. It's really a great effort to come here on a day like this—[*laughter*]—to John Eddie and Sheridan's modest little home—[*laughter*]—to be with Peter and Christie, whom I normally see on Long Island, now that I'm hanging around New York. [*Laughter*] I don't know why I didn't get here 3 hours earlier. [*Laughter*]

I am delighted to be here. I'm glad to be back in Houston. I want to thank Mayor Lee Brown, who I think is still here. If not, he was here and has got to go to an event; there he is. And I want to thank him not only for being an outstanding mayor but for his terrific service in the Clinton-Gore administration as our drug czar before he became mayor.

I also want to thank Max's colleague from Houston, Congresswoman Sheila Jackson Lee, who is here, for being here to support him. Thank you very much. And I want to thank the State representatives and other officials who are here.

But I want to say a special word; I made a passing reference to these two couples up here with Max and me, but let me tell you, I've known Peter and Christie for several years now. I remember once a couple of years ago, they were standing out—remember that—you were standing out on the street when I was driving by. Do you remember that? And I got out and said hello. And they wanted to become more active. They had gotten interested in some important environmental and health issues where they live on Long Island. They wanted to get more active in public life. And they have—I hardly know anybody that has exerted more consistent effort, have a positive impact for Al Gore and Joe Lieberman and for our Democratic candidates around the country than they have over the last couple years, and I just want to thank you for doing it. It's been great. Thank you very much.

And I want to thank John Eddie and Sheridan for being such good friends of mine. This is the second time I've been in their home. I've been once after dark and once before dark, and I liked it both ways. [*Laughter*] But they have been so wonderful to me for 8 years now, in good times and bad. And I'm very, very grateful.

I would like to thank all the people of Texas who have supported Hillary and me and Al and Tipper over these last 8 years. It was never a very easy sell here, but we actually did pretty well in both elections, under adverse circumstances. And I'm very grateful for the support I got here.

I just want to make two or three points here tonight, and I realize I'm—at a deal like this, you're probably preaching to the saved, but everybody here has friends in congressional districts in Texas that are contested and friends throughout the country in States that are contested. I had one guy ask me the other day, he said, "Why are you working so hard?" I learned that this is—I think this is the 142d event I have done for the Democrats this year, in a year when, as you know, I'm not running for anything, for the first time in 26 years. And most days I'm okay about it. [*Laughter*] I've now adopted the official title of Cheerleader in Chief, since my family has a new candidate and my party has a new leader, and I like it very much, and I've enjoyed it.

I am profoundly grateful for the chance that I've had to serve for the last 8 years. And I am very grateful if any of the ideas I had or the work I did, the fights I fought, and some of the bullets I took helped us to keep America on a progressive path and to resist the reaction that came after we won. But what I want to say to you is that sometimes it's harder for a country to make a good decision in good times than it is in bad times.

I remember back in '92, when the Republicans were trying to scare everybody about me, and they were derisively referring to me as the Governor of a small southern State, and I was so naive I thought it was a compliment. [*Laughter*] And I still do. I still do. And I thought to myself, lord knows how many people walked into polling places saying, "I wonder if I really ought to vote for that guy. I mean, he doesn't look old enough to be President"—that's before my hair turned—"and he is just a Governor of a small

southern State. I don't know if I know where it is or not. And everybody, the Republicans have got all these people saying terrible things about him. Oh, well, I'll take a chance."

I mean, come on, it wasn't much of a chance. The country was in a ditch. We had to do something different. [*Laughter*] And it's worked out, and I'm grateful. But what I want to say to you is that we actually changed the way things were done in Washington, and we've changed what was being done in the White House and, insofar as we could, what was being done through the executive branch of Government and with the Congress. We had a different economic policy, a different education policy, a different health care policy, a different environmental policy. We had a different crime policy, a different welfare policy, a different foreign policy. And we had a different policy toward trying to unify America, as opposed to trying to divide it, based on a simple philosophy that everyone counts, everyone ought to have a chance, and we all do better when we help each other. That's what I believe.

And I just tried to modernize those ideas to fit it with this new information global society we're living in. But when you strip it all away, it has a lot of simple meanings. For example, I believe, and I think all of you believe, that these people that served us tonight ought to have the same chance to send their kids to college that those of us who could afford a ticket have to send ours to college.

So it worked. Max told you a little bit about it. Just in the last 2 days—we were able to announce yesterday that poverty was at a 20-year low, and that minority—African-American and Hispanic poverty dropped more than ever before from one year to the next, last year, and more than in 34 years for children, that median income was above $40,000 for the first time in the history of America.

And today we announced that the surplus this year would be $230 billion. Now, let me tell you, when we were doing it their way, when I took office, the deficit was $290 billion, and the projected deficit for this year, when I took office, was $455 billion. So instead of a $455 billion deficit, we've got a $230 billion surplus. And when I leave office, we will have paid off $360 billion of the Nation's debt.

So in education, we changed the policies. Reading scores are up. Math scores are up. The dropout rate is down. College-going is at an all-time high. Are they as good as they ought to be? No where near. But I keep pushing for more accountability, more results, more rigor in identifying schools that aren't working and turning them around or putting them under new management. We can do a lot better.

But what I want you to know is, we know something we didn't know when Hillary and I started on this over 20 years ago. We actually know that you can turn around any failing school, and we know that there are people who know how to do it. I'll just give you one example. I was in Harlem the other day in a school that just 2 years ago—an elementary school—2 years ago—where 80 percent of the children were doing math and reading below grade level—2 years ago. Today, 74 percent of the kids, same kids, are doing reading and math at or above grade level.

You can turn these schools around. But you have to have high standards, rigorous accountability, well-trained teachers, small enough classes, a disciplined environment, and for the kids that come from tough neighborhoods and circumstances, they need preschool and after-school programs and mentoring. If you've got it, you can turn them around. So we can do that. So things are going well. Now, that's point one.

Point two is, what are you going to do with the good times? The point I want to make to you is, there are a lot of big challenges out there and a lot of fabulous opportunities. When Al Gore says, "You ain't seen nothing yet," that's not just a campaign slogan. I'm not running, and I believe that. I believe the best times for this country are still out there, if you make the right decisions.

Max talked about a couple of issues. Let me just tell you, there's another thing—I'm sort of frustrated with the coverage of the Presidential campaign in the last few weeks. The press takes about a week, and they tell you everything that's wrong with Governor Bush, and they say, "Oh, my goodness, we may be too tough on him. Let's load up on Gore for a week." And then we'll have a week

or 10 days of that. And then they say, "Oh, well, maybe we'll do that. We'll load up on Bush a little." Have you watched this? And it's all about personal stuff or what they remember or how they said this, that, or the other thing.

Let me tell you something. I think it's a bunch of bull in terms of how it affects you. Here's what I believe. I believe you have two honorable people who love their country, love their families, and are going to do their best to do what they believe if they get elected. And I do not think America is very well served by all this rigmarole, trying to confuse people into thinking that, if you can just find which one has the worst quirks, you'll know to vote for the other one. That's a bunch of hooey. That's not true.

Now, what I want to tell you is that there are real, significant differences between the two parties, and every House seat, every Senate seat, and the White House matters. And to pretend otherwise is naive and wrong and risks squandering the best moment in my lifetime to shape the future of our dreams for our children.

Look, they've got different economic policies, the Democrats and the Republicans. The Democrats believe we ought to give a tax cut of more modest proportion that will be focused on child care, long-term care, helping people send their kids to college and deduct the tuition, and helping people save for retirement. They believe that we should save enough money to make sure that we can invest an appropriate amount in education, health care, the environment, national defense, and—big time—keep paying this debt down until we get out of debt, in 12 years, for the first time since 1835, so we can keep interest rates down and the economy expanding. That's what we believe.

They believe that we should give roughly 75 percent of the non-Social Security surplus, which they've already said we should set aside, right? When you hear them saying, "We just want to give away one in four dollars in taxes," it's not quite right. They believe we should give most of the non-Social Security surplus, which they say we shouldn't touch, in a tax cut. And most of you would make more money in the short run under their program than ours.

Why are you here? I'll tell you why I believe you're here: because you've been there. And if you spend 1.6 trillion on a tax cut, and $1 trillion to partially privatize Social Security, which is what it costs if we give the young people here 2 percent of your payroll taxes, and all these people that are 55 and over—and I'll be one of them next year—you guarantee them the existing benefits, you've got to fill up the hole of people taking the money away. It costs a trillion dollars.

By the time you pay for that and the Social Security privatization, and you add inflation plus population growth to Government spending, and you take into account either party's promises—just the Republican promises—you are way back in deficit.

What does that mean? Higher interest rates. The Council of Economic Advisers thinks the Gore Democratic congressional plan would keep interest rates a percent lower a year for a decade. Do you know what one percent lower interest rates means? It's worth about $390 billion in home mortgages, lower home mortgages; $30 billion in lower car payments; $15 billion in lower college loan payments; and a much higher stock market, a much higher rate of business investment, more jobs, and higher incomes. It's a big difference. If you want the money now, you should be for them. If you want to keep building America, you should be for us.

But let's not pretend that there's no difference here. It is big and profound and deeply held by both sides. They really believe that the more you cut taxes, the more the economy grows. The last time we tried it, we wound up $4 trillion in debt.

People ask me all the time, they say, "You had all these geniuses like Bob Rubin and Lloyd Bentsen in your economic team. What great new innovation did you bring to Washington when you became President in economic policy?" And my answer is always the same: "Arithmetic." [*Laughter*] We brought arithmetic back to Washington. DC.

Now, I'm telling you, we're just six seats away from the majority. His seat matters, not just in Texas, not just in his district; every American has a stake in seeing this economic policy go forward.

I could go through—I'll just do one more. We have hugely different health care policies. We believe in a strong Patients' Bill of Rights, and they don't. And there's a reason. It's not that they enjoy seeing the 18 million people a year—18 million people a year—who are either denied health care or have the proper health care delayed because someone—not a physician—is not sure that what they need is covered by or should be permitted by their HMO.

Now, I can say this because I have not been opposed to managed care. When I took office as President—let's get the whole truth out here—inflation in health care was 3 times the rate of inflation in the society. We were about to be swallowed up by health care costs. We had to get in there and manage the system better. But the problem with all management systems is, if you lose sight of what the primary goal is, you get in trouble in a hurry. The primary goal is not to maximize profit; it's to maximize profit consistent with the first goal, which is the quality of health care given to every single person in one of those health care systems.

There is 18 million people that are delayed or denied health care. So we say—Max and all the Democrats and our crowd—we say, you ought to have a right to see a specialist if you need it. You ought to have a right to go to the nearest emergency room. If I hear one more person tell me a story about somebody hit by a car and driving by three emergency rooms in a city before they get to one that's covered, I think I'll scream. You ought to have a right to keep the same doctor during a course of treatment, even if you change jobs. And if you get hurt by a delay or denial of service, you ought to have the right to sue. And everybody ought to be covered.

They've got this sort of Rube Goldberg scheme which says, well—theirs is not a Patients' Bill of Rights; theirs is a patients' bill of suggestions. [*Laughter*] They say, "If you don't get it, it's too bad, but we won't let you sue." Although they may be willing to get us into Federal court now—the Republicans—but they don't want to cover everybody. Their initial plan left 100 million Americans out. Now, why is that? Because the health insurance companies don't want it, and they don't want to do anything they don't want to do.

Now, you just have to decide whether you think their management imperatives are more important or whether you think these 18 million people's health care is more important. Now, they will tell you that our plan will cost too much money. But their own Congressional Budget Office says, if our bill passes, it will cost under $2 a month in health insurance costs. And I think it's worth about $1.80 a month. I'd gladly pay it to know that if you got hit by a car, you could go to the nearest hospital, and you could keep your specialist. But you've got to decide.

It's the same thing on this Medicare drug thing. The fastest growing group of people in the country are over 80. If you live to be 65 in America today, your life expectancy is 82. The young women in this audience, because of the human genome project, are going to come home with babies in the next 10 years that have little gene cards with them that tell them how to maximize their life, and life expectancy will rapidly rise to about 90 years in this country.

Now, we know, with the miracles of pharmaceuticals, we can stay alive longer and live better. We also know that over half the seniors in this country have medical bills they cannot really afford. So we say, "We've got the money now. Medicare is a very efficient program with very low administrative costs. We'll run a voluntary prescription drug program through here, and we'll let everybody who needs it buy into it, with subsidies for very poor people." That's our position.

Their position is, "We'll help people up to 150 percent of the poverty level. Everybody else can buy insurance, and maybe we'll give them a little help." Now, all the fights I've had with the health insurance companies—let me say something nice about them—the health insurance companies have been completely honest in this debate. They have said to their friends in the Republican Party, "Your plan won't work. We can't offer insurance for people to buy drugs at a price they can afford to pay that's worth having. It can't be done. It won't work."

Nevada passed a bill like the one the Republicans—from the nominee for President all through the Congress—are advocating.

You know how many insurance companies have offered to cover the medical, the pharmaceutical bills of the people of Nevada since they passed the bill? Zero. Not one.

Why do they keep doing it? One thing I admire about them is, they're always undeterred by evidence. [*Laughter*] We've got a lot of lawyers in the crowd. You know other people like that. [*Laughter*] The evidence has no impact, whatever. They know what they believe, and "don't bother me with the facts." Now, why would they do that? They say, "Well, let's just help the poor folks first." Over half the people who need this help are above 150 percent of the poverty line. That's about 16 grand for a couple in America, most places, retired couple.

Why do they do that? Because the pharmaceutical companies are against our position. Why would the pharmaceutical companies be against selling more drugs and making a profit on it? Because they think—you need to know the whole story; I'll tell you the whole story—because they believe if Medicare is the purchaser of drugs for all these folks that buy into the program, it will become the biggest drug purchaser in America, and we'll have enough market power to get a better price.

Right now, American seniors pay much higher prices for drugs than people do in other countries, even if the drugs are made here. Now, like all things in life, it's not entirely—there's not all right and wrong on one side. All these other countries have price controls, and one of the reasons we've got the best pharmaceutical industry in the world is that we've invested huge amounts of your money in medical research, but they've invested a lot of theirs. And it costs a lot of money to bring new drugs to market, and they recover both the cost of the development plus the cost of manufacture, sale, and distribution from you because they can't recover any developmental costs overseas. But once they get it all out of you, then they can sell that medicine a lot cheaper in Canada or Mexico or anyplace else.

Well, we're not going to solve all that overnight, but all I know is, that is a very poor excuse for denying needy senior citizens in America their right to medicine that they've got to have to stay alive and have a healthy life.

But you can decide—but let's not pretend there's no difference here. We're for the hate crimes legislation. They're not. The appointments on the Supreme Court will be dramatically different because these people have different views and convictions. And you have to assume that honorable people will act on their convictions if they're in a position to do it.

Study after study after study shows that, notwithstanding the relentless efforts of both parties to paint the politicians of the other party as less than honest and the happy complicity of the press in dumping on both sides, that overwhelming, Presidents do pretty much what they say they're going to do when they run. You can look at throughout the whole 20th century, and it's the truth. Sometimes you just have to admit you're wrong; sometimes circumstances change. By and large, people do what they say they're going to do.

So there are big differences here. And I just want to ask you, if you know anybody in Max's district or where another member of my administration—a former member—Regina Montoya Coggins, is running in Dallas or any of the other really contested districts here or you know people in other States that you know are close and are battleground States, you need to tell them, "Look, we've had big successes. There are big differences. People cannot be lulled into complacency, because times are good, to thinking this election doesn't matter."

I'm telling you, it's exciting out there. I think you are going to find out in the next 10 years you're going to have babies born with a life expectancy of 90 years. I think we're going to find out what's in the black holes in outer space. I think we'll find out what's in the ocean depths and things that we never dreamed before. I think that we will find a cure for Parkinson's. I think we may be able to actually reverse the onset of Alzheimer's. The kind of things that are going to happen here are unbelievable. And I think we will find ways to bring prosperity to people in places and neighborhoods that have been totally left out of this recovery, if we make the right decision.

But that's why I'm going all over the country. I worked as hard as I could to turn this country around and get it going in the right direction. But all the best stuff is still out there if we make the right decision. Every House Member, every Senate Member, the race for the Presidency—it's not about who's good and who's bad; it's not about who said this little thing or that little thing in the newspaper yesterday. It's about what they're going to do that affects your lives, your children's lives, your grandchildren's future, and what this country looks like.

And if you believe that we've had a good economy and you'd like to keep changing in this direction, if you believe that all children can learn but we ought to help them with more teachers and modern schools as well as accountability, if you believe that we ought to get rid of child poverty and that old folks ought to be able to get the medicine they need, if you believe that we can grow the economy and improve the environment at the same time—and I didn't even talk about that tonight; I can keep you here to midnight on that—if you believe that in the world we ought to be doing things like reaching out to our trading partners and building partnerships with Latin America and Africa and being responsible partners in the world, and if you really believe that we ought to be one America across all the lines that divide us, that we all do better when we help each other, you ought to stick with our side, and the best is yet to be.

Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 6 p.m. at a private residence. In his remarks, he referred to reception hosts John Eddie Williams, Jr., and his wife, Sheridan; reception cochairs Peter Cook and his wife, Christie Brinkley; Mayor Lee P. Brown of Houston; and former Secretaries of the Treasury Lloyd Bentsen and Robert E. Rubin. Representative Sandlin is a candidate for reelection in Texas' First Congressional District.

Remarks at a "Texas Tribute for President Clinton" in Houston

September 27, 2000

Thank you very much. I appreciate what Mayor Rendell said, once again illustrating the complete accuracy of Clinton's third law of politics: Whenever possible, be introduced by someone you've appointed to high office. [*Laughter*] But I loved it.

I want to thank all of the people who are responsible for this wonderful evening tonight. Jess and Betty Jo, thank you so much; Bill and Andrea. Thank you, Garry. I thank my friend of nearly 30 years, Billie Carr, for being here tonight. And I thank all the State legislators and party officials, and especially Representatives Max Sandlin and Sheila Jackson Lee, who make my life so much easier in Washington.

I thank Lloyd and B.A. Bentsen for being here tonight. I want to tell you, I just was with another group over at John Eddie and Sheridan William's house, and I said, people are always asking me—we had all this great economic news, and they're talking about how brilliant my economic advisers were, how brilliant Lloyd Bentsen was, and how brilliant Bob Rubin and all the others were, and they said, "What great new innovation did they bring to Washington?" I always say, "What they brought to Washington was arithmetic." [*Laughter*]

Lloyd and I tell them, "Where we came from, we weren't very smart, and we thought the numbers had to add up, or it wouldn't work." [*Laughter*] Sure enough, it worked out all right, and the prosperity our country enjoys today is in no small measure because of the service that Lloyd Bentsen rendered to our Nation. And I thank you so much.

I want to thank my longtime friend Governor Mark White for being here. We were colleagues together back in the long ago, when we were working on improving our schools, and I think the children of Texas are still benefiting from a lot of the work you did, way back then. And I thank you for being here tonight, Mark.

And I want to thank the entertainers. I have special feelings about all of them. Red Buttons and I were together in Los Angeles at an event that we did for Hillary right before the Democratic Convention started. He was funny then; he was funnier tonight. And I was thinking, I wonder if I can tell those jokes when I'm not President anymore—[*laughter*]—or will I have to wait until I'm 81? [*Laughter*] But he was great. I loved it.