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pray that the day will come sooner, rather than later, where all the people of the region will see that they can share the wisdom of God in their common humanity and give up their conflict.

Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:45 p.m. in the Grand Ballroom at the Waldorf Astoria Hotel. In his remarks, he referred to Michael W. Sonnenfeldt, chair, Jack Bendheim, president, and Susan Stern, vice president, Israel Policy Forum; Judith Stern Peck, former chair, United Jewish Appeal Federation of New York; dinner emcee Lesley Stahl; Kerry Kennedy Cuomo, wife of Secretary of Housing and Urban Development Andrew M. Cuomo; New York State Comptroller H. Carl McCall; Mark Green, New York City public advocate; musicians Jessye Norman and Billy Joel; author Toni Morrison; Garrison Keillor, host of "Prairie Home Companion"; Speaker of the Knesset Avraham Burg; Israeli Cabinet Secretary Yitzhak Herzog; dinner honorees Dwayne O. Andreas, chair, Archer Daniels Midland Company, Louis Perlmutter, former chair, Brandeis University, and Alan D. Solomont, chair and founder, A.D.S. Group; Mr. Solomont's wife, Susan; Prime Minister Ehud Barak of Israel; Chairman Yasser Arafat of the Palestinian Authority; President-elect George W. Bush; and Ambassador David Ross, Special Middle East Coordinator. A portion of these remarks could not be verified because the tape was incomplete.

Remarks at the Rededication of the AFL–CIO Building

January 8, 2001

The President. Thank you. What do you think, Mom? She did a good job, didn't she? I thought she was great. [*Laughter*] When Susan said they would collectively bargain for ice cream, I thought to myself, it is only in large families that even John Sweeney would be against unionizing. [*Laughter*] No parents can stand against their united children, if there are enough of them. [*Laughter*]

Thank you, Susan. Thank you, John, for your friendship, your support, for bringing such incredible energy and direction to the labor movement; to all the officers of the AFL–CIO; and Maureen, thank you for your friendship; Mrs. Kirkland; Monsignor.

I would like to thank all the members of the labor movement, and I'd like to thank all the members of my administration who support labor. John said there were too many to mention, and he'd get in trouble, but I want to also say a special thank you to Secretary Alexis Herman for being labor's friend and partner. Thank you.

I think it would be interesting, you know, maybe it's just that we don't have as much to do at the White House these days—[*laughter*]—but we have the largest turnout here of senior members of the administration for any event outside the White House we have ever held. So I would like to ask Mr. Podesta and Martin Baily and Kathy Shaw, from the CEA, and Bruce Reed and Steve Ricchetti and Gene, and Janice Lachance and Aida—everybody here who is part of the administration stand up—Karen, stand up. Everybody stand up, Chuck. Thank you.

You know, John, Karen Tramontano is going with me, and we're exploring whether you can unionize a former President's office. [*Laughter*]

AFL–CIO President John J. Sweeney. Karen will do it. [*Laughter*]

The President. We're ripe for organizing here.

I have so much to thank you for. I thank you for the work you did for the Vice President, for your pivotal roles in the victories in Michigan, Pennsylvania, and so many other places—yes, and Florida, and the victory in Florida, yes. [*Laughter*] You're taking my good joke away. [*Laughter*]

I also want to thank you, those of you from New York, for all you did for Hillary. I am very grateful to you for that. When she was sworn in last Wednesday, I can honestly say it was one of the happiest days of my life. I don't know when I've been that happy since Chelsea was born. And it wouldn't have happened if it hadn't been for so many of you who stuck with her and supported her, and I am very, very grateful.

Senator Kennedy, I would like to thank you for your friendship and your support. In ways that will probably never be a part of the public record, you have been my true friend for a long time, and I thank you.

This is a very emotional moment for me. We're thinking about the last 8 years; that's what you're thinking about. I'm thinking about the last 26 years. In 1974 I ran for

Congress in a district where, in 1972, President Nixon had defeated Senator McGovern 74–26. I ran against a Member of Congress who had an 85 percent approval rating when I started, and, obviously, a 99 percent name recognition. I was zero-zero.

I raised in this campaign about $160,000, which was a fortune in 1974. And over $40,000 of it came from the labor movement, which was a fortune in 1974. And I was one of the top 10 recipients of all House candidates of help from labor. I was 28 years old, and nobody thought I had a chance. It turned out, I didn't. [*Laughter*] But the truth is, I nearly won the race. We made it part of an overall referendum on the policies and direction of the National Republican. It basically made the rest of my career possible, and it could not have happened without the labor movement.

And I was sitting here thinking that people that really helped me then, most of them aren't around anymore. A man named Dan Powell, that a lot of you knew, who was then the head of the AFL–CIO region in Memphis; the Arkansas president, Bill Becker; the guy that ran the labor movement in west Arkansas, a guy named Dale Dee Porter. One of them is still here, though, Wayne Glenn. Thank you. He was there with me 26 years ago.

And every day for 26 years, almost—well, 27 years now; I started in January of '74—I have been profoundly grateful to the working people of my native State and this country for what you represent and what you stand for and for the fact that you not only have tried to help your own members, but you've also cared about the larger society.

When Susan was talking about her family and then she kind of morphed her remarks into her union, I thought it was a beautiful thing because we all really believe that our country and our unions and our workplaces ought to work the way our families do when they work best.

All worthy endeavors, including politics, are team sports. And it doesn't matter how good the quarterback is or the best player on the team; if you don't have a team, you can't win. And I will say again, I don't even have the words to tell you how profoundly grateful I am for more than a quarter century of being able to be your teammate.

John quoted from George Meany's speech, and there were a few moments there, when he started talking about court decisions, I wondered if it was really John changing the words. [*Laughter*] Then I realized that Mr. Meany was defending a court decision, not attacking one.

The mission that was articulated by George Meany in 1955 has endured. The AFL–CIO still leads the country in its efforts to improve the lives of its members and all working Americans, as well, to bring economic, social, and political justice to the work place, but also to the Nation and, increasingly, to the world beyond our borders. Thanks to vigorous leadership, rejuvenated organizing efforts, and strong grassroots support, you are on a roll.

This building is a symbol of today's labor movement. It's on the same foundations you started, but you've modernized it for a new age. You've adapted to the new challenges and new opportunities. You're looking to the future. And I hope we can be part of that future together.

You know, I got tickled when Susan said she thought she was going to introduce Hillary. I thought, for gosh sakes, I've only got 12 days until I'm a has-been. [*Laughter*] Just 12 days to being a has-been, let me enjoy my 12 days. [*Laughter*]

The truth is that we're all going to do fine in this new century if we stick with what we've done these last 8 years. If we keep having open and honest debates, what John called differences of the head, but we focus on the basic mission: empowering workers, strengthening families and communities, embracing change, but in a way that is consistent with our values. We've been working on this for some time now. It turns out it worked pretty well.

In October 1992, when I spoke to you as a candidate for President, I said I wanted us to build an America where labor and management, business and government, and education worked together to create a high-wage, high-growth society. That's the America we worked to build for 8 years now. And along the way, we disproved an idea that the other side had relentlessly promoted for a

dozen years, which is that when labor is at the table, the economy is weakened, and the only way America would have a healthy business environment is if government was regularly condemned and labor was regularly weakened. It turned out not to be true.

Now, it's going to be interesting to see, now that they have a certain influence over the course of America's affairs, whether they acknowledge that in the last 8 years we proved that America is better off when labor and business and government work together for the welfare of all Americans.

Today, we have a stronger labor movement and more partnership, and if we were trying to hurt the economy, we did a poor job of it. We have 22.5 million new jobs. We have the lowest unemployment rate in 30 years, the lowest female unemployment rate in 40 years, the lowest Hispanic and African-American unemployment rate in history. And the difference in this recovery and so many others is that everybody was doing better. Every sector of our economy had about the same percentage increase in its income over the last 4 years, with the bottom 20 percent having a slightly higher percentage increase.

Since 1993, the yearly income of the typical family is up $6,300, hourly wages up by more than 9 percent in real terms. So this rising tide has truly lifted all boats.

We also have the lowest poverty rate in 20 years, and last year we had the biggest drop in child poverty in 34 years. And it is no accident that these things have happened at a time when the labor movement was a bigger partner in the policymaking direction of the United States because you cared about not only your own members but the working poor, as well, and the family members of people who were in the American workplace.

For example, in 1993, when the deficit was high and we had to turn it around, you supported giving the tax cut that we could afford to the 15 million American families that were working 40 hours a week for the most modest wages. Nearly none of them were union members, but you wanted them to have the first tax cut because, most of all, they had children in the home and you felt that nobody should work 40 hours a week and raise their kids in poverty. And because you did that, over 2 million people have been lifted out of poverty, because of the earned-income tax credit. And you should be very, very proud of that.

We have provided now various tuition tax cuts, the HOPE scholarships and others that 10 million Americans are using to go to colleges and community colleges around this country. The direct loan program has saved $8 billion for students and $5 billion for colleges of higher education because you supported the right kind of tax relief, targeted toward education.

Family and medical leave, something that we were told would be just terrible for the economy, has now given over 20 million Americans the chance to take some time off from work when there's a sick parent or a newborn baby, and the American economy is stronger than it's ever been. And its been good for business, because you have more and more and more people who feel comfortable at work because they're not having their insides torn up worrying about their children or their parents at home.

We passed Senator Kennedy's Kennedy-Kassebaum law to let millions of Americans keep their health insurance when they change jobs. We strengthened pension protection for tens of millions of Americans. We've got 90 percent of our kids immunized against serious childhood diseases for the first time. The life of the Medicare Trust Fund has been extended to 2025. We have the cleanest environment we have ever had: The air is cleaner; the water is cleaner; the food is safer. We set aside more land—Secretary Babbitt says if it will get done, we'll surpass Teddy Roosevelt, and we'll have set aside more land than any administration in history. And it hasn't been bad for the economy.

But I want to say something else, too. As in every new progressive era, we sparked a pretty severe reaction from the forces that didn't like the changes we were trying to make. And when they won the Congress, they tried, among other things, to weaken the labor movement. So we defeated their attempts to repeal the prevailing wage, to bring back company unions, to weaken occupational safety laws. Instead, we cracked down on sweatshops, protected pension funds, passed tough new worker's safety rules

to prevent repetitive stress injuries, and at least once, we did succeed in raising the minimum wage.

Now, we were told when we raised the minimum wage it was a terrible thing for the economy and particularly rough on small business. Well, let's look at the record. Since the last time the minimum wage was increased, America has created almost 12 million new jobs. The unemployment rate has dropped from 5.2 to 4 percent, and in every single year, we have set a record for the number of new small businesses in America.

So the next 4 years are going to be challenging for you, but at least you'll have one solace: You'll have all the evidence on your side. I must say, there have been times in the last few years when I've almost admired our opponents in the political arena, because they are never fazed by evidence. [*Laughter*] You know, "Don't bother me with the facts. I know what I think, and I know who's greasing these wheels, and the facts are absolutely irrelevant." But at least you have it, and you know most Americans care about them so don't forget the evidence.

You've built a record that proves that America is better off when we are pro-business and pro-labor, when we all work together and everybody has a seat at the table, when everybody's concerns are heard and individuals are empowered. Don't forget it. Fall back on the evidence, and you will prevail.

What does that mean? Well, it means that you've got to keep winning new members. As the work force has changed, your membership has gone down. Now it's going back up. You have to be geared to the future of the economy. John and Rich Trumka and our Linda Chavez-Thompson—I have all these jokes I want to tell, and my staff told me I could not tell any of them. [*Laughter*] They say that I have to assume the appropriate role for a former President, and I cannot say any of the things that I want to say, which would leave you howling in the aisle—[*laughter*]—and the only thing that could get me a headline in my increasing irrelevancy from my friends in the press. [*Laughter*] But just use your imagination. [*Laughter*]

I want to focus on the future now. And as a citizen, I want to help you build that future. You've got to get the minimum wage increase this year, number one. One of the reasons our economic team is here is that we're releasing a report today from the National Economic Council which highlights the challenges facing workers who are working full time for the lowest wages. It shows—listen to this—more than 2.6 million Americans earn at or near the minimum wage. Another 6.9 million Americans earn less than the $6.15 an hour that we would have raised the minimum wage to. So that it would affect 10 million people, almost, and all their family members.

Now, these are people who work every day to stock store shelves, wash dishes at restaurants, care for our kids. They're in every town and city and of every racial and ethnic group. They are not, as the caricatures often would have it, mostly middle class teenagers working for money to go out on the weekends. Nearly 70 percent of them are adults. More than 60 percent are women. Almost half work full time. And many are the sole breadwinners struggling to raise their kids on $10,300 a year. They need and they deserve a raise, and they have waited for it for far too long.

Senator Kennedy did everything he could to get it passed at the end of the last session of Congress, and I thought we were going to get it. But in the end, our friends on the other side decided that they could get an even bigger tax cut out of milking the minimum wage if they waited until the new session of Congress.

Now, these families should not be punished for the failure of Congress to act for the last 2 years, since I first called for an increase in the minimum wage. We ought to make up for lost time and lost wages by raising the minimum wage above what I originally proposed 2 years ago, because they've lost more time.

And I want to thank Senator Kennedy, Congressman Bonior, and the others who are working with you on this. But I would like to say something else. You've got to make it clear to the American people what you will and what you won't trade for raising the minimum wage. Raising the minimum wage should never be conditioned on taking away

overtime or other labor protections that workers have. And again, you have something you didn't have 8 years ago. No serious person can say that it is necessary to take these things away to have a strong economy or to have a vibrant small business economy. It's a dog that won't hunt anymore. Use the facts as your shield and keep working.

Let me say that I hope that you will continue to swell the ranks of your members, and I hope you will continue to be on the cutting edge of change. There's a lot of other things that need to be done, and I think you'll be surprised how many of them you can get done the next 4 years if you're smart and careful.

I think it's clear that we have the money now to add a comprehensive prescription drug benefit to the Medicare program, and I hope you'll do it. It's clear that the Children's Health Insurance Program has now added over 3.3 million people to the ranks of people with health insurance, and we've got the number of people without health insurance going down for the first time in a dozen years. It's time to add the parents of those children to the ranks of those with health insurance.

It's clear that we can do more to balance work and family without hurting the economy. I hope there will be an expansion of family and medical leave. I hope there will be a strengthening of the equal pay for women laws. I hope we'll pass the "Employment Non-Discrimination Act," and I hope we will increase our support for child care for working families. There are many, many people, huge numbers, who are eligible by law for Federal assistance in paying their child care bills that we have never come close to funding.

I hope that you will continue to work to empower poor people in poor communities, whether in inner cities, Appalachia, the Mississippi Delta, or on Native American reservations. I hope you'll continue to work to make America the safest big country in the world. I hope you'll continue—let me be more explicit here. In Michigan and Pennsylvania, you had to fight against a lot of your members who were NRA members who believed that Al Gore was going to take your guns away. And you did a brilliant job saying, "No, he won't take your guns away, but the other guys will take your union away if they can." And you won a ground war.

Now, let me be serious here. The truth is, most of your people who are NRA members are good, God-fearing Americans who wouldn't break the law for anything on Earth, and they get spooked by these fear campaigns. Now, we're in a—I want to make a suggestion—in a nonelection year, when there's not the kind of pressure that we saw last year. And let's don't kid ourselves, the reason that our party didn't win the Congress, in my judgment, more than anything else, is what they did in those rural districts to us again, just like they did in 1994 on guns.

Now, it didn't work at all in New York. Why? New York even has a—you have to get a license to carry a gun in New York. And there's lots of sporting clubs. Nobody has missed a day in the woods in a hunting season. Nobody has missed a single sports shooting event. So all those fear tactics didn't work in New York, because all the hunters and sportsmen could see from their own personal experience that it was not true.

But I believe that you—we've all got a big interest here in keeping America going in the right direction on crime. We've all got a big interest in keeping guns out of the hands of kids and criminals. And we don't need to wait for an election where we're all torn up and upset and you have to win a ground war against your own members just to have an election come out all right over an issue that we shouldn't be debating in the first place at election time.

So I regret that I have not been more persuasive, because I came out of that culture. But I'm telling you, you need to use this next year, when there's no election going on, to go out there and sit down and talk about where we're going, because we've got to keep working to make America a safer place, and nobody wants to end the sporting and hunting culture that has meant so much to so many of your members. And I implore you, you can do this. Maybe nobody else in America can do this, and you can do it.

But you have to do it in a nonelection year, in my opinion, where people aren't fighting against you and you don't feel like you're

pushing a rock up a hill. And I'll help you if I can. This is a big deal for America.

We're still not near safe enough as a country. I'm glad the crime rate has gone down for 8 years. It's a gift you can give the children of your members and the communities in which you live.

And finally, let me say, I hope you will continue on some of the things we disagreed with over the years. We've got to figure out how to put a human face on the global economy. We are becoming more interdependent. We are becoming more and more interdependent. There is going to be more trade whether we like it or not, a trillion dollars a day in pure—just money transactions across national lines.

We have got to figure out how to be on the side of making sure that the little folks in every country in the world are not trampled on by the increasing power of financial transactions and international economic transactions. Instead, we have to prove that we can lift up the fortunes of all people. We have to have good labor rights. We have to have good environmental standards. We have to have fair and open financial rules, so that people don't get ripped off. We've got to do this together, and you've got to be part of the debate. Whenever you're part of the debate, America wins, and Americans win.

And I'll tell you, I've had a great time. I said yesterday in my church, they may find somebody who can do this job better than me; they will never find anybody that had any more fun doing it than I had. I have had a great time. But America is always about tomorrow. And I will end where I began.

This building should be a metaphor for the future of the AFL and the future of America. You built a new building with new technology for new times on old foundations. You stayed with what was best about the past and embraced what was necessary and attractive about the future.

So whenever you come in the front door of this building, think about that as a roadmap for your future. And remember what Susan said about a union being like a family and a workplace being like a family and a nation being like a family. And remember that great line from George Meany's speech—we should never forget our obligation to do unto others as we would like to be treated ourselves. We should never forget that politics, work, and life are all team sports. It's been an honor to be on your team.

Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:20 p.m. in the lobby. In his remarks, he referred to International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers member Susan Hagan, who introduced the President; Ms. Hagan's mother, Ada Hagan; Richard L. Trumka, secretary-treasurer, and Linda Chavez-Thompson, executive vice president, AFL–CIO; President Sweeney's wife, Maureen; Irena Kirkland, widow of former AFL–CIO President Lane Kirkland; Monsignor George G. Higgins, former director, Social Action Department, National Catholic Welfare Conference (later known as the U.S. Catholic Conference), who attended the first dedication in 1956; Gene Sperling, Assistant to the President for Economic Policy and Director of the National Economic Council; Aida Alvarez, Administrator, Small Business Administration; and Charles M. Brain, Assistant to the President and Director of Legislative Affairs.

Remarks on Presenting the Presidential Citizens Medal

January 8, 2001

Thank you and good afternoon. I would like to thank all of you for coming and welcome you to the White House. But especially the Members of Congress who either are or have been here. Senator Cleland, welcome, sir. Senator Kennedy; Representative Gilman—Mr. Chairman Gilman; Representative Eleanor Holmes Norton; Representative Sununu. And Mr. Justice Souter, we're delighted to see you here today. We thank you for coming.

I won't have many more chances to do this, so I'd also like to thank the United States Marine Band for being here and for all their work.

Yesterday, Hillary and Chelsea and I went to Foundry Methodist Church, which has been our home church since we've been in Washington. And they asked me to speak on reflections and anticipations. And I said I had many anticipations. I anticipated, for example, that my religious bearing would be severely tested when I returned to commercial