

Remarks at the Annual Republican Congressional Fundraising Dinner

June 13, 1991

Thank you. Thank you, Senator Gramm, and thanks, all of you. First, let me say what a superb job my introducer is doing in his early efforts—and there will be ongoing efforts—get control of the United States Senate back. Phil Gramm is a tiger. You saw a little of it here tonight. He's tough, and I believe he's going to get the job done.

May I first salute our Vice President. Let me tell you something: Dan Quayle is doing a superb job for our country here and abroad in everything he does, and I am proud to have him at my side.

And of course, let me salute the former majority leader of the United States Senate, Howard Baker, who took on this task, a busy man. And he got a job done in a historic way. Howard, we owe you a tremendous vote of thanks and thank you, sir.

And I also salute Bob Michel and Senator Dole. It's a joy to work with them. I couldn't ask for any leaders to give me more support, steadfast, loyal support, than these two, one in the Senate and one in the House. And thank you both.

And may I also thank my Cabinet. We've got a good Cabinet, a strong Cabinet. We get a lot of ideas presented at the Cabinet table. And then the decision is made, and they come together. And I am very blessed with having them and having a strong White House staff, many of whom are here tonight. So, I'm grateful, and it gives me a good chance to say that to you, the movers and shakers of the Republican Party.

Let me just say a few words about our country. Frankly, I am confident, optimistic about the future of this great country. And I am very proud of the way our young men and women served with courage in the Gulf, the way they selflessly liberated a small nation. And our objective was to show that aggression will not stand, and they sure showed that. The aggressors were kicked out of Kuwait because of the fine young men and women of this country.

And what I want to see us do is put this same courage and dedication and sense

of purpose to work right here at home. In the communities I visit—and Barbara is with me, going to many more on her own, I might add—I sense a certain urgency. There is an impatience in the air. People feel that as a nation we've got great work to do. And that is good because that is America.

You know, I spoke at the White House last night on the lawn, with the monument behind us and a beautiful summer evening there, to a remarkable cross section of America, hundreds of people who make America a land of opportunity. People whose products and ideas fuel an economy that, whatever its ebbs and flows, remains the envy of the world. People who make government work for us and not against us. And finally, the Points of Light, the people who use their time and talent to help the young and old, who are too busy solving problems to be stopped by them. These people give this nation its special character, and they make their nation a nation of practical people, resourceful, down-to-Earth, hard-working. And they make America a nation where ideals count; a nation filled with people not easily satisfied, always ready to aim high, to ask more of their country and of themselves.

And so, that is what is going on across the country, but here in Washington we've got to ask ourselves: How can government help? How do we recognize the role that government must play and the limits to what government can do? Each party provides its own answer. The Democrats that control their party don't look at things the way we do. I frankly get a little sick and tired of hearing the true practitioners of partisan politics saying that we have no domestic agenda. We have the kind of domestic agenda the American people want, the kind they elected us to enact. And if those leaders weren't up there, we'd get the job done for this country. The partisans refuse to move.

I loved it when they attacked a speech

that I didn't give even before I didn't give it. [Laughter] They go out and assail a theme that wasn't particularly going to be in the speech in the first place. They're desperate. They seem to feed—these Democrat leaders—on hard feelings, to thrive on bad times, to keep telling us that everything is bad about our country. And such a negative approach to this, the greatest country on the face of the Earth.

But your philosophy, my philosophy, is fundamentally different. We put our trust in the people. Republicans want to do more than simply rein in the excesses of the liberal alternative. Republican government is guided by a sense of what is good for the individual, what is good for the family. The family stands at the very center of all that is right and good about America, and this President and this party will defend the American family and will deny legislation that weakens the American family.

When we put together our policies and programs, we've got to always ask ourselves: Does this really help? Does this program or policy promote independence, or are we treating a proud individual as a ward of the state? Are we strengthening or weakening the family? Is government offering a helping hand or a fatal embrace? The answers to those questions shape our administration's approach to government.

Take education: We want schools that work, an education strategy that sparks innovation, improves achievement, raises standards, and in the process, revolutionizes the American schools.

Take housing: Let the Democrats make it their goal to warehouse the largest possible number of housing tenants by throwing money at bricks and mortar. Our goal is to transform those tenants into America's newest homeowners and give them the dignity that everybody that owns a home feels in his heart.

And take child care: We fought off, with great help in the Senate and great help in the House, the other party's attempt to build a new child care bureaucracy managed and mandated from Washington, DC. A system of redtape and regulations so stifling that it would take our kids out of their grandparents' arms and put them into anti-septic government day care institutions.

And our child care initiative put choice right where it belongs—in the hands of the parents. And we passed—thank heavens we passed a good child care bill last year.

And look, I am the first to know that we have had difficulty putting our ideas into action. Right now, as you have heard tonight from our leaders, Republicans are on the short end of the numbers game up on Capitol Hill. In a world where the pace of change accelerates every day, we've got one part of government, congressional government, that moves at a glacial pace. I didn't come here to knock the Congress. I've got a lot of Congressmen sitting out here that make sense that can knock the Congress.

I've been there, though. I served in the House alongside of Bob Dole, who is here, and Bob Michel and many other old hands here tonight. And I will once again say that I just can't tell you, every day that I'm in the White House, how grateful I am to our leaders. And it's not just the two that we've had here tonight—I salute them—but to our whips Al Simpson and Newt Gingrich. They are doing a super job for our party.

Look, I respect the Congress, and I know the dedication that good Congress men and women bring to that job. And I know the way our whips get going and all the rest of our Republican team work tirelessly to advance our team. But I also know Capitol Hill, the way the place allows each individual Congressman to duck collective responsibility for taking action, even when action is imperative.

Back in March—and you heard Phil mention this—during my joint address to the Congress at the conclusion of Desert Storm, I challenged Congress to tackle pressing national problems with the same energy and the same sense of purpose that guided us in the Gulf. And I set out a fairly detailed domestic agenda, and to get things moving I picked just two issues. I singled out just two—it could have been more—a comprehensive crime bill and a transportation bill. And I urged the Congress to act to pass these two bills in 100 days. Franklin Roosevelt challenged the Congress to act in a period of time. Lyndon Johnson challenged it. President Ford challenged it. John Ken-

nedy set goals with timeframes on them. To listen to the leaders of the Democrats squawk, you'd think I was violating the Constitution of the United States.

Ninety-nine days have passed since I issued the challenge, and all we've gotten from the Congress these past 99 days is 101 excuses. And I think I detect a trend here: The complaints are getting louder the closer we move towards 1992, for some reason. If Congress doesn't get the message, the American people are going to have to get themselves a new Congress. And very candidly, with your generosity tonight and what so many of you have done in the past and will do in the future, that is where you come in.

In 1992, with your help, we will make great gains in the House. Bob Michel is right. I think the climate is different now. I really believe people want change. I think they're tired of people that serve in perpetuity. I think they want change and dynamism. And we can build Republican numbers up to a point where we are within striking distance of a majority, where we can work across the aisle then. Can't quite get it done yet. Then we'll be able to work across the aisle to build a consensus with the far-sighted, like-minded members of the opposition, and there are plenty of those around. Where after too many years in the wilderness, we can put our ideas into action in the House. And I have even higher hopes for the Senate. After election day in 1992, when I talk to the Senate majority leader, I'll be talking to Bob Dole, a Republican. And it's about time we get control back.

And so, let me say to all the Republican Members of the Congress here tonight: In spite of all the odds, thanks to you we have had our share of successes, from clean air to child care to the historic civil rights legislation, the Americans with Disabilities Act. But too much of the time you and the White House have been forced to play defense. I've counted on congressional Republicans to uphold my vetoes. We've turned back more than a few bad bills that would have

become law. And I was reluctant, but I had to veto 21 bills. And thanks to so many Members here tonight, not one single veto has been overturned. And that is not easy.

Which reminds me, if we could only get for the President that which 43 Governors have, we could really protect the taxpayer. And I'm talking about the line-item veto. And I'm trying to find ways to use it. And if we control one House of the Congress, we can get on the offensive. We can stay there. We can bring to the attention of the American people those things that I was elected to perform on. We can get our programs through: crime and transportation and education and a real growth package and our homeownership initiatives and regulatory reform and a true civil rights bill. All of our agenda to move America forward—and we've got a good one. We can deliver the kind of leadership America deserves, the kind of government that I honestly believe in my heart that only our party can provide.

And so, tonight I wanted to thank each and every one of you for helping us take a step forward to the future. As you get shaken down by these awesome fundraisers out here and you do the same to your fellow Americans, you're doing the Lord's work. We need you. And you're working to change the direction of this country and give us the manpower and the womanpower in both Houses of Congress to get the job done.

Thank you all, and God bless you. Barbara and I are grateful to each and every one of you.

Note: The President spoke at 9:36 p.m. in Hall A at the Washington Convention Center. In his remarks, he referred to Senator Phil Gramm, chairman of the National Republican Senatorial Committee; Vice President Dan Quayle; Howard Baker, dinner chairman; Robert H. Michel, House Republican leader; Bob Dole, Senate Republican leader; Senator Alan K. Simpson; and Representative Newt Gingrich.