

Remarks to the Congressional Hispanic Caucus Institute September 16, 1993

Thank you all, ladies and gentlemen, for that wonderful welcome. And thank you especially, my good friend Congressman Serrano, for that warm introduction and for not telling them that you are, after all, much faster than I am. [Laughter]

I also have to tell you, I just left my daughter at home. She's home working on her homework. Hillary's still working on health care. She summoned me. She said, "Dad, when you get the monkey suit on, come in and let me look at you." [Laughter] She always checks to see if I've taken all the shaving cream off my face. I was so proud of her because she is working on her accelerated Spanish course. When I heard Joe up here introducing me, I thought I should go ahead and confess that I asked my daughter if she would let me learn along with her. And she said, "I doubt if you can keep up, Dad, but you're welcome to try." [Laughter]

I am deeply honored to be here tonight with the Hispanic Congressional Caucus Institute. Since the time this institute was founded and I was Governor of Arkansas, I have admired your work. Your programs are helping to pass the baton to a new generation of leaders, grooming them in the halls of Congress and in Federal Agencies and encouraging them to pass along what they've learned to others. It's important work for young people and for our country. I want to say thank you for that. One day, it will produce a President of the United States.

I want to compliment the Institute's executive director, Rita Elizondo. Her hard work may help to inspire other children to pursue the lofty achievement of those whom you honor tonight: Ellen Ochoa, the first Hispanic woman in space, and Lucille Becerra Roybal, who has done so much to set an example for everyone in bringing urgent change to our country at the grassroots level. I would also like to honor and acknowledge Mrs. Roybal's husband, former Congressman Edward Roybal, and their daughter who has followed so well in her footsteps, Congresswoman Lucille Roybal-Allard.

There are a few people here from our administration tonight; I'd be remiss if I did not acknowledge them. First of all, our brilliant Sec-

retary of Housing and Urban Development, Henry Cisneros, and his wife, Mary Alice. And I want to say a public and personal thank you to Henry Cisneros for what he did this week to prove that we're still behind the enforcement of civil rights in housing in this country. I want to acknowledge the presence of our outstanding Secretary of Transportation, Federico Pena, and his wife, Ellen. Unlike me, they may be faster runners than Congressman Serrano. Nelson Diaz, the General Counsel at HUD; Aida Alvarez, the Director of the Office of Federal Housing Enterprise Oversight at HUD; Norma Cantu, the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights at the Department of Education; Fernando Torres-Gil, the Assistant Secretary for Aging at HHS; Maria Echaveste, who runs the Wage and Hour Division at the Department of Labor; Joe Velasquez, the Deputy Assistant to the President for Political Affairs; Isabelle Tapia, the Deputy Assistant to the President for Scheduling and Advance; Patti Solis, the Deputy Assistant to the President who directs the scheduling for the First Lady; Lillian Fernandez, my Special Assistant in the House Liaison Office; and Carolyn Curiel, who is with Communications and Speechwriting and helped me write all the things that I may not be able to say properly tonight. I want to say a special word of thanks, too, to a former member of our staff, the Assistant to the President for Intergovernmental Relations, Regina Montoya, who went home to Dallas. But she's here with us tonight. I thank her for her service.

The people now who serve in this administration, from the White House to the Cabinet departments, the people who serve on Capitol Hill, the people who are full-time public servants, have set an example that will be important to the whole country. All the people who are now in the unprecedentedly large Hispanic Caucus in the Congress can now honestly help to represent the hopes, the dreams of the Hispanic people of the United States and equally important, perhaps, to ensure that we make Hispanic-Americans full partners so that we move forward and do it together.

I had an awesome experience earlier this week, as all of you know and some of you have

already commented on it, when I hosted the Prime Minister of Israel and the Chairman of the Palestine Liberation Organization in signing an historic peace agreement that, if you had asked just one month before, probably 90 percent of the American people and 90 percent of the informed opinion in the world would say could never come to pass.

It was an amazing thing, you know, once I realized it was going to happen and they wanted to come here to Washington to consummate the signing and make sure that the President didn't forget that the signing was the beginning, not the end, of the process, and then trying to work out how these two men who had fought each other literally for decades, who had put their whole lives into spilling the blood of one another's family and friends and allies, how they could somehow undergo this transformation to see each other as problems but not as necessary enemies. Someone said—I don't want to claim credit for that phrase—that this whole thing happened because, for some reason, at this magic moment in our history, those people looked at each other and saw enemies no more, but only problems. Problems can be solved. Progress can be made. Enemies don't talk to each other.

Tonight I want to talk to you from the heart for just a moment about possibilities. Because what that moment reminded me of, again, is that if we can imagine it, it can happen. If we can somehow engage the thorniest problems, if we can somehow unlock the ears and the hearts of the toughest adversaries, it can happen.

Tonight I ask you, my fellow Americans, to think about what it is we would like our children and our grandchildren to say we did with this moment in history, a moment in which many, many good things are happening and many, many bad things are happening at a bewildering rate of speed. The cold war comes to an end when the Berlin Wall drops and the Eastern European countries abandon communism and Russia abandons communism, revealing there a whole new set of problems, economic problems, social problems, religious and ethnic conflict but still, to be sure, taking away the threat of nuclear annihilation. We see people hungering in Latin America for democracy and seizing it and trying to build free economies where free people can work hard and be rewarded for their labors, trying to escape from the dark years of political repression and economic depression.

We see so much to be hopeful about. Here in this country, we see the wonders of technology opening up worlds we would never have imagined. That's all true. But we also see a world in which none of the rich countries can figure out how to create jobs, a world in which most Americans are working harder than they were 10 years ago for roughly the same wages in real dollar terms they were making 20 years ago to pay more for education and health care and in taxes, wondering whether ever they will be able to pass along to their children the dream that they had as children.

We have to face the fact that, in spite of the fact that people look to us all over the world to make peace, they wish us to go in and stop the starvation and the oppression in other countries, we of all the countries in the world have the highest percentage of people in prison because we are so violent. We have cities where the average age of murderers is now under 16, where teenagers carry weapons that are better than those police officers have. So we have this anomalous situation. If you are well-off in this country, you have the best health care in the world, but if you're one of the 35 million or so who don't have it, you're in a real fix. If you work for a living and you lose your job, you might lose your health care. If your child ever gets sick, really sick, you may never be able to change jobs without losing your health care.

We have a Government desperately needing more funds to grow the economy and to deal with the real problems we face at home and abroad, mired in the operating patterns of 60 years ago. And it is no wonder that so many of us are distrustful of our Government and afraid of our future and unwilling to take the kinds of chances that Americans have always taken in expanding trade beyond our borders, in reaching out to establish closer ties with our neighbors, in believing that the future belongs to us and can be bright and broad and deep if we do what we should.

So I ask you tonight not to take the shine off a perfectly wonderful and happy evening, to simply search your heart and say if Itzhak Rabin and Yasser Arafat could come here and sign away the legacy of the last four or five decades of hatred, to try to make a new beginning, can we not also make a new beginning in this time of sweeping change?

My dreams for this country are not very com-

plicated. I believe that, in a time of change, you can do two things: You can hunker down and turn away from it and hope it'll go away, and that works about one time in a hundred. About once in a hundred it'll work. Or you can say there has to be a way I can make this change my friend. There has to be a way that the most basic traditional values I harbor, to have a good family life, to live in a safe community, to see my work rewarded, to give my children a good education, there has to be a way for me to enhance those values and hopes and dreams in the face of all this change. What is it I must do to do that?

And if I ever do anything, whether you agree with it or not, and you want to know, "Why in the world did that fool do that?" all you have to do is to remember what I just told you, because I believe in this time of momentous change, it is my job not to turn away from it and hunker down but to embrace it with gusto and figure out how to preserve those basic values by making the changes that will make all these trends our friend and not our enemy.

I do not pretend for a moment that I am always right or that I have all the answers. Indeed, sometimes I am so perplexed it is almost heartbreaking. But I know that the people who walk the dusty roads of south Texas or the hard streets of the South Bronx, the people who were in the Adelante Con Clinton army that got me 70 percent of the Hispanic vote in the last election, hired me to change things in this country.

And so I ask you to be part of that change. Everything that we have done is a part of that. The motor voter bill is important. Why? Because it makes it easier for more people to vote who aren't represented. Why should you trust people in politics to make changes if you're not a part of electing them?

The family leave law is part of that. Why? Because in a world in which more than half the mothers of children under 5 are in the work force, we have to make it possible to be a successful parent and a successful worker. We cannot force people to choose.

The economic program was part of that. Why? Because it is criminal for us to leave another decade where we quadruple the national debt and we load it onto our kids. And then the Congress, 10 years from now, comes to town, and they have no money to spend on education, no money to spend on the economy, no money to spend on new technology, no money to spend

defending the country, no money to spend on anything except paying checks, more money for the same health care, writing checks for retirement, and writing checks on interest on the national debt. There will be no ability to create the future unless we do something to release the burden of the debt.

The economic program was also important because, for the first time in history, we changed the tax laws so that millions of families, including millions of Hispanic families, can be told, if you work 40 hours a week and you have a child in your home, you will no longer be in poverty. The tax system will lift you out of poverty, not drive you into it. That was a profoundly important thing.

But there is more work to be done. We began today the formal campaign to try to pass a drastic reform of the health care system. Look at the Americans without health care. Look at the Americans in peril of losing their health care. Look at the businesses going broke or at least not able to hire anybody else because they can't afford the cost of health insurance for extra employees, so they work their present employees overtime or work part-time people because they can't pay for health insurance. Look at the number of people who live in our cities who don't have access to public health facilities that ought to be open around-the-clock and that ought to be engaging in primary and preventive care. Look at the number of children who are born with low birth weight. Look at all these things, and ask yourself how in the world can we justify continuing a system which costs our people 40 percent more than any other people on Earth pay and does less with it because we insist on funneling money into things that have nothing to do with the health of the American people and everything to do with undermining the future of this economy. I tell you, we cannot do it.

We are spending more money every year on the same health care. And I'm having trouble preserving funding for the space station, something which provides high-tech employment to Hispanic Americans from Texas to Florida to California and made possible future astronauts like Ellen Ochoa. Why? Because we have not faced our obligations. So I ask you to join me in this great effort to provide affordable health care to all Americans. We can do it, and we must do it.

Now, I ask you too—and I know, you know,

one of the worst things you can do at a dinner is talk about something where people at the dinner disagree. But I have to do this on the NAFTA issue, and I want to tell you why. I don't care if I change a single mind tonight, but I want you to think about this. I want you to think about—now, wait a minute. Wait a minute. You all can all speak and argue with each other when I'm gone. That's what I want you to do. [Laughter] I want you to think about this: The argument against the treaty is that it will lead to the movement of American jobs to Mexico because their wages are lower than ours. That's true. That's the argument, right?

There are 2,100 companies now in the *maquilladora* area. I governed a State where people shut down and moved their plants to Mexico, and I knew the people who lost their jobs. The only thing I want you to know is I would not knowingly do anything to make more people like that. So you say, why is this nut doing this if he's had personal experience? I'll tell you why. Because if we beat this thing, they can keep on doing that.

I'll give you another thing that I think is important. Because of the immigration laws passed before I became President, 2½ million Hispanics will have the opportunity to become legal citizens of this country. I believe that immigration has enriched and strengthened America. But the rising tide of illegal immigration in States like California is sparking a disturbing hostility to the diversity that is clearly the future of America. And I hear people in California say, "Well, I'm against this because of all this illegal immigration problem." What I want to tell you is anybody who wants to go to Mexico for low wages can go regardless of NAFTA. If we don't raise incomes in Mexico and incomes in America by strengthening our ties, the illegal immigration problem will get worse, not better. And then you will have more of this highly destructive, emotional, counterproductive feeling rifling throughout our political system. And I don't think that's good.

I think America ought to revel in its diversity. We ought to embrace our diversity. When people go to Los Angeles County, they ought to be happy that there are 150 different racial and ethnic groups there, not worried about somebody else who might show up tomorrow. So we, we should produce the policy, whatever it is; we should pursue the policy that will reduce illegal immigration, keep legal immigration

going, and make Americans feel better about the diversity. Because without it, we'll never be what we ought to be, moving into the 21st century.

And let me say one last thing. A rich country in the world we're living in only grows richer, a rich country only grows richer by expanding its economic contacts beyond its borders. And we do not have the option to do what our friends across the Pacific and Japan did to build their economy—they don't even have the option of doing it anymore; they're going to have to quit—which is to sell everything to other people and not buy any of their stuff. We don't have that option.

So when I look at what's happening in the world and I see that Asia is the fastest growing part of the world and Latin America is the second fastest growing part of the world and Latin America is just here handy and starts on the south of our border with Mexico, the reason I want to do this over the long run is I want to keep the movement to democracy, I want to keep the movement for economic growth, I want Americans to prosper by helping our friends and neighbors in this hemisphere to build a stronger world. I think over the long run it will protect America's economic future.

Now, you don't have to agree. You don't have to agree. But I ask you if you disagree, don't win just because people are scared today, because we all know they're scared of losing their jobs. We all know people are alienated. But somebody's got to explain to me how people would be more likely to move their jobs to a place where they can move their jobs now if all they want to do is chase lower wages when the wages will be coming up, the environmental standards will be coming up, and people will be buying more American products. I believe it is in the interest of this country, again, not to turn away from the change but to embrace it, not because it will be easy, not because nobody will be hurt but because on balance we'll be better. We can never make in a world in which we live, which is always imperfect—we cannot make the perfect solution the enemy of the better solution. That is why I have embraced this course and why I hope others will as well.

Now let me just say one or two other things. I am excited about the upcoming referendum in Puerto Rico. Whatever they're for, I'm for. And I hope you are. I am excited about the prospects we have been given to promote de-

mocracy from Russia to the Middle East to Haiti. I am excited about the promise of change. I am profoundly disturbed about the problems we have.

The only thing I ask you to do is, even if you disagree with me, never run away from the problems. I don't understand why in the United States of America, when we've got the violence we've got on our cities, we can't pass the Brady bill in the Congress and take these assault weapons out of the hands of teenagers. I don't understand why we can't do that. I don't understand why we don't have an education and training system that from the moment someone loses their job—because now people don't normally get the jobs they lost back; they have to find another job—is no longer an unemployment system, but is a reemployment system, and from the get-go, from the first day, from the first week, people are told, "Here are the new jobs of the future, and here are funds to train for them." I don't understand that. But if you will help me and you leave me in, I'll fix those two problems, because you will fix them, not me. We'll do it together.

And I could give you example after example after example of this. The thing I always love

about being in the presence in any form or fashion of the Hispanic culture is that it is so life-affirming. It is so passionate. It is so real. It is so straightforward. I tell you, my friends, think about that event last Monday. Think about the passion, the feelings, the strength you have, what you worry about for your children and what you want for the future and say, if they can make peace, how can we in America walk away from our challenges? We're going to walk into them. We're going to conquer them. And the Hispanics in America are going to lead the way, lead the way in partnership with our administration and on every street and in every community of this country. I love what we can do, but I am troubled by the fact that we're not doing it. Let's seize every day we have to make the most of it. And always remember that peace agreement in the Middle East as a spur to us to make this country what it ought to be for our children.

Thank you, and God bless you all.

NOTE: The President spoke at 8:30 p.m. at the Washington Hilton.

Nomination for Assistant Secretaries of Commerce *September 16, 1993*

The President today announced his intention to nominate Raymond E. Vickery, Jr., as Assistant Secretary for Trade Development and Charles Meissner as Assistant Secretary for International Economic Policy at the Department of Commerce. The President also nominated Lauri Fitz-Pegado as Assistant Secretary and Director General of the Office of the U.S. and Foreign Commercial Service at Commerce.

"These talented individuals, experienced in their fields and committed to hard work, will offer strong support to Secretary Brown's team at Commerce," the President said. "I am pleased to have their help."

NOTE: Biographies of the nominees were made available by the Office of the Press Secretary.

Nomination for Deputy Director of the Peace Corps *September 16, 1993*

The President today announced his intention to nominate U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of Djibouti, Charles R. Baquet III, a former Peace Corps volunteer, as Deputy Director of the Peace Corps.

"Like Peace Corps Director Carol Bellamy, Charles Baquet is a former volunteer who knows firsthand the possibilities and problems facing