

Mar. 14 / Administration of William J. Clinton, 1994

Harshbarger, Massachusetts attorney general; A. Joseph DeNucci, Massachusetts auditor; Joan

Menard, Massachusetts Democratic Party chair; and Mayor Thomas Menino of Boston.

Remarks at the New England Presidential Dinner in Boston *March 14, 1994*

Thank you. Thank you, Mayor, for your strong and supportive words and your good leadership and for the wonderful, wonderful entry into Boston today. When you had the boat out there spewing water and all those thousands of people and all those young people from City Year out there cheering, I began to feel like a real President. *[Laughter]* I thank you, Lea Salonga, for traveling thousands of miles to sing for me tonight. And I'm glad I got to shake your hand. You're a great talent, and we were graced by your music. Thank you so much. I want to thank Alan and Fred and Elaine and my good friend Paul Montrone, in his absence, and all the rest of you who made this dinner possible tonight. I want to thank David Wilhelm for the hard work that he's given to the Democratic committee and for that fine film that makes my speech irrelevant. *[Laughter]* It was wonderful, wasn't it? It was a good movie. It reminded us of—*[applause]*

I thank Senator Kerry for his remarks and for his leadership, for his defense of the spirit and the objectives of this administration on the floor of the Senate and his leadership in so many areas but especially now in trying to enact a crime bill that is both tough and intelligent and his belief that we could enact a major piece of anticrime legislation that would really begin to attack some of the root causes of crime and to adopt some things that actually work to reduce the crime rate instead of just to raise the decibel level of the rhetoric that is in the air. John Kerry was the first Member of the Congress who convinced me we might actually be able to persuade people of both parties to approve a bill in the range of \$22 billion and that we might actually be able to put 100,000 more police officers on the street and take these assault weapons off the street and give our young people some things to say yes to and have adequate drug treatment and do some things that really make sense. The whole country is in his debt, as am I and are you.

I want to thank, too, as strongly as I can say, your senior Senator, Ted Kennedy. I'm glad that he seems to be well on his way to a strong reelection. You know, long before I had ever really thought about the obligations of this country in the area of health care, when I was the youngest elected Governor in America but not yet in office in 1978, the Democratic Party had a mid-year convention in Memphis. And I received a call from the White House when President Carter was in office, asking me if I would moderate a discussion of this issue featuring Joe Califano, the then Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare, and Senator Kennedy, neither of them being shrinking violets. *[Laughter]* I was 32 years old at the time and mortified. So of course I said I would do it. And people were there from all over the country. I only had to cross the Mississippi River from home to be there. But I remember—it's been 16 years ago now—as vividly as if it happened yesterday, when Ted Kennedy stood on that stage and said for the first time, I think, to a truly national audience that the health care that had been given his son when he was desperately ill should be available to every American. He said it then, and we're going to make it happen now.

The film was about what we did last year, only a little about what we're trying to do this year. I can say that in a couple of minutes and then make the one central point I wish to make to all of you tonight. Last year we had a very good year. This year we have to keep working on the economy. If we can keep the growth going, we'll have a very good year indeed. We've had 2.1 million new jobs in 13 months, 90 percent of them in the private sector—most job growth was in State and local government in some years of the 1980's, or at least a huge percentage of it was—and we want to keep that going. We want to pass health care, health security that is always there in a way that keeps what is best about health care, which you can appreciate in this shining tribute

to the American health care triumph, and fix what is wrong. We want to pass a comprehensive welfare reform bill that will liberate people from the dependence of a system that has aggravated some of the worst pressures in the breakdown of the family in this country. We want to pass this crime bill. We want to pass, as John Kerry said, a campaign finance reform bill, a lobby reform bill. We want to pass a comprehensive overhaul in the unemployment system, which is designed for a time which no longer exists. It used to be when people went on unemployment they needed a little money to get by on until the economy picked up again and they were called back to their old jobs. Now the huge majority of people who are unemployed don't get called back to their old jobs, they have to find new ones. It's wrong to tax employers to pay for an income system that's inadequate, that is leading nowhere. We need to change the whole system and begin immediately to prepare people when they lose their jobs for another—a different job, one in which they can succeed and win in the global economy. These are all things we need to do. And we mean to do them this year, in spite of the fact, or maybe because of the fact that it is an election year.

Now, this is a Democratic Party dinner, and it occurred to me that those of you who are here have supported this administration and me personally and the fine people who are associated with our efforts in spite of the fact that on April the 15th almost all of you will get a higher tax bill—[laughter]—because you know all the money is going to reduce the deficit and you know it's meant lower interest rates, record-high markets, new investment, and a growing economy.

As has already been said, our trading partners around the world beat on us for a decade to get the deficit down. If my new budget passes the Congress, and it's well on its way already, we'll have 3 years of deficit reduction for the first time since Harry Truman was President, and we will have laid the foundation for a strong private recovery.

These things are terribly important. But that's not the point I want to make tonight. The point I want to make tonight is that there have always been differences between Democrats and Republicans. And these differences have taken different forms at different times. On occasion, the Republican Party has been the party of true

and progressive change. The best example was, of course, the first and greatest Republican President, Abraham Lincoln. Another example was Teddy Roosevelt, who helped to usher in the modern era of new Presidents, of activist Presidents, a man who wanted to save much of our natural resources, a man without whom there would be no buffalo in America today, just for example, and many of our national parks would not be there, a man who understood the dangers of great concentrations of power, whether in Government or in the private sector; people like President Eisenhower, who really tried to build a bipartisan foreign policy to help to move us away from the military industrial complex but leave us strong enough to win the cold war. Even Richard Nixon, though he's been much maligned, signed the bill to create the Environmental Protection Agency and first proposed that all employers should contribute to their employees' health insurance so that everyone could be covered.

I say that to point out that there have been good and bad ideas embraced, I guess, by both parties at different times. I'm a Democrat by heritage, instinct, and conviction because I believe most of the time in American history we've been on the side of ordinary people, on the side of bringing people together, and on the side of the future. We have been the party of change in a constructive and profound way. I thought when I ran for President I would have the chance to enter one of these great debates and we would see what would happen, whether I was right and wrong or my ideas were right and wrong.

Almost from the beginning I saw a very different edge to the Republican Party in this time, not the party of Lincoln and Roosevelt or Eisenhower but the party dedicated just to being against whatever we were for and committed to the politics of personal destruction. They were so busy with it they even tried to look in my passport file in the campaign in '92, something that didn't bother me. I was happy to have them rummaging around in my passport file instead of coming up with a good idea that might sound better than one of my ideas. Let them go. Now, as you pointed out, they are at it again. They have a little health retreat, and they can't agree on a health care plan, so they come back and get at it again.

I just want you to know something. You look at the people that are in our administration;

they get up every day and try to make something good happen for America. Senator Kennedy mentioned my wife, well-known to many of you here because she went to Wellesley and spent a lot of time in Massachusetts, has just committed herself in a passionate way to trying to figure out how to solve this health problem to give ordinary people the chance to get health care. Let them come and debate her. Do they want to do that? No, they would rather take out after her. It saves them the trouble of having to come up with an alternative health care plan. The Vice President of the United States, I think the ablest and most influential person ever to hold that office and someone who has been a credit to this country, who cares passionately about what he is doing. Eli Segal from Boston—we passed the national service bill; it will stand as the symbol of what this administration tried to do. Did you see those kids holding that sign when we came in the harbor today, "Thank you for believing in the youth of America"? This is a big deal.

This is a very important time in our history, sweeping changes going through our economy and society, terrible problems that beg for honest debate from people of different perspectives. Even if we get the economy going, even if we provide health care to all, even if we revise the unemployment system, if we do all the things I said, how can we survive as a country if within a few years over half of our kids are born into families where there was never a marriage? How will we transmit the kinds of coherent values to our people? How can we expect the young people, if they are born into fairly chaotic circumstances where they're not isolated so someone can come in and help them, to behave in 15 years from now?

These are profound problems. They beg for debate. We need to think about new and different things in totally different ways than we have in the past. No one, even our party—let's be honest about it—we don't have all the answers. We need an honest debate about the future of family in America, about how we're going to rebuild our communities in America. People say they're concerned about crime and violence; they ought to be. But you tell me how you can avoid it if you have people living in square block after square block after square block where the family, the community, and the work base is broken down and where vacuums are created into which drugs and crimes, gangs

and weapons move. We need a serious debate about that.

We need a serious debate about the fact that wage earning—hourly wage earners have been working in this country for 20 years now with virtually no increase in their income and that every country—I just came from Detroit, from our G-7 jobs summit—every wealthy country in the world is now having trouble creating new jobs even when their economy is growing.

We have always known in the past that productivity was good for jobs and incomes. I came from a part of the country where everybody used to work on the farm. You can't go back more than one generation older than me without finding somebody in your family that was on the farm. The farm jobs went away; people went to Detroit and Chicago and got jobs in the plants. Those economic changes have always happened. And every time technology and productivity took away jobs in one sector, more were created in another sector. Now we find that these wealthy countries are really having trouble with the explosion of technology, the explosion of productivity, and the globalization of the economy creating new jobs. Is something new happening in world history? I don't think so; I just think there are different lags. But the point is no one knows for sure. This begs for honest political debate and genuine conflicts of ideas.

Why then are we confronted in this administration with an opposition party that just stands up and says, "No, no, no, no, no, no, no, no"? When I was a Democratic Governor and they had the White House, I constantly sought them out, engaged them in debate, offered to work with them on issues from education to welfare reform to crime to you name it. I never did them the way they are doing us in Washington, DC, today. It is wrong, and it is not good for the United States of America.

I'll tell you something else. The mayor talked about me being a marathon runner. The marathon comes from a certain place inside me. I am an old-fashioned, really old-fashioned American. I believe more than half the time, in the contest between good and bad, good wins. In the contest between truth and falsehood, the truth wins out. I believe that most people want something that will elevate them and bring them together with different people, instead of something that will demean them and divide them from others. That's what I believe.

I believe fundamentally in the common sense and the essential core goodness of the American people. Don't forget that Alexis de Tocqueville said a long time ago that America is great because America is good, and if America ever ceases to be good, she will no longer be great. We have to appeal to what is good in this country. And we have to ask people to face hard truths and debate hard issues and come together and think new thoughts about problems that we are, frankly, not solving today. That is what I wanted to do when I became President and what I am doing my best to do. And I am only sorry that too often, in too many ways, on too many days, it is a debate which engages only members of my party.

I will say this: Senator Kennedy has had some good success in getting a substantial number of Republican Senators to talk seriously about health care. We are having some help in dealing with the issues of crime. But this overriding negative, intensely personal, totally political, devoid-of-principle attack is not good for the country, and it is inconsistent with the tradition of Abraham Lincoln and Teddy Roosevelt.

If I ask you to go home tonight and make a list of the greatest Presidents who ever served here and the greatest things that were ever done in Washington for the American people, you would have members of both parties on your

list. But every one of them would have done something good for the American people, would have tried to elevate the dignity and the human potential of the men and women of this country, tried to give the children of this country a better future than their parents had.

I got into this work because that's what I wanted to do. And I am old-fashioned enough to believe that in every age and time the central purpose of our common political life will be to find new and important ways to get people together and to get things done so that we can elevate the meaning and content and direction of people's lives and do right by our children and by our future. That is what I think. And I'll tell you something. In 1994, in 1996, if there is only one party that believes that, the American people in droves will come to us.

Thank you, and God bless you all.

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:08 p.m. at the Boston Park Plaza. In his remarks, he referred to Mayor Thomas Menino of Boston; entertainer Lea Salonga; Alan Leventhal, Fred Seigel, Elaine Shuster, and Paul Montrone, dinner organizers; David Wilhelm, Democratic National Committee chairman; and Eli J. Segal, Chief Executive Officer, Corporation for National and Community Service.

Statement on Nominations for the Department of the Navy

March 14, 1994

I am pleased to announce that I have nominated Admiral Jeremy M. Boorda to succeed Admiral Frank A. Kelso II as Chief of Naval Operations.

Admiral Boorda is currently serving as Commander in Chief, U.S. Naval Forces, Europe/Commander in Chief, Allied Forces, Southern Europe where he is responsible for coordinating and planning NATO military actions over Bosnia-Herzegovina and in the Mediterranean and Adriatic Seas.

Admiral Boorda brings to the job of Chief of Naval Operations a keen appreciation of operational requirements in the post-cold-war world and an outstanding ability to work with our allies in complex and challenging circumstances. He

has distinguished himself as one of the foremost military leaders serving in the armed services today, and his counsel and guidance on the many national security issues facing our Nation will be of great value.

Admiral Boorda assumes the post of Chief of Naval Operations at an important time in the history of the United States Navy. I will depend on him to continue the progress that Admiral Kelso has made in restructuring the Navy to meet the new domestic and international security environments.

I have also nominated Vice Admiral Leighton W. Smith, Jr., U.S. Navy, to relieve Admiral Boorda and be promoted to the rank of admiral. As the former Director for Operations, U.S. Eu-