

Remarks at the Franklin D. Roosevelt 50th Anniversary Commemoration  
in Warm Springs, Georgia  
April 12, 1995

Thank you very much. Governor Miller, President Carter, other distinguished honorees, Commissioner Tanner, Mr. Barrett, Anne Roosevelt, and members of your family: Thank you so much for your wonderful remarks. And Arthur Schlesinger, thank you for yours. After the last three speakers, I see I don't have to worry about whether what I am about to say would be considered too political on this occasion. [Laughter] I am delighted to be joined here by two Members of Congress, Congressman Collins and Congressman Bishop; many State officials; and appropriately for this day, the Social Security Administrator, Shirley Chater. I thank the Morehouse Glee Club. I couldn't help thinking when I walked up here and heard them singing that President Roosevelt would have been happy to have had the opportunity to walk down these lanes and hear those melodic voices.

In the 50 years since Franklin Roosevelt died in this house behind me, many things have happened to our country. Many wonderful things have changed life forever for Americans and have enabled Americans to change life forever for people all across our planet. This is a time when we no longer think in the terms that people thought in then and perhaps a time when we cannot feel about each other or our leaders the way people felt then.

But I think it's important just to take a moment to remember that even though Franklin Roosevelt was the architect of grand designs, he touched Americans, tens of millions of them, in a very personal way. They felt they knew him as their friend, their father, their uncle. They felt that he was doing all the things he was doing in Washington to help them. He wanted them to keep their farms and have their jobs, have the power line run out by the house. He wanted them to be able to have some security in their old age and see their children come home in peace from war.

In my home State of Arkansas, the per capita income of the people was barely half the national average when Franklin Roosevelt began his work. And when he came there during the Depression, people were so poor that when they were preparing for him to come, there was lit-

erally not enough paint to paint the houses along his route. And so they all split the paint and painted the fronts of their homes so at least the President could see the effort they made. That's the way people felt.

My grandfather, who helped to raise me, was a man with a grade school education in a tiny southern hamlet who worked as a dirt farmer, a small storekeeper, and for an icehouse back before we had refrigerators and there really were iceboxes. He really thought Franklin Roosevelt cared about whether he had a job. And I never will forget the story he told me during the Depression when he came home—the only time in his life when he was unable to buy my mother a new dress for Easter, and he wept because he did not have \$2. He thought Franklin Roosevelt cared whether people like him could buy their children Easter outfits. That is the way people felt. And even into the 1960's, when as a young man I began to go from town to town working for other people who sought public office, there were people in the sixties who had pictures of President Roosevelt, in modest homes in tiny, remote towns, on their mantels or hanging on the wall because they thought he cared about them.

Like our greatest Presidents, he showed us how to be a nation in time of great stress. He taught us again and again that our Government could be an instrument of democratic destiny, that it could help our children to do better. He taught us that patriotism was really about pulling together, working together, and bringing out the best in each other, not about looking down our nose at one another and claiming to be more patriotic than our fellow countrymen and women.

Above all, he taught us about the human spirit. In the face of fear and doubt and weariness, he showed we could literally will ourselves to overcome, as he had done—and as has been already said so powerfully—in his own life. He led us from the depths of economic despair, through a depression, to victory in the war, to the threshold of the promise of the post-war America he unfortunately never lived to see.

He did all these things and so many more to change America and the world, a lot of things we just take for granted today, that even today nobody's tried to do away with, like the Securities and Exchange Commission, which safeguards our financial markets, or the Tennessee Valley Authority or the very emblem of the New Deal, Social Security.

He and his remarkable wife, Eleanor, whom we remembered together and who we must remember today, did a lot of things just to bring out both the problems and the potential of Americans. And he also changed America with a brilliant team. I saw here today Mr. Schlesinger, I was looking at Mr. Galbraith sitting out there, wondering how many of you were going back over your lives and remembering what you were doing then. I'm very honored to have as my Deputy Chief of Staff here Harold Ickes, whose father was President Roosevelt's Secretary of the Interior. Like me, this is his first visit to Warm Springs. But he has lived with the honor of that legacy for his entire life.

I think it's also important that we remember today that President Roosevelt helped to found the March of Dimes, and today marks the 40th anniversary of Dr. Salk's discovery of the polio vaccine, developed because of the work of the March of Dimes, which continues to the present day.

If I might pick up on something that Arthur Schlesinger and that Anne said, I think if President Roosevelt were here, he would be asking us, "Well, this is all very nice, and I appreciate the honor, but what are you doing today? What are you doing today?"

At the end of the war, he left us what may be his most enduring legacy, a generation prepared to meet the future—a vision most clearly embodied in the GI bill, which passed Congress in June of 1944 just a few days after D-Day but before the end of the war in Europe and in Asia. He wanted to give returning GI's a hand up. He really captured the essence of America's social compact. Those people that served, they had been responsible, and they were entitled to opportunity.

The GI bill gave generations of veterans a chance to get an education, to build strong families and good lives, and to build the Nation's strongest economy ever, to change the face of America, and with it, to enable us to change the face of the world. The GI bill helped to unleash a prosperity never before known.

In the fifties, the sixties, and the seventies, all kinds of Americans benefited from the economy educated veterans and their fellow Americans built. And we grew, and we grew together. Nothing like it had ever been seen before. Every income group in America, every racial group, all were improving their standing and growing together, not growing apart.

Somewhere around 20 years ago, that began to change, not because of anything that was wrong with the GI bill or wrong with the institutions we had put in place but because the world changed. The economy became more global. Our financial markets became more global. There was an information and a technological revolution which exploded the unity of America's economic progress. And all of a sudden, we began to grow apart, not together, even when the economy was growing. We divided growth from equality for the first time since Franklin Roosevelt became President, and it has caused a terrible slew of troubles for the American people over the last 15 to 20 years.

In the 1980's, our response—since Arthur Schlesinger said that President Roosevelt was for democratic capitalism, I think you could say that the response in the 1980's was conservative Keynesianism. That is, blame the Government and blame the past, but deficit spend under the title of tax cuts and tilt the tax cuts to the wealthiest Americans because it is their investment that creates jobs.

Well, the massive deficits did spur growth, but it gave us the first permanent Government deficit in the entire history of the United States. And the inequality among working people did not go away; instead, it got worse. Meanwhile, our investment in our people—the thing Franklin Roosevelt believed most in—began to slow down, even in education and training, because we decided that there was something wrong with public activity.

The result: We intensified the splits in our economy. We divided even the great American middle class as incomes stagnated, as people worked longer hours and slept less and spent less time with their children and still felt less secure. And at the same time, many good things were happening, but only to those who were prepared to seize the changes that we live with.

It is amazing that in America we could have more than half the people today living on the same or lower incomes than they were enjoying 15 years ago and still creating the largest num-

ber of new jobs and having the largest numbers of millionaires coming out of our economy than we have ever known, these two things existing side by side, the good and the bad.

If President Roosevelt were here, what would he see today? He would see a country leading the world's economy, producing millions of jobs with people literally afraid that their lives are moving away from them. He would see a world of turbo-charged capitalism in which it is possible to succeed economically, but millions of Americans don't know if they can hold their families and their communities and the disciplined rhythms of life together. He would see people who are confused, saying, "Well, if there is an economic recovery, why haven't I felt it? He would see people angry, saying, "I've worked hard all my life; why was I let go at the age of 50, and how am I supposed to send my kids to college?"

He would see people who are cynical, a luxury no one could afford when one in four Americans were out of work or when our very existence was at stake in the Second World War. Now we can afford the luxury, and we have it in abundance, saying, "Well, it doesn't make any difference, nothing we do makes any difference. If I hear good news, I know they're lying."

He would see, indeed, a country encrusted with cynicism. He would see an insensitivity on the part of some people who say, "Well, I made it, and why should I help anyone else? If you help someone, all you make is an ingrate." He would also see a profound sense of division in the American psyche, people who really do believe that if someone else does well, that's why I'm not doing so well, and in order for me to do well, someone else must not do that well. That was not Franklin Roosevelt. He was not cynical. He was not angry. He was not insensitive. He did not believe in division. And he certainly was not confused.

He believed that we had to pull together and move forward. He believed we always had to keep the American dream alive. Langston Hughes once said, "What happens to a dream deferred? Does it shrivel like a raisin in the sun, or does it explode?" For Franklin Roosevelt, it was neither.

My fellow Americans, there is a great debate going on today about the role of Government, and well there ought to be. F.D.R. would have loved this debate. He wouldn't be here defending everything he did 50 years ago. He wouldn't

be here denying the existence of the information age. Should we reexamine the role of Government? Of course we should. Do we need big, centralized bureaucracies in the computer age? Often we don't. Should we reassert the importance of the values of self-reliance and independence? You bet we should. He never meant for anybody, anybody, to become totally dependent on the Government when they could do things for themselves.

But should we abandon the notion that everybody counts and that we're going up or down together? Should we abandon the idea that the best thing we can do is to give each other a hand up, not a handout? Should we walk away from the idea that America has important responsibilities at home and abroad and we walk away from them at our peril? The answer would be, from him, a resounding no.

My fellow Americans, Franklin Roosevelt's first job was to put America back to work. Our big problem today is, Americans are back to work, but they feel insecure. They don't feel their work will be rewarded or valued. And we have to find a way to raise America's incomes by making Americans more productive and making this economy work in the way that President Roosevelt dreamed it would.

Everybody knows we have a Government deficit. I'm proud of the fact that we brought it down 3 years in a row for the first time since Mr. Truman was President. Everybody knows that, but let's not forget that we also have an educational deficit. Education is the fault line in America today. Those who have it are doing well in the global economy; those who don't are not doing well. We cannot walk away from this fundamental fact. The American dream will succeed or fail in the 21st century in direct proportion to our commitment to educate every person in the United States of America.

And so I believe if President Roosevelt were here, he would say, "Let's have a great old-fashioned debate about the role of Government, and let's make it less bureaucratic and more flexible. And those people in Washington don't know everything that should be done in Warm Springs." And he would say, "Let's put a sense of independence back into our welfare system." But he would also say, "Let's not forget that what really works in life is when people get a hand up, not a handout, when Americans go up or down together."

If you look at this great debate we're having in Washington with our twin deficits, the budget deficit and the education deficit, I say to you, we try to solve one without the other at our peril. We have brought the deficit down, and we will work to do it more. Congress and I, we will fight about what kinds of cuts we ought to have, but we'll get there and we'll bring it down some more. We already are running the first operating surplus in nearly 30 years, except for interest on the debt. And we will do better. But we cannot do it at the expense of education. We cannot do it at the expense of education.

There's a lot of talk about tax cuts. I say this, we have to worry about how much and who gets it and what for. We should not do it if we have to cut education. We should not do it if we have to explode the deficit. And if we're going to have a tax cut, we should do it in ways that lift the American people's income over the long run as well as the short run. We have to have—we have to have a sense that our future depends upon the development of our people. That's why I say, if we're going to have a tax cut, we must give people some tax relief for the cost of education. That is the most important tax cut we can have, and I will insist upon it and will not support a legislative bill that does not have it.

You know, everybody wants to have more disposable income, but what we don't want to have is disposable futures. So let us not sacrifice the future to the present. And let us not have a false choice between a budget deficit and an education deficit. We can have both.

I wish President Roosevelt were here. I wish he were just sort of on our shoulder to deride those who are cynical, those who are skeptical, those who are negative, and most of all, those who seek to play on fears to divide us. This country did not get here by permitting itself to be divided at critical times by race, by religion, by region, by income, you name it.

And just remember this: President Roosevelt died here, and they took his body on the train out, and America began to grieve. Imagine what the people looked like by the sides of the railroad track. Imagine the voices that were singing in the churches. They were all ages, men and women, rich and poor, black, white, Hispanic, and whoever else was living here then. And they were all doing it because they thought he cared about them and that their future mattered in common. They were Americans first. They were Americans first. That was his contract with America. Let it be ours.

Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:14 p.m. at the "Remembering Franklin D. Roosevelt" 50th anniversary commemorative service at the Little White House. In his remarks, he referred to Gov. Zell Miller of Georgia; Joe Tanner, commissioner, Georgia Department of Natural Resources; Lonice C. Barrett, director, Georgia State Parks and Historic Sites; Anne Roosevelt, granddaughter of Franklin D. Roosevelt; Arthur M. Schlesinger, Roosevelt biographer; and John Kenneth Galbraith, author and economist.

## Interview With Wolf Blitzer and Judy Woodruff of CNN

*April 13, 1995*

*Ms. Woodruff.* Mr. President, thank you for being with us.

*The President.* Glad to do it, Judy.

### *President's Goals and Republican Agenda*

*Ms. Woodruff.* You are now well over 2 years into your Presidency. The common, increasingly common, perception out there is that because of the successes of the center-stage role that Newt Gingrich and the House Republicans have played, that your Presidency has been somehow diminished, made less relevant because of all

the activity and the agenda-setting that they've been doing.

*The President.* Well, they had an exciting 100 days, and they dealt with a lot of issues that were in their contract. But let's look at what happens now. The bills all go to the United States Senate, where they have to pass, and then I have to decide whether to sign or veto them.

So now you will see the process unfolding. And I will have my opportunity to say where I stand on these bills and what I intend to