

Today the Republican leaders in Congress face a similar choice. They can go it alone and we will end up going nowhere, or they can come on down to the White House and we will get a good job done for the American people together. That's how our system works best. That's how we should reform health care and help working families.

Every United States Senator, for example, every single one, 100 of them, voted to pass the bipartisan Kennedy-Kassebaum health care reform bill. Now, Republicans can work with us to make that health care more available to 43 million Americans by passing a bill that says that you ought to be able to keep your health insurance if you change jobs or lose a job, and you ought not to be denied health insurance just because somebody in your family has been sick. We can agree on that, or the Republicans can send me a more partisan bill that has special provisions for special interests.

The Republican leadership can work with us to raise the minimum wage, or they can go

on ignoring working families and moderates in their very own party, and do their best to obstruct even a vote on the minimum wage.

Now, if you look at what's been done that is good in the last year and 4 months—this year's budget, the antiterrorism bill, the telecommunications bill, the lobby reform—every single good thing has been done because Democrats and Republicans in Congress worked together and worked with me. That's how to get things done.

The only way for us to move forward is to do it together. That's the right thing to do on balancing the budget, the right thing to do on health care reform, the right thing to do on the minimum wage. That is what we are here for: to move America forward. So let's get together, and let's get to work.

Thanks for listening.

NOTE: The address was recorded at 5:21 p.m. on April 26 at the DuPont Hotel in Wilmington, DE, for broadcast at 10:06 a.m. on April 27.

Remarks to the National Association of Realtors

April 27, 1996

The President. Thank you very much. Thank you, Art and Michael, Robert, Russ, ladies and gentlemen. Thanks for the warm welcome.

Audience member. Go, Bill! [Laughter]

Audience member. Four more years! [Laughter]

The President. Let me say that I've been trying to convince the Congress it's too early to start all that. So you've got to help me set a good example. [Laughter]

I am delighted to be here and delighted to be with you. I'm delighted to be here once again to express my support for your work every day, and my thanks for the support you have given to me in our common efforts to rebuild this economy and to increase homeownership.

Spring is the traditional start of the home-buying season, and it's a time of hope and, at least for us here in Washington, it came not a day too soon. We suffered through a tough winter, and we thought the spring would never come. But I was glad to see that in March, that home resale activity was up in every region

of the country, and there was a 16 percent jump in single-family home sales last month, compared to March of '95. I hope that is a harbinger of a good spring, a good summer, and a good year for you and for the United States.

Art said something—I didn't even have a note on this, I wasn't going to talk about it because I hear everybody is not interested in foreign policy, but I want to tell you something. You made a remark about our common understanding of the importance of homeownership in building our democracy. As I'm sure most of you know, I just came back from a trip to Korea, Japan, and Russia, and I had an astonishing experience in Russia, in addition to being there at a nuclear summit where we made some real strides forward in our unfinished work of removing any danger of nuclear explosions from the face of our children's future. I had an opportunity to meet with 12 leaders from very different political factions in Russia, as they are getting ready to have another election there for President. And it was fascinating. First of all,

they had a virtual brawl of an argument right there in front of me, which I liked. They behaved just like our politicians do. [Laughter] Made me think they were kind of healthy. [Laughter]

But it was very interesting to see that one of the things that is happening to change that country, to make more people more devoted to democracy and freedom, is the ownership of property. And it is very interesting to see that in the areas where there is more ownership of property, where people, for example, own more of their own businesses, they're more committed to democracy and to economic reform and to the promise of free enterprise, even with all of its troubles as they start. And so now they're trying to get more homeowners, more property ownership out in the rural areas of the country.

And I say that just to say a lot of times we just take it for granted that once you start a democracy, it's just such a wonderful thing we just keep on with it. And we realize that—I mean, we forget that this is the oldest continuous democracy in human history, and it's not all that easy to start one and it's not all that easy to save one. And a lot of times people want to lay down the burden of governing themselves and making all these hard decisions and living under the rule of law and enduring defeat as well as victory in elections and in other big decisions.

And I was there still watching this very great country, with its rich and profound history, essentially still in the process of defining what it wishes to be in the 21st century. And it struck me so clearly there that giving people a piece of the country for themselves, whether it was in the private ownership of a building, private ownership of a farm, private ownership of a home, private ownership of a business, that is the key to making everybody feel that they can really win, even if their side doesn't win every election or if every issue doesn't go their way. So that liberty, free speech, and free elections and personal liberties should include—indeed, I would argue must include—the recognition of private ownership of property in order to make sure that democracies can last. I wish them well, and I know that you do, but I thought you'd be interested in that.

We take this country and everything good about it for granted, and we take our system for granted. And sometimes we don't even show

up on election day and we say—nearly every citizen does say—from time to time says foolish things like, well, it doesn't really matter what happens, and all that. We just think it will go on. But one reason it probably will go on is that we all have a piece of America. And even people who don't own property still have a piece of America because they know they can, they know that we all can participate in this.

And so when you see the next couple of months unfold in Russia and you watch that and you see what happens to their democracy, you ought to just think about what they have in common with us. And as they move to have more control in their—individuals and families and communities—over their future, a lot of it will be because they have a personal, private stake in the public future of a free country.

Four years ago when I sought this job I am now privileged to hold, things weren't so good for you or for the rest of the country. Our economy was down; unemployment was high; the deficit was exploding; the debt had quadrupled in just 12 years. I wanted to change the course of this country, and I knew we had to do it, first of all, by getting economic growth back by driving interest rates down. And that meant that we had to do something about the deficit. But to me it was part of a vision that I have about what I want our country to look like in the 21st century and how I want America to be perceived by all of its citizens.

I want this country to be a place where everybody who is willing to work hard and obey the law has a chance to live out their dreams without regard to their race or their region or their station they were born to in life. I want this country to be a place that is coming together, not being driven apart, even though we're rapidly becoming the most diverse democracy in the world. Los Angeles County alone has 150 different racial and ethnic and religious groups within one county. But if we can come together and meet our challenges based on shared values, instead of being driven apart, that's a guarantee of America's strength.

And I want us to continue to lead the world as the greatest force for freedom and peace and security and prosperity, because whether we like it or not, we're living in a global economy and we can't run away from it. So we'd better try to shape it; we'd better try to have more democracies and more people who want to work with us and more people who are com-

mitted to finding nonviolent solutions to their own problems, as well as to the problems that affect us all.

We've seen it lately in the great debate we've had the world over on terrorism. And we know now that in this great open world we're living in, with all of its opportunities, the organized forces of evil can cross national boundaries. You can have a terrorist that's homegrown, or you can have a terrorist that is tied to the forces beyond your borders, as we did at the World Trade Center. And every country is facing these kinds of challenges.

So I want all those things for our country. But I know it all begins by giving individuals and families the power to make the most of their own lives. And we could never have done that unless we started by reversing the disastrous fiscal condition of this country by bringing that deficit down and getting interest rates down and promoting economic growth, while continuing to invest in the things that we all know we have to invest in, like education and infrastructure and environmental protection and the integrity of our medical programs, so that the country can grow together.

Now, that's what I tried to put together in that 1993 economic plan. And this organization supported that, and I will be eternally grateful. But it worked. I predicted that if we implemented it we would cut the deficit in half and generate 8 million new jobs. Well, last month the Congressional Budget Office said that by the end of this year the deficit will be less than half of what it was 4 years ago, and we already have 8½ million new jobs. That's something you can be proud of.

This country is enjoying the lowest combined rates of unemployment and inflation in what used to be called the "misery index" in 27 years. For 3 years in a row we've had a record number of new businesses started and—I like this statistic—a record number of new self-made millionaires, not people who were inheriting their wealth but people who made it the old-fashioned way in America. Our telecommunications and auto industries are once again leading the world. We've halted finally—and this may, over the long run, be the most important thing of all—we have finally halted a 10-year-long slide in average hourly earnings. And most important to you, of course, as has already been said, homeownership is at a 15-year high.

The Government has been reduced in size and it has been reformed so that it is beginning to work better and cost less. I'll just give you one example. The Small Business Administration has cut its budget by over 25 percent and doubled its loan volume. And I'm very proud of that. It's the smallest your Federal Government—as you come here to Washington this month, it's the smallest it has been since 1965. *[Applause]* Thank you.

By the end of this year it will be the smallest it has been since 1963. And yet, we are still working to try to do better. There's been a quiet revolution in the relationship of the National Government not only to the private sector, but to State and local governments. There's been a lot of debate in Washington, for example, about what kind of welfare reform legislation we ought to sign. But I think there's a broad consensus in America that the welfare system ought to empower people to take responsibility for their own lives, not just support people forever who ought to be supporting themselves.

We had some differences here about how that ought to be done. I have a very strong conviction that most people—based on my 12 years as a Governor, I have a very strong conviction that most people on welfare are dying to get off of it if they can be given the ways to work and support themselves and they don't have to hurt their kids. So I'm for a system that is very, very tough on work, very tough on child support enforcement, but is good to the kids, has child care and other support for the children. It ought to be pro-work and pro-family. After all, most of you had to work and raise your families. Most Americans are working and raising children. So what we want is an America where everybody can succeed at home and at work. And if we have to choose one or the other, we get in a lot of hot water because none of us have any more important job than raising our own children well. So that's what we're striving for.

But anyway, you might be interested to know while all this hullabaloo about the legislation has been going on, we have made over 50 agreements with 37 States to get them out from under destructive Federal rules and regulations and let them require people who can work to work. Seventy-three percent of the people on welfare in this country are under welfare reform today, and that's a good thing.

But I want to talk to you today about the paradoxes of this good news, because you have all seen the paradoxes. You know, for example—I mean, if I had told you this 3 years ago, let me ask you if you would have found it hard to believe—if I had said to you, look, you support my economic plan and in 3 years and 4 months we'll have 8½ million new jobs, we'll cut the deficit by more than half, we'll have the lowest combined rates of unemployment and inflation in 27 years, highest homeownership in 15 years; but wages for the bottom half of the work force would be more or less stagnant, about what they were 15 years ago, and there will be places in our inner cities and rural areas that won't have any new investment, and there will be a lot of people that look like me, 50-year-old white guys, that will be being downsized at big companies just when they're trying to send their kids to college, and they won't know what to do and how to get another job paying anything like what they were making, and there will be a lot of women and people of color going through the same thing, but there are a lot of these big companies—and they'll be out of work for a while—and we'll cut the inflation rate in health care dramatically by having more competition, but we'll still have a lot of people who won't be able to get health insurance because they work for small businesses and it's too expensive, or because they can't take it from job to job with them—you'd say, well, that doesn't make sense, it doesn't compute.

The reason it's happening is that we're going through the period of most profound economic change we've been in 100 years, since we've moved from farm to factory and from the country to the city, as a general rule. Now, we're moving from a cold war set of regional economies in the world to a global economy, and every kind of work is more dominated by information and technology, including yours, than it was 5 or 10 years ago. If you were to go home with me in Arkansas at planting time or harvest time you'd see people driving around in farm equipment with computers, maybe with software in it that they designed themselves.

So with all these changes, what has happened? A lot of work that used to be done by a lot of people can now be done by a few people. And all organizations need fewer people passing orders down and information back up. And there's an enormous mobility in technology and money and information and management.

And that's what's creating all these incredible opportunities for people that I just reeled off. But if you happen to be on the wrong side of it on a given day, it can also dislocate your life.

And it happened 100 years ago. When we became an industrial country, there were people who came in from the country and went to cities and got jobs in factories and overnight became middle-class citizens—for the first time in their lives could afford to have their own home and send their kids to good schools and have a decent retirement, maybe even take a vacation for the first time. But there were also tens of thousands of people living in tenement houses in these cities, virtually without the means to support themselves, because when you have this kind of upheaval you have some bad along with the good.

And what we have to do is to find a way to grow this economy fast enough to keep America generating these new jobs, but also give people the chance to raise their families in dignity, to get incomes up, to be able to afford to buy their own home, to be able to have access to education for a lifetime if they have to change jobs and access to health care they can carry around with them from job to job and access to retirement savings that they can carry around with them from job to job, so that we can compose family life and community life and still keep the American job machine growing.

That is the challenge of the moment, and you will play a big role in that. I think you understand that. That is what I hope so much that in this election year we can have an honest debate about. We don't need another stale debate about yesterday's issues, or this one's an alien and the other one ought to be disqualified and all that kind of stuff. We ought to actually have an honest discussion about which path to the future we're going to take, because no great country has solved this problem. Indeed, no other country has done anything nearly as well as the United States has in generating new jobs. But we have to say, even with all these jobs, we need to have a really permanently growing economy that is pro-family and pro-community and that gives everybody a chance to live up to their dreams. That is the challenge we all face as Americans today.

Now, I believe that homeownership is a big part of that. You know that and I do, too. So we ought to balance the budget, but I don't

think that we should do it in a way that undermines the ability of people to own their own home. If we can simplify the Tax Code, I'm all for it. But I don't think we ought to adopt a flat tax that will raise taxes on everybody making less than \$100,000 a year and put homeownership out of the reach of all the people in those categories.

Your president has already mentioned that the last time I spoke to you in Anaheim in 1994, I asked you to work with Secretary Cisneros to develop a national homeownership strategy that will take us up to two-thirds of the American people in their own homes, 8 million new homeowners by the end of the century. And we are well on our way to getting there because of the 56 major housing and finance groups that have joined us. I want to thank you for that.

I also want to thank you for your support of FHA, and I want to ask you to continue to support it. Again, there's always an argument for doing anything that will save money to help us to balance the budget. But we don't want to do anything that will undermine our ability to grow the economy. And if you want hard working people on modest incomes to have a chance to be pro-work and pro-family, lower income people have got to have access to buy modestly priced homes. That's why we shouldn't do anything to wreck FHA. And I hope you'll stay with us on this.

Last June, Secretary Cisneros and I were joined by representatives of this partnership, including people from your organization, at the White House. We announced 100 specific actions that we can take to make homeownership more affordable, to target underserved populations, to educate those who haven't considered becoming homeowners. Now, we've now got this national homeownership rate, at the end of the first quarter of 1996, up to 65.1 percent. That's the highest rate since 1981 and the sharpest increase, as you heard earlier, in 30 years. We can make it. We can get up to two-thirds of the American people in their own homes by the end of this decade.

Beginning next week, HUD and FHA will launch the next phase of this effort, a grassroots outreach and education campaign designed to help millions of new Americans become homeowners. The cornerstone is a new toll-free number to provide instant information on the wide variety of home-buying help that HUD offers.

We're going to launch a series of home-buying seminars in schools in over 20 markets across the country, to bring together real estate professionals, lenders, governmental and nonprofit organizations to help potential first-time buyers gain an understanding of the process. Outreach and PSA's will show how FHA can open the door to homeownership.

I don't need to tell you about how important that is. And again, I want to thank you for helping. But let me say that the most important thing we can do to help you is to continue to grow this economy. And the most important thing that we can do to continue to grow the economy is to keep the interest rates down by finishing the unfinished business of balancing the Federal budget in a way that is consistent with our values and our long-term economic interests.

Now, yesterday I signed a bipartisan budget that will cover the Government's operations for the rest of this year. We fought about it for 6 months. But I would have gladly signed the budget I signed yesterday on the first day of the new budget year. It was a year of intense and heated debate, but finally the Republicans and the Democrats in the Congress and the White House came together and we crafted an agreement that is good for the American people.

First, the budget I signed for this year keeps the deficit on a downward path. We're now cutting the deficit for the 4th year in a row for the first time since Harry Truman was the President of the United States. The budget cuts billions of dollars in spending and eliminates outright over 200 Government programs. I bet you don't miss a one of them. *[Laughter]* You know, while I was a Governor, every 2 years I'd eliminate a government agency just to see if anybody complained. And I never got the first letter. *[Laughter]*

But let me say that the budget we adopted also upholds our values and keeps my pledge that this budget honors our commitments to our elderly, to our children, and to our future. It invests enough to keep environmental protection going in a responsible way. It invests enough to keep our commitments in education and to keep opening the doors of college education wider, to keep striving for higher standards in education, to keep more kids coming into these Head Start programs. It does the right thing there. It protects the integrity of the Medicare and Medicaid programs while understanding

that we have to do things to lower the inflation rate in them. That's what it did for this year.

Now, this is just a one-year budget. When you hear us talk about the balanced budget up here, that's a multiyear budget plan. And now it's time to finish that job. Earlier this year I proposed a plan to balance the budget, and Congress' own economists have now certified that it will do so in 7 years. The Republicans in Congress have their own balanced budget plan that is now different from the one that I vetoed several months ago. If you laid my plan and their plan side by side, you would find enough cuts in common to both plans to balance the budget and still provide a modest tax cut, stuff we have agreed on already in common spending reductions. The ingredients, therefore, for a balanced budget are clearly at hand.

Are there other things we disagree on? You bet there are. We disagree about the details of how Medicare should be changed. We disagree about certain specific things in the area of environmental policy. We have big disagreements about whether we should abandon our commitment to put 100,000 police on the street—I don't think we should—or whether we should cut back on a college loan program that's making the loans more affordable to our kids. I don't think we should do that.

But if you're just talking about balancing the budget, there is more than enough savings in common to both these plans to do that and provide a modest tax cut right now. All we need to do is to sit down and make the agreement. And I made it clear that I want to meet with the leaders of Congress as soon as possible. I'm willing to meet with a big group of lawmakers or a little group of lawmakers, with the leaders or the followers or the caucuses or the bipartisan groups or any group of them. When Senator Dole suggested last week, perhaps in jest, that he thought the two Presidential candidates ought to sit down and work it out, I accepted within 10 minutes of hearing the offer. I'll do it any way. We can cut it flat around. There's not that much difference, anyway. But the fact is that we ought to do it. We should not have a work stoppage here in April because there's an election in November. We ought to stay at the job and get the job done.

Again I say, while you're here I hope you will urge us—you don't have to take sides in all the details. You don't have to say, the Presi-

dent is right. But I hope your voice will be loud and clear that the time is now, not next year, now, to pass a genuine, compassionate, but tough bipartisan balanced budget plan to keep these interest rates coming down and this economy growing. You will benefit from it, but so will all the rest of America.

Let me say this: In spite of all the fights that we have up here, this budget agreement that I signed was not the only good thing that's happened in the last year and 4 months coming out of the Congress. But they all have something in common. Just a few days ago, I signed an antiterrorism bill that will dramatically increase the capacity of your Government to fight terrorism. A few weeks ago, I signed a telecommunications bill which will create hundreds of thousands of new high-wage jobs in the telecommunications industry and keep America leading in many sectors of that important part of our economy. Just a few days ago, the United States Senate passed 100 to zero the Kassebaum-Kennedy health care reform bill which simply says you ought to be able to keep your health insurance if you move from job to job and you ought to be able to buy it, even if someone in your family has been sick. That's what it says.

Now, all those things, those good things that have happened that I laud the congressional leadership of the other party for supporting, have just one thing in common. Every one of them has one thing in common. They were passed with bipartisan support, and they were negotiated in good faith between the President and the Congress. In other words, we put the public interest over short-term political advantage. And because the right thing was done, everybody was better off. Now, that is what we ought to do on this budget.

I remember once in the heat of the cold war, President Kennedy said in his Inaugural Address, "Let us never negotiate out of fear. But let us never fear to negotiate." That is my message to the Congress. Let's get to work and do this job for the American people.

Beyond the budget, I want you to know—a lot of you clapped when I talked about the Kassebaum-Kennedy health care bill. The Senate version passed 100 to nothing. Why? Because it's a clean, simple bill designed to achieve those two objectives. The House version of the bill was far more controversial. Why? Because there were certain specific interests that wanted

other things in the bill. They honestly believe it would be good for America. A lot of the rest of us don't think it would be good; we think it would do more harm than good.

My question to you is, since you all clapped for the two things and they passed 100 to nothing, I urge you again, say to the Congress: Pass that bill clean; don't clutter it up with things we disagree about. These are big things. This will help millions and millions of people. Pass a clean, good bill that has bipartisan support that will help everybody in America. It will be good for America. There's no politics in it if we all do it together. That's the right thing for the country in health care and in the budget. And I ask for your support for that as well.

Let me say in closing that I ask you again to ask yourselves, what do you want America to look like in the 21st century? What are you working for? What do you want your children and grandchildren to feel like when they get up every morning? What kind of world do you want them to live in?

If you want them to be able to live out their dreams if they're willing to work hard for it; if you want them to live in a country that's still the strongest force in the world for peace and freedom and security; if you want them to live in a country where we meet our challenges together, no matter how diverse we are, because we share the same values, then we have to keep in mind two things. First of all, we have to give every American the capacity to make good choices and be rewarded for work; everybody's got to have the ability to do it. There's a lot of talk about empowerment in Washington. It's a buzzword today. I love that word, but it means more than choice. It means the ability to seize the choice you want to make.

And the second thing we've got to do is to do it together.

We are moving into a new age. The old categories in which we divided ourselves do not give us easy answers to these new challenges. As I said before, there's not a country in the world that's solved the problem of economic growth—that gives everybody a chance to participate in it, that deals with the downsizing, the areas that don't get investment, the stagnation of wages among people that don't have a lot of education. We're trying to come to grips with that.

But we cannot do it in the old, highly intensely partisan way. That is doomed to failure because we are moving into a new era. We have to break new ground. We have to be willing to give up on some of the things that we used to hold onto, and grab onto each other and work together and solve these problems. And we have to be animated by the vision we have of what we want America to look like. Homeownership has to be a part of it. A growing economy has to be a part of it. A more unified sense of our ability to work together through our diversity has to be a part of it. But it begins by saying we have to put the public interest ahead of short-term politics. I ask for your support as Americans for that goal.

Thank you, and God bless you all.

NOTE: The President spoke at 3:45 p.m. in the ballroom at the Sheraton Washington Hotel. In his remarks, he referred to Art Godi, president, Michael Graeper, public policy forum chair, Robert Galiano, public policy forum vice chair, and Russ Booth, 1996 president-elect, National Association of Realtors.

Remarks at the 25th Anniversary Reception for the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts

April 27, 1996

That's the most attractive introduction I've ever had. *[Laughter]*

Ladies and gentlemen, welcome, welcome to the White House and welcome here for this occasion. We're delighted to join in the 25th anniversary celebration. And I want to say a

special word of welcome to the members of the Kennedy family and to thank them for remaining tireless in their efforts to preserve, promote, and honor our Nation's culture.

The Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts prospers today as our national cultural institu-