

background, or their religion has got to stop. We have got to stop it. We have got to stop it. Now, you don't have to guess about this; look around the rest of the world. Which road do you want to walk into the future? And I know that either I or my successors will make some mistakes in our judgments about what the United States should do around the world. But basically, it is right for us to continue to reach out to other countries. It is right for us to support peace and freedom and to try to expand our own prosperity by expanding that of others. It is right for us to be partners with other countries, even when we're tired and we want to lay our burdens down, because it's the only way to fight terrorism, the only way to fight drug dealing, the only way to fight organized crime; it is right to do that. So you get to decide about that, which road will you walk into the future.

And I want to ask you when you leave here tonight to think about what else you can do for the next 6 months. I appreciate the money you've given Bob Torricelli and the Democratic Party and our efforts. I am grateful for that. But it is not enough, because the American people are trying to get a grip on this period of change. They're trying to understand what's going on, and you can help.

And it's exciting. You should feel privileged to live in this time. Believe me, there's a lot

more good than bad in it. Believe me, if we do the right things, the children that are here in this audience will have the opportunity to live out their dreams more than any previous generation of Americans ever has. You should be happy and proud to have the responsibility of citizenship at this time.

And so I ask you as you leave tonight to think about it: What do you want America to look like for your children and grandchildren, and what are you willing to do to make it happen? And what do we have to do in Washington to help everybody have their chance at the American dream in a country that's going forward together? That is what is at stake.

I think I know what road the American people will walk into the future if they understand what the choices are. You must help your fellow Americans understand the choices.

Thank you, God bless you, and good night.

NOTE: The President spoke at 8:30 p.m. in the Old Central New Jersey Railroad Terminal at Liberty State Park. In his remarks, he referred to comedienne Whoopi Goldberg; Donald L. Fowler, national chairman, Democratic National Committee; James E. Florio and Brendan Byrne, former Governors of New Jersey; jazz musician Peter Duchin; and Raymond J. Lesniak, chairman, Clinton/Gore Campaign Committee, New Jersey.

Remarks on the Legislative Agenda and an Exchange With Reporters May 8, 1996

The President. Good afternoon. Today I want to make a brief statement about the work that Congress and I can do together in the next 90 days. The next 3 months can be a time when we sign into law measures that will truly help us to meet our challenges, protect our values, and move our country forward together.

But right now, Congress is facing a logjam. The Democrats and I believe we must raise the minimum wage, which is nearing a 40-year low. The Republicans want a temporary reduction in the gas tax. There's only one fair way to break this logjam. Congress should pass the minimum wage increase clean, and if Republicans want a temporary reduction in the gas

tax, then Congress should pass that clean. That is how we can break the logjam and then get on with the other crucial work at hand.

There's still time for us to balance the budget while protecting our basic values. We can reform welfare, cut taxes, double the size of our Border Patrol, and make sure our people are able to keep their health insurance if they change jobs or if someone in the family gets sick. All this legislation is ready to go right now. Much of it passed with broad support and by large margins. All Congress has to do is send it to me, and we'll be in business. But Congress must send it to me clean.

I'm very concerned by reports that some Republicans in Congress want to ruin these good, bipartisan bills by attaching to them bad proposals that shouldn't be there in the first place. They want to load the bills up with poison pills, measures the Republicans are inserting in the legislation to make sure I will veto it, so they can pretend it's not just the poison pill I'm against but the bill itself.

For example, they know I would sign a welfare reform bill if they sent it to me by itself. But they're determined to link welfare reform to Medicaid changes that cut coverage to children, to pregnant women, to the elderly, and to families with children with disabilities. Or they link it to a tax increase on working people by cutting the earned-income tax credit.

They do that in hopes of provoking a veto, so they can run negative ads in the fall accusing me of being against welfare reform. That's what I mean by poison pill. It may be good politics, but it's not good for the American people.

So I urge Senator Dole and Speaker Gingrich and the Republicans in Congress: Keep the legislation free of poison pills. I say to Republicans in Congress: Work with me to pass welfare reform, a balanced budget, a tax cut, an increase in the minimum wage, health care and immigration reform, without inserting deadly, poison-pill provisions. Join me in 3 months of progress, not 3 months of partisanship.

Let me be clear. If we want a balanced budget, pass it without the poison pill of cutting education or the environment. If we want welfare reform, pass it without the poison pill of cutting the earned-income tax credit and thereby raising taxes on working families, without the poison pill of ending guaranteed Medicaid coverage for poor children, pregnant women, the elderly, or families with children with disabilities. If we want health insurance reform, leave out the poison pill of nationwide, unrestricted, permanent medical savings accounts. If we want to raise the minimum wage, do it without the poison pill of undermining workers' rights. If we want immigration reform, pass it without the poison pill that slams shut the schoolhouse door in the face of innocent children.

Finally, I ask the Republicans in Congress to consider something else. This is the first time your party has controlled both Houses of Congress at the same time since 1954. What is the record you will present to the American people and leave for history? When you have worked

with me in a bipartisan fashion, we have done positive things for the American people: a fine telecommunications bill; tough antiterrorism legislation; honest lobbying reform; a budget that gives our country its 4th straight year of deficit reduction while protecting education, the environment, Medicare, and Medicaid. Will this be the record we build on, or will you go your own way again, leaving the American people with a memory of extremism, deadlock, and Government shutdowns?

It's no secret to anybody that this is an election year, but there will be plenty of time for all the politics in the world after we do the work we were sent here to do. So let us treat these next 3 months as the end of the legislative session and not as the beginning of the election season.

Senator Dole and Speaker Gingrich and the Republicans in Congress, I ask you to abandon the strategy of veto in favor of making this a season of progress.

Q. Now, you know that your statement will be taken as a very political one, but are you really saying that you will sign a bill to repeal the tax cut if it doesn't have the minimum wage, or will you veto it otherwise?

The President. What I'm saying is that we have a logjam here. I believe the price of fuel should come down, and I believe it will come down. The price of oil has dropped about \$3 a barrel since I announced the modest release from the petroleum reserve and the Energy Department announced its actions, and then, independently, the Justice Department announced its actions. There is still some backlog in the refinery capacity, and that's going to take some time for it to manifest itself in prices at the pump.

But if they want a temporary reduction in the gas tax, the way to do it is to end the logjam, give us a clean vote on the minimum wage increase. We should increase the minimum wage and pass their temporary reduction of the gas tax. But you know, raising the minimum wage is very important to a lot of us and, more importantly, it's very important to millions and millions of working Americans.

And we have got a logjam here, so I have once again come forward and said, "Okay, I'm willing to do my part to break the logjam. Let's do both." And that's the right thing to do.

1996 Election

Q. You seem to be asking the Republicans to put aside politics for 3 months. Will you ask the Democratic National Committee not to run the highly negative ads against Senator Dole that it has been running, and say that no Clinton/Gore money will be spent on these types of negative ads?

The President. Well, first of all, I'm not asking the Republican committee or Senator Dole to refrain from politics. I'm not asking him not to make his speeches. I'm not asking him to refrain from differentiating himself from me. I'm not asking them to refrain from raising and spending money any way they choose, although I do think we should pass the campaign finance reform bill.

So I'm not asking them to do that. They may do whatever they choose. All I'm saying is, when we have worked together in a bipartisan fashion, we've gotten progress. We now have huge, broad areas of agreement here. And I have never let the areas of disagreement affect my willingness to work with them to achieve agreement. And that's all I'm asking. I'm asking them to take the same position.

Legislative Agenda

Q. Mr. President, I'm not sure we got an answer to Helen's [Helen Thomas, United Press International] first question, and that is, would you sign a repeal of the gas tax if there were no increase in the minimum wage? And aren't you just doing the same kind of linkage that you have said Republicans shouldn't do all along, even as far back as the Government shutdowns are concerned?

The President. No, because what they're doing here is refusing even to give us a vote. And Senator Dole has refused even to give a vote on raising the minimum wage, or he wants to put this poison pill in it that will undermine workers' rights.

So the Democrats in the Senate are quite united. They have never been treated like this before, and they did not treat the Republicans like this before. And they have not abused the filibuster in their minority position the way the Republicans did for 2 years solid in 1993 and 1994. They have not done any of that. But they're saying they are sick and tired of seeing millions and millions of American working families get the shaft from a refusal to even schedule a vote.

So what I'm saying is, we've got a logjam in the Congress. The two parties are at loggerheads, and I'm offering a way to fix the logjam. And that's the way to do it. Let's just vote on both of them clean.

Q. First, would you, in fact, sign the gas tax bill? And secondly, if the minimum wage measure is as important to you and your party as you say it is, why did you and your party not propose it when you had control of the Congress?

The President. The reason we didn't is that in the first year—let me just say, I have always been on record in favor of minimum wage increases that more or less keep up with inflation. But in the very first year, keep in mind what I did, we doubled the earned-income tax credit and made it refundable and basically put ourselves on a track where we're going to take working families with children out of poverty.

But meanwhile, when it became apparent to me that the minimum wage was dropping to a 40-year low, it was obvious we had to increase it. And I had no reason to believe that this would be a big partisan issue. I mean, even Republicans had been willing in the past to vote for a minimum wage increase; it was only when they got into the majority that they decided it was a terrible idea. And so I had no reason to believe that they wouldn't. We did the first things first: We doubled the earned-income tax credit first, and then I asked for an increase in the minimum wage.

Now, I believe that we can still get this done. You know, the last time we voted on a minimum wage, there was a Republican President, and a lot of Republican Members of Congress voted for it. I don't know why they have all suddenly decided it's a terrible thing to do.

Q. Will you sign the gas tax?

The President. I have told you what my position is. There is a logjam in the Congress. The Senators have made it clear that they want to vote on both of them, the Democratic Senators have. They are now using the filibuster in the way the Republicans repeatedly used it in 1993 and 1994. I am offering a way to break the logjam. I will be glad to sign both bills. They ought to vote them out clean. At least they should give us a clean vote on the minimum wage. That's what I think should be done.

Medicare and Medicaid

Q. Mr. President, your most recent Clinton/Gore campaign commercials still speak about Republican cuts in Medicare and Medicaid. Speaker Gingrich points out repeatedly that these aren't cuts in Medicare or Medicaid; these are simply cuts in the projected growth of Medicare and Medicaid, which you in your own 7-year balanced budget proposal similarly propose. Are you prepared now to stop calling the Republican savings in Medicare and Medicaid cuts?

The President. Let me say this, are you prepared to stop it? Are you prepared to stop it? When I came to Washington I was amazed when I proposed budgets, that that was the language that was used. The press used it. We all learned to use it from the press. I have seen repeated—years and years of articles saying, cuts in this, cuts in that, cuts in the other thing.

And the question is, if you cut below the rate of inflation plus growth, is that a cut? I think it is. Should we say, a proposed cut? If you have 27 seconds to talk to the American people, how long does it take to say, “a proposed cut in the rate of increase but a real cut if it is less than the rate of increase plus growth”?

Now, keep in mind, this language has been used around Washington, not simply by politicians but by others for a very long time. Most average Americans believe that it amounts to a cut in Medicare if they're being asked—if they're living on \$20,000 and they're being asked to pay higher premiums for the same thing they got last year, particularly if the premiums go up more than the rate of inflation.

So if there's going to be a change in the language, we ought to all get together and agree on what the language is. The language I am using, sir, is no different from the language the Republicans used when discussing defense all those years and no different than the press used on a regular basis when I arrived here. So maybe we should try to find some new language, but it ill becomes the Speaker to say that when I—you go back and you could probably find reams and reams and reams of speeches that he's given about defense and other issues, talking about cuts that weren't cuts; they were cuts in the rate of increase.

So we'll just—I'm trying to be straight with the American people. And the truth is that the Republicans wanted to reduce the rate of investment in Medicare and Medicaid—we've talked about this in this room many times—to a level that was completely unsustainable when we started this budget process, and that was going to impose significant and unjustifiable burdens on middle class families, working families, the old, the young, families with children with disabilities. And I still believe that what they're trying to do is not advisable, but we are much closer than we used to be.

The real answer is, they left these budget negotiations at the start of their primary season. We were very close together. We were closer together than was ever reported in the press. Why don't they want to come back and sit down and work together and come up with a balanced budget? Once we have an agreed-upon balanced budget, nobody will ever be debating this again. Everybody knows we have to have savings in the projected levels of spending in Medicare and Medicaid. The question is, is what they are trying to do good for Medicare and Medicaid? I don't believe it is.

And they have—I would remind you that they now have a budget which acknowledges that their earlier levels of spending were too low. They do. They have abandoned their first budget already.

Legislative Agenda

Q. Mr. President, if you get an immigration reform bill that forbids education to the sons of illegal immigrants, would you veto it?

The President. Well, I am opposed to that, as you know. And so far, it's not in the Senate bill. So we're trying to keep it out of the final bill, and I will do everything I can to keep it out.

Q. To answer Terry's [Terence Hunt, Associated Press] question, beyond language and beyond your suggestion to break the logjam, having just last night talked about the forces dividing society, how will we see a change in you to usher in this new era of cooperation you seem to be suggesting today?

The President. First of all, you haven't heard me up there condemning the Speaker and Senator Dole in the kind of intense personal terms that they have used. You haven't heard that. You have never heard me doing that. Secondly, I have—I did not end these budget negotiations.

They did. Thirdly, whenever we sign—whenever I sign legislation that has bipartisan support, I always give them credit for the work they do for America.

Now, I am not going to hide my differences from them from the American people, and I have never asked them to hide their differences from me from the American people. I don't ask Senator Dole to suspend his campaign or, you know, I don't ask him to stop doing—going around saying I was wrong when I fought for the Family and Medical Leave Act, which he says all the time, that I was wrong when I stood up for the assault weapons ban or the Brady bill, and he led the opposition to it. I don't ask him to stop that.

All I'm saying is, we're supposed to show up for work here every day. And we were closer than was even reported in the press in the budget negotiations. Now they are adopting a strategy to say that "we're going to use the lawmaking process of the United States to force the President to veto bills where the main subject of the bill he is really for, because we would rather

have the veto"—and I think that's wrong—or, "we're not going to permit people to get an increase in the minimum wage. We actually want the minimum wage to fall to a 40-year low." That's what they said.

So if the Democrats in the Senate are going to one time use the filibuster position they have, which the Republicans used over and over and over and over again in '93 and '94, to an extent never before seen in modern history, more than had ever been done before—if they're going to do that, to demand a vote on the minimum wage, I have come here today not to play politics with them but to say, here is a way to balance the logjam. Let's have a clean vote on the temporary reduction in the gas tax. Let's have a clean vote on the minimum wage. Do that. It is the right thing to do. It's the right thing for America to do.

Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:10 p.m. in the Briefing Room at the White House.

Remarks at a Democratic National Committee Dinner May 8, 1996

Thank you. Thank you very much, Mr. Vice President. You may have held your humor in check tonight, but you don't ever hold anything back from America every day in your job. The American people will never really know—at least, until I write my memoirs—all the magnificent things Al Gore has done as Vice President. But I'm telling you, we should all be very grateful to him, and I appreciate it. Thank you.

I want to thank Tipper for so many things: for making me more sensitive to the whole issue of mental health; for making me see the world in a different and deeper way, through the lens of her camera; and for sharing my birthday and all those crazy characteristics we Leos have. *[Laughter]* You know, there comes a time when the four of us are out at 12:30 in the morning on Saturday evening, I don't want to talk about public policy anymore—*[laughter]*—so we just let Al and Hillary go on their way and we talk about music or something.

I want to thank Don Fowler and Chris Dodd for the incredible labor of love and effort they have exerted, and all of those who work with them: Marvin Rosen and the others who have raised so much of the funds, and Terry McAuliffe and those who have helped our campaign. I thank them all so much.

I want to thank Dan and Beth and the other cochair, and all the committee who worked so hard tonight. And I'm very grateful to Stevie Wonder and to Robin Williams for not only adding a little glamour but adding a little depth to our life in their songs and in their humor. They made us think about what's really important in life and what's really important in public life. I thank them especially for honoring our friend Ron Brown. As I said when I spoke at his memorial service, I probably wouldn't be here if it weren't for Ron Brown, and I'm glad we could be here for him tonight. And thank you, Alma, for being here with us.