

on behalf of a grateful nation, I thank you for what you have done and continue to do to keep America strong and free.

Best wishes for a memorable observance.

BILL CLINTON

Remarks at a Dinner for Representative Richard A. Gephardt in St. Louis,  
Missouri  
*May 17, 1996*

Thank you very much. August Busch, thank you for that introduction. Thank you for your friendship and support. Thank you for all you do for this community.

To Representative Bill Clay and Representative Karen McCarthy, Mayor Freeman Bosley, your county executive, Buzz Westfall, ladies and gentlemen. I am delighted to be here today. I have been here all day. I have been to a wonderful high school. I have talked to a lot of wonderful young people. I have been with Congressman Gephardt and Mrs. Gephardt as we have stormed a bocce ball—or you say bocce here—a bocce ball arena, where I think I better go back to golf. But I loved playing.

In my public life I've had an opportunity to do a lot of things, but I have never given a speech in a domed football stadium before. I feel that I'd be better off passing or punting or something else. But I still feel like it's first down instead of fourth, so I'm going to try to get through the talk.

I know that St. Louis has done a lot of remarkable things in the last few years, including build this magnificent facility and attract the Rams here. I know you're looking forward to celebrating the centennial of the World's Fair and the bicentennial of the Louisiana Purchase. I'm always excited when I come here to the heartland, and I want to congratulate you for what you have done.

I feel deeply indebted to the people of Missouri for many things, and the people of this fine city. But I want to say a special word of thanks to those of you who met with my wife on her recent trip here. She had a wonderful time; she loved the reception. She sold a few of her books, and she came back in a very good humor. And that's something I was very grateful for. Thank you.

I'd also like to say a special word of thanks to you for keeping Dick Gephardt in the United

States House of Representatives and enabling him to help to lead our Democratic Party, the Democratic caucus in the House, and this country. I told a group of people earlier this evening that Dick Gephardt had done a lot for this country, and whenever I met him he always wanted to talk about issues of great national concern after he has twisted my arm for one more TWA route to somewhere. And believe me, even though I said "somewhere," I have the list in my pocket; I know exactly what I'm supposed to be lobbying for. *[Laughter]*

I had a wonderful time talking with Dick this afternoon about the weekends he comes home and just goes into neighborhoods and knocks on doors to talk to his constituents and ask them what they think. I must say that one of the things that I miss about public life since becoming President is that I don't get a chance to do that sort of thing so much anymore.

When I sought this office, some of the people on the other side used to make fun of me for being the Governor of a small Southern State. Well, I was, and I'm proud that I was. One of the great virtues of that is you got to know your people. And they felt they could call you by your first name, and they felt they could share their real feelings with you. And that's what helps to make democracy work. And I hope all of you appreciate just how rare it is to see a person who has years of national leadership experience like Dick Gephardt but never forgets the folks back home and always puts their concerns first. That's what makes American democracy work, and I am very grateful for him. And I know that you are, too.

I want to ask you to take just a few minutes tonight not so much to listen to me but to kind of listen to yourself. We're just 4 years away now from a new century, indeed a new millennium. We're going through a period of astonishing change in how we work, how we

communicate with each other, how we live, how we relate to the rest of the world.

At a period like this, when everything is changing, the role of your Government in Washington has to change as well. And for the last 3½ years I've been trying to find ways to make those changes work for all the American people, as August said, in a way that creates more opportunity and brings us together as a country.

But tonight I want to ask you to answer these questions that I have to ask of myself all the time. Because in this country the people are still in the saddle. That's what a free country is. That's what democracies mean. That's what elections are for. And in order to make really good decisions, I think you have to know the answer to that question. Here this great country is, more than 200 years old, the longest lasting great democracy in human history, standing on the brink not only of a new century but a whole new era in the way human beings work and relate to each other. What do you want your country to look like in that new era? Most of us in this room tonight are adults. We have lived most of our lives in the 20th century, and we will leave the 21st century to our children and our grandchildren. What kind of America do we want to leave for them? Those are the great questions before the American people today.

When I look ahead into this next century and I see that the nature of work is changing and the nature of American life is changing more than any time in a hundred years, since the beginning of our own century when we moved from being primarily a rural people to being more a city people, when we moved from most of us making our living on the farms to most of us making our living either in the factories or around factories. Now we're moving from a national economy to a global economy, indeed, a global society. We're moving from an industrial economy to one dominated by information and technology in every form of human endeavor, including agriculture. I don't know how many farmer friends of mine at home know more about computer technology than I do, because that's how they have to make their judgments about what to plant and how to bring the crop in.

The great computer genius who is the head of Microsoft, Bill Gates, says that the transformation in technology we're undergoing in communications is the greatest in 500 years, that

the digital chip is the most significant thing to happen in the way people communicate with each other since Gutenberg printed the first Bible in Europe 500 years ago.

Now, when I think about that, what I think is that this is an incredible age of possibilities. Most of us have been able to benefit in some way or another from this age of possibility; otherwise you couldn't afford to be here for Dick tonight. And we owe it to ourselves, to our children, our grandchildren, and to our country to think about what kind of age we want to pass on to our children.

I have three simple things I want for America in the 21st century. I want every child in this country, without regard to their race, their religion, their gender, where they grow up or how much they start out with in life, to have a chance to live out their dreams if they're willing to work for it. I want this to be a country that relishes in all of its diversity. Today I was in an Italian-American neighborhood in St. Louis, the Hill. I went to a high school where there were children of many different racial and ethnic groups. The other day I was in New Jersey, in what used to be primarily a white ethnic neighborhood; it's still primarily that, but there were African-American children there, there were Hispanic-American children there, there were children from the Indian subcontinent who are Hindus, there were children from the Middle East who are Muslims. And they were all there in this American school.

All over the world people are consumed with fighting each other and keeping each other down because of their racial, their ethnic, or their religious differences. I have done what I could to end those tragedies, from Northern Ireland to Bosnia to South Africa to the Middle East. But I know that this country has always had a legacy of battling within its own soul, when we look at our brothers and sisters who are different from us and ask, do we have more in common, or are our differences more important?

Now, if you look at this global society in which we are going to live, the diversity of America—all these different kinds of people with different languages, different cultures, different backgrounds, different experiences, different ties to other countries, every country in the world Americans have ties to—that is a meal ticket to the future if we make up our mind we're going into the future together, we're going

to be bound together by the values we share, not divided by the differences among us. That is my second dream for the American people in the 21st century.

The final thing is, I hope and pray that we will not lay down the mantle of leadership in the world that is on us now. I know it is burdensome. I know many of our fellow Americans think that we should not do it. But America has to remain the world's strongest force for peace and for freedom, for prosperity and for security. I am proud of the fact that in the last 3 years there are no more nuclear weapons pointed at the children of America for the first time since the dawn of the nuclear age.

But there are still security threats to the children of America. There is terrorism. There is organized crime. There is drug running. There is the proliferation of weapons of destruction, chemical and biological weapons. There is the threat of global environmental destruction. And we have to work with our neighbors. And we have to try to get other great, strong countries to define their greatness in the way we try to define ours, not by whether we can push people around beyond our borders but by what we stand for and what we believe in and what we believe free people can do when they work together. And this is very important. We cannot walk away from that.

So that's what I want: opportunity for all, a country that is coming together instead of being divided, and a country that is leading the world to peace, freedom, and prosperity. If we do that, our children will live in the greatest age of possibility in all human history.

So the question is, what's that got to do with Dick Gephardt? What's that got to do with the House of Representatives? What's that got to do with the future we all hope to share? I can just give you a couple of examples.

When I became President, the deficit was like a lot of problems that a lot of us have in our personal lives: we all say we ought to do something about it, but we never got around to it. It's kind of like that diet I keep meaning to go on. And there was no popular way to reduce the deficit and still keep America's values intact and fulfill our responsibilities to education, to investment in technology, to the environment, to the elderly, to those with disabilities, to people who had legitimate needs.

We couldn't find a perfectly popular way, but we did pass a deficit reduction plan. And now

the deficit in America is less than half of what it was 4 years ago. It's the first time the deficit has gone down 4 years in a row since Harry Truman was President. And if it hadn't been for Dick Gephardt and the Democrats in Congress, it would not have happened. And he deserves the credit for it.

The unemployment rate in Missouri when I took office was 6.2 percent. The last time I checked it was under 4, because we got the deficit down, interest rates down, and growth up again. In this country we have 8½ million more jobs than we had 4 years ago; homeownership's at a 15-year high; we've had an all-time high of new business formation—self-made, not inherited, millionaires—self-made, it's a good thing—and an all-time high in the sales of American products around the world.

People told me when I became President we could never work out a fairer trade relationship with Japan. We've negotiated 20 separate agreements. In those areas, our exports are up 85 percent in 3 years. If it hadn't been for the support I had in the Congress demanding not only free trade but fair trade—that would not have happened if it hadn't been for Dick Gephardt and his friends in the Congress and what they stood for. I appreciate that. America is stronger and better because of those efforts.

Four years ago, the Congress had spent 6 long years bickering about the problem of crime, and our country was being gripped by a wave of crime. But people were learning what to do to bring the crime rate down, and a lot of it was pretty old-fashioned: going back to community policing, getting the police out from behind the desks and the cars and on the streets again, in the schools again, talking to people again, not only catching criminals and closing crack houses but preventing crime from occurring.

And we passed a bill that put 100,000 more police on the street, that took a serious position against domestic violence for the first time and gave the communities of this country the resources to help deal with that. It stiffened our abilities to break the serious gangs and to deal with the international threat of drugs. We passed the Brady bill. We passed a ban on 19 kinds of assault weapons. And a lot of this was very controversial.

But here's what has happened. The crime rate is down in America for 3 years in a row—and this year it will be down for 4 years in

a row—the murder rate is down, the robbery rate is down, all serious categories of crime are down. Contrary to what people said who fought us in the crime bill, there is not a single hunter in Missouri or Arkansas who lost a weapon that they used in duck season or deer season or hunting anything else in the wide world. But I'll tell you who did lose weapons: 60,000 people with criminal records and bad mental health histories couldn't buy handguns because we passed the Brady bill. And it wouldn't have happened if it hadn't been for Dick Gephardt.

So it makes a difference. What you do tonight in helping Dick Gephardt and his allies makes a difference. They've made America a more prosperous place. They've made America a more secure place.

We have a lot more to do. We're working in Washington now on a whole range of things to strengthen families, to increase economic opportunity, to say to the working people of this country in this global economy maybe there won't be quite as much ability to say, "I know I'll have this particular job for my whole work life," but at least we owe you the right to get a lifetime access to education, lifetime access to affordable health care, and lifetime access to a pension you can carry around with you if you move from job to job or if you lose your job. That's the way we can keep the dynamism of the American economy, grow the jobs, and help people who work still raise stable, strong families. Those are the kinds of challenges we have to meet.

We have to do more to ensure the education of our children, its quality, and its opportunity. We have to do more to protect the environment in ways that grow the economy. We have got to do more to ensure our position in the world. We've got to do more, as I told the children today here, to fight crime. And to do it we need a different kind of Government.

Let me tell you something you may not know. Under legislation that we passed when Dick was the majority leader, we have reduced the size of the Federal Government by 240,000. It is the smallest it has been since Mr. Johnson was President. By the first of the year, the Federal Government will be the smallest it's been since John Kennedy was the President of the United States of America. We have reduced the size of Federal regulations by 16,000 pages.

But you haven't heard anything about this, probably because we did it in a decent way.

We did it in a decent way. Less than one percent of the people in that 240,000 had to be separated involuntarily from the Federal Government; everybody else we got an early retirement. We did it by attrition. We gave them a generous severance package. We found other jobs for them. We did it in the way that we ought to handle transitions.

So, yes, we've got a smaller Federal Government. But when they had the 500-year floods along the Mississippi River, in Missouri and Iowa and other places, nobody wanted a weak Federal Government, they wanted a strong Federal Emergency Management Agency to come in here and help to rebuild Missouri and help to rebuild all the other places that were devastated.

With most of the new jobs being created in small business, nobody wants a weak Small Business Administration. So we cut the budget by 25 percent, but we doubled the loan volume of the Small Business Administration. I am proud of that. That's the kind of Government we need. You're getting more for less, helping America to grow stronger.

We rewrote the student loan laws of America so that young people who want to go to college and are afraid they can't afford it can now get student loans at lower cost on better repayment terms. And if they get out of college and they want to do something that serves the rest of us but doesn't earn them a lot of money, if they want to teach school or be nurses or work as law enforcement officers, they can now pay those loans back as a percentage of their income, so that no child should ever not go to college or drop out of college because they are afraid they can never pay their loans back. That is a change that we made thanks to Dick Gephardt, and it made a difference in the United States of America.

So I ask you to think about these things. There is so much more to do. I honestly believe that even in this year, we've still got a chance to pass the right sort of balanced budget; to pass a good welfare reform plan; to pass the Kennedy-Kassebaum bill that will say to people, if you lose your job or someone in your family gets sick, you can still keep your health insurance. I believe we can do these things. I sure hope we'll get a chance to pass an increase in the minimum wage, so it doesn't fall to a 40-year low.

But the main thing I want you to keep in mind is the big picture. If you want more opportunity for people who show responsibility, if you want us to come together around our shared values instead of being divided in the old ways, if you want your country to lead the world, then we need a Government that is smaller and less bureaucratic, yes, but one that is still strong enough and committed to a central goal, not giving things to people but giving them a chance to make the most of their own lives as citizens, as workers, as members of families, as members of communities, as citizens of this great country. That's what we need. And that's what we're working on. And that's what's at stake.

So when you go home tonight, think about that. Yes, I have worked hard for the economy because I think people need to have a chance to make a decent living and because I think that when people work hard they ought to believe they can do a little better every year. But this is about much more than economics. As I have said many times, if we're fortunate enough, any of us, to know in advance, as a gift from God, when the last time we ever put our head on the pillow is, before we end our life on this Earth, I'll bet you anything we won't be thinking about finances. We'll be thinking about what we really loved, our families, our friends, our children, what we cared about, what we did that made us proud. I want this to be a country where everybody can feel those things are within their grasp. That's what I want. And we can achieve it. But in our system, the President doesn't do that alone. In our system, it requires people in the United States Congress

who share a vision and share a strategy for achieving it.

And I can tell you that I have worked with Dick Gephardt for years now, and what you see is what you get. We spent 50 hours together in budget negotiations in the quiet of the Oval Office with the Republican leaders of Congress. He never raised his voice. He never lost his temper. He never did anything that you wouldn't have been very proud of. But he was always, always sticking up for the idea that we had to balance the budget, but we had to do it in a way that would grow the economy, enhance opportunity, bring this country together, and leave us all stronger. You would have been proud of that. There was never a reporter, never a camera, never anything public about it. But his quiet, determined strength impressed me more even than I had been in the past.

So you think about that when you go home tonight. I hope you'll be proud you came here. I hope you'll think your investment was worth it. And I hope, for the rest of this year, for the rest of this decade, which is the rest of this century, you'll be asking this question of yourself and answering it, because America, in all probability, will wind up looking like your vision of it, especially if you work to realize it.

Thank you, God bless you, and goodnight.

NOTE: The President spoke at 7:25 p.m. at the Trans World Dome. In his remarks, he referred to August Busch IV, chairman of the board, Anheuser-Busch Co.

## **The President's Radio Address** *May 18, 1996*

Good morning. Four years ago, I challenged America to end welfare as we know it, to require work, promote responsible parenting, shift the system from dependence to independence. Just a few days after I took office, I met with the Nation's 50 Governors, and I urged every one of them to send me a welfare reform plan that would help to meet that challenge. In return, I pledged to waive outmoded or counter-

productive Federal rules that get in the way of reform.

Most of the Governors took me up on that deal. So in the last 3 years, my administration has granted 38 States welfare reform waivers, clearing away Federal rules and regulations to permit States to build effective welfare reforms of their own. The State-based reform we've encouraged has brought work and responsibility