

Remarks at the American Federation of State, County and Municipal
Employees Convention in Chicago, Illinois
June 21, 1996

The President. Thank you. Thank you. Let me say, first of all, when I was standing up here with Gerry McEntee on my right and Bill Lucey on my left, I thought the best I could do is to ask you to give Clinton/Gore the same majority you gave McEntee/Lucey in 1996. I will accept it.

I'm also proud to be joined today by two of your friends from Illinois, two Members of the House of Representatives, Congressman Bobby Rush from Chicago and Congressman and Senator-to-be Dick Durbin from Illinois.

I understand I missed a lot at this convention. I missed the formal transfer of the gavel to Speaker Gephardt. I'm sorry I missed that. I missed Senator Kennedy pleading guilty once more to wanting all Americans to have health care. And I'm sorry I missed that.

Before I go further, I want to also congratulate someone else who is very special to this union, who celebrates today her 25th anniversary with AFSCME, Gerry McEntee's tireless and indispensable right hand, Gloria Caoile. Please stand up and be recognized. [Applause] Thank you.

[At this point, Ms. Caoile ran up to the President and hugged him.]

If I had known she was going to do that, I'd have done it first thing. It was great. It was quite wonderful. [Laughter]

Ladies and gentlemen, I will never forget as long as I live—

Audience members. Down in front!

The President. You all calm down. Relax. You want everybody to sit down. They're taking pictures. We're going to have a little fun. Just relax. Be loose. Be loose.

I want to tell you that I will never forget as long as I live the fact that AFSCME stood with me early in 1992, when it was lonely and cold, and never stood back, never backed out. And I will never forget that no organization in America stood with the First Lady and with our administration more strongly when we fought to give health care to all Americans and preserve the dignity of Americans in our health care system. And I thank you for that.

I also will always be proud that when I was a State employee as the Governor of my State, I was a dues-paying member of AFSCME, because it got out of fashion for a while, but I have always believed in the dignity of public service. I believe it's important to honor people who take care of our parents and watch over our children and care for the sick, who protect the environment, and who are always there in emergencies. That's what you do. America should know it and be grateful. And I know it, and I'm grateful. I thank you for that.

I enjoyed watching the film that was shown just before I came out. It gave me a chance to reminisce a little about that campaign 4 years ago. I ran for that election because I had a vision for what I wanted America to look like in the 21st century, a vision which you shared. I wanted us to go into the next century with every American, without regard to race or gender or income, every American, having a decent opportunity—not a guarantee but an opportunity—to live up to their dreams. I wanted to see us coming together as a country, not being driven apart by cheap partisan politics designed to divide the American people. And I wanted us to continue to be the strongest force in the world for peace and freedom and prosperity.

Now, we've worked for 4 years to meet our challenges and to protect our values with a simple strategy: opportunity for all, responsibility from all, a community of Americans working together. We are all in this together. And I am tired of all the people who seek to divide us every day for their own personal advantage.

Four years ago the economy of the United States was drifting, high unemployment, an out-of-control deficit, few new jobs, a nation increasingly divided. We charted a different course with a new economic strategy: to cut the deficit; expand the sales of American products; give tax cuts to the 15 million hardest pressed American working families; invest in education, the environment, research, and new technologies, give incentives for people who live in the distressed areas; and yes, pass programs like the Family

and Medical Leave Act that enable people to succeed at home and at work.

It's very fitting that I am here today because this week—tomorrow, to be exact—is the fourth anniversary of the issuance of our economic plan in 1992. We called it "Putting People First." I said that if we did that two things would happen: First of all, we'd cut the deficit in half, and second, we would create 8 million new jobs in 4 years.

Now, after leaving us with a weak economy and record deficits and quadrupling the debt, the Republicans said it couldn't be done. They said my economic plan was a disaster. They said it would bring on a recession. Let me just read you some of the things they said. Senator Dole said, "The American people know this plan doesn't tackle the deficit head on." Speaker Gingrich said, "This will lead to a recession next year." Dick Armey said, "Clearly, this is a job killer." John Kasich said, "This plan will not work. If it was to work, I'd have to become a Democrat."

Well, 3½ years later, we cut the deficit by more than half, and the economy has not produced 8 million new jobs, it's produced 9.7 million new jobs. Mr. Kasich said if this plan was to work, "I'd have to become a Democrat." I expect him to show up at the United Center in Chicago; we'll save a seat for him at the convention.

There are other ways that this strategy has helped real Americans. We've got 3.7 million new homeowners—new homeowners. We are moving toward our goal, led by Secretary Cisneros, of having more than two-thirds of the American people in their own homes by the end of this decade for the first time in the history of the United States of America.

We have an all-time high in the exports of American products and services. We've got an all-time high 3 years in a row of people starting new businesses in our country. We are moving this country in the right direction. The rates of unemployment and inflation combined are the lowest in 28 years. This country is on the move again. We've got a lot of problems out there, but we are moving in the right direction.

Maybe most important of all to me—because I think the test of the economy must always be, does it work for average Americans, does it help people build strong families, do all these numbers mean something in the lives of our people—the most important statistic of all to

me, therefore, is that last year average hourly earnings for American working people started to go up again for the first time in 10 years, and it's high time.

So when it came to the economy, with all respect, I think the evidence shows that they were wrong and AFSCME, the administration, and our friends in the Congress were right.

Then came the elections in '94, and they won the Congress. And they gave us their Contract With America. Their idea was, under the guise of balancing the budget, to fundamentally alter the Medicare program to create two classes of care, turn Medicaid into a block grant and make sure that it couldn't cover the populations that it had protected for three decades, dramatically reverse education funding at a time when it's more important to educate more people for their future than at any time in the history of the United States of America, gut enforcement of the environmental laws, weaken enforcement of the occupational safety and health laws, allow employee pension funds to be raided, and raise taxes on 8 million of the most vulnerable working families in the country. That was their plan. They passed it; I vetoed it. They were wrong about that, too.

But we have more to do. It is high time we began the move on the future and forgot about the divisive and self-destructive elements in the contract. Let's do something positive to help build on the good work that's been done. Let's raise the minimum wage and not let it fall to a 40-year low and lift the American people. Let's pass the Kennedy-Kassebaum health care reform bill and guarantee that you don't lose your health insurance if you change jobs or if someone in your family gets sick. Let's do it now.

Senator Kennedy's bill passed the United States Senate 100 to 0. Why has it not passed the Senate and the House and been sent to my desk? Because we are debating matters that have nothing to do with Senator Kennedy's bill being put on that bill that would undermine our ability to improve health care for all Americans. Let's stop all the controversy. Let's make an agreement. Let's get off the dime and stop depriving the American people of something 100 Senators have already said they're entitled to. Pass the Kennedy-Kassebaum bill now, and send it to my desk.

Let's give pension security to all those people out there working in small businesses, people

that maybe have to change jobs four or five times in their lifetime. I have sent to the Congress a package of initiatives designed to make it easier for people who are self-employed or who work in small business to take out a pension plan, to keep it when they lose their jobs, to take it with them when they change their jobs. Every American who works hard ought to have pension security in this country, even in the global economy.

And let's continue to make education available to all Americans. I said the other day, and I want to reiterate, if you look at the future of America in the global economy, if you want all working people to have a chance to raise their incomes, all people have to have a chance to get more education. I have asked the Congress to do two things, and I will reiterate them here today. Number one, give every family a tax deduction for the cost of tuition up to \$10,000 a year for college. And number two, make 2 more years of education after high school just as universal as high school by giving a tax credit of \$1,500 a year for the next 2 years of education so that everybody can have it—everybody. [Applause] Thank you. Thank you.

That is what this is about. But it's about more than economics. We also need other things to keep our country strong. We need strong families, strong communities, safe streets, and a clean environment.

When I became President, I had literally talked to hundreds of Americans who despaired about the crime problem. They really didn't believe anything could ever be done to lower the crime rate. But I did, because I had seen the crime rate go down in communities where community policing had been adopted, where the police were back on the street again working in the neighborhoods, working with people to try to prevent crime and catch criminals and making things work. I have seen that happen.

And so I asked the Congress in 1994 to pass the crime bill and, earlier, to pass the Brady bill. And the leadership of the other party, they fought us on it all the way. They fought us on the 100,000 police; they fought us on the assault weapons ban; they fought us on the Brady bill. They convinced a lot of good God-fearing Americans, including some members of this union, I'll bet, that if those bills passed they were going to be weakened in their ability to pursue their hunting and sporting interests,

somebody was going to come get their gun. Well, now it's been 2 years later, and guess what? Every AFSCME member in America that wants to go deer hunting is still hunting with the same rifle. Nobody lost their gun. It wasn't true. They didn't tell you the truth.

In my home State in the fall, in a good year the ducks are so thick you can hardly see the sky. Every Arkansas AFSCME member who wants to go duck hunting is still hunting with the same rifle, if that's what they want to do. They did not tell them the truth. But I'll tell you who is not having a gun. There are 60,000 people who have criminal records, who are stalkers, who had no business buying guns who couldn't get them because of the Brady bill. We were right, and they were wrong. It was the right thing to do.

In just 2 years, we have almost half of those police officers paid for. We're ahead of schedule and under budget. And in that budget last year they tried to repeal the commitment to put 100,000 police on the street with the crime rate going down and the murder rate going down. They tried to turn back on a strategy that worked. I said no then; I say no today. We're going to make the American people safer. We're not going to put them at risk again. We're going to keep working until crime is the exception, not the rule in America again.

And there is a lot of talk about welfare reform. Well, let me tell you something. There are a lot of people in this audience that know more about moving people from welfare to work than the politicians in Washington will ever know. And if you work with people on welfare, you know that most people on welfare would very much like to be off of welfare. You know that there are flaws in the system which keep people on it, but they're not often the ones that others think are there. And there are changes that ought to be made. Well, they talked about it, and they're still talking about it, but while they were talking, we were acting. We have given 40 States a total of 62 separate experiments to move people from welfare to work.

But I did veto their bill because it was tough on kids and weak on work. You cannot expect people on welfare to be different from people who aren't on welfare. We want to succeed at home and at work. We want people to succeed to home and at work. We don't want to be tough on the kids; we want to be good to the

kids. That means what we need is child care and health care for the kids. We need jobs for the people to do, then require them to go to work. It's fine. Be very tough on that. Require them to go to work.

Now, who was right in this great debate? All I know is, after 3 years child support enforcement collections are up 40 percent; there are a million fewer people on food stamps; there are 1.3 million people fewer on welfare than there were the day I took the oath of office. I believe our approach has been proved to be right, and I think we should stay with it: work; child care; support for the kids; let people succeed at work and at home.

There are other things we're doing that have been controversial, that have engendered opposition from the leadership of the other side. They didn't like it when we proposed tough restrictions on tobacco advertising, and they have been richly rewarded for their dislike of that position. All I know is, it's illegal in every State in America for kids to smoke. Three thousand of them start smoking every day, and a thousand of them are going to die sooner because of it. I think we ought to do something about it, and I'm not about to apologize for it to anybody.

Some of their leaders didn't like it when we enacted the V-chip and said that televisions ought to include this V-chip now that we've got all these cable channels, so that parents would have more control over the programming their young children watch. I'm a big believer in the first amendment, but I think it's pretty hard to raise a kid in today's society, and we ought to give parents all the help they can get to help them raise their kids free from violence and other destructive influences.

In all these debates, a clear picture comes through. We're going through a big change, folks. You all know it. You're having to change. You're dealing with it. We're moving from an economy based on big organizations in an industrial age that do mass production to an economy based on rapid transfer of information and technology in smaller, less bureaucratic, more creative organizations. It's affecting all of us in the way we work and live. We're moving way away from that cold war world where the world was sort of divided in two, into a world where there is a global society and things are happening so fast we can hardly keep up with it. And that's requiring a lot of changes.

They believe that the Government is the problem and that what everyone needs is to be told, "You're on your own. Go out there into the tender mercies of the global economy. Have a great time in cyberspace, and we'll get out of your way." I believe no great nation, at any point in human history, has ever, ever, gotten greater without extending opportunity to more and more people and having responsibility for more people to build a strong community. This is the greatest nation in human history because we have built a middle class of people, and average people have had a chance to make it if they have done the right things. And that's what I think we ought to be doing into the 21st century.

So I say to them, I want us to go into the 21st century meeting our challenges and protecting our values together. Should we have a smaller Government in Washington and give you folks more responsibility? Yes. Should we walk away from our obligations to our people? No. No. Should we balance the budget? Yes. It will get interest rates down and create more jobs. To balance the budget, do we have to wreck Medicare and Medicaid, undermine education, and destroy the environment? No.

I don't know about you, but I think this country was right 30 years ago when we said through the Medicaid program that no poor child or pregnant mother, that no elderly person, that no person with disability should be denied quality medical care just because they can't afford it. I think we've got a stronger, better America because of that. I don't think we're weaker; I think we're stronger.

The majority in Congress today insists that we repeal this guarantee. I vetoed it once; I'll do it again if I have to. I think we're right. I think we're stronger because we honor these obligations. I don't know about you, but I think this is a better country because 30 years ago we decided that through the Medicare program we would provide adequate health care to every senior citizen in this country. And you know, we now have dramatically improved circumstances as a result of it. If you live to be 65 in America, you then are in a group of seniors that have the highest life expectancy in the entire world because of Medicare and Social Security.

Now, should we give people on Medicare more options? Should we expect people to pay their fair share? Should we do everything we

can to cut inflation? Do we have to make sure that this program will survive for the next century and beyond? Of course we do. But the plan that I vetoed, and the one they still propose, would put in place a Medicare plan that would literally create two tiers of care for our seniors and put millions and millions of our poorest and sickest seniors into second-class Medicare. I don't believe in that. I think we're stronger because we treated our senior citizens in a good and dignified way without regard to their income. I believe that.

I don't believe that we ought to weaken the worker safety laws. We can find better ways to work in partnerships with employers, but do we want to go back to the time when there were no protections for worker safety?

We can find better ways to operate in the environmental sphere. We're giving 50 different companies, right now, the opportunity to throw the rulebook away if they're subjected to tests for clean air and clean water and the other environmental tests. We're not hung up on the bureaucracy. But do we want to forget about the standards for clean air and clean water and chemical right-to-know and all those things? I don't think so.

Audience member. No-o-o!

The President. I say we should stand up for the notion that America will be stronger in the global economy of the 21st century if we give our people clean air, clean water, safe streets, a solid education system, if we honor our commitment to our parents, and if we decide we are going forward together. It's always worked before. Why won't it work in the global economy of the 21st century?

I understand the other side is criticizing us because we have the support of labor unions. Well, I plead guilty to that. [Applause] Thank you.

Audience members. Four more years! Four more years! Four more years!

The President. Thank you. Thank you.

I would put—it is true that I have done some specific things that all of you wanted that I believed in. I believe in the Executive order I signed on striker replacement. I believe in the repeal of the antiunion Executive orders from the previous administration. I believe in the appointments I've made to these Federal agencies that finally are giving a fair break to both labor and management and not being too one-sided. I believe in that. I think you're enti-

tled to a fair break. I think you're entitled to the respect and the full protection of the laws that were out there for you. I believe in those things.

I don't believe that we should weaken the power of labor by going back to company unions. I don't believe that. But I also want to point out, and based on my experience as a Governor and my experience as a President, it is simply a myth to pretend that everybody who serves the public is antichange. I'd like to see some of these people who criticize people in public service go out and look at how the changes have been made in some of the welfare programs that you serve in and some of the health care programs that you serve in. I would like to see that.

I'd like to remind everybody in this country, if you'll let me now in my role as President, crow that Business Week last year said that the best customer service on any toll-free line in America was not given by L.L. Bean or Federal Express but by the Federal employees at the Social Security Administration. I am proud of that.

The Labor Department last month released a report by the mayor of Louisville, Jerry Abramson, and former Governor Florio of New Jersey, pointing out that when State and local governments work in real partnership with their workers and let the people on the frontline who know how things really work make decisions, then taxpayers can get better services at lower cost. You are willing to, able to, and actually effecting change. And you ought to get credit for the changes you're making to make the American people's lives better.

Now, let me say in closing, this is a very important election, because there is no status quo option here. You remember how in '92 we said the issue was change; it was change against drift and more of the same. Not true anymore. There are two very different views of change before the American people. We are going to walk straight into the 21st century on the strength of the decision we make in November. We are going to take one of those paths into the future.

And the good thing is the American people don't have to guess anymore. They know what I will do because I have done my best to do what I said I'd do in 1992. And the results have been good for the American people.

But to be fair, perfectly fair to our friends on the other side, they have also made it clear what they will do. The budget I vetoed would be the law of the land within 6 months after they had the Presidency and the White House. If the American people want it, they know how to get it. The environmental measures I stopped would be the law of the land within 6 months after they controlled the White House and the Presidency. And the worker safety weakening and all the other things.

So if you believe that the message we ought to give to Americans is, "You're on your own. Have a good time in the tender mercies of the global marketplace. Enjoy cyberspace," you have a option. But if you believe as I do, that the only way this country is going to be able to lead the world for peace and freedom and prosperity, the only way we're going to be able

to get this country to come together with all of our diversity is to create opportunity and demand responsibility from everybody, to meet our challenges and protect our values together, then you have that choice for the future as well.

I know where you stand. I know where you're going to be working to see America stand in November. And all I can tell you is, as long as I live I'll be grateful that you stood with me.

Thank you, and God bless you all.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:02 a.m. at McCormick Place East. In his remarks, he referred to Gerald W. McEntee, president, William Lucey, secretary/treasurer, and Gloria Caoile, special assistant to the president, AFSCME; and James E. Florio, former Governor of New Jersey.

Remarks at a Democratic National Committee Dinner in Houston, Texas June 21, 1996

Thank you. You know, after all these speeches, if I had any sense I would just quit while I'm ahead—[laughter]—say, "Thank you very much. Everything they said is true; please show up in November." [Laughter]

I am delighted to be back in Texas. I am very grateful for what Secretary—Senator Bentsen said. I told Lloyd when he was leaving the State, I said, "You know, I really miss you." It was always a delight for me to see Lloyd and B.A. They were a part of our family, and he did a magnificent job as Treasury Secretary.

I want to thank Chairman Fowler for the vigor and energy that he has brought to this job, the passion. And he is absolutely tireless, and he has done a fine job, and I am grateful to him. And I want to thank Bill White for leaving our administration—not for leaving our administration—[laughter]—but for coming home to Texas to be the chair of the Democratic Party. I wish he hadn't left, but he's doing the right thing now that he's here.

I want to thank Bob and Elyse Lanier who have been such good friends to me and came to the airport to meet me today. And I think, since I have said it in other States, in other places, I might as well say it in Houston: I

doubt very seriously that there is a mayor anywhere in America who has made as much difference in as little time and been more effective than Bob Lanier has. And it's a real credit to him.

I thank the Members of Congress who are here, Ken Bentsen and Jim Chapman and my good friend Martin Frost, who is going to give us a Democratic House again if we can just keep everybody rocking and rolling—Gene Green and Eddie Bernice Johnson and Sheila Jackson-Lee. And I'll just say one thing: You know, Supreme Court decisions are the law of the land and all that, but it would be a real shame if we lost Sheila Jackson-Lee or Eddie Bernice Johnson or Martin Frost or anybody else who could be affected by that redistricting decision. And I hope they'll have a chance to run and win in November.

I want to thank all the former Governors who are here. I want to thank Dolph and Janie Briscoe for being so wonderful to Hillary when she came down to Uvalde to meet them. And I want you to know, Governor, I'm still wearing those socks you sent me that are made from your wool down there in Uvalde. And I'm—every time I go to the golf course I've got them