

Remarks in Salinas, California August 8, 1996

The President. Thank you. Ladies and gentlemen, Leon Panetta did not make me come here, I wanted to be here, and I am glad to be here today. I love looking at this crowd.

Mayor Styles, thank you for your welcome and thank you for that wonderful plaque with the beautiful drawing by a young child on it. Chief Nelson, thank you for what you said and for the leadership you give. Anna Caballero, thank you so much for your wonderful introduction. I was sitting listening to her speak—I thought, you know, she speaks better than most of us do. She ought to run for higher office someday. I think she will. She was very good. Simon Salinas, thank you for being here today.

Congressman Farr, thank you for doing such a fine job. You know, he was talking about all these programs we supported. What you need to know is that Sam Farr voted for every one of them, and every one of them was hard to pass. There were people who were actually trying to keep us from putting 100,000 police on the street and doing those other things, and Sam Farr was there with me every step of the way. And I thank him for that.

Sam Cabral and the International Union of Police Associations, I thank you for your endorsement. I thank you especially this year because it means something. For years and years as a Governor and as attorney general, working with communities like Salinas in my home State when I was struggling to deal with the problems of crime, I always heard the politicians in Washington talk about crime, and I never heard anybody come out for it. I mean, all people in public life are against crime. You never hear somebody stand up and give a speech for crime. But nobody ever did anything about it in Washington. And I was determined that we would change the direction of our Nation in dealing with the crime problem at the grassroots level with local communities. And I thank you for validating that today.

Ladies and gentlemen, there's someone else I want to introduce in the audience—I just saw him sitting out there—a man who has done as much as any individual citizen I can think of in the last few years to try to make our children safer, a man who lives not very far from you

and who went through the unimaginable agony of having his own child abducted and killed. Her murderer was just convicted and sentenced. But in all these years he has borne his grief with dignity and worked to help us pass laws and adopt policies that would make other children safer in their homes. And I'd like you to welcome Mr. Marc Klaas. Marc, stand up. *[Applause]* Thank you. God bless you, sir.

I'd also like to say just one more word about Mr. Panetta. We were supposed to come here in a helicopter today and, believe it or not, it was too foggy for us in San Jose to take off, so we had to drive. So we drove over from San Jose, and Leon and Bruce Lindsey and I were sitting in the car together, and the closer we got to Salinas the happier Leon got. *[Laughter]* He was like a kid with a new toy when we drove into town. And he was talking about where he used to have an office here. We got out of the car and the first thing Sam Farr said is, "I got a better office than you did. I got another room." *[Laughter]* And he began to talk about you and about his life as a Congressman and about his friendships here and about what kind of community this was. And as we walked down the streets and people waved to us, this sort of flood of memories came out.

And I don't know that there's a harder job in public life than being Chief of Staff to the President. He's responsible for whatever mistakes he makes and all of mine, too. *[Laughter]* He has to defend me on the bad days as well as brag about the good days. You know, you've got to deal with Congress, run the White House, try to manage what's going on in the Cabinet, deal with the press, and just wait for another tire to go flat on you. *[Laughter]* It is an unimaginably difficult job. He has been magnificent, and you should be very proud of him. But I think the ultimate reason for his success is he never forgets what the purpose of the job is. Washington is a long way from Salinas, and I know a lot of times the debates up there seem very far and almost alien, almost unreal, and excessively political. And Leon Panetta has never forgotten his roots. Every day when he goes to work he imagines what we're doing in

terms of how it will impact people like you and how you will receive it and whether it will help us to raise our children. And other things being equal, he'd just as soon be back home, and we need more folks like that serving the public in our Nation's Capital.

Finally, I would like to congratulate Alvin Harrison and his teammates on their great 1600-meter relay. They were magnificent. [Applause] Thank you.

You know, Hillary and Chelsea and I had the privilege of going to the Olympics. Chelsea spent a week there, and Hillary went three times. I went twice. We got to speak to the team before the games began and then welcome all those who could come to the White House there yesterday. And I was trying to think to myself all during this whole thing and especially after the terrible bombing and then wondering how people would respond, and all the athletes showed up the next day, and all the spectators did, too. And people said, "We're going on." And I was thinking to myself, what is it that we really love about the Olympics?

I mean, Americans love all sports, and we're thrilled by sports achievements. But I think that we love the Olympics in part because we think it works the way we want the world to work. I mean, if you think about it, there they are, people from 197 different nations—there's a small, isolated little island like Nauru that sends 4 or 5 people and a large, vast country like Russia or Australia, a country with only 18 million people, had the third biggest delegation—all these countries participating. People that give expression to their national pride, and more than ever before.

But they all come together and play by the same rules in an atmosphere of mutual respect, and they have to win by doing something good, not by doing something bad to their opponents. Nobody wins by breaking their opponent's bones or by standing up in a public forum and saying how terrible their opponents are. They win by doing well. And they win by working together and accepting these rules. And I think that we think the world would be better if it worked that way.

The thing that made me so proud of the America team—as I looked at them I thought to myself, you know, if the American team were to disperse and walk out in the Olympic Village, but for their uniforms nobody would have any idea where they were from. They could be from

Africa or Latin America. They could be from Mexico or India or Pakistan. They could be from any number of countries in the Middle East. They could be from China or Japan. They could be from Scandinavia. They could be from anywhere, because we are bound together not by our race but by our common commitment to this country and to the Constitution, the Bill of Rights, and the Declaration of Independence.

I was gratified that Sam said one of your community groups here had as its motto the title of my wife's book from that old African proverb, "It takes a village to raise a child." I want to talk to you about that today because that's really why I came here, because I think Salinas is a wonderful model of what has to be done by people in their communities if we're going to get this country in the shape it needs to be in to move into the 21st century.

Yes, there are things we must do in Washington. Yes, there are things that others must do. But where it matters is where people's lives are changed, in their homes, in their schools, in their communities, in their places of worship, with civic groups, with the local media, with other people who are involved in giving people the chance to make the most of their own lives.

I know, because some other people were telling me before I came out here, of the very moving story of your gold medal winner and his twin brother. That's an American story. And what we need to do is to make sure that there are a thousand stories like that for every child we lose, instead of the other way around. We don't have a child to spare, not a child to—[inaudible].

I have worked very hard in the last 3½ years to achieve my vision of what our country would be like when we move into the 21st century, and it's very simple. I want America to be a place where everybody, regardless of their race, their income, their background, their gender, has a chance to live out their dreams if they're responsible enough to work for it.

I want this country to stand as a brilliant rebuke to all the places in the world that are consumed by racial and religious and ethnic and tribal hatred, where people are killing each other around the world because of their differences. I want us to embrace our differences with respect and affection and reach across the lines that divide us and say we are stronger because of our differences, because we share

the same values and we share the same visions of the future.

And I want our country—and this requires me to do some things that everybody doesn't like from time to time, but I want our country to continue to be the strongest force for peace and freedom and prosperity in the world, because increasingly threats to our security that seem a long way away can come right home. Whether it's terrorism or drugs or shipping weapons or organized crime, we have to stand as a force for peace and freedom and prosperity throughout the world, so that we can guarantee that future to our children here at home.

So we worked very hard to do that, first to create opportunity by bringing our economy back. I'm grateful that the deficit has been cut in half, that trade is at an all-time high, that we're selling California agricultural products in markets they were never sold before, that we have over 10 million new jobs, that the California economy is coming back. We've got a lot more to do, but we're moving in the right direction, and I'm grateful for that.

We've tried to expand educational opportunity. One of my goals is to make sure every classroom and every library in America is connected to the information superhighway by the year 2000. And California is leading the way. We're moving to improve performance, to set higher standards, to support our schools, to help our schools support this by being able to stay open later hours, for example, and give children something to say yes to as well as something to say no to. We're working to open up the doors of college education to all Americans so that no young person should ever decline to go to school after high school just because of the cost of it.

I tell you, there's a lot of talk, you'll hear a lot of talk between now and November about tax cuts and how much we should have and whether we can afford them, and they all sound good. It's like going to the candy store, you know, "I'll have some of that and some of that and some of that and some of that." But if you eat it all at once, you might get sick.

So I say to you, it may not be popular, but I will not advocate any cut in taxes in this election that cannot be paid for in our attempts to balance the budget, invest in education, protect Medicare and Medicaid and the environment. But we have to do that.

But we can afford some targeted tax cuts. I'm about to sign one when we raise the minimum wage that will give people a \$500 tax credit if they'll adopt children, because we want to encourage more children to be adopted into stable families, to be given a good start in life. That's an important thing.

I want to see tax relief for families when they're rearing their children. And the most important thing we could do and I think the most significant tax cut we could give America's families is a deduction for the cost of college tuition. And I want to make 2 years of education after high school as universal and available as public education through the 12th grade is today by giving people a tax credit for the cost of a community college for 2 years after high school. Everybody should have that, everyone in America. It should be universal.

But all this opportunity will not mean much to children who cannot play and learn and grow in safety. All this activity and opportunity will not mean much if children spend their whole childhood looking over their shoulder when they're walking to and from school to see if somebody is going to shoot them. All this activity and opportunity will not mean much to children who are lost in a fog of drug addiction or captured in a web of crime from which they cannot escape.

And so I say to you, I came here today to honor your efforts in fighting crime and rescuing our children. And I just want to thank you from the bottom of my heart for what you have done. And I want to make a couple of points here—

[At this point, an audience member required medical attention.]

The President. Have we got a doctor here? Is there a doctor in the house? We need a doctor up here. All this hot air is difficult. *[Laughter]* Okay, we're doing a good job. We have one doctor here and one in the crowd coming up. Come on up, sir. That's fine. We've got one already on the site there.

Now, let me ask you to think about something that to me is very important. If I had told you—you heard all these people say all these good things we've done to fight crime. But the truth is that 4 years in a row the crime rate has come down in America, but until this year, it had been going up among juveniles. So we were winning the battle against crime and losing it with our kids. It seems inconceivable. Cocaine

use dropped by a third in America in 3 years, but casual drug use has been going up among people under 18 since 1991.

Now, we all know there are a lot of reasons for that. But the fundamental reason, I think, is that too many of these kids are growing up in chaotic circumstances where they're being left to raise themselves. And Salinas said, we are not going to do that anymore; we're going to rescue every single one of our children.

We can create all the jobs in the world and all the opportunity in the world, but if we go into the 21st century with too many children killing children, too many children having children, too many children raising children, and too many children raising themselves on the street, this country will not be what it ought to be. And the only way we can turn that around is if communities say, we're going to take all the resources we have, and we're going to go after every single child. They're all our children.

So I thank the chief and the mayor for pointing out that we have put funds into this community to hire police officers; we've put funds in this community to help you with your special projects. But if you hadn't used it properly it would not amount to a hill of beans. Nothing we do in Washington to try to rescue the children of America will work unless it is given life in the commitment of people in every community in America. You are doing that in Salinas. That's what I want every community in America to do.

I do have some good news to tell you today. For the first time in 7 years, violent crime arrests of juveniles went down last year—for the first time in 7 years. Arrests for murder by juveniles went down for the second year in a row by over 15 percent. We are moving in the right direction. We have to do more of what we are doing.

All over this country people like you are coming alive to the fact that unless we do some things together we're not going to rescue our children. And I have tried to go around this country, to places where things are working, to highlight them, to urge every other American community to do the same, and to say what we in Washington can and will do to help. We can break the backs of gangs and youth violence, but we cannot do it unless the efforts we make in Washington find expression in the efforts you make on the streets of Salinas. Parents have to work with police; neighbors have to look out

for each other; the schools, the community groups, everybody has to do it.

Everyone has a role to play. Everyone has a responsibility to fulfill. But we know if we do it, we can win. You don't have to give up on our kids anymore. You don't have to give up on crime. You don't have to accept unacceptable rates of violence. You don't have to say that we're going to lose a large number of our children every year because they happen to be poor or they happen to be isolated or they happen to have been picked up by a gang. You can say no to all that. And you are proving it in Salinas, and I want you to keep doing it until you eradicate the problem entirely.

Don't forget that not so long ago this community was literally invaded by an army of 20 gangs with 1,500 members. And don't forget that that led to drugs and drive-by murders and that a lot of kids wound up in those gangs just because they didn't have any other thing to belong to. You think about it; we all want to belong to a gang. We just want to be in good gangs. Alvin's relay team is a gang; it's a good gang. Right? Every church, every synagogue, that's a good gang. If you like your school, it's a good gang. People have a need; we are not destined to live isolated lives. And a lot of these kids who wound up in gangs are living in a vacuum alone, raising themselves, and they are drawn to the first magnet that makes them feel like they're more important. We all have that need, every single one of us. We need to know that we are a part of things that are bigger and better than ourselves, that we can find expression and meaning and force and direction in life by joining with other people. And when you have things like Peace Builders and when you tell kids that they matter and you tell them they can belong and that they can amount to something and they can live out their dreams and no matter where they start out they might wind up with a gold medal and at least they can win a gold medal in the race of life if they do the right things, then you can change this.

So you have had these breathtaking reductions in violent crime by juveniles associated with gangs. The numbers are staggering. And what I want to ask everyone in America is, if your community hasn't done what they have done in Salinas, what's your excuse. Get off the dime, go to work, and we'll help you. Every child

counts in every community in America. We need more of this.

I also want to brag on the Alisal Union school district, where an antitrucancy initiative is keeping children in school. Every school district in this country that has cracked down on truancy has reduced juvenile crime, reduced the dropout rate, increased learning, and given more kids a better chance. Uniforms for elementary and middle school students keep them focused on what's inside, not what's outside. That also helps. Curfews keep the kids off the street and in a safe and secure place, and that's good.

And finally, let me just say one other thing. The thing I like about what you have done here is that you have not only cracked down on what's going wrong, you've tried to make things go right. You know, it's easy for anybody to stand up at a microphone and tell kids what they ought not to do. That's easy to do, and it's important to do. It's really important what people should not do. But every human being needs something to say yes to, and too many of our children have not had enough things to say yes to. You are also giving them something to say yes to. And I encourage you, as you teach people right from wrong, never to forget you not only need to suppress the wrong, you need to lift up the right and give people something to live for and to shoot for and to strive for.

I believe the most important thing we can do in Washington today, at a time when we have reduced the size of the bureaucracy, we are moving to balance the budget, is to say that we still have to have a Government that is strong enough to help people when they're flat on their back—as you are if you have a flood or a base closing and you need to change the whole direction of your economy or recover from a disaster—and also to help people make the most of their own lives, to build strong families, strong communities, strong workplaces, and a strong Nation.

You are a building block of that. I hope everyone in America will see somewhere tonight on a news report this great, vast sea of faces in this wonderful farming area, from all walks of life and all different backgrounds, who said simply, “We are not giving up on our children. We are lifting up our children.”

Thank you, and God bless you all.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:24 p.m. at the Monterey County Courthouse. In his remarks, he referred to Alan Styles, mayor, Daniel T. Nelson, chief of police, and Anna Caballero, city council member, Salinas; Simon Salinas, supervisor, Monterey County; Sam Cabral, president, International Union of Police Associations; and Alvin Harrison, U.S. Olympic athlete.

Statement on Proposed Legislation To Establish a Veterans' Medicare Reimbursement Model Project

August 8, 1996

Today I have directed Secretary of Veterans Affairs Jesse Brown to send to Congress legislation for an innovative pilot that will expand health care options for our Nation's older veterans.

The “Veterans' Medicare Reimbursement Model Project Act of 1996” fulfills a recommendation made by the Vice President's National Performance Review and moves forward an idea proposed during the early days of this administration. The proposal has the potential of multiple benefits: expanding the choice of health care for older veterans; bringing new resources, utilization, and operational experience

to the VA health care system; and producing savings for the Medicare Trust Fund by providing health care to Medicare-eligible veterans at a lower cost in the VA system.

This bill would establish a model demonstration project under which the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) would be reimbursed by the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) for health care provided to certain Medicare-eligible veterans.

It would open the VA system to Medicare-eligible veterans at a limited number of sites, allowing VA to receive reimbursement from Medicare, and testing whether this is a way of