

Remarks at a Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee Reception May 21, 1997

Thank you very much. Senator Kerrey, thank you so much for what you said. I certainly hope someone taped that; I may need it later. [Laughter] Thank you, Senator Torricelli, for your tireless efforts, your great energy. I thank all the other Senators who are here from our party. I have seen Senators Harkin, Dodd, Mikulski, Breaux, and Rockefeller. I'm sure I've missed someone. Who else is here? Senator Graham, Bryan. Bumpers is not here, is he? Dale Bumpers came to a fundraiser? My Senator is here. Give him a hand. [Applause] That's great. [Laughter]

Anyway, I want to say a special word of appreciation to Senator Daschle, who took on the leadership of our party and the Senate at a difficult time. And I think that every single Member of the United States Senate would have to say that he has performed with incredible skill and discipline and leadership and humanity. And we are very grateful to him.

Ladies and gentlemen, I thank you for being here tonight. I'm here because I want to see the Democrats who are running for reelection win. I want to see Senator Biden have a chance to chair the Judiciary Committee. I want Senator Hollings—I know he's here—to be reelected, and Senator Boxer, Senator Murray, Senator Carol Moseley-Braun.

I'm here because even though we have had occasional well-publicized disagreements, the last time I checked, the Democratic Congress has supported me more frequently than the Democrats supported my last three Democratic predecessors. So I am very grateful for the partnership that we have had. It means a lot to me, and I thank them for that.

And I'm here because I wanted to tell all of you who contributed to us so that we could all be here tonight, I am proud of you. You are doing what it takes to make the American political system work. And you ought to be proud of yourselves, because if it hadn't been for you, a lot of us would not be here doing the things which have been done to advance the cause of the American people. And I hope you will always be proud to be here among your friends who agree with you and who are trying to move this country forward. And thank

you, Dale Chihuly, for your support and your artistic gifts to all of us. God bless you, sir.

Ladies and gentlemen, for almost 4½ years now we have worked hard to lead this country into a new century with a different way of governing America. In 1992, our country was drifting and divided, and I had a new idea, that we could bring the American people together and move us forward if we thought about what it would take to essentially preserve the American dream for everyone in the 21st century. Opportunity for all, responsibility from all, everybody is part of our community, and we're prepared to lead the world toward peace and freedom and prosperity—a very simple program.

At the time, Democrats had had a hard time commanding national trust because people said, well, we couldn't be trusted because we'd spend every dollar we got our hands on; we couldn't be trusted with the deficit; we couldn't be trusted to manage the economy; we couldn't be trusted with defense; we couldn't be trusted with foreign policy; we couldn't be trusted with crime. You remember all that whole litany that our friends on the other side used to say about us.

Well, now we have 4½ years of experience. Yes, we're going to pass a balanced budget plan; but don't you forget, 77 percent of the work has been done, done entirely by Democrats who voted in 1993 for the economic program that represented the philosophy the voters ratified in 1992. And we were right, and that's why we can balance the budget today and continue to invest in our country and move us forward.

Senator Daschle talked about a record number of new jobs. We've also got the lowest employment rate in 24 years, the lowest inflation in 30 years, the highest business investment in 35 years. And here's something important to Democrats, the biggest decline in inequality in incomes of working families in over three decades. That's what we came here to do; that's what we're doing; and that's what we're going to do more of if you help us keep these people in the Senate and bring some friends along so that we can have a majority and continue to move this country forward.

Crime has gone down 5 years in a row for the first time in over two decades. We've had the biggest drop in welfare rolls, before the welfare reform bill was signed, in 50 years. The Democrats have a lot to be proud of. And we have a lot to do. And all elections are about the future.

Now when this agreement passes, it will provide for a balanced budget that has the biggest increase in education in a generation; enough funds to continue protecting the environment and close 500 of the worst toxic waste dumps and continue our work to try to preserve our national parks, to try to save the Florida Everglades, to try to move this country forward environmentally. It contains funds that are adequate to restore almost all of the cuts in—wrongful cuts in aid to legal immigrants that were imposed last year by the Congress. And it provides funds to help us make sure that all those people we are telling, "You have to move from welfare to work," will actually be able to get from welfare to work and will be able to have a job when they get there.

Yesterday we announced a new partnership with 100 companies, that will soon grow into 1,000, who are committing to hire people to move from welfare to work. We are going to move another million people into the work force from welfare in the next 4 years. That is our approach: Don't cut people off and walk away from them; give them a chance to raise their children and succeed in the workplace.

Let me just say that we have a lot of challenges ahead. We have cured the structural deficit in our country, but we have to attack the generational deficit. That means that we have to recognize that while poverty is at an all-time low among senior citizens, and we're proud of that, it's twice that high among our children. And we can't let it get worse as those of us in the baby boom generation move toward our retirement years. We have to literally carry out a crusade to take care of the future of the children of this country. Part of the things that I like about this budget is that it's got funds in there—\$16 billion worth of funds—to extend health insurance to half the kids in this country who don't have it. And we shouldn't quit until we finish that job.

And finally, let me say, we have one big debate still raging in our party and in our country. And I'm clearly on one side, and I'm here to plead guilty. I believe it's good for America to

lead the world to a more open economy, to more peaceful arms arrangements, to more co-operation, to more democracy. And I believe we did the right thing in the last 4 years to conclude over 200 trade agreements, the largest trade record of any administration in the history of the country. That's one of the reasons in the last 2 years more than half of the new jobs coming into our economy have paid above average wages.

I believe we're doing the right thing to make an agreement between NATO and Russia, which I'm going to Paris to celebrate next week. I believe we're doing the right thing to open NATO membership to new members so that we can avoid having a 21st century like the 20th century and, frankly, virtually every century before it where wars were fought and people were killed on the soil of Europe.

I believe it's a good thing for the United States to try to make peace in the Middle East and Northern Ireland and Bosnia, to try to ask our friends in Greece and Turkey to work with us to resolve their problems. I believe it's a good thing for us to care about what's going on between India and Pakistan and hope that it can be worked out. I believe it's a good thing for us to believe that here at home our incredible racial and ethnic diversity should be seen as an asset. And I am proud of the fact that I have consistently opposed the dismantlement of all affirmative action programs. I think it is a terrible mistake, and you can see it in the enrollment figures in these colleges and universities in Texas and California now.

So that's what I believe. And it's hard to quarrel with the results now. If you can help us with your ideas and your contributions and with recruiting good candidates in all these States, we now have a record. It is no longer open to serious debate that when we said in 1993 you could shrink the deficit, cut the size of Government, and increase investment in education, technology, and science and research, they laughed at us and said, "All you're going to do is bring on a recession and make the deficit worse." The deficit's been cut by 77 percent. You heard Tom Daschle say we produced 12 million jobs for the first time in history in a 4-year period and the lowest unemployment rate in 24 years. Our approach was right, and they were not, and that's why we got a budget agreement today that will enable us to balance the budget. All we have to do is to stay on

the good issues, run on the high road, and be able to find good candidates and finance them, and we can keep moving this country forward.

Don't you ever forget—you go home tonight—12 million people have jobs because we changed the economic policy of the country; 186,000 felons, fugitives, and stalkers did not buy handguns in the last 4 years because we changed the policy of the country; 12 million working families got to take a little time off from their jobs when they had a sick parent or a sick child without losing their jobs because we changed the direction of the country. And I could go on and on and on.

What you do makes a difference in the lives of people you will never meet, you will never know, who could never afford to be here tonight. That is the unique role you occupy in American democracy. I am very proud of it and very grateful to you and deeply determined to keep this country and our party moving in the right direction.

Thank you for your support. Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:23 p.m. at the Corcoran Museum of Art. In his remarks, he referred to glass artist Dale Chihuly, whose work was displayed at the museum.

Remarks at a Townhall Meeting on Education in Clarksburg, West Virginia May 22, 1997

The President. Thank you very much. Thank you, Mary Helen. She said she was nervous, but I thought she did a great job, didn't you? Terrific.

Thank you, Bob Kittle, for hosting us here, Leon Pilewski, the principal, and all the faculty here at Robert Byrd High School. I thank Governor Underwood, Mrs. Underwood, Governor Caperton, the other State officials for being here, the legislative leaders, the local school officials.

The congressional delegation did want to come, but the Senate is voting today on the balanced budget amendment. I'll have a little more to say about that in a minute. But I kind of wish Senator Byrd had been able to come here, especially to this school, but he and your other legislators have put their duty first, and I respect that, and they're where we all want them to be.

I'd like to thank your State superintendent of education, Hank Marockie, for being here, and recognize the president of the State board of education, Cleo Mathews, who's here because not only is she the president of the State board of education but her daughter, Sylvia, is the Deputy Chief of Staff to the President. And that's a nice little walk from Hinton, West Virginia, so I thank them for being here. Cleo, thank you.

I thank Mayor Flynn and others for making me feel so welcome in Clarksburg and all the communities along the way where the people came out to say hello. But mostly I want to thank all of you in this audience for joining me to talk about education, about the plans that you have and the plans that I have to make education better, and especially the importance of high standards, to give our children the knowledge and skills they will need to seize the opportunities and meet the challenges of the 21st century.

I came here in part because of the great progress you are making in the national movement to raise academic achievement. In 1996, the State of West Virginia tied for third in the Nation in improvement since 1992 in the mathematics performance of fourth and eighth graders. You should be very, very proud of that.

I want to thank Governor Underwood for supporting this educational effort, and I want to thank my former colleague, with whom I served for many years, Gaston Caperton, for making education his top priority here in West Virginia, among other things, making West Virginia the Nation's leader in putting technology in schools.

I believe you either now have or soon will have computers in every single one of your elementary schools in West Virginia. That is something you can be very proud of—that, the distance learning work you've done. And I want