

Remarks at a Luncheon for Senator Barbara Boxer in San Francisco June 23, 1997

Thank you very much, Senator Boxer, Senator Torricelli. Delaine Eastin, thank you for being here and for supporting our educational standards and excellence movement. I thank the Saxophone Quartet and the Bacich School second grade choir. I thought they were both terrific. [Applause] Thank you. I guarantee you one thing, when the kids were up there singing, every one of us was saying, "I wonder if I could sing that song, if I could remember all those States in alphabetical order." [Laughter] Good citizenship.

When Barbara Boxer was finishing her remarks, Bob Torricelli, who is an old friend of mine—old friends talk, she should have chided us for talking—[laughter]—Bob Torricelli leaned over to me and said, "She is the best spirit in the entire Senate."

You know, in the spirit of campaign reform, I think you know one of the things that I favor is full disclosure. And for those of you who don't know, Barbara Boxer's first grandchild is my second nephew, so that's really why I'm here. [Laughter] It has nothing to do with party or conviction or anything. Therefore, I have had an unusual opportunity to get to know this woman, and what I can tell you is that everything I have ever seen of her in private is completely consistent with the face and the voice she presents to the public. And that is important. What you are seeing is exactly what you get 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 weeks a year.

And while we normally but not always agree on the issues, the thing I would like for you to think about today is the spirit, the heart of the matter. I've been here a good while now in Washington, and I had a real life before I moved to Washington—[laughter]—and I expect to have a real life when I leave. And I have almost come to the conclusion that more important than the ideological debates or the party differences is which spirit will dominate Washington as we move into the 21st century.

I mean, here we are basically with the strongest economy in a generation, with an unemployment rate below 5 percent for the first time in 24 years; the lowest inflation in 30 years; and for us Democrats, a very important statistic,

the biggest decline in inequality among working families in over three decades; the number one exporter in the world; the lowest deficit as a percentage of our income of any major economy in the world; a crime rate that dropped—the biggest drop in 36 years last year; before the welfare law took effect, the biggest drop in welfare rolls in the history of the Republic. And yet, there are really still people in Washington who seem like they're mad about it. [Laughter] And they want to do whatever it takes to make sure you don't think about it. And this whole spirit, you know, are you going to be for the people who try to drive you down or the people who try to lift you up. That's really what it's about.

You know, you listen to some of these people talk in the Nation's Capital, you'd think that they spent the whole morning sucking lemons before they got up to give the speech. [Laughter] And you listen to Barbara Boxer talk in the middle of a rainstorm and you'd be convinced you were on the beach in some sunny resort. [Laughter] It's a difference in approach to life and attitude and whether you believe the purpose of politics is to elevate the human spirit and bring people together across the lines that divide them and make people believe that tomorrow can be better than today, or whether you believe the purpose of it is to carve out your little niche of power and anything that threatens it, including good news, should be crushed at the earliest possible moment with whatever means at hand.

Now, that really is the great choice here. You must not let this woman be defeated by all the people who will say, well, she's too liberal on this, that, or the other thing. If she ever made a mistake in her life, it was a mistake of the head, not the heart. And don't you ever forget it. We all make mistakes.

And that is really what is at issue. I have done everything I can as President to heal the kind of divisive, destructive, political climate that has come to dominate too much of the discourse in Washington, the automatic assumption that anybody who is different from you has got something terrible wrong with them, the feeling that anything you can do to beat somebody who is

your opponent, no matter how much you have to denigrate them, is all right. I've tried to get beyond that. I've tried to treat my opponents with respect and dignity and honor. And I've tried to restore what I thought was the best tradition of this country.

But you've got a Senator that works like crazy every day, that gets things done. You heard that list. One thing she didn't mention—she'll be glad Torricelli told me this. He said she forgot to say something. She forgot to say that when she was fighting for that emergency supplemental that we got passed for all the emergencies, one of the things it had in it was money for breast cancer research in the San Francisco area to see whether environmental causes are leading the higher rates of breast cancer here than other parts of the country. She did that.

You know, I hope you'll forgive me, but I'm as high on America as those kids are. I think they're right. I think they're right. And I don't pretend to have all the answers. All I know is that this country is better off today than it was when Barbara Boxer got elected to the Senate. I know that she has made material contributions to the efforts that our administration has made to grow the economy, to give poor people a chance, to increase the availability of education, to increase the accessibility of health care, to drive the crime rate down, and to bring us together across the lines that too often divide us. That's what I know.

And that's far more important than any specific issue that you can turn into a 30-second ad one way or the other. And I know that the spirit she brings to public life is the spirit we need from all people who go to Washington to represent you without regard to their party or their philosophy. If we brought that kind of spirit into all of our endeavors, instead of thinking about how we could drive a stake into the spirit of the American people by our short-term advantage, this country would have no problems.

And also, we cannot afford to be afraid of the future. And that sort of divisive talk, you know, it makes people afraid of the future. We don't have anything to be afraid of if we just face our problems, face our challenges, realize that we've still got a lot to do, realize that we don't have a person to waste, and realize that we all deserve to be represented by people who wake up in the right spirit.

And I believe that this woman is a rare treasure for our country. Yes, we're now united by marriage. [Laughter] Yes, I'm personally crazy about her. That's all true. But the most important thing—I'm not running anymore, I won't be on the ballot anymore. I've been in public life for a long time. I've seen a lot of people come and go. Contrary to what you may read or feel, the overwhelming majority of people I have known of both parties and all philosophies have been scrupulously honest people who worked hard and made less money than they could've made doing nearly anything else with people of their talent and energy and ability, who wanted to make this a better country. And everybody who is trying to convince you of the contrary is wrong. And people who try to keep the American people in a bad frame of mind because they just can't bear to think that somebody is happy and successful somewhere are wrong.

And what we need to do is to be focused on our common problems and our common business. So don't let the people who trade on fear and only win when you're unhappy turn Barbara Boxer into a cardboard cutout of what she really is. Don't let that happen. And remember, it's way more important than the issues; it's about the spirit of the country. It's about the spirit of California. California did not get where it is, you didn't come back from all those disasters and a terrible recession just on my policies. I'd like to think I helped, but you didn't get there—you got there on the spirit of the people. And if everybody had sat around, being in the frame of mind that the kind of people who are going to fight her so hard want you to be in when you go vote on election day, you would not have recovered.

We cannot behave on election day in a way that is different from the way we want to behave on every other day of the year. We cannot look at the world in a different way on election day in a way different from the way we want to look at our life and expect to get the kind of elected representatives we want and the kind of collective decisions we have to make as a people. Remember that.

Remember Senator Torricelli's line. And through the ups and the downs, you stay with her and you make up your mind that you will not let the people of California be taken in by an attack on her because she is the great

spirit of the Senate. And that's what America needs: the right spirit.

Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:24 p.m. at the Hyatt Regency San Francisco Hotel. In his remarks, he referred to Delaine Eastin, California superintendent of public instruction.

Remarks at Mar Vista Elementary School in Los Angeles, California June 23, 1997

The President. Thank you. I thought Mary Mendez did a good job for a parent and not a professional speaker, didn't you? Give her a hand. [Applause]

Hello!

Audience members. Hello!

The President. It's wonderful to be back in California and to be here in Los Angeles and to be here in this terrific neighborhood at this great school. Thank you very much for having me here. Thank you, Mayor Riordan, for your good work and your kind remarks.

I want to thank my Small Business Administrator, Aida Alvarez, who's here with me today. She's been speaking to the LULAC convention. But I brought her here to emphasize another passionate feeling of mine, and that is that we have to give every American a chance to live up to his or her God-given abilities. Aida Alvarez is the first American of Puerto Rican descent ever to be in a President's Cabinet. So I thought I would bring her today, and I'm glad she's here.

Thank you, David Lawrence and Dr. Sharon Levine, for your great citizenship. And thank you, Doris Palacio, for the wonderful work you do here at this school. I'm very, very proud of you, thank you. I want to thank the people from Children's Now, the parents, the students, and the teachers at Mar Vista.

Now, you know what we're here to talk about. Too many children all across America, too many children here in California, some children in this crowd today don't have health insurance. We are here today because Kaiser Permanente is going to make a major change in that for you in California. We want to congratulate them, but even more important, we ought to be here to resolve to do better and not to rest until every child in America has an appropriate health insurance policy and adequate health care when they need it.

The hard truth is that while America has the highest health care quality in the world, in many ways too many Americans don't have access to the best the system has to offer. You heard the good doctor outlining it. Today, over 10 million American children, over 1.6 million of them here in California, don't have health insurance. Do you know what that means? That means nearly 40 percent of the uninsured children don't get the annual checkups they need and may not find those holes in the heart or lead problems or other problems. It means one in four uninsured children don't even have a regular doctor. It means too many children who have trouble seeing a blackboard don't get the glasses they need to correct their vision; that too many nagging coughs go untreated until they worsen into more serious conditions that may require costly treatments and lengthy hospital stays later; that too many parents actually face the agonizing and impossible choice between buying medicine for a sick child or food for the rest of their family. We must do better, and we can.

Our economy is the strongest in the world. In the last 4 years we've become the number one exporter again, we've produced over 12 million jobs, we have the lowest unemployment rate in 24 years, and we are still the only advanced industrial country in the world that does not provide health insurance for every single one of its working families. It is wrong, and we have to do better.

It is true, as you have heard, that a number of children are actually covered by law under State programs like MediCal, and for some reason their parents either don't know or don't believe they can access the program. We have to do better. But it's also true that nearly one-sixth of us simply don't have health insurance. I tried hard to enact a plan that would give all American working families health insurance,