

president, American University; Secretary of the Navy John H. Dalton and his wife, Margaret; Harry L. Thomas, Sr., District of Columbia City Council member, Ward 5; and President Jiang Zemin of China. The President also referred to

the "Commencement Address at American University in Washington, June 10, 1963," *Public Papers of the Presidents: John F. Kennedy, 1963* (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1964), p. 459.

## Remarks at a Democratic Business Council Dinner September 9, 1997

Thank you very much. First I want to thank Steve Grossman for his leadership and his dedication. I had an opportunity to be with Steve and his wife during my holiday, and I met his son, who was singing for me with the Princeton Glee Club. You saw Steve standing here—his son is 6'5" and weighs 290 pounds. [Laughter] So I tell you that to say, do not underestimate this man. [Laughter] He has hidden power that manifests itself in all kinds of interesting ways.

I thank Tom Hendrickson for the work that he's done on the Democratic Business Council. I love this group, and I'm very proud of the fact that since I've been President we've added hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of members to this group, people we asked to give contributions that are quite generous but by today's standards are still fairly moderate, because we want to get large numbers of people who want to participate with us in making the future for the Democratic Party.

I thank Alan Solomont. And I want to thank my Budget Director, Frank Raines, for coming tonight. After he engineered the balanced budget agreement, I thought he would never do anything else for the rest of his life. [Laughter] He thought he was entitled to retire, but I said no.

I had a great day today. I hope you did. I had a great day. I met with some wonderful people. I was able to see some progress in a lot of areas where we've been working hard. But I started the day—or I didn't start the day but in the middle of the day, at noon, I went to American University to give a speech about what I hoped we would do in the last 3 months and couple of weeks of this year. And it's a fascinating place, American University. They have students from over 140 different racial and ethnic and national groups. Ninety percent of

the students are involved in community service. That's an astonishing thing.

American University 34 years ago was the site of President Kennedy's famous speech on arms control in the cold war. And many people believe it was the finest speech he ever gave. What I reminded the students of today was that in that speech, instead of just focusing on the problems that existed then between the United States and the Soviet Union, John Kennedy actually imagined a world where there was no more cold war, there was no more communist threat, our two nations were no longer enemies. We are now living in the world that he imagined 34 years ago.

And I made that point to tell them that they had to imagine the world they wanted to live in in the 21st century, and that everything I have done for the last 4½ years was a product of what I had imagined we would do and should do as a country.

It was almost 6 years ago that I announced for President, at a time when our country was in a very different position than it is now, when we seemed to be drifting into the future and be more divided than we ought to be and somewhat uncertain about what our role in the world ought to be. It seemed to me clear that we were going through a time where people were dramatically changing the way they work, the way they live, the way they relate to each other, the way we relate to the rest of the world, and that what is always called upon at a time like that is to take a new course that is consistent with the oldest values of this country.

And to me, my whole work has always been about three things: One, creating opportunity for everybody responsible enough to work for it; two, making sure our country remains the leading force for peace and freedom and prosperity in the world; and three, making sure that

out of all of our differences, which are legion, we still come together as one America. Opportunity, responsibility, community: Those are the things that I think about every day. And I've been thinking about them every day for 6 years and, indeed, even longer than that.

Now, we can be proud of where this country is. The country has got a lot of genuine hope and a lot of solid achievement. Before the budget was balanced, thanks to the work that the Democrats did in 1993, we had reduced the deficit by 80 percent. We had a historic drop in the welfare rolls. We had huge drops in the crime rate. You have places in inner cities and isolated rural areas that are beginning to see a renaissance of growth and development again where there hasn't been any in a very long time.

Now, this balanced budget agreement not only gives us the first balanced budget since 1969, when President Johnson presented his last budget before leaving office, it also gives us the largest increase in health investment since Medicaid in 1965, which will be used primarily but not exclusively to provide health insurance for about 5 million children that don't have it now. It provides the largest investment increase in education since 1965, which will be used, among other things, to make sure we reach our goal of hooking up all the classrooms and the libraries to the Internet by the year 2000, adding large numbers of children to the Head Start rolls, putting another 100,000 work-study positions in for college students, and doing a number of things that will help make our schools better. And finally, of course, we passed the tax portions of the bill, which among other things—and I think most importantly—essentially opened the doors of college education to all Americans who are willing to work for it, so that we can now say to a child struggling in a family maybe having a hard time making ends meet, "If you stay in school, if you make decent grades, and if you'll work for it, you can go to college. You'll either get a Pell grant or a work-study position or get a tax credit that will send you to college. You do not have to worry about that anymore."

So that's all very encouraging. But what I think is important is that we recognize we're living in a very dynamic time, and we have to keep pushing. I'm glad we have 13 million new jobs. I'm glad the unemployment rate is the lowest in 24 years. I'm glad the inflation rate is the lowest in 30 years. I'm glad that

consumer confidence and business investment are at record highs. I'm glad about all of that. But it is not enough. I'm glad the crime rate has dropped, but it's still too high. And under our welfare reform law, we have to move even more people from welfare to work in order to meet the requirements of the law and avoid hurting any children, which we don't want to do.

So we have a lot more to do. And today I talked to the students at American University—I'll just say very briefly—about the things we're going to try to do just between now and the first of the year. First, we have to pass appropriation bills which implement the budget. I think it's very important that you understand the balanced budget agreement is a 5-year budget plan that enacted the tax cuts and the budget numbers for Medicare and Medicaid and the other so-called entitlements. But for education, transportation, everything else, we have to pass a budget bill every year for those things that is faithful to that agreement. So that's the first thing we have to do.

And in that agreement, in education, which is terribly important to me, we're also fighting a little battle underneath the screen which I hope has become more public in the last few days, to try to preserve the ability of the Department of Education to contract with a bipartisan group established by Congress to develop examinations in reading and mathematics for fourth and eighth graders so that we'll have national standards for the first time that will apply to all of our children.

The tests are voluntary, and they are not designed to be used for any reason to punish the kids but just to see whether our children are learning to read by the fourth grade and whether they know the math they need to know by the eighth grade. We're the only major country in the world that doesn't have national academic standards tied to international norms. To pretend that English is somehow different in Montana than it is in Maine, or that math is somehow different in Washington—Northwest Washington—than it is in southern Florida is pure folly.

And I am immensely gratified that a significant number of States, 15 big cities, 6 of the 7 largest big-city school districts in the country have said, "We would like to participate in this. We're not afraid. We want to know where we

are and how we can do better.” That will be a big fight.

Then we’re trying to pass a juvenile justice bill that will help to deal with what I consider to be the biggest threat to our civil society on the crime front, which is that crime had been going up dramatically among—most dramatically among people under 18. Now it’s leveled off in the last couple of years, and we hope it’s going down. But we still have a lot to do to keep our kids out of gangs, off drugs, away from guns, in school, living positive lives.

And I just want to point out, since Mr. Grossman and Mr. Solomont are from Massachusetts and they’re very proud of it, that our juvenile justice bill is modeled in large measure on the program that has been operating in Boston, where it has been about 2 years now—2 full years—since any person under the age of 18 has been killed by a violent—gun. That’s an amazing thing. And so we can do this, but it’s very important.

The third thing we’re going to try to do is to make sure that I get the authority that Presidents have been given since the 1970’s to negotiate trade agreements, comprehensive trade agreements that can be presented to Congress for an up-or-down vote. That’s very controversial now, I think because some people have ambivalent feelings about the trade agreements we signed with Canada and Mexico. I think the evidence is pretty compelling in the positive side there, but the main thing we have to understand is that this fast-track authority I’m seeking has nothing to do with that.

The question is, are we going to continue to lead the world to open up markets for American products worldwide? Are we going to continue to lead the world in targeting specific sectors of the economy where we have a particular advantage, like telecommunications? Are we going to continue to lead the world toward freedom and open markets by reaching out our hand to our neighbors to the south of us, like Chile and Argentina and Brazil, where 70 percent of the increase in America’s trade in the last year has come from our neighbors in this hemisphere and to the south? And I do not believe that we dare walk away from that world leadership.

We negotiated over 200 trade agreements since I’ve been President. About 25 percent of our growth, of those 13 million jobs, has come directly because of the expansion of American

trade. We can compete with anybody, and if I have anything to say about it, that’s exactly what we’re going to do, because America’s national interest requires that we continue to lead the way.

Now, two or three other things I want to mention. The McCain-Feingold campaign finance reform bill will be up, and if it passes, it means all of you can still be here. *[Laughter]* But it would set a lid on contributions of about \$20,000, I think. It would have other restrictions. And combined with our efforts to get free or reduced air time for candidates, it could really dramatically change the way politics works.

Now, every year I’ve been President we’ve had a campaign finance bill up in the Congress that was a good bill. And every year I’ve supported it, and every year it’s died because of a filibuster in the Senate. And the people who don’t like it promise that’s what’s going to happen this time. All I can say is, this time everybody in America will know about it for a change, and that’s something to be said for that.

So I hope those of you—I personally don’t believe it’s a bad thing for people to contribute to their political parties. Even when our friends in the Republican Party get contributions from people that agree with them, I think that’s a good thing. What is a bad thing is that the campaigns cost so much today that the restrictions and the rules set up in 1974 have been totally overwhelmed by the sheer cost of campaigns. And you know most of it is in communications costs, in television, in radio, in direct mail, and anything else. We have a chance to change that now, and I’m going to do my best to do it.

And finally, on the domestic front, a big global issue is this issue of climate change. I am convinced that the climate is changing. I am convinced that the industrialized world, now aided by the developing world, has put so many greenhouse gases into the atmosphere that the climate is warming. It is leading to more extreme climatic events all across America. Most of you, wherever you’re from, can think of a more disruptive pattern of climate. A man told me just last week that he was leaving the place where he had lived for the last decade because the climate had changed so dramatically it was not at all like what it was when he moved there 10 years ago.

I say this to make this point: The countries of the world recognize that they need to reduce

the greenhouse gases they're putting into the atmosphere. But it's kind of like two people standing in an airplane with their parachutes on; everybody wants the other person to go first. Nobody wants to jump unless everybody does. And there's always going to be a reason not to do it. But the truth is that we are committed, all of us, including the United States, to embracing in Japan this December a goal of reducing greenhouse gas emissions significantly by early in the next century. And we have to find a way to do it that still permits the economy to grow.

Now, we know that right now, if we all just change behavior, with available technology, with no cost, we can reduce it by 20 percent—right now, with available technology, at no cost. You cannot make me believe that we can't find a way to do this and still grow the American economy. And I have invested too much time and effort to create those 13 million jobs to see them all go away, but neither am I prepared to say that my grandchildren will live in a world that's hardly fit to live in because we couldn't take care of the environment that God gave us. And I refuse to believe that we have to make the choice. We don't. We're going to do this. We're going to do it right, and we're all going to do it together. But it's going to be a hard fight, and I'd like to ask for your support.

Finally, let me say, in terms of what we're going to try to get done between now and the first of the year: The Secretary of State is in the Middle East today. We are working very hard in Bosnia. The situation with regard to peace in Northern Ireland is better than it has been in a very long time, and we are hopeful and work very hard there. I think that you can see that the involvement of the United States is critical. And I intend to maintain it, and I intend to see that we prevail wherever we possibly can.

And the last point I wish to make is this: I'm going to try to step up over the next few weeks my public involvement in this racial dialog that I called for at San Diego State University—the University of California at San Diego, excuse me—not very long ago. I strongly believe that the diversity in this country is a godsend for the 21st century. It's a global society. If you want one example, Congress became acquainted with the fact that there were seven economies in Africa that grew at greater than 7 percent last year. So we had no trouble getting

Republicans as well as Democrats to support the Africa trade initiative we put together, because it wasn't about black and white, it was about green. *[Laughter]*

And I don't say that—that's not a criticism of the Republicans. I am very grateful—I am very grateful for the bipartisan support we had. And I think that—if you look at the fact, where else could you go—I went to the American University, there's people from 140 different national groups there. In a global society, that is a godsend. But very few people have taken the time to think about what are the problems we've got that are still unresolved. How can we expect to do without racial problems if everybody doesn't have an economic opportunity and an education opportunity? And what will it be like when there is no majority race in California, our biggest State? We'll know within a decade. What will it be like when there is no majority race in the entire country? We'll know within three or four decades.

Now is the time to think about this. Now is the time to prepare for it. Why? We're living today without a cold war, in part because people in John Kennedy's time imagined that there would be a time when there would be no cold war. They never lived to see it, most of them. Only a few are still around who in the beginning of the cold war imagined that it would come to an end. But their imagination made all the difference. And how we imagine the 21st century and then go about giving meaning and reality to our imagination will make all the difference.

That's really why you're here. That's really what we're going to try to do with your investment. And that's what I think will make the biggest difference to our people.

Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 8:50 p.m. in the Crystal Room at the Sheraton Carlton Hotel. In his remarks, he referred to Steve Grossman, national chair, and Alan D. Solomont, national finance chair, Democratic National Committee; Mr. Grossman's wife, Barbara; and C. Thomas Hendrickson, chair, Democratic Business Council.