

Remarks at an Arkansas State Democratic Party Reception in Little Rock,
Arkansas
September 27, 1997

The President. Thank you very much. Gosh, I'm glad to see you. Thank you, Chairman Gibson, Congressman Berry. You know, Marion Berry had me in his home and to coon suppers so many times I was practically paying part of the property tax down there. [Laughter] Then I got him to come to Washington to work, and he thought he'd gone to a foreign country. [Laughter] Now he's going to be there when I'm gone. [Laughter] And he's still doing that poor country boy routine, you know. He's just milking it for all it's worth. [Laughter] He's a good man and my dear friend, and I'm proud that he's my Congressman.

And Congressman Snyder, I'm glad to be the first constituent. I voted for you, and I just have one question. How come I don't ever get the newsletter? [Laughter]

You know, Vic Snyder is an unusual man. He was in the Marine Corps, and sometimes I think he has more courage than is good for him. He's always sticking his neck out. And he's got a medical degree and a law degree, and sometimes I think he knows more than anybody ought to have to carry around. [Laughter] But I am very, very proud that we have sent a person of his caliber to the United States Congress from this district. And you should all be proud of him. So I thank you for that.

And, Bynum, I thank you for organizing this, and I thank all of you for being here for the Arkansas legislature. When we had the tornadoes down here and I came down to look at Arkadelphia and College Station and fly over the parts of Benton that were hurt so badly, afterward I had about an hour, and I invited the legislators to come out here and see me at the airport. And there was a whole bunch of stuff going on—I didn't dream anybody would come. And more than half of you showed up, those of you who are legislators here. And I heard something from the Arkansas legislators I never thought I would hear as long as I lived. About 30 of them said, "We really miss you." [Laughter] I thought I would never hear it.

And then I made a mistake—I made the mistake they teach you in law school 101. They said, "Never ask a question you don't know the

answer to." I made a mistake. I said, "Why?" [Laughter] And they said, "Because we could have so much fun when you were here because whenever it got going too far you would always stop us, and now we have to be responsible, and we have to do the right thing for the State of Arkansas." [Laughter]

But I think our legislators have done the right thing for the State. And because of the term limits law, all of you know that more than 50 of the seats will turn over. And that's really why we're all here.

I tell you, I've learned a lot of things in the last 5 years, and most of them have been utterly wonderful. Hillary and I have had a magnificent experience. Our daughter, thanks to the media and others, was permitted to have about as normal a childhood as you could have in Washington, living in the White House. And she's off at college now, and when we took her to Stanford, the student speaker to the parents got up and made the following remark—she said, "I don't want any of you to worry, your children will miss you—in November"—[laughter]—"for 15 minutes." [Laughter] So she's having a great time.

And our country is in better shape than it was 5 years ago when we started this odyssey. And I guess what I would like to say to you is that the country works best when there are two parties with different views that are both strong that are required by the dynamics of the situation to make principled compromise.

You heard what Vic said, that balanced budget we signed is a great thing for America. But I want you to know that the Democrats made some critical contributions to it without which it never would have happened. Number one, in 1993, without a single Republican vote, we took the tough vote on our economic plan, and the deficit had been reduced by 87 percent before the balanced budget act was passed. That's why we could pass one with all the good stuff in it, and you should never forget that.

Number two, what else did the Democrats put in? If it hadn't been for us, there never would have been \$24 billion for children's health to give 5 million children, almost all of them

in lower income working families whose parents don't have health insurance on the job, the coverage of health insurance and the dignity and security their families deserve. We put that in there.

The third thing we did—which I think 30 years from now will live, along with the fact that we finally balanced the budget for the first time since Lyndon Johnson was President, will live as the enduring legacy—we literally can now say because of the HOPE scholarship, the \$1,500 tax credit for the first 2 years of college which covers the cost of tuition and fees at most of the community colleges in the country, because of the tax credits for the junior and senior year of college and graduate school and adults going back for job training, because you can now have an IRA you can withdraw from tax-free if you spend the money on education or a health insurance policy or to buy a first home, because we've got in the last 2 years 300,000 more work-study positions, and because we've got the biggest increase in Pell grants in 20 years, we can now say, finally, this country has opened the doors of college to every person in the country who is willing to work for it. And I'm proud of that, and you should be proud of that. And that was what our party put in there.

And it was our party that overwhelmingly supported the family and medical leave law and that got the minimum wage law raised for the first time in a very long time and in so many other ways. And it was our party, standing united, these Members of Congress behind me, that enabled us to stop the contract on America from going into effect in 1995, even after the Government was shut down. So it matters. There are differences that are honest in these parties, and it matters what we did.

There is another thing that Vic Snyder said that I don't think we ought to dwell on too much, but it bears repeating. There's a difference in the way we do our business, too. There is a difference in the way we do our business, too. And I came to Washington sick and tired of the politics of personal destruction. And many times over the last 4 years it has broken my heart to see how people tried to put all of you on trial and our whole State on trial. And I went back in my own mind to a chilling phone call I got in 1991 from a man who was kind of a friend of mine in the other party who said, "We can make people

believe anything about Arkansas. You're the only guy that can beat us. If you run, we'll take it out on them." And they were as good as their word.

But you did not weaken, and I kept smiling and Hillary kept smiling, and the country kept doing better, and the people that were doing that just got madder and madder and madder and madder. But on the other hand, and against all odds after all you've been through, you came through, and you voted for me overwhelmingly again last time. And I am more grateful than I can say. But I want to tell you something else. It matters who holds these positions. It matters who is in the legislature.

You know, I was a voter. I voted against the term limits amendment. I used to joke with people that whenever John Miller walked in a room I was in, if there were 100 people in the room, the knowledge of State government doubled when he walked in a room. [Laughter] I used to say to people—I used to talk about the people that had been around there a long time, and we'd fight sometimes, but I always thought it was a good thing to have elected citizens with the real power reins.

And now we have to be sensitive because all of our newer members are going to have to rely more on permanent staff people, and they're going to have to listen more to the lobbyists because they'll have information they don't have. And so we're going to have to work hard to make adjustments. There is no such thing as a perfect system.

But we need good, knowledgeable, hard-working, honest people to present themselves to serve in the legislature more than ever before. And if there is any good thing about it, we'll have to go to people and say, "Look, you know you don't have to take your whole life doing this because we've got these term limits now, but your State needs you to step forward and serve."

And then I want to see the Democrats out there running positive campaigns. Vic and Marion will tell you, when I was pleading with all of our Democrats to vote for the balanced budget—because of the things that were in it, because it had integrity, it was a good Democratic budget, and I was sick and tired of seeing that Democrats were the party of tax-and-spend, when we took the deficit down all by ourselves—I argued the following: I said, "Look, when I became President, what did you hear

at every election about our party? What did they say? They said we were weak on national defense. They said we didn't really support a strong foreign policy. They said we couldn't be trusted to manage the economy. They said we were weak on crime and weak on welfare." I heard it all like a mantra, over and over again.

Well, they can't say that 5 years later, because our economy is the strongest it's been in a generation; because we have advanced the cause of peace and freedom around the world; because we have the lowest—biggest drop in welfare in history and the smallest percentage of Americans on welfare since 1970. After 20 years of immigration of poor people coming to America, we still have the smallest percentage of people on welfare since 1970. And the crime rate's dropped 5 years in a row.

So what is the subject? The subject is, how are we going to organize this country so that everybody has a chance to live up to his or her God-given capacities? How are we going to organize our lives so that people can work and still do their most important job, which is to raise their children properly? How are you going to balance the demands of work and family? How are we going to grow the economy and preserve the environment? Those are issues that require people with our kind of values and our kind of interests and our kind of insight. And the future depends upon that.

I pledged when I went to Washington I would change the Federal Government. I would make it more active but smaller, and give more power to the States. And we have done that. Now, if the States have more power on everything from education to welfare and a whole range of other issues, it then becomes even more important who is in the legislature.

So I'm telling you—I'm glad you're here. We need the money. [Laughter] I'm glad you're here. And I should point out that this fundraiser is completely consistent with the State law, and if we finally get Congress off the dime and pass the McCain-Feingold bill, all the limits here would be way under that bill. So this is the kind of thing that is good for America. I'm glad you're here, but I need two more things.

We need, number one, we need good candidates to come forward. And secondly, we need you to work to win. And let me just ask you for one more thing, and I'll be home to help. We must not—we must not—lose the seat now held by Senator Dale Bumpers in the election.

And there are some really wonderful people who have either already made up their mind to run or who may yet decide to run. I ask only one thing, that they have a good, honest, positive debate, that they bring their best ideas forward, that they not cut each other up, and when it's all over—you remember how you felt and how I felt on the morning after the election when I had won this overwhelming victory, and yet for the first time in the history of the State of Arkansas a Democrat had lost a Senate seat. I don't want that to happen again, and we don't need that to happen again. I cannot be effective without a sufficient number of Democrats in the Senate.

I want you to be in a good humor about this. This country is in better shape. And don't worry about us. And the tougher it gets up there—I always know, the better America does, the worse they will try to make it. [Laughter] It drives them nuts. [Laughter] They just hate it, you know. And I don't understand it. I always thought we should be happy when people had jobs. [Laughter] I always thought we should be happy when the country was at peace. I always thought we should be happy when people were advancing peace and freedom, and we were actually marching forward and facing our problems.

But you know, there's a lot of wonderful people in Washington, and then some of it is like another country. [Laughter] And they'll be shed of me soon enough. They ought to just relax. [Laughter] Let us do our job. Let us go on.

Remember what I said—this was not a one-shot deal, my Presidency. It was a miracle; nobody thought it was going to happen. [Laughter]

Audience member. I did!

Audience member. We did!

The President. First—in the beginning, only my mother and my wife thought we were going to win. [Laughter] Even my daughter and I had doubts. [Laughter] But it's part of something bigger. It's got to be part of something bigger. You have to understand, there are fundamental differences about how we view the future. So that if you like what we've done, keeping Marion and Vic in office is a part of it; electing people to these vacancies in the legislature is a part of it; holding Senator Bumpers' Senate seat is a part of it. You have to see this as a part of our life's work. This is part of what we are as citizens.

Three years from now, I'm going to come home. We're going to have a library. We're going to have a lot of fun. I'm still going to be a citizen. I'm still going to care about this. And I want you to care about it.

Audience member. We all want to hammer 'em—

The President. So thank you for being here, but hammer 'em—hammer 'em. That's a good idea.

God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 3:45 p.m. on the grounds of Ray Winder Baseball Field. In his remarks, he referred to Bynum Gibson, chair, Arkansas State Democratic Party; and John Miller, Arkansas State representative.

Remarks at a Candlelight Vigil Honoring the Little Rock Nine in Little Rock

September 27, 1997

Thank you very much, Leta. Dr. and Mrs. Titus, members of the board, Tiana Mitchell, and students and faculty. Let me say, I thought Tiana did a fine job representing the students here and spoke very well.

Hillary and I are delighted to be joined by a number of members of our administration, including Secretary of Transportation Rodney Slater, Bob Nash, and Janis Kearney and Carroll Willis. And there may be others here, but I thank them all for coming.

I know there are a lot of officials out there. I see Senator Walker and Mayor Hays, and I'm sure there are others. I thank you for coming. Thank you, Daisy Bates. Reverend clergy, thank you for coming. And especially, of course, to the Little Rock Nine, I'm delighted to see all of you. We're really getting to be old friends now. *[Laughter]*

And you just heard an address from the person I have picked to be chief of the Presidential speechwriting division for the remainder of my term in office. That was a terrific job, not only because he spoke so well but because of what he spoke. And I want to come back to that in a moment.

I love Philander Smith. I used to jog by here most every morning. If it wasn't too early, usually the students would be out walking around and say hello to me. I've seen the physical improvements in the campus, and they're very impressive, and I congratulate you on them. You know Carroll Willis and Lottie Shackelford and my great friend the late Mahlon Martin all were graduates of Philander Smith, so I have been

personally benefited by this school. And I thank you for that.

But I have to say a special word of appreciation to the choir, because the choir was the first choir from an historically black college to sing at the Presidential Inauguration—mine, in 1992. And I thank you very much for that. They've been back to Washington quite a few times since, and it's always a better place when they're there.

Let me say, tonight especially we have come, I would hope, to do two things. Nothing we can ever do, I think, will equal the emotional impact that the ceremony the day before yesterday in front of Central High School had not only on our State but, I think, on the entire country. I was in Texas yesterday and person after person after person came up to me, just overwhelmed by what they saw on the television and by the sight of the Little Rock Nine walking through the front doors, unimpeded.

As I understand it, the first thing we wish to do, and one which Dr. Roberts has already spoken about, is to acknowledge that there were others who may never have gotten their names in the newspapers, who had a lot to do with the way these young people turned into successful adults and were able to carry on their courageous struggle: parents and family members who were threatened with the loss of their jobs; neighbors who gave them everything from money to food to transportation; and of course the faculty here at Philander Smith who volunteered to tutor them, an extraordinary gift. And I would say to all of you who were involved