

Remarks on Campaign Finance Reform Legislation

October 4, 1997

For 5 years now we have watched the bipartisan effort to reform our campaign finance laws die at the hands of a filibuster in the United States Senate. I hope this year will be different. Republican Senator John McCain and Democratic Senator Russ Feingold have a strong bill that would curb the power of special interests and increase the confidence of the American people in our campaign finance system.

But this Tuesday, their opponents will try once again to kill this bipartisan bill, which has

the support of every Democratic Senator and a number of Republicans. They'll try it by using a "poison pill" amendment that will guarantee that reform dies one more time.

Make no mistake, a vote for this killer amendment is a vote to block meaningful reform.

NOTE: These remarks were recorded at 11:10 a.m. on October 4 in the Oval Office at the White House for later broadcast.

Remarks at a Dinner for Democratic Gubernatorial Candidate Don Beyer in Arlington, Virginia

October 4, 1997

Thank you. Well, Don, I can say yes to almost everything you asked for. *[Laughter]* I don't know about the car deal. We'll have to negotiate that. *[Laughter]* Everything else, put me down for a "yes." *[Laughter]*

Ladies and gentlemen, thank you for the warm welcome, and thank you for being here for Don and Megan. Thank you for inviting me. I want to begin by expressing my enormous admiration and gratitude for the friendships of two people in this audience with whom I served as Governor, Chuck Robb and Gerry Baliles, two of the greatest Governors Virginia ever saw.

In addition to everything Don said, I also would be remiss if I did not thank Gerry for his leadership of the special commission I established on the future of the airline industry. When we started, every airline company in America but one was losing money. We were in terrible shape. But it is a very different situation today, thanks in no small measure to the recommendations that Gerry Baliles made several years ago that we have implemented. And the country is in your debt, and we thank you, sir.

And I also want you to know from my point of view, I'm not sure there is a person in the United States Senate, given his background, his constituency, the battles he's been through, that when he was really needed, showed more con-

sistent personal courage as a public figure than Chuck Robb has these last 5 years. And I am very grateful to him for that.

I think the most battle-hardened veterans of war would tell you that there are many different ways of displaying courage and very few people can display them in every way you should in life. Everyone knew what a great battlefield record Chuck Robb had, but I have seen him stand up under withering personal attacks. I have seen him take votes that people in much safer constituencies than his would not take. I have seen him honorably and in a friendly manner disagree with his President when he thought I was wrong, and every time I knew he was doing exactly what he thought was right. And you should be very, very proud of that.

I want to compliment your whole Democratic team. I was glad to see Bill Dolan out there, and I miss L.F. Payne in Congress, but it will be nice seeing him in State office in Virginia. And thank you both for running, and thank you for being a part of this.

Let me say that I have been especially enthusiastic about Don Beyer's campaign for Governor, for what I think are good reasons. But I think the stakes are also very high. Everybody knows that in general Virginia has been a Republican State that able Democrats have been able to beat the odds in on occasion in the

last 20 years. I have enjoyed a lot of friends and a lot of support from this State for which I am very grateful.

But I want you to understand why I think this governorship is important to the future of the country. And if you'll give me a few minutes, this is not exactly a political speech, but you have just a—not very long before the election, and I want you to understand what I believe the significance of this election is to the children of this State, to the future of this State, and perhaps for the message it might send to our whole country as we move into next year when there will be 36 Governors' races like this throughout the country.

It was—just 2 days ago marked the 6th anniversary of my formal entry into the race for President on October 3, 1991. I can't believe it was so long ago. *[Laughter]* At that time, I had been Governor for quite a long while, and I was Democrat by heritage, instinct, and conviction. I was extremely frustrated by the state of play in our national debate because I thought there was too much hot air, too much rhetoric, too much sort of tired old fights replaying themselves over and over again in Washington that had very little to do with the future that I was struggling to build for our people in our State.

And I said, "Look, I have a vision of what our country should be like in the 21st century, and I don't think we're moving there. I believe that we ought to be a nation in which everyone who takes the responsibility for doing so should have an opportunity to make the most of his or her own life. I believe we ought to be a country in which we are coming together across the lines that divide us into one America, not being divided for short-term political gain. And I believe we ought to be a country that continues to lead the world for peace and freedom and prosperity. And if we are going to be that kind of country, that means we have to take a new direction. We have to favor policies that are pushing the future, not the past. We have to lead, not follow. We have to work for unity, not division. We have to work for people, not power politics. And we have to work in a way that supports progressive change, not the status quo."

And that means that we have to do things very differently. It also means that we need a different kind of Government, a Government that doesn't try to do everything but doesn't

pretend it can do nothing. That's the new Republican message, basically: Government is the enemy and people don't need any help.

My view is that the role of Government is to give people the tools to make the most of their own lives and to try to create the conditions in which they can succeed in doing that. That's what I believe.

For almost 5 years now we've been implementing that approach. And uncomfortably for our opponents, there is now a record on which people can make a judgment. And I'm really proud that America is better off today than it was 5 years ago, much better off. We believed that we could have an economic policy that reduced the deficit and balanced the budget and still have money left over to invest in our future, in our children, in education. We believed that we could expand trade in ways that both were free and fair. And the results have given us the strongest economy in generations.

We believed we could fight crime in ways that were tough but also smart, to try to keep kids out of trouble as well as punishing those who got into trouble. And we believed we ought to put 100,000 police on the street and we ought to take the assault weapons off the street. And I saw a lot of good people—and we didn't think it would kill anybody if they had to wait a while to buy a handgun until we checked out whether they had a criminal record.

Now, the results are in, and crime is dropping. And I believe that new approach is one of the reasons every single law enforcement group in this State endorsed Don Beyer for Governor, because they know—*[applause]*.

We believe we had to end the culture of poverty and welfare dependency in a way that was not just tough but was also pro-family. But it was one thing to require people to go to work, but you had to do it in a way that also supported our fundamental and most important job, which is the raising of our children. So we could be tough on work, but we had to be good to children. And that's why we said no when the people in the other party tried to take away the guarantee of health care and nutrition to our children, and why we said, "If you want to require people to go to work, make sure they have job training and make sure they've got child care when they go to work so their kids will be all right, and then we'll be successful."

That approach has given us the biggest drop in welfare rolls in history and the lowest percentage of Americans on welfare since 1970. After 20 years of immigration and a lot of people from all over the world who were on low income, we still have the lowest percentage of our people on welfare we've had since 1970. So it worked.

We also reduced the size of the Government by 300,000 people, got rid of 16,000 pages of regulation, and gave more authority back to State and local government, forged more partnerships with the private sector. All that worked.

And now we are looking to facing the future. And that's where the Governors come in. The job of Governor is now more important than it was 5 years ago. Why? Because Governors have more responsibility. And what is their responsibility? Well, if we know what the right path is on crime, if we know what the right path is on welfare, if we are practicing fiscal responsibility, what does it take to create that vision in the lives of the American people, to create opportunity for all responsible people? What does it take to bring us together across the lines that divide us? What does it take to keep America strong, leading the world?

Well, among other things, it takes an unlimited commitment, in my judgment, to the proposition that we have to preserve our environment while we grow our economy. That means Don Beyer should be Governor of Virginia.

Our administration has passed the Safe Drinking Water Act. We've cleaned up millions of tons of chemicals from the air. We're tightening air pollution regulations. We are working very hard across a whole broad span of things. We have cleaned up more toxic waste dumps in 4 years than the previous administrations did in the last 12, and we're going to clean up 500 more.

But there are still some things that the States have to do, and that we have to work in partnership with the States on. The *pfisteria* thing is one issue. The Chesapeake is another. It matters who the Governor is. I'm telling you, if you care about the environment, it is not enough to vote for Members of Congress and for the Presidency on environmental issues. It really matters what the environmental philosophy of the Governor of Virginia is, and it will have a lot to do with your future. That's the first thing.

The second big issue: One of the major contributions of the Democrats in Congress to this balanced budget agreement was the biggest expansion in health care for children since Medicaid was enacted in 1965: \$24 billion to provide enough money to insure 5 million more children in America, and almost all of them in working families who don't have health insurance. About half the kids in the country don't have health insurance.

How are we going to do that? In a partnership with the States. You need a Governor who believes that these kids ought to have health insurance and who will be devoted to implementing that program in the proper way. Virginia has a lot of people who are working hard to raise their children. They show up for work every day; they pay their taxes; they ought to see that their kids have health insurance. It will not happen unless this legislation which we passed is actually made real in the lives of the children of Virginia. And it will matter a very great deal who the Governor is. That's another reason to be for Don Beyer for Governor of Virginia.

The third reason—and in my judgment, even though it's not the last point I want to make, it is still the overriding point—is the question of education. Virginia has been devoted to the cause of education for a long time—perhaps the best system of higher education in the United States, certainly one of the four or five best systems in the country, in Virginia. You know that.

We also know that our system of K through 12 education is not as good as it ought to be. And there's a lot of ferment and debate in America about that. Don asked me to veto any attempt to divert public school money to the private schools. That's my speech. I agree with that. I'm all for more choices for people within the public schools, and I understand why people make other choices, and I like privately funded scholarship programs for private schools. But the truth is that most of our public schools today are underfunded, not overfunded. You will not make education better for the vast majority of people by further weakening the funding level. They should be held accountable. Standards should be raised. We should improve them.

But what are we going to do? There are a lot of things that I could talk about. We could stay here until dawn talking about education. But I'll just mention two that Don has made

important. One is technology. We now know that, properly implemented, technology in our schools can, for example, do things—we know that it will help the brilliant kids who already know more than their parents do about computers. [Laughter] We know that. But what we now know is, that properly implemented in the early grades, technology can help children who have learning problems, can lift reading levels, can lift comprehension levels. We know that.

And in our budget we have funds that would put us on the way toward making sure we hook up every library and school classroom to the Internet by the year 2000. He wants to have one computer for every five students. That is the future of America. That's another good reason to be for Don Beyer for Governor of Virginia.

You already heard Don express his opinion about the standards issue, whether we should have national standards and a national exam. And you know that his opponent is against it. Let me tell you, if there was ever an example of the conflict between ideology and reality, this is it. There is not a single major country in the world, except the United States, that does not have national standards for what constitutes adequate knowledge in the dominant language of the country, in mathematics, in science, and a number of other things—only the United States.

Now, we have said, "Well, we don't want to do that because we've always had local control of the schools. We don't want the Federal Government to engage in some power grab." And that's the sort of ideological hit we're taking for doing this. Let me remind you that the first call for national standards and national exams to measure them came at the University of Virginia in Charlottesville in 1989, endorsed by President George Bush—I stayed up all night long writing that national education goals statement—endorsed by Republican and Democratic Governors alike. The Republican Governors were insisting on it.

I got elected. We said, "Let's do it." All of a sudden they said, "The Federal Government is trying to take over the schools." [Laughter] Mathematics is the same in Virginia and Vermont. [Laughter] Language is the same in Michigan and Maine. This is crazy.

Furthermore, our plan simply says that the States can voluntarily participate or not. The local school districts can voluntarily participate

or not. The Federal Government's sole role in the bill that Chuck Robb voted for that passed 87 to 12 in the Senate is to pay for the development of the test to be supervised by the bipartisan or nonpartisan national board established by Congress, with Republican and Democrats and educators on it—already supervising tests given in 40 States but to only selected students—so that every fourth grader could take a reading test. If the kids have not been here long enough, obviously they shouldn't be held to a knowledge in English that they couldn't possibly make. So that's not a problem; we're not going to unfairly discriminate against the children of immigrants.

Nothing in this test can be used to hold back kids. This test is designed to say: If you don't know what you need to know, here is a road-map; here's what you should know; here's what you don't know; here's what your teacher, here's what your schools can do to make sure you get up to snuff. I think the kids that are the most disadvantaged kids in the country have the biggest stake in the success of this national standards program. How will we ever get all our public schools up unless there are high standards by which we can measure them?

Now, if there was ever an issue which ought to determine—with no other issues taken into account—the outcome of a Governor's race in any State in America, it should be the education standards issue. And in Virginia, which is proud of itself, from the time of Thomas Jefferson, in leading the country in education, surely you ought to send a message to the country that Virginia will vote for national standards of excellence for all our children in the next election, and not against it—surely.

And there's one last issue I want you to think about, because I think it sends a big message to the country. We are in the process of becoming a truly multiracial, multiethnic democracy in a way that no other nation is. Now, India is bigger than we are and, believe it or not, they have even more languages spoken within their border. Russia has many, many different languages spoken, many different ethnic groups. But the difference is, almost all the people who are in different groups live only with their own group on their own piece of land, and they're not nearly as blended as we are. With all of our problems of segregation, we are clearly becoming the most integrated, multiracial, multiethnic, multireligious democracy in the world.

And as I'm sure virtually everyone in this room knows, based on the best evidence we have, the most diverse school district in the United States is Fairfax County, Virginia—in the entire country. Look around this room. We've got all different kinds of people, all different backgrounds. In a global economy, in a global society, where the real threats to our future are threats that can cross national borders—terrorist groups, drug traffickers, international criminal gangs, people robbing accounts through clever uses of computers—whether we can work together and live together and solve our problems together will determine our success as a nation.

I think the person who is elected Governor of Virginia sends a clear signal about what this State, which was at the base of our founding and wants to be in the vanguard of our future, believes about whether we can build one America. And that's another big reason to be for Don Beyer for Governor of Virginia.

I worked with Chuck Robb. I worked with Gerry Baliles. I worked with Doug Wilder. I want to work in a new way with Don Beyer. But I want you to do it not for me and not because we really want to say our new Demo-

cratic Party is accepted in Virginia but because we're building a new America for the 21st century, because we have within our hands the capacity to build a future better than any past the United States has ever had, able to put all of you in this room and all the people you represent together in an incredible kaleidoscope of opportunity, achievement, and common endeavor.

But it really will matter who your Governor is; what the priorities are; whether we are for the future, not the past; change, not the status quo; unity, not division; people, not politics. That's what Don Beyer represents. You've got a few weeks to go out and make sure that he wins on election night, and I want you to do it.

Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 7:35 p.m. in Chesapeake Hall at the National Airport Hilton Hotel. In his remarks, he referred to Mr. Beyer's wife, Megan; William D. Dolan III, Democratic candidate for attorney general of Virginia; L.F. Payne, Jr., Democratic candidate for Lieutenant Governor of Virginia; and L. Douglas Wilder, former Virginia Governor.

Opening Remarks at the White House Conference on Climate Change *October 6, 1997*

Thank you very much. Thank you, Mr. Vice President, for your remarks and your remarkable leadership to help us keep our Earth in the balance. Thank you, Father O'Donovan, for letting me come home to Georgetown one more time to discuss a matter of immense importance to America and its future. I thank the Members of Congress and the members of the Cabinet and the administration who are here, all those who have agreed to serve on the panels, and all you who have come to be part of this important day.

Six years ago last Friday—I can hardly believe it, but it was 6 years ago last Friday that I announced my intention to run for President, challenging America to embrace and to vigorously pursue a vision of our country for the 21st century: to make the American dream alive for every person responsible to work for it, to

keep our country the world's strongest force for peace and freedom and prosperity, to bring our people together across all the lines that divide us into one America.

Shortly afterward I came here to Georgetown to this great hall to outline specific strategies and new policies to achieve that vision, rooted in our values of opportunity and responsibility, faith and family and community, designed to help Americans seize the opportunities and solve the problems of this new age. It was clear to me that our new direction had to be rooted in some basic guideposts, that we had to be oriented toward the future, not the past; toward change, not the status quo; toward partnership, not division; toward giving all a chance, not just the few; and finally toward making sure America leads, not follows.