

Oct. 8 / Administration of William J. Clinton, 1997

Middle East Coordinator; President Ezer Weizman and Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu of Israel; and Chairman Yasser Arafat of the Palestinian Authority.

Remarks at the Metropolitan Baptist Church in Newark, New Jersey *October 8, 1997*

Thank you all for that warm welcome. Thank you, Reverend and Mrs. Jefferson, for making us feel at home in the Metropolitan Baptist Church. Thank you, Senator McGreevey, for your introduction and your passionate commitment to the families and the children and the future of this State.

Thank you, Mayor James. Thank you, my great friend Congressman Donald Payne. Thank you, Audrey West, for your work here in the Head Start program. And thank you, Linda Lopez, for having the courage to get up here and give a speech today. You did very well. I thought you did very well.

Mr. Mayor and Congressman, I'm delighted to be back in Newark, a city that is earning its reputation as a Renaissance City every day. I hear story after story of Newark's coming back—a new performing arts center, a new sports complex in the historic Ironbound district, most importantly a new spirit that I sense in this room and that I saw in this church and its facilities for caring for children when I walked in the door.

You know, I have been in a lot of buildings in my life. Sometimes I think the job of a President or a Governor is going into buildings of all kinds. *[Laughter]* And after you have a little experience with walking into buildings, you get the feel of what's going on there before anybody tells you. When I walked in this building and I saw the posters of the children on the walls, I saw the pride people take in maintaining it, I saw the care that had gone into designing it, I knew that the spirit of the Lord had moved you to do the right thing for our children. And I thank you for that.

I'm feeling a little nostalgic now, not only because my daughter just went off to college, because this is the 20th anniversary of my first public office, when I was attorney general of my State, but also because last week it was 6 years ago that I first announced for President.

Now, sometimes young people come up to me all the time and they say, "I want a career in public life. Should I do it?" And I always encourage them. I tell them that no matter what they may read or hear from time to time, the overwhelming majority of people in public life, from both parties and all philosophies, are honorable, good people who work hard to do what they believe is right, and it is a noble endeavor. And we spend sometimes so much time finding fault with ourselves we forget that we wouldn't be around here after 220 years if we didn't have a pretty good political system supported by a wise and caring citizenry. But I always tell them, the most important thing before you run for office is not to decide what office you want, but what you would do if you got it.

You remember there was a—about 20 years ago, Robert Redford was in that great movie "The Candidate"—you remember that? And he won and said, "Now what?" If that's going to happen to you, don't run. I was encouraged. I was listening to Senator McGreevey talk, and I thought—it's the first time I've heard him speak since he's been officially the nominee of our party—I thought, that man knows what he wants to do, and that's the beginning of wisdom and the prospect of success. If you just want the job for the honor of the thing, it's not worth the pain of getting there. It's only worth it if you have an idea about what you're going to do.

And all of us are living on the vision of those who went before us. I'm sure that Reverend Jefferson is grateful for the vision of all of his predecessors, Reverend Johnson and others, who conceived of what this might be. The Scripture says, "Where there is no vision, the people perish." And what I want you to think about today is, as you celebrate what goes on in this building for our children and you imagine what could go on in this entire State and Nation, what is your vision for what America should look like when your children or your grandchildren are

your age? That's a question I ask myself and try to answer every single day. It keeps me centered, keeps me focused, keeps me going in the tough days.

When I started this odyssey 6 years ago, I had a vision that I was afraid might not be realized unless we changed what we were doing. I knew we were about to start a new century and a new millennium, and I had a very clear idea of what I wanted. I wanted to see three things out of which I thought all else would flow: I wanted our country to be a place where the American dream was really alive for every person, without regard to race or color or creed or where they live if they were willing to work for it. I wanted our country to continue to lead the world toward peace and freedom and prosperity and security even though the cold war is over and we no longer totally dominate the economy of the world the way we did at the end of World War II. And I wanted our country to embrace and celebrate our increasing diversity but not be divided by it, instead to come together as one America.

The American dream for everybody willing to work for it; America leading the world for peace and freedom and security and prosperity; America coming together as one America—that's what I want. And everything I do in the limited time available to me as your President I try to make sure is advancing that vision.

Now, we have, therefore, tried to follow certain policies: policies that favor the future, not the past; policies that favor change, not the status quo; policies that favor unity, not division; policies that help everybody, not just a few people; and policies that enable us to lead, not follow. You know that old joke they used to tell me that unless you're lead dog on the sled, the view is always the same. [*Laughter*] We've got to be leading. We've got to be leading.

Now, we have come a long way in the last 4 years and 8 months as a people: over 13 million more jobs; lower crime; the biggest drop in welfare rolls in our history; a cleaner environment; advances in the safety of our food and the public health generally; breakthroughs in science and technology and especially in medical research; advancing the cause of peace and freedom and prosperity and security all around the world and with more energy than ever before in Africa, thanks largely to the leadership of your Congressman, Donald Payne. We thank him.

In 1996 I tried to characterize all this as building a bridge to a new century. And we have a strong foundation of success on which to build that bridge, but we all know that there's more to do. There are still people in Newark who don't have a job, even though we've created more jobs in less time than our country ever did before. There are still people in Newark who get up and work hard every day, but they and their children are still living at or below the poverty line. There are still children who are losing their childhoods to crime and gangs and drugs and guns, even though we've tried to reduce those problems and they are not as bad as they were. But if you're one of the victims or one of the people caught up in it, it's just as bad as it ever was.

So we still have things to do. But we know this—we know that if everybody has got a good job and everybody has got a good education and everybody can raise their children properly, most of our problems will go away. Don't you believe that? Don't you believe that? [*Applause*]

And the reason I wanted to come here today and celebrate what you have done and then look to the future is that it seems to me that, with more and more and more people in the work force, with more two-parent families having to have both incomes to make ends meet and more and more single-parent families, we can't ever forget that the most important job any of us ever have on this Earth if we bring children into the world is raising those children right.

I used to tell my daughter after I got elected President—the first time she said, “You're too busy for this, that, or the other thing”—I said, “Let me tell you something: Until you leave here, you are still my most important job, and don't you ever forget it.” And I believe everybody—everybody—should feel that way. If we fail with our children, since we'll be gone and they'll be left, what will we leave?

Not very long ago, Senator Paul Tsongas tragically died, too early in life, after a long battle with cancer. I remember when he left the United States Senate, the first time he had to deal with his cancer. He wrote a book called “Going Home.” I was Governor when it came out. I took it home one day and laid down on the couch and read it straight through, one afternoon—played hooky from school—from

work. That's one nice thing about being Governor, you can give yourself an excused absence. [Laughter]

And I was laying there reading Paul Tsongas' book, and here was this man I had admired from before. I thought he was such a creative United States Senator; I was sick that he was leaving. I knew he had a reasonable chance to live quite a few more years, and I couldn't figure out why this guy would leave, because he was not a quitter in any way. And there was a section in this book where he was talking about his children and where he was saying, "I'm determined to fight this. I hope I'll live a long time." And he did, he lived more than 15 more years. He said, "I hope I'll live a long time, but," he said, "one of the wisest things I ever heard—it never meant anything to me until I was diagnosed—is that no person on his deathbed ever says, 'I wish I'd spent more time at the office.'"

These kids, they're our most important job. They are the only manifestation of the immortality of the human spirit on this Earth. And I think it's great that everybody—I hope—will want to have a good education and have the ability to work. And I will never rest until the work we've done to bring the economy back embraces everyone. But we should never forget that there are conflicts between work and childrearing which we all have to help people resolve.

There is no more important responsibility than helping people balance the demands of work and family, because, think about it: If Americans fail at work, then the economy craters and our country has all these problems and all the social problems get worse. If America fails at home, the economy might be strong and our social problems will still get worse, and more importantly, our legacy will be a destructive one.

We must find a way for people to succeed in the workplace and succeed in raising their children and do both. And there is a role for all of us in that. That is a community responsibility. For us to pretend that that is everybody's problem and they've got to work it out ignores the fact, number one, that people can't do it and, number two, that I'm stronger and my child will have a better future if your children have a better future, that we are in this together whether we acknowledge it or not, so we better

acknowledge it and reach out and make ourselves one community.

Hillary has said many times that governments don't raise children, parents do, but that every one of us has a special responsibility to help parents succeed, to create the conditions to give parents the tools to make their lives successful. Or in my wife's words, it really does take a village to have the kind of childrearing we want for all of our children. That's what this church and this Head Start program mean. It's the living embodiment of our shared responsibility for our children.

And for nearly 5 years, we have worked very hard to help parents raise their children. We fought for the V-chip and the rating system on television programs, because I think there is too much inappropriate material on television for young children at times when they're watching it. And I think you ought to have more opportunity to—[inaudible]—it. We've worked very hard to put tobacco out of the reach of children because it's still the largest killer of our young children.

We're fighting every day to make our streets and our schools safer and more drug-free and to hold up those examples of fighting juvenile crime that not only punishes people who should be punished but saves kids from getting in trouble in the first place.

It's been nearly 2 years now since a single child under the age of 18 has been killed by a gun in the city of Boston, where the police and the probation officers make house calls and the parents walk the streets. And the compliance with the probation officers' orders is 70 percent; I feel quite sure it's higher than most places in the world and in America. Why? Because they said it takes a village to keep kids out of jail. Better send the kids to college than to jail.

We have made it easier for millions of parents to take some time off if their children are sick without losing their jobs and to keep their health insurance when they move from job to job.

We raised the minimum wage and we lowered taxes on families with children with incomes of under \$30,000. It's worth about \$1,000 a year now to families of four with incomes less than that. And this summer, when I signed the new balanced budget law, it's the biggest increase in aid to children's health and in aid to education since 1965 in that law—5 million more

children, almost all of them in low-income working families, will be able to get health insurance under that bill.

And the bill really does go a very long way toward creating that system of lifetime learning that Senator McGreevey talked about: a \$500-per-child tax credit for working families; a big increase in Head Start; the America Reads program, to mobilize a million volunteers to teach all the 8-year-olds in this country to read, so that every third grader can read independently; the great effort to wire all of our classrooms and libraries to the Internet by the year 2000, have computers within the reach of all children.

And I must say, thanks to AT&T, which was complimented earlier, and others, New Jersey has had the gift of private sector support there that I want to see in every State in this country. We're going to do our part. We need others to do their part. Technology can be a great liberation for children, particularly in poorer neighborhoods, and if properly used, for children that are having learning problems, and if properly used, children who need to become fully fluent in English as well as whatever their native tongue is. We have to do this.

And we have done more to open the doors of college to all Americans than ever before. I think we can really say when these programs are fully implemented, anybody who's willing to work for it can get a college education because we had the biggest increase in Pell grants in 20 years; we're up to a million work-study positions now in our schools; more and more young people going through the national service program, AmeriCorps, and serving in their communities, earning the right to go to college; an IRA you can save in and withdraw from tax-free if you're paying for college for your children; and the HOPE scholarship and other tax credits so that you can get a \$1,500 tax credit to pay for the first 2 years of college and other tax reductions for the junior and senior year, for graduate school, or if you're an adult and you have to go back and get training.

We are trying to set up a system where people of any age can be educated at any time, whenever they need it. And we will help them. But we still have to make sure that our parents have access to quality, affordable child care. That's the great big hurdle left to be crossed. If we can get all the children insured for health care, then the great hurdle for families will be

making sure that we can solve this last great obstacle.

As Head Start parents and personnel, those of you involved in this program know how important it is, and your director has already spoken eloquently about it. That's why I worked hard to create Early Head Start, so we could bring in kids even earlier, and why I fought to make sure that in this budget we'll have a million children in Head Start every year by the end of the budget period.

But as hard as we've worked on that, we've got to do more. We've got to keep going until we literally can say, every parent and child in this country can have access to quality, affordable child care, which includes, for the reasons Senator McGreevey said, an educational component, an appropriate, stimulating educational component for the youngest of our children.

Our brains, we know now, are like computers that we're building ourselves, and they get wired in a certain way by the time we're about 4 years old. And it's hard to rewire them after that. We know, for example—and I don't want to get into numbers, but let me just give you an example of the significance of what goes on in this building. The newest scientific research shows that a child who has loving, involved parents—and a big part of this, by the way, is helping parents who—almost 100 percent of parents want to do a good job; one of the things we've got to do is make sure they all know how to do a good job. But a child with loving, involved parents and an appropriate pre-school or other child care program that has an appropriate educational component—and I mean basic things for infants, singing to people, showing colors and sights and sounds, all that—will have about 700,000 positive interactions with that developing computer up here by the time they're 4 years old—700,000. A child who is left essentially isolated, with a parent who has never been trained to do that work, may have as few as 150,000 positive interactions, or less than one-fourth.

Now, you tell me which child has got a better chance to make it at 17, at 21, at 30, at 40, at 50. You can literally reduce it, therefore, almost to a matter of science. Fundamentally, it's an affair of the heart, but you have to understand there is a fact basis behind this, now. And this new scientific research is just stunning; it's breathtaking. And we cannot knowingly permit huge numbers of our children to be at that

kind of input disadvantage while their own little computers are being built. It isn't right. And it isn't smart. And we pay every day—today—for the mistakes that were made 10, 15, 20 years ago. And so that's why I say that we have to do this.

One of the things we were worried about when we started moving all these folks from welfare to work is what would they do for child care. So we put \$4 billion more into the child care program, because the worst thing in the world we could do is to have someone who had been gripped by welfare feel good about being at work and then be racked with worry about what was happening to the child at home.

We've now—this morning we learned that last month another 250,000 people went to work from welfare. That's a stunning number. Now, in 4 years and 8 months, 3.6 million people who were living in families on welfare now live in families at work, drawing a paycheck. That's good. That's good.

But we've got to make sure their kids are okay. Because most of those jobs, when you move from welfare to work if you don't have a lot of education, most of those jobs don't pay very much. And we know that child care can cost as much as 25 percent of a person's paycheck, if they live on a modest income. So one of the things that I'm encouraging all the States to do, as your welfare rolls drop, is to take the money that you've got left—because the Federal Government gives you the same amount of money now, whatever your welfare rolls are—is take that money, put it into child care, and make sure the kids are going to be okay. If you help the parents when they go to work, you should help the kids when they go to child care.

Listen to this. Over half of the children under the age of one are already in some kind of day care. But 12 million children under the age of 6—17 million children between the ages of 6 and 13—have one or both parents in the work force. So, in spite of the numbers and the great efforts and the stunning success of facilities like this one, the hard truth is, there are still too few child care facilities to meet our growing demands.

And again, I say that remember the findings that Senator McGreevey referred to that we had people testify when Hillary and I sponsored that White House conference on early childhood and the development of the brain. We can't let this

happen. There are also too many facilities in operation that are doing the best they can on the money they've got, but they're just not adequate for what the children need. What every child needs is what you provide here, education. If they need to be here all day, let them stay all day. We've got to find a way to do this.

If you take any survey of parents and experts in the country, they'll say that child care is in short supply, especially in our hardest pressed communities. Studies tell us that more than half of the child care centers that are in operation don't provide adequate child care, including the educational component for their children. One out of three children in child care programs that are running out of private homes receive care that may actually retard their development, according to the studies. But what can the parents do if it takes 25 percent of their income, which is not enough, at any rate, to pay the expenses to be in a proper child care facility?

So I say to you, our vision cannot be realized until we face this. And every American should be concerned about it because every American—or our children—will be affected by it. And we pay now or pay later. We either act like a community now to lift these children up, or we will be punished as a community later for our collective neglect. This is a big challenge for our future.

I'm delighted that so many people at the State and local level, and now increasingly in Congress, are taking up this issue and giving it the attention it deserves. On the 23d of this month the First Lady and I will host the first ever White House Conference on Child Care, with parents and child care providers and experts and business leaders and economists to talk about what we can do to learn from promising efforts like yours.

But I ask you to think about this today as you walk out of this building and you think about what everyone has said—what the pastor said, what Senator McGreevey said, what the satisfied parent said and the dedicated Head Start provider said—think about what we can do together to make sure that what was said here about the children in this place can become real for all the children of our country. It is the next great frontier in bringing our community together so that we can realize that grand vision for the new century.

Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:45 a.m. in the gymnasium. In his remarks, he referred to Rev. David Jefferson, Sr., pastor, Metropolitan Baptist Church, and his wife, Linda; State Senator Jim McGreevey; Mayor Sharpe James of Newark; Au-

drey West, director, Newark Head Start program; Linda Lopez, a parent who introduced the President; and Rev. B.F. Johnson, former pastor of the church. A portion of these remarks could not be verified because the tape was incomplete.

Remarks at a Reception for Democratic Gubernatorial Candidate Jim McGreevey in West Orange, New Jersey October 8, 1997

Well, he looks like a Governor. [Laughter] He sounds like a Governor. He's got a good plan about what he would do if he were Governor. And he's got something else, just magical. We were a couple of hours ago in a wonderful Head Start program at a church near here, and when McGreevey walked in the room, the fire alarm went off. [Laughter] If you've got that kind of heat and electricity, you ought to be Governor.

I am delighted to be here with all of you. I thank the legislative leaders who are here: Senator Lynch, Assemblyman Doria, State Democratic Party Chair Tom Giblin—if I forget somebody, complain—[laughter]—Assemblywoman Buono, State Senator Bryant, Hudson County Executive Bob Janiszewski, Cherry Hill Mayor Susan Bass Levin, Sheriff Fontoura, Mayor-about-to-be Bob Bowser, Mayor Spina, and all other officials who are here.

I'd like to say a special word of thanks to a former colleague of mine, Brendan Byrne, who is in the audience. Governor Byrne, thank you. I'm glad to see you here. After he left the Governor's office, it was never the same at the national Governors meeting. [Laughter] He's been gone a long time, and we haven't produced a single Governor who had the oneliner gift that Brendan Byrne had. [Laughter] We only laugh about half as much. I'm glad to see you all.

This is perhaps the first opportunity I've had, in this sort of setting anyway, to say something I would like to say really to all the people of New Jersey, which is, I want to thank you for the enormous vote of confidence that was given to me and to Al Gore and to our team in the election of 1996. I was overwhelmed by it, and

I thank you for it. [Applause] Thank you very much.

I'd like to talk for a few minutes in maybe an almost conversational way to try to explain to you what I know, both as President and as someone who was a Governor for 12 years before I became President and served with 150 other Governors, about the importance of this election at this moment in time.

I'd like to thank the Lieutenant Governor of New York, who's also here. Betsy, stand up. Thank you for becoming a Democrat and coming across the river to be with us. Thank you.

I think it's important that you understand because you have to go out of here and talk to people about this election, and you want it to be fundamentally a positive election of choices about the future. I promise you, that's the way the voters will look at it. They'll be trying to figure out, "If I make this choice, what difference will it make to my life, my child's life, the future of our State?" And there are some things you need to really focus on about this particular moment in our country's history and what the role of a Governor, any Governor, would be at this moment in history and therefore what kind of things you should be looking for.

When I ran for President and I announced 6 years ago last week, I did it against all the odds, when no one but my mother really thought I could win. [Laughter] He said he knows the feeling. [Laughter] I'll tell you, there are a lot more who think you can win today, Senator, than when you started—a lot more today than when you started.

I had a very clear reason. I did not think my country was moving in the direction that would take it where I thought we ought to go in the century that was upon us. And I have