

Remarks at a Rally for Congressional Candidate Eric Vitaliano in Staten Island, New York

November 2, 1997

The President. Thank you. Ladies and gentlemen, as you may have noticed in the last couple of days, I'm a little hoarse—[laughter]—so I can't speak too loud, though I hope I will be heard.

I want to thank President Springer for making us feel so welcome. Thank you, Assemblywoman Connelly, and all the other leaders of our party who are here. I want to thank Senator Bob Torricelli from New Jersey for being here with me, and in a moment I want to ask him to say a few words—he is always in stronger voice than I am. [Laughter] But most of all, I want to thank Eric Vitaliano and his wonderful family for making this race for Congress for your future and for our country.

I'm so happy to be back in Staten Island. I'm glad to be here especially on this mission, because the people who live on this island and the people who live in Brooklyn in this congressional district are representative of the people I ran for President to give voice to and to give a future to.

I want to just ask you to remember what it was like in 1991 and '92, when I started running for President. The economy was down, the country was drifting, politics was used to divide people with hot air and bogus charges, and we had no strategy to restore the middle class, to rebuild the economy, to reclaim the future for our children. And so I set out from a very different place, but representing people very much like you, to bring a vision to this country and unite us behind the idea that in the 21st century every American responsible enough to work for it, regardless of their race or station in life, ought to have a chance to live the American dream; that this country ought to continue to lead the world for peace and prosperity; and that we ought to unite, across all the lines that divide us, into one America.

Now, no one can come into this district and tell you for whom to vote. But I want to ask you, why has the other party spent all this money on ads trying to tear down Eric Vitaliano? And why did my predecessor and my distinguished opponent in the last election come here on behalf of his opponent? Because they

are still trying to implement the contract on America and their agenda—and we don't think they're right—and because they have—this is the most important thing—they have opposed every single thing we have tried to do that has moved this country forward in the last 5 years.

So I don't want you to vote for me or against President Bush or Senator Dole or even Speaker Gingrich. I want you to vote for yourselves and your families and your future. This election—this is not about New York City politics, New York State politics. This is about what this man can do for you to set the right course for this country that will help the children of Staten Island and Brooklyn to have a brighter future. That's what this is about, nothing more and nothing less. I'll just give you some examples. And you remember, they all came for Mr. Vitaliano's opponent. I'm proud to be here for him.

But let me just give you some examples—vote for your future. I said we ought to break out of the bogus political debate in Washington that was paralyzing America. I said we could reduce the deficit and balance the budget and still invest in the education of our children. They all opposed it. We were right and they were wrong. We've got 13 million jobs and low unemployment.

I said that we could talk tough on crime till the cows come home, but until we acted tough and smart, till we supported more punishment and prevention, and until we put 100,000 police on the street in America, we couldn't bring down crime. Well, they opposed it. But we were right, they were wrong. Crime has been going down in this country for 5 years. That's what you ought to vote for.

They said Government was inherently bad and ought to be demolished. I said, no, it ought to be smaller and less bureaucratic, but we still ought to invest in the education of our children, in cleaning up our environment, in protecting the public health. They opposed us on all those issues. Today, the deficit has been reduced by 90 percent, the Government is 300,000 people smaller, but we're spending more on education

and public health and environmental protection. We were right, and they were wrong.

Make no mistake about it, this is about you and your life. This man has shown you in his public service that he knows how to take sensible, tough, but smart policies on crime; that he is committed to preserving the environment—when he got the legislation through to close that landfill. He has shown you that he cares about middle class families and middle class values and the future of children and that he believes it ought to be a future that includes all kinds of Americans. That is what is at issue. Make no mistake, that is what is at issue.

And what you have to decide is whether you believe the course that I have taken, which has moved away from the old liberal-versus-conservative debate to build a common future for America's future—whether that kind of course, which requires independence, which requires the ability to differ, which requires the ability to think, and requires the ability to pull people together—whether that's the course you want, or whether you want one more soldier in the army that opposed our economic policies, our education policies, our environmental policies, our crime policies, right down the line. If you believe the country is better off today by having that kind of leadership and that kind of direction, you have only one choice on Tuesday: you have to show up for Eric Vitaliano and send him to Congress.

We are determined to open the doors of college to every American who will work hard enough to earn the grades to go. We are determined to make sure every 8-year-old in this country can read, that every single classroom in America is hooked up to the Internet, that every adult who loses a job has an immediate—immediate—chance to go back and get new skills and get back into the work force. We are determined to move this country forward together. We are determined to prove we can keep cleaning up the environment while we grow the economy. We are determined to keep working on the crime problem until it not only goes down but everybody in every neighborhood feels safe when their children are on the streets and in the parks again. That's what we're determined to do.

And maybe most important of all, we are determined to give families and communities the tools to solve their own problems. The first bill I signed was the family and medical leave law.

The people who are trying to beat Eric Vitaliano opposed it.

So I ask you to think about this. And on Tuesday when you get up, don't be thinking about me; don't be thinking about those other folks that came in here for Eric's opponent. Be thinking about your children, your grandchildren, the people you live here with, the kind of Staten Island you want to build, the kind of New York you want to build, the kind of future you want to build. And make sure you show up, and drag three or four of your friends along with you, and tell them that America has a lot riding on the decision made in Staten Island and Brooklyn.

Thank you, and God bless you. [Applause] Thank you.

Now, 2 years ago, I was in the same sort of fight with Bob Torricelli in New Jersey. They said we couldn't win. They ran the same kind of negative ads against him. They said the same things against him. One thing is, they're perfectly predictable. [Laughter] But Bob Torricelli triumphed with the help of people like you. He's worked all over America to help us have that kind of election in other places, and I'd like to ask you to make him welcome. Senator Bob Torricelli from New Jersey.

[At this point, Senator Robert G. Torricelli of New Jersey made brief remarks.]

The President. One more thing. One more thing. In these elections, these special elections, very often the outcome is determined not by those who vote but by those who have an opinion who don't vote. And I want to say a special word of thanks to the unions, to the police officers' association, to the teachers, to the firefighters, the city workers, to every group of people who are supporting Eric.

But let me tell you, those of you who are part of organizations and those of you who are active in the Democratic Party and those of you who are here as concerned citizens and especially those of you who are here who are students, who have the most at stake because you have the most years still ahead of you—you must go, and you must bring your friends. Don't make your endorsements meaningless by not making them manifest by a big turnout. Don't let the people who don't vote determine this. Let the people whose eyes are bright and focused on the future have the energy and the compassion and the patriotism to show up on

Tuesday so we'll have a big celebration Tuesday night.

God bless you. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:06 p.m. in the athletic center at the College of Staten Island. In

his remarks, he referred to Marlene Springer, president, College of Staten Island; State Assemblywoman Elizabeth A. Connelly; and Mr. Vitaliano's opponent, Vito Fossella, Republican candidate for New York's 13th Congressional District.

Remarks at a Rally for Gubernatorial Candidate Jim McGreevey in Edison, New Jersey November 2, 1997

Thank you very much. Ladies and gentlemen, if you have heard the radio spot I did for your next Governor, you know that I am not in very strong voice. I've been a little hoarse. But the subject of my speech is the last line of the radio address: I may have lost my voice, but you can find your voice on Tuesday, election day.

I want to thank the people of New Jersey for being so good to me and to Al Gore in 1992 and in 1996. I thank the Members of your congressional delegation who are here who work with us every day, Congressmen Payne and Menendez, Pallone and Pascrell; and our good friend Congressman Harold Ford from Tennessee. I thank Barbara Buono, Senator Bryant, Chairman Giblin for helping in this campaign. I want to say a special word of thanks to your Senator, Senator Lautenberg, who did so much work on the balanced budget. And I want to thank Senator Torricelli for the work he did—for the work he has done on the balanced budget and the work he has done to stand up to the negative partisan attacks of the leaders of the other party. You should be very proud of both of them for what they have done.

I'm glad to be back here at Middlesex. Hillary and I were here 3 years ago. Since I came here, with the help of these Members in Congress, we passed a balanced budget which includes the HOPE scholarship, which is a \$1,500 tax credit for the first 2 years of college so that every American can go on to a place like Middlesex. And I want to thank the students here for their engagement in community service, for their involvement in AmeriCorps. And especially I want to thank the volunteers in the America Reads program who are making sure our children can read.

Now, this is an interesting Governor's race. As I said the last time I was here, Senator McGreevey, I don't get a vote in New Jersey, and he won't get a vote in Congress—why am I here? Why have two members of the Republican majority in Congress come here to campaign for the Governor in the last few days? Because it really matters in the world we're trying to create for the 21st century not only what we do in Washington but what happens in the State capitals.

And so I say to you, in the last 2 days you should listen to what they say and how they voted. You listen to see what I say and what I've done. But when you sort it all out, you should vote based on what's best for you and your children and the future of New Jersey.

This election is terribly important to me because the people of New Jersey are important to me, and because you can send a signal to the rest of the country about the direction that we have to take into the new century. You know, just remember what it was like 6 years ago when we started: the economy was in bad shape; the country was increasingly divided; the middle class felt like it was on the ropes and ignored; and we seemed to be drifting toward the future. Washington was dominated by exceedingly partisan debates and a lot of hot air rhetoric.

And I said, I think we can do better. We can create a country where the American dream is alive for everybody responsible enough to work for it. We can create a country where we're coming together across the lines that divide us, not being driven apart as so many other people around the world are being driven. We can continue to lead the world for peace and prosperity. But we have to change, and we have to move forward.