

And as we move into this new era where we have to have more flexibility, more partnerships, and more common sense, in which we want to reject the kind of ideological false choices we're often confronted with in the political debates here, the partnership that exists and the quality of it and the quality of the people that do the work at the State level, the partnership with the Federal Government will be critical in terms of how Americans actually get to live and what kind of world our children actually grow up in. That's what this is about.

So in so many ways the governorship is more important than ever before. We have tried to give more responsibility to the States. We've also tried to give them more things to do. And

it has succeeded in places like Vermont, which have had visionary leadership.

I can only hope and pray that every Governor will do the job that I know that he will do in health care, in education, in the environment, in building a solid future for our children. You're going to help him to do it by your presence here tonight, and I'm very grateful to you.

Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 8:47 p.m. in the Colonial Room at the Mayflower Hotel. In his remarks, he referred to Loretta Bowen, legislative and political director, Communications Workers of America; Gov. Howard Dean of Vermont, chair, and Katie Whelan, executive director, Democratic Governors' Association.

Remarks at a Democratic National Committee Dinner November 12, 1997

Well, I hardly know what to say. [Laughter] You have unwittingly uncovered how Elizabeth came to be appointed an ambassador. In 1992, these 10 guys came to see me from Washington, and they said, "If you can make Smith Bagley hush for 3 years, we'll support you for President." [Laughter] I'll never look at you the same again. I'll always think of you as the president of the American Women's Club, for the rest of my life. [Laughter]

I can see this is going to be on Pat Robertson's television show tomorrow night. There's something brewing here. [Laughter]

I'd like to thank Smith and Elizabeth, first of all, for opening their home to us. This is a beautiful, beautiful place, and a very interesting place. I got a little history of the house tonight. If you haven't gotten it, I think you should. I'd also like to thank you, Elizabeth, for your truly extraordinary service in Portugal. You did a great job, and I'm grateful. And thank you for making Hillary and Chelsea feel so welcome over there.

Ladies and gentlemen, I have not a long talk to give tonight. I'm feeling rather nostalgic today. We were talking around the table—I spoke today, earlier, at the memorial service for Congressman Walter Capps, who was a particular friend of mine because his daughter,

Laura, has worked for me for several years and used to work as George Stephanopoulos' assistant. So she was literally in the room next to the couple of rooms I occupy along with the Oval Office in the White House.

He was about 62 years old and only served 10 months in Congress. He was a college professor for over three decades, and he got elected in '96, after having been defeated in '94. But he was a wonderful, wonderful human being and a very close friend of ours. And he, like me, absolutely idolized his daughter, and so he used to hang around the White House all the time, even when Congressmen shouldn't have been there, just to catch a glimpse of his sweet child.

All these eulogies today were talking about how Walter Capps was always in a good humor and always basically felt relaxed and at peace and was so unpolitical in the Washington sense of the term, and also, that even though he was in his early sixties, how utterly completely devoid of any kind of cynicism he was, which I think is an admirable thing.

Well, anyway, I got myself in the right frame of mind. And then right before I left to start my rounds this evening, I spent an hour and a half with my political director, Craig Smith, who is here with me, and we sat around a

table, along with Mickey Ibarra and Maria Echaveste, who also work in the White House, with, I don't know, 12 or 15 young people, all under 30. And there was an Indian-American State legislator from Minnesota who is one of four South Asians in State legislatures around the United States. There was a young Hispanic city councilman from Tucson who persuaded his wife that they should delay their honeymoon so that he could come to this meeting with me. I personally thought that was going a little far. [Laughter] There was a young woman who is the head of the Future Farmers of America in South Dakota. There was a young Native American woman who had a degree in physics and was going back to study to teach physics to children on Indian reservations in the United States. It was a very impressive group of people—a number of others.

And we just went around the room, and they said whatever they wanted to say to me. They asked me whatever they wanted to ask. There was a young African-American man who is a Rhodes Scholar who went to Jackson State University in Mississippi. And they talked about a lot of different things, but I left the meeting feeling really good about our country, that we had young people like that and that, contrary to a lot of the stereotyping about generation X, they didn't have a bit of cynicism, and they were quite upbeat about their future, and they were very determined to see that their generation did its part in meeting the problems of our time. They were all especially interested in citizen community service, which I found was very moving.

I say that by way of background, because we are coming to the end of the year; I guess Congress will go home in the next day or two when we—we've got a few little disputes outstanding. And then we'll resume again around the time of the State of the Union in January.

And I feel a great deal of gratitude this year. We have the lowest unemployment rate we've had in nearly a quarter of a century, lowest inflation rate in 30 years. The deficit has been reduced by 92 percent before the balanced budget kicked in on October 1st—92 percent reduction from the day I took office. We have cleaner air, cleaner water, safer food, and we're cleaning up more toxic waste sites than ever before. The crime rate has gone down; the welfare rolls have had a record drop. And I think, more importantly, people really know down

deep inside America can work again, that we can really make this thing work.

Your presence here tonight is important because it's very important, as we get ready to go into an election season, that we do our dead-level best to make sure people understand what the real choices are before them and what policies we have adopted that are—for instance, the Republican Party would never have adopted, and people can make a judgment about whether they're right for America.

But if you take this balanced budget bill, for example, if there had been a Republican President and a Republican Congress, they might have adopted a balanced budget bill, and it would have had a capital gains tax in it. It might have had the \$500-per-child tax credit, even if they controlled the Presidency and both Houses. It never would have had the tax credits for all forms of higher education after high school that effectively opened the doors of college to all Americans. It never would have had the biggest increase in education since 1965, with funds to put computers in all the classrooms of the country. It certainly would not have had the biggest increase in child health since 1965.

I doubt very seriously that it would have had the Medicare reforms we had and the Medicaid reforms we had. The American Diabetes Association said that the diabetes changes were the most important things since the discovery of insulin 70 years ago. We added 12 years to the Medicare Trust Fund and covered more women for mammographies; did a lot more work in testing prostate cancer, which is I think the most underresearched and undertreated major form of cancer in America today, now, now that we've more than doubled the efforts that we're making in breast cancer. And I'm very grateful for that, and the country will be stronger because of it.

We passed the Chemical Weapons Convention in a bipartisan fashion. We got bipartisan support to expand NATO, and that's good.

And we're heading into Thanksgiving with—tomorrow, I believe, I'm going to sign the appropriations bill which finally, finally secures a victory I've been working for since the State of the Union; Congress has agreed to let us proceed to establish national academic standards, not Federal Government standards but national academic standards, and have voluntary tests in reading and mathematics for the fourth and the eighth grades. So I'm very, very happy about that. They also fund our America Reads

program, which is now in 800 colleges around America. We have tens of thousands of college kids going out into schools every single week now, more than once a week, teaching young people to read. So it's a good thing, and I feel very good about it.

As we look ahead next year, we've tried to set the framework for what we still have to do. We're about to appoint—the congressional leaders in both parties and I—members to a Medicare commission that will attempt to come up with a bipartisan long-term solution to the Medicare problem so that when my generation retires, we won't bankrupt our children and prohibit them from taking care of our grandchildren.

We're now working full steam ahead, hoping we can reach an agreement with other countries in Kyoto about how the wealthier countries of the world can together reduce the threat of global warming and climate change without having to give up economic growth. I am absolutely positive, based on the evidence, that it can be done if we can organize ourselves properly to do it.

We had a great conference on hate crimes yesterday, which I think will lay the foundation for our continuing efforts to reconcile people across all the lines that divide us in this country. And not very long ago, Hillary and I hosted the first White House Conference on Child Care ever, which I think is one of the great outstanding social issues of our time.

One of the young men who was at our meeting today said, "You know what I'm worried about?" He said, "I'm worried about how I'm supposed to feel secure in a world where I might get laid off at any time and a lot of my friends don't have any health insurance. And I want to have children, but I want to know how I'm supposed to feel secure." And so we had this interesting discussion about what security meant when I was his age. I said, "You know, when I was your age"—he was about 20, I think—"I took it for granted that my folks would have the jobs they had as long as they wanted them." I mean, they might get laid off in a recession or something, but people generally had one job, and they kept it for their careers. And if they were lucky, they had health insurance on the job; and if they didn't, health care wasn't all that expensive anyway. And so we talked about that. And we talked about how for a long time you knew at least if you could

get an education, you could have security. And he said, "Well, I'm not even sure Social Security will be there for me." And I said, "It will be there for you. I know that people say your generation doesn't believe it; it will be there. We have to—it's another thing we're going to work on."

But if you think about what I've been doing, a lot of what I've been trying to do is to prepare a way for us to get into the future so that that young man and people in his generation can feel a sense of social security in a time dominated by global economics, global technology, rapid changes, and oftentimes big changes, in the workplace.

One of the reasons we had as much trouble with the fast track as we did—and I still believe we'll succeed in getting some fast-track authority in this Congress—but one of the reasons we had the trouble we did is that people feel—you know, it might have nothing to do with trade—they pick up the paper 3 days before the vote and see that Levi Strauss is laying 10,000 people off. And then today they see Eastman Kodak is laying 10,000 people off. And one man in Louisiana who said, "I'm an ardent free trader," had to deal with the fact that one company laid 2,400 people off in his congressional district right before he got ready to vote on this.

Now, how do we create an atmosphere of security there? Everybody knows that the economy is in good shape today, but they're still looking at tomorrow. The one thing we cannot do is to say, "We're not going to trade with the world; we're going to run away; we're going to freeze everything in place," because we can't freeze everything in place. We can't. We did a study, the Council of Economic Advisers did, which said that 80 percent of our job loss was due to technological change, 20 percent due to trade and business failures where people just stop buying your product or service. So a lot of this is just intrinsic to the changing economy, which means we have to have a new definition of security in a more dynamic world.

What would that be? First of all, everybody's got to have access to a good education, and people have to have access to education for a lifetime. If people my age lose their jobs, they have to be able to get a good education to go back to work. You have to set up a system of lifetime learning that operates at higher levels

of excellence at critical points than sometimes it does today.

Secondly, people have to have portability of health insurance and portability of retirement. It's not enough to secure Social Security, because most people can't live on just Social Security—at least, they can't maintain their lifestyle on Social Security.

Now, we have actually done quite—I've been trying, under Democratic and Republican Congresses now, for 5 years to pass what I called my "GI bill of rights" which would set up—go a long way toward setting up a system of lifetime learning, because if you're eligible for public aid and you lose your job, what I think we ought to do, since nearly everybody in America lives within driving distance of a community college, is just give people a certificate, and let them take it wherever they want and get whatever training they want, and take a lot of the Government programs out of it, and let the educators and the marketplace decide. That's what—I'm trying to do that. The tax credits that we gave to college students, though, or to their parents, to pay the cost of college also go to adults who have to go back to school.

We have made health insurance somewhat more portable with the Kennedy-Kassebaum bill, although there is increasing evidence that there are people, lots of people, working in America where their employers are offering health insurance, but they still don't feel they can afford to buy it. And there are a lot of younger people now who are worried sick that they work in places where they can't buy health insurance. And they don't need it most of the time, but if they have a car wreck or develop a serious illness, they'll really be in trouble if they don't have health care. So I intend to keep doing more on that. We're going to add 5 million kids to the rolls in this budget; we're going to do more.

Perhaps in an area—kind of unheralded—where we've done the most good in the last 5 years is in protecting and making more portable pension plans. In December of '94, I signed the legislation which stabilized 40 million people's pensions and outright saved 8.5 million people's pensions that were under water. Since then, we have slowly but surely added provisions that make it easier for people to get a pension, private pension, 401K plan, and then take it around if they move from place to place.

The next big challenge is child care. Every family I know with school-age children, even people with very high incomes, has—every single family I know, without regard to income, has felt some significant tension at some point in their children's lives between their obligations at work and their obligations at home. And I think we are really going to have to work hard to find the way—the Government can't afford all this—we've got to find a way to have a quality child care network in America that's safe and affordable. We've got to have—we've got to do more than we've done so far on the family leave law, and we've got to have more flexible working hours so that people, if they earn overtime—if they work overtime—a lot of people in this country, keep in mind, have to work overtime. It's a part of their job; they have to do it. And a lot of people want to work overtime. But if you have children, you ought to be able to take your overtime in cash or time at home. I strongly believe that.

These are the sort of things we need to be thinking about. These are the kinds of things that will create a new sense of social security in a highly dynamic economy. And I'm convinced if we deal with our long-term challenges like climate change and entitlements, if we continue to work on education, if we try to build a country where you can balance family and work, and then if we keep working on trying to solve this problem of how we can celebrate our diversity and still be bound together as one America, I think things are going to work out pretty well for this country, for that group of young people.

And what I'm hoping people will say when our time here is done—it won't be so long now; I keep telling my eager Republicans bashing me around, they ought to just relax; time is taking care of a lot of their problems—[laughter]—that people will say that we are really prepared for a new century, we are really prepared for a new era, we really have a chance to create a country where there's opportunity for everybody responsible enough to work for it, where we're coming together, and where we're still leading the world for peace and freedom.

And we have been able to do that in no small measure because there was a core of people in our party—not just in the Congress but among the Governors and mayors—who believed that we could be faithful to our values and still embrace new policies for the new

times, and that it would work. And I don't think anyone can seriously argue that we're not better off today than we were 5 years ago. And you'd have to be pretty disingenuous to say that the policies of our administration had nothing to do with it. So I feel good about it.

But I just tried to have a little conversation with you tonight—this is the things that I'm thinking about, and I'm feeling a little mellow because I went to my friend's memorial service today, and I feel very reassured because of the young people I saw today. But the last thing I'd like to say is, I think what you have done here in supporting this party is a good thing. And I disagree with those who say that people in both parties who support their political convictions with their financial support are doing a bad thing. I disagree with that.

And I passionately believe we should change the campaign finance laws. I also believe if we want to make it work, we're going to have to change the media availability laws, because most of us do not—most of us in public life don't spend our time hitting on people like you in private life repeatedly because it's all we want to do in office. This is not a demand—people don't just sit around thinking, I think I'll raise a lot of money and then go throw it out a window somewhere. This system we have was driven by the increased cost of communicating with the public, primarily through the electronic media, although not entirely. And if we want it to work, in the absence of a Supreme Court decision which allows us to limit the size of contributions that people make to their own campaigns—wealthy people—or that limit the amount of money you can spend on a campaign, the only way to make it work is to provide, in exchange for the willingness to observe certain limits, to provide free or reduced air time.

And so I want to say to you, I think you have done a good thing. I think our country is better because of what you have done. I want you to help our party in the '98 elections. I believe if we have a clear, unambiguous agenda

to try to create the kind of framework for life in the 21st century I talked about, that our people running for Congress will do quite well.

But I also hope you'll continue to help us reform the campaign finance laws. But I want you to understand—you know this, a lot of you who have been with us a long time, you know that what is driving this is the cost of communicating with the voters. And every time we see an election where only one side is doing the communicating, I know of no example where the voters ignored the person who was talking to him or her the most and instead embraced the person who was totally silent—although there have been times when I wanted to do that myself, as a voter. I know of no example where that, in fact, occurred.

I'd also like to thank you, Mr. Grossman, for your willingness to take on a very difficult job at a tough time and to do a good job of it, and I'm very grateful to you.

And again I say to all of you, this is an act of high citizenship, what you're doing. And we cannot afford to let the American people become skeptical or cynical about this endeavor just at the time when our country is on a roll. And if we do the right things, it will stay on a roll and we'll be able to have a positive impact on all the good people in the rest of the world who are trying to make the most of their freedom, too. That's what you're part of, and when you go home tonight, I want you to be proud of it.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:29 p.m. at a private residence. In his remarks, he referred to dinner hosts Elizabeth F. Bagley, former U.S. Ambassador to Portugal, and her husband, Smith; Pat Robertson, founder, Christian Coalition; former Assistant to the President for Policy and Strategy and Executive Assistant to the Chief of Staff George R. Stephanopoulos; and Steve Grossman, national chair, Democratic National Committee.