

NOTE: S. 1564, approved February 13, was assigned Public Law No. 105–158.

Remarks at a Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee Reception in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

February 13, 1998

The President. Thank you very much. Thank you, Mayor. Thank you, Martin; thank you, Diane. I think that it was so easy to raise money for this because everybody wanted to come see your place, myself. [*Laughter*] It is a truly beautiful, beautiful home, and we thank you for having us here.

I thank Congressman Klink and Congressman Fattah and Congressman and Mrs. Holden for being here. And Joe Hoeffel, I thank you for being here and for having the courage to run again. This time I think you will be rewarded. Thank you very much.

I've had a wonderful day in Philadelphia, and the mayor has painted a rosy picture of it, but I'd say it was fairly accurate. The people of Pennsylvania have been good to me and to my family and to the Clinton-Gore administration. The people of Philadelphia have been especially good. In the last election, I think, we won the city by more than 300,000 votes. And I am very, very grateful.

I also want to thank Ed Rendell for always being there, for helping us raise money for Democrats across the country, as well as for me and for the Vice President. And I want you to know I really appreciate Martin Frost because in good times and bad times he's been willing to get out here and try to stick up for what he believes in and help his colleagues to be funded. And that's hard. And, you know, I never saw anybody any better at it than Martin Frost. He is just like a dog, to the bone, man. [*Laughter*] Every time—when I wake up in the morning and I start throwing bones to my dog, Buddy, that's the way Martin is when it comes to raising money. [*Laughter*] Martin lives in Texas. A lot of you know that Martin lives in Texas, and unfortunately, because our Coast Guard and other military personnel have gotten so good at apprehending drugs that used to come by air and by sea into the United States, more and more of the cocaine traffic has shifted

overland from Mexico with this huge volume. And I thought to myself, if Martin Frost had the same sense of finding illegal drugs he has of finding campaign contributions, he alone could shut off the flow of illegal drugs through the Mexican border. [*Laughter*] I've never seen anything like it.

But—so, I'm very grateful to all of you. And of course, I'm grateful for this turnout tonight. I'd like to just say a few words—I really didn't prepare any remarks tonight, but I have thought—I've asked myself, why was the response to the State of the Union this year, even more than other years, particularly strong? That is—we had 400,000 hits on our website for information about the State of the Union, after the address. And I think part of it is that Americans are now—it's sort of sinking in that the country is working again.

And all the Democrats here in the House will tell you, we had to work very hard for the first 4 or 5 years to make the country work again. I mean, so much was dysfunctional. When I was elected they told me that this year, if nothing happened, this year our deficit would be \$370 billion. It was supposed to be \$295 billion the first year of my Presidency. And the crime rate was going up and the welfare rolls were exploding. They reached an all-time high in February of 1994—all-time high. And we had all kinds of other real difficulties. And the country seemed to be dividing—and for 20 years—Ed talked about closing the inequality—for 20 years, average wages of people with a high school education or less had been dropping compared to inflation and inequality had been increasing among working people. And people just had the feeling things weren't working.

So we brought a new approach to Washington, and we said the Democrats may be the progressive party, but we've got to be economically responsible. You have to understand, any given time more people are working than are

unemployed, you have to make the economy work for people who can take care of themselves if the economy works.

So we went first for reducing the deficit. Then we said that it was fine for us to be an open market to other people's products, but we wanted to do more to open other markets to our products. Because, with 4 percent of the world's people and 20 percent of the world's income, we obviously have to sell more of our products abroad if we're going to maintain our standard of living.

And we recognized that no matter how much we tried to cut unnecessary spending to balance the budget, we still had to invest in our people and our future. So we worked at it for 5 years.

Your mayor, as much as anybody in the country, I think, had a lot to do with passing a crime bill in 1994 that put 100,000 police on the street and take assault weapons off the street and begin to give young people something to do other than get in trouble. And we've just been working at it.

And we were able, in this last State of the Union Address, as a Nation—not me but as a Nation—to celebrate what had happened. The deficit, instead of \$370 billion, would be somewhere around \$10 billion this year. And if we can repeat what's happened—we're in the fiscal year that began last October 1st—if the next 8 months are like the first 4, we'll actually have a balanced budget or a small surplus this year, not even next year.

So we're moving in the right direction. The crime rate has gone down every year for 5 years in all major categories. We have the lowest welfare rolls in 27 years. We have the lowest Hispanic unemployment rate ever recorded since the unemployment rate has been measured by race; the lowest black unemployment rate in 25 or 26 years. We have—last year we began to really turn around this income inequality problem—the highest percentage gained in income last year was among working people in the lowest 20 percentile of our population, which is very important, closing those opportunity gaps.

But beyond that, I think the response was good because we said, you know, the time to prepare the future is when the sun is shining, not when you're up to your ears in quicksand. And so I tried to lay out to the American people a program to really prepare this country for the new century, to invest in science and tech-

nology. I came here to talk to the American Academy of Scientists today about the recommendations we made for a 21st century research fund. It was an idea that I first heard from Hillary, that we ought to give a gift to the new millennium that says we're going to imagine the future and respect the past. So we proposed a fund, first of all, to dramatically increase medical research, to focus on cancer especially, to increase other scientific research, as well as to preserve our most important heritage. We've got—believe it or not, the Star-Spangled Banner is in danger of total destruction. We have to save it. It costs \$13 million to do it. We need to repair the way we maintain the Declaration of Independence, the Bill of Rights, the Constitution. These are very important things to us.

And all over the country there are people who have their own treasures. In Philadelphia, where the Nation began, it may be easy to overlook, but every little rural county in Pennsylvania has some part of America's past, some part of their roots that is very much worth saving. And people I think see that as a way of bringing the country together and moving forward.

We have important missions in education. I really do believe we have succeeded now with all the things we've done in opening the doors of college to all. And we know we've got the best college system in the world, but no one believes we've got the best system of elementary and secondary education in the world. And we have to make that the best now. And then we have to get these kids who come from a difficult background and let them know they can go on to college.

Believe me, if you want to lower the inequality in America, the only way to do it over the long run is to get more kids and more adults to get higher levels of education. And Chaka Fattah came up with this proposal and worked with a lot of the rest of us, and I mentioned it in the State of the Union, where we're going to go into—we're going to get colleges all over America to go into junior high schools or middle schools, starting with seventh graders, and tell them, "We're prepared to give you somebody to work with you for the next 6 years to make sure that you succeed in school. You learn, you perform, and you can go on to college, and we'll tell you right now, right now, in the seventh grade, how much college aid you can get.

We'll guarantee it to you if you do your part." This will be an astonishing thing. This can revolutionize what we're trying to do.

We want to lower class size in the early grades and help cities like Philadelphia, where the average school building is 65 years old, to repair school buildings. If you're going to have smaller classes, you've got to have more classrooms. If you're going to have more teachers, you're going to have more classrooms to teach them in.

We want to help places like the place I visited in Jupiter, Florida, the other day, where they've got a school building, and then out back they've got 17 trailers with children in classrooms. We want to help them. This is a place where both the urban areas and the suburban areas that are growing have a common interest in building a better education system.

We want to continue to improve the health care system—160 million Americans now in managed care, and it will be more. And there are lots of benefits to that. Every single living American has benefited from lowering the inflation rate in health care—every one of us has. It's one of the reasons we have a stronger economy. And all the people in the medical profession who participated in it, trying to provide quality health care with lower inflation costs, deserve our thanks, and the responsible people in managed care deserve our thanks.

On the other hand, we do not want to get to a position where any American, because of the health care plan that he or she is in, is having the decisions about what's best for their health care made by someone other than a physician based on what's best for the patient. So we have to strike the proper balance here, and we want to do that.

We want to continue to deal with the problem of coverage. We still have 40 million Americans without health care. We're trying to cover 5 million more children. We want to let people between the ages of 55 and 65, who lose their health insurance, just buy into the Medicare program at the real cost of the insurance policy or Medicare. And I believe that a lot of people will do this, hundreds of thousands, maybe even more than a million, often with the help of their children. We have a mission there.

We have an environmental mission. We have got to find a way to continue to grow the economy and preserve the environment. We're working with Detroit to try to reduce greenhouse

gas emissions and other pollutants in cars without undermining our economy. We know now that there are lighting systems and glass systems and other building systems that are available that would enable us to build buildings, rehabilitate buildings, build factories, build electric generating capacity, grow the economy without increasing greenhouse gas emissions. We have to do that for our grandchildren. And we can think about that.

I'll just mention one other thing that I think is very important. I said the other night—and I've gotten the strongest response across America, and I didn't really know what the response would be when I said it—that it is now projected that after running 30 years of deficits, we're actually going to run surpluses for several years. Now the surplus may go up or down depending on economic growth, but structurally we won't have a deficit anymore, which means in any given 5-year period, even if you have a recession or something, we'll have surpluses for the predictable future. And I said, and I will say again, I don't think we ought to start projecting how we're going to spend the surplus, whether it's in a spending program or a tax cut, until we have saved Social Security.

You know, it is easy for us to forget, but it was not until 1985—now, think about this—in the whole history of the country, it was not until 1985 that senior citizens became less poor than the general population. In 1935, when Social Security got started, two-thirds of the people who were elderly in this country lived in poverty, most of them in abject poverty. Unless they had kids who could take care of them, once they were out of the work force they never made enough money to save. We didn't have, really, savings systems. And they were in terrible problems.

Social Security helped to change that. The disability program in Social Security helped to help those who were disabled. Adjusting the income every year with the cost of living increases, although it cost money, helped to give dignity to people.

Now, as the baby boomers retire—and I'm the oldest of the baby boomers; I was born in 1946—and for the 18 years, from the end of World War II, 1946, for 18 years thereafter, to 1964, that group of people is the largest single group of Americans in our history, ironically, until the group that is now in high school—in grade school and middle school. We finally

have a group of schoolchildren bigger than the baby boom generation.

But there will be for several years—there will be, for several years after the baby boomers retire, a dramatic shift in the number of people retired compared to the number of people working. Not so long ago there were five people working for every person drawing Social Security. Now there are about four, I think. But by the time all the baby boomers get into the retirement system, if we retire at presently projected rates, there will be only two people working for everybody drawing.

Now, I don't know a single person in my generation that wants to give up the elemental security of Social Security. But neither have I ever met a person in my generation who wants to burden our children with higher tax rates and undermine their ability to raise our grandchildren. Therefore, if we start now, since the Social Security Trust Fund is okay until 2029—and actually I think soon we'll be a few years beyond that—we can take modest steps now that will take care of Social Security for a long time in the future.

Now, something else has happened that we all know. Since we're all earning higher incomes, hardly anybody can actually maintain their standard of living with Social Security alone. So in addition to reforming Social Security and saving it, we've been working very hard since 1994 to make it easier for people to save in 401(k) plans, to protect retirement more, to make it easier for people to carry their retirement around from job to job. We will have to do more of that. We will have to help people do more to save for their own retirement. But this is an incredible gift that we can give to the future. So in the next year we're going to have these forums around the country. Then we're going to try to pass legislation in 1999. Now, I think the American people want us to do that.

Now, let's get down to the political purpose of tonight. In every election in the 20th century, in off years, and especially in the second term of a President, the President's party always loses seats in one House of the Congress in an off-year election. We have a chance to beat that trend this year, and I honestly believe there is quite a good chance, not just a 30 percent chance, a very good chance that Martin Frost is right, that we could have a Democratic majority, that Mr. Gephardt could become the Speaker, that we could go forward—a very good

chance. Why? Because for one thing, this is not a typical second term. That was not a rest-in-the-shade agenda that I gave the American people. [Laughter] And I don't believe in resting in the shade. I intend to work till the last minute of the last hour of the last day in January of 2001. I intend to be hitting it. I don't believe in that.

Audience member. That sounds like something our mayor said.

The President. And if we can stay united, as we are, and if we can be positive and if we can not play politics—that is, I think it is imperative that we do everything we can to work with the Republicans to pass every single thing we can this year, because we know that in good faith, no matter how hard we work with them, no matter how hard they work with us in good faith, there will be enough honest disagreements in this agenda I've outlined, that by November, Joe will still have something to campaign on. [Laughter]

But we have to recognize that people elect you to govern. So, if we can stay together, we've got a good agenda; we've got good candidates; the only other thing we have to do is to make sure that we are properly funded. In the last 2 weeks of the last election, when we were 11 seats short of taking Congress, in the 20 closest races our people were outspent about four to one—about four to one in the last 2 weeks—in the closest races. We are determined to see that that won't happen this time. And you are helping. But I believe that we are best served by a positive campaign, working, bringing out the best in the American people, and getting people to look to the future.

Everybody knows that this new approach is working. All the things they used to say about the Democrats are not valid anymore—our opponent. They can't say we're fiscally irresponsible because we balanced the budget. They can't say that we are weak on crime because we've had policies that were in effect written by the law enforcement community, implemented, and are working. They can't say that we don't care about work over welfare because we've moved record numbers of people from welfare to work and still tried to do more to support their children.

So a lot of these hits that used to be put on the Democrats don't hold water anymore.

Now we are free to debate the future, to envision the future, to work for the future. And if we'll do that, we can achieve it.

Let me just leave you with this last point. I spent a lot of time in the last year reading the history of the 19th century, because I came to realize that, like most Americans, I knew a fair amount about our founding and what happened in Philadelphia, I knew a fair amount about Abraham Lincoln and the Civil War, and I knew a fair amount about what had happened from Theodore Roosevelt forward. Most Americans don't know much about what happened after Andrew Jackson until Abraham Lincoln, and what happened after Abraham Lincoln until Teddy Roosevelt—they just don't.

And what I got out of that study was a more unified picture of the history of America. And if you go back to our founding and study the history of America, I think you'll see that, at its best, our progress through time has always been about three things: widening the circle of opportunity, deepening the meaning of our freedom and our liberty, and strengthening our Union, our sense of national union.

Thomas Jefferson's greatest achievements—well, he wrote the Declaration of Independence. He changed us from being a colonial country to a continental country when he bought Louisiana—giving me a chance to become President, thank you very much—[laughter]—sending Lewis and Clark on their great expedition.

Abraham Lincoln strengthened the Union and deepened liberty. But also—a lot of people forgot about it—he signed the bill in the middle of the Civil War to establish the system of land grant colleges, widening the circle of opportunity.

In the 20th century our party—we haven't always been right, as I've said, we've been wrong from time to time, and we haven't always been up to date, but we have always, from the time of Woodrow Wilson forward, been in the vanguard of widening the circle of opportunity, deepening the meaning of freedom, strengthening the Union of the United States. And if we will do that all year, on the stump, but also at work, then I believe that the chances that the American people will say, "We like this, and we will elect people who believe this," are quite extraordinary. And you have made it possible for us to have a chance to do that.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 6:35 p.m. at a private residence. In his remarks, he referred to Mayor Edward Rendell of Philadelphia; dinner hosts Martin and Diane Weiss; Gwen Holden, wife of Representative Tim Holden; Joe Hoeffel, candidate for Pennsylvania's 13th Congressional District; and Representative Martin Frost, chairman, Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee.

The President's Radio Address

February 14, 1998

Good morning. Our most important task in the coming years is to strengthen America for the 21st century. Nothing weakens our families and the fabric of our Nation more than the use, abuse, and sale of drugs.

Today I want to talk about what we all must do to protect our children and keep our communities safe from drugs. I'm very pleased to be joined by the leader of our antidrug efforts, General Barry McCaffrey. Let's begin by recognizing that the fight against drugs must be waged and won at kitchen tables all across America. Even the world's most thorough antidrug strategy won't ever do the job unless all

of us pass on the same clear and simple message to our children: Drugs are wrong; drugs are dangerous; and drugs can kill you. That is our most powerful antidrug strategy.

We've had some very encouraging news in recent months. We're finding that more and more of our young people are saying no to drugs, and we can all take great pride in the fact that the number of Americans who use drugs has fallen by one-half since 1979. But that number is still too large. That's why I'm proposing a new 10-year plan to meet one unambiguous goal: We can and must cut drug use in America by another 50 percent. This plan