

Remarks at a Reception for Representative Sheila Jackson Lee in Houston January 9, 1998

I was just getting my last-minute instructions. [Laughter] Thank you for being here. Thank you for the warm welcome. Let me begin by saying that I am honored to be here on behalf of Sheila Jackson Lee and I'm delighted that you're here.

I want to thank her family for sharing her with the people of this congressional district and the United States Congress. It's not easy to do. It is easy to forget the rigors of public service, but ask yourself if you could do a job, even one you loved, if you had to fly back and forth from here to Washington every week, if you were away from your spouse and your children for prolonged periods of time, and when you came back to see them, over 100,000 people could call you on the phone and say why you should be with them instead of with your family. [Laughter]

It's a difficult job being in Congress, but Sheila Jackson Lee does it well. She does it with enormous energy, and she has had an unusual impact for a person with no more seniority than she has, just by the sheer force of will and work. I know I'm no different than other people—when I see her coming at me with that look in her eye—[laughter]—I don't even want to hear what she has to say. I just say, yes, yes. [Laughter] That way I don't have to keep dealing with it. I just say yes. [Laughter] Because if I say no or maybe, eventually I'm going to get around to yes anyway. [Laughter]

She just became the chairman of the House Children's Caucus. And we had a great announcement earlier this week at the White House where I announced a program to involve millions of more children in child care, to raise the standards, to train more trained child care workers, to make them safer and better—the child care centers of America. We still have to pass it through the Congress. I'll bet you it will pass this year, and when it does—you mark my words—Sheila Jackson Lee will deserve a lot of the credit, the largest effort by the National Government to help communities provide quality child care in the history of the United States of America. So I'm very hopeful about that.

We had a great meeting today over at the George Brown Auditorium with, I don't know, several thousand people, and at least half of them were young people, to talk about the fact that in the Balanced Budget Act, which Sheila Jackson Lee supported last year, we had the biggest expansion in aid to college since the GI bill was passed at the end of World War II 50 years ago.

Consider this: In that bill we gave the vast majority of American families of modest incomes, even upper middle-class incomes and down, access to a \$1,500-a-year tax credit for the first 2 years of college—that makes community college virtually free for virtually everybody in the country—amazing thing; a \$1,000 tax credit for the junior and the senior year, for graduate schools, to help people go to school. We had the biggest increase in Pell grant scholarships for students with modest incomes in 20 years. We redid the student loan program so you can get the loans quicker, where the fees cost less money, and now you can pay the loans back as a percentage of your income. So no one need ever fear borrowing money to go to school again, because you're not going to be bankrupted by paying the loans back because you can limit the loan to a percentage of your income.

And today I announced Texas has been one of the States that has made the most use of AmeriCorps, our community national service program. We've had 100,000 young people in this country who've earned money to go to college by serving in their communities. And today I announced we're going to ask for 1 million work-study slots next year, so people can work their way through college.

So I thank Sheila Jackson Lee for supporting my education program. She has supported my economic program, including my trade policies. And even when they were controversial. She understands we can't help people who are losing out in the global economy at home by cutting off opportunities to create more jobs by selling American products abroad. And I thank her for that, and you ought to thank her for that. She's done a very good job.

So I'm glad to be here for her. And I'm glad to be here with Mayor Brown. That's got a great sound, doesn't it: Mayor Brown. I got tickled today in our earlier meeting. I was here with the mayor, who was in my Cabinet. He ran—he was the drug czar in my Cabinet, my very first one. And former Treasury Secretary Lloyd Bentsen was also at our meeting. We nearly had a quorum for a Cabinet meeting in Houston. [Laughter] Knowing how people in Texas think, you probably thought I just had three or four too few from Houston. [Laughter] But anyway, I was pretty proud of Houston's contribution to my Cabinet and my administration.

You know that story Lee told—unfortunately, that's a true story, that story he told about Memphis and how I left him to give the speech and when I left everybody left. [Laughter] But he will—you know, in his quiet, persistent way, he always gets even. [Laughter] And what I want to tell him is, his time is coming, because he got elected this year, and I got elected last year, and I can't run for reelection. So when I am a former President, I will come down here; I will let him introduce me to speak for him. And when he leaves, the media will leave, the crowd will leave, everybody will leave. [Laughter] And I will talk to the handful who are left with great energy, and we'll be even then. [Laughter]

I don't know how many of you have seen this wonderful movie "Amistad." Have you seen it? It's a great movie about the African slaves that were basically towed into New Haven harbor and eventually are freed through the intervention of former President John Quincy Adams in the 1840's, late 1830's, 1840's. And Quincy Adams has got a great line in here; he says, "There is nothing so pathetic as a former President." [Laughter] All I can tell you is, I hope to find out. [Laughter] I hope the good Lord has got that in mind for me, and I'll try to beat the odds.

We've had a good time today. I woke up in south Texas this morning, got there at 2 o'clock last night. I was in Brownsville, McAllen, and Mission today. I've had a great day. And then I came to Houston, and we've had a wonderful day. This is quite a remarkable place you have. You should be very proud of it.

I want to take just a very few minutes of your time to say something pretty serious, maybe a little bit abstract. We've talked about

some of the specifics we are doing. In 1992 I was the Governor of Arkansas—in 1991, actually. I decided in late 1991 to run for President for a very simple reason: I wanted America in the 21st century to be the greatest country in the world as a force of peace and freedom. I wanted our country to be coming together as one America instead of to be driven apart by its diversity as so many other places in the world are. And I wanted the American dream to be alive not just for my child but for every child that was responsible enough to work for it. And I believed we had to change course to get there because it's a new time.

And it really is a different time. We've already got one leg in the 21st century; you surely know that in Houston. And how would you describe this? What is different about this new time?

First of all, the extent of globalization is greater than any other previous time. We are more tied to people all around the world in ways good and sometimes not so good, or at least potentially not so good, than ever before. Goods and services and people and money and technology and information, they just move around the world at great speed.

Secondly, there is, along with the globalization, an utter explosion in information and in science and technology which is changing the way we work and live and relate to each other and the way we relate to the rest of the world. When you put these two things together, the scope and pace of change is more rapid and profound in ordinary life than at any previous time.

Those of you who are in business know that. Those of you in education know that. In just about any line of work you know that. If you've got a law practice, you know that. If you run a branch of a bank, you know that being a bank teller is not what it was 5 years ago. I'll bet you some of you in here have not used the Internet very much, but if you have children, I bet your kids have. [Laughter]

Now, here's an interesting thing to think about. Five years ago, when I became President 5 years ago, the Internet was still largely the private province of research physicists. It got started as a Government research project. It was turned over to these research physicists. A couple of bright young people in their twenties figured out that this thing had enormous potential commercial and educational and just communication application and is now the fastest

growing social organism in human history, I guess. Just think, hundreds of thousands of pages are being added to the Internet worldwide every month, you know, whenever somebody has got some new idea.

So what does all that mean? Well, first of all, it means that the old arrangements are not adequate. And one of the things that had hurt my party, the Democratic Party, in national elections was that people said, "Well, the Democrats have a good heart, and they're trying to take up for the people that need help, but they're too wedded to the old arrangements." And then the modern Republican Party, the Republican Party of the last 20 years, said, "Well, the real problem is the Government itself. Government is inherently unsuited to deal with the problems of the modern age." And you heard them say that many times in all good faith: "The Government is the problem. The Government is bad. If we just had less Government, everything would be hunky-dory."

I did not agree with either approach. I didn't think that my party could afford to be a stand-pat party. I thought we had to change. But I thought I had seen enough of the world to know, number one, that no other country was trying to move into the 21st century without a partnership between government and business and labor and people in the public and private sectors and that there are some things we have to do together as a people that can only be done through our Government. There are conditions and tools that have to be provided to people to make the most of their own lives.

If you believe what I think is the American creed, which is: we're all created equal; nobody should be discriminated against; and everybody that needs it deserves a hand up—that's what I think. So I set out on this odyssey that has now culminated in where we are 5 years later, with the simple idea: I'm going to change the role of Government. We're not going to do nothing, but we're not going to try to do everything. We're going to focus on creating the conditions and give people the tools they need to make the most of their own lives.

What does that mean? It means we're going to grow the economy by reducing the deficit, investing in people, and expanding trade. It means we're going to protect the environment, but we're going to do it in a way that proves we can improve the environment while we grow the economy. It means we're going to expand

health care, but we're going to do it in a way that not only focuses on quality care but tries to keep the cost down. It means we're going to actually reduce the size of Government but increase the investment we make on the streets in trying to fight crime—different ideas, not being put into false choices.

And 5 years later, I think the results are pretty good. The budget is 92 percent lower than it was the day I took office—the deficit is. And I'm going to send a balanced budget to Congress next month for the first time in 30 years. We've had 14.3 million new jobs and the lowest unemployment rate in 24 years, the lowest crime rate in 24 years, the biggest drop in welfare rolls in history, the highest rate of homeownership in history, including the highest rate of homeownership by African-Americans and Hispanic-Americans.

I didn't do all that. You did most of it. I did my job. Our job was to create the conditions and give people the tools to build good lives, good families, good communities, a strong nation, and then to reach out to the rest of the world, recognizing that this is an increasingly interdependent world.

I say this to make a simple point for why it really matters that you're here for Sheila Jackson Lee, apart from the fact that she's a fireball and you like her. [Laughter] That's good enough reason to show up, but there is a bigger reason. Ideas have consequences in public life, just like they do in the classroom or in novels or in your personal lives. We had an idea that there was a role for Government in public life in the 21st century; that it wasn't inherently bad, but it needed to be smaller and less bureaucratic and more focused on empowerment. And we have a lot of challenges left.

You've still got neighborhoods in Houston where there are people who haven't been helped by this global economy. We've still got places where free enterprise has not found its way in. The biggest untapped market for American goods and services are in the unemployed neighborhoods of America. We've made a lot of progress in education; there are still a lot of underperforming schools. I'm trying to get everybody to go to college, but the first thing you've got to know is when you get out of high school your diploma means what it says, and you can read it, and you know what it means, and you got out of it what you need.

The Congresswoman was trying to delicately sidestep the fact that I am the oldest of the baby boomers, but alas, it's true. [Laughter] And when our crowd retires, if we don't now—now—prepare with necessary, prudent reforms in Social Security and Medicare, we will put ourselves in the position of either sacrificing two of the most important accomplishments that have relieved the anxiety from old age and made the elderly people less poor than the rest of us for the first time in history—two fabulous accomplishments—or in order to keep them just like they are, if we're unwilling to change them, we'll have to put a big old tax on our kids that aren't fair and make it harder for them to support their grandchildren. Why? Because there's more of us than there are of them.

This is not a complicated deal. And there's about an 18-year bulge there that we have to get through, after which, because of the childrearing habits of our own children and because of immigration, things will kind of settle out again.

It is irresponsible—I don't know anyone in my generation, anybody in the baby boom generation, who really wants to saddle our kids with an unsustainable economic burden to take care of us in our old age. So we're going to have to make some prudent changes. If we do it now, we're open about it, we don't try to play politics with it, can we do it? We can reduce it nearly to an accounting problem. We'll just do what makes sense and do the commonsense thing and go on. But we have to do it.

We've got to figure a way to stop this climate change, this global warming. Can we do it without wrecking the economy? Of course we can. Look at all the announcements Detroit has been making just in the last few days about new cars. Of course we can.

We've got mountains of natural gas in this country we haven't even begun to use. We stopped using it 20 years ago because we thought we were running out of it. Now we know it's a good thing we didn't use it; now, we need to use it now to stop the climate from warming up too much. We have major challenges. There's another 10 I could give you.

The point I'm making is the country is in good shape now, and we can be glad about that. But when you're doing well the last thing you should do in a time of change is to sit on your laurels. When you're doing well you should say, "I have been given this opportunity

to think long-term about the problem, to think about my children, to think about my grandchildren."

In Washington, some people have criticized me for trying to have this national year—have a dialog on race, because they say we don't have any riots in the cities. My view is, if I don't ever want any more riots in the cities and I don't like what I see in the problems from Northern Ireland to the Middle East to the tribal wars in Africa to Bosnia, why don't we try to do something about it while we're all getting along more or less? I think that's a pretty good idea.

I say that because ideas have consequences. I think the approach that Sheila Jackson Lee embodies—that you can be pro-business and pro-labor; that you can have compassion for people who deserve and need help and still be fiscally responsible; that you can be tough on crime but still smart enough to realize the best approach is to keep kids out of trouble in the first place; that you can grow the economy and preserve the environment; that you can reduce the size of Government and the burden of bureaucracy and still increase your investment in education and the future and science and technology—in other words, a modern, balanced, commonsense, progressive approach—it seems to me that that is what we need for quite a long while to come in the United States, not because things aren't doing well now, not because I'm not grateful, but because I don't think we're anywhere near finishing the transition we have to make as a country if we really want 21st century America to be a place where every single child can live up to his or her God-given capacities if they're responsible enough to do it, where we know we're going to be one America celebrating our diversity but bound together by things that are more important, and where we're still the world's leading force for peace and freedom and prosperity. And I don't think you think it either.

I think every one of you, if you'd be really honest, would say, "I'm really glad we're doing well, but do we have challenges over the long run? You bet we do. It matters. Ideas have consequences. The approach you take matters." This woman has made a positive contribution to the direction of America, and I believe what we're doing needs to continue beyond the service that I can render as President. I believe it needs to continue well into the next century.

And thanks to your presence here, she's got a good chance to do that, and I want you to make sure it happens.

Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 8:48 p.m. in the ballroom at the Four Seasons Hotel. In his remarks, he referred to Mayor Lee Brown of Houston.

The President's Radio Address *January 10, 1998*

Good morning. Today I want to talk with you about the extraordinary promise of science and technology and the extraordinary responsibilities that promise imposes on us.

As we approach the 21st century it is clearer than ever that science and technology are changing the way we live and work and raise our families. Remarkable breakthroughs in biomedical science are helping to unravel the mysteries of life, holding out new hope for lifesaving cures to some of our most dreaded diseases. In recent years, we've made real progress lengthening the lives of people with HIV, finding the genes that can show heightened risk for breast cancer and diabetes. Now we're on the verge of discovering new treatments for spinal cord and even brain injuries.

For 5 years I have maintained our Nation's solid commitment to scientific research and technological development, because I believe they're essential to our Nation's economic growth and to building the right kind of bridge to the 21st century. The balanced budget I will submit in just a few weeks to Congress reflects that continued commitment. And in my upcoming State of the Union Address, I'll talk more about what we're doing to keep America on the cutting edge of the scientific and technological advancements that are driving our new global economy.

Still, it's good to remember that scientific advancement does not occur in a moral vacuum. Technological developments divorced from values will not bring us one step closer to meeting the challenges or reaping the benefits of the 21st century.

This week, like many Americans, I learned the profoundly troubling news that a member of the scientific community is actually laying plans to clone a human being. Personally, I believe that human cloning raises deep concerns, given our cherished concepts of faith and hu-

manity. Beyond that, however, we know there is virtually unanimous consensus in the scientific and medical communities that attempting to use these cloning techniques to actually clone a human being is untested and unsafe and morally unacceptable.

We must continue to maintain our deep commitment to scientific research and technological development. But when it comes to a discovery like cloning, we must move with caution, care, and deep concern about the impact of our actions. That is why I banned the use of Federal funds for cloning human beings while we study the risks and responsibilities of such a possibility. And that's why I sent legislation to Congress last June that would ban the cloning of human beings for at least 5 years while preserving our ability to use the morally and medically acceptable applications of cloning technology.

Unfortunately, Congress has not yet acted on this legislation. Yet, it's now clearer than ever the legislation is exactly what is needed. The vast majority of scientists and physicians in the private sector have refrained from using these techniques improperly and have risen up to condemn any plans to do so. But we know it's possible for some to ignore the consensus of their colleagues and proceed without regard for our common values. So today, again, I call on Congress to act now to make it illegal for anyone to clone a human being.

Our Nation was founded by men and women who firmly believed in the power of science to transform their world for the better. Like them, we're bound together by common dreams and by the values that will drive our own vision for the future. And our commitment to carry those enduring ideals with us will renew their promise in a new century and a new millennium. We must never lose touch with that, no matter what the reason, or we'll lose touch with ourselves as a people.