

This is a time—I read all those statistics off to you—28, 29, 30 years, and you were all clapping. It's really exhilarating, isn't it? But what you have to think about is, this doesn't happen all that often. And we have space now and confidence and a sense of possibility, and we cannot squander it.

Robert Kennedy used to quote Tennyson, saying it is not too late to seek a newer world. Well, it isn't too late. But I don't care how good things are—believe me, I've now lived long enough to see things change—it's not too late, but we don't have a moment to waste. And we've only just begun.

So I want you to celebrate what you've done. I want to thank you for what you've done, but I want you to think about the next 50 years and realize what a precious gift as citizens we

have been given to mobilize together, to think about the large matters of our children and grandchildren's future, and to actually to do something about them. And keep in mind, we're where we are because we had ideas and we had action.

Thank you very much, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:30 p.m. at the Omni Shoreham Hotel. In his remarks, he referred to Antonio Riley, Wisconsin State Representative; Gov. Roy Romer of Colorado, general chair, Democratic National Committee; Al From, president, Democratic Leadership Council; William Marshall, president, Progressive Policy Institute; Gov. Tom Carper of Delaware; Lt. Gov. Kathleen Kennedy Townsend of Maryland; and Jill Docketing, cochair, Kansas Justice Commission.

Remarks at a Reception for the SAVER Summit

June 4, 1998

Thank you very much, and welcome to the White House. I want to say again a special word of thanks to Senator Breaux and the other Members of Congress who have pushed this summit. I believe that Congressmen Neal, Payne and Clay are here, and there were others, of course, with us earlier in the day. I thank Secretary Herman for her outstanding leadership.

I think it is truly remarkable that Louisiana State has gone so far in the baseball finals. [Laughter] And I say that as a neighbor. I've actually known about John Breaux—John Breaux and I first ran for office in 1974, and we had the same ad person, so I knew about John Breaux sort of from a distance. And my guy, who was his guy, kept saying, "You're so earnest. You just don't have the kind of moves that Breaux does." [Laughter]

And Louisiana—I grew up in Arkansas, so he's my neighbor, and it's just different down there. [Laughter] Really. Baseball—it's the only State in the country where, in all probability, everybody on the baseball team has to slow down to play that sport, instead of speed up. [Laughter] It's just an amazing place.

I quoted Benjamin Franklin today and told you all the story about his leaving the £2,000 to Boston and Philadelphia. Franklin also once

said, it's better to go to bed without supper than to wake up in debt. And we're almost out of debt, so we're giving you drinks and not supper here tonight. [Laughter] But at least we're making progress. And if we're quick enough, at least you'll be able to have supper. [Laughter]

There was a good feeling in that room today when all of us were there. I think you all felt good about it; I felt good about it. The reason we felt good about it is because you like to see your leaders working together and listening to you. And that's the way it ought to work around here all the time.

I keep telling people I have to travel out in the country and see people and just sit and listen on a regular basis to remind myself that I'm supposed to be working for you instead of against them, and vice versa—that that's really what we're all here for. And I think the fact that we have this level of common commitment is some evidence that we understand this is a big deal, and you don't have the luxury of engaging in petty politics.

Here you are in this remarkable East Room, with this wonderful picture of Theodore Roosevelt, the only American President ever to win the Nobel Prize for Peace, for helping to settle

the war between Russia and Japan in 1905. And there's this very famous picture of George Washington that was painted by Gilbert Stuart in 1797. We bought it for \$500. It's worth slightly more than that today. [Laughter] It's appreciated even more than Benjamin Franklin's £2,000. [Laughter]

And I think about it because that picture was hanging in this room, and there was food all over the room, and there was a banquet being prepared, when James Madison was President. And he was the last President ever to actually be the Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces. He actually rode into battle with our forces in the War of 1812. And in 1814 when the British came up the river and burned the White House, Madison was in Maryland, near here, with the troops, thinking that he would be able to cut them off. But they came up the river instead.

And so they sent word to Mrs. Madison and to the others to get out of here and abandon the banquet. So when the British got here, they found all this food. They sat down and ate our food, and then they burned the house—[laughter]—which was a sort of an efficient thing for them to do, I guess. [Laughter] But the point is, James Madison said, "Leave and don't take anything but that picture." Because that picture symbolized our roots. It is a truly priceless American treasure now, which would not have been there but for the fact that Dolley Madison had the presence of mind, with the British breathing down her throat, to cut it out of its frame, roll it up, preserve it, and get to safety.

We have a remarkable way of coming together as a democracy when our existence is threatened. When we have a chance to do something really big, we have a remarkable way of coming together, as I think we had enormous support across party lines for the constructive role the United States played in the peace process in Ireland, for example. And now I believe there's a great deal of support for what we have done in Bosnia, because it's working.

It is harder to get a democracy together when you're dealing with a very large problem, but it's not right on your doorstep; it's 10, or 20, or 30 years down the road. And one of the most impressive things to me about the young people—the young people who work here, for example, at the White House, the young people I meet at the colleges and universities or in workplaces around the country—is that I find

they really do spend a fair amount of time thinking about what America will be like in 20, or 30, or 40 years. And it's a tribute to their parents; it's a tribute to their educators; and more than anything else, it's a tribute to them.

But those of us who are, like Senator Breaux and Secretary Herman and I, sort of on the cutting edge of the baby boom burden, we've had a pretty good run in this country. This country has been very good to us. We've had an amazing life. But we also have not had many opportunities, because of the divisions of the last 30 years, to really coalesce our country and to take on these big, long-term challenges.

Now, in trying to deal with the challenges of Social Security and the other savings issues, of Medicare, preserving the environment for the long time while we grow the economy, and all the other big challenges of the country—those of us who are in our middle years or later, who are in a position to really make decisions here, this is the opportunity of a lifetime for us. And for reasons, as I said earlier today—for reasons, I think, largely due to the success our country is enjoying now, our democracy will permit us to do it. And our children are demanding that we do it.

And so I think you should be mindful of that, and you should be happy about it, because not every citizen gets to do what you're being asked to do, not every generation has a chance to do—to preserve the country and keep it strong and united and growing for a whole generation, as you're being given the chance to do.

So I hope you will not only take this seriously, as I know you will, but enjoy it. And then when you leave here, do what you can to convey this sense of both possibility and urgency to the people with whom you come in contact with across the country, because we have to maintain this sense in the country that this is something their democracy ought to produce, that this is not something that just leaders can do alone but is something we can do together. And with your leadership and energy, I believe we will.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 6:45 p.m. in the East Room at the White House.