

Remarks at a Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee Dinner in
New York City
June 8, 1998

Thank you very much, “Mr. Speaker”—has a nice ring to it, don’t you think? *[Laughter]* Let me thank the very large number of House Members who are here or who have been here, in addition to Congressman Gephardt and Congressman Frost: Congressman Rangel and Congresswoman Lowey and Congresswoman Maloney, Congressman Pallone, Congressman Nadler, Congressman Hinchey, Congressman Ackerman, Congressman Engel. And Congresswoman Ellen Tauscher is here from California, where in the California primary she won 55 percent of the vote against nine Republicans. That’s a good sign for our future.

Let me tell you, in California, for those of you who don’t know it, everybody just runs and all the votes get added up together, and the top voting Democrat and the top vote-getting Republican then run against each other in the fall. If I were the Republican in her race, I would reconsider.

Let me also thank Judith Hope for her work for the Democratic Party, and Mayor Dowden, thank you for coming. We have two candidates here. I don’t know if they were mentioned earlier, but Paul Feiner from the 20th district and William Holtz from the 1st, thank you for running. We can’t win if we don’t have candidates. And for all of you that had anything to do with putting this event together, I thank you.

I do want to apologize to Congressman Frost’s mother for comparing Martin to my dog, Buddy. That’s not exactly what I did. I said if I’d been thinking clearly I would have named my dog Martin, instead of Buddy—*[laughter]*—because Martin Frost is so insistent, it’s just like a dog biting you on the leg; you know, until you do what he wants to do, he will not let go of your leg. And so here I am, and I’m honored to be here.

Let me say to my long-time friend Chevy Chase, that deal on the Bosnian vowels is one of the funniest things I’ve heard in a long time. *[Laughter]* But you have persuaded me that it ought to be done. *[Laughter]* But I do want to make an announcement about it. I’ve worked a long time to eliminate deficit spending, too long to change course now. I’m also against def-

icit vowelizing. And therefore, we are going to have to reduce our vowels in order to increase our gift to Bosnia. *[Laughter]* And Chevy, you lost the lottery. We are taking your vowels. From now on, your stage name will be “Chv Chs.” *[Laughter]* I will write your first note to that effect tomorrow. *[Laughter]*

Ladies and gentlemen, I feel good about where our country is; I feel good about where our party is. I feel profoundly honored to be associated with all of these Members of Congress who are here tonight. I guess I would like to make just a couple of points.

When I became President, I was not very interested in politics as usual. I had the same reaction to a lot of what goes on in Washington. It is so plainly and blatantly and nakedly political and so clearly divorced from the way ordinary people live out there in the country, that many of you expressed to me tonight when you walked through the line.

I was, in the words of one of my distinguished opponents, “just a Governor from a small Southern State.” But I did have these old-fashioned ideas, and some fairly modern ones as well. I thought that, yes, we needed new ideas, consistent with Democratic Party’s enduring values. But I also had this really old-fashioned idea that if somebody just sort of showed up in Washington and went to work every day and worried about how many things you could get done, at the end of a year or two you’d actually get a lot of things done; and that if we spent more time trying to pile up accomplishments for the American people, instead of pile up negative words on each other, we would get a great deal done indeed.

And I have to say to you now, 5½ years into my Presidency, I am more optimistic today than I was the day I took the oath of office for the first time about the potential for this political system to do what needs to be done for the American people, to empower them to make the most of their lives in the 21st century, to create conditions of peace and security, to move us forward together. But it takes sustained effort.

Now, I look back on the last 6 years, and here is the story we can say—and if someone had told me this on Inaugural Day, I would have said, I'll take it proudly—because today we have the lowest crime rates in 25 years, the lowest unemployment rate in 28 years and 16 million new jobs, the lowest percentage of our people on welfare in 29 years, the first balanced budget and surplus in 29 years, the lowest inflation rate in 35 years, the smallest Federal Government in 35 years, and the highest homeownership rate in the history of the United States. That is the record of the Democratic Party at the eve of the 21st century.

Now, yes, it is true, as Mr. Gephardt said and I've never hesitated to say, that Government did not do this alone. But in each case, Government had a role to play that was indispensable. The American people deserve the ultimate credit for anything that's achieved in this country; that is, first of all, in the nature of the democracy, and secondly, in the nature of essentially a private economy and a private society. But there is a role to play here.

And it is critical to point out, if you go back to 1993, I don't believe any serious observer believes the economy would have come back as much as it has if we hadn't passed the economic plan, without a single vote from the other party and without a vote to spare. I don't believe any serious analyst believes that the crime rate would have come down as much as it has if it hadn't been for the economy coming back and for the passage of the crime bill and a commitment to put 100,000 police on the street and ban assault weapons.

And I could go through the whole litany. So I'm very proud. As a Democrat, to be able to stand up here and say that this country is now working for ordinary Americans, based on these numbers, is very important to me. We have last year—it's working for all kinds—we have a record number of new Hispanic-owned businesses, the lowest black unemployment rate ever recorded. Last year, for the first time in history, there was statistically no difference between the African-American high school graduation rate and the graduation rate of the white majority.

These are stunning indicators of forward progress, and I'm proud of that. I'm proud of the fact that along the way we were also able to pass the Family and Medical Leave Act. And we cut taxes for families with modest incomes

of under \$30,000; it took 2.2 million children out of poverty.

I'm proud of the fact that we reformed the adoption laws, the child support laws, and the pension protection laws, helping tens of millions of Americans. I'm proud of the fact that we put a record amount of money into research, especially into medical research; that we opened the doors of college to everybody willing to work for it, with tax credits and scholarships and work-study programs.

I'm proud of our national service program, AmeriCorps, that's given almost 100,000 young people a chance to serve in their communities. I'm very proud of the fact that, according to our Interior Secretary, Bruce Babbitt, we have now protected more land in perpetuity for the American people than in any other administration in the history of the country except those of Theodore and Franklin Roosevelt. All of those things are things we can be proud of.

And what I am here to tell you tonight is we could do a lot more if we all start rowing in the same direction. No one can seriously say of the Democratic Party now, "They are not a party of fiscal responsibility." No one can seriously say of the Democratic Party now, "They are not a party that believes in the primary value of work and family." No one can say we don't believe in public safety. No one can say that we can't be trusted with the foreign policy of the country and the national security of the country. All the negative things that our adversaries said about us for years and years and years have no currency in life at the present state of affairs.

Now we have a chance and, I would argue, a profound obligation as a people, and for those of us who are Democrats, as a party, not to just try to coast along through this good time but to say, "Hey, it's been a long time since we had a time like this. And no time lasts forever." We have a special obligation to take this moment of high confidence and real possibility to deal with the remaining challenges that the people of the United States face, the real long-term challenges.

That's why I thank Mr. Gephardt and our entire caucus for saying that we should not spend the surplus we expect to accumulate this year until we first have developed and passed a plan to save the Social Security System, so that the baby boom generation doesn't bankrupt

our children and their ability to raise our grandchildren.

Over the next 2 years, we have to face the challenges that Social Security and Medicare present us. We had a very gripping conversation around our dinner table tonight about the enormous financial pressures on the health care delivery system here in New York, occasioned by the growth of managed care, the tightness of Government budgets, and the declining percentage of Americans who get health insurance with their work. We have to deal with these challenges. And you have to pick a party. The American people have to pick a party to deal with them in the next 2 years.

We have continuing education challenges and huge debates in Washington where the Democrats have been strong in support of our agenda of smaller class sizes, higher standards, connecting every classroom to the Internet, better trained teachers, more after-school programs to keep kids out of trouble in the first place. Dick Gephardt is right: Yes, we have to punish people who misbehave; yes, we have to be tough on the gangs. We can't jail our way out of this crisis. We have got to find these children before they get in trouble and save more of our kids. And we know what to do about it. The question is, are we going to take this opportunity to do it? We have the means to do it, and we know what to do. The question is, will we do it?

We're just finishing a huge rough period, and we have a few more weeks to go, of El Nino, where the fires have been raging in Mexico; the fires have been raging in South America and in other places. There's a big story in the morning paper that, based on the first 5 months of this year, if present trends continue, 1998 will be the hottest year ever recorded since we have been measuring temperatures. Already we know that the 5 hottest years since 1400 have occurred in the 1990's. This climate change business is not just some—as some would have you believe—some academic theory.

Now, on the other hand, there are some who would have you believe that we can't deal with the problem of climate change and global warming without essentially shrinking the economy. That's not true either, and that's a Hobbesian's choice we don't have to make.

I am committed to dealing with this issue to prove we can improve the environment; we can reduce greenhouse gas emissions; we can stop the rapid pace of global warming and con-

tinue to grow the American economy if we do it in a responsible way. And if you have from now to midnight, I could give you 50 examples to win that argument.

But the answer is not, as our adversaries on the other side do, to call these hearings in Congress and attack administration witnesses and attack environmental specialists and claim that global warming is some big academic conspiracy designed to break the economy of the United States. I'm telling you, the 5 warmest years since 1400 have occurred in this decade. We have lots of evidence.

But the good news is, this is just like buying an insurance policy. We don't lose anything. If we change our course in a responsible way, we can continue to enjoy high rates of growth with less destructive energy practices. And I am committed to doing that.

Let me just mention one or two other things. I want very badly to pass a Patients' Bill of Rights. The American Medical Association is supporting us; consumer groups are supporting us. On balance, the managed care movement was coming to America and, on balance, it started out as a very good thing, and it has done a lot of good things. We could not sustain an economy with medical costs going up at 3 times the rate of inflation every year forever; it was an unsustainable pattern.

But any management technique that gets divorced from the underlying purpose of the enterprise will eventually get you into trouble. I don't care what your enterprise is; when you get technique over principle, you're going to get in trouble. And because of the things I mentioned earlier, we have a crisis there. And I think I can speak for every American, or nearly every American, that we want people who are sick or whose illnesses can be avoided to get whatever the appropriate amount of medical care is.

We don't want to waste any money. We want the tightest management possible. But we cannot afford to see this great country where life expectancy has been going up, where the quality of life has been improving, where we now see laboratory tests on animals that are actually restoring severed spines and getting movements in lower limbs of animals, and where we identified two of the genes that are very important in forming breast cancer, and where we're just about through—in the next 2 years, we'll finish this gene-mapping project so we'll actually be

able to develop software to analyze all of our genetic problems and solve Lord only knows what other health problems—this is the last time we want to get into the business of basically stripping from our physicians and other health care professionals the ability to give basic care in a decent, humane, caring way. We can surely figure out how to manage as well as possible without doing that.

Look, I could go through a lot of other issues. The bottom line is this—I do want to talk a little about two other issues—but the bottom line is this: We Democrats have an agenda. We're not trying to sit on these good times. There's not a single person here asking you to vote for them just because they've done a good job. If you think about it, that's pretty remarkable.

There are people in New York City that care about the fact that the unemployment rate in America that's highest are on Native American reservations out in the high plains. There are Democrats from suburban districts with 3 percent, 2 percent unemployment that want to pass Secretary Cuomo and the Vice President and our urban empowerment zones to get investment back in the inner-cities and get the unemployment rate down in the highest unemployment areas of New York.

Why? Because we have an agenda, because we believe that this is a time that comes along once in a generation. And if we just sit on our laurels and enjoy it, we'll be paying for it for a generation. This is a time when we have the confidence and the means and the knowledge to face the long-term challenges of America to guarantee that this will be the greatest country in the world for the next 50 years. That's what we're about.

And I just want to close with two issues. The first is the fact that the Democrats are committed to making a virtue of our diversity. We know that in an increasingly shrinking world, the fact that we come from everyplace, represent all religions, all races, all ethnic groups, all different kinds of cultural experiences and understandings, that if we can be bound together by a common set of American values, our diversity is the greatest asset we will take into the 21st century.

And the second thing I would say is that we believe we have to be a force for peace and freedom and security. Chevy mentioned the speech I gave at the U.N. conference on drugs

today. There were 40 heads of state there—this would have been unheard of just a few years ago—people saying, "Nobody's big enough to solve this problem alone, and no nation is too small to make a difference. We're going to work together."

I ask you to support the decision I've made to go forward with my China trip. I hope you will support the efforts we're making to move India and Pakistan back from the nuclear brink. They are great nations. They can have a great future. We can work this out. But the answer is not to start another nuclear arms race on the Indian subcontinent. The answer is to find another, more constructive, secure way for both nations to be great nations and successful with their people and in the world.

I ask you to continue to support our efforts to fashion a peace in the Middle East and to assure you that the people there are still working on it, and we are moving. I thank those of you who helped me over 5 long years, with the result we celebrated with the Irish election in the last few days. I thank you for doing that.

But this is the last point I want to make. We cannot go into this new world alone. You know, you may not agree—some people didn't agree with me when I sent the troops into Bosnia. Some people didn't agree with me when I went into Haiti. Some people didn't agree with me when I extended credit to Mexico—they turned out to be a pretty good risk, I might add—paid us back early with a big profit. And I haven't been right on every decision. But I am confident that the big decisions are right.

We need an alliance with Asian countries where we work not only for greater prosperity but for greater security and greater freedom. We need an alliance with our neighbors in the Americas where we work to make sure that this increasing prosperity lifts the fate of all people together. We need an alliance with Russia to build a democratic Russia that is also prosperous. We need to keep working in constructive partnership with the Chinese so that they will define their greatness in the 20th century in a more constructive way than many nations did in the—in the 21st century they will be more constructive than many other nations were in the 20th century. We need to bring Africa into the family of nations.

In New York you think about these things. This is an argument we have to win in Main Street America. We are 4 percent of the world's

population; we have 20 percent of its wealth. We exercise sometimes far more than 20 percent of its influence in matters of foreign affairs. We cannot continue to do it unless we are responsible members of the world community. We have to cooperate as well as lead.

And that's what this is all about. It's about what your children and your grandchildren will live like in the 21st century. It's about what the world they have will be like. Those of you who are at least as old as I am, and those of you—a few of you are a little older—understand what I'm saying. A time like this comes along just every now and then.

Chevy Chase mentioned the 30th anniversary of Robert Kennedy's death. This weekend I had the privilege of going to Congressman Joe Kennedy's home in Boston to gather with his mother and many of his brothers and sisters and Senator Kennedy. And we had a lunch with a lot of the people who worked for Robert Kennedy in his Senate office and his Presidential campaign. And I gave my weekly radio address on Robert Kennedy. For those of us who were just coming of age when he was killed, there were stunning parallels between what he sought

to do and what we are now in the process of trying to do: bringing people together across racial and ethnic lines, trying to lift the poor up on a combination of self-reliance and decent support for successful parenting and childrearing, trying to be engaged in the world, but on terms that are consistent with American values. It's almost as if we've been given the opportunity to redeem the promise of our party and, in a larger sense, of our Nation, that kind of strayed and was divided for quite a long time.

That's what this election is about. I'm telling you, we've got good ideas; we've got a good track record. We're not asking anybody to elect us because the status quo is fine. We believe we can do better in the 21st century, and we want you to get out there and help us win these elections and win that House back so we can do that for America.

Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 8:45 p.m. at the Waldorf Astoria. In his remarks, he referred to Judith Hope, chair, New York State Democratic Party; Mayor James T. Dowden of Bridgewater, NJ; and comedian Chevy Chase.

Remarks Welcoming President Kim Dae-jung of South Korea *June 9, 1998*

I am proud to welcome President Kim Dae-jung and the entire Korean delegation to the United States and to the White House.

We live in remarkable times. In the 1980's, some of the greatest heroes of freedom were the political prisoners of repressive regimes: Lech Walesa in Poland, Vaclav Havel in Czechoslovakia, Nelson Mandela in South Africa, and Kim Dae-jung, who faced a death sentence in South Korea after years of unjust and brutal treatment by the government.

How very different things are now. Lech Walesa was elected Poland's President; Vaclav Havel and Nelson Mandela are the Presidents of their countries; and Kim Dae-jung is here today as President, after the first-ever democratic change of power from the governing party to the opposition in the 50-year history of the Republic of Korea.

The irresistible longing for freedom, human rights, and democracy has carried Kim Dae-jung to the Presidency of his country and now back to America, where he once lived in exile and where there has long been strong bipartisan support for Korean democracy.

Mr. President, you have the admiration of the American people. We will work together to deepen democracy and economic opportunity.

President Kim has spoken of the powerful link between democratic governments and market economies. In the 21st century, nations will not be able to sustain great economic power unless their people are empowered, free to speak their minds and create their own futures, unless there is equal opportunity and the rule of law.

America strongly supports the economic reforms President Kim is pursuing: opening markets, making financial institutions, businesses,