

Remarks at a New Democratic Network Dinner July 13, 1998

Thank you very much. Well, Joe, I agree with Hadassah; this is pretty impressive. I would like to thank all the members who are here, all the candidates who are here, the sponsors of this event, and those of you who have contributed, because this group is going to give the American people a chance to finally and fully ratify the ideas that we have been pursuing the last 6 years.

I want to thank Simon. I did tell Senator Lieberman I thought Simon had given a good talk. One of the things that I always think that all of us should be doing is trying to recruit good young people and lift them up. Simon self-selected; we didn't have to recruit him at all. [*Laughter*] After surviving the War Room in '92, he understands that all you have to do is just sort of stand there and keep going, and it will be all right.

I'm delighted to see so many of you here, so many old friends and some people who are getting involved in this. And I will be a little brief tonight. I rewrote my talk; here it is. Even I can't read it, so it will be less.

Well, I'd like to just kind of recap how this all began. I'll never forget the first time or two I talked to Al From and the first encounter I had with many of you through the DLC, and how strongly we felt that our party, which we had no intention of leaving, was being rendered irrelevant in national elections, partly by being caricatured successfully by the very adroit tactics of our friends in the Republican Party and partly because we seemed unable to break out of the conventional wisdom which had worked for us in the past but which seemed inadequate to the dynamic present. And that had been the case for some years.

If you look around the world today—and I don't want to make any untoward foreign policy comments—but if you look around the world today, you see that there is always quite a high price to pay if you stay with a strategy that once worked for you, or with ideas and policies that once worked for you, when circumstances change and they no longer fit. We find that in business; we find that in our personal lives, in virtually every form of human endeavor.

And so more than a decade ago, those of us that loved and believed in the Democratic Party as the instrument of progressive government, lifting people up, giving them a chance, building the American community, and expecting responsibility from every citizen, started, through the Democratic Leadership Council, to try to come up with the ideas that would carry America forward.

It is true that we built it on the old bedrock values of our party—and, I think, of our country—of opportunity, responsibility, and community. It's also true that we said some things which made everybody angry and often confused our friends in the press. And they sometimes said, "Well, if you don't fit into these old categories, you must not have any principles."

I mean, whoever—it's obviously stupid to believe you could reduce the deficit and balance the budget and still keep investing more in education and science and technology, for example; hard to believe that, on crime, the only thing that would ever work would be to be tough on people who should be properly punished, but to do smart things to prevent crime in the first place; on welfare, to say that if you're able-bodied you ought to go to work, but we don't expect you to give up your most important job, which is raising your child; or on the environment, to say that it's crazy to believe that we can ever have long-term economic growth without preserving the environment, but we think we can do it and still grow the economy.

And when we said these things, for years people said, "Well, those people, they don't have any principles, because, after all, we know what a principle is; a principle is an old liberal idea or a new conservative idea. That's what a principle is. And that way we don't have to think anymore. We were relieved of all the burden of thinking about the complexities of the modern world if we just put you in some box. And if you guys don't fit, it must mean that there is no core there."

But we sort of pressed ahead. And when I started running in '92, a lot of you helped me, even though you honestly didn't believe I had a chance to win. [*Laughter*] Only my mother thought I could win. That's not true; Hillary

did. And the American people gave us a chance. And we set about the business of doing this.

And along the way, we found that, as all people do, it wasn't always easy to take your general principles and turn them into specific bills and specific policies. From time to time, we had disagreements, but it's clear the path we have followed. And it was clear to us very often even when it wasn't clear to people who were commenting on it.

I remember when we had the debate on welfare reform, for example, and I vetoed the first two bills and I signed the third one, so people said, "Well, obviously, the President just didn't want the Democrats to be exposed to another veto in an election year." I never read a single article which analyzed the difference in the bill I signed and the two I vetoed. The two I vetoed said, "We're going to make you go to work if you're able-bodied, and if you have to give up being a good parent, that's fine with us. We're not going to give your kids Medicaid. We're not going to give your kids food stamps. We're not going to provide adequate child care for you. The most important thing is work, and if you can't be a good parent, that's tough." I still believe that's the most important job in America. So when they fixed the bill, I signed it.

So fast-forward to the present. If you look back on the last 6 years, if somebody told you on the day of Inauguration in 1993 that after 6 years we'd have the lowest crime rate in 25 years, the lowest unemployment rate in 28 years and 16 million new jobs, the lowest welfare rolls in 29 years, the first balanced budget in 29 years, the lowest inflation in 32 years, the smallest Federal Government in 35 years, the highest rate of homeownership in history, a quarter of a million people who couldn't buy guns because they had mental health histories or criminal records, cleaner air, cleaner water, safer food, fewer toxic waste dumps, 90 percent of our kids immunized, and a foreign policy that's helped to advance the cause of freedom from Bosnia to the Middle East to Northern Ireland to Haiti, that's expanded trade and stood up for human rights in places like China and other places around the world—you would have said, "Never happen in 5½ years."

The American people did it. We had something to do with it because we gave them the ability to do it, because we said the role of Government should be to give people the

power, the tools to make the most of their own lives and then to provide the conditions within which they can accomplish that, but always to remind people that one of the big differences between ourselves and the other party historically, and still, is that we believe that we are fundamentally interdependent and that our personal independence can only really be manifested when we're working together for the greater good. And those who say that's a flaky idea and inappropriate to the moment need only go back and read our founding documents.

Our Founders pledged their lives and fortunes and sacred honor to the proposition that we should all be able to pursue life, liberty, and happiness within the context of a free government of limited power but unlimited potential and that our eternal mission as a country was to form a more perfect Union, not to form a more perfect collection of swarming individuals but to form a more perfect Union.

And I'm very grateful that I was given the chance to serve. And it's a good thing we got that constitutional amendment, or I'd try to get another chance. *[Laughter]*

But I want to tell you, I am absolutely convinced that we have not finished the job of convincing the American people that the prospects for the future depend upon the continued embrace and development of the ideas which have produced the results of the last 6 years. That's what this election is all about. They say, "Oh well, you know,"—I hear a lot of my Republican friends say, "Well, you know, you go all the way back to the Civil War, and the party of the President always loses seats in the mid-term election, especially in the second term of the President." And I said, "Well, that's because they think they're sort of retiring." I'm not sitting in the sun here; we've got an agenda.

We don't believe America should be sitting on its laurels. We believe, first of all, that we hadn't had a balanced budget and a surplus for 29 years, and we don't want the majority in Congress to spend it before we save Social Security. We want to reform Medicare in a way that is relevant to the 21st century, that protects the health care of seniors. And we don't want Social Security and Medicare to bankrupt the children and grandchildren of the baby boomers. And we believe we can do both things. And we think, as Democrats, we're better suited to that path.

We want to continue to reform education, even as they try to eviscerate our agenda, as I speak, in the House of Representatives. We want to continue to advance the environmental agenda with market technology and research to prove that we can improve the environment while we grow the economy. We want to continue to prove that we can be one America, across all the lines that divide us, because what we have in common is more important.

We have a lot of big things to do. We want to prove that we can go into inner-city neighborhoods and isolated rural areas and Native American reservations and bring the principles of market economy and the right kind of support and prove that even in the poorest parts of America we can create a system of opportunity that will work for people and that they ought to have a chance to be a part of.

We have a lot to do. This country still has responsibilities in the world that we are not fully meeting. If we're going to create the kind of world trading system we want, if we're going to continue to be a force for human rights and democracy, if we're going to organize ourselves against the security threats of the 21st century—including biological and chemical warfare, small-scale nuclear warfare, terrorism, narcotrafficking—we have other things to do.

And if we keep these ideas up front, I think that the people we have seen here tonight, the Members of Congress and the candidates, have an excellent chance of winning. And I think we have an excellent chance to genuinely build a majority party not based on the success of one person from, as one of my adversaries once said, a small Southern State.

I am very grateful for the chance I had to serve and run. I'm grateful for the chance that I've had to win elections. I've loved every day, every month, every year of my life in politics. But the success America enjoys today is fundamentally due, first, to the character and effort and ingenuity of the American people and, secondly, to the fact that we have done the right thing. Ideas matter; there are consequences that flow from actions taken or forgone. And you know and I know—and I can tell you agree with me because you're quiet and you're listening—that two Presidential elections in good times—the second one in good times—do not necessarily ratify what we're doing.

We have worked like crazy to hammer these ideas into policies. And we've had honest de-

bates and arguments, and sometimes we still disagree, but we know we're moving the country in a certain direction and we know it works. And we've got to go out there in this election season and tell the American people that, "Hey, you know, I like the President, too, but this is not a personality contest; this is the struggle for the ideas that should properly dominate the public policy of this country, that should guide this country where we're going, and should lift us up and give us a chance to do even better in the 21st century."

What you're doing is very, very important. And if you're undertaking one of these congressional races out there in an open seat—maybe it's held by a Republican; maybe it was held by a Republican—and it gets tough and you get discouraged, just remember, you know in the very marrow of your being that two-thirds of the American people, if they could get rid of all the cardboard, cut-out, superficial, negative images that our friends in the Republican Party have laid on us for 20 years relentlessly, cleverly, and often effectively, and strip all that away and just look at what they stand for and what we stand for, and have an honest choice of the ideas before them, they would say, "I think I like that New Democrat way; I think that's right."

So don't get discouraged when you're still shedding the shackles of history. Don't get discouraged when you're still scrubbing the barnacles off the tarnished image that we had for too long. Don't get discouraged when you're still moving against the preconceptions that people have embedded over 20 years. The hardest thing in the world to change is a mind. But ideas move people; they drive countries; they change destinies—in people's individual lives and family lives and work lives and in the course of a country's life. And this country has had a good 6 years because of the ideas that all of you worked hard on for years and years and years, before I had the extreme good fortune to serve as President in 1993.

So don't give up on that, and don't get discouraged. And don't think that just because every election since the Civil War in an off year has turned out a certain way, that this one will, because there's something different about now. The country is doing well. We've got the ideas, and we've got youth. And if you keep your spirits up and you understand the historic mission you're on and you think about

what your country ought to look like when your children are your age, I think you'll be very pleased by how it turns out.

Thank you very much, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at approximately 8:05 p.m. in the Crystal Ballroom at the Sheraton

Carlton Hotel. In his remarks, he referred to Senator Joseph I. Lieberman, cofounder, and Simon Rosenberg, executive director, New Democratic Network; Senator Lieberman's wife, Hadassah; and Al From, president, Democratic Leadership Council.

Remarks on the Year 2000 Conversion Computer Problem *July 14, 1998*

Thank you very much, Mr. Vice President, Dr. Alberts, to all of our platform guests, Senator Bennett, Senator Dodd, Congressmen Horn, Kucinich, LaFalce, and Turner, and members of the administration who are here and all the rest of you who are committed to dealing with this challenge.

This is one of those days that I never thought would ever arrive, where Al Gore has to listen to me give a speech about computers. [*Laughter*] Being President has its moments. [*Laughter*]

International Monetary Fund Financing for Russia

I have to ask your indulgence because this is my only opportunity to appear before the press today, and I need to make a brief comment about something that is also of importance to all of you, and that is the agreement that was reached yesterday between Russia and the International Monetary Fund to stabilize the Russian economy.

I think all of us understand that a stable and democratic and prosperous Russia is critical to our long-term national interests. Ever since the fall of communism there, there has been a strong bipartisan consensus in our National Government and, I believe, in our country to working toward that end.

The commitments that Russia made in connection with yesterday's agreement will substantially advance economic reform and stability there. Now it is critical that those commitments be implemented to strengthen confidence in their economy.

It is clear, I think, to all of us now that our prosperity here at home in America is deeply affected by the economic conditions elsewhere in the world. About a third of our eco-

nomic expansion that the Vice President referred to, which has given us 16 million new jobs and the lowest unemployment rate in 28 years with the lowest inflation rate in 32 years, has come from our exports and our economic relations with the rest of the world. We therefore have a clear interest in playing a leading role to advance freedom and prosperity and stability.

One of the most cost-effective ways of doing that is through the International Monetary Fund, the world's financial firefighter. For the first time in 20 years now, the IMF has had to draw on special emergency reserves to underwrite this Russian financial package, because its resources were stretched dangerously thin due to the financial difficulties throughout Asia, principally.

To protect our economic strength, therefore, it is imperative that Congress act now to promote global economic stability by paying in America's share to the IMF. Earlier this year, the Senate, in an overwhelming bipartisan vote, endorsed legislation to strengthen the IMF and to pay our fair share into it. Since then, the legislation has languished in the House. If we fail to act responsibly at a time when there is so much financial uncertainty in the world, we will be putting our farmers, our workers, and our businesses at risk. This is a time to put progress ahead of partisanship, and I ask Congress to proceed to do so. [*Applause*] Thank you.

Year 2000 Conversion

Let me also say at the outset, I want to say a special word of thanks, as the Vice President did, to John Koskinen and his whole team for the work they are doing and to all the people that are working with them. We have, just on