

## Remarks at a Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee Dinner August 4, 1998

Thank you very much. Maxine, you have neither been a fair-weather nor a faint-hearted friend. [Laughter] And you have always let me know exactly what you think, whether I wanted to hear it or not—[laughter]—in good times and bad. And I thank you.

I thank all of you for coming. Sidney, thank you for being here and for the service you've rendered our country as an Ambassador. I thank the Members of the Democratic congressional caucus who are here: Congressman Ford; Congressman Frost, the head of the DCCC; Congressman Hoyer; Congresswoman Lee; Congressman Rush; and Congressman Lewis, who, like Maxine, started out with me in 1991; and Congressman Stokes, we're going to miss you, and we thank you for your service.

I would like to thank two former members of your group who are here, also my longtime friends, Harold Ford, Sr., and Andrew Young. Thank you both for being here tonight. I also note your high degree of judgment, about how the Federal Government works, in bringing Secretary Slater. You probably know he got the first budget out this year. He has all the money. [Laughter] He may have the only money in the Federal Government. He's doing a wonderful job, and I thank you for bringing him tonight.

Let me say very briefly, we've already had a chance to visit individually and in groups. More than anything else, I would like to thank you. I'd like to thank you for supporting our congressional candidates and the genuine prospect we have to reverse 150-plus years of history in making historic gains in this election. And I would like to thank you for the example you have set for Americans—for all Americans—the work you have done, the barriers you have broken, the hurdles you have overcome, the Americans you have helped, and the reaffirmation you give in your daily lives that the American dream can be made real in the lives of all kinds of people.

I also thank you for the specific ideas you gave me tonight to move forward. I would just like to make a couple of observations. I'm very grateful to have had the chance to serve as President at a time of remarkable change and to try to make sure that this period of change

works for all Americans and that, when we get to the 21st century, the American dream is alive and well for everybody who is responsible enough to work for it, that our country is strong and visionary enough to continue to lead the world toward prosperity and peace and freedom, and that we can do that because we have enough sense to come together, across all the lines that divide us, into one America. That is what I have worked for.

Now, we all know that we are facing a new time of economic challenge because of the difficulties in Asia, which I have spent an enormous amount of time on, as you might imagine actually, since last November. For quite a long while now, we've been working on that, and every day we work on it, because Asia is a big part of our economic growth. Thirty percent of our growth in the last 6 years has come from exports and expanding our position in foreign countries.

But I want to ask you to think about where we go now. The temptation for a great, free country when you have the lowest unemployment rate in 28 years and the lowest crime rate in 25 years and the lowest percentage of people on welfare in 29 years and the first balanced budget and surplus in 29 years and the highest homeownership in history, is to say that's pretty good; let's take a break; I've been working myself to death; let's just take a break. [Laughter]

But the truth is, as all of you who deal in international economics know especially, that things are changing so fast, we can't afford to take a break, number one; and number two, we now have the confidence and the resources to deal with the long-term challenges of the country. And I would like to just offer a couple of observations.

We are working with our friends in Asia to try to restore economic growth, and we will do everything we can to help those who are prepared to take the necessary steps to help themselves. But we have to look also at what other opportunities are there to continue to grow the American economy. And I would just like to offer a couple of observations.

Number one, there are still places in this country that have not fully absorbed this economic recovery. The unemployment rate in New York City is 9 percent; the unemployment rate in many neighborhoods is considerably higher. And yet in all those neighborhoods, over 80 percent of the people are working. There's opportunity for investment that will create jobs for the others and bring a very high rate of return, with no risk of inflation to the aggregate economy because those are underutilized human resources. And it's true in every city in this country; it's true in a lot of smaller towns; it's true in a lot of Native American communities. We're going to have a Native American economic conference in the next few days, first one ever held. And I think it is very important that we focus on the fact that people who are out of work or communities where the unemployment rate is too high and the investment rate is too low are enormous opportunities for us at a time when there is some turmoil around the world.

The second thing I'd like to do is make a plug again for Africa. We have an Africa trade bill before the Congress. I took a great trip to Africa; a number of you went on it. American investors earned a 30 percent return on their investment in Africa last year—30 percent. Now, you may say, "Well, yes, Mr. President, but those were the easiest investments, and they picked the low-hanging fruit." But you could go a ways down from 30 percent and still make pretty good money.

And so I say again, I think that is an important thing. Tomorrow Deputy President Mbeki of South Africa is coming back to the United States for another one of his meetings with the Vice President and the Gore-Mbeki Commission, and I intend to see him. Secretary Daley is going to Africa in September. Secretary Slater and Secretary Rubin were there last month. So we have followed up on the trip that Hillary and I took to Africa with, as I said, a number of you in this room, and we want to continue to work on that. It is of enormous importance.

I would also note that Latin America is doing very well. Our neighbors in Latin America and in the Caribbean are doing relatively well and continuing to prosper in this difficult time. And there are opportunities in the Caribbean, where there was a relative disinvestment for several years, that I think need to be looked at by Americans. And we have a lot of cultural ties

to a lot of the island nations of the Caribbean as well as to Latin America that I think would bear fruit.

And so I think it very important that in America, while we do everything we can to focus on the Asian financial challenges, that we also know that there are opportunities here at home and opportunities in Africa and opportunities in Latin America and elsewhere to continue to grow the American economy.

Now, in connection with the issues here at home, the thing that I think is important to remember in this election is that, in order for the Democrats to buck the tide of a century and a half of history, we have to continue to do what we've been doing for the last 8 months. We have to continue to press our agenda and to be for something that will excite America and bring hope.

We have before the Congress now an opportunity agenda that would help a lot of you to make more investments in America's communities: a second round of empowerment zones, another round of community development financial institutions. One of you told me today you're involved with a community development bank in Los Angeles that this administration helped to set up. These things are going to make a huge difference around the country if we can reach a critical mass of capital in enough communities.

Secretary Cuomo at HUD has a number of initiatives, that are part of this, that will actually create significant numbers of jobs with investment—private sector jobs in communities where they're needed.

So I ask for your support in publicizing of the community empowerment agenda that we have been pushing now ever since my State of the Union Address in Congress and that the Democratic caucus, as far as I know, unanimously supports.

We need to stand up for the educational empowerment zones that we have been pushing. In Chicago now, the summer school in Chicago, since it's summer, I can say is the sixth largest school district in America. That's how many children are in summer school. Guess what? The juvenile crime rate is way down in Chicago, and the learning is way up.

Over 40,000 children during a regular school year now get 3 square meals a day at their

school in that city. We have an educational community empowerment initiative before the Congress that would enable us to support other communities in doing that, giving children a chance to stay out of trouble and in school, after school, giving children a chance to go to summer programs like this, giving us a chance to give educational opportunities to all different kinds of people. And I ask for your support for that, but I ask you to talk to your friends and neighbors about it. There are big issues in this election season that deserve to be debated.

What we really need to do is to make sure that every child, of whatever race and of whatever station, in whatever neighborhood they're born in, has the chance to live the success stories that you have lived. What we really need to do is to make sure that we are still working hard to create one America. What we really need to do is to make sure that we're not sitting on our laurels and being distracted but instead bearing down and looking forward and lifting up and pulling together this country.

All over the world people still look to the United States for leadership, for peace, for freedom, for security. But in order for us to do good in the 21st century around the world, we first must be good here at home on those things that we know matter most.

You've helped us a lot, and I can tell you that Maxine is grateful; I am grateful. You're going to make Congressman Frost look better tomorrow with what he's done for the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee. But the most important thing is, by being here tonight, you have helped us to work with your constituents to make 21st century America the greatest period in our Nation's history, and I thank you for it.

Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 8:24 p.m., in Ballroom Two at the Washington Court Hotel. In his remarks, he referred to Representative Maxine Waters; Sidney Williams, former Ambassador to the Bahamas; and Deputy President Thabo Mbeki of South Africa.

## Statement on the Fifth Anniversary of the Family and Medical Leave Act *August 5, 1998*

Five years ago today, the Family and Medical Leave Act went into effect, giving tens of millions of Americans the peace of mind that they would never have to choose between the jobs they need and the families they love. I am very proud that the Family and Medical Leave Act was the very first piece of legislation I signed into law.

Millions of Americans have benefited from this historic legislation by taking time off—without fear of losing their jobs—to care for a newborn or adopted child, to attend to their own serious health needs, or to care for a seriously ill parent, child, or spouse. In addition, a report issued today by the Department of Labor shows the relative ease with which the law has been

implemented; the overwhelming majority of employers have found the FMLA easy to administer, and 9 out of 10 complaints have been successfully resolved, often with a simple phone call.

I have always believed that we can help our workers fulfill their family responsibilities and strengthen the economy and America's businesses. For 5 years, the Family and Medical Leave Act has helped us to fulfill both of those critical goals.

NOTE: The Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993, Public Law 103-3, was approved February 5, 1993.