

Remarks at a Victory in Kentucky Luncheon in Louisville August 10, 1998

Thank you. Thank you very much, ladies and gentlemen. You know, unfortunately, I don't get to run for office anymore. [Laughter] And therefore, I'm supposed to appear above the fray and unpolitical. But I have some experience in this area, and I would say, if I asked you—if I gave everybody here a piece of paper and a pencil and I said I want you to write down why Scotty Baesler believes he should be the Senator, I believe you could all write something down now, couldn't you? [Laughter] That is the definition of a good political speech. Let's give him a hand. [Applause] That was a great, great thing to do. Thank you.

You know, I love this State, and the mayor almost made fun of me—and the Governor—for coming here so much to Kentucky. I don't want to apologize, but I have been coming here a long time now and a lot of times since I've been President. And this State has been very good to the Vice President and to me, and I want to say a special word of thanks for that, for the support and the electoral votes we received from the people of Kentucky in both our runs. On behalf of the First Lady and Al and Tipper, all of us, we're very grateful to Kentucky for that.

I want to thank the Governor for being my friend and for doing such a wonderful job. I want to say to Steve Henry and Charlie Owen, I think you both have bright futures, and you've shown a lot of character by the way you've rallied behind Scotty Baesler and the idea of the Democratic Party and the principles for which you made your race. And I appreciate it very, very much.

I want to thank all the other officials who are here, including my longtime friend and fellow Arkansan, your county judge/executive, David Armstrong; your State party chair, Ron McCloud. And we've got a congressional candidate here, Chris Gorman. Chris, stand up there; good for you for running.

Where's Fred Cowen? Fred, stand up; stand up there. When I was a young man starting out in politics 20-plus years ago, Fred Cowen was then an Arkansan. And on October 3d, 1991, when I ran—announced my candidacy for President, there were only two elected officials

from outside Arkansas who were on the steps of the old statehouse with me, and one of them was Fred Cowen. So I want you to help him get elected here. It would mean a lot to me personally to do that.

Senator Ford, I'm going to miss you—and you do look good. [Laughter] We've all had that experience. I knew I was sort of on the other side of the divide when an 80-year-old woman came up to me that I'd known many years and looked up at me and said, "Bill, you look so good for a man your age." [Laughter]

I'd also like to thank one other person who is here. I was a Governor, you know, forever and a day. I was a Governor for 12 years. And then I got beat once, so I was out for 2 years. So over a 14-year span, I had the privilege of working with five Kentucky Governors. You know, you had that one-term deal then, so all I had to do was hold on to my job, and I'd always know somebody new from Kentucky if I'd just wait around. [Laughter] But one of them who was a particular friend of mine is John Y. Brown, and he's here today, and I thank him very much for coming. Thank you, Governor. Thank you.

Now, look, Scotty has given the speech, but let me tell you, the stakes are very high. The issue he mentioned, many others I could mention, they depend upon having people in the Congress who will do the right thing. Now, just ask yourself—just take the three things he mentioned that are in the past, and one in the future, and think about the issues we'll be facing. Think about the minimum wage, the family and medical leave law, the crime bill, and the Patients' Bill of Rights. What do all those things have in common? The real beneficiaries of that legislation are the ordinary folks in this country, the people who work here at this place, not those of us who are sitting here at these tables.

The real beneficiaries are the people who are not organized, who could never afford to come to a luncheon like this, but who are the heart and soul of this country, who get up every day and do the best they can at their job. They do the best they can to raise their children and take care of their parents. They pay their

taxes. They fight our wars. They do all the work in this country. And all they want is a fair deal.

And when things change as much as they've been changing in how we work and live and relate to each other and the rest of the world, the job of the Government is to take our oldest values and hook them to new ideas so that we can move into the future and make it a better time than the past.

You go back through the whole history of this country, and you see that the country has always been about certain basic things. It's been about freedom for responsible citizens and widening the circle of freedom. We redefine it quite a lot. When we started out, you had to be a white male property owner to vote. We didn't even let all the white men vote when we started. We said, "All people are created equal," and then we said, "Oh, by the way, here's our definition." So we've had to do a lot of work on freedom.

It's about opportunity. I'm grateful for the fact that there are 16 million new jobs and that we have the lowest unemployment rate in 28 years. But as Congressman Baesler said, there are still a lot of people who are working hard and don't have enough to get by. There are still some places in this country—inner-city neighborhoods, places like Appalachia, and places in South Texas, Native American reservations—where they don't know there's been an economic recovery. It's about widening the circle of opportunity.

And it's about deepening the bonds of our community, the idea that we want to live in a country where not only we are treated fairly, but everyone else is, too; where not only we have a chance to raise our children and build our families and our communities, but everyone else does, too.

So you think about the crime bill. The crime bill is about freedom and community, because if you're scared to death when your child goes to school, if you don't feel secure on your own street, you're not really free.

You think about the minimum wage. It's about opportunity and community. And by the way, it's always turned out to be good economics, because if working people are making enough money, then they'll be spending it with other people who are in business.

If you take the Patients' Bill of Rights—and it's the most important thing now, because it's something we still have to do—160 million

Americans are in managed care. Now, I don't think that's a bad thing, because before managed care, inflation in health care costs had gone up at 3 times the rate of inflation. That was unsustainable. It was going to bankrupt businesses; it was going to bankrupt families; it was going to take too much of our money away.

But any device for saving money should be hooked to the values of the mission. The mission of the health care system is to take care of people. And the problem with managed care is that there are no limits that express the values of the country.

Now, this Patients' Bill of Rights, here's what it does—let me just tell you what it does, because it says a lot. I could go through all these other issues, but I'm going to take my cue from the Congressman, because here's an issue—every single issue—keep in mind, every single issue, he's on one side, his opponent is on the other.

This Patients' Bill of Rights says you ought to have a right to a specialist if you've got a medical condition which requires a specialist. We had a lot of breast cancer survivors at our former event. Why? Well, one reason is, they know that it makes a big difference, if you're a woman with breast cancer and you have to have a mastectomy, whether you have a specialist or a general surgeon. Just one example. We say yes; they say no.

Two, you ought to have a right to emergency room care in emergency conditions where the nearest emergency room is. And you just think about it. If one of your kids gets in a car wreck, and they get hauled into a hospital, and your children are on life supports, do you want the doctors to have to wait to call an insurance company to get approval before they start taking care of them? I don't think so. Just ask yourself what you want. Most of us wouldn't have to worry about it. Millions of Americans do. Should we change that? We say yes; they say no.

Here's another thing that happens. Suppose you've got an HMO, and your employer, as he or she ought to have the right to do, has to change insurers at a certain time. Should they be able to make you change your doctor if you're in the middle of treatment? If you're a woman who is 7 months pregnant or 6 months pregnant and you've been going to the same doctor all the time, should they be able to force you to change obstetricians? What if you're in the process—what if you've got some sort of

lymphoma or cancer, you're taking chemotherapy, and you're in the middle of treatment? Should they be able to make you change your oncologist, or should there be protections against that? We say, yes, there should be protections, and you ought to be able to complete your treatment before you can be required to change doctors. They say no.

Should you have real protections of privacy for your medical records that are even stricter than the ones we've got now, or should we make your records available to more people? They say, make them available to more people. We say, not without your permission. We think, in this computerized age where everything about us is on a computer, we need more privacy protections, not fewer.

See, all this is about the world we're moving into. And interestingly enough, there are 43 managed care firms supporting our bill. Why? Because they're out there doing the right thing already, and they're being subject to unfair competition because they're determined to take care of people. And they don't think it's right to have somebody else get a financial advantage with them just because they've got enough power to kill a bill in Congress.

So this is about the future. Man, I'm telling you, most of the medical stories you're going to be hearing in the next 10 years are going to be good medical stories, unbelievable advances in medical research. Last year—how many people do you know, how many friends or family members have you had in your life who were confined to wheelchairs because of spinal cord injuries? Last year, for the first time ever, a laboratory animal got movement back in its lower limbs, after its spine had been shattered, because of a nerve transplant.

How many people do you know whose child had some sort of predisposition to a medical condition that, if the parents had known when the baby went home from the hospital, they wouldn't have suffered as much as they did? Within 5 or 10 years every mother will get a genetic code map of their children's bodies, how it works, what the pluses and minuses are. Most of the medical stories are going to be good stories. And there's going to have to be business management brought to the medicine like everything else. But you have to put people first.

You know, Scotty is independent. We don't agree on everything. When he doesn't agree

with me, he votes the other way. And most of the time, I imagine, his constituents agreed more with him than me. That's what Representatives are for. But I'll tell you something, I never had any doubt that he was the same person in Washington that he was in Kentucky and that he wasn't up there doing rhetoric to try to inflame people for no good reason. This election is about whether we're going to put the progress of the country over the partisanship of Washington, whether we're going to put the people's interest over the interest of politics, whether we're going to try to make America more unified as we go into the future or more divided.

And you really can see this Patients' Bill of Rights as a metaphor for every other issue. I could give you a speech about education, about how to preserve the environment and grow the economy, about how we're going to deal with the problems so horribly manifested in what we went through with our Embassies in Africa and all the losses of life. But every issue for the future—you just remember—the right answer is new ideas, old values. Take care of most people, and those of us that are doing pretty well are going to do fine anyway. We'll figure out how to do fine if we've got a system that takes care of most ordinary Americans.

That's what this guy will do. He'll be a great Senator for the 21st century. I hope you will help him. I hope you will help Chris Gorman. We need every person we can in the Congress who believes in what Scotty stood up here and talked about today. And I thank you for being here to help him.

God bless you. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:20 p.m. at the Seelbach Hotel. In his remarks, he referred to Representative Scotty Baesler, candidate for the U.S. Senate, and his primary election opponents, Lt. Gov. Stephen L. Henry and Charlie Owen; Mayor Jerry E. Abramson of Louisville; Gov. Paul E. Patton of Kentucky; Chris Gorman, candidate for Kentucky's Third Congressional District; Fred Cowen, candidate for Jefferson County judge/executive; and John Y. Brown, former Kentucky Governor.