

Remarks at a Dessert for Senatorial Candidate Charles E. Schumer in New York City

October 12, 1998

First of all, I want to thank Harvey for his wonderful words and for being a real friend to me and to Hillary and to our causes. And I want to thank Steve and Maureen for having us here tonight in their modest little home. [Laughter] I love this place. [Laughter] And you might be relieved to know that while Chuck Schumer was in here giving his speech to you, I was next door signing the budget bill so the Government won't shut down tomorrow morning. So they have—I was giving the Congress 4 more days to do right.

Let me say, first of all, I just talked to Hillary this morning. She's in Prague tonight, but she would like to be here. And when I tell her about it, she will be sorry that she wasn't. But she wanted me to say a special thank-you to all of you. New York has been especially wonderful to our family, to our administration, and especially supportive in these last several months, and I might say, no one more than Congressman Schumer. I also see Congressman Nadler over there, who was reminding people about the Constitution last week in a truly stunning way. Thank you, Congressman, for your great work.

And let me say, I went to a big fundraiser for Chuck Schumer earlier tonight at a hotel. There were hundreds of people there. And he wasn't there because he had been down voting, notwithstanding Mr. D'Amato's ads saying that he didn't show up. He was down there voting. So I told Chuck when he started running that I wasn't up this year, and if I could ever fill in for him, I'd be happy to. And so that's what I did earlier tonight. [Laughter]

And I'd like to just tell you a couple of the things that I said, because I—Harvey talked about standing by me. If you want to stand by me, the best thing you could do is stand up for him, for Congressman Schumer, and for the people who are basically supporting the vision we've all shared for moving this country forward.

I was amused to see this television ad saying that in this last year the Congressman had only voted—whatever—70-something percent of the time. You know, we don't, we the Democrats,

we don't set the agenda for Congress, and we don't even determine how many days a week they work. But I think if you'll check, they worked fewer days this year than in any year in the last umpty-dump zillion; nobody can remember a time. And if I were a member of the Republican majority, I would not be criticizing Chuck Schumer for what he did in this Congress, because what they've done is to kill campaign finance reform, to kill the tobacco reform legislation, to kill the minimum wage increase, to kill the Patients' Bill of Rights, to try to stop us from saving the surplus for Social Security reform. So I don't believe I would be criticizing someone else.

I also, if I were this particular Republican from New York, I wouldn't be talking about Chuck Schumer's voting record, because we are enjoying the first surplus in 29 years in no small measure because in 1993, without a single Republican vote and without a vote to spare, Congressman Schumer, Congressman Nadler, and the Democratic caucus voted for an economic program that reduced the deficit by 92 percent, before we had the bipartisan balanced budget agreement of last year.

And then in 1994, if you want to really see the issues that divide these two candidates when they're a good ways away from an election, we had two issues that I can't help mentioning. One was the Brady bill, which Chuck Schumer wrote, which has now kept a quarter of a million felons and fugitives from getting handguns and saved Lord knows how many lives. Congressman Schumer was the sponsor of the bill; his opponent voted against it.

Then there was the crime bill. I remember well the crime bill of 1994, when the Democrats were in the majority in the Senate and the Republicans were in the minority, but they were trying to filibuster to keep us from actually even getting a vote on the crime bill—even bringing it to a vote. And therefore, Congressman Schumer was for putting 100,000 police on the street, for community policing; everybody that lives in New York City knows the crime rate has gone down because of community policing, people

walking the streets. We have made that contribution all over the country, and we've got crime at a 25-year low. And Congressman Schumer was on one side, and his opponent was on another. The same thing with the assault weapons ban, same thing with the Violence Against Women Act; all those things were in that bill.

So if you're just going to look at this from a traditional point of view, the attacks and the parries and then the counterattacks, I think Schumer wins hands down.

There is another way to look at this. I probably shouldn't say this because Chuck's got an ad on this, but a lot of people, a lot of the Democrats, they make fun of Senator D'Amato for being called "Senator Pothole." And I'm kind of sympathetic with that. You can only make fun of that if you don't have a pothole in front of your house. If you have a pothole in front of your house, you would like it if someone filled it. And if you get a flat every time you get in your car, it's hard to think about the higher things. So there's something to be said for that.

But what I always say about Chuck Schumer is, having dealt with him now for years and years, he is the most intensely meticulous, detailed, constructively aggressive politician I ever dealt with. Therefore, no one will hold a candle to him when it comes to filling a pothole that needs to be filled. [*Laughter*]

But being a Senator is about more. So let me just take 2 minutes to ask you to think about what I think is really important. I mean, if you want to have people decide whether to vote on these ads, or whatever, I can give you all those answers. But what really matters is this: It's how people think we ought to be using our time today, and what that will mean tomorrow and next year and 5 and 10 years from now. That's what really matters.

I mean, if I told all of you that helped me in 1992, if I had told you—I said, okay, we'll meet in 6 years at Steve and Maureen's apartment, and when we meet we'll have nearly 17 million new jobs and the lowest unemployment rate in 28 years, and the first balanced budget in 29 years, and the smallest percentage of people on welfare in 29 years, and the lowest African-American poverty rate in history, and the highest homeownership in history, and the biggest real wage gains in 20 years, and finally, after 25 years, a reversal of wage inequality—

and, oh, by the way, we'll be making progress in making peace from Northern Ireland to the Middle East to Bosnia—tonight, thank God, to Kosovo—and you'd have said, "Well, it sounds good, but I don't believe you. It won't happen."

But it has happened. And I'm very grateful for having had the chance to serve. But what really matters in this Senate race, what really matters in all these Congress races, what really matters is, what in the world are we up to now? What are we about? What are we going to do with all this that we have? Are we going to just sort of sit back, relax, and enjoy it? Are we going to be preoccupied and distracted? Or are we going to recognize that it is a precious gift for a nation, a free nation, to have a moment like this? And it gives us the freedom to look beyond our nose and the daily concerns of life at the larger problems around us. That's what I hope and pray to goodness we'll do.

Now, everybody that lives in New York knows that in spite of the good times we're enjoying, this is a very turbulent time in the world. All of you know that because this is the home of the stock market, because you know what goes on in Asia and Russia and these other places. But there are lots of examples of that. And just because we're doing well doesn't mean that things are static and they're going to be that way a long time.

The real reason that I would like to see Chuck Schumer go to the Senate is that I think he has the unique capability of being both a practical, day-to-day person who will serve the immediate interests of the people of New York and of being a visionary who can make a contribution to the Nation's future.

And the thing that I have tried so hard to do since I became President is to get the people of this country to look down the road, beyond today, and to get the people to come together across the lines that divide them. Looking down the road, we've got to do something with the international financial systems. We've got to do something with Social Security and Medicare before all the baby boomers retire and bankrupt our kids. We've got to do something; we've got to keep doing things until we prove that we can have the best education system in the world for all of our children, who are increasingly minority, increasingly lower income, increasingly the children of single parents. We've got to prove we can grow the economy and improve the environment. And we have to prove that

we can come together across the lines that divide us, and in so doing, we can lead the world to a better place.

It's amazing, isn't it, how much of your time I've had to spend as President dealing with people's primitive hatreds? You think about it. Rwanda, my people in Ireland—although we're doing real well right now; if the wheel doesn't run off, we're actually going to stay on the good path. In the Middle East, I talked to Prime Minister Netanyahu and Chairman Arafat today; they're coming on Thursday. We're going to work and try real hard to make that next big leap toward peace. But people have harbored ancient hatreds there.

Bosnia, Kosovo—today in Kosovo, NATO voted to give notice that we're prepared to conduct airstrikes to stop the slaughter of the innocents in Kosovo. And Mr. Milosevic said that he would fully comply with the U.N. resolutions and let us bring in an international set of observers to monitor it. So the NATO people said, "Okay, we'll take 4 days and watch and see." This is good news.

But this is amazing. This is the 21st century. We're talking about putting computers in every kid's classroom, and we're dealing with centuries-old ethnic, religious, and racial hatreds. And today, what was America's greatest sadness, that in Wyoming a young man who was brutally beaten died. And he was beaten up because he was gay.

So that's the last thing I'd like to say to you. I have tried to make our party and, hopefully, our country stand more for the proposition that we should not define ourselves in terms of what we aren't and who we can look down on, but we should instead define ourselves in terms of what we have in common and what we can together build. And I think it's fair to say that I've had more success out in the country and maybe out in the world than I have in Washington, DC, where old habits die hard.

But I can tell you, if you want your country to do good in the rest of the world, we must be good at home. And the sort of typical daily politics of give and take and cut a little here off of your opponent's hide and hit a little there, it's not worthy of a great country doing what we're doing now. We're doing very well in a world with a world of trouble. And a lot of the people in trouble helped us get rich the last 6 years. And we have higher obligations. We have responsibilities that no one else can

fulfill. And unless we fulfill them, the rest of the world won't do well, and eventually it will come back to haunt us and our children.

I can tell you now after 6 years as President, every single Senate seat—every one—is a matter of great import to the United States and to its future. New York—it's very hard to have a competitive Senate seat because once people get in, particularly if they're in the other party, they normally outspend us three or four to one. We now have a genuine debate going on here between two people who are, thanks to you, both going to be adequately funded, who will be able to discuss what the future ought to be like, and who have voting records which are indicative of how they will be in the future.

And I really believe that Chuck Schumer is an extraordinary human being. I believe he has the capacity to have a lot of the things that make Senator D'Amato popular with many New Yorkers: he'll be aggressive; he'll be persistent; and he'll fill the potholes. But he will vote a progressive tradition all 6 years of his term, not just as we get nearer to election. But far more important, he'll be thinking about these big issues.

So when you go home tonight, I want you to think about this. The outcome of these mid-term elections will rest on whether people of a progressive bent, many of whom could never afford to come to an event like this, will take the trouble on election day to go and vote. If we were having a Presidential election, Mr. Schumer would be winning this race in a walk. You wouldn't have to worry about it. Why? Because there would be this huge turnout.

But normally, in the off years in the United States, a lot of people just don't go. And a lot of them are our people, the people that work and wear the uniforms at those three hotels I visited in New York before I got here. They're a lot of the people we're working for, and their children and the promise of their children. If they decide that they ought to show up, if they go through the hassle of figuring out how to vote while they're dealing with a job and the child care and everything else, then we have a chance to do something that has not been accomplished in 150 years in American politics.

But that's what your being here tonight will make possible. So, I want you to think about it. I think it's a very exciting time. It's not free

from danger; this is not an easy time. This international financial situation is very, very important, and we have got to convince our allies to join with us, in my judgment, in taking strong action here, just like they did in taking strong action on Kosovo today.

But we can do these things. And again I want to say, New York has been a special part of this country from its inception. It is still a special part of our country. It carries all—when I got off the helicopter tonight down in lower Manhattan and I was fixing to get in my car, and it was kind of a warm fall night, and I looked out and I saw the Statue of Liberty down there, it just literally—still, after all these years—took my breath away.

This is a place that ought to be represented by a Senator who can make a major contribution to what America should become in the 21st century. That, more than anything else, is my case for Congressman Schumer.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:05 p.m. at a private residence. In his remarks, he referred to desert cohorts Harvey Weinstein, Steve Rattner, and Maureen White; and murder victim Matthew Shepard. H.J. Res. 134, making further continuing appropriations for the fiscal year 1999, approved October 12, was assigned Public Law No. 105–254.

Remarks on the Situation in Kosovo and an Exchange With Reporters *October 13, 1998*

The President. Before I leave to visit a school in Maryland and talk more about our ongoing budget struggle to secure funding for education, I would like to say a few words about Kosovo.

Over the past few days, NATO has resolved to move President Milosevic from the battlefield to the bargaining table. The commitments he has made could lead—and I emphasize the word “could”—to the peaceful resolution of a crisis that threatens stability in the Balkans and the lives of tens of thousands of refugees, many of them homeless. But for that to happen, we must now see progress as President Milosevic turns his commitments into concrete realities.

First, the cessation of hostilities must continue. Second, the troops President Milosevic recently sent to Kosovo must begin to move out, and those already there must begin to come to garrison. Third, the international monitors must be allowed to enter and be given full freedom of movement. Fourth, humanitarian relief agencies must be able to bring help to the hundreds of thousands of displaced persons. And fifth, serious autonomy negotiations with the Kosovars must begin to go forward.

As I said last night, we will not rely on what President Milosevic says, but on what he does for the whole world to see. To that end, a key component of the commitments he has made is an intrusive, on-the-ground and in-the-air

verification system. It will include about 2,000 international inspectors in Kosovo who will serve as watchdog to ensure that the cease-fire holds and the Serb forces withdraw, while building confidence among Kosovars to return to their homes. And it will involve unrestricted NATO aerial surveillance to monitor compliance and quickly detect violations.

The international community prefers compliance to conflict. But in voting to give our military commanders the authority to carry out airstrikes against Serbia, NATO sent a clear message to President Milosevic: NATO is ready to act. It is up now to the President of Serbia to follow through on his commitments.

Thank you.

Q. Mr. President, given your expressed distrust of Milosevic, how optimistic are you that he’s going to be able to fulfill this long list of conditions by the deadline?

The President. Well, I’m neither optimistic, nor pessimistic because I have something better now. We have now a verification system, so we’re not dependent upon our hopes. We have a verification system. There will be facts—facts on the ground which will tell us whether or not the compliance is there. And I certainly would hope that this NATO position will, in effect, be maintained until all the conditions are fully met. And I expect that it will be.