

Remarks at a Reception for Congressional Candidate Janice Hahn in Los Angeles, California  
October 24, 1998

Thank you very much, Roz. I want to begin, I think, by thanking all of you for the raincheck. I'm sorry that I couldn't be here on time, but I'm glad the delay had a happy result.

I want you to see something. See these? Normally, when I give a speech, I do it from notes like this, which I can't even read now that my eyes are—[*laughter*]. And then, before I give a speech, they give me notes like this. And on the last day of the peace talks in Maryland—or however many days it was—until I went to bed last night, I was up for 39 hours, constantly. I didn't even do that in college. [*Laughter*] And so before I got off the plane, even though I did get a little nap before I came out and a decent night's sleep last night, my staff gave me these notes and they said, "Read this side. Read this side. We were so afraid you're so sleepy that you won't know what you're saying, and you might get up and say something you actually think and get us all in trouble." [*Laughter*]

And I might say, Roz, right before I got out of the car, I had a talk with Hillary, and she said to tell you hello, and she's sorry she's not here. And she told me to read these notes, too. [*Laughter*] But I don't think I will. [*Laughter*]

I want to begin by saying that the main reason I wanted to come here today is that Janice Hahn is a very important person. I've known Roz Wyman for years, long before I ever even thought of running for President, and this is the first time I've ever been invited to this house. [*Laughter*] So I'm delighted to be here. And if I had been here, I would have watched "The Godfather" the first time. [*Laughter*] But I also might have watched it the second and third time.

I want to thank Congresswoman Maxine Waters and her husband, Ambassador Sidney Williams, for being here; and Kathleen Connell, your State controller; and my longtime friend Nate Holden, thank you for coming. I want to say a special word of appreciation to Jane Harman for doing a great job in Congress. We've had 6 wonderful years together.

In many of the same ways, we represented what we hoped would be a new direction for our country and one that would bring our party to many years of majority in America. And she did a magnificent job for her congressional district. She destroyed a lot of gender stereotypes by becoming one of the great experts on defense in the United States Congress. She destroyed a lot of stereotypes about Democrats by proving that we could, first of all, reduce the deficit 93 percent without any help from the other party and then supporting our efforts which produced this marvelous balanced budget and surplus. And in so many other ways, she really embodied what I think is the best of public service, and I thank her for it very much.

I also want to thank Janice Hahn for simply making this race. The Congress needs more people who have been teachers, who have served the public in different ways, who have worked with gang alternative programs, and worked with groups like the Boys and Girls Clubs in Watts, who know all the faces of America.

I tell all the time that people in Congress, just because they may represent the dominant face at a moment in time, the thing that makes a democracy resilient and effective is when all of the faces of America are seen and all the voices are heard and all the needs are addressed.

And so I just appreciate the fact that she was willing to make this race. And when I couldn't get her on the phone the day the filing closed, I thought, well, there is one of two things going on: she's either out doing what it takes to file, or she's hiding from me and all the other people that are harassing her to run. [*Laughter*] And I'm glad it was the former.

I also want to thank her for giving the speech she gave here today and reminding you of what this election is all about. And I'd like to just take a couple of minutes to put this in some larger context.

What we saw in the last couple of days in this flowering of this peace process under the most difficult circumstances imaginable—the heroic periodic intervention by King Hussein,



grappling with his own serious illness and reminding Prime Minister Netanyahu and Chairman Arafat and all the other people there, including a lot of people who have been involved in the wars that the Israelis and the Arab peoples of the Middle East have fought with each other, reminding them what the purpose of life is all about—represents in my view, in a larger sense, what ought to be the mission of America and the mission of public service.

And in 1992, when I ran for President, and California was undergoing such great economic turmoil, and you'd had the riots in L.A. and all the other things that were going on, I think the overriding reason I wanted to do it is that it seemed to me that Washington and the politics of Washington was nowhere near the politics that we saw unfold over the last week at the Middle East peace talks, that it was much more about winning victories over opponents than it was winning victories for the American people. It was much more about rhetoric than reality. It was much more about partisanship than progress.

And for 6 years I have labored to try to create a 21st century America in which every person would have an opportunity if he or she were willing to work for it, in which we would become reconciled to ourselves with all of our diversity as a stronger American community, and in which we would reassert after the cold war a positive role in the world for peace and freedom and prosperity for others as well as for ourselves. And I think we are well down that road.

I am grateful for the successes of the economy, for the healing of the social fabric, for the opportunities I have had to try to do these things. I am grateful that in this last session of Congress, because the Democrats, though in the minority, stood strong, stood together, we were able to win the fight to keep the surplus from being squandered on a tax cut and, instead, it will be saved to address the Social Security reform we have to make early next year; that we got the funding to put 100,000 teachers in our schools, which will enable us to bring class sizes in the early grades down to an average of 18; that we got funds that Senator Boxer fought so hard for for after-school programs for a quarter of a million more children in this country, to try to give them something good to do after school. I am grateful for all of that.

I am grateful that we beat off all the most serious assaults on the environment and passed our clean water initiative, which is designed to address the fact that for all of our progress, 40 percent of our rivers and lakes are still not fit for swimming or fishing. I am grateful for the fact that we passed our whole community empowerment initiative in housing and more empowerment zones, more facilities like the \$400 million Community Development Bank that was established here in Los Angeles.

I am very grateful that in this last year, we have been a force for peace in Bosnia, with free elections in Kosovo, where I hope—it's too soon to say—but I hope we've headed off another Bosnia; the advances in Ireland, and of course, this great breakthrough in the Middle East. We're not out of the woods yet. The agreement still has to be implemented. And I hope that in Israel, the people and the members of his political coalition will support Prime Minister Netanyahu, who took significant risk, given the nature of his political support, to sign an agreement that will clearly increase the security of the people of Israel, even as it gives more land and more economic opportunity to the Palestinians.

To me, this is what politics is all about. And in a larger sense, that's what this election is all about. This is the 21st century Congress you're electing. And the real issue here is whether this election will be controlled by agenda or by apathy and financial advantage.

We have the agenda. I believe, in spite of the fact that the last Congress wouldn't do it, that most Americans believe we ought to have the National Government providing incentives to build or repair 5,000 schools. We've got more kids than we've ever had in school.

And you wouldn't believe the number of places I've been. I've been to a small town in Florida where one grade school had 12 trailers out behind it housing children. I've been in classrooms in magnificent old school buildings in our big cities on the East Coast, in Philadelphia, where the average school building is 65 years old. That's the bad news. The good news is you couldn't begin to afford to build a school like most of those schools are today. But it's wrong when the windows are broken, whole floors are shut down, spaces have to be boarded up, and the light doesn't come in because people can't afford to maintain them and repair them. This is a big issue.



You heard Janice tell her own story about the patient's problems with HMO's. I can say, I have what I think is a reasonable position on this. I believe when I became President that we need better management in the health care system because inflation was going up in health care at 3 times the overall rate of inflation. And eventually it was going to consume the whole economy, but no management technique can ever be permitted to overwhelm the purpose for which the enterprise was established in the first place. And I don't care whether you're selling food or automobiles or health care or whatever you're selling—management techniques are designed to enable the most efficient way of providing the quality of product or service that you're in business to do in the first place.

And I'm deeply disappointed that the HMO lobby essentially persuaded the members of the other party to defeat the Patients' Bill of Rights, which would have said, addressing just this, that every person in an HMO ought to have a right to have medical decisions made by a doctor, not by an accountant; that if your doctor says you should see a specialist, you should be able to see one; that if you get hurt, you ought to go to the nearest emergency room, not one all across town because it happens to be covered by your plan; that medical records ought to be kept private and that if your health care provider is changed by your employer while you're pregnant or while you're getting chemotherapy or while you're in the middle of any other treatment, you ought to be able to complete the treatment before you're forced to change your physician.

These are elemental, basic, fair things. It would be a modest, but a very modest, increase in cost in these plans, to give peace of mind and dignity and, in many cases, lifesaving care to Americans all across this country. I think these things are worth fighting for.

I think it's worth fighting for saving Social Security for the 21st century. The next Congress will have to do two things. It will have to, one more time, beat off a raid on the surplus. Just because we saved it once doesn't mean we won't have to deal with it again. Then it will have to decide how to reform Social Security so that we can still take care of the basic social mission. Today, one-half of the seniors in this country would be in poverty but for Social Security. And when all of us baby boomers retire, most

of them won't have the kind of pension I'll have.

Now, most people have sources of income other than Social Security, and I'm doing everything I can to try to make it easier for people to take out different kinds of retirement plans, do more saving on their own, and build up a decent lifestyle. But in the end, we still need that bedrock protection so that none of our seniors have to live in abject poverty.

And if we don't deal with it now, we'll have one of two choices. If we just sort of put it off, take this golden moment of prosperity where we have a surplus and just squander it, then a few years from now we'll have a few more economic hard times. There will always be some excuse not to do it. If we don't deal with it now, and we wait for the roof to cave in, then we'll have one of two choices: Either we will lower the standard of living of our seniors in a way that we'll be ashamed of, or we will lower the standard of living of our children and their ability to raise our grandchildren because it will take a whopping tax increase to maintain the system. Now is the time to deal with this.

So if you think about the great challenges of America, if you think about the health care challenge, if you think about the education challenge, if you think about the Social Security challenge, if you think about the need that this Congress passed up under pressure from the tobacco companies to pass legislation to protect our children from the dangers of tobacco, still the number one public health problem in the country—they passed up a chance to pass the campaign finance reform, even though we had a bill that had some Republican supporters as well; they've passed up a chance to raise the minimum wage, even though you can't raise a family on \$5.15 an hour, and we'll never have an easier time when the unemployment rate and the inflation rate are both so low—there is a lot to do.

So again I say to you, what do we have to worry about? We have to worry about, first of all, getting this message out. That's why your presence here is important. Because in the last 2 weeks, according to what my staff tells me, our side will be outspent by their side roughly three to one, when you account for all the third party ads and the interest group ads and all these things that will come out there in all the races that are in play.



The second thing we have to do is to convince people that this election is as important as the Presidential election. No one questions this assertion. No one questions the fact that our party would do very, very well in these elections if it were a Presidential year, because we have the issues, because we have the momentum, because the country is doing well. Even with a financial disadvantage, we would do well.

But in off years, normally a lot of our folks don't vote—working women who have to deal with the hassles of child care and a job every day—so we vote on a workday still in America, so that's one more thing to worry about; minorities and low income people who live in cities that may not have adequate transportation, and it's enough trouble to get a bus to go to work, and then you've got to figure out how you're going to get to the polling place. There are objective reasons why these things happen. But if the people you know believe it matters, if they understand—I can tell you, every single vote in Congress matters, every single seat in the House, every single seat in the Senate—if the people know that, then Senator Boxer and Gray Davis and Janice Hahn will be elected on November 3d with strong margins.

So I just ask you to think about, when you leave here and you ask yourself, "Why did I go there?"—[laughter]—was it worth the money, hassling the traffic, whatever else you went through to get here, you just think about this: We're still around here after 220 years, as the greatest democracy in history, because most of the time most of the people make the right decision. So what's at stake in this election is your ability to persuade most of the people to show up.

So thank you for coming here, and thank you for giving your money, but you're not off the hook. [Laughter] Because every one of you, you have people you work with, people you socialize with, people you worship with, people you know, that you—if you ask them, will be more likely to be there.

And so, you were so kind when you stood and clapped when the references were made earlier to the work I did in this peace process. I don't need any applause. It was my obligation, and it was an honor, and it was a joy, even the meanest and toughest parts of it. But what you liked about it is what you should feel about public life and political work every day. What you liked about it was you knew that we were not there struggling so that Netanyahu could win a victory over Arafat, or Arafat could win a victory over Netanyahu, or they could win any victories over any of the other players there. They were there saying, we want to win a victory for the people we represent, for our common humanity. That's what that was all about.

And everybody knows it, which is why we feel elevated when something like this happens—that we—it gives us new energy and new hope, and it reminds us of what counts. And I'm telling you, it will be just as true on election day as it is now.

And there will be votes that Janice Hahn will count in Congress—cast in Congress—you will never know about because you just can't keep up with all of them. But more often than you can ever imagine, she will be called upon to reaffirm not a victory over some opponent, but a victory for the people she represents.

And she deserves, and you need, the voice of every person heard. That is true in Senator Boxer's race. It's true in Gray Davis' race. California has got to set a standard for America, and the best way to do it is with a record turnout on election day.

Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 5:10 p.m. at a private residence. In his remarks, he referred to reception host Roz Wyman; Nate Holden, Los Angeles City Council member; King Hussein I of Jordan; Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu of Israel; Chairman Yasser Arafat of the Palestinian Authority; and California gubernatorial candidate Lt. Gov. Gray Davis. Janice Hahn was a candidate for California's 36th Congressional District.