

Remarks at a Democratic National Committee Dinner *December 1, 1998*

Thank you very much. I'm delighted to see all of you. I think this is the first—virtually the first speech I've given since the election. I'm delighted to be here. I thank you for coming; I thank you for your support.

Thank you, Jeff and Andy and Charles and all the other cosponsors of tonight. I want to thank Governor Romer and Steve and Len Barrack and all the other people here from the DNC and the people who are here from the White House staff.

A great deal of what needs to be said has probably already been said, but I would like to just make a couple of remarks if I might. First of all, all of you who have been part of this administration, both formally and informally through your support, have helped us to make some real differences in the lives of Americans. I said today, at the World AIDS Day, that while there are alarming trends in the growth of AIDS around the world, we can take a lot of comfort in the fact that the rate of new infections is declining in America, that the death rate went down in America. And that is because, in no small part, I think, the efforts that you made which made it possible for us in the last 5½ to 6 years to have an increase in research of 65 percent and prevention of 34 percent and drug assistance up 640 percent—it's a big deal to me because I don't think we want medicine out there that ordinary people can't have access to—and the Ryan White Act funding of 240 percent.

You mentioned the minority initiative, which is very important. Today, on World AIDS Day, we announced that we would put \$200 million in the next fiscal year into the NIH to develop an AIDS vaccine; another \$160 million into NIH for other AIDS-related research; that we would invest several million dollars in trying to deal with the problems of AIDS orphans around the world; and that we would have \$200 million, which the Vice President announced today, in housing assistance for people with HIV and AIDS. So we are moving in the right direction.

I'd like to ask you also to continue your support for the larger agenda of inclusion of this administration. The real mandate of this election was for the American people to pull together

and to go forward. We have a generation of baby boomers about to retire, and we've got to figure out how to save the Social Security system in a way that does not bankrupt our children and our grandchildren.

We have an enormously successful economy, but deeply disturbing trends that you may have seen on the front page of, I believe it was, the New York Times in the last couple of days, indications that we are now falling behind other countries in the rate of our children who are graduating from high school and the rate of our young people who are actually finishing college as opposed to those who are going. We have a big education agenda. Some of it was enacted in the last session of the Congress; some of it was not.

We have a huge health care agenda out there, including the Patients' Bill of Rights, which is very important for everybody who is covered by a managed care plan. And I feel especially driven on this issue because I have supported the expansion of managed care. I thought it was absolutely imperative to manage the health care expenditures of this country better when I became President. But I don't think it's wrong for people—right for people to be denied access to a specialist or otherwise to have enormous disadvantages simply because of the health care plan they happen to find themselves in.

We have enormous numbers of people between the ages of 55 and 65—most of you are younger than that, but if you're not that age, you'll be there before you know it. It doesn't take long to live a life, I've discovered. We have enormous numbers of people who can't get any health insurance. We proposed, at no cost to the taxpayers, to let them buy into the health plan of the Federal Government—I think, a very important initiative.

And so there's a whole broad agenda out there that helped to bring the American people together and to rally support to what we were trying to do in the last election. And Roy said he thought the inclusion message was important; I believe that. And I believe that what we have to continue to do is to demonstrate that we have more things in common than we have dividing us.

In the end, the American people are almost always called upon to make the same decision: Are you for progress or partisanship; are you for people or politics; are you for unity or division? And I think—I said this before; I hate to say it, and I wish it weren't true. But I think that—because I wish we never had to have these sober reminders—but sometimes when terrible tragedies strike us, they bring us to our senses in a way that would never otherwise be the case. And I think the horrible death of Matthew Shepard helped to sober the country up and think about what it is that is really essential, not just about our citizenship in this country but about our humanity.

So I ask you to continue to work with us, to continue to help push us forward, and to continue to help move this country forward, to continue to involve more people in the life of

the administration and ultimately in the future of America.

I feel very grateful to be here serving, and I feel very grateful to have had the support of those of you around this table. And I look very much forward to 2 more years of significant progress.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 7:10 p.m. in the Colonial Room at the Mayflower Hotel. In his remarks, he referred to dinner cohosts Jeff Soref, vice chair, Democratic National Committee Gay and Lesbian American Caucus, author Andy Tobias, and fashion designer Charles Nolan; Gov. Roy Romer of Colorado, general chair, Steve Grossman, national chair, and Leonard Barrack, national finance chair, Democratic National Committee; and murder victim Matthew Shepard.

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Thank you very much. Ladies and gentlemen, let me first of all say, when Steve Grossman was standing up here bragging on everyone else, I thought to myself: When he took over our party when we were \$18 million in debt, it didn't seem like a very sound decision on his part—not a sound political decision, not a sound business decision because he had to stop doing other things, probably not a good thing for his family. And we wouldn't be here if he hadn't put in all those long hours and long days and long weeks and long months. He never got tired. People talk about how I don't; I do get tired. I plead guilty: I get tired. Steve Grossman never got tired. *[Laughter]* And I think we ought to tell him that we know that, and we thank him so much. *[Applause]* Thank you.

Let me say tonight is a special night for all of us because we're joined by three of our new Senators, and I'm very proud of all of them. Hillary and I have known Evan and Susan Bayh for a long time. They're both my golfing partners; they used to be my jogging partners back when I was young like they still are. And we served as Governors together. We've done a lot of things together for years. And I was abso-

lutely thrilled to see the great success that they enjoy.

I met John Edwards in North Carolina when he and Elizabeth were down there. We went to a very hot rally one night, and I went away—and Erskine Bowles went down with me. It was the day we had the—we celebrated America's Heritage Rivers, and we did the New River in North Carolina. And then we went to this big event where John was the featured speaker. And we walked out, and Erskine and I had to go back to Washington. I said, "Erskine, I'll swear I believe that guy can be elected." This is months beforehand. *[Laughter]* And sure enough, he was, thanks to a magnificent effort in North Carolina.

And all of you know that Hillary and I virtually moved to New York State in the Schumer campaign. And I saw Chuck and Iris and their daughters up close on many occasions, campaigning. I thought I knew New York real well, but Chuck Schumer taught me a few things and showed me a few people and a few places and a few neighborhoods that I had not known before then.

And I really believe that these people embody not just the future of our party but the future