

Feb. 18 / Administration of William J. Clinton, 1999

his remarks, the President referred to Mayor Will Boc of Dover, NH.

Statement on Senator Richard H. Bryan's Decision Not To Seek Reelection *February 18, 1999*

Throughout his career, Senator Richard Bryan has been a staunch advocate and tireless champion of the people of Nevada. He has been an ardent protector of Nevada's environment and has been a leader in preserving Nevada's lands and treasures. Senator Bryan has played a critical role in promoting rigorous health and safety standards for America's children and consumers. As a distinguished member of the Finance Committee, Senator Bryan has consistently

been recognized for his leadership in promoting fiscal responsibility and has helped ensure a brighter future for Nevadans and all Americans. While his decision to retire must be somewhat bittersweet, I know that he will continue to fight for what he believes in and will continue to be a proponent for America's progress. Hillary and I send our best regards to Dick and his family for every future success and happiness.

Remarks at a State Democratic 100 Club Dinner in Manchester, New Hampshire *February 18, 1999*

Thank you. I want to thank you for a typically reticent Yankee welcome tonight. *[Laughter]* It is wonderful to be back. I have very much enjoyed being with Governor Shaheen and with Bill today, and we've had a lot of time to visit. I want you to know that it gives me an enormous amount of pleasure and pride to see the Governor at her task, to know the victories that you have given her, to know that now she has a Democratic State Senate for the first time in 86 years and that you made a lot of gains in the House and that the Democratic Party is moving in the right direction.

I thank Jeff and Sophia and all the other officers of the Democratic Party, all the legislators and other people who are here. I am glad to be back. I'd like to thank the people from New Hampshire who have been a part of our administration. I'm not sure I can remember all of them, so many have been. But I would like to thank Joe GrandMaison and Stephanie Powers, Ricia McMahon, Terry Shumaker—I talked to him today; I called Terry Shumaker and said, "It's just like the Caribbean up here in New Hampshire; you ought to be here"—

[laughter]—George Bruno, Dick Swett, so many others.

I want to thank—I brought four people back here tonight who slogged through the snows of New Hampshire with me in '91 and '92, Michael Whouley, Jeff Forbes, Paul Begala, and Bruce Lindsey. And they are glad to be here, and we thank you.

You know, the last time I was in this building, I believe, was at the Democratic Convention in the campaign of '92. And I remember there were—the center aisle was open, and everything was crowded, and all the candidates got to have a little demonstration. And in my demonstration, there were a bunch of students who carried a banner down the middle aisle for me; I'll never forget it. And to see this vast crowd here today, celebrating the successes of our party and our Nation and your State, is wonderful.

You know, I didn't know exactly what I was going to say today when I got here. I remember when I first started coming here, people kind of laughed at me when I said that New Hampshire was a lot like my home. All the experts

expected you to send me home. *[Laughter]* Instead, you made me feel at home, and I still do. I love it.

In 1992, when I came here, when Hillary came here, amidst all the economic problems and personal turmoil, people whose businesses had been closed because their loans were canceled, in some cases, people who had never missed a payment; elderly people who were having to choose between food and medicine; young working families who couldn't buy health insurance because their children had been sick—I remember a young girl who talked to me about the pain in her family because her father could not get over the fact that he was unemployed, and he could no longer take care of his family,

In the middle of that difficult time the people of New Hampshire came out to see me and Hillary and listen to what we had to say. You took us into your homes. You shared your struggles and your dreams. And in so many ways, the story of America in 1991 and 1992 was, for me, the personal histories I heard in New Hampshire.

I saw a lot of people today that I met then, that I've tried to keep up with on all the times I've come back here since then. I think, of all the things that were said to me today, the things that meant the most were—well, there were really two things: First, to know that people are doing better and feel better about their lives, their children's future, our country's future.

I got to check in today with Ron and Rhonda Lee Machos, and I made them the poster family for my struggle for health care access because their oldest child, Ronnie, was born with a heart problem. Today I saw Ronnie and Tristen, his little brother, and mama's about to have a third son. But I got a letter from the dad the other day who said, "Little Ronnie is doing exceptionally well. No problems with his heart. Looks like he needs no further surgery. He scored two goals and got one assist in his last hockey game." That's a long way from being born with a hole in your heart. "Younger son Tristen is 7 this year, and quite a pistol"—I saw him today—"and more startling news, Rhonda Lee is pregnant with our third child." Listen to this; this is the point. "One thing we will experience for the first time is health insurance in pregnancy." Those are the kind of stories I wanted to hear after we had a chance to work together to make America a better place.

The other thing I heard that made me feel so good today was that any number of people in various ways said, "We stuck with you because you came to us with a detailed program, and you did exactly what you said you would do, and it worked." Well, today—I didn't do it. We did it. You did it.

Don't ever forget—I was in Dover today, you know, where I coined that now famous line that "if you would stick with me, I would stick with you until the last dog died." And the people of Dover had any number of humorous things to say about that. *[Laughter]* "We've seen a lot of dogs killed, but at least the last one is still living." *[Laughter]* "This dog is limping but still going." I heard it all. *[Laughter]* I heard it all.

Here is the point: If you had listened to the political experts, the dog would have died. *[Laughter]* But instead you held out a lifeline. You decided that the election should go on. You decided that these ideas, that this new direction for our country deserved a fair hearing among the American people. You embraced our cause.

People ask me all the time, "Well, what if this, that, or the other thing had happened, and you hadn't become President?" All I know is, I have never forgotten—as anyone who has worked for me in the White House will tell you—the kindness and the toughness, the humanity and the determination of the people of New Hampshire who would not let our campaign and what we wanted to do together for America die. And I never will.

Now, the point of all that is that every time you hear about something good that's happened in America, you ought to say, "I was part of that." This is a journey we have taken together. In America, there is not a difference between the Government and the people, between those who govern and those who let them govern. You gave me permission to do this based on a contract I made with you and the rest of the American people. And it's been quite a wonderful journey.

When I came here—7 years ago today, we had the New Hampshire primary. The unemployment rate was 7.3 percent. Today, it's 2.9 percent. In the 4 years before I took office, you lost 41,000 jobs here. In the 6 years since, you've gained 77,500. In 1992, business failures were increasing by 44 percent every single year. In the last 6 years, they've dropped by nearly

three-quarters. In 1992, your welfare rolls were among the fastest growing in the country. Today, they are half what they were on the day I took office.

We have seen—as a lot of your police officers said to me today, we have seen new police officers, new teachers, AmeriCorps volunteers, people benefiting from the earned-income tax credit, from the HOPE scholarship—which about 26,000 New Hampshire students will take advantage of this year; 32,000 more are taking advantage of the lifetime learning tax cut to pay for their college education, and on and on. This is what campaigns are really about.

And the test is, do we use the authority and the power and the responsibility given to us by the people to advance their cause? I said over and over and over again in New Hampshire in 1992 and I say again tonight, I was raised to believe that no person can sit on the sidelines and knowingly permit any of his or her fellow citizens to live under burdens that do not permit them to live up to the fullest of their God-given capacity. I always believed if we could create a country in which there was opportunity for every citizen responsible enough to take advantage of it and if we could convince people that we really have to be one community, that we will never be all that we could be unless we care about our neighbors and work together and realize that our welfare is caught up in the welfare of those who may seem very different from us, but underneath it all the diversity of America is our greatest strength, as long as we recognize that what unites us is more important than anything that could divide us. I believe that, and I still believe that tonight.

What I want to say is I believe the reason the Democratic Party is coming back all over America is that more and more Americans believe that—including independents and Republicans—that we ought to be about opportunity, responsibility, and community. We ought to be looking for ways to put people over politics, to put unity over division.

It is not an accident that we've gone from a \$290 billion deficit to a \$70 billion surplus with a bigger one coming this year, that we have the longest economic expansion in peacetime in the history of the country and the lowest peacetime unemployment rate since 1957. This is not an accident. It happened because people like you believed in and embraced certain ideas and then went out and worked like crazy when

the chains were taken off of you to make America work again.

And you should take pride in that, pride not only in your own work but pride in the work you did as citizens, in the work you did in campaigns, in the work you did in talking to your friends and neighbors. This is what makes America work—when the people are put first, when the dreams and the hopes of the American people are put first, and when the problems are tackled instead of just talked about. That's politics at its best, and that's what this building, that convention, all those years ago and this night will always mean to me.

Now, I want to get off this rather passionate political note and say something completely dry and academic, something completely factual, purely historical, wholly nonpolitical. Nobody had more to do with the decisions we made and success we've enjoyed than Vice President Al Gore. I understand he may have been around here recently. He wasn't with me in '92, until I became the nominee. But in '93, as he never tires of telling me, he cast a decisive vote on the economic plan that began to bring our country back. And as he always says, whenever he votes, we win. *[Laughter]*

I do want to say, you know, I have been very fortunate in the people who have served in our Cabinet. I once had a group of Presidential scholars at the White House, and a gentleman who taught at Harvard said, "Mr. President, one of the reasons your administration has been successful is that you have the most loyal Cabinet since Thomas Jefferson's second administration." It was an amazing statement. He said, "I'm a historian. I know."

We have all these people who work in the White House every day, day-in and day-out, whose names you don't know, who never get any glory, who deserve a lot of this credit. We also have a great team of people around the country working. But I have been very blessed by the work especially of the First Lady and the Vice President, and you all know it.

So I came here tonight to say thank you, to reminisce just a little bit, to thank you for Hillary and for me and for all of our administration but not just to say, thank you. Because if you remember in '92, every event we did, every home we visited, every townhall meeting we had that were bursting at the seams—that's the first time I knew I had a chance to get elected President, actually. I went to Keene,

and they said, "We put you in a place that will hold 150, and if 50 people show up, don't be embarrassed. It's a good turnout. It's New Hampshire, nobody knows who the heck you are." [Laughter] And 400 showed up and I said, "Holy moly, something's going on."

Oh, by the way, Mayor Pat Russell and her husband, Ron, are celebrating their 49th wedding anniversary tonight. Let's give them a hand there. Happy anniversary. [Applause]

So I wanted to do that. But remember this: We were really worried about making New Hampshire and America and the lives of ordinary citizens work again. I mean, people just wanted things to work. Do you remember, five out of the seven biggest banks had failed? I mean, people wanted things to work.

Okay, things are working now. So here's the most important thing I came here to say. I came to deliver on what I really owe you tonight. When things start working and people have been through all that you have been through, the temptation is to stop at what we've already said and done, pat yourself on the back, feel good about it, kick back, relax, wait for something else to happen. And I came here to tell you tonight that that would be wrong. That would violate the ideas and the principles on which we campaigned, you and I, in 1992 and upon which we were returned to office in 1996.

Why? Because, yes, America is working, but we are living in a very dynamic world where things that happen beyond our borders can affect how you live in every community in New Hampshire and throughout this country, and when, you know as well as I do, that we have large, long-term unmet challenges facing us in the century that is now less than a year ahead.

And so I ask you to think tonight about what we must do not only to celebrate what's been done and think about the next election, but we need to think, if we want to retain the support of the American people, from the Presidency, if we want to get it back in the Congress, if we want to keep the Democratic Party moving in the right direction in New Hampshire, we have to do a good job for the American people and the people of this State every day for the next 2 years. That is the best politics, to do what is right.

Now, I will not keep you through a whole recitation of my State of the Union Speech—[laughter]—but I want you to know that I worked hard on that for months, and it reflects

the thinking that I have brought to this job for years. I prayed in the early years of the Presidency when we were bailing water out of the ship that we would one day right ourselves and America would be working again, and as a people we could be called to think about these large, long-term challenges. And we would be making a terrible mistake as a political party if we played politics with them, looked only to the next election, and forgot that all of us are charged with the responsibility now that America is working to have America moving forward.

What are those challenges? I'll just mention two or three: The aging of America; the challenge of balancing work and family, as more and more people go into the work force and more and more parents are working; the challenge of giving every child a world-class education; the challenge of dealing with our environmental difficulties while continuing to grow the economy and living more at harmony with ourselves and our neighbors on this planet; and the challenge of dealing with America's obligations to lead the world toward greater peace and freedom and prosperity.

I met a lot of people here with Irish roots tonight, like me, who thanked me for the role that I have been honored to play in the Irish peace process. We are struggling today to keep a new conflict from breaking out in the Balkans. We are struggling today to deal with the challenges of chemical and biological weapons so that our children won't have to face them. We are struggling today to help our friends in democratic Russia keep their democracy alive and restore their economic health.

And one of the things that I did when I was in New Hampshire that I tell you I believe more strongly today than I did then is to say, "Folks, there is no longer a dividing line between domestic policy and foreign policy." The person in the remotest, smallest village in northern New Hampshire cannot be unmindful of America's responsibilities and opportunities in this great wide world. We have to fulfill them, and the Democratic Party should lead the way.

So what does that mean? Let me just mention two things. Let's talk about aging and education, the old and the young. The number of people over 65 is going to double by 2030. People are living longer. The average life expectancy in America now is already over 76. By the time the young people in this room who are under

30 tonight reach their later years their life expectancy, in all probability, will be somewhere in the mid-eighties.

Now, what does all that mean? First of all, let's not kid ourselves, this is a high-class problem, and the older I get, the better this problem looks. [Laughter] So I don't understand all this handwringing; this is a good deal, you know? This is a high-class problem. It is a tribute to our health system, to healthier behaviors, to scientific discovery, and also a fact of the baby boom.

Now, what we have to do is to figure out how, when the baby boom retires and medical costs escalate in the Medicare program, which will happen before the baby boom retires, we can preserve our obligation to our seniors without bankrupting their kids and grandkids. This is an issue which affects everyone, the aging of America. More and more people will take care of their parents as they get older and may need some help doing it. More and more people, if we don't do our job, will feel the squeeze between their parents' retirement needs and their children's education needs.

That's why I have said my first priority in dealing with this budget surplus we have waited for 30 years, and we have worked for 6 years, after 12 years in which they quadrupled the debt of the country—my first priority is to save Social Security and Medicare and pay down the debt to strengthen America for the 21st century. [Applause] Thank you.

Now, we will have a real policy debate with our friends in the Republican Party on that issue. They will agree with us that we should save the surplus necessary for Social Security, and then they'll disagree with us on what the best way to spend it is. And that's good. That's a high-class problem. That's the kind of honest political debate we ought to have. But they will not agree that we should also save that portion of the surplus necessary to deal with Medicare, even though it is going to run out of money in 10 years. And we have to save it, reform it, but also, in my judgment—I'll never forget the people I met in New Hampshire who told me this: We ought to add a prescription drug benefit to the Medicare program for the elderly people who need it.

Now, I believe the Democratic position, which is embraced by the leaders of our party in both Houses of Congress, as well as by our administration, is the right one. If we save 77

percent of this surplus over the next 15 years, we can do two things. We can prepare to save Social Security and Medicare; we'll also pay down the national debt.

When I took office, the national debt was one-half our annual income. It had quadrupled in 12 years. I had to spend, the first year I put together a budget, over 14 cents of every dollar you pay to the Federal Government in taxes just to make interest payments. Well, now the debt is down to 44 percent of our annual income. But if you do what I'm recommending here, if the Congress will go along and we save 77 percent for 15 years, we will take it down to 7 percent of our income; the debt service will be 2 cents on your taxes; the rest will go to real things. And within 18 years, the United States of America will be out of debt. This is what we should do.

Now, in addition to saving Social Security and Medicare, we have other health responsibilities. In my balanced budget there's a long-term care tax credit. We have to make sure that we pass a national Patients' Bill of Rights to support what Governor Shaheen is trying to do here in New Hampshire. We have to pass a bill sponsored by Senators Kennedy and Jeffords to make sure people with disabilities can take full-time jobs without losing their health insurance.

And we ought to, while we're helping, deal with the problem of family and work by broadening the number of people eligible for the family and medical leave law. I met people today who said they took advantage of it and what a difference it made for their families.

We ought to raise the minimum wage, and we ought to pass the initiative I have offered to give \$15 billion in private sector capital to rural areas and urban communities who have not yet felt our economic recovery. If we can't fix the poorest areas of America with free enterprise now, we will never get around to doing it.

Now, we also have to remember our children. I'm proud of the fact that we have more people in Head Start, kids in Head Start than ever before, that we have 90 percent of our children immunized against serious childhood diseases for the first time, that in the balanced budget law of 1997, 5 million children became eligible for health insurance, and thanks to what the Governor has done here with the child health program in New Hampshire, we are finally reaching those children.

But we have more to do. I'm proud of the fact that we have opened the doors of college to everyone with these tax benefits, and greater student loans and work-study programs. No serious person believes that our elementary and secondary education in every State, in every community, in every school, is what is necessary to give a world-class education to what is the most diverse student body our country has ever had.

Now look, this diversity is our meal ticket to the future. In a global economy, the idea that we have children in our schools from every country on Earth, from every culture on Earth, from every religious faith on Earth, all learning what the basic rules of American citizenship are in action every day and being given a chance to be responsible and to participate in our country and to learn to relate to each other—in a world that is being torn asunder all across the globe, from Bosnia to the Middle East to the tribal wars of Africa, over differences of race and ethnicity and religion—what we are trying to do is a godsend for our future, economically, politically, and frankly in terms of just the quality and richness of our lives.

But we have to do better with education. We have got to do better with education. We have to finish the job we started last year of hiring 100,000 teachers. We have to pass the bill Congress turned down last year to build or modernize 5,000 schools. I'm tired of going to these schools that can't even be hooked up to the Internet because they're so old.

We have to finish the job of hooking all our classrooms and libraries up to the Internet. And thanks to the E-rate that the Vice President and I fought so hard for, a billion dollars in discounts will be available this year to our schools, so every school, even poor schools, can afford for their children to hook up to the Internet.

And I believe we have to bring a revolution of accountability to our schools. For over 20 years now, I have spent a lot of time in classrooms. I've listened to teachers; I've listened to principals; I've listened to students; I've listened to parents. I can tell you that every challenge in American education has been met by somebody, somewhere, and that we still, on the edge of a new century, this so-called information age where people learn what everybody else is doing with blinding speed, we are still not very good at copying from others.

The Founding Fathers would be disappointed that school districts still seem to believe that they can't learn as much from others as they ought to. They set up the States as the laboratories of democracy. When I was a Governor for 12 years—as I told your Governor, back when I had a life—when I was a Governor for 12 years and I could actually stay here and sit around and talk around this table half the night and drink coffee with you, I was proud of the things that my State did first, but I was prouder of the things my State did second.

We have got to install, somehow, the best practices in education that educators tell us work. That's why I believe, based on what I've seen in some of the toughest urban school districts in America, we ought to say when we reauthorize all this Federal aid this year, "You can have it, but you've got to stop social promotion. But you can't tell the kids they're failures when the system is failing them. You have to turn around the failing schools. And you have to give the children summer school and after-school programs and whatever they need."

Look, our kids rank at the top of the world in fourth grade tests in math and science. Then the drop down to the middle in eighth grade tests. And then by the 12th grade, they're ranking near the bottom. Now, the same kids start out—they didn't get dumber as they traveled through life. That is telling us something about ourselves. We can do better. We have to have higher expectations, higher standards, higher accountability for everyone. But we can't tell the kids that they're failing if the system is failing them. We're not doing them any favor passing them along, but we have to lift them up and give them the support they need.

So I ask you to embrace the education agenda, to embrace the saving Social Security, saving Medicare, paying down the debt agenda, to embrace the agenda of bringing economic opportunity to our distressed areas and expanding health care access and doing more to help people balance work and family and dealing with the environmental and other challenges I have outlined. I ask you to do it because the best politics, as has been proven over and over and over again, is doing the right thing for the American people, saying what you're going to do, and if you get elected, doing it, and dealing with the emergencies as they come up, dealing with the challenges as they come up.

In 1998, for the first time since 1822, the party of the President in the sixth year of his Presidency gained seats in the House of Representatives. Now, I believe with all my heart it was because our party went out there with a simple message. They said, "Our concern is you; our commitment is to your future and your children. Vote for us, and we will save Social Security first, before we squander this surplus. Vote for us, and we will modernize those thousands of schools. Vote for us, and we will pass that Patients' Bill of Rights. Vote for us, and we'll get interest rates down, pay the debt down, keep this economy going. We have an agenda. And it's an agenda that will deal with the long-term problems as well as the short-term problems of America."

That's what the Democratic Party represents now: opportunity for all, responsibility from all, a community of all Americans. We no longer have a country, as I said 7 years ago, where I worry about me, you worry about you, they worry about them. I didn't want that then, and I don't see that today. We know—we know—we are all in this together. We know that we'll all do better if we do the responsible thing, if all our neighbors have opportunities and if we live together as citizens in one community.

You have all helped to make that the new reality of 21st century America. I want you to be proud of it but not to rest on it. Help your Governor. Help your legislators. Realize the dreams of your children. Don't run away from the work of governing. Stay with the real things that real people care about and the politics will take care of themselves.

Thank you, God bless you, and on to tomorrow. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 8:23 p.m. at the Armory. In his remarks, he referred to Gov. Jeanne Shaheen of New Hampshire and her husband, Bill; Jeff Woodburn, State chair, and Sophia Collier, State finance chair, New Hampshire State Democratic Party; J. Joseph GrandMaison, Director, Trade and Development Agency; Stephanie Powers, Director, School-to-Work Initiative, Department of Education; Patricia McMahon, Director, Community Outreach and Liaison, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Administration; Edward E. (Terry) Shumaker III, Ambassador to Trinidad and Tobago; George C. Bruno, former U.S. Ambassador to Belize; Richard N. Swett, Ambassador to Denmark; political consultant Michael Whouley; and Mayor Patricia T. Russell of Keene, NH, and her husband, State Representative Ronald G. Russell.

Remarks Prior to Discussions With President Jacques Chirac of France and an Exchange With Reporters

February 19, 1999

President Clinton. Is everyone in?

Q. Yes, sir.

President Clinton. As you know, we're going to have a press conference at the conclusion of our meetings. But I just wanted to take this opportunity to welcome President Chirac and the members of his delegation back to the White House. We have had a good working relationship and a warm personal friendship. I'm delighted to see him.

We have a lot of important things to discuss, especially the situation in Kosovo, but also the work we've been doing on the international financial matters and many other things. And we'll be able to discuss them later at the press conference.

But mostly, I just want to welcome him here and give him the chance to make a few remarks, if you would like.

President Chirac. I want to say how happy I am to be with you here and with President Clinton, my good friend.

We're going to have a very interesting day's work together. We'll, of course, first be talking about Kosovo and also a number of other important questions, like the international financial monetary situation in preparation of the NATO summit and a number of other subjects.

And I want to thank President Clinton for his welcome.