

Statement on a Meeting of the Prime Ministers of India and Pakistan *February 22, 1999*

I welcome the successful meeting over the weekend between Indian Prime Minister Vajpayee and Pakistani Prime Minister Sharif. I commend the two Prime Ministers for demonstrating courage and leadership by coming together and addressing difficult issues that have long divided their countries.

The two leaders committed to intensifying their efforts on key matters, including: containing their competition in nuclear arms; preventing nuclear or conventional conflict between them; resolving territorial disputes including

Jammu and Kashmir; refraining from interference in each other's internal affairs; fighting terrorism; promoting political freedom and human rights; and working together to improve the lives of their citizens through economic growth.

South Asia—and, indeed, the entire world—will benefit if India and Pakistan promptly turn these commitments into concrete progress. We will continue our own efforts to work with India and Pakistan to promote progress in the region.

Remarks at the Democratic Governors' Association Dinner *February 22, 1999*

Thank you very much. Ladies and gentlemen, thank you for the warm welcome. I thank Governor O'Bannon for his kind introduction. I thank him and Governor Patton for their leadership of the Democratic Governors. I am delighted that all of them are here tonight, and I want to pay a special compliment to Tom Carper for his leadership for the National Governors' Association this year. And I might add, a special compliment to all the Democratic Governors who showed up here in Washington with an agenda for the NGA to put the children of this country first and put education on the front burner and not let it get mired in the partisan politics. They deserve an enormous amount of credit, and I thank them.

I want to thank Katie Whelan, Jennifer Rokala, Mark Weiner for their work for the DGA. And I'd like to thank the leaders of our national party who are here tonight: Governor Romer, Mayor Archer, Congresswoman Sanchez, and Joe Andrew—whom we stole from Indiana; thank you very much. I thank the Members of Congress who are here: Senator Akaka, Senator Bayh, Senator Dodd, Congresswoman Mink, Congressman Hoyer, and goodness knows who else is here; former Democratic Chairman Don Fowler and all the former Governors who are here: Governor Waihee, Governor Miller of Nevada, Governor Bayh—a twofer.

Let me also say one other thing by way of introduction. I am profoundly grateful to the NGA for putting together, courtesy of my good friend Frank Greer, that magnificent film on Lawton Chiles, one of the best, ablest people I ever knew, and I thank you for that.

When Rutherford B. Hayes became Governor of Ohio, he described his position in this way: "Not too much hard work, plenty of time to read, good society, et cetera." Hasn't changed much, has it? [*Laughter*] After he became President he said, "I am heartily tired of this life of bondage, responsibility, and toil." Well, I don't think he was right about either job. And I'm proud of the work you do and grateful for the role that all of you played in giving me a chance to serve you as President. It is not bondage or toil, although it is responsibility.

Nearly everybody who has had this job has written something like that. And it makes you wonder if they complain about it so much why they work so hard to get it. There is no place on Earth, I think, as President Kennedy once said, where a person is called upon to reach deep into what you believe and what you think should be done, and then given the opportunity to marshal the resources of the country to move forward. But I think it is clear to all of you who have worked with me in the past that much of the success that this country has enjoyed,

that we were a part of—and I certainly don't claim responsibility for all of it—but whatever success we have been able to enjoy in this administration is in no small measure the result of the fact that I had a chance to serve as a Governor for a dozen years. And I thank the people of my State for giving me that chance and all the Governors who worked with me.

In 1992 we said that we were bringing a New Democratic philosophy to the country. All it really meant was that we were going to bring Democratic ideals of opportunity for all, and a community of all Americans, and the Governors way of work—putting new ideas over old ideology and putting people over old-fashioned Washington politics. It turned out to be a pretty good theory.

All of you know that we've gone from a record deficit to a record surplus, that we have the longest peacetime expansion in history, the lowest peacetime unemployment rate since 1957, now the lowest unemployment rate of any industrial country in the entire world. We have opened the doors of college to all Americans who are willing to work for it, provided immunizations for over 90 percent of our children for the first time in history. We're in the process, with your help, of providing health insurance to 5 million of the 10 million children in America who don't have it. Our country is working again and for that, and for the role all of you have played in it—not only the Governors and their staffs who are here but all the others who are here, from the labor organizations and the education groups and the business groups—I am profoundly grateful.

What I would like to just take a couple of minutes to talk to you about tonight is the urgency of the Governors being involved in dealing now with the great long-term challenges of this country. The easiest thing to do when things are going well is to say, "We worked hard to get here; let's take a break." I might say that every time our country has done this—you go back through the whole history of America—every time we have done this, it has gotten us into trouble. And we can ill afford to do it now when the world is changing so fast and when even amidst our own prosperity, as all of you know, there is a lot of trouble around the world. Virtually all of Asia is in recession. Our neighbors in Latin America, our fastest-growing markets, all have had their economic growth dramatically reduced because of the

global financial trouble. There are a lot of threats to our security lurking out there in nooks and crannies of discord the world over.

And I asked the American people in the State of the Union, and I ask the Governors here tonight, to join me in making the most of this opportunity that we have, because of our prosperity and equally because of our national confidence, to look at the long-term challenges of the 21st century. We have a chance to guarantee for the next several decades that these challenges we know about now can at least be met. No one can foresee for sure what will happen 10 or 20 or 30 years from now, but we know that if we deal with the problems that we know are out there now, if we seize the challenges we know are out there now, that our successors will have an easier path and our country will do a better job with more of its children.

We have to deal with the aging of America. There will be twice as many people over 65 in 2030 as there are now, and I hope I'm still one of them. You know, a lot of people go around wringing their hands about the problems with Social Security and Medicare. This is a high-class problem. We have this problem because we're living longer and staying healthier. The fastest growing group of Americans in percentage terms are people over 80. So I have asked the Congress to set aside 77 percent of this projected surplus for 15 years to save Social Security and Medicare and to improve them.

If we do that, we will also be able to pay down the national debt so that in 15 years, instead of half our annual income, which is what it was when I took office, it will be 7 percent of our annual income. That's the smallest percentage it has been since 1917, before this country entered World War I. Instead of spending 14 cents on your tax dollar to pay interest on the debt, which is what we were paying in 1993, we'll be spending 2 cents. And if future Congresses have the discipline to stay on this track, we could actually be a debt-free nation in 19 years. Just think of it and what it would mean for our children.

We can save Social Security. We can do something about the inordinate rate of women on Social Security who are still living in poverty. We can lift the earnings limit that now is imposed on people on Social Security, which I think is a mistake, since we have more and more older people who are healthy, who are strong, and who want to work. We can add

20 years to the life of Medicare and add a prescription drug benefit with some significant, but doable, reforms if we will have the discipline to set aside 77 percent of this surplus. That leaves us plenty of money to have tax cuts. I think we should have them dedicated to helping middle class people save for their own retirement, to have more investment in education, and to pay for our military needs. We can do all of that.

Now, the easy thing to do—we'll say, "Well, we've got this surplus, we waited 30 years for it, let's just give it away. It will be popular." There are a lot of Americans who could use all the money now. But it would be a mistake. And believe me, if you look at all this turmoil around the world—and the Governors that are going on the trade missions, that are seeking foreign investment, that want to do more business, you understand this. I don't know—and I'll say more about this in a minute—I don't know whether the United States can rectify a lot of these problems in the global economy in the next couple of years; I'm going to do everything I can to get that done. But I know this: If we have the debt going down, we'll keep interest rates down and investment high; if things go wrong overseas, they will be better than they otherwise would have been; and if things turn around overseas, our boom will be greater than it otherwise would have been if we have the discipline to do this. And I implore you to help me.

The Governors—Democrat and Republican alike—complained for years and years that everybody in Washington talked about balancing the budget, and no one ever did anything about it. And after I got here and I saw all the blood that was on the floor after the '93 economic plan, I understood why nobody did anything about it. Dick Riley, my Education Secretary, another of our former colleagues, used to always tell me after that, when I'd be moping around, he'd say, "Just remember my old saying: 'let's change; you go first.'" *[Laughter]* But we're here now, and we don't want to turn around. We want to keep going.

You know we have to do something about the children and families in 21st century America. We have more kids in our schools—they have more diverse backgrounds; more of them come from parents who don't speak English, or whose first language is not English—than ever before. A lot of them are going to school

in trailers or in school buildings so old they can't even be hooked up to the Internet. I thank you for your support of our agenda to help you hire more teachers, to help you build or modernize schools. I ask you to continue to support our efforts to raise the standards. Governor Carper had the right slogan for this year's Governors' meeting: raising student achievement. We ought to end social promotion, but help the kids with after-school programs and summer school programs. We ought to turn around the failing schools. We ought to give the parents the report cards. We ought to do what it takes for educational excellence.

We also ought to do more to help working families afford quality child care. One of the great ironies is when we fought very hard for welfare reform—the Democratic Governors stood with me in insisting that we get billions of dollars in that welfare reform bill for child care—that we keep the guarantee of medical care and nutrition for the kids. The welfare rolls have dropped by nearly 50 percent. The people that are left are harder to place. We can't just let them be thrown into the streets. So a lot of you are using your surplus funds to put more money into child care and more money into training. It is an irony that a lot of people who have never been on welfare, but who have young children, cannot afford their child care needs.

In our balanced budget this year, we have a comprehensive program that will allow millions of children to have comprehensive child care while their parents go to work. And succeeding at home and work ought to be America's family mission for the 21st century. I ask you for your support for that and for our efforts to expand the family leave law, to raise the minimum wage, to pass the Patients' Bill of Rights, to do more to support equal pay for equal work—a bigger and bigger issue among working husbands, as well as working women. All these things need to be done if we are going to have the proper balance between work and family, so that our parents can do their job if our schools do theirs.

We have to build the right quality of life for the 21st century. We talked a lot at the Governors' meeting today about the livability agenda that I put forward with the leadership of the Vice President, Carol Browner, Rodney Slater, Dan Glickman, to try to help our communities manage their traffic problems, their

toxic problems, their need for more green space with no Federal mandates, and a lot of empowerment. I hope you will help me pass that.

And finally, as the Governors get more and more and more involved in the global economy—and you’ve been leading us that way for 25 years now—I hope you will help me in my continuing effort to convince the Congress and the country that there is no longer a clear dividing line between our interest beyond our borders and our interest within our borders. I’ll just give you one example.

I want to keep this economic expansion going. I am convinced that to do it we have to have more economic growth at home and more economic growth abroad. Governor Patton invited me to Kentucky’s Appalachian region to push my America new markets initiative—tax credits and loan guarantees to get people to invest in the high unemployment areas of America. Mayor Archer here, in Detroit, got one of our first enterprise zones, and the unemployment rate in Detroit is now one-half of what it was in 1993. Detroit’s unemployment rate is about at the national average. We can do that in rural areas and urban communities all over America.

And then we have to reach out beyond our borders to create a financial system and a trading system that works for ordinary people in the 21st century; to have labor standards, environmental standards and more open markets; to make it possible for money to go into places, but to make honest loans and open loans and protect against these wild fluctuations that have not only hurt overseas countries, but have hurt American farmers, have hurt our companies like Boeing, and have been a killer for the steel industry. We have got to put a human face on the global economy, but we cannot run away from it. The Governors know that.

And I ask you to help to build a national consensus for that approach—not for running away, but not for saying, “Well, we’ll just open things up and forget about how it affects ordinary people.” In the end, the test of all of our efforts as Democrats is, are people out there in the country, who never come to a fundraiser but get up every day and work their hearts out and raise their kids and do everything they’re supposed to do, are they going to be better off if this policy prevails? That is the heart and soul of what drives our party. And if we can deal with the aging of 21st century America, the challenges of children and family

in 21st century America, the challenges of our environment in 21st century America, the security challenges of 21st century America, we’re going to do just fine.

We can only do that if we deal with one last challenge, which I believe today more than any other thing is the distinguishing difference between the two parties. And that is, we believe that 21st century America must be one America, united, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

Every night for the last several nights, I have made a call to the Secretary of State, who is over in France trying to broker a peace agreement in Kosovo, trying to avoid another horrible ethnic slaughter in a country right next door to Bosnia. And you know what we went through there. Every week I try a little harder to use the time I have remaining to get a just and lasting peace in the Middle East. In the last several weeks, I have exerted what efforts I could, so far without success, to avoid a brutal, murderous conflict between Ethiopia and Eritrea, to minimize the other tribal wars in Africa.

Now, after years of work, we’ve hit another snag in the peace process in Northern Ireland, and we are doing our best to try to get by this last tough thing. All you have to do is to read the papers to know that there are continuing tensions between India and Pakistan, between Greece and Turkey, that have old, deep ethnic and religious roots. All over the world, in the so-called modern world, ancient animosities are driving people to the point of war and are keeping people down. Ordinary people in other countries, the kind of folks we try to represent here, cannot build a normal life because their leaders are determined to continue conflicts based on racial, religious, or ethnic lines.

And it’s why we have to guard so hard against that sort of thing here at home. We think we’re doing great now and we can indulge ourselves in conflicts that we know better than to pursue; that is wrong. And we have to honestly say the great test of our democracy, in the end, is whether in good times and bad, America not only tries to do good abroad but to be good at home. In the end, we will be judged by that. We have to be a country where we all serve together, which is why I’ve worked so hard for AmeriCorps. We have to be a country

where we're pushing back constantly the frontiers of discrimination, which is why I have supported so strongly the "Employment Non-Discrimination Act."

And we have to be a country that relishes our racial, our ethnic, our cultural diversity and says we celebrate all this, but we know that underneath what God gave us all in common—in spite of all of our differences—is more important; that the framers of our Constitution so long ago were pretty smart when they talked about the inalienable rights given to every human being. And if we recognize that, then we ought to be able to find a way to live together.

I have done everything I know to do for 6 years to move us toward that one America. Should we have differences; should we have arguments; should we have elections; should we have discussions? Of course we should. But when you leave here tonight, if you don't remember another thing I said, you just remember this: No country throws away its common values and common humanity, even for an instant, without paying a price. And every night—every night—I thank God that we have the chance to be a force for peace, from Northern Ireland to the Middle East to Kosovo to Africa. I ask for the opportunity every night to make one stab to work out the problems between Greece and Turkey on Cyprus, to try to bring India and Pakistan closer together. And I thank God every night that we have not been cut apart by those things.

But America is growing more and more diverse. One of our new Governors here, Gov-

ernor Davis, while he is Governor—while he is Governor—may preside over a State that has no majority race. Now, this is a good thing in the world of the 21st century if—but only if—America not only preaches our doctrine to people abroad but lives by it at home.

The Democratic Party in the 1990's has constantly been for opportunity, for change, and for community. I like to joke that at the end of the 20th century, looking back on over 200 years of American history, our party leaves this century and enters the next as not only the party of Jefferson and Jackson and Franklin Roosevelt but also now the party of Abraham Lincoln and Theodore Roosevelt. And I am very proud of it. I want you to stay proud of it. And I want us to live by it.

Thank you, and God bless you all.

NOTE: The President spoke at 8:58 p.m. at the National Building Museum. In his remarks, he referred to Governors Frank O'Bannon of Indiana, DGA chair, Paul E. Patton of Kentucky, DGA vice chair, Thomas R. Carper of Delaware, Gray Davis of California; former Governors John Waihee of Hawaii, Bob Miller of Nevada, Evan Bayh of Indiana, and Roy Romer of Colorado, general chair, Democratic National Committee; Katie Whelan, executive director, Jennifer Rokala, national finance director, and Mark Weiner, treasurer, Democratic Governors' Association; Mayor Dennis W. Archer of Detroit, MI; Joseph J. Andrew, national chair-designate, and Donald L. Fowler, former national chair, Democratic National Committee; and media consultant Frank Greer.

Remarks Prior to a Meeting With Congressional Leaders and an Exchange With Reporters

February 23, 1999

The President. I'd like to make a very brief statement, and then we'll take a couple of questions. And as you know, you'll get to ask the leaders questions after the meeting, and we've got a lot of work to do. But I think it's important to—first of all, I want to say how pleased I am to have the whole leadership here, how much I appreciate their coming down. We've

got a lot to discuss, and I'm looking forward to it.

Kosovo Peace Talks

I'd like to make just a couple of comments about the peace talks at Rambouillet on Kosovo. They made a lot of progress; they've got about a 40-page document which describes in greater detail than ever before what the nature of an