

## Remarks at a Democratic National Committee Dinner in Austin May 7, 1999

Thank you very much. You know, when Roy was doing that riff, you know, “Before he came, I didn’t know I needed new furniture; I didn’t know I needed new art work; I didn’t know I needed”—Mary kept getting redder and redder, and finally she says, “He may not know he needs another place to spend the night tonight.” [Laughter] I must say this is a lot better than the last hovel we spent the night in. [Laughter]

Let me say to all of you, I’ve had a wonderful time here tonight, seeing so many of my old friends. There are a lot of people here—the ones Roy mentioned and also Carlos Truan, Gonzalo Barrientos—a lot of other people who were with Roy and Garry and Judy and Nancy and Tom, all the rest of us, way back in 1972. And we have remained friends for a long time. And during most of that time, with the odd interruption, sometimes the odd, wonderful interruption like the reign of Governor Richards, the election of Lloyd Doggett, we’ve been in the minority.

And I want to talk tonight a little bit about—I want to have kind of a serious conversation tonight about why I really came here, because what Joe said is right. I’m not running for anything. And I would seize any excuse to come here to Austin, because I had some of the happiest days of my life here, and I have a very jealous wife who wishes she were here today.

But for the next 2 years, I’m helping the Democratic Party because I believe it’s the right thing to do for America. I hear a lot of folks on the other side kind of licking their lips and saying, “Well, wait until the next election, and we’ll have Clinton out of the way. Maybe it will be better.”

What I want to say to you is that I am very grateful that I’ve had the chance to serve you. And I am profoundly grateful that we have the lowest unemployment in 30 years and the lowest welfare rolls in forever and a day—they’re half the size they were before—and the lowest crime rate in 25 years. Roy was saying that we’ve got 90 percent of our children immunized against serious diseases for the first time in history. The doors of college are virtually open to every

American now because of our HOPE tax credit and the student loan changes we’ve made. We’ve set aside more land in perpetuity than any administration, except for the two Roosevelts, in American history. I’m grateful for all that.

But what I want you to understand is that I’m grateful because I got a chance to implement a set of ideas that now represent the governing philosophy of the Democratic Party. And it is very different from the driving philosophy of the other party. And if the American people like the results that have been achieved, then we need to support those people running for the Congress and the White House who believe in these ideas.

In 1991, when the incumbent President was at 75 percent approval and I decided to make this race when nobody but my mother and my wife thought I could win, I did it because I was worried about my country and my Capital. Because it seemed to me that there was nothing particularly wrong with America that couldn’t be fixed if we would just open our eyes and go to work. The unemployment rate was high, inequality was increasing, the social problems were worsening, and we had a lot of problems around the world that we didn’t seem to have any governing idea of dealing with. But I felt great about America. I just thought we had to change the way Washington worked.

Just go back in your mind to that period and that long period where the other party spent 12 years telling us how terrible the Government was, and a lot of our guys were sort of fighting a rearguard action defending it. But most of the ideological battles which took place in Washington were about yesterday instead of about tomorrow. And so I set off on this crazy journey with a lot of you, based on a few simple ideas.

First of all, I asked myself, what is the problem? The problem is that we have not thought about how to take full advantage of this explosion in technology and the globalization of the economy in society and at the same time figure out how not to leave anybody behind and make our families and our communities stronger and maintain our push for peace and prosperity around the world. We haven’t thought about

how to make the transition in a way that not only provides vast opportunities for people like those of us in this beautiful setting tonight, but makes America as a nation stronger.

And it seemed to me that what we had to do is to go back to some very basic things: that we had an obligation to try to have opportunity for every person who was responsible enough to deserve it; that we had to try to build a community made up of every law-abiding citizen without regard to what other differences they had; that we had to commit ourselves to be more involved in the rest of the world, not less involved, because the world is growing smaller and smaller; and that we needed a different sort of Government that could be much smaller—and it is today, by the way. It's the same size it was in 1962. That's the size of your Federal Government today. And I'm proud of that.

But what you need to know, we made it smaller but more active, focused not so much on telling people what to do or maintaining old bureaucracies but giving people the tools they need to make the most of their own lives. Those were my ideas: opportunity, responsibility, community, a Government that gives people the tools to make the most of their own lives.

And I thought to myself, there are a whole lot of things people believe that I don't think are true. I believed if we work at it, we could reduce the deficit and still increase our spending in education and health care if we did it right. Well, 6 years later, we've got a huge surplus, and we've nearly doubled spending in education and health care.

I believed we could improve the economy and improve the environment. The air is cleaner and the water is cleaner than it was 6 years ago. We've reduced chemicals in the atmosphere from chemical plant emissions by 90 percent in the last 6 years.

I believed that we could help people succeed at work and at home. And I still think that's one of the biggest problems we've got in this country, people trying to be good parents and trying to meet their obligations at work at the same time.

I believed that we could promote entrepreneurialism and trade around the world and still help people who, because of their education or where they live, are at risk of being left behind. Those are the things that I believed.

I believed that we can be a force for peace and recognize that there are some times when we have to use our overwhelming military force.

I believed that in welfare we could reduce the welfare rolls, get more people to work, and at the same time help people who were on welfare to do a better job of raising their children, that we didn't have to hurt people in their responsibilities as parents to say, "If you're able-bodied, you ought to work if you can."

I didn't believe that—all those choices and all those debates that I kept hearing in Washington. And so we set out to do it, and the public responded, and the people gave me a chance to serve; and then in '96, another chance; and then in '96 and '98, kept returning more of our people to the Congress so that we're at the point where we can almost reverse the election of '94.

I think the election in '94 happened, by the way, because we made the tough decisions as a party, all alone, to reduce the deficit, without a single vote from the other party, and increase our investment in education. We made the tough decision almost all alone to pass a crime bill that put 100,000 police on the street, banned assault weapons, and required the Brady bill's waiting period. And by the election in '94—and we tried to provide more health insurance, all alone, and didn't have enough votes to do it. And by '94, what happened was people knew what we'd done on the economic plan, but they didn't feel the economy was getting better; they knew what we'd done on the crime bill, but the NRA convinced a bunch of hunters we were going to take their rifles. By '96, everybody still had their rifles and the crime rate had gone down, the economy had gone up, and we got reelected. And the Congress is doing better ever since our elections.

So now we're poised for this election in 2000. And what I want to say to you is, I appreciate what Roy said about me, and it's nice to be introduced by your old friends. They'll lie about you a little now and then. But the truth is, you must believe this, this administration has succeeded because we had the right ideas and the right approach and we're grounded in the right values, and it's what represents the heart and soul of the Democratic Party today. And that's why I'm here.

We've got a lot of big decisions to make. And you have to decide who is going to make them. We have to deal with the aging crisis—

twice as many people over 65 by 2030. I hope to live to be one of them. [Laughter] I've given the Congress a plan that will save Social Security, save Medicare, provide help for people taking care of their parents and long-term care, allow middle income people and lower income people to save for their own retirement for the first time and do it in a way that pays down the national debt by 2015 to the lowest point it has been since before World War I. And that's really important to keep the economy going, because we'll be less dependent on the vagaries of the global financial system.

I've given the Congress a plan that will improve the quality of education by ending social promotion, by providing after-school and summer school programs for our kids, by finishing the work of hooking all our classrooms up to the Internet, by modernizing a lot of these old school buildings and helping the school districts that are having kids in house trailers, by supporting better teaching, and by having national academic standards, which I hope our whole party will embrace and help us in this great battle we're in, because I think you should have local control of the school about how to implement national academic standards.

There's an international standard that all of our children need to meet if we want them to make a good living. And we're about the only advanced country in the world that doesn't have that. As a result, we've got the finest system of higher education in the world; no one believes that our system of elementary and secondary education is uniformly the finest in the world. And yet, it can be. And all the diversity we have in our schools is a great asset in a global society, but every one of those kids deserves a chance at the brass ring.

I was in the Alexandria school system the other day, across the river from the Capitol and the White House. There are kids from a hundred different racial and ethnic groups there, nearly a hundred different native languages. Every one of them can make a contribution to America if he or she gets a world-class education. And to pretend that it ought to be a local option whether they get it is, I think, obscuring what is plainly real here.

So we Democrats stand for more flexibility about how to do things, but for national standards of excellence based on international standards of what our children need to know. And

I think the American people are with us on that.

I could talk about a lot of other issues. I'd just like to mention one or two more. The Vice President is coming down here to south Texas in a couple of weeks to our annual empowerment zone conference. Since 1993, we've been trying to figure out ways to get more investment into poor urban neighborhoods and poor rural areas and poor Native American reservations, because there are still a lot of people that haven't participated in this economic recovery.

And I worry a lot about how we're going to keep America's growth going and our unemployment low without any inflation, especially if we have trouble overseas. One way is to make more markets here at home. And there are lots of places right here in Texas where unemployment is still too high, too many hardworking people still don't have the skills they need, and where if we could attract the right investment in the right way we could have dramatic growth. So this is going to be a big challenge. If we can't get around now to giving poor rural areas and urban areas that have been left behind the chances they need, we'll never get around to it.

Let me just mention one or two other things. I am very interested in this whole issue of balancing work and family. And I think there's some things we ought to do. I think we ought to raise the minimum wage again. I think we ought to strengthen the family and medical leave law. I think we ought to pass the Patients' Bill of Rights. I think we ought to pass our child care plan to help lower income people with their child care costs. We have to realize that most parents have to work and every parent ought to have the option to do it, but no parent should have to sacrifice the most important job any woman or man has, which is to raise strong, good kids. There are a lot of things out there we have to do. We've got a big job to do in the world. You can see it today with some of the problems we have.

Now, I'd like to close by just asking you to think about three things and giving you examples of what my philosophy is, that I think is our party's philosophy. These are the best of times for Americans, but we're all pretty sobered up right now because of three events of the recent days. One are the terrible tornadoes in Oklahoma and Kansas and, to a lesser extent but still sad, in Texas and Tennessee; two is

the heartbreaking incident in Littleton, Colorado; and third is the continuing conflict in Kosovo. Now, let me tell you what they mean to me.

First, the tornadoes mean that none of us should get too big for our britches. We're not in control. We have to maintain a certain humility when thinking about all the problems of the world. But as our hearts go out to those people—I'm going up to Oklahoma City tomorrow to tour the damage and talk about what we can do to help them put their lives back together—I'm thinking about what we can do to try to prepare better for the next one. I'm thinking about what we can do if we know we're going to grow and expand in areas that have been tornado alleys, what we ought to do to build houses that will do a better job of withstanding them or have quicker escapes to places that will be safer. In other words, I think what we always should be thinking about is: How can we make it better? How can we deal with what is going to come?

In the case of Littleton, on Monday, Hillary and I and Al and Tipper Gore are going to sponsor a big meeting at the White House with people from the entertainment and Internet communities, people from the gun manufacturers, people from the religious communities, people who work in schools on problems of violence, students, a lot of other segments of our society, coming together to talk about how we can start a national campaign to reduce the likelihood of violence against our children.

Now, I think it is important that you know how I look at this. I think the world's worst thing we can do is to use this awful heartbreak to get into a fingerpointing session, because the truth is that not a single soul here knows exactly what triggered those kids. And we all know that in any given time there will be people who are more vulnerable than others to whatever influences to which they're exposed to. But I do think we would all admit, if we sort of take our defenses down, that the society in which our children grow up today, number one, throws things at them faster; number two, gives them even more opportunities to be isolated from their parents and from their peers; number three, exposes them at an earlier age and in greater volume and intensity to more violence and the coarsening of human relationships; and number four, it's way too easy for them get

things like Tech-9 assault pistols. And I think we can all sort of admit that.

And what I'm trying to do is to figure out what we should all do here to launch a genuine grassroots national campaign where I try to pass the laws I should pass; the gun manufacturers come forward and do what they ought to do to try to protect our kids; the entertainment community makes a contribution; the Internet community makes a contribution—they've worked hard, by the way, with the Vice President to try to give parents more screening technologies—and the religious community comes forward; the mental health community comes forward; the schools provide more adequate counseling services and peer mediation for the kids, and what some of our schools are doing now, providing a hotline so kids who know what's going on in the school can call and tell somebody without being subject to abuse.

There are lots of things to be done here. But there's also something to be said here for recognizing the incredible pressures that parents and children are under because life is so fast and so crowded. And it is easy for all of us, if we're not careful, to wind up being strangers in our own homes. And our children need to understand also that no matter how solid and rooted they are, childhood is a fragile and difficult time. Every school will always have its cliques. Every school will always have its groups. But we've got to teach our kids that they can enjoy being in their crowd without looking down on the others; because people who are constantly subject to ridicule and abuse are going to have their lives twisted or distorted in some ways, unless they are really superhuman.

So I'm looking forward to this. And all the cynics who say it can't be done, I would remind you that teen pregnancy is now down 5 years in a row because of a national grassroots movement, not because of any law we passed in Washington. Drunk driving is down because of Mothers and Students Against Drunk Driving. We now have 10,000 companies that have voluntarily joined an alliance that we organized a couple years ago to hire people from welfare to work, and they've hired over 400,000 people without a single law being passed. We can do this. And I believe we can do it, but only if our political, public life brings us together and not drives us apart.

And the last thing I'd like to say is about Kosovo. I know this is a difficult issue. I saw

the people with their signs on the way in, saying we ought to end the fighting. Nobody wants to do it more than me. I think those of you who've known me for 30 years know that the most difficult thing that I ever have to do is use a superior position to put pressure on somebody else, particularly if it involves the use of violence. I'm not that sort of person.

But let me tell you, since the end of communism, we have seen the inevitable rise of national aspirations and ethnic aspirations, especially in Central and Eastern Europe. In one place only, the former Yugoslavia, we have seen that turned into a credo that says it is all right to burn the homes, destroy the records, destroy the churches—the mosques, in this case—and the museums, and the libraries, and the very lives of families; it's all right to rape the daughters; it's all right to shoot the sons; it's all right to do this.

And for 3 years, we worked, through the United Nations and negotiations and everything else, to end the war in Bosnia. And finally, we ended the war in Bosnia when NATO bombed and when the opposition forces started winning some battles on the ground. And we've been able to maintain a peace there.

People don't have to like each other. People may have legitimate grievances. But ethnic cleansing and killing people wholesale because of their race or religion is wrong. And the United States is in a position to stand against it, and we ought to.

I know there are a lot of people who disagree with me. They say, "Well, we don't have any vital national interest." I would argue to you that we do. It's not only a moral, humanitarian issue. We'll be better off if our best allies in the world, in Europe, live in a continent that is whole and democratic and at peace and free of this sort of thing. First of all, they won't be wasting their money tearing each other up. Secondly, they'll be better trading partners. Thirdly, they'll be better partners in helping us solve problems in other parts of the world. And if we can put an end to ethnic cleansing in Europe, then we can put an end to it in Africa, and we can put an end to it wherever else it rears its ugly head.

If we can't solve this problem, it's very difficult to understand how our children are going to live in peace in a world where every radical terrorist group can get on the Internet and figure out how to build a bomb or get weapons

or do anything else they want to do. We have got, at least, to tell people that in the world of the 21st century, it is not okay to kill people just because they're of a different race or ethnicity or religion.

That's why I must say, I want to applaud the senators who are here, who are trying to pass that hate crimes act in the legislature in honor of James Byrd. I think it's very important. It makes a statement.

This is the last thing I'll say about this. I've already talked longer than I meant to, but if you don't remember anything else I say, remember this: It is one thing to say that we all ought to get along together and quite another to do what is necessary for us to do so in decency and honor.

The differences among us are a part of what makes life more interesting and makes this country so successful, as long as they are contained. When the differences among us are used, as they are in Kosovo today, as they were in Bosnia before, as an instrument of human destruction, they can quickly make life unbearable.

Now, we can't force anybody to like anybody else. Maybe not everybody in this place tonight likes everybody else. But we live according to certain rules, and we do it not only because it is morally right but because we do better when other people do well. When we do the right thing or, as Hillary says, when we act like we're in a village, we all are better off.

So I ask you to think about this. The Democratic Party has stood for community and for opportunity and for citizen responsibility. We have refused to accept all these phony choices we were presented with, between economic growth and the environment, between accountability and help in education, and all the other things. These ideas have led America to a better place. That's why I'm here. I'm glad I was President. I hope I was the instrument of a lot of the good things that have happened in this country. But the most important thing is that we continue in this direction, that we stay on this course, that we embrace these ideas. And that is why it is important to support this party.

I'm very grateful to you. Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 8:38 p.m. at a private residence. In his remarks, he referred to Roy

and Mary Spence, dinner hosts; Texas State Senators Carlos Truan and Gonzalo Barrientos; Garry Mauro, former Texas land commissioner; Judy Trabulsi, Nancy Williams, and Tom Henderson,

who worked with the President on the 1972 McGovern campaign in Texas; former Gov. Ann Richards of Texas; and Joseph J. Andrew, national chair, Democratic National Committee.

## The President's Radio Address

*May 8, 1999*

Good morning. I want to talk to you today about our efforts to help the people and communities devastated by the terrible tornadoes that hit Oklahoma, Kansas, Texas, and Tennessee this week. These tornadoes killed over 50 people, injured hundreds more, and damaged or destroyed thousands of homes and businesses. I know I speak for all Americans when I say to the families who lost so much, our thoughts and prayers are with you.

Today I'll be flying to Oklahoma City to get a firsthand view of the destruction. This is a duty I've performed many times in the aftermath of many natural disasters. One thing I've learned is that the images we see on television can never fully convey the level of sheer destruction or the depth of human grief caused by these disasters. Yet, I've also learned that the worst of nature can bring out the best in people.

At times like these, families rally together; neighbors help neighbors; strangers reach out to strangers; while police, doctors, firefighters put in 24-hour days in often hazardous conditions without complaint. Natural disasters create many victims but bring forth many heroes. There are some challenges that no individual, indeed, no community can handle alone. And on these occasions the National Government must act quickly, effectively, compassionately.

When I became President, I vowed that the Federal Government would do a better job of helping communities respond to the ravages of nature, and it has. As part of Vice President Gore's reinventing Government effort, the Federal Emergency Management Agency, under the direction of James Lee Witt, has gone from being much criticized to becoming a model of disaster relief, now recognized all around the world for its speed, skill, and dedication.

Officials from FEMA and other Federal agencies are already on the ground in communities

hit by this week's tornadoes, healing wounds, searching for missing persons, providing shelter, clearing debris, restoring power and water, issuing emergency expense checks. But more must be done.

Today I'm glad to announce the Department of Labor will spend over \$12 million to provide temporary jobs for some 3,500 Oklahomans. Men and women who lost their jobs and businesses destroyed by the tornadoes will be paid to serve at relief centers, to distribute food and water, to help on construction crews. They'll be able to feed their families by rebuilding their communities.

I'm also announcing today that I'll ask Congress for an additional \$372 million for FEMA's disaster relief fund. These resources are crucial for our disaster relief efforts, and I urge Congress to act quickly on my request.

Finally, in the balanced budget that I sent to Congress there is \$10 million to further improve the National Weather Service's next generation Doppler radar network. This system makes it possible to issue warnings in advance of coming tornadoes so that local residents can seek shelter. Over the last decade, average warning times have doubled from 6 minutes to 12 minutes. Residents of hard-hit Cleveland County, Oklahoma, received warnings a full 35 minutes before the tornado touched down there this week, and that warning saved lives. That's also why I support the creation of a national weather center for state-of-the-art tornado and severe storm forecasting at the University of Oklahoma.

The Federal Government has a responsibility to provide individuals with the tools they need to improve their own lives. That's what we're doing in Oklahoma this week. Natural disasters test our faith, but they also show us that the old-fashioned American values of neighborly care and concern are still very much alive. And