

Remarks at a Reception for Hillary Clinton in Cazenovia, New York September 2, 1999

I would like to thank the Greens for making us all feel so welcome, and I would like to thank you for—I have been overwhelmed by the kindness and the hospitality of the people these last few days and by the sheer beauty of this place, everywhere we've been, and I want to thank you all for sharing that with us.

I'd also like to thank the people of New York and the people of this area for your many kindnesses to me and to Al Gore and to our families and our administration, including the electoral votes of New York in two Presidential elections.

I want to just make a couple of points. First of all, in terms of where our country is today, we are in a good place because we have tried to make decisions for 6½ years to think about what is best for America, for all Americans and for the future and not just for the moment, for those that may have the most influence. And it's worked pretty well.

In this historic part of our Nation, I think it is fair to say that if you read the history of America closely, as I have tried to do, the continuing mission of this country is to always be working to widen the circle of opportunity, to deepen the meaning of freedom, and to strengthen the bonds of our community. This is more and more important as we grow more diverse and as we get more involved with the rest of the world.

Now, if you look at what has happened in the last 6½ years, I don't think it's a subject of much debate anymore. And I am very grateful for the efforts that I have been able to make with so many others to improve the economy and lower the crime rate and lower the welfare rolls and strengthen the role of America in the world.

But the mission of the country is never over. And Hillary just mentioned a few things. One of the things that I think about all the time is that not every community and not every section of our country has participated fully in this astonishing economic recovery, and that bothers me. It bothers me that not every child in this country is getting a world-class education. It bothers me that there are people in Washington who really don't want to use this truly historic

opportunity to extend the life of the Social Security Trust Fund out beyond the life expectancy of those of us in the baby boom. Any of you here who are baby boomers, like me, I'm sure you share my concern. I am determined that, when we retire, our children will not have to support us at the expense of our grandchildren. That's what Social Security is.

And in a global economy, believe me, if we were to pay off the debt of this country in 15 years, for the first time since Andy Jackson was President, then the children in this audience would be the economic beneficiaries. We would have a generation of lower interest rates and higher growth and stronger economies in every place in America.

And that brings me back to why you all came here. *[Laughter]* When I met Hillary in law school, I was really afraid for her to go home to Arkansas with me, because I was afraid she would be wasting what I think is one of the greatest talents of public service I've ever known in my life. It turned out it hasn't been a waste; she's done pretty well. *[Laughter]*

But when you hear her talking about all these issues, I think it's important to note that she's not only had 30 years of experience as a child advocate, which puts her in a position to know more about education and family policy than virtually anybody who could run for this kind of job. We worked together when I was Governor for a dozen years, which is why she understands all these economic development issues and the things that you talked about, about the economy.

And then for the last 6½ years in the White House, she has been not only an advocate for health care reform and for our children, but she's literally gone all across the world looking for ways that people can come together instead of be driven apart by all the things that seem to be doing so much to divide people, both in the United States and around the world.

I know I'm heavily biased—*[laughter]*—but I also have more experience than most people do in this area. I have known thousands and thousands of people in public service. I've never known anybody with the same combination of ability, experience, compassion, and unrelenting

dedication as my wife, and I thank you for being here.

NOTE: The President spoke at 5:05 p.m. at a private residence. In his remarks, he referred to dinner hosts Edward and Joan Green.

Remarks at a Reception for Hillary Clinton in Syracuse, New York September 2, 1999

The President. Well, all I can say is this has been a very interesting night. Duke and Terry threw a party in an Irish bar, and the first thing I see when I walk in, besides all of your smiling faces, is a buffalo head. [Laughter] Now, I don't know what that means. [Laughter].

Audience members. It doesn't mean anything. [Laughter]

The President. It could be a piece of New York's trivia. The buffalo in America was saved by Theodore Roosevelt. We had 20 million buffalo head in America in the mid-1800's. When he became President, it was down to 12 known head, and he brought them back. Or it could be just another metaphor for all the speeches about Syracuse that I've heard from Terry. [Laughter] Or it could be a symbol of the golf game we had a couple days ago.

You know, people are asking me how I'm reacting to this whole deal. I love it. And I'm trying to think—all the time, people are coming up to me and saying, what are you going to do when you leave office? And you know, I have a lot of interests. And so one of you who knows that I love music—I'm walking through the crowd tonight, and a gentleman gives me this video tape which says, "How to Find Gigs That Pay Big Bucks." [Laughter]

I am indebted to the people of New York for many things, including voting for me and Al Gore twice and giving us a chance to serve. I thank you. I love Syracuse. When I came here running for President—I have had a wonderful time in this area. It is spectacularly beautiful and is full of the rich history of America. And I hope that our presence here has helped to lift the visibility of this area in a positive way in the eyes of all America. And I hope it does.

I want to say, if I might, just two things. One is, I'm going to spend every day I've got left in the last year and 5 months or so of my Presidency to try to prepare this country

for the new century. We have the chance of a lifetime, which we dare not pass up, with this prosperity we have to prepare for the aging of America. For those of you who are baby boomers, like me, I can tell you our generation does not want to retire and impose an inordinate burden on our children and undermine their ability to raise our grandchildren. We can save Social Security and Medicare if we do it now and don't squander the surplus. And that's what I am determined to do.

And I'll just mention two more things. We can, if we will use what we know, give every child in this country a world-class education, and they all need it. And the third thing we can do is bring opportunity to the places in America that have still not had job growth and get this country out of debt for the first time since 1835. That's what I'm going to work on.

The second thing I want to say is America is always about change. It is constantly in the process of reinventing itself. So if someone said, "Vote for me because I'll do everything Bill Clinton said and did," I would vote against that person, because we're always in the process of change. But we have to build on what works. And what we have to do, even when we're having a good time, is remember what the purpose of this country is. The purpose of this country is every day to make progress in expanding opportunity, deepening freedom, and strengthening our communities.

Now, I have known Hillary a long time, as a matter of fact, to be precise, 28½ years. That's how long we've known each other. I have known thousands of people in public service. And you shouldn't be basically confused by the kind of venom that too often comes out of Washington. The truth is most of the people that I've known in public life, at all levels, in both parties, were good, honest, hard working people that did what they thought was right. And that's the truth—most of the people I've known.