

*Hurricane Floyd Disaster Assistance*

Q. Mr. President, a lot of the frustration of the people in New Jersey over the flood situation is that—a lot of them have said this to me—is that when natural disasters occur, one, they're given grants very quickly, but they're saying, "Hey, here we are in the United States, and we have to deal with loans, SBA loans, and keep waiting and waiting."

The President. That's why I gave this community development block grant money early, because this money can be used as grants to do this kind of work. And I've been following this very closely. We spend a lot of money, if you will, in grants in America, but most of it is in repairing public facilities and in helping people get through immediate emergencies, which is about all we can do overseas as well. But

under unusual circumstances, we've seen this in other places.

In North Dakota, when they had that terrible flood—you remember in Grand Forks—we were able to release some community development block grant funds, which they were able to use not only for individuals but also for businesses who were so devastated that the low-interest loans were not enough.

So I'm hoping that this announcement I've made today will respond directly to what I have heard from the people of New Jersey needs to be done.

NOTE: The President spoke at 6:37 p.m. at Newark International Airport. In his remarks, he referred to Gov. Pedro Rosselló of Puerto Rico. A tape was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

Remarks at a New Jersey Democratic Assembly Dinner in Elizabeth, New Jersey  
October 18, 1999

Thank you. Well, first of all, ladies and gentlemen, let me say I'm delighted to be here in Ray Lesniak's humble home. [Laughter] It's a beautiful place; we have a beautiful tent. It's a gorgeous New Jersey evening. When I got out of the airplane at the Newark airport and I looked up in the sky, it was just so beautiful, and I was so glad to be here.

I thank Representative Menendez for being here and for his friendship and support and his representation of you in the Congress. I thank Mayor Bollwage for hosting us; and my good friend Mayor Sharpe James, who is the only big city mayor in America who's also in the State Assembly—in the State Senate—it's liable to start a trend—[laughter]—which if you're a Democrat would be a very good thing to do. [Laughter] So, Sharpe, I think at the next mayors' conference you ought to suggest to all of our other mayors they should run for the State Senate or the State Assembly. It would be a good thing.

Chairman Giblin, thank you for your work. Senator Codey, Assemblywoman Weinberg, and to all the other members of the Assembly here, all the other mayors that are here. Mr. Corzine,

thank you for being here and for offering yourself for public office.

I got tickled, you know, I'm always learning about New Jersey, and I love it. What Ray didn't say was that we had the biggest improvement in our vote in the margin of victory from '92 to '96 in New Jersey of any State in the entire United States of America. And I am so very grateful for that.

So here's what I learned about New Jersey politics tonight. Lesniak, the Pole—[laughter]—introduces Bob Janiszewski. Doria, the Italian, pronounces it properly and calls him Janiszewski. [Laughter] Now, that's because if you're not in the family you've got to be politically correct—[laughter]—but if you are, you want to say the guy's name in the way that can get the most votes. [Laughter] It was fascinating, I loved it.

Let me say, I met—you know, Bob had me, in October of 1991, 8 years ago this month, to the Hudson County Democratic dinner. And I was hoarse; I could barely talk. I thought, you know, I saw this guy, and I didn't know whether he was going to bounce me out of the room or put his arm around me, and as

strong as he is, I might not survive either one. [Laughter] And I wanted so badly to make a good impression, I couldn't even talk. Maybe that's why most of the people there supported me. I don't know. [Laughter]

But since then, the friendships that I have enjoyed here, the support that I have received from here, and the opportunity we've had to work together has meant more to me than I can say. And you've been so good to me, to the Vice President, to our family in the administration. I just can't thank you enough.

You might ask—Joe said, well, I'm the only President that ever came here for the Assembly candidates. Now, if I were running for reelection you might understand that. What am I doing here tonight? Well, if Ray Lesniak asked me to empty my bank account—meager though it is—fly to Alaska to meet him tomorrow morning, I'd probably do it. I feel deeply indebted to him, and I'm glad his wonderful family is here tonight.

But I came here tonight not only out of a sense of gratitude and indebtedness to people like Joe and so many others here who have helped me over the years but also because I think this is quite important. And I'd like to ask you just to take a few minutes with me and think about where our country has come from, where we are now, and where we're going, and how these Assembly races fit into it.

You know, when I ran for President in 1992, it's almost impossible to remember what the country was like. We had high unemployment, stagnant growth, stagnant wages. We had increasing social division; crime was up; welfare was up; all the social problems were up. We had had serious incidents of civil disobedience out in Los Angeles. We had political gridlock in Washington. Our country was divided, and there was no unifying vision that would bring the people together, and it seemed to me that someone ought to run.

And at the time, the incumbent President, Mr. Bush, was at over 70 percent approval in the polls, in the aftermath of the Gulf war. But it seemed to me that somebody ought to run and say, "Look, this country is going through a lot of changes, and we have a lot of challenges and a lot of opportunities. And we're not going to either meet the challenges or seize the opportunities unless we have a vi-

sion that will bring us together and move us forward."

And so I went around the country. I declared—to show you how much frontloaded this process has become, I didn't even declare for President until this month in 1991. This race has been going on ever since my daughter was in diapers, for—this year I think. [Laughter] And I said, "Look, I believe we need to bring this country together around a set of simple values and new ideas: opportunity for all, responsibility from all, and a community of all Americans. I believe we need to look to the future and understand that we can get rid of this deficit and still invest in education, that we can protect the environment and still grow the economy, that we can help labor and business, and that all these either/or choices that have been put on us from Washington for years and years and years will not get us where we want to go."

I also said I thought we needed a new set of partnerships in America between Government and business and labor and between the Federal Government and the State and local government. We needed to focus on empowering our citizens to make the most of their own lives and challenging them to serve in whatever way they could.

All these things were just arguments in '92. And luckily for me and the Vice President, the country gave us a chance. They said, "Okay, we heard your argument. We'll give you a chance." But it's not an argument now. There's evidence. The results are in, and after nearly 7 years in office, we have the longest peacetime expansion in history, 19½ million new jobs, the highest homeownership ever, the lowest unemployment rate in 29 years, the lowest welfare rolls in 30 years, the lowest poverty rates in 20 years, the lowest crime rates in 26 years, the lowest murder rate in 32 years, the first back-to-back budget surpluses in 42 years, and we've reduced the size of the Federal Government; it's the smallest it has been in 37 years. It's not an argument anymore. We're going in the right direction.

And along the way, we proved you didn't have to give up other things. The air is cleaner; the water is cleaner; the food is safer. We've set aside more land and protected it than any administration in the history of this country, except those of Franklin and Theodore Roosevelt. We've immunized 90 percent of our children

against serious diseases for the very first time. A hundred and fifty thousand young Americans have now served in AmeriCorps. The HOPE scholarship and other financial aid have virtually opened the doors of college to all Americans who are willing to work for it. And 15 million Americans have taken advantage of the family and medical leave law.

Now, the question before America in the elections of 1999 and 2000 is what are we going to do now? Where are we going now? Are we going to say, "Well, we're doing so well, we can indulge ourselves in petty politics and meanness and just power positioning of the moment?" Or are we going to say, "Hey, this is the chance of a lifetime. Once in a lifetime a country is in this kind of shape—a great country, leading the world—and we have to use this once in a lifetime chance to basically build the 21st century of our dreams for our children and our grandchildren and for a safer and more prosperous world?"

In order to do that, we have to challenge the American people, and you have to challenge the people of New Jersey to think big and to be big. I know what I think the big challenges are. And when I tell you, you'll see why I'm here tonight.

One, we have to take care of the aging of America. The number of people over 65 in this country will double in the next 30 years. I hope to live to be one of them. *[Laughter]* When that happens, there'll only be two people working for every one person drawing Social Security. So meeting the challenges of the aging of America requires us to do a number of things.

Number one, to save Social Security and stretch out the life of the Trust Fund until it encompasses a life expectancy of all the baby boomers. That's worth fighting for.

Number two, to save and reform Medicare and add a prescription drug benefit. To let people between the ages of 55 and 65 buy into Medicare, because people who lose their health insurance at that age almost never find another job with the same sort of health care guarantees. We ought to have a long-term care tax credit. That's a tax cut I wish my Republican friends would embrace, because so many families are having to take care of their parents or disabled relatives in long-term care.

The second thing we've got to do is meet the challenge of our children. We have more children from more diverse backgrounds by far

than at any time in our history, in State after State after State, not just in places like New Jersey and New York and California. My State, Arkansas, is one of the top two States in America in the percentage growth of Hispanic children in our schools. Our whole country is becoming more diverse. And yet we know that, while we have the best system of colleges and universities in the world, we do not give all of our children a world-class education.

We need higher standards, and we need more support. If we're going to have no social promotion, which I favor, we also should have summer school and after-school programs for the kids who need it; 100,000 teachers for smaller classes, which gives great results, and every classroom in this country should be hooked up to the Internet. And we ought to build or modernize thousands and thousands of schools. And if my initiative passed, we could help you get that done here in New Jersey.

So, the aging of America and the children of America; the third big challenge we have is to help the families of America in an age where almost everybody with children is also working. I think we need to broaden the reach of the family leave law. I think we need to toughen the enforcement of equal pay for equal work. It is still not a reality. Women still don't get equal pay, and that is very, very important. I'm the only guy that I know made less money than his wife every year we were married until I became President. *[Laughter]* This is something I'm doing for the rest of you. *[Laughter]* I feel very strongly about it.

We ought to pass the patients' protection bill. We ought to do more for child care for working families. We ought to raise the minimum wage. These things are important. We ought to expand health care coverage, especially to children of lower income working people.

The fourth thing we've got to do, I believe, is to set as a national goal that we're going to make America the safest big country in the world. Yes, the crime rate is the lowest in 26 years. That's good. The murder rate is the lowest in 32 years. In spite of these horrible school shootings, children are less likely to be killed today than they were 7 years ago. I'm proud of that. But does anybody seriously believe this country is as safe as it ought to be? And if it's not, why should we stop until America is the safest big country in the world?

Now, I have a proposal to put 50,000 more police on the street—the first 100,000 did a good job—and to put them in the highest crime areas of the country. The Democrats in Washington, we're trying to pass proposals for reasonable gun restriction, for child safety locks, for closing the gun show loophole, which has no background checks at gun shows and urban flea markets, and doing a number of other things. But we shouldn't stop. We shouldn't say we're satisfied with where it is, because we shouldn't be.

The next thing we ought to do is to make this economy work for all Americans. You know as well as I do that right here in New Jersey there are people and places that have not been touched by this economic recovery. We've worked very hard on this. The Vice President has run our remarkably successful empowerment zone program. But we want to double the number of those empowerment zones, and we want to make sure that with our new markets initiative that people who have money to invest get the same financial incentives to invest in poor neighborhoods in America we give them to invest in poor neighborhoods in Latin America, in Africa, in Asia, and throughout the world. Because people here who want to go to work ought to have a chance. If we don't do something now, when our economy is so prosperous and when our unemployment rate is so low to give people who don't have work the chance to have it, we will never get around to it. Now is the time to do that.

Let me just say one other thing, maybe in some ways the biggest idea of all. People are asking me all the time if we've repealed the business cycle, because we now have the longest peacetime expansion in history. We haven't. But one of the things we know is that if we keep an open economy and we keep competing and this technological revolution continues and we educate more and more of our people, we'll do better. But you all know that one of the reasons we're doing better is because we took a \$290 billion deficit and turned it in to \$115 billion surplus, and that drove down interest rates, and it increased investment; it increased jobs; it increased incomes; it lowered home mortgage rates; it lowered college loan rates; it lowered car interest payment rates and credit card rates. It made us more prosperous.

If my plan in Washington is adopted, to save Social Security and Medicare, it will enable us

to pay down the debt over the next 15 years, so that 15 years from now this country could be out of debt for the very first time since—listen to this—Andrew Jackson was President in 1835. Now, why should the nominally more liberal party be for getting us out of debt? Because it's good for poor people who want jobs; it's good for middle class people who want affordable credit; it will give us a stronger, longer-running prosperity. And when we do get into trouble, it won't be nearly as bad as it otherwise would have been. And I hope every Democrat will stand up for that and stick up for that. That's why I vetoed that Republican tax bill, because we never would have gotten out of debt and we wouldn't have had any money left to invest in education and health care and the environment.

I'll just mention two other things real briefly, because they don't bear on you quite so much. One is, I think the most important thing we can do is keep working to build one America, to keep working to reach across the lines that divide us. The more complicated, the more diverse we get, the more we ought to be lifting up and celebrating our differences and making a little fun of them, like I did tonight—*[laughter]*—and enjoying it but also reaffirming our common humanity.

When you see all these hate crimes we have—Matthew Shepard killed in Wyoming because he was gay; James Byrd dragged apart in Texas because he was black; a Filipino postalworker shot in California by a man who just got through shooting at Jewish children at a Jewish community school; an African-American basketball coach and a young Korean Christian killed walking out of his church in the Middle West by a man who belonged to a church that said he didn't believe in God, he believed—the church believed in white supremacy.

When you see all this stuff it is just sort of the most egregious example in America of the problems that all of us have in looking at people who are different from us and feeling fear or misunderstanding. And when those things are not dealt with, they can lead quite easily to hatred, which can lead to dehumanization, which in the most egregious examples, can lead to killing. And it's not just America. It's all over the world. What am I working on in the Middle East or Ireland or to try to stop tribal wars in Africa or in Bosnia and Kosovo? All over the world, we are still, on the verge

of this most modern of ages, we're bedeviled by fear of the other.

We had a fascinating—Hillary has organized eight different Millennium Evenings at the White House, where we bring in brilliant people to come talk about various things and then put it out over the Internet, all over the country and all over the world. Last week we had two guys come in and talk. It was the most fascinating thing you ever saw. One of them helped to develop the architecture of the Internet. The other one was an expert in the human genome project. And they talked about how computers made it possible to unlock the mystery of the human genes and together would make it possible to do things like put little computer chips in any part of our body that's broken someday and have the chip emit electronic impulses which would, for example, take the place of damaged nerves. It was fascinating.

But what the geneticist said is interesting. He said that all human beings, from a genetic point of view, are 99.9 percent the same, and that the genetic differences among groups of people—that is, within them are greater than the genetic differences of the group as a whole with any other group. So that among Poles, Italians, Latinos, and African-Americans, within each of those groups, the genetic differences are different than on average the genetic differences of one group are from another. We have got to get over this notion that we define our lives in terms of being better than somebody who is in some other group. And it's a huge issue.

The last thing I want to say—you mentioned the test ban treaty. I have done everything I could from the first day I got here to try to lead the world to a point where we could take advantage of the good things going on and beat back the threats of tomorrow. What are the threats? The spread of nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons; the growth of terrorism, organized crime, and drug running and the groups working more and more together. What are the opportunities? Expanding trade, expanding communications.

One of my big struggles with the Congress is that they don't agree with a lot of this. But I just want you to know one thing about the test ban treaty. Everybody is for it when you hear about it. Then they can get a lot of people to say, "Well, I don't know if I'm for it because," they say, "why should America sign a

nuclear test ban treaty when other people can cheat?"

The answer is, the treaty makes it harder to cheat. Because if we get the treaty, we get over 300 supersophisticated sensors that we put out all over the world, in all the critical places, which catch people cheating. If we don't sign it, it's harder and harder to know whether people are testing or not; and even if they do, they're not violating any rules, because we walked away.

Now, that's what I think. Deal with the aging of America. Deal with the children of America. Deal with the families of America. Make us the safest big country in the world. Get us out of debt and give poor people a chance to be a part of this economy. Make us one America, and keep leading the world. That's what I think.

Now, look at the Republicans' position. On Social Security, they have an act to save Social Security or reform Medicare, and they say there won't be any prescription drug benefit this year. On education, they're against voluntary tests; they're against our no-social-promotion policy; they won't give us 100,000 teachers; and they sure won't give us any funds to help you to build or modernize your schools. On the family issues, they're against expanding family leave; they haven't supported equal pay; they're sure against the Patients' Bill of Rights, the leadership; and they haven't helped us expand child care. On the crime issue, they were against putting 100,000 police on the street, and they're against putting 50,000 more. And you know where they are on the gun issues. On the economy, the tax cut would have taken away the possibility of getting us out of debt. On one America, they're against the hate crimes bill, the employment nondiscrimination bill. And on world leadership, it's not just the comprehensive test ban; they won't pay our U.N. dues; they're against our doing our part to combat climate change; and they're against adequately funding our national security. I vetoed a bill today for foreign operations which doesn't have any money to meet our obligations to the Middle East peace process, any money to increase our efforts to diminish the nuclear threats that still exist in Russia, any money to help pay off the debts of the poor countries that the Pope and everybody else has begged the rich countries of the world to do in the year 2000.

Now, what has all this got to do with the New Jersey Assembly? Plenty. Because if you

look at these things—the children, the seniors, the families, whether the economy works, how the education system works, whether we’ve got safe streets, and whether we’re coming together instead of drifting apart—a lot of that work is done at the State level. Joe has already talked about it but, you know, I’m proud to come here because you’re trying to pass a meaningful patients’ protection bill that not only has the right to sue but also has an ombudsman to look over how the managed care system works.

Now, I have a right to say this because I have never condemned managed care, per se. But do you know when I proposed the Patients’ Bill of Rights, 43 managed care companies came to me and said, “Mr. President, we’re interested in these principles. We think they ought to be the law. But you don’t understand; you have got to pass a law, because if we try to do this on our own, we’ll lose our shirt if our competitors undercut us. They’ll take all the healthy people and not charge them anything and leave us with all the problems. There needs to be a law here.”

I’m here because New Jersey’s Democrats are trying to pass child-proof gun legislation, which is very important. I’m here because you believe in progressive, not regressive, taxation—and I know about your fight there—and because of what you’ve done in education. Keep in mind, this only works if there is a partnership.

Now, my Republican predecessors talked a lot about partnerships, but we have eliminated

more regulations on the State—two-thirds of all the Department of Education regulations. We have turned over more programs to the State than my two predecessors combined. But if it’s going to work, you have to have the right people in the State government.

So I ask you, again, think about what you want the new century to look like for your kids and your grandkids. Think about the obligation we have with this chance of a lifetime. Do what you can to stick with us nationally but also at the State level. And if you do what you ought to do in these elections, you will send a loud message to America that we are moving in the right direction for tomorrow.

Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 7:30 p.m. in an outdoor tent at a private residence. In his remarks, he referred to State Senator Raymond J. Lesniak, dinner host; Mayor J. Christian Bollwage of Elizabeth; Mayor Sharpe James of Newark, NJ; Thomas Giblin, chairman, and Robert C. Janiszewski, Hudson County chairman, Democratic State Committee; State Senator Richard J. Codey; State Assembly members Loretta Weinberg and Joseph V. Doria, Jr., who introduced the President; Jon S. Corzine, former chief executive officer, Goldman Sachs; Vinton G. Cerf, senior vice president of Internet architecture and technology, MCI WorldCom; and Eric Lander, director, Whitehead Institute/MIT Center for Genome Research.

## Remarks to the Voices Against Violence Conference

October 19, 1999

Thank you. Good morning. I think Rebecca Hunter did a wonderful job with her pledge and with her introduction, don’t you? Let’s give her another hand. [Applause] I thought she was great.

I would like to begin by thanking our House Democratic leader, Dick Gephardt, and all others who were involved in this Voices Against Violence meeting. I want to thank Congressmen Frost, Bonior, DeLauro, Clement, and Menendez, who are over here to my left. And I see Representative Capps out there. There may be

more Members of Congress here. I thank all of them for being here.

I would like to thank our Secretary of Education, Dick Riley, who came with me; Jeff Bleich, who runs our national grassroots campaign against youth violence. And I’d like to thank Ananda Lewis of MTV and all the other organizations who are working to help make this a safer place for all of you. I thank the parents, the teachers, and the chaperons who came here with you today.