

Remarks at a Reception for Senator Tim Johnson *December 7, 1999*

Thank you very much, ladies and gentlemen, I'm honored to be here. I was trying to think of some one thing I could say that would illustrate the esteem in which I hold Tim Johnson and Barbara, and how valuable they are to the United States Senate. And I think that the best example is that Pat Moynihan and I are here, and we're not running for anything. *[Laughter]* We're here because we like and admire Tim Johnson, and we think he should be reelected, and we appreciate what he's done.

I enjoyed meeting all of you when you went through the line and we had a chance to visit. A lot of you expressed various concerns, which I appreciate. I want to thank Vic Fazio and Jim Slattery for coming. They served in the House with Tim; they were there when I became President. And I want to thank all of you for being here.

I just want to say a couple of serious words in this holiday season. First, our country is greatly blessed. We have been very fortunate. Last week I announced that we went over 20 million jobs since January of 1993, the most rapid job growth we've ever had and the longest peacetime economic expansion in our history.

It is now commonly agreed that the strength and the duration of this expansion was propelled by the 1993 vote that Congress took on a strict party line vote, much to my regret, in favor of the economic package I presented, which reduced the deficit dramatically, put us in a position to pass the Balanced Budget Act of '97, and has now given us the first back-to-back surpluses we've had in 42 years, low interest rates, high investment, and an amazing run of economic growth.

Tim Johnson was in the House. He knew he wanted to run for the Senate. It was an immensely controversial vote. Everybody that took it was told by our Republican friends that it would bring the economy crashing down and be the end of civilization as we knew it. And they were wrong, and he was right. But he couldn't have known at the time, when he put his political life on the line, that it would all come out the way it has. And I wouldn't be here, if for no other reason than that. If it hadn't been for his vote—we passed it by one

vote in the House and the Senate; if it hadn't been for his vote, we wouldn't be here tonight. And if we were here, we wouldn't be nearly so well off as most of you are. So thank you, Senator, for what you did.

I also want to thank Tim for his devotion to using this moment, which is truly remarkable. At least in my lifetime, our country has never had these conditions where we've had as much economic prosperity and as much social progress. In addition to the economic statistics, which you all know, we have a 25-year low in crime, a 30-year low in welfare rolls, a 20-year low in poverty; the lowest African-American and Hispanic unemployment rates ever recorded; the lowest female unemployment rate in America in 40 years; the lowest poverty rate among—single-parent households poverty rate in 40 years. We are moving forward. And this is the first time we've ever had these conditions with the absence of internal crisis and external threat.

And I think it imposes a great challenge on us, because very often individuals, families, businesses, and nations are most likely to mess up at times of great prosperity and high comfort, because it's easy to be distracted, it's easy to be divided, it's easy to take your eye off the ball.

You know, Samuel Johnson said that nothing concentrates the mind so much as the prospect of your own destruction. The flip side of that is also true: It's easy to lose your concentration when things are going very well. And I just want to say to all of you, I think it's very important that we look at the big challenges facing this country: that we save Social Security beyond the life of the baby boom generation; that we extend the life of Medicare and add a prescription drug benefit to the 75 percent of our seniors that don't have adequate prescription drug coverage; that we do something to give economic opportunity to the people and places that have been left behind in this country, like the Native Americans in Senator Johnson's home State that he has shown such remarkable concern for; that we deal with the long-term challenges of the environment in a way that continues to grow this economy—a lot of you are involved in that; I talked to some of you about

ethanol production tonight; we're about to get the science worked out, we get the technology worked out to reduce the number of gallons of gasoline it takes to make more gallons of ethanol; you're going to see an explosion there that will change the whole economic and environmental future of the United States—that we continue to press for peace and reconciliation and the reduction of the threats of weapons of mass destruction around the world.

Many people here tonight are Pakistani-Americans. I told somebody about 4 months ago that we were making progress on peace in Ireland, progress on peace in the Middle East, progress on peace in the Balkans. But the two places that I have been stymied, since I became President, were in relationships between Greece and Turkey and relationships between India and Pakistan. And just a couple of weeks ago the Greeks and the Turks announced they were going to have talks on Cyprus, and in a few days they're going to meet and discuss whether they will accept Turkey as a candidate for the European Union. So that leaves Kashmir. [Laughter]

And let me say to all of you, and to my good friend Senator Moynihan, who, in one of his many former lives, was our Ambassador to India—I have told many people this—of all the hundreds—we literally have in America now representatives of well over 150 different ethnic groups, I think something like 185. In education

and income, Pakistanis and Indians rank in the top five. They often meet together, work together, do things together in the United States. The Indian subcontinent would have a limitless potential for the 21st century if the differences between the two nations could be reconciled. There would be less need to spend vast amounts of money on military expenditures and more funds available for education, for social development, for all kinds of challenges that are out there facing people. So I look forward to making a real stab at that next year, and I see some hopeful signs there. But many of you can help, and we need your help.

The last thing I want to say is that in this coming election season, which is already well underway, I think it's very important that we not forget that we all still have to do the people's business. We all get paid; we're expected to show up for work every day. And I expect to accomplish a great deal next year, with the help of Senator Johnson and Senator Moynihan. And I am comforted by the thought that when term limits take me away, he'll still be here, thanks to you.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 7:55 p.m. at the Westin Fairfax Hotel. In his remarks, he referred to Senator Johnson's wife, Barbara, and former Representatives Vic Fazio and Jim Slattery.

Remarks at a "Keep Hope Alive" Reception

December 7, 1999

The President. Thank you so much. Mark, thank you for this evening. Reverend Meeks, Dennis, all the distinguished business and labor leaders in the audience, and my many friends: Berry, Willie, so many others.

Thank you, Smokey, for being here and for singing for Stevie at the Kennedy Center Honors the other night. You were magnificent. Thank you so much.

Reverend, thanks for bringing your whole family here, except for those who had to have babies and read books tonight. [Laughter] Santita thanks for the music; it was magnificent,

as always. And Jackie, thank you for being my friend and my inspiration.

And I want to thank your mother for all the things that Jesse said. But I want you to know, I've been in public life now—well, I started running for—I ran for my first office almost 26 years ago. I have talked to tens of thousands of people. I've shaken hundreds of thousands, maybe over a million hands now. And Grandma, you're the only person, ever, who came up and complimented me on quoting Machiavelli in a speech, in my whole life, ever. [Laughter] She said, "Every smart politician reads that fellow." [Laughter]