

demonstrate conclusively its commitment to take its rightful place in Europe.

I would like to express my admiration to Greek Prime Minister Simitis for his statesmanship and groundbreaking efforts with Mr. Ecevit to improve relations between Greece and Turkey, efforts which were key to bringing about this momentous development.

Finally, I want to congratulate all the members of the European Union for their decision and to express my support for their vision of a Europe stronger and more united for its embrace of diversity. In particular, Finnish Prime Minister Lipponen deserves credit for his hard work and skill in helping to bring about this extraordinary achievement.

Remarks at a Reception for Representative Alcee L. Hastings in Fort Lauderdale, Florida

December 11, 1999

The President. Thank you very much. Whoa! You will have to forgive me; you can hear that I have a cold, and so I can't talk very loud. So if you talk, I can't talk. If you like my speech very much, I can't talk, because I can't get over all the cheers. But let me say to all of you, first of all, I want to thank the Keiser family and the leadership of this college for welcoming us here. I want to thank the president of the student body, Dean Samuels, who met me and gave me a gift from the students.

I believe in the audience we have, in addition to Representative Hastings, another candidate for Congress on our ticket in an adjacent district, State Representative Elaine Bloom. I think she's here, and there she is. I want you guys to help her.

Let me say to all of you, I have had a wonderful day in Florida. I don't think I ever had a bad day in Florida. This is the first time I've ever been in Florida in my life that I've been sick, and I had a good day in spite of it, because, this morning, I went up to Orlando to the Democratic State Convention. Now, I attended the Democratic State Convention in Florida in 1981 and in 1983 and in 1987, when I was just a Governor and a friend of your Governor's, and they were good enough to invite me. And I always had a big time, and Hillary had two brothers living down here then, and I was always looking for a reason to come and always learning about what was going on in Florida, and thinking, this is the beginning of what will happen in America.

So, anyway, 8 years ago this week—8 years ago—in December of 1991 Hillary and I came down to the Florida Democratic Convention,

which was holding the first election of the primary season, a straw poll. I was running fifth—fifth—in the country in the primaries at the time, but I got over 50 percent in the Florida Democratic straw poll. And it's been all uphill ever since, thanks to all of you, and I'm very grateful.

Now, I'm glad to be here tonight with Alcee Hastings, and I'll tell you why and ask you to help Elaine Bloom. Because I know the President sometimes gets the blame when things go wrong, but the President also gets the credit when things go right. And you heard Alcee talking about all those good things. I want to run over them again in a minute for you, but the good things that have happened here to the American people would not have happened had I not had the support of the Democrats in Congress, particularly those that were really strong-willed and outspoken, that had influenced the others, and Alcee Hastings is such a leader in the United States Congress.

And I want you to know that his influence extends beyond the Florida delegation, beyond the Congressional Black Caucus, because he is an intelligent man; because he cares about the rest of the world; because he believes that you can care about the education of our children and saving Medicare and Social Security for our seniors and protecting the Florida environment, and still care about decency and humanity all around the world and the end of not only racism at home but racial and ethnic and religious hatred all around the world. He is one of the most exceptional people in the House of Representatives, and I want you to help him.

Now, I'm going to give a short speech so I don't lose my voice, but you're more likely to remember it. I've got 14 months left, and then you're going to have an election to chart America's course in a new millennium. Here's what I want to say to you about it.

We just passed the first budget of the 21st century. We got 100,000 teachers for smaller classes in the early grades. We got 50,000 more police to keep the crime rate coming down. We got 60,000 more housing vouchers to help poor people move from welfare to work. We've doubled the number of after-school programs to help kids stay in school and learning and out of trouble. We gave States for the first time help to help turn around or shut down schools that are failing our children, because all our schools can do better. We moved forward on the environment. We paid our dues to the U.N. We gave debt relief to the very poorest countries in the world. We are moving forward.

Then, there's a lot of stuff we didn't do that I want to next year: the Patients' Bill of Rights, the minimum wage increase, the hate crimes legislation.

We had a great year in foreign policy. You know, I'm Irish. We saw the completion of the Irish peace process this year, and I'm very happy about that. And just last week, I announced that—earlier this week, a couple of days ago—that next week Israel and Syria will resume their peace negotiations in Washington, DC, in a couple of days.

So we're going to keep working to the last hour of the last day. But I want you to step back a minute, because what happens in these congressional elections, whether Bill Nelson gets elected United States Senator from Florida, whether Elaine Bloom gets elected United States Representative from Florida, whether we hold the White House—and I believe we will—but it all depends on—I wish I could be more whoop-dee-doo. I'm doing the best I can. It all depends on what the voters think the election is about.

Now, I want you to remember this. We put in our economic program in 1993, and the Vice President broke the tie in the Congress, and the Republicans said it would be a disaster. Now, we have 20 million jobs, the longest peacetime expansion in history, the lowest unemployment rate in 30 years, the lowest welfare rolls in 32 years, the lowest poverty rates in 20 years, the lowest African-American and His-

panic unemployment rates ever recorded, the lowest female unemployment rate in 40 years. Now, that's the first thing.

The second thing I want to say is, we have the lowest crime rate in 25 years; 90 percent of our kids immunized against serious childhood diseases for the first time in history; over 2 million more kids covered under the Children's Health Insurance Program. We've cleaned up 3 times as many toxic waste dumps as the predecessor administrations, both of them. And we now have the lowest output of waste that is terribly damaging to the environment that we've had in 20 years. Twenty years ago we had 50 million fewer people.

We've had 150,000 young people serve this country in AmeriCorps, 7 million young people take advantage of the HOPE scholarship to go on to community college and to other college education. We've had 10 million people get the benefit of the minimum wage, and over 20 million get the benefit of the family and medical leave law. This is a better, stronger, more together country than it was 7 years ago.

But what I want to say—I'll stay the course. I want you to stay the course. And then what I want you to do—wait, wait—what I want you to do is go out here and find your fellow Floridians who may not be Democrats, who may not be voters, and not only do I want you to stay the course; I want you to teach the course.

You know, we had an idea that we ought to have a country with opportunity for all, responsibility from all, and a community of all Americans. And almost everything that we fought for we were opposed by the leaders of the other party. And I've been willing to work with them. And when we've worked with them, I've always given them credit for what they've done. But I think we have proved that we're a stronger country when we go forward together across racial lines.

So what are they trying to give you in Florida? Mr. Connerly wants to come here and try to abolish affirmative action when we've proved that going forward with affirmative action in the right way strengthens the economy and the society and makes us all better off. So I want you to think about that.

So the first thing I want you to tell folks is it's not like we don't have evidence here. It's not like there's no evidence about which approach works. I'll never forget how the NRA went after Congressmen in States like Florida

after we passed the Brady bill and I signed it, because my predecessor vetoed it. And they told the awfulest stories about how people are going to lose their guns. Well, 470,000 felons, fugitives, and stalkers did lose their handguns, but not a single Florida hunter missed a day of hunting season because of it. They did not tell the truth about that. This is a safer country because of it.

Okay, so here's the issue. What's the election about? What's the election about? In my lifetime—in my lifetime—there has never been this much economic prosperity, social progress, national self-confidence, with the absence of a domestic crisis or a foreign threat. It has never happened. So what's the election about? It's about what we're going to do with that.

What do we propose to do with our prosperity? The Republicans gave us their answer in the last session of Congress when they passed a tax cut so large it would have prohibited us from saving Social Security and Medicare and prohibited us from ever paying down the national debt.

But when I vetoed it, the American people supported me, and Alcee supported me, and the Democrats in Congress supported me because they said, "No, no, no, that's not what we're going to do with our prosperity. What we're going to do with our prosperity is ask ourselves an honest question: What do we want America to look like in 10, 20, and 30 years? How are we going to build the America of our dreams for our children? What are the big challenges out there?" And let me just tell you what I think they are.

Number one, you've got to deal with the aging of America. You've got to save Social Security and Medicare for the baby boom generation, add a prescription drug benefit, let people over 55 buy into Medicare if they don't have health insurance. We've got to do this. We have got to do this. I'm telling you, every baby boomer I know is plagued by the thought that our retirement will burden our children and their ability to raise our grandchildren. Now, we've got the money now, folks, to take the Social Security Trust Fund out beyond the life of the baby boom generation, and we ought to do it.

Look at these young people. Look at the young people that are here, 18 to 23 or 24, the young people in that age group. Do you really think when they get old enough to have their children and they start raising families that

they should be burdened in what they can do for their children because they're having to take care of us, their parents, when there is no earthly excuse for it?

All we have to do is take the savings that we get from paying down the debt with the Social Security surplus and put those interest savings into the Trust Fund, and it will take it out beyond the life of the baby boom generation—no controversy, no heat, no nothing. We ought to do it, and we ought to do it next year.

The second thing we ought to do is to deal with the children of America. Ironically, we're growing at both ends, in our elderly and in our children. We've got the largest number of school children in our schools in our history. They are the most racially, ethnically, and religiously diverse school children in our history, and every one of them deserves a world-class education, and we ought to give it to them.

The third thing we ought to do is take a different approach to crime. Now, you all clapped when I said we had the lowest crime rate in 25 years; we've got the lowest murder rate in 31 years. Does anyone here think the crime rate is low enough?

Audience members. No!

The President. No. Now, when I became President, nobody thought we could get the crime rate down. They thought the crime rate went in one direction only—up. Okay, now we know it goes down. I propose that in the year 2000 we have a decent goal. We say we're going to keep working till America is the safest big country in the world.

I believe there are lots of other things I could say—and I'm trying to save the Everglades, you know—and I just want to say this one thing about the environment. The young people here, if they're going to have the kind of America they deserve, are going to have to accept the fact that you can improve the environment and grow the economy at the same time. And as soon as we—look, since I became President, the air's cleaner; the water's cleaner. We've set aside more land than any administration except those of Franklin and Theodore Roosevelt. We've cleaned up all these dumps. Let me tell you something. We better start thinking that we should be improving the environment as we grow the economy, not destroying the environment as we grow the economy.

But the last thing I want to say is this. I'll just give you one other. You ought to go home tonight and ask yourself what you think the big challenges are. Go home and make your own list. But I'll tell you, if somebody said to me tonight, "Well, Mr. President, you don't have 14 more months; you've got to leave tomorrow. But I'm the genie, and I'll give you one wish. You can do anything for America you want, but only one." What I would choose is for us to be one America, across all the lines that divide us, for two reasons. First of all, we'll never be what we ought to be as long as we still have hate crimes where some guy in the Midwest that belongs to a church he says doesn't believe in God but believes in white supremacy, goes out and kills in rapid succession an African-American former college basketball coach, and then kills a Korean Christian walking out of his church; an angry guy out in Los Angeles shoots a bunch of Jewish kids going to a church school, a synagogue school, and then goes out and murders a Filipino postman, and the guy thought he had a two-fer: he had an Asian and somebody who worked for the Federal Government; James Byrd gets dragged to death in Texas; Matthew Shepard gets put on a rack.

Yesterday, all over America, there were gripping pictures of these two young soldiers, one 21, one 18. The 21-year-old, a gay soldier who the 18-year-old beat to death with a baseball bat. And I thought to myself, looking at these two young boys—keep in mind, I look at them in a certain way not only because they're young enough to be my own sons, but because I have a lot of your sons under my command. Those young men, when they put on that uniform—both of them—when they put on that uniform, they basically took an oath that says, "If Bill Clinton tells me to, I will go halfway around the world to fight and die." That's what it means. Let's not kid. That's what it means.

So here are these two kids. They make the same pledge. They've got their whole lives before them. One of them is dead, and the other one's life is ruined. And frankly, I ached for both of them. And the young boy that murdered the other one because he was gay, he wasn't born feeling that way; somebody taught him to do that. So that's the last thing I want to tell you.

You guys are smart. That's why I always say what government ought to do is create the conditions: get rid of the debt; give people the same incentives to invest in poor areas we give them to invest in poor areas in Latin America and Asia and Africa; give people empowerment, and they will do the job. But, first and foremost, we must be one America.

That is also the way we can have the biggest influence in resolving the crisis in the Middle East, in Kosovo, in Bosnia, the tribal warfare in Africa, you name it. This old world is still burdened down with people that can't get along without hating somebody who is different from them. And we all know better. We all know better.

So I tell you, if you go out there and you make the subject of the election the record of the last 7 years and what are we going to do with our prosperity—and the answer is, we're going to deal with the aging of America, the children of America, make America the safest big country in the world, put America out of debt for the first time since 1835, bring genuine economic opportunity to the poorest people in the country, and be one America—we will come home next time, too.

Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 6:50 p.m. in the auditorium at Keiser College. In his remarks, he referred to Ward Connerly, chairman, California civil rights initiative.

Remarks at a Unity Reception in Coral Gables, Florida *December 11, 1999*

Thank you very much. Thank you, Gene. Thank you, ladies and gentlemen. I hope you'll forgive me if I'm a little hoarse. I've been battling a big cold today. I've had an amazing few

days. A couple of days ago we announced that we were going to start the peace talks again, after 4 years of hiatus, between Israel and Syria, and it's been a wonderful thing. And then I