

And when I think of those big questions and I think about the handful of people that I know in this town that I feel most comfortable making those decisions, she's one of them. And I also like to make her blush. *[Laughter]*

And this is the last thing I want to say to you. You know, on the one hand, I hope the American people will be more relaxed about this election than sometimes I fear they are when you see all these hysterical ads. And some of the things that happened, particularly in the other party's primary, just sent me around the bend. *[Laughter]* But I hope they will also be more serious.

I mean, I'd like to see—you know, Governor Bush made a serious proposal today about what he thought ought to be done on missile defense and other stuff. And Al Gore's got a serious proposal. How will the American people that don't think about this all the time know what to do unless they get together and discuss it? They made different proposals on Social Security and Medicare. They ought to get together and talk about it.

But the thing I want to say to you is in addition to being here for Ellen, because a lot of you come from other parts of the country, you need to make sure that everybody you talk to understands that the consequences of this election are just as significant as they were in '92, when the country was in the doldrums, or in '96, when they had to decide whether to ratify the direction we were taking.

And sometimes it is a sterner test of character to make the far-sighted decision when times are good than when they're bad. When times are bad, you don't have to be a genius to know you've got to do something different. *[Laughter]* You don't have to be smart as a tree full of owls to know that you've got to figure out what in the world you're going to do and go forward. *[Laughter]* When times are good, you know, people just sort of drift off and say, "Well, that

sounds nice, and that sounds nice," or, "Maybe I'll stay home and do something else." I'm telling you, this is a big deal.

Once in a lifetime a country finds itself in the position we're in now. And I do want you to be relaxed and have a good time, but you've got to understand, if we squander this opportunity, you have no earthly idea how long America will have to wait for it to come back around again, no earthly idea how long you'll have to wait for Members of Congress like Ellen and Steny and Karen and Cal to be able to go there and debate how to build the future of our dreams for our children, instead of how to throw the water out of a leaking, sinking boat.

And there's not a soul here over 30 years old that can't cite one time in your life when you have made a serious personal or professional mistake not because things were so terrible but because things were so good you thought there were no consequences to breaking your concentration.

So that's the other thing I want to say. Every day between now and November, if you talk to somebody about anything like this, you remind them: This is a big deal. This is not just the first election of the millennium in calendar terms. It is the first election in psychological and political terms as well.

We have not been in this shape in my lifetime. We may not get here again, and we'd better make the most of it. Your being here for her shows that you've got a big head start on understanding that.

Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 8:05 p.m. at a private residence. In his remarks, he referred to reception host Katherine Tauscher, daughter of Representative Tauscher; President Chen Shui-bian of Taiwan; Hong Kong Democratic Party Chair Martin Lee; and Gov. George W. Bush of Texas.

Remarks at a Democratic National Committee Dinner

May 23, 2000

Thank you to the modest Mr. McAuliffe. *[Laughter]* There's one other person I'd like to thank. I'd like to thank Abe Pollin for making

this place available to us tonight. Thank you. And your reward for raising all this money is

that you don't have to listen to me give a long speech tonight. You've heard it all.

But I want you to know that I am profoundly grateful. And when we started this campaign year, I was very, very worried that we would be, in this period between April the 1st and August the 1st, swamped by the Republicans financially. And it didn't work out that way, partly because they had a rather competitive primary. And then the idea—and I've been, as you know, I've been exerting some modest efforts, with a lot of your help, to raise money for our party and for our Senate campaign committee and our House campaign committee.

But this is a truly wonderful thing. You know, we'll still have to go out and raise some hard money and do some things. But this really puts the Democrats in a competitive position between now and November. And the gift you're giving the Vice President is, I think, inestimable, and I'm grateful to you for that.

I just want to say one thing. A lot of you have heard me say this before, but I want to say it one more time: The test of a country when times are good may be more severe than the test when times are tough. We don't know when again in our lifetimes, any of us, we will have at once so much economic prosperity and social progress and national self-confidence.

But there are huge, huge questions out there. We saw today, Governor Bush outlined one. You know, both candidates want to reduce the number of nuclear weapons, but one is not so sure we need either the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty or the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty. Most Americans don't know there's a big difference there and don't understand what that means for their children's lives. But it's huge.

You know, what does national security mean in the early part of the 21st century? How are we going to keep the economy going? And should we pay down the debt, or risk a tax cut that will put us in debt again? What are the consequences of either course? Do you

think you can grow the economy and make the environment better, or do you think that's some sort of a subversive plot to destroy free enterprise? Do you believe that we will have to make further efforts, like employment nondiscrimination and hate crimes legislation, to be one community in the diversity of the 21st century or not? How are we going to put a human face on the global economy? What's the best way to deal with the aging of America? These are big questions.

And I say this repeatedly, but anybody over 30 years old can remember at least one time in your life when you made a huge mistake, personally or professionally, not because times were so bad but because they were so good you thought there was no incentive to concentrate and no consequence to the failure to do so.

This is a major election. I'm grateful for this dinner. I'm grateful that you're honoring me. I'm grateful for your extraordinary efforts and for Terry's indefatigable energy. But the purpose of all this is to build the future of our dreams for our kids. So I want us to have a huge, good time tomorrow night. And then I want us to go out and spend this money in the wisest possible way to make sure that all the work we've done in the last 8 years is not squandered but instead built upon.

And I thank you for helping the Vice President. I believe he is going to win, and I believe he's going to be a wonderful President. But it's going to be a lot more likely after tomorrow night.

Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 8:55 p.m. in the Capital Club at the MCI Center. In his remarks, he referred to Terence McAuliffe, former finance chair, Democratic National Committee; Abe Pollin, owner, National Basketball Association Washington Wizards and MCI Center; and Gov. George W. Bush of Texas.