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Remarks at a Gala for Senator Christopher J. Dodd

June 12, 2000

Thank you very much, Rosa. I want to thank you and Stan for your friendship, and I want to thank you for being graceful enough not to say that in 1980, when Chris Dodd got elected, I became the youngest ex-Governor in the history of America. *[Laughter]*

I want to thank Chris and Jackie for trusting me to get up here at the podium tonight. And Senator Daschle and Senator Lieberman, thank you for what you said and for your friendship. Boy, ol' Bob Dole was great, wasn't he? *[Laughter]* He owes me a lot, Bob Dole does. *[Laughter]* I mean, if it weren't for me, he'd be just like all us gray-haired 50-year-olds; he'd have to pay for his Viagra. *[Laughter]* We've had a lot of fun, Senator Dole and I have, in the last 3½ years. And we had a little fun before. But I appreciate his coming tonight.

And I want to thank Father Fluet for his prayer and his remarks, quoting that wonderful chapter from Matthew. It so captures the political philosophy of Chris Dodd. He did ask me, he said, "You know, Mr. President, they say I only have 3 minutes, and I need more than 3 minutes. Can I have more than 3 minutes?" I said, "You're Chris Dodd's priest. If I could do it, I'd make you a cardinal." I said, "Take whatever you want." *[Laughter]*

It's an amazing crowd of people here tonight, and not all of them want to be Vice President. *[Laughter]* But a lot do. I just want to say, this really says something about Chris Dodd. In addition to Senator Lieberman and Senator Daschle and Representative DeLauro here, we either have now, or we have had—because some of them had to leave and go vote—listen to this: Senator Lautenberg from New Jersey; Senator Reed from Rhode Island; Senator Reid from Nevada; Senator Akaka from Hawaii; Senator Wellstone from Minnesota; Representatives Larson, Maloney, and Gejdenson, obviously from Connecticut; Representative Pelosi from

California, who just came in; Representative Chet Edwards from Texas; Representative Sherrod Brown from Ohio. Those are just the ones I saw.

Now, what does that tell you? They want Chris Dodd's contributor list. *[Laughter]*

I want to say a couple of things very briefly. First, I would like to associate myself with every good thing that's been said about Chris Dodd tonight. I want to thank, on behalf of myself and Hillary, Chris and Jackie for being such good friends, for the private time we've spent together—time playing golf, time just having dinner, time talking about our family, our friends, our dreams.

I want to thank Chris Dodd for making it possible for the first bill I signed as President, over 7 years ago now, to be the family and medical leave law. He introduced me tonight to the woman who, with her child, inspired that law in his mind and heart. I like a person who believes politics is about flesh-and-blood people and how they live, their hopes, their dreams, what they try to make of themselves and their children.

And you may remember that the Democrats had passed that law in the previous administration, and it had been vetoed. And I promised and made it an issue in the '92 campaign. I said, "I want to sign this bill. I want it to be the first bill I sign." And I listened to all that whining about how, you know, this is going to be a terrible burden on small business, and we were going to bankrupt the economy, and how awful it would be.

And 7½ years later and 22-plus million jobs later, we've set records for small business formation in every year, and over 20 million of our fellow citizens—over 20 million—have been able to take a little time off when a baby was born or a parent was sick, thanks to the fact that Chris Dodd didn't give up in the face of a

veto, an opposition, and all that rhetoric. It changed America.

And I believe that one of the things we ought to be doing with our prosperity now is building on the work he did with the child care tax credit and the family and medical leave law, because the idea behind it is a very simple but powerful one, which is that we ought not to ever ask an American to choose between succeeding at work and succeeding at the most important work of all in life, raising your children. Thank you, Chris, for giving us that—[inaudible].

I want to thank Secretary Daley and Secretary Richardson for coming. I don't know if they want to be Vice President or if they just want Chris to take care of them after the next election. [Laughter] But they love you, too.

I want to thank you for agreeing to become chairman of the Democratic Party after the Republicans won the Congress in '94 and everyone said we were dead—we, generically, and me, specifically—and you didn't believe it. And you went around and gave hope and cheer and energy and fight and courage to people when all the pundits said we were history. I thank you for that. A lot of good things have happened in this country in the last 4 years because of what you did.

And lastly, I think someone ought to remark more explicitly on one of the reasons for your remarkable blend of quality. You are, to the very core of your being—and notwithstanding the fact that you know more about Latin America than anybody in the Congress—completely, irrevocably Irish. [Laughter]

Now, as an apostate Irish Protestant, whose people come from Fermanagh, just across the Republic's border into Northern Ireland, it has been my great good fortune to involve the United States in the Irish peace process. You will never know how many times along—[ap-

plause]—thank you. You will never know how many times along the way, including sometimes calling me from the west of Ireland, where he has a place, at all hours of the day or night, Chris Dodd and I have talked about Ireland—all the things we have said in good times and sometimes the unprintable things we said in the difficult times; how many times I've called him just to sort of check, just to make sure I had it right, that I wasn't misreading the tea leaves and the incredible, emotional complexity of Irish politics.

I say that because any Irish person with any sense knows that the only things that count in life are affairs of the heart and that if you're blessed by God with a pretty good mind, it's only supposed to be used to have a better understanding of the human heart and what counts.

So for all your gifts, my friend, for all the things you've learned in life with its ups and downs, the thing which brings you to this night with your optimism intact, with your energy still high, with your wonderful wife and this legion of friends, is that in the very best sense you were faithful to the idea of the Irish. You have followed your heart, and the world is a better place, and your friends are all richer. We love you very much, and we thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at approximately 10 p.m. in the Ballroom at the Mayflower Hotel. In his remarks, he referred to Representative Rosa L. DeLauro, who introduced the President; Representative DeLauro's husband, Stan; Senator Dodd's wife, Jackie Marie Clegg; former Senator Bob Dole; and Father Gregoir Fluet, who gave the invocation. The evening's program was entitled, "A Salute to 25 Years of Service—An Anniversary Gala Honoring Senator Christopher J. Dodd."

Remarks on Proposed Medicare Prescription Drug Benefit Legislation June 13, 2000

Well, Ruth, this is the most laughs we've had in this room in a long time. [Laughter] You can come back tomorrow and the next day and the next day. [Laughter]

She made the trip all the way from Idaho here. She had bad weather in Chicago last night. This is hard. She went to a lot of trouble to