

Remarks at a Democratic National Committee Reception February 8, 2000

Thank you very much. Thank you, John. Ladies and gentlemen, thank you for being here tonight and for your support for our party. I wanted to just say a few words, and then we'll visit a little.

I did put out the budget yesterday. And I've had a great week. We had the State of the Union, and then I went to Switzerland, to Davos, to the international economic forum, to talk about what I believe our policy ought to be on trade in the 21st century. And before I issued my budget, I got to hear my wife make a great speech on Sunday when she announced for the Senate in New York. I was very proud of her. I thought she did a wonderful job.

Today I took action on another item I discussed in the State of the Union over at the American academy of sciences. I signed the first Executive order of the 21st century, protecting the genetic privacy of all Federal employees and asking Congress to do that for all employees throughout the country. I think that is a very important issue. We're going to have all this huge explosion of knowledge when we finish the mapping of the human genome. And we want people to participate to the maximum possible degree in all benefits that will flow out of that.

And if we expect that, then we're going to have to make sure that they don't lose the right to a job, lose the right to get insurance, lose the right to be considered for promotion because their genetic map shows that they might have some propensity to some problem. We want people to participate in every conceivable way in learning about it so that we can develop blocking gene therapies for all the problems people have.

So this is a very, very exciting time for our country. For me, it's actually rather interesting. For the first time in probably 24 years to see an election season come and go when I'm not on anybody's ballot anywhere—[laughter]—it's rather interesting. I'm having a good time. [Laughter] I feel like the cat that ate the canary some days.

But one of the things I would like to say to all of you that I hope you will keep in mind throughout this year—as you support us, as you

talk to your friends, as you make arguments for our candidates, from the White House to the Senate and the House and the governorships—is that the Democratic Party now has had 7 years of testing our dominant philosophy. And I think it's pretty clear, number one, that it works, and number two, that it's shared by a majority of the American people.

Seven years ago when we began, we just had a roadmap for the future. We said, "Look, we believe that there is a reason the country is suffering from economic stagnation and social division and political gridlock and that Government's been discredited, that we were operating under a philosophy that said Government was the problem, that pitted people against one another, and that was very good about talking about problems like the deficit but not very good about doing anything about it."

And we came to this town—our whole administration did, beginning with the Vice President and me—with a philosophy that said we were going to unify this country, that we were going to try to create opportunity for everybody, challenge everyone to be responsible, and bring everybody together in one community. And we were actually going to try to bring Washington together. I must say, we've had more success in the country than we have in Washington. [Laughter] But still, it's been an exhilarating effort here, and still a challenge every day.

So now we've had 7 years of these results. And I just want to say what I said in the State of the Union Address. I think it is imperative that we not squander this moment under the illusion that because things are going well for this country there are no consequences to what we say, what we do, and what we advocate. We live in a very dynamic world. Things are changing very rapidly. We have never had this kind of opportunity to shape the future.

A few of you in this room are as old as I am. I was telling somebody the other day that when we passed the milestone to having the longest economic expansion in history, the last one that was this long—the next to longest one now—was the one that occurred in the decade of the sixties. And you probably all remember that it played out under the inflationary

pressures of what was then known as guns and butter, the Vietnam war and our obligations at home.

When I graduated from high school in 1964, even though the country was still hurting over President Kennedy's assassination, we had actually come together and lifted ourselves up out of that. And there was this sense that there was nothing we couldn't do. Within 2 years, we had riots in the streets. The country was deeply divided over the war in Vietnam; we had over a half a million people there. Within a couple more years, the economy was in terrible shape. And the politics of division, basically, began to rule our national campaigns.

As an American citizen, I have waited now about 35 years for my country once again to be in a position to basically be a nation of builders and dreamers, where we could shape the future. That's why in the State of the Union Address I said we've got to, number one, remember what brought us to the dance here. We've got to stay with an economic policy that has given us the ability to deal with these things. And I know I'm being criticized somewhat, from the right and the left, for paying the debt down. But we've got to keep this economy going. To do that, we've got to keep interest rates down and confidence sky high. And if you want businesses and individuals to be able to borrow more, then the Government should borrow less. And it will generally tend to be more efficient borrowing.

Number two, we've got to invest in education; we've got to expand health care; we've got to help families balance their roles at home and at work; and we've got to continue to stay in the forefront of science and technology and meeting the new security challenges of the 21st century, especially the challenges of terrorism and biological and chemical weapons. We have to do these things.

But it is within our grasp to shape a future that would have been undreamed of just a few years ago. I believe that the Democratic Party is the right party to lead this country. Even though it's flattering to see the Republicans sort of edging more and more toward our economic policy—I think that's a good thing. I think it would be a great thing for our country if we had a bipartisan economic policy. It's an important part of our national security in the 21st century.

But we still have radically different approaches to things like sensible efforts to keep guns out of the hands of criminals and away from children to matters like making educational opportunity real and available to all, matters like our obligation to make available the access to health care. We've provided—because of the provision that Hillary and I and others fought so hard for in the 1997 Balanced Budget Act, we got 2 million more children in poor working families with health insurance today than we had just 2 years ago—2 million more. I made a proposal—and we got funding already, you've already paid for this, you don't have to—we have funding already for 3 million more. But I think now if we bring those children's parents into the program, we could take care of 25 percent of the uninsured people in America, and they're the 25 neediest percent.

The second fastest—big group are people between the ages of 55 and 65 who leave the work force, lose their health care, aren't old enough for Medicare. And you'd be amazed how many people that I grew up with in Arkansas—we're all moving into this age group—who are affected by this. You're talking about a very large number of people. I think we ought to just buy them into Medicare—pay the cost, whatever the real cost is, give them a modest tax credit so it's more affordable.

These are big issues. We've got to keep people coming together, meeting these basic needs if we want to keep people focused on the future. People stop focusing on the future when they have to worry about how they're going to keep body and soul together or when they feel threatened.

So we have to keep the momentum up. And believe me, no matter what we do—and as I said, I would be elated if we wound up with a bipartisan consensus on our economic policy this year—there are going to be profound differences in our responsibilities to each other to build a strong society. And I cannot tell you how strongly I believe that a big part of our economic success has come because we were also doubling our investment in education and training and making it clear to ordinary people, through increases in the minimum wage, the Family and Medical Leave Act, things like this, that we cared about what happened to them and we thought they ought to be a part of America's future.

So you stay with us. Stay with us as we try to pass the Patients' Bill of Rights and the other things we've got on the plate now. And tell people the story, that we had a set of ideas, we had a core philosophy, and it has worked. And we do need to keep changing America, but we don't need to forget what brought us

to this point; we need to build on it. With your help, we will.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 7:10 p.m. in the John Hay Room at the Hay Adams Hotel. In his remarks, he referred to John Merrigan, chair, Democratic Business Council.

Remarks at a Democratic National Committee Dinner *February 8, 2000*

Thank you so much. I am delighted to be back in this wonderful, wonderful old house that contains a lot of good ghosts. I want to thank Jim and Joe for hosting this event. I thank all of you for coming. Joe, I want to thank you for having my mother out to the track. My mother was convinced that heaven was a race-track—[laughter]—where she would not have to run. [Laughter] And I am delighted to be here with you today.

I want to thank all my friends from Maryland for being here, particularly Lieutenant Governor Kathleen Kennedy Townsend and Senator Miller, Speaker Taylor, party chair Wayne Rogers, and all the others who are here. Maryland has been very good to me, to Hillary, and Al and Tipper Gore. It's been one of our best States in both '92 and '96, and also, thanks to truly outstanding leadership, a genuine laboratory for virtually every reform I have advocated for 7 years.

You know, one of the things that you have to constantly reconcile when you're President is, how do you apportion the President's time? And if I just—after a while, if I keep making announcements in the Rose Garden or in the Oval Office or in the White House, there's no picture there, or it's the same picture. So you want to go out, but you don't want to go too far, because otherwise you spend all day going to and from someplace, and you miss a day's work. Well, it was my great good fortune that I happened to be President at a time when Maryland was so superbly led that every good thing in America that was going on anywhere was also going on in Maryland. And I thank all of you for that.

I want to thank Ed Rendell and Joe Andrew and my longtime friend Andy Tobias for their willingness to come in and lead our party and try to get us through a very challenging election year, when we expect to be outspent but not outworked. And we know if we have enough money to get our message out, it won't matter if they have a little more. And I want to thank all of you for making them look a little more successful tonight. We're very grateful to you for that.

And I want to thank Donna Shalala for being here. She is the longest serving and, I believe, by far the most effective Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services. Today we dealt with one of Donna's issues. I went out to the American Academy of Sciences and signed the first Presidential Executive order of the 21st century, banning genetic discrimination in employment and insurance of Federal employees, and endorsing legislation introduced by Senator Daschle in the Senate and Congresswoman Louise Slaughter from New York in the House to ban genetic discrimination in employment and insurance practices for all employees.

I sort of would like to take that as a little metaphor. That's a future issue, and it's thrilling to me. Why do we even have to worry about that? Because in just a little bit, we'll have an entire map of the sequencing of the human genome. We already know that broken genes and what they look like—that are high predictors of breast cancer. The good news about that is, pretty soon we'll have diagnostic techniques that will either be able to head off the cancer ever developing, with gene therapies that block the destructive development, or diagnose the cancer when it's just a few cells and not after