

Mar. 4 / Administration of William J. Clinton, 2000

Rolland and all the other tragic victims of gun violence is to pass sensible gun safety legislation right now.

Thanks for listening.

NOTE: The address was recorded at 1:05 p.m. on March 3 in the Los Gatos Room at the Silicon

Valley Conference Center at Novell Headquarters, San Jose, CA, for broadcast at 10:06 a.m. on March 4. The transcript was made available by the Office of the Press Secretary on March 3 but was embargoed for release until the broadcast.

Remarks at a Democratic National Committee Reception in Los Angeles, California

March 4, 2000

Thank you, Neil. I want to begin by just telling you that from the moment I got out of the car, I realized that I was going to have a wonderful time this evening. I thank the Nazarians, the Farahniks, and the Kadishas, and all of you for being here.

Gray Davis was talking about this being the Governor's Mansion. When I walked in here and looked up at the spiral staircase, I said, "You know, I really do live in public housing, after all." [Laughter]

Seriously, let me say to all of you that I am profoundly honored to be here with you tonight because what our host said in his opening remarks, about coming here from Iran with nothing and how well he has done, and all of you have done, is a testament to the power of faith and family and work. Thank you for having the rabbi here tonight. He even gave me a book to read tonight. [Laughter] I promised to read it as quickly as I can.

I ran for President because I felt that this country had the best system in the world if people were given the conditions and the tools in which their faith, their family, their work could flourish. And it has been a joy and an honor to serve. For whatever role I have played in our prosperity and our improving social progress and our role in peace around the world, I am very grateful. But I want you to think tonight about, also, the role you can play. There is no such thing as a time to completely rest, maybe a day, a week, but not a long time. And a country becomes great by always trying to do better, sometimes in small steps, sometimes in large steps.

I believe some very basic, simple things. You said that the President is not royalty yet. Most

of the people in the national political press certainly agree with that statement. [Laughter] But I came from the heartland of America. I was the first person in my family ever to graduate from college. But I was taught to believe something as a child I still believe. And I look around here, and I see the living embodiment.

I believe every person counts, that everyone should have a chance, that everyone has a responsible role to play in life, and that we all do better when we help each other. I believe that freedom is the best system of government to allow the values that any of us have to flourish. And the fact that you can come here, preserve your community, and be a part of the larger American community is stunning evidence that that is right.

I regret that so many of you had to leave your native land, one of the most wonderful places in all of human history, one of the most important places, culturally, in all of human history. And I hope and pray that what we have seen in three elections now, there, means that there is a movement toward openness and freedom there, too, and that someday all of you will be able to go home to visit and have two homes, complete and open and free.

I have done my best to support that process in the limited way any American President can. I have also done my best to stand against the forces of religious and racial and ethnic and tribal hatred throughout the world, as you pointed out, from Northern Ireland to the Middle East to Africa to the Balkans. I have tried to protect the right of every person in this country and to advance the right of every person in every country to practice their faith as they see

fit. And I have found more than ever that usually, when you do the right thing, it turns out to be the practically beneficial thing.

And so, as I think about this moment—here we are on the eve of another set of elections—it seems like only yesterday I first took the oath of office. And this is the first election in almost 30 years that I have not been involved in as a candidate. And on most days, I'm all right. [Laughter] But tonight I speak to you not only as your President but as a citizen. I believe that our obligation in this election is to show that we are grateful for our prosperity, and we intend to do something with it. I believe our obligation in this election is to show that we are not arrogant about our progress, because we realize we'd have profound challenges here and around the world that we can still have an impact on, and we should shoulder those challenges and embrace them eagerly.

I believe that this election will be determined by what the people of this country decide the election is about. If they decide it's about who can offer the most immediate, short-term gratification, we'll be in trouble. If they decide that this has been a pretty good 7 years because we continued to take the long view and we asked people to save a little so that we could get the country out of deficits, and now we're trying to get the country out of debt—and lo and behold, it turned out to be good social policy, because when interest rates dropped, more jobs were created. And more poor people worked themselves into the middle class, and the welfare rolls were cut in half. And we were still able to double our investment in education. So that's what I am concerned about, as your President and as a citizen.

You came here, some of you came here directly from Iran after a terrible upheaval. You know, therefore, that you can never take life's blessings for granted. I don't want the American people to take life's blessings for granted. I want them to take this as an enormous opportunity to build the future of our dreams for all the children of this country. If we do that, we'll be just fine.

Tomorrow I'm going, at 5 o'clock in the morning, to Selma, Alabama, where 35 years ago tomorrow, 600 brave Americans walked across a bridge for the right to vote. Some of them were killed for it. Many of them were brutalized for it. But because they walked across that bridge, this country is a better place.

What I want to say to you is, at the time that happened, most of you were not in this country then. Most of you in this room weren't even born then. But I was just a young boy. I believed that my President was doing a great thing to give every American the right to vote, something that had been too long denied. I believed that my Congress was doing a great thing to guarantee the civil rights of all Americans. And I believed that we were in an economic period of opportunity that would go on forever.

You may know that last month we celebrated the longest economic expansion in the history of America. I'm proud of that. The last longest economic expansion in the history of America was the decade of the 1960's, and because we were not careful, it got away from us. And instead of passing civil rights laws in Congress, we had riots in the streets. Instead of winning the cold war by the power of our example and our values and our strong defenses, the country was torn apart over the war in Vietnam. Instead of electing people that we admired, we saw Senator Kennedy and Martin Luther King killed just before I graduated from college.

I say that not to depress anyone but just to remind you of what you who are immigrants and who had to flee your country know: Opportunities in life are not to be taken for granted; good fortune is not to be taken for granted. We are never to believe that we deserve everything we have. Instead, we are to ask ourselves, what is our responsibility? And the greater our good fortune, the greater our responsibility. It is not only true for families and communities, it is true for a country.

This country has never had the chance it now has to literally build the future of our dreams and to be a force for peace and freedom throughout the world. For all of you who have helped me to serve, I am very grateful. I worked as hard as I could to turn it around and to get things going in the right direction. And I'm not done yet. I get a little queasy when people start thanking me for doing a good job. I feel as if I'm hearing a eulogy, and I pinch myself—[laughter]—and I feel perfectly alive and still very much in harness. But you do have to think to the future. You are having elections. You are planning for the future.

The reason I like this Governor and the reason my wife, who wishes she could be here tonight, told me—when most people thought he had no chance to win, she said, "He'll win,

because he's serious about the job, and he has thought more about what he would do if he got it." And Vice President Gore and I, we've worked hard to be serious about the job, to do things that would advance the values that we share.

And so I say to you, I thank you for your help. We'll do our best to invest your contributions wisely. But I hope you will continue to talk to your friends and neighbors. If somebody asks you tomorrow or the next day or the next day, why were you here tonight, don't say, "Father made me come." [Laughter] Tell them you

came because you understand that this good fortune has to be nourished. You understand that it carries with it responsibilities, because you want every American to have the same chances that you have had, and because we all do better when we work together.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 8:46 p.m. at a private residence. In his remarks, he referred to reception cohosts Neil and Dora Kadisha, Parviz and Poursan Nazarian, and Leon and Debbie Farahnik; and Gov. Gray Davis of California.

Remarks at a Democratic National Committee Dinner in Los Angeles March 4, 2000

Thank you very much. I don't know about you, but I've been to one or two of these events in my life—[laughter]—and I had a wonderful time tonight. This is a marvelous restaurant. I've never been here before, in all my years of traipsing around L.A., and I think we ought to give them a hand for making us feel so welcome.

I want to thank Mayor Rendell and our national finance chair, Joel Hyatt, for coming out here with me. I especially want to thank Chuck and Elizabeth and the Zimons, the Nathansons, all the others who have worked so hard. I want to thank all the people from the entertainment community who came. Kenneth and Tracy, thank you for being here. I want to thank especially Gregory and Veronique Peck for being here. And all the rest of you.

Mac Davis, thank you. I'm sure you remember this, but your show was on in Washington about the time I became President the first time. And in the last year of her life, my beloved mother got to go, and she thought you were the best thing since sliced bread. And I will always be grateful to you for the joy you gave to my mother when she was very ill, and I thank you for that.

And Olivia, I did my best not to sing along with you tonight. [Laughter] But when you started singing, I looked at Marc Nathanson; I said, "How many of her albums do you have? I mean, the old albums." [Laughter] I said, "I've still got that one where she comes up out of the

water." [Laughter] And I still look at it every now and then. [Laughter]

So I want to thank you not only for your work as an artist, but especially because of my family's experience, I thank you for your continued fight against cancer, for children, and for being a role model for women all over this country by going on. Thank you very much.

And I don't know what to say about Governor Gray Davis, except I think we ought to maybe change his first name to "Red Hot" after tonight. [Laughter] You know, it's okay for you to get a little funny, but if you get any better, your shtick won't work anymore. [Laughter] That was a pretty good rap.

But you're also—I might add—Hillary and I were talking about the California Governor's race when it started, and we knew his primary opponents and liked them. But I had known Gray for years and years. And I said, "Hillary, what do you think is going to happen in that race?" She said, "Oh, I think Gray Davis will win." And I said, "Why?" She said, "Well, because he really wants to do the job, and he has a really good idea of what he would do if he got there, and that will communicate itself over the course of the campaign and build a lot of confidence among the voters." And I think that pretty much says it, and I think the confidence of the voters has been well placed.

I'll try to make this fairly brief tonight, but I want you to think about why you came and what you'll say tomorrow if somebody asks you