

Remarks at a Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee Luncheon
in Cleveland, Ohio
March 13, 2000

Thank you so much. I want to say, first, how honored I am to be here with our leader, Dick Gephardt, and how much I look forward to his becoming the Speaker of the House. He is a truly remarkable human being and a really wonderful leader.

I want to thank Stephanie Tubbs Jones for welcoming me here and for doing such a good job for you. I'm delighted to be here with Marcy Kaptur and Dennis Kucinich. And I'm glad to see Sherrod Brown up and around. I told him he looked like a Roman soldier in one of those 1960's extravaganzas with that brace on.

I want to thank Congressman Jim Barcia for coming to Cleveland to be with us today, and Congressman Patrick Kennedy, who had to leave. And Mayor White, thank you for making us feel so welcome. Maryellen O'Shaughnessy, thank you for running for Congress. I certainly do hope you win, and I'm going to do what I can to help you. I'm glad to see you out here.

And I want to thank our Senate candidate, Ted Celeste, also for running in this race and for being here today, and my good friend Lou Stokes. I told some people a story when I was coming out—when I was here with Lou Stokes—I wanted to come to Cleveland with Lou before he left the Congress. I was here in his district many times when he was in Congress, but the last time we visited an elementary school in this district where there was an AmeriCorps project and the kids were tutoring these grade school kids—our young AmeriCorps people were.

And so we went to this assembly, and I gave a little talk. And then I was shaking hands with all these 6- and 7-year-old kids. And I got to the very end of the line, and this 6-year-old looked at me, and he said, "Are you really the President?" [Laughter] So help me, this happened. I said, "Yes, I am." He said, "But you're not dead yet." [Laughter] And it was clear to me that he had learned in school his Presidents were George Washington and Abraham Lincoln, and a part of the job description was that you had to be deceased. [Laughter] There's been a day or two in Washington in the last 7 years

when I thought the kid might have been right. [Laughter] But I will always remember that.

I also am glad to be here today just to say a profound word of thanks to the people of Cleveland and the State of Ohio for being so good to me and to the Vice President, for giving us your electoral votes in 1992, and by a much wider margin in 1996. And I hope the trend continues in 2000.

I'm here primarily, as all of you know, to support these Members of the House and the candidates and the drive to restore a Democratic majority in the House. And I'm here for three reasons, basically.

One, they deserve it because they took the tough decisions that turned this country around and paid the price for it. We had no votes from the other side when we passed the economic plan in 1993, which drove interest rates down, investment up, and got this economy going again. And they deserve it. They also put their lives on the line to vote for the Brady bill and the assault weapons ban and the efforts to put 100,000 police on the streets, which has given us a 25-year low in crime and a 30-year low in the gun death rate in America. Half a million felons, fugitives, and stalkers were denied weapons because of the Brady bill. So they have earned it.

They provided large margins for the Balanced Budget Act in 1997 and for every other piece of progressive legislation that has passed, from the family and medical leave law to increasing the earned-income tax credit to tax relief for working families. And I could just go right on down the line: achieving 90 percent of our children with basic childhood immunizations for the first time, cleaner air, cleaner water, and a growing economy. So they've earned it.

Two, there are huge differences between the parties still on a lot of very fundamental issues. And Dick mentioned a few of them, but I just want to tick off three or four. Number one, if you want this economy to keep growing, we have to remember to dance with what brought us: We've got to keep paying down the debt; we've got to save Social Security and Medicare in a way that doesn't cause the baby boomers'

retirement to bankrupt our children; and we've got to save enough money to invest in education and health care.

We can still have a modest tax cut that will do an awful lot of good for a lot of people, to help people pay for health care costs, to help people pay for child care costs, to help defer the cost of tuition for sending your kid to college, for doing a lot of other things. But we have got to first keep the economy strong. We've got a chance to get this country out of debt over the next 12 or 13 years, for the first time since 1835. And if we do it, we'll have low interest rates for a generation and the highest economic growth we've ever had. We'll continue this expansion. The Democrats will support that. Our friends in the other party will support a tax cut so large that we'd either have to cut education, not save Social Security or Medicare, cut defense, or go back to running deficits. So it's a clear choice.

Second is education. Our agenda is clear. We want smaller classes, more teachers, better trained teachers. We want to modernize and repair schools, which is profoundly important. We want to hook every classroom up to the Internet. We want high standards which support the kids, more after-school and summer school programs. And we want more efforts to give people the excellence that they need. And every single year we have to wait until the very end of the legislative session and have a huge fight to get our education agenda through. And we normally get about 70 percent of it, but only because all of us stay together. This will become more and more important.

Third, it is important to continue to give more people the chance to be a part of this economic prosperity who haven't done it yet. That's what our new markets initiative is all about, to give you who can afford it the same incentives to invest in poor neighborhoods in Cleveland, in Indian reservations, in the Mississippi Delta, in south Texas, and places like that that we now give you to invest in Latin America, Asia, and Africa. If we can't give the poor areas in America today the opportunity to have free enterprise, when will we ever get around to it? And I think that's very important.

The fourth thing I want to mention is health care. It's very important. We believe that people between the ages of 55 and 65 that lose their health insurance ought to be able to buy into Medicare and ought to be given a little help

to do it. We believe that people who are taking care of aged parents or disabled family members ought to get a \$3,000 tax credit to help them do it. We believe that the Children's Health Insurance Program, which we passed in 1997, should also include the parents of those children. And if we did those things, 25 percent of the uninsured population in America would have health insurance, and the health care providers in this country, many of whom have difficulties, would have a lot more cash flowing to them to keep a healthy health care system.

These are just some of the issues. There are big differences. And Dick mentioned the final one I want to mention. I have been involved for way over 20 years now in law enforcement. The first elected job I ever had was as attorney general of my State. I have always believed that we could drive crime down and diminish racial and other tensions between the police and the community. I have always believed that we had to have both smart punishment and smart prevention. I have always believed that. And for 7 years we have worked to put more police on the streets, to give our children something to say yes to as well as something to say no to, and to keep guns away from criminals and kids without undermining the legitimate interests of hunters and sports people.

Now, what I've tried to do, since the Columbine tragedy, in particular, and in the aftermath of the terrible deaths in the last couple of days, is to say, "Okay, let's do some more things that make sense. Let's require child trigger locks on all new handguns that are sold. Let's require background checks at these gun shows and urban flea markets, as well as at gun stores. Let's hold parents who are flagrantly irresponsible—or other adults, custodial adults—and let 6-year-olds get guns, let's hold them responsible for what they do. And let's ban the importation of these large ammunition clips." We banned assault weapons in America, and then people get around it by importing them.

This is all very sensible. It doesn't affect anybody's hunting, doesn't affect any sport shooting. It's no big problem. And all the practical problems can be worked out.

Well, we had a lot of energy after Columbine for doing that. The Senate passed a strong bill, because Al Gore broke a tie vote. The House passed a much weaker bill. But then they were supposed to get together, pass a compromise, agree on provisions, and send it to me. Eight

months later, they still haven't met. The committees haven't met. So I ask them to meet.

Now, in the aftermath of the terrible losses in Michigan and Tennessee—little Kayla Roland—I thought we could have some more energy for doing this. And what happened? The NRA started running all these ads attacking me personally—which I didn't take personally. I, frankly, was honored by it. But they were—and so I agreed to go on ABC, Sam Donaldson's program Sunday and answer questions about this. And all I did was to say why I was for closing the assault weapons; why I was for banning these large capacity ammunition clips, the import of them; why I was for closing the gun show loophole; why I was for child trigger locks; and why I thought adults who were knowing or reckless in letting little kids get ahold of guns ought to be held responsible.

And then the head of the NRA came on after me, and he said—I want to read you what he said, just so you'll know that there is a difference here between the two parties and America has to choose. He says that I am willing to accept a certain level of killings to further my political agenda and Vice President Gore's: "I believe—I have come to believe that Clinton needs a certain level of violence in this country. He's willing to accept a certain level of killings to further his political agenda and his Vice President's, too."

Now, it's quite one thing to say that when you're on national television. It's another thing to look into the eyes of a parent who's lost a 6-year-old and say that; to visit, as I did, the parents of the Columbine kids, or in Springfield, Oregon, or Jonesboro, Arkansas, and say that.

I want you to know this because I'm not trying to put you in a depressed mood, I'm trying to fire your energy for the coming combat. Maybe he really believes this. But if he does, we've got even more trouble than just a horrible political mistake. We've got to make up our mind as a country.

I'm glad the crime rate is at a 25-year low. I'm glad the gun death rate is at a 30-year low. I don't know a single living American who believes this country is safe enough. The NRA says we ought to prosecute gun crimes more. I agree with that, and we have. They're for holding adults accountable when they recklessly give kids access to guns; good for them. But they're not for anything that is a preventive

measure, that might require the slightest effort on the part of the people they propose to represent, even if making that effort lets everybody else live in a safer America. They were against banning cop-killer bullets—and there weren't any deer in the deer woods wearing Kevlar vests.

So I regret this. And I'm not going to get in a shouting match about it, but I want you to know that there are big stakes here. So I want to help these people because they've earned it, and they've given you a good country to live in and a stronger America because they're right on the issues.

And the third reason that I want to be for them is the point Dick made about wanting to run the House in a bipartisan manner and to set a good example. One of the reasons I ran for President is that I was completely turned off, as a Governor of what my predecessor called a small southern State, at the way that Washington was so much in the grip of name-calling and an attempt to systematically undermine other people personally. I thought it was wrong. And now that I've had some passing experience with it, I feel more strongly about it. I'm not running for anything, but I'm telling you, this is a great country, and you deserve a better climate than you have been getting in Washington, DC. And you've got to have people who will stand up and say that.

I've worked as hard as I could to build one America out here in the grassroots, to get people to come together across racial lines and religious lines and the other lines that divide us, and to be a force for that kind of harmony around the world. But it is difficult for America to do that if what they see in the national political leadership is this sort of slash-and-burn—well, the kind of stuff I just read you. And I think we can do better than that. And I know he'll be better than that, and these Members will be better than that.

Folks, we've got a lot of honest differences of opinion. And maybe they're right some times, and we're not always right. But I know one thing—we are right to believe that elections ought to be fought about what's good for you and what's good for your life and not whether we can decimate our adversaries. And that's the kind of Speaker Dick Gephardt will be.

So when people ask you why you came here today, say, "Well, they've done a good job, and they deserve our support. They've got better

ideas for the future, and that's what matters. And not only that, I like the way they will run our Nation's Government. I will feel better when they're having arguments up there over policy instead of personalities, and when they're trying to put people first and actually get something done."

Those are three good reasons for you to be here today, and I hope you will share those with all your friends and neighbors in this area. If you do, you'll dramatically increase the chances of their success in November.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:39 p.m. in the lobby at the Playhouse Square Center. In his remarks, he referred to Representative Patrick J. Kennedy, chairman, Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee; Mayor Michael R. White of Cleveland; Maryellen O'Shaughnessy, candidate for Ohio's 12th Congressional District; former Representative Louis Stokes; 6-year-old Kayla Rolland, who died after she was shot by 6-year-old classmate Dedrick Owens in Mount Morris Township, MI; Sam Donaldson, cohost, ABC's "This Week"; and Wayne LaPierre, executive vice president, National Rifle Association.

Remarks to the Community in Cleveland March 13, 2000

Thank you very much. Thank you. First, I think Wanda did a pretty good job, don't you? Let's give her another hand. [Applause] I am delighted to be here in Cleveland. I want to thank all the people who are up here with me. Alice Katchianes, thank you for being here, and Mr. Venable, thank you for your welcome. If I could sing like that, I'd be in a different line of work. [Laughter] I thought that was great.

I want to thank Congressman Sherrod Brown and Congressman Dennis Kucinich, Congresswoman Stephanie Tubbs Jones, my great friend Lou Stokes, all the other officials who are here today. State Representative Jack Ford; County Commissioner Jimmy Dimora; State Senate candidate Donna McNamee, a woman I met at the dedication of the FDR Memorial with President Roosevelt's wheelchair, I'm glad to see her here.

I want to say a special word of appreciation to Congressman Dick Gephardt for his leadership and his passionate commitment to this and so many other good causes. Without him and these other members of our caucus, we wouldn't have a prayer of passing this proposal today. And I thank him.

And I want to say, obviously, how pleased I am to be here with Donna Shalala, who is, as Dick Gephardt suggested, not only the longest serving but by a good long stretch the ablest and best Secretary of Health and Human Services this country has ever, ever had. And I love to see her mother, and I'm glad she made room

for me at tax time. [Laughter] I told her, I said, "You know, when I get out of this job, I hope I need the services of a tax lawyer." [Laughter] Right now, it's all pretty straightforward. But that was, without a doubt, the shortest speech I ever heard a lawyer give, what she said to me. [Laughter] You probably doubled your business just by being here today.

I do love coming to Cleveland, and you heard Donna say that we have a lot of people in this administration from Cleveland, including my Deputy Chief of Staff, Steve Ricchetti, who is here today. But Clevelanders, they may go anywhere, but they never get it, Cleveland, out of their soul. If you go into Steve's office, there is a great photograph from the opening day of baseball at Jacobs Field in 1994. Now, I remember that because I threw out the first pitch. But Steve's got the picture on the wall because when I threw the pitch, everyone was absolutely stunned that it didn't hit the dirt—[laughter]—and Sandy Alomar caught it. So he really got—I'm incidental to the picture. He's got Sandy Alomar catching a ball which he was convinced would go into the dirt. I thought I did pretty well for a guy who played in the band, myself. [Laughter]

Let me say, this is a great time for this city and a great time for our Nation. As I said in the State of the Union Address, I hope this time will be used by our people to take on the big challenges facing America. One of those big challenges is what to do about the aging