

Remarks at a Reception for Senator Daniel K. Akaka May 9, 2000

The President. Well, thank you very much. Aloha.

Audience members. Aloha!

The President. And to Danny and Millie and all of you, thank you so much for having me here. Senator Daschle, thank you for being here. And I'd like to acknowledge our great friend, a former Member of the House of Representatives, Norm Mineta. Thank you for coming, Norm, and being here with your friends and your extended family.

I want to tell you that I'm here for two reasons tonight, besides the fact that I've never had a bad day in Hawaii. *[Laughter]* And I knew that if I came here tonight, Danny would do as much as he could to simulate Hawaii. You know, I would have music; I'd have a lei; people would say "aloha"; everybody would be relaxed. And by the time I left, no matter what I was worried about, I'd be in a good mood. And sure enough, that's happened.

The second reason I'm here is in behalf of one of the finest people in the United States Senate and one of the most popular people in the entire Congress. Dan Akaka is not only a good Senator, he is a good man. And I have yet to meet the first human being who didn't love him who knew him. And I want to thank him for being my friend.

The third reason I'm here is because he asked me, and I owe him. *[Laughter]*

You know, there was this—you heard, Senator Daschle said all those nice things about my service as President. There was a really funny article—I was reading Hillary this article—you know, when you think you're about to get good press, read it to your spouse, and they'll find a way to bring it down. *[Laughter]* So I said, "Look here, here's this article. It says I have really high job approval ratings. And if it weren't for '93 and '94, they'd be the highest average ratings since people have been taking polls." And Hillary said, "Well, of course. In '93 and '94 you made all the hard decisions that gave you the high job approval ratings in '95 and afterward."

And if you think about it—I said it in a casual way, I'm serious—in 1993, when I presented an economic plan to cut the deficit in half and

to get this country moving again and get interest rates down, we didn't get a single vote from the other party. They all said that it was going to throw the country into recession. And if anybody—anybody—in our party in either House had changed their vote, it would have been defeated. We would not have enjoyed the economic recovery we have had, and I would not have enjoyed the political recovery I enjoyed after 1994.

But the most important thing is, the American people now have the longest economic expansion in history, over 21 million new jobs, unemployment rate under 4 percent for the first time since early 1970. And when I leave office, we will have paid off—paid off—\$355 billion of the national debt in the last 3 years. Now, all because he was there. We lose one vote, and it's history; the whole last 8 years are a totally different story.

It was almost the same when we had to pass the crime bill to do more to keep guns out of the hands of children and criminals, put more police officers on the street. You probably saw the report Sunday, crime down 8 years in a row—and the leadership of the other party overwhelmingly negative on the Brady bill, on banning the cop-killer bullets, on the assault weapons ban, on putting 100,000 police on the streets, all of those things. He was there.

And in education, I just want to say, you know, that's a story that is not as well-known: college-going up 10 percent, reading and math scores almost up a full grade level. But in the areas where people have taken seriously the legislation that I proposed 4 years ago, that every State had to identify every school which was not performing well, where the schools were not teaching the children to learn, and come up with strategies to turn them around, we're seeing breathtaking gains.

I just got back from Kentucky. I'll just give you one example. I was in this little town in western Kentucky, where your former colleague Wendell Ford was born and grew up, and he was there to be with me—Owensboro, Kentucky—two-thirds of the children on free and reduced lunches. Nineteen ninety-six we passed—the Democrats did—a requirement that

States identify schools that are failing and come up with strategies to turn them around or shut them down. To stop social promotion, which we didn't require, but we supported, we also have gone from nothing to \$50 million for after-school and summer school programs, to help so we don't brand children failures when the system fails them.

Okay, so I show up in this little town in western Kentucky where the local grade school has just been named the 18th best grade school in the State, and they were a failing school 4 years ago. Now, here's what you need to know: Two-thirds of the kids in that school are eligible for free or reduced school lunches—two-thirds. Of the 20 best elementary schools in Kentucky, 10 of them have over half of their kids eligible for free or reduced school lunch.

Race, ethnicity, income, and location are not destiny if we can give all of our children a world-class education. And the role we played in that would not have been possible if it hadn't been for the supporters I had in our party and the Congress, including Senator Akaka. So I'm proud to be here tonight for him.

Now, last and most important, elections are always about tomorrow, always about the future. So if someone asks you why you came here tonight, besides bragging on Danny Akaka as a human being and talking about what a great record he built, how much you appreciate the fact that he helped me, I hope you will say something like this: This is the first time maybe ever our country has had such a great opportunity because of our economic strength and social progress and our role in creating a more peaceful world, that we've had the opportunity to build the future of our dreams for our children.

The real question in this election is, what are we going to do with all this prosperity? What's the answer to that question? Do you believe that's the question? And if you believe that's the question, what's your answer?

Audience member. Al Gore!

The President. I'm coming to that. *[Laughter]*

But this is very important. You know, I'm not running for anything, but I know a little something about elections. And normally, the candidate who wins is the product of what the voters believe the election is about. If you ask the right question, it will lead you to the right answer.

So what's this election about? This election is about, what are we going to do with all these good things that have happened in the last 7 years? I think the answer is, what we're going to do—I know what I think it should be. It should be, we're going to take advantage of it to build the future of our dreams. We're going to take our big opportunities. We're going to take our big challenges. We're going to bring economic opportunity to people in places left behind. We're going to give all our kids a world-class education and get rid of child poverty. We're going to do more to help people balance work and family. We're going to prove that you can meet the challenges of the environment and still grow the economy. We're going to deal with the aging of America and save Social Security and Medicare and add a prescription drug benefit. We're going to build one America. We're going to pass that hate crimes bill, and we're going to pass the "Employment Non-Discrimination Act," and we're going to continue to fight against racial and ethnic and religious and other discrimination, until we pull this country together.

That's what I think we ought to do. And we're going to keep the economy going, and we're going to keep going until we get this country out of debt for the first time since 1835. These are big things, you know, big things we've never been able to do before.

Now, if you believe that's what this election is about, then the next question is, how are you going to do it? Well, you have two choices. You can continue to change, building on what has brought us to this point, or you can abandon it and go back to the political philosophy that governed before we started in 1993.

And that's what Danny Akaka's race is about. That's what the race for President is all about. Do you want an economic strategy that gives us a tax cut we can afford and still gives us enough money to pay down the debt, save Social Security and Medicare, and invest in the education of our children? I do. But if you prefer, you can have a tax cut and a defense increase and education vouchers that takes us back to deficit spending, doesn't give us money to invest in education, but makes everybody real happy in the short run because they'll be rolling in dough.

Now, we tried it their way. We tried it our way. You have evidence. Now you have to

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choose. Which way are you going to try going forward?

The same thing is true with education. The same thing is true with health care. The same thing is true with the environment.

And so I say to all of you, I'm glad you're here. I'm glad you're helping Dan Akaka. He is as fine a man as I've ever known in public life. And he's always good to me when we play golf together. *[Laughter]* But I'm telling you, this is a big election. I'm not running, but I can tell you it's just every bit as important as the one we made in '92 and the one we made in '96, because this will determine whether the American people are going to embrace what works or say, "Okay, we tried it for 8 years, and it was nice, but I think we'll go back and try something else." And the something else was what they tried before, but it was so long ago, everybody has forgotten.

That is what this is about. This gentleman here said, "You ought to tell people that the slogan of this election ought to be: 'Before You Go Back, Think Back,' " which is better than anything I've thought of. *[Laughter]*

But the reason I want the Vice President to win is because I know what a role he's played in the last 8 years, and I know he understands the future, and he knows how to lead us there.

The reason I think Dan Akaka should be re-elected is, I know how much he loves the ordinary people that he represents and because every single time his country needed him he was there—every time. Not one time did he ever take a dive and walk away when we were trying to build this future.

And so I ask all of you to think about that. I thank you for helping him. And I want you to go out between now and November and tell people why you are doing this. Tell them there may not be another time in our lifetime when we can do this. Tell them there are places and people that are still left behind, including a lot of people in Hawaii because of the Asian financial crisis, who didn't fully participate in this economic recovery. And tell them you want a change, but you'd like to keep moving in the direction that we've enjoyed for the last several years.

One good way you can do that is by making sure that he gets as near to 100 percent of the vote as possible.

Come on up here, Senator Akaka.

NOTE: The President spoke at 8:40 p.m. in the John Hay Room at the Hay-Adams Hotel. In his remarks, he referred to Senator Akaka's wife, Mary Mildred (Millie); and former Senator Wendell H. Ford.

Videotaped Remarks to the White House News Photographers' Association May 10, 2000

Good evening. I'm sorry I can't be with you tonight, but I'm glad to join you in this way, as the members of the White House News Photographers' Association celebrate your annual dinner. I extend my congratulations to this evening's award winners.

For a long time now, I've been an admirer of your work, and in more recent years, I've even been a subject of it. From here on the other side of the lens, I want to tell you how much I appreciate your skill and your dedication. Each and every day, you bring the world of Washington into sharper focus for the world outside Washington. Taking on some of the toughest assignments in journalism, you turn them into images that endure, images that help

define our times and the way that we will remember them far into the future.

I want to mention one family that's been making this kind of contribution for half a century now, the McNamees. Wally McNamee was first named Photographer of the Year back when President Eisenhower was in the White House. Along the way, he's been honored more than any member in the history of the association. Wally, congratulations on tonight's award. It really has been a lifetime of achievement.

Of course, one of the greatest honors any parent could ever receive is when a child chooses to follow in his footsteps. Tonight Wally's son, Win, carries on a McNamee family tradition