

Remarks at a Military Salute Week Dinner in New York City July 5, 2000

Please be seated. Let me say, first of all, I'm delighted to be here at Boomer Esiason's podium. *[Laughter]* When he was up here talking about being President, it was all I could do to avoid screaming, "Throw long, throw long!" *[Laughter]*

I want to also thank my good friend Lieutenant General Marty Steele, who is the president of the Intrepid Museum. It's a big step forward for him. He, like me, he was born and grew up in Arkansas, and he never saw a ship this big in his life until he was too old to figure out how to run one. *[Laughter]* So I appreciate your broadening his experience in life.

I'd like to thank the Members of Congress who are here, and General and Mrs. Shelton, I thank you for being here. And to all the executives who have worked so hard with Tony and the Fisher family to advance the cause of the Intrepid Museum and Foundation, I thank you.

I'd like to say a special word of thanks to Dick Grasso. He is the only person in New York who would give me any credit for the growth of the stock market in this last 7 years. *[Laughter]* There's ol' Mac saying he's wrong about that. It just shows you how confident Mr. Grasso is in his own leadership. *[Laughter]*

Let me say I am delighted to be here. Hillary and I were here yesterday with Chelsea for the tall ships and the review of the military ships. It was a magnificent day. I know many of you were here, and it's a Fourth of July that I think all of us who were here will never, ever forget.

We are now at a place which, in some sense, makes every day the Fourth of July, for the Intrepid is a monument to the heroism of our Armed Forces. It is a place where young people come to learn about our history and our values and exactly how we went about defending them. It is a testament to the extraordinary generosity and vision of Zachary and Elizabeth Fisher.

We all miss Zach tonight. I will never forget his devotion to our troops and to their families. His pride in them and their service and his sensibility to their hardship led him and Elizabeth to reach out to them in ways that were profoundly moving and genuinely life-changing for many of them. He gave a college scholarship or a place to stay near a hospitalized

loved one or a program for a disabled child over and over and over again.

By their acts of generosity, the Fishers made our Armed Forces stronger, and therefore, they made our Nation stronger. And I hope they made all the rest of us more sensitive to the sacrifices of military service and the continuing needs of our military families. All Americans owe them a debt of gratitude.

Now the Fisher family and those of you who support their work carry on this important legacy, a legacy embodied by this magnificent ship. But we all must carry on their legacy as citizens. Our remarkable economic prosperity, to which Mr. Grasso referred, has made this not only a time of opportunity but a time of profound responsibility as well.

I have been saying over and over again like a broken record—so much that even my fans are getting tired of it—but I'm going to say one more time tonight, how a nation handles its prosperity is as stern a test of its judgment, its values, and its character as how a nation handles adversity, and in some ways, it is more difficult. There's not a person in this audience tonight, over the age of 30 anyway, who can't remember at least one time in your life when you made a serious mistake, not because things were so bad but because things were so good you thought there was no penalty to the failure to concentrate. And so it is that our Nation today is confronted with the chance of a lifetime to shape the future of our dreams for our children and, with wise leadership, to shape the first several decades of the 21st century world, because of the gift of our prosperity.

A big part of that will depend upon whether we're prepared to give wise and generous leadership to the rest of the world for peace and freedom, for security and prosperity. And that will depend in no small measure on whether we do the right things in meeting the military challenges of the 21st century.

The Congress this year is passing a defense budget that I believe will meet those challenges—to modernize our forces, to strengthen our readiness, to give our men and women in uniform the training they need, the equipment they need, and even more than we have done

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in the past to give them the quality of life they deserve. A strong defense, no less than in the past, is still a force for peace and stability in the world.

I also hope the Congress will support a strong diplomacy as a part of that defense. Congress recently approved our package for aid to Colombia, which I know has been somewhat controversial, but I believe it is profoundly important. Colombia is the oldest democracy in all Latin America. About a third of her land today is besieged by drug traffickers and guerrillas. There are people there every day who put on military uniforms and police uniforms and put their lives at risk simply by doing their jobs, in a way that is almost inconceivable for an American to imagine in this year. And so we are going to help them, and in so doing, we hope they'll keep more drugs out of the bodies of our own children.

I hope we will continue to support peace in the Balkans. Our military won a war in Kosovo and ended another one in Bosnia and stood up for the proposition that people in Europe in the 21st century will not be murdered because of their religion or their ethnic background. We saw it happen before—it led to the Holocaust in World War II—and the United States will not let it happen again in this new century.

We are doing our best to free the poorest countries of the world from the burdens of crushing debt and disease, to support peace-keeping in Europe, Asia, and Africa, to support peace from Northern Ireland to the Middle East.

I announced today that early next week the peace talks will resume between the Israelis and the Palestinians in Washington with the Prime Minister and Chairman Arafat. I ask for your prayers and support for these brave people as they come here to try to end an old conflict. But if they are willing to make a sacrifice for peace, then the United States must lead the

way in helping to make the investments necessary to ensure that the peace has a positive impact in ordinary people's lives.

The challenge of securing peace did not go away with the end of the cold war; it only became more complex. It still requires our leadership, not just from the White House and from Congress and our military leadership but also from our scholars, our scientists, our engineers, our business leaders, and from ordinary citizens.

The reason there was a man like Zach Fisher is that America is a place of shining opportunity. The reason that our military families needed his help is that we need so many people to serve, and they have needs that, even with all the generosity of Congress, we have not fully met while we continue to try to lead the world toward peace and to avoid war. His example, if nothing else, should convince every American that we should support our military, and even more important, we should support our mission, because when citizens do that, in ways large and small, America is stronger, and the world is a safer and more decent place.

Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:10 p.m. in Technologies Hall at the Intrepid Sea-Air-Space Museum. In his remarks, he referred to sports announcer and former NFL quarterback Boomer Esiason, who was the master of ceremonies for the program; Intrepid Sea-Air-Space Museum President and Chief Executive Officer Lt. Gen. Martin R. Steele, USMC (Ret.); Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman Gen. Henry H. Shelton, USA, and his wife, Carolyn; Intrepid Sea-Air-Space Museum founder Zachary Fisher's nephew Anthony Fisher and widow, Elizabeth Fisher; New York Stock Exchange Chairman and Chief Executive Officer Richard Grasso, who introduced the President; Prime Minister Ehud Barak of Israel; and Chairman Yasser Arafat of the Palestinian Authority.

Remarks at the University of Missouri in Columbia, Missouri *July 6, 2000*

Thank you very, very much. I want to begin by thanking President Pacheco and Chancellor

Wallace. I'm delighted to be here. I want to thank the doctors and nurses who are here. And