

the National Weather Service's near-term forecast calls for continued hot, dry conditions with the probability of additional lightning-caused fires.

Over the last several years, the U.S. Forest Service and the Department of the Interior have increased their efforts to protect communities, watersheds, and threatened species from the risk of fire, including reducing hazardous fuels on at-risk public and private lands.

In the western National Forests alone, there are more than 56 million acres at risk. Since 1994 when the Forest Service treated approximately 385,000 acres across the United States, the Department of Agriculture has increased annual hazardous fuels treatments almost four-fold. Last year, almost 2 million acres were treated. But there is much more to be done. You are currently working to develop a long-term strategy to expand Federal efforts to protect communities in the urban-wildland interface and the underlying ecology of these areas. This long-term plan will set targeted funding priorities to reduce fire risk in fire-dependent ecosystems throughout the country. The plan will focus on protecting communities, watersheds, and species and is a critical component of any fire management program.

To help address this issue in the near term, today I am directing you to report back to me in 30 days with recommendations on actions that may be taken to respond to this year's fires; to reduce the impacts of these wildland fires

on rural communities; and to ensure sufficient firefighting resources in the future. First, the report should consider potential responses to this year's fires, including:

- A short-term plan for rehabilitation of fire-damaged ecosystems, including means to minimize the introduction of invasive species, reduce threats to water quality, and protect endangered species. The plan should also address the role of natural restoration processes in these efforts.
- An assessment of the economic impacts in affected areas.

Second, the report should focus on the short-term actions that Federal agencies, in cooperation with States and local communities, can take to reduce immediate hazards to other communities in the wildland-urban interface. As part of this effort, the report will examine how the Federal Government, in cooperation with State and tribal governments, and local communities, will prepare for anticipated extreme fire conditions in the future, by analyzing fire management planning and firefighter personnel and resources.

You should use this information to review firefighting and prevention needs and work with the Office of Management and Budget to determine whether there are additional FY 2001 funding needs so that the Administration may request, and the Congress may provide, additional resources before the end of the fiscal year.

WILLIAM J. CLINTON

Remarks at a Democratic National Committee Dinner in Charlottesville, Virginia

August 8, 2000

Thank you very, very much. First of all, I want to thank Pat Kluge for having us here. Thank you, Bill. Thank all of you for coming tonight. Some of you, like Alan, are my old friends; some of you I met for the first time tonight; some of you we've met along the way over these last 8 years. I know the hour is late, and the main attraction of this dinner is coming to this magnificent house. I may ask for your permission to use this in an ad, the tag line of which will be, "If you want to live like a

Republican, you have to keep voting Democrat." [Laughter]

I'll be very, very brief. First of all, I thank you for your support of the DNC, and I thank you for—those of you particularly from Virginia who supported Senator Robb. But I want to ask you to think about what you should do now. The Republicans have had their convention in Philadelphia, and they presented themselves in a very appealing way. And we get our chance next week in Los Angeles, a place, I would

remind you, which 40 years ago this month launched John Kennedy on the New Frontier, and I believe will launch Al Gore as the first President of the new century.

But I want to be very brief, but I want you to just try to listen to me—even though it's late and I may not be very good because I got up very early to go to Idaho today—about what I hope you will say to other people about this election. I have always believed—always—no matter what the polls said, ever, I've always thought the Vice President would be elected President. I've always believed Chuck Robb would be reelected to the Senate, for a combination of personal and political reasons.

But the only thing that I'm concerned about this year is whether or not the very success that we've worked so hard to effect will put people in such a good humor—which I love, I want everybody to be happy, you know—not every President wants that—that people will be under the illusion that things are going along so well nobody could mess it up if they tried, and there aren't really any consequences to this election; and secondly, that everybody seems perfectly pleasant in this election year, and therefore, the differences between the two candidates for President and Vice President and the candidates for the Senate and the House and the two parties must not be very great.

Now, I am all for a positive campaign. Having been the beneficiary of some of the negative campaigning of the last 20 years, I think it would be a good thing if we called a halt to campaigns where the main strategy was to convince the voters that your opponent was just one step above a car thief. And I think we can do without that. The truth is, most of the people I've known in politics were honest, hard-working, and did what they thought was right. And I've been in it for a good while.

But it's very important that we go back to the main thing—I always tell people, there are just three things you need to know about this election. One is, it is a truly important election, a big election; two is that there are big differences between the candidates; and three is, we're the only side that wants you to know what the differences are. What does that tell you about who you ought to vote for?

Now, let me just say on each point—why is it important? You can make a very strong argument that this election is just as important, if not more important, than the election of 1992,

which had an historically high turnout, where people were full of energy, and where there was a very good response to the message that I laid out and the specifics in our program, much of which was developed when I worked with Chuck Robb in our years as Governors and our years with the Democratic Leadership Council—which, I hasten to add, Joe Lieberman is now the chairman of. So Chuck and I and our whole crowd, we're elated by this because it proves that the Democrats are going to keep moving the country forward, looking to progressive new ideas, trying to be relevant and to reach out to all thoughtful people without regard to their background and their party.

But this year, you can understand why people would think that the election is not so important. We're in the middle of the longest economic expansion in history. We just—there's going to be an announcement tomorrow that the teen pregnancy rate is at a several-decades-low rate. All the social indicators are going in the right direction: crime at a 25-year low; welfare rolls at a 32-year low, cut in half in the last 7½ years.

But the truth is, this is the time which is even more important. Why? Because none of us have ever been in the position before where we could build the future of our dreams for our children because of our prosperity, first.

Second, we live in a world where change is the only constant and where we know we still have big challenges out there. What are we going to do when the baby boomers retire? How do we propose to give all of our children a world-class education? We have the largest and most diverse group of schoolchildren. How do we propose to keep the economy going and do something about climate change, which even the oil companies now say is real? Twelve years ago, and even 8 years ago, all they did was make fun of Al Gore for being the first one to tell us to think about it. And those are just three issues.

So you've got to convince people they need to pay attention, this is really important. What you do with your prosperity is at least as stern a test of character, judgment, and values as what you do with adversity. Because, really, if you've got any sense, if you're faced with adversity you only have one choice: change and work.

The second thing is, there really are real differences here. And we can posit the fact that our opponents are good people and patriotic

people and want to do what they think is right, but there are real differences. I just want to mention two or three, because they affect not only the President's race, the Vice President's race but Chuck Robb's race.

One, on economics. Our position is we worked hard for this surplus. It's kept interest rates down; it's kept this economy booming. From the minute—as Chuck said, the most significant vote for the economy cast in this administration was way back in August of 1993, when we said we were going to reduce the deficit by at least \$500 billion over the next couple of years, and we were going to do some very unpopular and controversial things to do it, and we were prepared to do it and take the heat.

By one vote in both Houses it passed. Not a single Republican voted for it. They said it would bring a recession, increase the deficit, increase interest rates; the sky would fall; the world would end. That was their basic position. And so it is fair to say that they are not to blame for the consequences of our economic vote.

Now, to be perfectly fair, a few years later they did come along, and we passed the balanced budget bill with big bipartisan majorities in both Houses. But that's because the hard work had been done by the Democrats alone, people like Chuck Robb, who put his neck on the line, knowing he was going to have to run for reelection in a very difficult environment, and he did it anyway.

So what do we do now? Our position is, yes, we have a big projected surplus, but we think it would be a big mistake to spend it all, because it's projected and because the truth is, the way it's done doesn't take account of a lot of things we know we're going to have to spend. We know there will be emergencies. We know Government spending will grow by more than they say because it doesn't take account of the population. So what do we say?

We say, let's give the American people a tax cut that we can afford and focus on things that we really need: universal access to college, access to long-term care, working families' access to child care, more retirement savings, relief from the marriage penalty. But let's keep it at a place we can afford.

And I want to be quite candid. It's only 25 percent the size of the Republican tax cut; 80 percent of the American people would get more money under ours than theirs. None of you

would; you'd all get more money under theirs. But why should you be for us? Because, among other things, you get at least interest rates a percentage lower for a decade, which is lower business loans, a stronger stock market, more jobs, higher profit, and for ordinary people, literally \$250 billion in mortgage payment savings, \$30 billion in car payment savings, \$15 billion in college loan savings.

What's their—now, it took me a while to say that. They've got a much more appealing position. Their position is, "Hey, it's your money; we're going to give it back to you. Why is the Government keeping your money? Vote for us; it's a \$2 trillion tax cut over 10 years." What's the problem with that?

Number one, they have said they want to partially privatize the Social Security system, which means those of you who are younger can take 2 percent of your payroll and invest it in the stock market. But in order to do it and keep everybody happy, they have to guarantee the benefits of everybody over 55 under the present system. Well, the thing is scheduled to run out of money in 2034 anyway. Under the Vice President's plan, it would go to 2054, which would take it out beyond the life expectancy of all but the most fortunate baby boomers. But if you lower the date of bankruptcy of Social Security from 2034 up forward, obviously that's a non-starter, so that costs a trillion dollars over 10 years just to keep it where it is. And then they promised to spend money and all that.

But the most important thing you need to know is, this surplus is projected; it may not be there. And as I've said all over America, now, this is kind of like getting one of those letters from the sweepstakes signed by Ed McMahon. *[Laughter]* You've all gotten them—"You may have won \$10 million." And you may. And when you got that letter, if you went out and spent the \$10 million the next day, you really should think seriously about supporting the Republicans this year. *[Laughter]* But if you didn't, you ought to stick with us and keep this prosperity going.

Now, this is important. You have to explain this to people. There was a big, big headline in USA Today, one of the big newspapers, just in the last couple of months, saying people didn't understand the differences. This is a gaping difference. They want to go back to the economic policy we had before we showed up here. And Chuck Robb sat there all these years

and voted for—took all these tough votes in a State that was anti-tax, stated it was conservative, put his neck on the line to get this country in the shape it's in now, and all of a sudden we're going to have an election and allow it all to be thrown away just because we don't understand the consequences? This is a huge deal, folks. This is not a casual conversation here. This is a gaping difference.

I'll give you another couple of examples. Crime—we supported 100,000 police, the Brady Bill, the assault weapons ban, and their leadership was against it—their past and present leadership. Now we want to put 50,000 more police on the street in the highest crime areas, close the gun show loophole in the background check law, mandate child trigger safety locks because a lot of kids die by accident every year, and stop the importation of these large capacity ammunition clips. They allow you to get around the assault weapons ban because you just get the clips from overseas legally, and then you add them to a weapon that you buy legally here because it's not an assault weapon, and presto, you've got an assault weapon. It's a huge loophole.

And the Vice President thinks that people who buy handguns from now on ought to have a photo ID license showing that they've passed the background check and they know how to use the gun safely. I agree with that. That's our policy.

Their policy is, they've never supported us on the 100,000 police, as Chuck will tell you, or the 50,000 more. We've had to just drag it out, fight for it every year. And their policy is, what we really need is to have more concealed weapons, and people should be able to carry them everywhere, even in houses of worship. [Laughter] No, they believe this.

I was on a townhall meeting the other day and I spoke to one of the advocates of this position in Texas; this is the Texas policy. And she made a very heartfelt, compelling case for why this was the answer to all the crime problems in America and why I was wrong. The point I want to make is you have to assume when people say they're going to do something, they believe it, and they get elected, that they'll do it. So there's a real difference here.

There are differences here on the Patients' Bill of Rights, on the minimum wage, on a whole host of other issues. There's a profound difference on the choice issue. The next Presi-

dent will appoint between two and four judges to the Supreme Court, in all probability. The next Senate will confirm or deny those appointments. The nominees of the Republican Party for President and Vice President have repeatedly said they believe that *Roe v. Wade* is wrong and should be changed. The nominees of the Democratic Party support it. And because they're honorable people, you have to expect them to do what they believe is right when they get these appointments.

And I think that this should be something we deal with soberly, not in slogans, and not by attacking people. People who—everybody has very deep feelings about this, but we should assume that they will do what they believe is right. And I know that Al Gore will do what he believes is right. And I know what Chuck Robb believes is right. And it's not just on this issue, not just the choice issue, but this relates to civil rights enforcement and how the ordinary citizens are treated in the courts of the land, and all these matters are very important.

So you need to think about this, and you need to tell people who tell you it doesn't matter who wins that they're wrong, that the rhetoric may have been similar at both conventions, and we're pleased by that, but that we have changed our policies—here's our policies; we tell you exactly what we're for. There's a reason that they didn't have as much detail at their convention, and that is that they hope you think there's not much difference here. There is a huge difference.

And I could give you lots of other examples. But I don't want to keep you any later, but you get the point. We may never have another chance in our lifetime.

And I want to say a couple of things about the Vice President, a couple of things about Joe Lieberman, and a couple of things about Chuck Robb, because I'm really proud to be identified with them.

Al Gore is the best Vice President this country ever had, by a good long way. We have had a lot of very fine Presidents who were Vice President, including Senator Robb's father-in-law, who gave us Medicare, the civil rights laws, and did a lot of other things of enduring value for America. Teddy Roosevelt was Vice President; Thomas Jefferson was Vice President; Harry Truman was Vice President. We never had anybody who in this job did anything remotely as much as Al Gore has done, to support

the economy, to advance the cause of education, to make sure all of our schools were hooked up to the Internet, to help us deal with the environmental challenges of the country in a way that was good for the environment, to downsize the Government in a way that didn't require us to put people in the street.

I could give you example after example after example. He is, therefore, the best qualified person in my adult lifetime to be President, to run. There's—not even close. No serious student of the Presidency, whether they agree with any of my policies or not, would seriously dispute this. There has never been a Vice President who did so much good for the country as Vice President and had this much influence and this much responsibility.

The second thing you need to know is he's got the right economic policy. And I think that's pretty important. I'd kind of like to keep this thing going a while. I've got to go out and be a citizen, earn a living here—[laughter]—and I'm going to be really steamed if after all these last 8 years it doesn't work out for me. It will be terrible. Think about my daughter and my continuing educational responsibilities and—I'm kidding, but it's serious—dead serious. It couldn't be clearer.

The third thing you need to know is, this guy really does understand the future. I saw Governor Bush took a shot at him on this whole Internet thing. That's another one of the many bum raps you get. If you stand around in politics enough, you'll get some bum raps. What Al Gore said he did and what he did—what he actually did is he sponsored legislation to turn the Internet from being the private province of a few physicists into a broadly available communications technology which is sweeping the world. Do you know how many sites there were on the Worldwide Web when I became President? Fifty—5-0—in 1993. It's now the fastest growing communications exchange in history. He did have a lot to do with that. He is the first person I ever heard say, "The Library of Congress will be on the Internet, and ordinary people will be able to get it."

And he did lead the fight for the E-rate, which means that all the poorest schools in America can now hook up to the Internet. When we started this thing, only 3 percent of our classrooms were hooked up to the Internet, only 11 percent of our schools. Today, over 90 percent of our schools and two-thirds of our class-

rooms are hooked up to the Internet. That's pretty good.

He understands climate change. Like I said, people made fun of him for years. I don't want the Florida Everglades to flood; I went to too much trouble to try to save them. I don't want farm fields in the Middle West to burn up. I want somebody who understands this.

He understands all our medical records and our financial records are on the Internet, and somebody ought to be able to say yes before somebody else can go get them. He understands the human genome issue and what we have to do to try to maximize its benefits without letting people lose the ability to get a job or health insurance because they got a bad little gene card. He thinks about these things. I want somebody in the White House that understands the future, and he does.

And the fourth thing that's most important to me of all is that he believes in one America. He thinks we all ought to go along for the ride. He thinks that the people who served this dinner tonight deserve the same chance to send their kids to college as the rest of us have.

And I'll tell you just a couple things about Joe Lieberman. When I was a first-year law student at Yale, he was a 28-year-old candidate for the State senate whom I had the honor to support. He's been my friend for 30 years. He believes ideas are serious. He was—Chuck will tell you, he's been an integral part of everything we've done with the Democratic Leadership Council over the last gazillion years—since we've been working on it, 15 years—and has firmly said that the Democratic Party is the party of the vital center and of tomorrow's ideas and we're going to keep changing in the right direction, which I think is very important. And I agree with what Chuck said, his wife will soon be one of the most quoted people in Washington. But I should tell you that we didn't mean that in a pejorative sense. She is a wonderful woman and will become, I think, terrifically popular around the country.

Now, the last thing I want to say is, one of the reasons I always love to come to events like this is I get to embarrass Chuck Robb. [Laughter] Here's a guy who never talks about his military service. Do you ever hear Chuck Robb give a speech about Vietnam? You'd think he was teaching college somewhere talking about it, because he thinks all he did was do his duty.

He never talks about the votes he cast in terms of putting his neck on the line. I'll never forget the night that he was sitting in the White House with me in 1993, and they were trying to literally eviscerate me over my gays in the military issue. And Chuck Robb—the only time I ever heard him talk personally about his record in Vietnam—and supported me on that, based on his personal experience, knowing he was going to have to face a terrible reelection battle in '94, knowing he was going to have to take a very tough vote on my economic plan, knowing that he was going to have everybody in the well-known groups in Virginia that don't agree with us about anything going after him and trying to basically politically decapitate him.

And this man is very modest and very restrained in what he says. But I do not believe there is a braver person in public life today than Chuck Robb. I do not believe it. And I've always thought he'd be reelected. The people of Virginia need to know what kind of Governor he was, what kind of Senator he's been, and what kind of person he is. You need to take care of that, too. This country needs him. This country needs him.

All that Al Gore and Joe Lieberman are saying, all the stuff that I've tried to do these last few years, he was out there in the early '80s, from then on, arguing that our party should take this course and our country should take this course. And I feel the same way I do about him and Joe and Al, all together: We must not let the people who did so much to bring Amer-

ica to this magic moment be punished in this election because times are so good people don't think it makes a difference. I'm telling you, if people know what the election is about, know what the differences are, I can go on vacation between now and November. But our job is to make sure they know that.

So I thank you for your contribution; I thank you for your support. But remember, you may not get a chance like this in your lifetime again. You may not ever get a chance when there's so much economic prosperity, social progress, the absence of crippling domestic crisis or overpowering foreign threat, to literally shape the future of your dreams for your children. It may not happen to you again.

You ought to carry that as a personal responsibility every day between now and November—for Al Gore and Joe Lieberman, for Chuck Robb, for my favorite Senate candidate from New York, and from everybody else we've got running. It's worth fighting for, and we have to win.

Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:54 p.m. at a private residence. In his remarks, he referred to dinner host Pat Kluge and her fiancé, Bill Moses; Ed McMahon, Publishers Clearing House Sweepstakes spokesperson; Republican Presidential candidate Gov. George W. Bush of Texas and Vice Presidential candidate Dick Cheney; and Hadasah Lieberman, wife of Democratic Vice Presidential candidate Senator Joseph I. Lieberman.

Remarks on Presenting the Presidential Medal of Freedom

August 9, 2000

The President. Thank you. Good afternoon. Welcome to the White House. I want to join Hillary in welcoming all those who have been acknowledged and all the other family and friends of our honorees today. And I want to thank her for many things but especially for the conversations that we had leading up to this day about people who should be selected and the reasons there. Some of them reflect, now that we've been here 8 years and been involved in public life for nearly three decades, a lot of personal experiences that we have had.

And we had a lot of good times talking about who should be here today and why.

More than 60 years ago, President Franklin Roosevelt said, "Freedom cannot be bestowed. It must be achieved." From the founding of our Nation, it has been the duty of each generation to achieve freedom all over again, to expand it, to deepen its meaning, to widen the circle of those who are included as full citizens.

Today we honor 15 men and women who have done exactly that. They have helped America to achieve freedom. It is my honor, on behalf