

Remarks at a Reception for Representative Eddie Bernice Johnson September 12, 2000

Well, that's not really why we're here. [*Laughter*] But if you want to change the Constitution in any way that's good, you're going to have to change the Congress first. [*Laughter*] And if you change the Congress and you have the right outcome in the Presidential election, you won't need to change the Constitution. [*Laughter*]

Let me say, first of all, to Bob and Sheila, how glad I am to be back in their home. They have been so phenomenally generous to so many people who have devoted their lives to public service, who, therefore, have to have the help of people like them to continue to serve. But I'm grateful to them because a lot of people wouldn't do that, and I thank them.

I will say to you publicly what I said to them privately a few moments ago. They've enjoyed a great deal of success in life, and God's been good to them, and they've worked hard to help God along—[*laughter*—and they've done right well. It's a long way from Mississippi. [*Laughter*]

But I think their greatest glory is in their two children. And I expect Brett, one day, to win the U.S. Open in tennis—[*laughter*—and I think his sister will one day win the gold medal in the Olympics for her equestrian skills. Whether they do or not, they're really good people, and that's the ultimate tribute to Bob and Sheila, because they take all this good fortune they've had and instead of just thinking about themselves, they think about their children, and they think about our children, which is why they're helping Eddie Bernice and why they've helped so many other people, and I want to thank you for that.

Now, I got Eddie Bernice in a sentimental mood tonight, because we were in the living room visiting with a few people. I put my arm around her, and I said, "Let me ask you something. Do you think there is anybody here who has known you as long as I have?" [*Laughter*] She said, "You know, come to think of it, I don't believe there is."

And 28 years ago, when we were working together, it was a pretty interesting experience. Senator McGovern got 33 votes—percent of the vote in Texas. I never will forget, one day I was on a plane from Dallas to Little Rock with

a young businessman from Jackson, Mississippi, and he said, "What are you doing?" And I told him what I was doing. He said, "You're doing what?" [*Laughter*] I said, "Yes, I'm working for McGovern in Texas." And he looked at me—he didn't crack a smile—and he said, "You know, you're the only white man I ever met for McGovern." [*Laughter*] It's a true story. It's a true story.

Two years later, when Sam Ervin was having his hearings, the phone rang in my house in Little Rock one day, and it was this guy on the phone. He had kept my card, and he said, "I just called to tell you, you were right, and I was wrong." [*Laughter*]

Well, Eddie Bernice was right on so many things. Look, I can be very brief. This woman has been a friend of mine for 28 years, and she still pretty much looks exactly like she did 28 years ago. And since I don't even look like what I did 8 years ago, I resent that. [*Laughter*]

But she's the sort of person that I think we need in positions of leadership in the country and in our party. She is a passionate proponent of equal rights for everybody. She cares about health care. She cares about giving everybody a chance, but she also understands how to run the store. She's fiscally responsible. She's committed to the global economy. She wants America to run toward it, not run away from it. She's taken a lot of tough votes to stick with me when I tried to modernize this economy. When even members of our own party thought I was wrong, she always stood with me—sometimes when it wasn't easy. And she understands that if you want to really help working people, you also have to help business, too. And there's a lot of you here tonight because of that.

So I think the country would work better if everybody believed that you could be pro-business and pro-labor, pro-growth and pro-environment, pro-civil rights and pro-individual opportunity. I think the country would work better.

So I would have come here regardless, because she's been my friend for 28 years, but I'm telling you, she is a great Member of Congress. And she believes the things that I think are important for Americans to believe and to live by and to work by together if we're going

to make the most of the phenomenal opportunities that are before us.

You know, I just had an interview with *Wired* magazine. You all ever read *Wired* magazine? [Laughter] And these two young women came in and interviewed me, and they're miles ahead of me on a lot of this operational technology. But they think I've been a fairly good friend of the high-tech sector, and we were talking about it. And they said, "You know, it might even be more interesting to be President in the next 8 years than it was in the last." [Laughter]

And I just would say this. One of the reasons that I'm so interested in this election for—I've got a lot of personal stake in this election. As you know, I voted in New York for my wife for the first time in my life today. It was a big kick, one of the greatest thrills I ever had. I loved it. And obviously, I feel a deep personal commitment to Al Gore because he's been the best Vice President the country has ever had. And I have—Joe Lieberman and I have been friends for 30 years. I met Joe Lieberman 2 years before I met Eddie Bernice, when he was 28 years old, running for the State Senate.

So it's funny how life goes in circles, you know? None of us ever could have known that we would be where we are today doing what we're doing today. In spite of what she says, I don't believe that even my mother thought I could be President in 1973. [Laughter] Most people I knew just wanted me to get a haircut. [Laughter]

But you know, when Harry Truman went home to Independence, Missouri, he said he was reclaiming the most important title any American can have, that of citizen. And I believe that. I've worked as hard as I could to try to turn this country around, and we're in better shape than we were 8 years ago.

I think if you listen to the political rhetoric today and compare it to the rhetoric of 8 years ago, or even 2 years ago, the people have sent the politicians a clear message: They're tired of hate-mongering and division; they want to hear people talk about the issues. And they have figured out again that elections are job interviews. All these things are jobs. It really matters if you get up and go to work every day. It matters if you're doing the right things. It matters if you've got good people around you. It matters if you're not embarrassed to say, "I don't know, but I'd sure like to learn."

And I take a lot of pride in that. But what I want you to understand is that as a citizen, just like I said when I spoke in Los Angeles, I've waited for 35 years for my country to have the chance again to build the future of its dreams for our children. All of the best things are still out there. In spite of every good thing that's happened to us in the last 8 years, the best is still out there. But we have to make good decisions, and we have to hire good people for President and Vice President, for Senator and Representative. And then we've got to make up our mind we're going to go forward together.

The basic reason I'm a Democrat is because when I was a little boy, my grandfather told me a story about how he cried one Easter in the Depression because he couldn't afford \$2 to buy my mother an Easter dress. And when I was a kid, everybody had to have a new outfit at Easter. And my mother made me get one whether I wanted one or not. And if you remember the fashions of the fifties, it was fairly painful for me sometimes to wear some of the things that were mandated just because my granddaddy had a tough time in the Depression. [Laughter]

But anyway, my grandfather believed everybody deserved a chance without regard to their race. And he believed that we all do better when we help each other. I still believe that. And I'm proud to be a member of the oldest political party of any democracy in the world, and I'm proud for whatever contribution I was able to make to those two goals. But the best is still out there.

And so I'm crazy about our candidates for President and for Vice President. I love my wife more than life, and I've been nuts about Eddie Bernice Johnson for 28 years. But the real reason we ought to be helping them is, it's the right thing for America.

Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 8:35 p.m. at a private residence. In his remarks, he referred to dinner hosts Robert L. and Sheila Johnson, their son, Brett, and their daughter, Paige. Representative Johnson was a candidate for reelection in Texas' 30th Congressional District.

Remarks at a Reception for Congressional Candidate Mike Ross September 12, 2000

The President. Thank you very much. Well, this is a special way for me to end what has been a special day, here in the home of my oldest friend in the world. The older we get, the more we want to say, longest standing—[laughter]—or some phony substitute. Mack and Donna Kay have been so wonderful to me, and I'm very grateful that they did this for Mike, because it's particularly important, and I want to say a little more about that.

I want to thank Senator Bumpers and Senator Lincoln and all the Members of Congress who are here from Arkansas and throughout the country and former Members who are here and all the members of my administration who are here and all of you who are here without whom I would not be here myself and those of you who have worked so hard to make our last 8 years successful for America.

You know, Mack was my first Chief of Staff, and then he was my Envoy to the Americas. And I think he now feels as at home in any South American country as he does in south Arkansas—[laughter]—because he's done such a great job for our country, and I'm very grateful for that.

And I'm grateful for all of you who've served in this administration, one way or the other—those of you still here to the bitter end and those of you that got out when you can still make some money. [Laughter] Look at old Billy laughing. [Laughter]

Now, I want to say a few things about this race. On the way down, Mack looked at me, and he put his arm around me, and he said, "Now, you know, you can't go down there and say what you really think." [Laughter] "Show a little restraint." So I'll try.

I want you to know a couple of things about Mike Ross and a couple things about south Arkansas. This district runs the whole length of the southern part of our State. It includes not only Hope, the place where I was born, but Hot Springs, the place where I grew up.

It includes a big chunk of the Mississippi Delta, one of the poorest parts of America. In fact, it's the poorest part of America, outside of the Native American reservations. It is an unbelievably wonderful place. I don't know that

I ever had so much fun in my life as I did campaigning down there. It's a place where personal contact matters a lot, and it's a place where I got 63 percent of the vote in the 1996 Presidential election. It is, therefore, the most Democratic seat in America presently held by a Republican, a genial person and a person who, wherever two or more gathered, was always happy to go, and that's good politics in south Arkansas. I know. I've been there. I never lost since they stood with me through thick and thin.

And it's a long way from Washington to the piney woods of south Arkansas, a long way from those soybean fields. And it's sometimes hard to get the message clear over the transom that exists between here and there. But all I can tell you is, I think that part of our State and our entire State are better off because of the economics, the education, the health care policies we've pursued, and whenever the chips were down, the Representative from south Arkansas was always on the other side.

Whenever the people down there needed one thing and the party leaders up here of the Republican Party said another, another always won. Over and over and over again, for 8 long years. It was just as hard politically for Blanche Lambert to stand up there 8 years ago and vote for that economic plan, as it would have been for the Congressman from the Fourth Congressional District. She did it, and he didn't, because they told him not to.

And when they said, "Now, here's this budget with the biggest education and environmental and health care cuts in history, and, oh, by the way, we're going to abolish the Department of Education," he stood up there and said, "Yes, sir, count me in."

And I'll bet you there never was a speech given about it at any country crossroad in south Arkansas. More to the point, when they—when we finally got out of debt and started running surpluses and started paying down an accumulated national debt which had quadrupled in the 12 years before we came here, when they controlled the economic policy of the country, then they were up here voting for tax cuts, most of which would go to a lot of people in this room that don't need it as bad as they