

credit and do these other things for our health care system and still take care of the people that are giving us the medicine and the health care. And we want America to keep going until we're the safest big country in the world. And we want to keep cleaning up the environment, while we improve the economy. And most important of all, we want to build one America. And on every single one of these issues, there are huge differences.

Look, folks, I've done everything I could to turn this country around, to get us together, and move us forward. But when the Vice President says—when the Vice President says in these debates, “You ain't seen nothing yet,” that's not just an election year slogan. I'm not going to be there, and I believe that. I believe that, because it takes a long time to turn a country around. It's like a big ocean liner in the ocean—that's why the *Titanic* hit the iceberg. They saw the iceberg, but they didn't see it in time to turn it around. Now, we got it turned around before we hit the iceberg, but

we still haven't reached the far shore of our destination.

So the best is still out there. But now it's all back in your hands. We've got to make the right choices. There is a clear choice. It just has to be clear to every single American.

I will never be able to thank you enough for what you have done for me. But the most important thing is what you will do for yourselves, your children, and your grandchildren by getting out, voting for her, voting for Bill Nelson, voting for Al Gore and Joe Lieberman on November 7th.

Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:10 p.m. in the Exhibit Hall at the Prime Osborne Convention Center. In his remarks, he referred to State Senator Betty S. Holzendorf; Bill Nelson, candidate for U.S. Senate in Florida; and Republican Presidential candidate Gov. George W. Bush of Texas. Representative Brown was a candidate for reelection in Florida's Third Congressional District.

Remarks to the Uncommon Women on Common Ground Conference in Jacksonville October 4, 2000

[*The President's remarks are joined in progress.*]

The President. —and when the actors were supposed to get their curtain call, they pulled back the curtains and all the real people were standing there. It was an amazing thing. But Kerry, you know her husband, Andrew, is in my Cabinet, of course. And her mother is a great friend of mine, and one of her brothers served in Congress with me during my Presidency. But she has done an astonishing thing here, and I urge you to look at the book and read it. It's really amazing. There are a lot of brave women out there around the world, doing things that stiffen the spine when you read about it.

Let me just say a few words about a couple of women's issues that I think are quite important. And I hadn't really prepared anything to say, but we're close to an election in which I believe the American people will make choices which, whether we consciously are aware of it or not, will shape a lot of how we live for

the next 20 years. And one of the biggest challenges we face, I think, is how to broaden the circle of prosperity to include people that aren't part of it and then how to figure out how both to continue to open opportunities for women and allow people to balance work and family, because the most important work of society is still raising children, and so we have to figure out how to balance these things.

And the truth is that our country is better at creating jobs, starting businesses, and expanding the economy than nearly any country in the world. In the last several years, we've been, by far, better than anybody else in the world, but if you look over a long period of time, we do pretty well with that. But we lag significantly behind a lot of other countries in figuring out how to balance work and family.

So I would just like to say that, for whatever it's worth, I think the family and medical leave law has now allowed some 25 million people to take some time off when a baby is born

or a family member is sick without losing their jobs. I think it should be expanded. A lot of you are small-business people. The big debate that we always have is, how burdensome will it be to small business if we expand it? Should we exempt smaller businesses? If so, where should the cutoff be at number of employees, and what kind of leave should we have?

But that's something I hope all of you will sort of debate, discuss, and go forward with, because when we finally—it was the first bill I signed as President and, I think, still one of the finest pieces of legislation I've ever been involved in. It's made a huge difference. Still, after all these years, it's not unusual at all for me in any given crowd of any kind of people to have at least one person come up to me and thank me for the family leave law and explain how it's affected their lives. It's already happened to me once today, and it happens everywhere.

But it's still rather limited in its reach. And we've got to decide what to do about it. But it's important. It's an important part of balancing work and family.

Another, I think, very important thing is strengthening the equal pay laws that the country has. I've got some legislation before the Congress now I've been trying hard to pass for more than a year to strengthen the equal pay laws. And there's an even more extensive bill up there that goes beyond what I have proposed, that maybe should be a law, but I can't even pass what I've got up there. *[Laughter]*

And again, the issue is, how much can we do on this? What kind of burden is it? Is it a burden for small businesses? And I think a lot of women who are active in business are in a unique position to offer the right kind of perspective. But the main thing is, we need to keep taking action on this, because there is still, even though we've made dramatic progress since President Kennedy signed the first legislation, there's still significant differences in providing equal pay for equal work. There's still a big gender gap in access to high-tech jobs. There's still a significant gender gap in people who hold positions of big responsibility in corporate America. Maybe Cathy talked about that a little bit; I don't know. But we've got to—there's a lot of these challenges that are out there, and I believe the National Government does have a responsibility, at least on the equal pay front.

And for the whole time I've been President, I've had six or seven women Cabinet members, including the first female Secretary of State and the first female Attorney General, who is from here in Florida. So we've tried to set a good example, but I think that these are very important issues that we will have to continue to work on.

Then there's a whole big cluster of health care issues that I think need a lot of emphasis. I've got legislation before the Congress now to spend a couple of hundred million dollars to provide medical care to poor women with breast or cervical cancer who otherwise wouldn't be able to access medical care. I think that's important.

But there are a lot of big issues here that I think need tending to. This whole issue of whether we should have a Patients' Bill of Rights or not, that essentially says you have a right to see a specialist if your doctor says you should; you have a right to keep your treatment if you're undergoing chemotherapy or you're pregnant and you change jobs and your employer changes health care providers, you should still be able to keep the same physician during treatment; and if you get hit and you have to go to the emergency room, you get to go to the closest one, not the one that is otherwise covered by your HMO; and if you get hurt really badly by a bad decision, you can sue. Otherwise, it's a bill of suggestions, not a bill of rights. This is a big issue.

Now, a lot of the HMO's are not for it because they think it will add to the cost of health care. And if you provide health care for your employees, you've got to be concerned about that. All I can tell you is, I have two pieces of evidence that it's affordable. One is, I put it into effect for all people covered by Federal health plans—Medicare, Medicaid, Federal Employees Health Insurance, military's and the military retirees'—and it's cost us a buck a month a premium.

The Congressional Budget Office of the Republican majority estimated, even though they won't support it, that it would cost less than \$2 a month a premium, about \$1.80. And their argument is that the population as a whole is a little bit higher risk than those that are insured by the Federal Government, which may or may not be so, but there's an argument for that. But anyway, I'd pay \$2 a month so that you could go to the nearest emergency room if—

God forbid—you got hit by a car leaving here. But this is a big family health issue, and there are others. So I just would point that out.

Then, let me say, something else that I think may not be seen as a women's issue but I think it's quite important is, what are the implications of the human genome project, and how does it relate to the explosion in Internet and computer technology? This is going to affect all of you. Young women coming home from the hospital within the next decade, I predict, will give birth to babies with a life expectancy of 90 years. I believe we'll move pretty quickly from where we are now, 77, to 90.

Now, secondly—and the reason that will happen is not because everybody will start having perfect babies but because you'll get a gene map—mothers and fathers will get gene maps of their kids that will tell them what their problems are. And then over the course of their life, a lot of those problems will be solved because we'll be doing experiments we haven't done and people will know to take their kids in for the solution. Or if you have, for example, a 50 percent probability, your baby does, of developing some kind of cancer in his or her thirties, you'll also learn that there are five or six things you can do that will cut the odds of that dramatically. So it will be a good thing.

Simultaneously, all your health records are going to be on somebody's computer, and so are all your finance records. How do we enable the people that do business, how do we enable the Internet economy to flourish, and protect your rights of privacy? I think you ought to be able to say so before somebody gets into the health or financial records. And working through that is going to be a big issue, and it will affect women, particularly those that are trying to manage a home and a work life. And they go to basically the core of family values in our society.

So they will provide a—that will be a big challenge, too. And I've sent some legislation up to Congress—I don't think it will pass this year because it's controversial, because some of the people involved don't think we ought to have as many protections as are in my bill for the privacy of medical and financial records. But it's something, no matter who the President is, you all have to deal with. And it ought not to be a partisan issue. It ought to be something that we deal with almost in a family way, as well as a business way. But it's an issue that

I would think that the women of America who are in the work force would have a special concern about. And so I hope you'll think about that.

So those are just some of the things that I wanted to mention. I think that we're moving into what should be the most exciting and prosperous time in the history of the country, if we make the right decisions. And I'll just mention two big ones that I think are important.

I think we ought to keep paying the debt down, because I think one of the reasons that we were able to—for example, our Small Business Administration in the last 8 years tripled the number of loans to women entrepreneurs over the previous 8 years. But one of the reasons we were able to do it is, the economy was growing against the backdrop of lower interest rates. And it's very significant, because if you pay the debt down over the next 12 years—basically, if you keep interest rates a percent lower over the next decade—it means lower business loans, more business investment, more growth. It also means about \$390 billion in lower home mortgages, \$30 billion in lower car payments, \$15 billion in lower college loan payments.

And I would like to see it become an American commitment, not a party commitment, because I think it makes sense. In a global economy, where all these financial markets are global, fiscal conservatism should be embraced by the more liberal and the more conservative party as good economics and good social policy, because if you keep interest rates lower, obviously you spread the benefits of the economy wider. So I think that is very, very important, and I would hope that everybody would agree.

The other thing that I think is hopeful is that we are engaged in a massive national debate now about how we can go about providing world-class education to all of our children. The only thing I can tell you is this: In 1979 Hillary and I started working on these issues when Bob Graham was the Governor of Florida. We did a lot of work together. And then when Lawton Chiles became Governor, he and I were very close, and we worked on these things. We didn't really know 20 years ago what we know now about how to have uniformity of excellence in education and whether every failing school could be turned around. We now know that they can be turned around and that all children can learn. It's not just a slogan.

And it's actually happening out there. In the last—in the decade of the nineties, reading and test scores went up. The dropout rate went down. The college-going rate is at an all-time high. The number of kids taking advance placement increased by two-thirds. The number of Hispanic kids taking advanced placement increased by 300 percent. The number of African-American kids increased by 500 percent, taking advanced placement tests.

I was in a school in Harlem the other day where 2 years ago—a grade school—2 years ago 80 percent of the kids were doing reading and math below grade level—2 years ago. Today, 74 percent of the kids are doing reading and math at or above grade level—in only 2 years. They've got a new principal. They adopted a school uniform policy. They adopted a high expectations/high accountability policy. They lowered the class sizes. They cleaned up the school, and they turned it around in 2 years.

I was in a poor school in western Kentucky a couple months ago that 4 years ago was one of the worst schools in Kentucky. Over half the kids were on school lunch programs. They were desperately poor. And in 4 years they went from—listen to this—12 percent of the kids doing reading at or above grade level to almost 60 percent; 5 percent of the kids doing math at or above grade level to 70 percent; zero percent of the kids doing science at or above grade level to 63 percent.

And the trick for America is not—this is not rocket science now. People know how to do this. This is happening. It happens in Florida. It happens in every State in the country. And what we have not learned how to do is how to do it on a uniform basis.

And so I hope that one of the things that will be debated—I spent—both Hillary and I probably spent more time in the 12 years before we came here working in schools than anything else we did. And I still think it's the key to the future of the country. You've got the largest and most diverse student population in the history of America, the first time we've had more kids in school than we did in the baby boom generation after World War II. And the good news is the schools are getting better, and the real good news is we actually know how to turn them all around. But it requires more than even a debate in the Presidential election. It requires

much more than legislation from Congress. It also requires people's involvement.

But for whatever it's worth to those of you that are involved in the schools, we're now awash in evidence that this is a problem we can solve, and therefore, when you have that, there's no excuse for not solving it. So I urge all of you, in whatever way you can, to make your contribution to that.

I've already talked longer than I meant to. And I didn't have any idea what I was going to say when I got here. [*Laughter*] But I'm glad I got invited. There is one thing I'd like to say officially—I don't know how many of you are here from Dade County in south Florida, but they had the worst weather down there yesterday that I have seen in the 17 years I've been going down there. And there's still a lot of serious flooding. The Governor has asked for an emergency declaration, and we're reviewing it now, and I hope to have it issued shortly. But we're going to do what we can to help. But for those of you who have friends and neighbors down there who don't know, it was really bad—I mean, really bad.

And among other things, for all us political junkies, the flood, lightning and wind knocked out the cable system last night, and we had to race to another place that had satellite TV so I could see the debate. [*Laughter*] But there are a lot more serious problems down there, and we're going to do what we can to help them.

I want to thank all the people here on the platform for putting this together. And I want to thank you for meeting here. Thank you for having me. Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 3 p.m. at the Prime Osborne Convention Center. In his remarks, he referred to author Kerry Kennedy Cuomo and her husband, Secretary of Housing and Urban Development Andrew M. Cuomo, her mother, Ethel Kennedy, and her brother, Joseph P. Kennedy II; Cathy Bessant, president, Bank of America (Florida); and Gov. Jeb Bush of Florida. The transcript released by the Office of the Press Secretary did not include the complete opening remarks of the President. A tape was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

Remarks at a Reception for Representative Corrine Brown in Jacksonville October 4, 2000

The President. Now, listen, we're going to forgive you for that minor election year exaggeration. [Laughter] Let me tell you folks, were you all—you weren't in the rally, were you?

Audience members. No-o-o!

The President. Well, we had a good one, and I thank you for making it possible. I just want to say more briefly what I said in there. I am grateful to the people of Florida for the opportunity they've given to me and Hillary and to our administration to serve. The first victory I won, of any kind, running for President was the December 1991 straw poll at the Florida Democratic Convention, and I'm very grateful.

We almost won here in '92 and spent no money. And I had a big fight within our own camp. I kept telling them, "We can win in Florida." So when we didn't win in '92, I said, "There will be no debate in '96. We're going all out." In the meanwhile, of course, we had the Summit of the Americas here; we moved the Southern Command here; we saved the Everglades; we helped to bring the economy back; and we got a big victory in Florida in 1996. And what Corrine said was true: When it came on the television early on election eve that Bill Clinton and Al Gore had carried Florida, everybody said, "Katie bar the door. It's over," and all that. And I would like it if you would send that message again on the night of November 7th.

I also want to say that if I have been able to help our country, it's important to me that you understand that it wouldn't have been possible had it not been for the support of people like Alcee Hastings and Corrine Brown. And she has done a great job in Congress. She does deliver. As a matter of fact, she works me to death. [Laughter] When people see her coming in the White House, if she wants something, we finally decided just go on and tell her yes before we even hear what it is—[laughter]—because we know if we don't, we just know she'll wear us out until we're all exhausted, and we'll wind up saying yes anyway. [Laughter] So we just say yes on the front end now. [Laughter]

She has done a really good job for you, and she deserves to be reelected. And in a larger sense, her election and every election this year,

from anybody who has been involved in the last 8 years, is a decision by the people about whether to keep changing in the direction we're going or whether to turn back around and go back to where we were and change in another direction.

And I can only tell you again—I don't want to repeat everything I said out there, but there are huge differences. I thought the Vice President did an excellent job in that debate last night. I was very proud of him. But it's important to me that you understand that—like I said, I'm not running for anything. We've got another candidate in my house now—[laughter]—and she's going to win, I think. But it's important to me that you understand that everything that I have tried to do this last 8 years to turn the country around, to bring the country together, to get it moving forward, is sort of like setting the table for a banquet, but the banquet hasn't been held yet.

And I can give you—we're paying off the debt, but we're not debt-free. We've had the longest economic expansion in history, but it hasn't extended to everybody who's willing to work. We've reduced, just this last year, the number of uninsured people, for the first time in a dozen years, but there are still working families with children out there that need health insurance and senior citizens that need medicine.

We've got—the test scores in our schools are going up, and the dropout rate's going down, and the college-going rate is at an all-time high. There's been a huge increase, two-thirds, in the number of our kids taking advanced placement courses; 500 percent increase in the number of African-American children taking advanced placement courses for college in the last decade. But we're not anywhere near where we need to be yet.

So the question is, what is it that we propose to do? We've got the country turned around, pulled together, moving in the right direction. We're going to change. The question is, how are we going to change? And the point I've tried to hammer home—and I want to, by the way, before I go any further, I want to acknowledge the presence in the audience of somebody