

Remarks to the Democratic National Convention in Los Angeles, California August 14, 2000

Thank you. Thank you, ladies and gentlemen. Isn't it great to be here in California together? [Applause] Forty years ago the great city of Los Angeles launched John Kennedy and the New Frontier. Now Los Angeles is launching the first President of the new century, Al Gore.

I come here tonight, above all, to say a heartfelt thank you. Thank you. Thank you for giving me the chance to serve. Thank you for being so good to Hillary and Chelsea. I am so proud of them. And didn't she give a good talk? [Applause] I thought it was great. I thank you for supporting the New Democratic agenda that has taken our country to new heights of prosperity, peace, and progress. As always, of course, the lion's share of credit goes to the American people, who do the work, raise the kids, and dream the dreams.

Now, at this moment of unprecedented good fortune, our people face a fundamental choice: Are we going to keep this progress and prosperity going? Yes, we are. But my friends, we can't take our future for granted. We cannot take it for granted. So let's just remember how we got here.

Eight years ago, when our party met in New York, it was in a far different time for America. Our economy was in trouble. Our society was divided. Our political system was paralyzed. Ten million of our fellow citizens were out of work. Interest rates were high. The deficit was \$290 billion and rising. After 12 years of Republican rule, the Federal debt had quadrupled, imposing a crushing burden on our economy and on our children. Welfare rolls, crime, teen pregnancy, income inequality—all had been skyrocketing. And our Government was part of the problem, not part of the solution.

I saw all this in a very personal way in 1992, out there in the real America with many of you. I remember a child telling me her father broke down at the dinner table because he lost his job. I remember an older couple crying in front of me because they had to choose between filling their shopping carts and filling their prescriptions. I remember a hard-working immigrant in a hotel kitchen who said his son was not really free because it wasn't safe for him to play in the neighborhood park.

I ran for President to change the future for those people. And I asked you to embrace new ideas rooted in enduring values: opportunity for all, responsibility from all, and a community of all Americans. You gave me the chance to turn those ideas and values into action after I made one of the very best decisions of my entire life, asking Al Gore to be my partner.

Now, first we proposed a new economic strategy: Get rid of the deficit to reduce interest rates; invest more in our people; sell more American products abroad. We sent our plan to Congress. It passed by a single vote in both Houses. In a deadlocked Senate, Al Gore cast the tie-breaking vote. Not a single Republican supported it.

Here's what their leaders said. Their leaders said our plan would increase the deficit, kill jobs, and give us a one-way ticket to recession. Time has not been kind to their predictions.

Remember, our Republican friends said then they would absolutely not be held responsible for our economic policies. I hope the American people take them at their word.

Today, after 7½ years of hard effort, we're in the midst of the longest economic expansion in history, more than 22 million new jobs, the lowest unemployment in 30 years, the lowest female unemployment in 40 years, the lowest Hispanic- and African-American unemployment rate ever recorded, and the highest homeownership in history.

Now, along the way, in 1995 we turned back the largest cuts in history in Medicare, Medicaid, education, and the environment. And just 2 years later we proved that we could find a way to balance the budget and protect our values. Today, we have gone from the largest deficits in history to the largest surpluses in history. And if, but only if, we stay on course, we can make America debt-free for the first time since Andy Jackson was President in 1835.

For the first time in decades, wages are rising at all income levels. We have the lowest child poverty in 20 years, the lowest poverty rate for single mothers ever recorded. The average family's income has gone up more than \$5,000, and for African-American families, even more. The

number of families who own stock, in our country, has grown by 40 percent.

You know, Harry Truman's old saying has never been more true, "If you want to live like a Republican, you better vote for the Democrats."

But our progress is about far more than economics. America is also more hopeful, more secure, and more free. We're more hopeful because we're turning our schools around with higher standards, more accountability, more investment. We have doubled funding for Head Start and provided after-school and mentoring to more than a million more young people. We're putting 100,000 well-trained teachers in the early grades to lower class size. Ninety-five percent of our schools are already connected to the Internet. Reading, math, and SAT scores are up, and more students than ever are going on to college, thanks to the biggest expansion of college aid since the GI bill 50 years ago. Now, don't let anybody tell you that all children can't learn or that our public schools can't make the grade. Yes, they can. Yes, they can.

We're also more hopeful because we ended welfare as we knew it. Now, those who can work, must work. On that, we and the Republicans agreed. But we Democrats also insisted on support for good parenting, so that poor children don't go hungry or lose their health care, unmarried teens stay in school, and people get the job training, child care, and transportation they need. It has worked. Today, there are more than 7½ million people who have moved from welfare to work, and the welfare rolls in our administration have been cut in half.

We're more hopeful because of the way we cut taxes to help Americans meet the challenges of work and childrearing. This year alone our HOPE scholarship and lifelong learning tax credits will help 10 million families pay for college. Our earned-income tax credit will help 15 million families work their way into the middle class. Twenty-five million families will get a \$500 child tax credit. Our empowerment zone tax credits are bringing new business and new jobs to our hardest pressed communities, from the inner cities to Appalachia to the Mississippi Delta to our Native American reservations. And the typical American family today is paying a lower share of its income in Federal income taxes than at any time during the past 35 years.

We are a more hopeful because of the Family and Medical Leave Act, a bill that the previous

administration vetoed. They said it would cost jobs. It's the first bill I signed, and we now have a test. Twenty-two million new jobs later, over 20 million Americans have been able to take a little time off to care for a newborn child or sick relative. That's what it means—that's what it really means to be pro-family.

We are more secure country because we cut crime with tougher enforcement, more than 100,000 new community police officers, a ban on assault weapons, and the Brady law, which has kept guns out of the hands of half a million felons, fugitives, and stalkers. Today, crime in America is at a 25-year low.

And we're more secure because of advances in health care. We've extended the life of the Medicare Trust Fund by 26 years, added coverage for cancer screening and cutting-edge clinical trials. We're coming closer to cures for dreaded diseases. We made sure that people with disabilities could go to work without losing their health care and that people could switch jobs without losing their coverage. We dramatically improved diabetes care. We provided health coverage under the Children's Health Insurance Program to 2 million previously uninsured children. And for the first time in our history, more than 90 percent of our kids have been immunized against serious childhood diseases. You can be proud of that Democratic record.

We are more secure because our environment is cleaner. We've set aside more land in the lower 48 States than any administration since Teddy Roosevelt, saving national treasures like Yellowstone, the great California redwoods, the Florida Everglades. Moreover, our air is cleaner; our water is cleaner; our food is safer; and our economy is stronger. You can grow the economy and protect the environment at the same time.

Now, we're more free because we are closer today to the one America of our dreams, celebrating our diversity, affirming our common humanity, opposing all forms of bigotry, from church burnings to racial profiling to murderous hate crimes. We're fighting for employment nondiscrimination legislation and for equal pay for women.

We found ways to mend, not end, affirmative action. We have given America the most diverse administration in history. It really looks like America. You know, if I could just get my administration up here, it would be just as good a picture as anything you saw a couple of weeks

ago in Philadelphia—the real people loving it. And we created AmeriCorps, which already has given more than 150,000 of our young people a chance to earn some money for college by serving in our communities.

We are more secure, and we're more free because of our leadership in the world for peace, freedom, and prosperity, helping to end a generation of conflict in Northern Ireland, stopping the brutal ethnic cleansing in Bosnia and Kosovo, and bringing the Middle East closer than ever to a comprehensive peace.

We built stronger ties to Africa, Asia, and our Latin American and Caribbean neighbors. We brought Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic into NATO. We are working with Russia to destroy nuclear weapons and materials. We are fighting head-on the new threats and injustices of the global age, terrorism, narcotrafficking, biological and chemical warfare, the trafficking in women and young girls, and the deadly spread of AIDS. And in the great tradition of President Jimmy Carter, who is here tonight, we are still the world's leading force for human rights around the world. Thank you, President Carter.

The American military is the best trained, best equipped, most effective fighting force in the world. Our men and women have shown that time and again in Bosnia, in Kosovo, in Haiti, and Iraq. I can tell you that their strength, their spirit, their courage, and their commitment to freedom have never been greater. Any adversary who believes those who say otherwise is making a grave mistake.

Now, my fellow Americans, that's the record, or as that very famous Los Angeles detective Sergeant Joe Friday used to say, "Just the facts, ma'am." [Laughter] I ask you, let's remember the standard our Republican friends used to have for whether a party should continue in office: My fellow Americans, are we better off today than we were 8 years ago? You bet we are. You bet we are. Yes, we are. Yes, we are.

But—yes, we are—we're not just better off; we're also a better country. We are today more tolerant, more decent, more humane, and more united. Now, that's the purpose of prosperity.

Since 1992, America has grown not just economically but as a community. Yes, jobs are up but so are adoptions. Yes, the debt is down but so is teen pregnancy. We are becoming both more diverse and more united.

My fellow Americans, tonight we can say with gratitude and humility: We built our bridge to the 21st century. We crossed that bridge together. And we're not going back.

To those who say—and I'm sure you heard this somewhere in the last few days—to those who say the progress of these last 8 years was just some sort of accident, that we just kind of coasted along, let me be clear: America's success was not a matter of chance; it was a matter of choice.

And today, America faces another choice. It's every bit as momentous as the one we faced 8 years ago. For what a nation does with its good fortune is just as stern a test of its character, values, and judgment as how it deals with adversity.

My fellow Americans, this is a big election with great consequences for every American, because the differences, the honest differences, between our candidates and their visions are so profound. We can have good, old-fashioned election here. We should posit that our opponents are good, honorable, patriotic people, and that we have honest differences. But the differences are there.

Consider this, just this. We in America would already have, this year, a real Patients' Bill of Rights, a minimum wage increase, stronger equal pay laws for women, and middle class tax cuts for college tuition and long-term care if the Democratic Party were in the majority in Congress with Dick Gephardt as Speaker and Tom Daschle as majority leader. And come November, they will be. That has to be clear to people. And that's why every House and every Senate seat is important. But if you'll give me one moment of personal privilege, I'd like to say a word about Hillary.

When I first met her 30 years ago, she already had an abiding passion to help children. And she's pursued it ever since. Her very first job out of law school was with the Children's Defense Fund. Every year I was Governor she took lots of time away from her law practice to work for better schools or better children's health or jobs for parents who lived in poor areas. Then when I became President, she became a full-time advocate for her lifetime cause, and what a job she has done. She championed the family leave law, children's health insurance, increased support for foster children and adoptions. She wrote a best-selling book about caring for our children, and then she took care of them

by giving all the profits to children's charities. For 30 years—30 years—from the first day I met her, she has always been there for all our kids. She's been a great First Lady. She's always been there for our family. And she'll always be there for the families of New York and America.

Of course, we all know that the biggest choice that the American people have to make this year is in the Presidential race. Now, you all know how I feel. [*Laughter*] But it's not my decision to make. That belongs to the American people. I just want to tell all of you here in this great arena and all of the folks watching and listening at home a few things that I know about Al Gore.

We've worked closely together for 8 years now, in the most challenging moments. When we faced the most difficult issues of war and peace, of whether to take on some powerful interests, he was always there. And he always told me exactly what he thought was right.

Everybody knows he is thoughtful and hard working. But I can tell you personally, he is one strong leader. In 1993 there was nobody around the table more willing to make the tough choices to balance the budget the right way and take this tough stance against balancing the budget on the backs of the poor and working people of America. I have seen this kind of positioning and this kind of strength time and again, whether it was in how we reform welfare or in protecting the environment or in closing the digital divide or bringing jobs to rural and urban America through the empowerment zone program. The greatest champion of ordinary Americans has always been Al Gore.

I'll tell you something else about him. More than anybody else I've known in public life, Al Gore understands the future and how sweeping changes and scientific breakthroughs will affect ordinary Americans' lives. And I think we need somebody in the White House at the dawn of the 21st century who really understands the future.

Finally, I want to say something more personal. Virtually every week for the last 7½ years, until he became occupied with more important matters, Al Gore and I had lunch. And we talked about the business between us and the business of America. But we'd also often talk about our families, what our kids were doing, how school was going, what was going on in their lives. I know him. He is a profoundly good

man. He loves his children more than life. And he has a perfectly wonderful wife who has fought against homelessness and who has done something for me and all Americans in bringing the cause of mental health into the broad sunlight of our national public life. We owe Tipper Gore our thanks.

Al has picked a great partner in Joe Lieberman. There's the Connecticut crowd. Hillary and I have known Joe for 30 years, since we were in Connecticut in law school. I supported him in his first race for public office in 1970, when I learned he had been a freedom rider, going into danger to register black voters in the then-segregated South. It should not be a surprise to anyone that Al Gore picked the leader of the New Democrats to be his Vice President, because Joe Lieberman has supported all our efforts to reform welfare, reduce crime, protect the environment, protect civil rights, and a woman's right to choose and to keep this economy going—all of them. And he has shown time and time again that he will work with President Gore to keep putting people and progress over partisanship.

Now, it's up, frankly, to the Presidential nominee and the Vice Presidential nominee to engage in this debate and to point out the differences. But there are two issues I care a lot about, and I want to make brief comments on them, and I hope I've earned the right to make comments on them. One is the economy—I know a little something about that—and the other is our efforts to build one America.

First, on the economy, Al Gore and Joe Lieberman will keep our prosperity going by paying down the debt, investing in education and health care, moving more people from welfare to work, and providing family tax cuts we can afford. That stands in stark contrast to the position of our Republican friends.

Here is their position. They say we have a big projected 10-year surplus, and they want to spend every dime of it and then some on tax cuts right now. That would leave nothing for education or Medicare, prescription drugs; nothing to extend the life of Medicare and Social Security for the baby boomers; nothing in case the projected surpluses don't come in.

Now, think about your own family's budget for a minute or your own business budget. Would you sign a binding contract today to spend all your projected income for a decade, leaving nothing for your families' basic needs,

nothing for emergencies, nothing for a cushion in case you didn't get the raise you thought you were going to get? Of course you wouldn't do that, and America shouldn't do it either. We should stick with what works.

Let me say something to you that's even more important than the economy to me. When Al Gore picked Joe Lieberman, the first Jewish-American to join a national ticket, to be his partner, and he joined with our Presidential nominee, who has, along with his great mother and late father, a lifetime commitment to civil rights and equal opportunity for all, even when it was not popular down home in the South, when they did that, we had a ticket that embodies the Democratic commitment to one America. They believe in civil rights and equal opportunity for everybody. They believe in a woman's right to choose. And this may be the most important of all, they believe the folks that you're buying your soft drinks and popcorn from here at the Staples Center should have the exact same chance they do to send their kids to college and give them a good life and a good future.

My fellow Americans, I am very proud of our leaders. And I want you to know that the opportunity I have had to serve as President at the dawn of a new era in human history has been an honor, a privilege, and a joy. I have done everything I knew how to do to empower the American people, to unleash their amazing optimism and imagination and hard work, to turn our country around from where it was in 1992, and to get us moving forward together.

Now, what I want you to understand tonight is that the best is still out there. The best is yet to come if we make the right choices in this election year.

But the choices will make all the difference. In February the American people achieved the longest economic expansion in our history. When that happened, I asked our folks at the White House when the previous longest economic expansion was. You know when it was? It was from 1961 through 1969. Now, I want the young people especially to listen to this. I remember this well.

I graduated from high school in 1964. Our country was still very sad because of President Kennedy's death, but full of hope under the leadership of President Johnson. And I assumed then, like most Americans, that our economy

was on absolutely on automatic, that nothing could derail it. I also believe then that our civil rights problems would all be solved in Congress and the courts. And in 1964, when we were enjoying the longest economic expansion in history, we never dreamed that Vietnam would so divide and wound our America.

So we took it for granted. And then, before we knew it, there were riots in the streets, even here. The leaders that I adored as a young man, Martin Luther King and Robert Kennedy, were killed. Lyndon Johnson, a President from my part of the country I admired so much for all he did for civil rights, for the elderly, and the poor, said he would not run again because our Nation was so divided. And then we had an election in 1968 that took America on a far different and more divisive course. And you know, within months after that election, the last longest economic expansion in history was, itself, history.

Why am I telling you this tonight? Not to take you down but to keep you looking up. I have waited, not as President but as your fellow citizen, for over 30 years to see my country once again in the position to build the future of our dreams for our children. We are a great and good people. And we have an even better chance this time than we did then, with no great internal crisis and no great external threat. Still, I have lived long enough to know that opportunities must be seized or they will be lost.

My friends, 54 years ago this week I was born in a summer storm to a young widow in a small Southern town. America gave me the chance to live my dreams. And I have tried as hard as I knew how to give you a better chance to live yours. Now, my hair is a little grayer, my wrinkles are a little deeper, but with the same optimism and hope I brought to the work I loved so 8 years ago, I want you to know my heart is filled with gratitude.

My fellow Americans, the future of our country is now in your hands. You must think hard, feel deeply, and choose wisely. And remember, whenever you think about me, keep putting people first. Keep building those bridges. And don't stop thinking about tomorrow.

NOTE: The President spoke at 7:52 p.m. at the Staples Center. In his remarks, he referred to Democratic Vice Presidential candidate Senator Joseph I. Lieberman. A portion of these remarks

could not be verified because the tape was incomplete.

Remarks at a Democratic National Committee Dinner in Los Angeles August 14, 2000

[*The President was presented with an award from representatives of the housing industry.*]

The President. Now, I have one new house and two front doors. Well, let me say very briefly, I want to thank the Homebuilders, the Realtors, the Fannie Mae, the Freddie Mac people, everybody who was involved in this.

We had a serious policy right from the beginning to try to increase homeownership. And we have enjoyed working with all these folks that are presenting this award. I don't really feel that it's mine; I think it ought to go to our national economic team and to my Treasury Secretaries and my National Economic Adviser and all the people that have worked on this.

But one of the key things rarely noted by those who analyze our economic success over the last 8 years is the explosion in homeownership, which has been accompanied by an explosion in home building. It's one of the reasons we need to work hard to keep paying down the debt, keep the interest rates low, and keep creating jobs so there will be a pool of people to buy these homes when they get built.

These folks standing with me represent tens of thousands of our fellow Americans who played a major, major role in the economic boom that all the rest of us have been a part of. So I'm gratified to receive this award, but I kind of think I ought to be giving it to them.

Thank you very much.

[*At this point, Democratic National Committee general chair Edward G. Rendell made brief remarks.*]

The President. Thank you, Ed, and thank you, Joe Andrew, and thank you, ladies and gentlemen.

I wanted to come by to thank you for your support of this convention and our party and our efforts, and also to participate in an award, which I'll say a little bit about it in a minute. But you know, I think sometimes people tend to minimize the importance of political parties

in this day of mass media. We don't have the same kind of old conventions we once had, where we have 53 ballots before we pick a nominee. You know, that would be high drama. But these conventions are very important because they give our people from around the country—just as the Republicans got the opportunity in Philadelphia—to get together, to talk, to find common cause, to articulate what we believe to the American people, and also to reinforce one another in a profound way. I appreciated what Mayor Rendell said about the real people in the Pennsylvania delegation.

I think in some ways it's the most rewarding thing about having been President for over 7 years now. I was at a meeting about a week or so ago, and I was shaking hands with the people after I spoke. And two women were standing about 10 feet from one another, and they didn't know each other, and both were on welfare when I became President. One of them has a master's degree now; the other is a lawyer. And it was really moving to me. I was in suburban Chicago a few days ago, and I met with these police officers from three different law enforcement jurisdictions. And two out of the three thanked me for helping getting more police officers for their area. So if you hang around long enough and you work at it, you actually can get some things done.

What I would like to say tonight, very briefly, before I bring my friend Walter Shorenstein up here with me, is that a couple of years ago we were talking, the Democratic leaders and I, and I said, "You know, here we are coming to the end of the 20th century. And if you look back to the time of FDR, our party has played a major role in shaping our Nation and our world. And I still think that political parties are important. And I think the Democratic Party ought to have a national award for a lifetime of service to our party that clearly benefited our country." So the Democratic Party thought it was a good idea, and last year we gave the