

needs of this country. I am pleased to sign it into law. October 23, 2000.

WILLIAM J. CLINTON

The White House,

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Remarks at a Reception for Representative Maurice D. Hinchey in  
Kingston, New York  
October 23, 2000

Thank you very much. First of all, thank you for the wonderful welcome. I am delighted to be here. You may know that on the way over here today, I stopped at your local elementary school and shook hands with the principal, the teachers, and as many of the eager students as I could reach. *[Laughter]* And they made a lot of wonderful signs, and I signed them, and I'm very grateful for that. I had a great time.

I also went across the street and shook hands with the kids at the pizza place. *[Laughter]* But because I was a little late, I didn't have one. *[Laughter]* I want to thank Mayor Gallo and Assemblyman Cahill and the other local officials who are here—John Parete, the Ulster County Democratic chairman. And most of all, I want to say I'm honored to be here for Maurice Hinchey.

We came in together, but I want to make absolutely sure he's still there when I go. *[Laughter]* We have fought our fights together. He has taken the risks that I have taken to try to turn the economy around and pull the country together and move us forward.

I'm especially grateful for his leadership for the Patients' Bill of Rights, to put medical decisions back into the hands of medical professionals and their patients; for a Medicare drug program that would provide all of our seniors access to affordable prescription drugs; for our education initiatives and, especially, our school construction initiative, which would give States like New York that have either overcrowded or falling down schools the funds they need to help repair or build or modernize schools without putting all of the burden on the local property tax payers; and for his help for the environment, because one of the things I was determined to do when I became President is to prove

we could grow the economy and improve the environment at the same time.

You know, when things go well, the President tends to get credit, and when they don't, well, that's the way it goes. *[Laughter]* Harry Truman said, "The buck stops here." But sometimes I think the credit should be more broadly shared, first and foremost with the American people. But you need to know that on more than one occasion, the critical initiative, beginning with our economic plan in 1993, has passed by one vote in Congress. So, if it hadn't been for Maurice and people like him, so much of the good things that we have been able to do for America over the last 8 years would not have been possible, and you need to keep him right where he is.

I would also like to say a few words about this Senate race, in which I have a passing interest. *[Laughter]* And I would like to say a few words about Vice President Gore and Senator Lieberman.

But I want to begin by just making two introductory comments. First of all, my heart is filled with gratitude for the people of the United States and especially to the people of New York, who have been so wonderful to me through two elections, giving me the State's 33 electoral votes, along with Al Gore. Last time, about 59 percent of the vote in 52 of the 62 counties supported our efforts, and you will never know how grateful I am.

Secondly, as Maurice said, for all the celebrations we've had in the last few days, our 8-year long effort to stand against ethnic cleansing and genocide and abuse in the Balkans, beginning with our efforts to stop the war in Bosnia, to roll back the expulsion of the people in Kosovo, the embargo on Serbia. Now we have

a genuinely elected President there, committed to the rule of law.

We have the President of South Korea winning the Nobel Peace Prize, which he richly deserved, a lifetime of struggle for democracy, first in his own country, narrowly escaping death, partly thanks to President Jimmy Carter over 20 years ago, and now opening the way to North Korea. And the United States supported that policy and, I think, had a significant impact on its success. And now Secretary Albright is there, and we have some hope of resolving our outstanding differences with North Korea and looking forward to the day when they will truly close the last chapter in the aftermath of the Korean war.

That's all been very moving, but it is punctuated and overshadowed now by the terrible violence in the Middle East, which also occurred at the same time that we lost 17 fine young men and women in the United States Navy in the terrorist attack on our ship in Aden, Yemen. I don't want to say too much about that today except I'm working on it, and my experience has been, in these matters, that the less you say publicly, the more likely you are to get done.

The point I want to make is, when I see, around the world, how people continue to struggle with their differences—with their religious, their racial, their ethnic differences—how people continue to misunderstand each other; how after working together for 7 years for the cause of peace, with occasional difficulties but never anything like this, the thing could get off the tracks like this, it makes me so grateful that our country has been so blessed to be the most diverse it has ever been and yet to be more united and making more progress and moving forward.

And the main thing I want to say to you today is, I've never thought much about the ability of one elected official to influence another one's race, so I don't know that I can convince anybody to vote for Maurice or Hillary or the Vice President. But what I would like to say is, I'd like to just share with you from my heart what I think the issues are and what I hope you will say to your friends and neighbors, because there's no doubt that citizens influence one another's opinions.

And if you think about—Hillary said this last night, and I had never quite thought of it this way, but she said, "You know, it was very hard for us to go down to that memorial service for

the sailors and their families at the U.S.S. *Cole*." People often ask me what the most difficult days of my Presidency are, and bar none, they have been the days when I had to go greet the families of people who were killed because of their service for the United States in the Embassies in Africa, in Ron Brown's plane, Khobar Towers in Saudi Arabia. It is very difficult.

But what my wife said last night that I would like to echo is, you know, the rest of us are not asked to put our lives on the line, and most of the people were so young. I think the oldest one was 31, but many of them were just 19. Many of them were younger than my daughter. And the least we can do is to be grateful for the progress of this country, to be proud of it, to show up and vote, and to take the next 2 weeks to discuss with our friends and neighbors and co-workers and family members what we think this is about. And so that's the spirit in which I would like to speak to you today.

Things are going well for this country, and we have—this is the first time in my lifetime where we've had at the same time so much economic prosperity and social progress, with the absence of domestic crisis and foreign threat. And so we have before us the chance to build the future of our dreams for our children.

And this election ought to be a feast for America. People shouldn't feel bad about the fact that nothing bad is happening. They should feel good about it. *[Laughter]* But they should understand that sometimes it's harder to make a good decision when times are good than when they're bad.

There's not a person in this room over 30 years old that hasn't made at least one mistake in their life, not because your life was going so badly but because things were going so well, you thought there was no penalty for the failure to concentrate. Isn't that right? Isn't that right? It's true. *[Laughter]* And all of the younger people are looking at those who are laughing and—*[laughter]*—time will take care of it. You will soon know about that. *[Laughter]*

So what I have urged my friends to do in the Democratic House and the Senate and in advancing the Vice President's cause and Hillary's cause is just to strive for clarity. I really think, you know, the American people nearly always make the right decision if they have

enough information and enough time. If they didn't, we wouldn't still be around here after 224 years.

So, from my point of view, this is what I would like you to know. First, I would like to say about my wife, that for 30 years, as long as I've known her—and I met her almost 30 years ago—her obsession has been the welfare of children and families. She took an extra year when we were in law school to study at the Yale Hospital and Child Study Center, so when she got out of law school, she would understand precisely how the law affected young children and their parents. And it has been the driving obsession of her whole life.

She has spent most of the last 30 years working on education, health care, and other children's and families' issues, and also working on the relationship between education and economic development and, specifically, how to get jobs into places that aren't growing as fast as the economy as a whole is growing.

And she went on corporate boards when we lived in Arkansas. She did a lot of work trying to figure out how to get investment into areas where it was needed, which is a big issue for upstate New York this year. And that's a subject that she's worked on for 20 years, so when she talks about it, it's not something that just sort of occurred to her when she started coming up here to see you.

The second thing I would like to say is that, for the last 8 years in the White House, she has perhaps been the most active First Lady in history, certainly had the broadest range of interests since Eleanor Roosevelt. She has worked on—the first thing she worked on was trying to help pass the first bill I signed, the family and medical leave law, which over 20 million Americans have now used to take some time off from work when a baby is born or a parent is sick, without losing their job. It is a great piece of legislation.

And she was very active in our health care efforts, even though we knew it was controversial, and in the end we got a lot done. Medicare was supposed to go broke last year when I took office. It now has 26 more years of life, something that you should remember when people ask you what we did.

We passed the bill that says you can keep your health insurance if you change jobs or if someone in your family gets sick. That's important. And we passed the Children's Health In-

surance Program, the biggest expansion of child health since Medicaid was enacted in 1965, which has now given us a decline in the number of uninsured people for the first time in 12 years.

She worked to find out more about the illnesses of veterans in the Gulf war and whether we should be doing more to help them, totally an issue that she just got interested in because nobody else was working on it. She didn't want those folks ignored.

She thought up the idea of celebrating the coming of the millennium by having a project that imagined the future and honored our past, and her Millennium Treasures Project is now the largest historic preservation project in the history of the United States—\$100 million in private and public money together. And a lot of the places preserved have been in New York, places like George Washington's revolutionary headquarters, Harriet Tubman's home, parts of the Underground Railroad—things that will go to places, many of them not doing so well economically, that will make them much more attractive for tourists, build community pride, and change their future.

So I'm very proud of what she has done as First Lady. And I'm especially proud that she's been to more countries than any other person in that position, ever. She says I shouldn't say that, because there's a lot more countries now than there used to be. *[Laughter]* After the fall of the Berlin Wall, it's sort of not a fair comparison. But she's spoken out for women's rights, for the rights of children, trying to get more kids in school. She's pointed out that national security involves more than just military aid, that we have to have education and health care and environment partnerships around the world.

We have to work together to roll back the tides of AIDS and TB and malaria, which together kill one-fourth of all the people who die every year on this Earth. And she's had a special role in the tough spots. She was very, very active in bringing women together and working with them in the Northern Ireland peace process. She spent a lot of time in Israel pursuing our twin goals of the security of Israel and the long-term necessity of resolving the matter through peaceful negotiations. And she's been to see our soldiers in Kosovo and Bosnia several times. I'm very proud of what she has done.

And what I'd like to say to you is that, of all the people I've known in public life, I've

never known anybody over 30 years—and in spite of the fact that we all say harsh things about each other at election time, the truth is that most people in public life I've known are honest, work hard, and do what they think is right. Otherwise, we wouldn't be around here after over 200 years. But I've never met anybody that had a better combination of brainpower with a great heart and compassion who would just consistently, day-in and day-out, work for what she believed in, never get tired. She spent 30 years working for other people. As far as I know, this is the first time in 30 years she ever asked anybody to do anything for her, and she had a hard time doing it. I said, "You've got to ask people to vote for you. You've got to ask people to contribute to you." She said, "I'm used to asking them to do that for you. It's hard to ask them to do that for me."

I think it's very important, if you're going to elect a Senator to succeed Daniel Patrick Moynihan, one of the most accomplished people to serve in the United States Senate in the 20th century, to succeed Robert Kennedy—he held that seat—you need a good partner for Senator Schumer. And New York has got a lot of big things on the agenda, and there are a lot of things that have to be done for America.

I have never known anybody with the combination of brains, compassion, heart, and the ability to get things done that she does. She will be a great Senator if you make sure she wins.

I want to say something about the Vice President. He has been a big part of all the success that we've enjoyed in the last 8 years and the decisions we made that were good. One of the things that President Kennedy said in more eloquent words—I wish I could remember exactly what he said—but he said, the Presidency basically is a place of decision; it's important that you work hard. And I think I've met that standard. But he has worked as hard as I have. But in the end, hard work is not enough. You also have to make good decisions, and that requires a certain level of experience, a certain level of judgment, a certain instinct.

And he was right when he supported our economic program. Maurice talks about it. He had to cast the tiebreaking vote in the Senate, or it would have been defeated. And that's what turned this whole budget around, got interest rates down, got investment up, and got the economy going. He supported the efforts we

made to reform the welfare system. We now have cut the welfare rolls in half, and families and children are better off, not worse off, as predicted.

He led our reinventing Government program. You know, sometimes our friends in the other party talk about how they're against big Government. But the facts are that under Al Gore's leadership, we reduced the size of the civil Government to its lowest size since 1960, when President Kennedy was running for office and Dwight Eisenhower was still President.

Under Al Gore's leadership, we have reduced 16,000 pages of Federal regulations which were on the book in the previous administration. We have reduced regulations in the Department of Education alone, regulations on States and school districts, by two-thirds. You don't have to keep that a secret if you don't want to. *[Laughter]* You can tell people that. I think it's an important part of the record.

He has—I don't know if you saw the announcement last week. General Motors announced that they had developed a car that will get 80 miles a gallon, which is the target they set in the beginning of our administration when we organized something under Al Gore's leadership called the Partnership for the Next Generation Vehicle.

You're all worried about the price of home heating oil this winter. We're all worried about what happens if there is instability in the Middle East with the price of oil. But I'm telling you, the answer is, more conservation, alternative sources of energy, free up the oil that is there for the things we need, like home heating oil. Now, if we get 80 miles to the gallon—and when GM made the announcement, they said that their participation in this Partnership for the Next Generation Vehicles project made it possible.

Al Gore also led our efforts to adopt a telecommunications law, a big bipartisan law that we passed 4 or 5 years ago that's created hundreds of thousands of jobs, thousands of new businesses, and something called the E-rate, which we fought hard for, and he led the fight, which enables every school and hospital to afford to hook up to the Internet.

Now, when we started this project in 1994, trying to get all our schools hooked up, we had only—listen to this—we had about 15 percent of the schools and only 4 percent of the classrooms in the entire country were connected to

the Internet. Today, 95 percent of the schools and 65 percent of the total classrooms are connected. And part of the reason is the E-rate; people can afford to hook onto the Internet to give kids in the poorest schools in this country access to tomorrow's information and tomorrow's economy.

Now, these are big things that he did. He also led our efforts on arms control, in many, many important other areas. So you cannot cite any person, I believe, in the history of the country who, in the position of Vice President, had the impact that he had. And I think that's very significant for this election.

Now, let me just say this. It seems to me there are four things I'd like you to consider. Maurice said, "Tell your weather story." I told the Congress, our crowd in the Congress, last week that those who were on our side needed to think of themselves as America's weather corps in the next 2 weeks, because if things were clear to the American people, we would win, and if things were cloudy, we might be in trouble. So we wanted clear. We need for people to understand clearly what the issues are.

And again I say that in a positive, happy sense. I think this could be the most positive election we've had in a month of Sundays. You don't have to be mad at anybody. You can posit the fact that your opponents are honorable, good people and that they will do what they believe is right, and we'll do what we believe is right. So what we need to do is make sure the voters know exactly what the differences are and then let the voters make up their minds.

I trust the American people. And I trust the people of New York to do the right thing. But I think there are—let me just make these four arguments for Al Gore and Joe Lieberman and Hillary and Maurice.

Number one, we've got to keep this prosperity going. You know, just looking around upstate New York, there are places and communities that still haven't fully participated in this economic recovery. Now, we've got a special program we're trying to pass to give extra incentives to get people to invest there. But to get there you've got to keep the overall prosperity going; you've got to keep unemployment down and labor markets tight. If you want investments to flow to inner-city neighborhoods, rural towns, Indian reservations, you name it—anybody that's been left behind—the economy has got to be strong to get people to invest there. This is

a huge deal—plus which, it benefits all the rest of you if the economy keeps going.

Now, I believe it is critical to do that, to adopt a policy that our side, all of our candidates, have espoused, which is, "We'll give you a tax cut, but it's considerably smaller than the other guy's, even though most middle-class people are better off under ours, because we think we've got to save some money for education and health care, and we have to get America out of debt. We've got to keep paying down the debt until America is debt-free. We can do it in 12 years and put us out of debt for the first time since 1835, when Andrew Jackson was President."

Now, why should that be important to you? Why should that be important to the young people in the uniforms back there who have been serving your meal, besides the fact that it sounds good? Because we live in a global economy; a trillion dollars moves around the world every day, crossing national borders. And that means if we keep interest rates lower by paying down the debt, it means for all of you lower home mortgage payments, lower college payments, college loan payments, lower car payments, lower credit card payments. It means lower business loans—costs, which means more businesses, more jobs, higher incomes, and a better stock market.

So if you keep interest rates down, everybody benefits—all the working people, all the business people, all the people on Wall Street, everybody else. And that is very, very important. And we have a program that will permit the country, under the Vice President's leadership, to do that.

By contrast, the size of their tax cuts plus the cost of their Social Security privatization program plus their spending promises means they can't do that. They can't get America out of debt. The numbers won't add up. So this is a significant difference. You just have to decide whether it's important to you or not.

But let me just give you an example. If you keep interest rates one percent lower a year than they would otherwise be, the American people save \$390 billion on home mortgages alone, \$30 billion dollars on car payments, \$15 billion on college loans. That's a \$400 billion tax cut right there, in lower interest rates. But people have to understand. That's a big decision you need to make, and you can make it either way. We haven't been out of debt since 1835.

You can say we'll just go on and have higher interest rates; take the money now and leave. But people need to understand what the decision is, and then we'll trust the American people to make the right decision. I think I know what they will decide if they clearly understand it.

The second decision I think is very important is whether we're going to build on the progress that we've made in other areas over the last 8 years or reverse that. Now, let's just look at some of those areas, if I could. In welfare, I've already said, welfare rolls are half what they were. The crime rate has dropped every year. It's now at a 26-year low; murder rate at a 33-year low; gun violence down 35 percent. In health care, we finally got the number of uninsured people going down because we're insuring more children.

In the environment, compared to 8 years ago, the air is cleaner; the water is cleaner; the drinking water is safer; the food is safer. We've cleaned up 3 times as many toxic waste dumps, and we've set aside more land in perpetuity for all time than any administration since Theodore Roosevelt a hundred years ago.

Now, I don't—and in education, let me just say something about that, that I think is very important for the American people to know. The dropout rate is down. Test scores in math, science, and reading are going up. The college-going rate is at an all-time high. There's been over a 50 percent increase in the number of our kids taking advanced placement courses and, among Hispanic kids, a 300 percent increase, among African-American kids, a 500 percent increase. And perhaps most important to me, more important than anything else, we have evidence in every State in the country that schools that were once thought to be failing inevitably are turning around.

I was in a school in Harlem the other day where, 2 years ago, a grade school—listen to this—2 years ago, 80 percent of the kids were doing reading and math below grade level. Today, just 2 years later—new principal, school uniform policy, high standards, accountability—74 percent of the kids' reading and math at or above grade level in 2 years—2 years.

So are we going to keep building on this or not? So in this election, we believe that our program put 100,000 police on the street, and now to add 50,000 more in high crime areas, had a lot to do with bringing the crime rate down. So does every policeman in America.

They believe that's not a Federal responsibility, and they want to get rid of it. You have to decide, but it will make a difference.

In education, we believe that education is a constitutional responsibility of the States and an operational responsibility of the local districts but a national priority. And we think there's a limit to how much money local property tax payers can come up with. So we've been paying for 100,000 teachers to make sure we have certified, well-trained teachers in the early grades to lower average class size to the point where the teachers can teach, and kids aren't sent to the fourth grade without the requisite reading and math and other skills they need.

We think this is important. We're about a third of the way through that program. Al Gore will continue it and build on it. So will Hillary. So will Maurice. They believe that is not a national decision, that we shouldn't have made that, and they ought to just block-grant the money, give it to the States, and see what happens. You can decide what you think, but people should know.

In the environment, we believe we've proved you can clean up the environment and grow the economy. They believe the air pollution laws are too tough and I went too far in protecting 43 million roadless acres in the national forests, even though the Audubon Society said it was the most significant conservation move in 40 years in the United States. They don't agree with that.

You get the drift here. It's not like there are no decisions. And I can make their argument. But you have to decide, and your friends and neighbors have to decide. So A, do you want to keep the prosperity going; B, do you want to build on the social progress of the last 8 years, or do you want to reverse course; C, who's the best qualified to meet the new challenges?

This is going to be a very new era. We have to close the digital divide. You know, we could create a new, gaping chasm in America and throughout the world if people everywhere don't have access to computers, know how to use them, can afford to log on to the Internet, and can get this information and know what it means.

We have to make the most of this new biotech revolution, which is one of the reasons I want to get medicine covered by seniors, because within the matter of a few years, you

are going to see cures for Parkinson's, for Alzheimer's, for two or three different kinds of cancers. It's going to be amazing.

With the human genome coming out, new mothers will soon begin to come home with genetic maps of their babies, and it will rather quickly take average life expectancy from where it is now, at about 77, up to 90 years. There are young women in this room that will have babies that will be born with a life expectancy of 90 years. You mark my words.

Now, what does that mean? It means, among other things, we've got to figure out how to make sure these benefits are broadly shared, and it means that once all your medical and financial information is on somebody's computer, we've got to figure out how to protect your privacy rights, even as we make the most of this information. That's a big deal.

And I'd like to have somebody that really understands that. I mean, the other day, 425 high-tech executives including Vint Cerf, who really is one of the fathers of the Internet and sent the first E-mail ever sent, 18 years ago, to his then profoundly deaf wife, who now can hear for the first time since she was 3 because of a computer chip implanted in her ear.

They came out for Al Gore. Why? Because they know he understands the future, that he has thought about these things, that he cares about them. He understands the energy future and what kind of changes we're going to have to make, and that's very important.

So how are you going to keep the prosperity going? Are you going to build on the progress or reverse course? Who understands the future best? And last, and maybe most important, how are we going to continue to build one America? The main reason I'm a Democrat is that we believe everybody counts; everybody ought to have a chance; everybody has a role to play; and we all do better when we help each other. That's what we believe.

Now, what does that mean? I believe—that's why we are for the minimum wage. That's why we're for stronger enforcement of equal pay laws to make sure women who do equal work get equal pay. That's why we're for hate crimes

legislation. That's why we're for the deductibility of college tax tuition, because we think the people who serve this meal ought to have the same chance to send their kids to college as those of us who could afford to pay for it. That's what we believe.

So sometime between now and the next 2 weeks, I hope every day you will have some chance to talk about this election. And if somebody says, "Well, why are you for Hillary for Senator? Why are you for Al Gore and Joe Lieberman? What's Maurice Hinchey so great anyway about?" you need to say, "Look, there's four big things you've got to decide in this election. Number one, do you want to keep this prosperity going or not? If you do, you better pay down the debt and keep interest rates down, have a tax cut we can afford, and save some money to invest in education and our future.

"Number two, do you want to build on the progress of the last 8 years or not? If you do, we better stay with the crime program, the education program, the health care program, the environmental program that have worked, that are moving this country in the right direction, not change course.

"Number three, we need people in office that think about the future and understand it.

"And number four and most important, we need people who really believe that we have to be one America across all the lines that divide us."

If people think about these issues in that way, we're going to have a great celebration November 7th.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:42 p.m. at the Hillside Manor Restaurant. In his remarks, he referred to Mayor T.R. Gallo of Kingston; New York State Assemblyman Kevin Cahill; President Vojislav Kostunica of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro); President Kim Dae-jung of South Korea; and Vinton G. Cerf, senior vice president of Internet architecture and technology, MCI WorldCom, and his wife, Sigrid.