

Their parents speak over 100 different languages. So when we say we're a nation of immigrants, we have to also say, but we're one Nation, determined to build one family, determined to make the decisions today with discipline to preserve the future for tomorrow, and determined to give all these kids a chance to live their dreams.

Not every child can be a Muhammad Ali, a Yogi Berra, an Andrea Bocelli. But every child can serve in the way that Millard Fuller has served, and every child can learn to respect his or her own heritage and faith and ethnic or racial background, but also those of every other American. That is the genius of America. That is the soul of the justification for this award you give.

It has been a profound honor for me to be able to come here representing the people of the United States these last 8 years. I have loved the work. I've even liked the fight. But more importantly, I have just loved seeing Americans pull together, move forward, and believe in each other again. Whatever happens, no matter what comes to this country, don't you ever let that change. As long as it doesn't, our best days will always still be ahead.

Thank you very much. Thank you.

Now, I have the honor to present Muhammad Ali and Angelo Dundee with this first-ever One

America Award. And I ask Angelo and Mrs. Ali to come up here. Let's give them a big hand. *[Applause]*

Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:06 p.m. at the Washington Hilton Hotel. In his remarks, he referred to Frank J. Guarini, chairman, Geraldine Ferraro, board member, and Joseph R. Cerrell, president, National Italian American Foundation; Richard Grasso, chairman and chief executive, New York Stock Exchange; U.S. Ambassador to Hungary Peter F. Tufo; U.S. Ambassador to Romania James C. Rosapepe; Tommy Lasorda, manager, 2000 U.S. Olympic baseball team; former professional baseball player Yogi Berra; tenor Andrea Bocelli; John Paul DeJoria, chairman, John Paul Mitchell Systems; Joseph P. Nacchio, chairman and chief executive officer, Qwest Communications International; fashion designer Miuccia Prada; former professional football head coach Dick Vermeil; Millard Fuller, founder and president, Habitat for Humanity International; actor Robert De Niro; Italian Ambassador to the U.S. Ferdinando Salleo; former President of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro) Slobodan Milosevic; and Muhammad Ali's wife, Lonnie.

Remarks to the Congregation of Shiloh Baptist Church October 29, 2000

The President. Thank you. Good morning.

Audience members. Good morning.

The President. Reverend Smith, Mrs. Smith, honored guests, members of the church family. All I could think about for the first 30 minutes is how much I wished I were in the choir today. *[Laughter]*

I want to say how honored I am to be here, and to be here with so many members of the White House staff, including two ministers—some would argue we need more—Zina Pierre, who works in the Office of Intergovernmental Affairs, and Kevin Johnson, the Deputy Director of our Community Empowerment Board, under the Vice President. We also have a lot of other folks, as you know, who are here who wanted

me to come here, I think, so they could be sure to show up. *[Laughter]*

I, too, want to thank Lorraine Miller, one of your members and one of my advisers, for all she did to make this possible, and all the others who have been mentioned. I want to thank this church for your outreach—to love not in word but in deed, in truth. I want to say a special word of appreciation to my friend, your delegate in Congress, Eleanor Holmes Norton, for being here.

I've known Eleanor a long time, and we have worked closely together since I was trying to become President in 1992. We have shared high moments and low moments. We shared a disappointment last week when the Supreme Court

said the people of DC shouldn't have full voting rights. I believe you should, and I always have.

But I think we can take a lot of pride, as your pastor just said, about the economic revitalization of the District of Columbia, and I am very honored that I could work with Eleanor to alleviate the extraordinary financial burdens on this city and have the National Government pay for the responsibilities that in any other circumstance would be done by a State government. And we took that off your shoulders; I think it will help.

I am proud of the DC College Access Act, which now has 3,000 of your young people going to college in other places for low in-State tuition. And I am still hoping we will succeed in passing our new markets program and some extra incentives for people to invest in the District of Columbia, to bring it all the way back.

So, I thank you, Eleanor. I thank you for the work that you've done to get Frederick Douglass' home established as a national memorial, and the preservation of the Carter G. Woodson home, which is near here, just up the street, I think.

This is a very kind of emotional day for me. I was thinking back—this is the first time in 26 years I haven't been on the ballot somewhere. [Laughter] And so I started kind of visiting around almost 27 years ago. And when you were singing and having your service, I was both here and my mind was wandering back over those 26 years. I thought of a time once when I was in an African-American service at night in the Mississippi Delta, in 1976, early. And it began to hail, and the building I was in was a tin-roof building. And it began to hail just as a lady got up to sing "If I Can Help Somebody"—a cappella. She had perfect pitch, and she just kept on singing through the hail.

And I thought of so many other things that have happened over the years, because I have had the opportunity to be blessed in churches like this one—to come as a fellow believer and a child of God and a fellow sinner, to say, thank you. So, thank you. Thank you very much.

I don't know what ex-Presidents do exactly. I wonder if anybody will ever ask me back when I leave. He finally did—Reverend Smith did. [Laughter] One of my predecessors told me that he was lost for the first 4 months after he left office because when he walked in a room, nobody played a song anymore. [Laughter] He was

never sure where he was. [Laughter] I am quite sure of where I am today, and I thank you.

I thank you for giving me the chance to serve these last 8 years, to give America a government that looks more like America, for working to create an economy that helps all Americans. I am very proud that we have achieved the lowest African-American and Hispanic unemployment ever recorded since we've been keeping these statistics, and that we have record homeownership and that we've tripled the number of small business loans to minorities. And we have the lowest crime rate in 27 years, and the African-American teen birth rate has dropped one-third since 1991—one-third.

We have 2 ½ million children with health insurance who didn't have it; over 90 percent of our children immunized against serious childhood diseases for the first time in the whole history of the country. For the first time ever, African-American children are graduating from high school at the same rate as white students; the number of African-American children taking advanced placement tests up 500 percent over the last 6 years, 300 percent in the last 3 years alone.

And all over the country—this relates to something that's in the pastor's letter today, which I urge you to read. I'll say more about it in a minute, but all over the country one of the most hopeful things is that schools where children weren't learning are being turned into places where children are learning.

I was in a little town in western Kentucky the other day, where 3 years ago, this grade school I visited was one of the worst schools in the State: 12 percent of the children reading at or above grade level; 5 percent doing math at or above grade level; none of them doing science—not one—at or above grade level. Three years later, 57 percent doing reading at or above grade level; 70 percent doing math at or above grade level; 63 percent doing science at or above grade level. You can turn these things around.

I was in Harlem the other day, in an elementary school where 2 years ago, 80 percent of the children were reading and doing math below grade level. Two years later, 74 percent doing reading and math at or above grade level. All children can learn, and we can turn these schools around. They can be made to work.

So I'm grateful. I'm grateful that we've had the longest economic expansion in history and

that everybody has gone along for the ride. I'm grateful that we have the lowest crime rate in 27 years and the lowest welfare rolls in 32 years, and the environment is cleaner, and we've got more kids with health insurance, and the schools are getting better. I'm grateful for all that.

But in America, our public life must always be about tomorrow. It's very interesting to go back and study the founding of this country and to read very carefully the words of the Founders. Look, these guys weren't stupid. They knew God created somebody besides white male property owners. [*Laughter*] They weren't stupid. You ought to read—Thomas Jefferson just wrote one book, called “The Notes on The State of Virginia.” I have a copy, original copy, going back to the late 1700's. This is before he was ever President. And he has a stunning little one-paragraph indictment of slavery.

So they weren't fools; they knew what they were doing. They were creating a system which would force people to slowly give up their hypocrisy and, as we broadened our horizons, would force us to keep going further and further toward God, toward the good, toward the common humanity that is in us all. So what did they pledge their lives, their fortunes, and their sacred honor to? To form a more perfect Union. Not a perfect Union; we don't get to do that on this Earth. But it would always become more perfect.

Now, that's what this election season is about. I'm now 54 years old. In my lifetime, we have never gone to the polls, ever, with so much economic prosperity, so much social progress, so little domestic crisis, so few foreign threats to our security—ever, not once. Now, I argue that that imposes on us a profound responsibility.

This is more a subject for a preacher than a political leader, but it occurs to me that everybody who is over 30 in this congregation today can remember at least once in your life when you made a huge mistake not because things were going so badly but because things were going so well, you thought you didn't have to concentrate anymore. Right? Everybody who has lived a certain length of time has made one of those mistakes.

So I grew up in the civil rights era and the Vietnam war era; I remember the energy crisis; I remember the hostages in Iran; I remember all the troubles this country has had just in my lifetime. So here we are. We went from

record deficits to record surpluses. We went from quadrupling the debt to paying the debt down. We're all going forward together, and here we are: We have the first election of the 21st century. And all the evidence is, a lot of people don't think, as the pastor's letter said, they don't understand what the differences are, and maybe they shouldn't go.

And I just came here to say, and to say to you and through you to the country, in my lifetime we've never had an election like this—not one—where there was so much prosperity, so much social progress, so few domestic crises and foreign threats. And we have the chance, therefore, to think about the big challenges and build the future of our dreams for our children; to save Social Security and Medicare, so when the baby boomers retire, we don't bankrupt our kids; to give an ever more diverse group of children, all of them, an excellent education.

Now you have over half the married couples with children in America now both work, both the husband and wife work; 59 percent of the women in America with a baby under one work. We have to do more to balance work and family. I sometimes think the best law I signed the whole time I was here was the first one, the family and medical leave law, because over 20 million people—over 20 million people—have taken some time off when a baby was born or a parent was sick, without losing their job. We have to do more things like this to help people balance work and family. The best thing about the welfare reform law was that we spent more money on child care and training and transportation to help people succeed as parents, as well as in the work force.

The pastor talked about the ozone hole. The world is getting warmer. The 1990's were the warmest decade in 1,000 years. And that relates to this energy crisis we've been toying around with here lately, where we're all concerned about we need to develop a whole different long-term future.

General Motors just announced a car getting 80 miles to the gallon; we need to get it on the market, all of them. We've got researchers with Department of Agriculture grants trying to figure out how to make fuel from biomass—that's a fancy word for corn or rice hulls or even grasses. You know it as ethanol today. And the problem with ethanol is, it takes 7 gallons of gas to make 8 gallons of ethanol. But if they get their job done in the laboratory, you'll be

able to make 8 gallons of ethanol with 1 gallon of gas. And that means that, in effect, we'll all be driving around getting 500 miles to the gallon. But we've got to do it. We've got to do it.

So you've got all these challenges out there. We've made a lot of progress in building one America, but our work is not over. We still have racial profiling; we still have debates over affirmative action; we still have qualified African-American judges who can't even get a hearing before the Senate.

We have the lowest childhood poverty in 20 years, and we had the biggest drop last year since 1966, but it's still way too high. We've got poverty among people over 65 below 10 percent for the first time in the history of the entire country, but poverty among our children is still too high.

We may have 90 percent of our schools hooked up to the Internet, thanks to the E-rate that the Vice President fought so hard for, to give a discount to the poorest schools. But there's still a digital divide, and it will have a huge impact unless we close it.

On Friday I signed a bill, H.R. 2879, which authorizes, appropriately, the placement of a marker commemorating Dr. King's "I Have a Dream" speech at the Lincoln Memorial. I say that—if you go back and read that speech, part of it was, "I dream that one day certain things will happen and that everything will be all right," but part of it was a dream that we would just keep on working on our more perfect Union.

Read the pastor's letter. You do not have to become too political to say that we're having an election in which there are vast differences that will have vast consequences for the way we live together as a people. And actually, I think it's something we ought to be celebrating. We don't have to say anything bad about anybody running this year. Maybe part of the story the last 8 years is that I got to take all the poison out of the electorate. *[Laughter]* I'm just glad you folks were there to administer the serum, or I wouldn't be here. *[Laughter]* But this could be a happy time. We ought to get up every day and thank God we're alive and all this good stuff is going on. We should be happy, happy about our country.

And then we need to imagine what kind of future we want and figure out the choices we have to make and which leaders are most likely

to take us there. But I promise you, this is an election that is not only profoundly important—where we make a terrible mistake thinking because things are going well, it's not important—but it is one in which there are real choices.

The pastor's letter mentioned some: the choices on affirmative action and education, on appointments to the courts, on the nature of tax policy. But there are others. The pastor talked about sacrifice. You know, a lot of members of my party sacrificed their seats in Congress in 1994 because they voted in 1993 to get rid of the deficit, because when you have deficits and you have big debt, interest rates are high. The interest rates are high because the Government is borrowing money that you'd like to borrow, and there's not enough to go around, so the price of money goes up. It's not very complicated.

So now we're paying off the debt, and interest rates are lower. So one big decision you have to make is, do you want a bigger tax cut now, even if it means we don't get out of debt and interest rates stay high? Or should we first say we're going to keep getting this country out of debt; we'll take what's left, give what we need to to education and health care and our children and our future, and take what's left and have a tax cut?

Let's go back to the theme of the sermon today. I think it's better to think about the future and keep getting us out of debt and keep the interest rates down. It also, by the way, is like a tax cut. If you keep interest rates one percent lower every year for 10 years, do you know what that's worth to you? Three hundred ninety billion dollars in lower home mortgages, \$30 billion in lower car payments, \$15 billion in lower college loan payments—by thinking about tomorrow.

But anyway, it's a choice. Some people disagree with that, and they make their case. But don't pretend there's no difference, that it won't have any impact on you. It will have a huge impact, which decision we make.

There are differences in education policy, in health care policy and environmental policy and crime policy and our foreign policy—arms control, and how we relate to Africa and the rest of the world. Just a ton of things here that you need to know—and you need to show—on election day.

The pastor mentioned Congressman John Lewis and what a great leader he was for civil rights, and how he came a long way from his little Alabama farm and a childhood when he stuttered so bad, he could hardly speak. And now he bellows his speeches in the Congress, and America listens. One of the greatest honors of my Presidency was walking across the Edmund Pettus Bridge with John Lewis and Hosea Williams and Coretta Scott King and Jesse Jackson on the 35th anniversary of the Selma march. And on that day, I gave a little talk which basically said, we still have bridges to cross.

Now, we're going to cross some bridges. The questions are, are we going to be walking in the right direction? Are we all going to walk across, or just a few of us? And if we all walk across, are we going to walk arm in arm, with outstretched hands instead of clenched fists?

I tell you, I look at the young children in this audience, the young girls in this audience that still have the time of giving birth to their own children ahead of them; because of this human genome project, a lot of these children will have—they'll be having babies within 5 or 10 years that have a life expectancy of 90 years. A lot of us that are moving into our later years, if we're lucky, the human genome project will give us a cure for Parkinson's, cancer, even the ability to reverse Alzheimer's before our time is done.

But as I was reminded the other day, when I met with the bishops of the Church of God in Christ, and I thought I was being kind of cute when I said to the head bishop, "You know, I wanted to come here and meet with some leaders who aren't term-limited"—I thought that was pretty funny. [Laughter] And the bishop looked at me and said, "Mr. President, we're all term-limited." [Laughter]

So I say to you, we're all just here for a little while. We've got to decide how we spend our time and what we care about. We're supposed to live with troubles, as well as good times. For whatever reason, God has blessed us all—me, most of all—to make this a good time. And now we're going to be judged on what we do with the good time.

We still have bridges to cross. We still have dreams to build for our children. The choices are stark and clear and will have great consequences. And we can say that with a happy heart today, honoring our opponents, not condemning them or criticizing them or saying anything bad about them but just going out, like America was supposed to work all the time, and making our choice.

But I am pleading with you—I have done everything I know to do to turn this country around, to pull this country together, to move us forward. I have done everything I know to do. But you remember this: The best things are still out there; it's still out there. And as long as we keep striving for that more perfect Union, tomorrow will always be out there. But in order to do it, you have to show.

So talk to your friends, talk to your neighbors, talk to your family members, talk to your co-workers, and make sure nobody takes a pass on November 7th. Learn, decide, and choose.

Thank you, and God bless you all.

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:40 a.m. In his remarks, he referred to Rev. Wallace Charles Smith, Shiloh Baptist Church, and his wife, G. Elaine; civil rights activists Hosea Williams and Rev. Jesse Jackson; and Coretta Scott King, widow of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Remarks to the Congregation of Alfred Street Baptist Church in Alexandria, Virginia October 29, 2000

The President. Thank you so much. Thank you, ladies and gentlemen. Good morning.

Audience members. Good morning.

The President. I want to thank Reverend Peterson and Mrs. Peterson and Reverend Jack-

son, all the staff and members of the Alfred Street Baptist Church family. I'd like to say a special word of appreciation to the young choir and the choir director for the music. Thank you, sir. They were great. You made the rest