

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

of us feel pretty young again, there singing. [Laughter]

I am delighted to be here with a large number of folks from the White House. You saw them all stand up. [Laughter] You should know, we have—we actually have two ministers in the White House: Zina Pierre, who works in the Office of Intergovernmental Affairs, and Kevin Jefferson, who is the Deputy Director of Vice President Gore's Community Empowerment Board. They're doing their job every day.

I am also very grateful for one of your members who works with us, Ms. Jena Roscoe, who made sure I got here today. Where's Jena? She's here somewhere. Where are you? Stand up there. [Applause]

This church, I am well aware, is not just a Sunday church. You minister to the spiritual and physical needs of the people every day of the week, from nurturing boarder babies to promoting good health, to this Habitat project that your pastor just told you how much you were giving to today. [Laughter] The Scripture says, "While we have time, let us do good unto all men." And a week from Tuesday, it will be time for us to vote.

I am grateful that your Representative in Congress, Jim Moran, came with me today. He is a very fine man and a great Member of Congress, and he's been a good ally of mine for these years I have served as your President, and I thank him. But for many reasons, I am especially grateful that Lynda Robb came with me today to be with you. You know, her husband, Chuck, has been your Governor, your Lieutenant Governor, your Senator. Her father, President Johnson, did more for civil rights than any President since Abraham Lincoln.

Lynda and Chuck have been friends of Hillary's and mine for almost 20 years now. We've seen our children grow up together. We served as Governor together. We have fought the battles of the last 8 years together. In the United States Senate, almost no one had more to lose than Chuck Robb by voting for my economic plan in 1993. You know, we'd been living on that deficit medicine so long, we were pretty well hooked up. [Laughter] We were addicted.

I used to have a Senator from Arkansas named Dale Bumpers, who just retired, who used to joke that if he could write everybody in America \$200 billion worth of hot checks, he could show them a good time, too. [Laughter]

And I remember when I became President, Senator Robb knew he had to run for reelection the next year. And once you get in that big a hole, there's no easy way to crawl out; everybody has got to hurt a little bit. But, without blinking, he came in and voted for the economic plan, and he and—thanks to him and thanks to Vice President Gore—if we'd lost Chuck Robb, Vice President Gore never would have gotten the vote. By one vote, the narrowest of margins, it turned the economy around, got interest rates down, got things going again. And we've gone from the biggest deficits in history to the biggest surpluses.

I think you shouldn't forget that on election day, that he was there. But in so many other ways, large and small, Senator Robb always tries to do the right thing, even when it's not the popular thing. When it comes to civil rights and human rights, he's always tried to do the right thing. When it comes to the safety of our children on the streets, the Brady bill, assault weapons ban, 100,000 police, even if some big, powerful interest group is going to get mad at him, he just sort of stands up there and does the right thing.

I don't know how many times—there's been a time or two in the last 8 years I've tried to get him to vote against me. [Laughter] I have. I've said, "Chuck, what are you doing? You're from Virginia; you've got to run again." He'd just say, "It's the right thing."

When I normalized relations with Vietnam, Senator Robb, who probably saw more combat in Vietnam than any other combat veteran, stood by my side and said it was the right thing to do. So we've been friends a long time. And I'm highly biased, but I want you to know, there is not a braver person in the United States Congress, or a person more likely, day-in and day-out, no matter what the pressures to do wrong are, to stand up and do right for you.

Now, mostly I came here to say thank you. You know, this is the first time in 26 years I haven't been on the ballot somewhere. [Laughter] I have been coming into African-American churches for almost 27 years now, listening, learning. And today my mind is both here, concentrated on the task at hand—which is to try to persuade you to go out and talk to every friend, family member, co-worker, and stranger on the streets you see between now and November 7th and drag them to the polls—but my mind is also wandering back over this

amazing life the American people have given me and the people of my native State of Arkansas.

I've thought about all the early times in the 1970's I was in various churches. I can still remember the songs that were sung. I can still remember when I was in poor churches when they didn't have all the instruments, and men would sit in chairs around the singers and use spoons on their knees to provide the rhythm. I can still remember going to investitures of pastors in churches built for 200, where there were 300 people there and 8 choirs. And it was hot. And we couldn't tell whether the people were being seized with the spirit or just having strokes. *[Laughter]*

So I just came mostly to say thank you. I have a heart filled with gratitude that I have had the unusual opportunity to serve. I have tried to turn our country around, to move it forward, and to bring it together. I am proud that we have had an administration, from the Cabinet to our appointees—at least one of whom is a member of this church—to our judicial nominees, that looks like America.

I am grateful that we have had an economy that has not only given us the longest economic expansion in history but has benefited all Americans. We have the lowest African-American and Latino unemployment rates ever recorded. We have a 15 percent increase, after inflation, in income over the last 8 years for African-Americans; in just the last 3 years, it's almost 10 percent; 1.1 million African-Americans buying their own homes for the first time; child poverty at a 20-year low.

I am glad that this has been about more than economics. We're a more united country. We have the lowest welfare rolls in 32 years, the lowest crime rates in 26 years. The teen birth rate has dropped by one-third for African-American teens since 1991 alone—by one-third. For the first time in history, over 90 percent of our children have been immunized against serious childhood diseases. And for the first time in a dozen years, the number of people without health insurance is going down, because 2.5 million kids have been given health insurance under the Children's Health Insurance Program that was part of our balanced budget.

Listen to this: For the first time in history, African-American children are graduating from high school at the same rate as white children, and the number of African-American children

taking advanced placement exams in the high schools is up 300 percent in just the last 3 years—it has tripled in the last 3 years; record college-going rate; and record levels of support through the HOPE scholarship, the lifetime learning tax credit, the Pell grant, and so many other things for our young people to go on to college.

Now, what I want to say to you is not, "Didn't we do great?" That's not why I came here. I came here to say thank you, and now it's your turn. I have done everything I could to turn our country around, to move it forward, to pull it together. But it is in the nature of, first of all, human beings, secondly, democracy, and thirdly, America, that there's always something to be done. And our public life always is about tomorrow.

When the framers of the Constitution wrote the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution—hey, they were smart guys. They knew that the world was about more than white male property owners. They weren't dumb. They knew what they were saying when they said all men are created equal. They knew they meant men, women, and kids. And they knew they meant blacks and whites and whoever else shows up—the Native Americans. They were not stupid.

I've got a copy of the only book Thomas Jefferson ever wrote, "The Notes on the State of Virginia." I believe it was the first printing; certainly, it was printed in the 1700's, before he became President. And there is in one of these chapters about a paragraph on slavery, but it's pretty obvious that Mr. Jefferson knew before he became President that it was a bad deal, and that it would have to fall, and that change would have to come. So we would start with a set of ideals, and then we would work on making our Union more perfect.

So that is the eternal purpose of America. And election time is your time to make a more perfect Union. It's your job. On November 7th, you count as much as I do. Your vote counts just as much—unless you stay home; then mine counts more than yours.

And there are still issues out there: racial profiling; affirmative action; diversity on the bench. I have named 62 African-American judges, 3 times the number of the previous two administrations combined, but—*[applause]*—wait a minute. That's not why I came here.

I came here for you to think about your responsibility to the future. But there has never been an African-American judge on the Federal Court of Appeals here in Virginia for the fourth circuit, which has the largest number of African-Americans in the entire United States, because I have been trying for 8 years to do it, and for 8 years I have been blocked in the United States Senate. I appointed Roger Gregory from Virginia; I appointed two people from North Carolina. I have virtually gone out with a searchlight looking for people that could get by the folks in the Senate. They were all qualified. This was not about qualifications.

And so, in the year 2000, when we still don't have an African-American jurist on the Federal Court of Appeals and we're running over with qualified people, there's still work to do in this country.

While poverty among African-American children has dropped by almost 30 percent since I took office, it's still way too high. Poverty among people over 65 is below 10 percent, for the first time in the history of our country. But the poverty rate among our children is still nearly double that. There is still a digital divide. Even though we've hooked up 95 percent of our schools to the Internet, thanks to Vice President Gore's E-rate program, which gives a discount to poor schools, you and I know there's still a digital divide, and if we don't close it, the world will not come together.

Well, there are lots of other issues, but you get the point. You know, I'm 54 now, and it looks younger every day. *[Laughter]* The pastor said it was young. And I can honestly say there has never been a time in my lifetime where we have had the longest economic expansion in history and lowest unemployment rate in 30 years, so we're moving in the right direction economically. But we also have declining crime, declining welfare rolls, declining teen pregnancy and drug abuse among young people, improving schools, improving health care coverage, and a cleaner environment. So you've got the economy getting better, the society getting stronger, with the absence of severe domestic crisis or external threat to our security.

We all know it's still a dangerous world, as the people of Virginia felt most of all when our U.S.S. *Cole* was attacked and we lost those fine young men and women sailors several days ago. But we are as free from external threat to our security and internal paralyzing crisis as

we have ever been. And all these things are going well.

Now, what's the point of—why am I telling you this? Again, not to make you clap but to make you think. Everybody in this church over 30 has made at least one big mistake in your life not because things were going well at the time—poorly—but because they were going so well at the time, you thought you didn't have to concentrate anymore. Isn't that right? Is that true? Has everybody here over 30 made a mistake because things were going well in your life at least once? You didn't think you had to concentrate. At that moment, it's just going so well, everything is on automatic.

Nothing is ever on automatic, ever—ever. And the reason I am here today is, I don't know if we'll have another chance in my lifetime, or yours, to go and vote as equals, to shape the future of our country—when you have economic prosperity, social progress, the absence of internal crisis, or external threat.

We can paint the future of our dreams for kids. We can figure out how to deal with the aging of America, how to save Social Security and Medicare when the baby boomers retire, how to give all of our kids excellence in education, how to make the most of the scientific and technology revolution. The young women in this audience will be having babies within 5 or 10 years that have a life expectancy of 90 years because of the human genome project.

These young people behind me that sang for us so beautifully today, when they begin to have their children, just be a matter of a couple of years until they'll—every mother will come home from the hospital with a little gene card that will tell you everything about your baby's biological makeup. Some of it will be kind of scary, but at least you will know. And they will say, if you do these 10 things, you can dramatically increase your child's life expectancy.

We worry about the energy crisis now, but GM just announced they developed a car that gets 80 miles to the gallon. And yesterday I signed the Agriculture appropriations bill which funds research into energy—listen to this—and right now, some cars in America, but not many, run on ethanol. You know, that's basically, you make fuel from corn. And the problem with that is, it takes 7 gallons of gasoline to make 8 gallons of ethanol, so the conversion is not too good. But the chemists are working on cracking the resistance to this, and when they

do, they estimate that you'll be able to make 8 gallons of ethanol with 1 gallon of gasoline; furthermore, that you'll be able to make it—you don't have to use corn; you can use rice hulls or even grass—anything.

Now, when that happens, all of you will be driving around in cars that will have the equivalent of 500 miles to the gallon. And the world will change.

Audience member. Amen! *[Laughter]*

The President. Now, why is that important? Because the 1990's were the hottest decade in a thousand years, and we don't want these kids and their children to grow up in a world full of storms and troubles and burned-up fields and global instability and wars because we couldn't take care of our environment.

So all this big stuff is out there. This is very exciting. I just hope I can stick around long enough to watch it unfold. It's really great. The best stuff is still out there. But it all depends on the choices we make. And look, I don't have to—I shouldn't tell you who to vote for; you already know who I'm for. *[Laughter]* So this is not rocket science. But here's what I want you to know. You may not ever get another chance like this in your lifetime to vote in an election like this, ever. And those of us who are older have a solemn responsibility to tell that to the younger people who may take this for granted, who may think this kind of a ride just goes on and on and on.

You know, my first election was between Hubert Humphrey, Richard Nixon, and George Wallace. And my country was torn clean apart. This stuff does not last forever. We've got to make the most of this moment, number one.

Number two, there are—we can have a happy election. We don't have to say anything bad about anybody in this election. We don't have to badmouth—the Republicans don't have to badmouth the Democrats; the Democrats don't have to badmouth the Republicans. We can just posit, everybody is patriotic; everyone loves their family; everyone loves their country. Now, let's just see what they say and where they disagree.

But I'm telling you, there are huge differences on economic policy, on health care policy, on education policy, on crime policy, on environmental policy, on foreign policy, and how we deal with arms control and how we relate to Africa and other emerging areas of the world. And you need to know that.

One side believes that it would be better if we had a very large tax cut and we partially privatize Social Security and we spent a fair amount of money—even though to do this would get us back into deficit—because they believe that tax cuts grow the economy more than deficits hurt it.

Then one side, our side, believes that we ought to first say, "Let's stick with what works and keep paying this debt down; get the country out of debt, because if we get the country out of debt, we won't be borrowing money, and therefore, you can borrow money more cheaply." That's the biggest tax cut we can give everybody. If we keep interest rates one percent lower a year for a decade, do you know what that's worth to you? Listen to this: for the American people, \$390 billion in lower home mortgages, \$30 billion in lower car payments, \$15 billion in lower college loan payments. That's a lot of money. But more important, it keeps the economy healthy.

But anyway, that's our view. Our view is, first things first; let's go on and get out of debt here. And then whatever is left we'll invest in our education, health care, our children, and then give people a tax cut we can afford. But there are differences. And you should listen to them and listen to us and make up your mind. But don't pretend that there aren't any differences.

When I hear people say, "This is not really a very significant election," it makes me want to go head first into an empty swimming pool. *[Laughter]* I mean, this is—we really do have a good choice here; I mean, a big, clear, unambiguous, stark choice. We don't have to get upset; we don't have to get mad, but we need to be smart.

So I want to tell you, as I said, you know how I feel, but that's not what's important. What's important is how you feel, because on November 7th, you're just as important as the President. And I will say again, I have done everything I could do to turn the country around, move it forward, pull it together. I have loved doing it. It has been a joy for me. I am thrilled to see an election unfolding in a more positive environment than so many in recent years have. It is wonderful. But the only thing I'm concerned about is people believing that it doesn't much matter whether they vote, that the consequences are not great, that there

aren't any significant differences. Those things are not true.

It matters whether you vote. It's the most important election in, arguably, that you've ever had to vote in, because you've never gotten to vote at a time when you could be completely faithful to your vision, to build a future of your dreams for your children.

So I implore you, show up. Call every friend, family member, co-worker, and halfway interesting-looking stranger you see on the street—[laughter]—between now and November 7th. It's a great chance for these kids here in this church to avoid some of the mistakes and trouble and heartbreak all of us had to live through—to keep making America the beacon of hope in the world. What a great chance it is; what a great responsibility it is.

For me, I'm grateful—I'm grateful that I got to serve. I'm grateful that you stuck with me.

I'm grateful that I got to serve with people like Jim Moran. I'm grateful that when I'm gone, I hope Chuck Robb will be left behind, because he is a rare bird. I want you to remember what I told you. I've known a lot of people in politics; I never saw anybody take more chances to stick up for little people and lost causes. I never, ever, saw anybody do it in a tougher environment. And I think that kind of courage should be rewarded. I thank you from the bottom of my heart.

God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:40 p.m. In his remarks, he referred to Rev. John O. Peterson, pastor, and Rev. Ed Jackson, associate minister, Alfred Street Baptist Church; Reverend Peterson's wife, Joyce; and Jena Roscoe, Associate Director of Public Liaison, White House Office of African-American Outreach and Youth.

Remarks on the Budget and the Legislative Agenda and an Exchange With Reporters

October 30, 2000

The President. Good afternoon. This morning I had planned on coming here this afternoon to share good news about bipartisan progress on the budget. Our team worked all weekend and late, late into the night last night, indeed, into the early morning hours, to fashion a good-faith agreement with compromises on both sides that provided for the largest increased investment ever in the education of our children. We thought we had that agreement.

But instead of honoring it, the Republican leadership came back this afternoon and ripped it apart. Why? Because some special interest lobbyists insisted on it. They've insisted on a provision that would undermine the health and safety of millions of workers.

Six hundred thousand people lose time from work each year because of repetitive stress injuries on the job, injuries that cost American businesses about \$50 billion a year. Our proposal would save these businesses \$9 billion a year and save 300,000 workers the pain and suffering associated with the injuries. That's the cashier at the neighborhood grocery store, the office worker who works on a keyboard 8 hours a

day, the nursing home worker who cares for our seniors.

Once again the Republican leadership has let the whispers of the special interests drown out the voices of the American people. Families should not have to choose between worker safety and their children's education.

We were on the verge of passing a landmark education bill, to hire highly qualified teachers to reduce class size in the early grades, to repair and modernize crumbling schools, to expand after-school programs, invest in teacher quality, and strengthen accountability to turn around failing schools. With the largest student enrollment in history, this budget would have honored our obligation to our children by investing more in our schools and demanding more from them.

If we could get this agreement, it would be a great bipartisan achievement. It was negotiated, until the early morning hours, by those authorized by the leaders in both parties to negotiate the agreement. But the Republican leadership is on the verge of abandoning it to put special interests ahead of the children's education. That is a mistake.