

Remarks at a Luncheon for Gubernatorial Candidate Bill Simon in
Stockton

August 23, 2002

Thank you all very much for coming. I'm glad to be back in California. It's an honor to be back in Stockton, California, I might add. It's wonderful to be in a part of the world where we grow a lot of things and help feed not only our own people but feed the world.

I'm also here to—I was up in Oregon yesterday to talk about sensible policy, to make sure that we don't allow our forests to burn. I flew over the Biscuit fire there in Oregon—it's a huge fire—and was briefed by the experts about, you know, how that fire got started. It was a lightning strike. But because of poor forest management, we allowed kindling to build up, and we allowed it turn into just a giant pile of ready-to-burn material.

I saw those firefighters that are spending hours trying to protect people and wildlife and habitat, and heard one after another say, "Mr. President, bring some common sense. Bring some common sense to our forest policy. Let's thin the forest so that they don't serve as giant piles of kindling to burn and ruin the legacy of good forests." That's what I was here to talk about, some commonsense policy.

And that's what you need in Sacramento, California, is some commonsense thinking, somebody who can lead this State. And that's why I'm honored to be back to work on behalf of the next Governor of the State of California, Governor Bill Simon.

And Laura did report, Bill, that she had a great trip. You drew the long straw with her, and you got the short straw with me. [Laughter] But she sends her very best to you and Cindy. She was impressed by your speech, and your—caliber of the campaign you're running. People are beginning to take notice here in California that something different's happening, got a little different attitude when it comes to politics

and the Governor's office. She picked up on that. And so she sends her very best.

I talked to her this morning. She's in Crawford, Texas. She is—[applause]—there you go; one person from Crawford. [Laughter] You've got 1/600th of the city here. [Laughter]

But yesterday, she had the high honor of having an elementary school named after her in Leander, Texas. I share that same honor of having one named after me right here in Stockton, California.

But I do want to herald the next first lady of California, a fine lady, a great mom, smart person, and that's Cindy Simon. Good to see you, Cindy.

Alex Spanos told me the funniest thing. He said, "This is an airplane hangar." It doesn't look like one to me. [Laughter] Alex, I want to thank you for your hospitality. What a fine American Alex Spanos is. I kind of needled him in front of, I guess, maybe three or four thousand people at the Civic Center down there. I said I love being around an optimist. He told me with a straight face that the San Diego Chargers were going to win the Super Bowl this year. [Laughter] Of course, that's what he told me last year. [Laughter]

But I love Alex. My family loves Alex. I know you love Alex. He's a wonderful contributor to the fabric of our society, and we appreciate you, Alex, and Faye, and your fantastic family. And thank you for your hospitality.

I surround myself with good people. I pride myself on the fact that my administration has got some good, honorable, decent, hard-working, smart people. And I've got some of them with me today. First, I've got a National Security Adviser right here from the State of California who is really doing a good job, and that's Condoleezza Rice.

And secondly, when I picked somebody to be the Secretary of Agriculture, I wanted somebody who knew something about agriculture. And it made sense to find somebody from this part of the world, so I picked a lady from Compton, California. Ann Veneman is doing a fantastic job for America.

I told her the other day that I wanted to make sure that agriculture wasn't treated as a stepchild when it came to international trade. You see, when you're good at something, that ought to be the cornerstone of public policy. And we're really good about growing crops and raising cows and raising chickens and hogs. We're good at that in America. We're so good at it, we don't have to worry about bringing it in from another country. We're self-sufficient in food, and that's important from a national security perspective.

But it's also important, if that's the case, to use our leverage to help our producers by opening up markets for U.S. products. And today Ann announced the fact that the Russians, our friends the Russians have finally honored the agreement to not only contract for our chickens but to honor the contract for American chickens. She's doing a fantastic job on behalf of the American farmer.

We've got two fine United States Congressmen here with us today—one, the Congressman from this area, Richard Pombo. Richard, thank you for coming. I know Richard's wife and son is here as well. And of course, there's Doug Ose from right up north of here. Doug and his family is here as well. Thanks for coming, Doug.

I want to thank State Senator Dick Monteith for coming today. He's going to be the next Congressman from the adjoining district. Thank you for coming, Dick.

My friend big Jim Brulte is here. He's a State senator from down south. He's got a lot of judgment and wisdom, and he's trying to keep the fiscal house in order until a new sheriff arrives in town, in Sacramento, California. And I appreciate Big

Jim being here, too. Thanks for coming, Brulte.

And finally, I want to thank your mayor, Gary Podesto, for his hospitality, his kind introduction down at the civic center, and for the great job he's doing for the people of Stockton, California. Thank you, Mr. Mayor.

I want to thank you all for helping the next Governor. I want to thank you for your talent and your time. I want to thank you for what you're going to do. You see, in order for this good man to win, he not only needs your financial support; he needs you to start helping turn out that vote, to start talking to your neighbors about why you need a change in Sacramento and why he's the man to bring that change.

In Texas, at least in the Crawford area, we call that coffee-shop talk. You've probably got a few of them around here. It makes sense, when you get into that coffee shop, to extol the virtues. When you find a good candidate, you've got to support that candidate. It's important for this great State that you do, because you've got some problems and you need somebody to solve the problems.

It starts with having the right kind of attitude. The attitude is, I want to work with people to make things better for everybody. You don't ask the question—you know, I'm going to work for people to make sure that this so-and-so has got the right party registration. That's not the right attitude for government. The attitude in the 21st century, the one that makes sense to me, is how can I work together with people from all walks of life to make things better? You need somebody in Sacramento who's got that kind of attitude, somebody who's willing to put aside all the typical old-style politics to bring a breath of fresh air, to bring new life into a stagnant situation. And the answer for the breath of fresh air for Sacramento, California, is Bill Simon.

I also appreciate a man who doesn't have to take a poll to figure out what to believe. I like Bill's ideas. I like the fact that he

set education as his number one priority. And that ought to be the priority of any Governor. The most important thing a State needs to do is to make sure that every child—not just a few or some—every child gets a good education.

And it starts with having high expectations. It starts with the belief that every child can learn. See, if you believe only certain children can learn, those that you kind of exclude won't learn. That's just the way it is. If you have low standards, you're going to get low results.

Bill understands every child can learn. He also knows what I know, that it's important to have flexibility in the public school system. You can't—one size doesn't fit all. You've got to trust local folks to chart the path to excellence. The bill I signed says that we're going to set high standards, but we're going to trust local people; we're going to let people design a path to excellence that works.

But also, what's important in education—if you believe every child can learn, then you need to ask the question: Is it working? Is every child learning? And see, that's why I am such a strong supporter of accountability. And Bill joins me. We need to know; we need to know if every child is learning. See, if you believe they can, then you're willing to measure. If you don't believe that every child can learn, then you don't measure. If you believe every child can learn, then you use an accountability system to say thanks to the teachers where children are learning, and to say to schools that aren't teaching: "You need to change, because every child counts in the State of California."

That's the kind of policy that's needed here in California. You need a policy that says every child can learn. When we find children who aren't, we're going to correct problems early, before they're too late to regain confidence in the school system. That's what you need to do in this great State, and this good man can do that.

We're getting ready to write a new welfare law in Washington that says work is the cornerstone of freedom, that we're going to help people work. We need to have a Governor in this State who understands the dignity that comes with work but who also understands, like I know, there are people—there are pockets of despair and hopelessness in this State, just like there are around the country. There just are.

And one way to help address each person is to unleash the great faith-based programs which exist all around the country. The Federal Government and the State government must not fear programs who change lives but must welcome those faith-based programs for the embetterment of mankind.

Bill understands that. You see, government can hand out money, but it cannot put hope in people's hearts or a sense of purpose in people's lives. That's done when loving Americans love their neighbor just like they'd like to be loved themselves. It's a breath of fresh air you need in Sacramento, California.

You also need somebody who can make the budget work. *[Laughter]* That's what you need. You need somebody who's willing to make tough decisions and set priorities with the people's money. It starts with understanding, when a government spends money, it's not the government's money; it's your money. And you better have somebody who understands that, that concept. And somebody who watches the budget carefully.

Bill Simon is a proven businessman who can get that done, and that's what the State of California needs. And that's why I'm so proud to be here to embrace his candidacy and urge the good people of California to work on behalf—for the State's interests, that this man get elected.

I want to thank you all for your support of his candidacy. And before I leave, I want to tell you we've got some tasks at hand at the Federal level, too, that we're going

to meet. There's no bigger task than protecting the homeland of our country. That's my most important job. I spend a lot of time thinking about it. Not only do I spend time thinking about it, I act on it.

You need to know that your Government is doing everything we can to run down every hint, every piece of evidence, every whisper about somebody that might be doing something to America. And we're chasing down every lead. A lot of good folks are working really hard on your behalf. And I'm proud of them. I'm proud of them at the Federal level; I'm proud of them at the State level; and I'm proud of them at the local level.

You probably have heard that I have asked for there to be a reorganization of the Federal Government in order to make the homeland more secure. I didn't run—and I readily concede this—on the platform: Vote for me, I want to make the Federal Government bigger. [*Laughter*] I ran on: Let's make it work better. If it's got a responsibility, let's see to it that it works better. And so the idea of the Department of Homeland Security is not to create new bureaucracy but to make those bureaucracies and those agencies which have got some responsibility in homeland security work better.

There are over 100 agencies in Washington that have something to do with protecting you. And it seemed like to me they ought to be under one umbrella, so there's accountability in the system. The problem is, is that I worry about a Senate bill—I don't worry about it, because I'm not going to accept it—a Senate bill which wants to micromanage, that wants to decide every kind of rule there is, that is more worried about protecting their own turf than protecting the American people.

But we're going to get a good Department. I want you to know we're doing everything we can to secure the homeland.

But the best way to do so is to hunt the killers down, one person at a time, and bring them to justice, which is what we're

going to do. And we're making some progress, and we have to make progress. After all, they are still out there, and they still hate. They hate what we stand for. I want you to tell your sons and daughters that we seek justice, not revenge, and we do so because we love freedom.

This country values every person. Every life is important. We value the ability to worship freely, and we hold those values dear. And when somebody wants to take them away, we're going to respond. And we'll respond in a forceful way. And force—we'll use every asset at our disposal to protect the people of this country but also to protect the values that we hold dear. It is our responsibility.

History has called us into action. And so long as I'm the President, this country is not going to blink. We will be steadfast and strong in our desire to make the world more free.

And we're making some pretty good progress. We've got this coalition of freedom-loving countries and people who understand the threats to civilization that terrorism poses, that are helping to share intelligence and to cut off money and haul them in, as I say, rather—it means arrest, incarcerate them. We've got over a couple of thousand of them—these are the big shots, the leaders. We're pulling them in, and slowly but surely we're decimating their army.

But this is a different kind of war. See, that's what makes it not very appealing to all the air time that they've got out there, because you can't see tanks and aircrafts and ships and convoys and all, the way that wars used to be fought. Remember, we're out there chasing down these people that hide in caves. They find the darkest cave possible. In the meantime, they're sending some youngster to their suicidal death. They've hijacked a great religion; that's what they've done. It's a different kind of enemy; but we're figuring them out, and there's no cave deep enough.

We've got a fantastic United States military. We've got a great coalition. We've got a people that understand the task at hand. And so we're making progress.

But there are some other hills we've got to climb in order to make the world more peaceful. There just are. As our fellow citizens, you've just got to understand that there's going to be more combat, more missions. We'll do everything we can to continue to enforce the doctrine that if you harbor one of these people, you're just as guilty as they are. You'll see that doctrine enforced. You'll see the doctrine that says "Either you're with us, or you're with them" enforced.

You'll understand clearly, as time goes on, why I feel strongly that we cannot allow the world's worst leaders to develop the world's worst weapons, to hold America or our friends and allies hostage. We just can't do that.

History has called us into action. History has shined the spotlight on this great land, and we will show the world that we love human values, universal values. And we will show the world that we love freedom. That's the task at hand.

And by being strong and patient and deliberate, we're going to make the world more peaceful; that's the objective. The objective is for our children to grow up in peace. The objective is to achieve peace in parts of the world where the people have given up on peace.

See, I think it's possible to achieve peace in the Middle East. I think it's possible to achieve peace in South Asia. I believe that out of the evil done to America can come some great good, if we remain strong and focused and diligent and tough when we need to.

And I believe here at home we can achieve a more compassionate country, too.

You see, out of the evil done to America has come a new culture, one that says serving something greater than yourself in life is part of being—part of being a patriotic American.

People say, you know, "How can I help? What can I do?" You know what you can do? You can love your neighbor just like you'd like to be loved yourself. You can understand what I know, that one person can't do everything to make America a more hospitable place, a more decent place, a more loving place; but one person can do something, and America can change one heart, one soul, one conscience at a time.

And all of us have a responsibility to help make that change, and it doesn't take much. Mentoring a child on a regular basis will change lives. Helping people who need, who are shut in, will change lives. Feeding the hungry will change lives. Helping find shelter for those who lack shelter will change lives.

See, America is changing, one person at a time. The evil people, they thought they were hitting a weak country. They thought they were hitting people that were so self-absorbed, so materialistic, that all we might do was file a lawsuit or two. *[Laughter]* But they realized this country is a country of courage and character and compassion and decency. After all, we are the finest country on the face of the Earth.

May God bless you all, and may God bless America.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:05 p.m. at the A.G. Spanos Jet Center. In his remarks, he referred to Mayor Gary A. Podesto of Stockton; Cindy Simon, wife of candidate Bill Simon; and Alex G. Spanos, founder and chairman, A.G. Spanos Companies, and his wife, Faye.