

Remarks at the Democratic National Committee Dinner

June 22, 1994

Thank you very much. Chairman Wilhelm, my good friend Vernon Jordan, between the two of you there's nothing left for me to say. *[Laughter]* I thank you for your leadership of our party. I congratulate you and DeGee on the upcoming birth of your first child. I thank Vernon and Ann Jordan and all those others who worked on this dinner and made it so successful tonight. I want to thank Terry McAuliffe and all the cochairmen of this dinner, the Members of the Congress, the members of the Cabinet, members of the administration who are here, and my fellow Americans.

I have two pieces of good news tonight. The first is that with about a half an hour left to go, the United States is ahead in the World Cup two to nothing over Colombia. I kind of like this World Cup. It reminds me of my campaign. We're the underdog in this deal; I like it. *[Laughter]* The second is far more important, and perhaps most of you have already heard, but this afternoon, the United States received official confirmation that North Korea is prepared to freeze its nuclear program in return for talking to us about those issues. This event, of course, is important to all of us, to our children and, if we're successful, even to our children's children. It does not solve our problems, but it gives us a chance to begin to solve them. It came about because of the steadfastness and resolve of our administration and working with our allies. In this case, we had an interesting set of allies from the very beginning, of course our friends in South Korea and Japan, but also in Russia and China. There was a sense that we had to do something here.

It came about because of the deft putting of our case and the case for North Korea's coming into the community of nations by another great Democrat, former President Jimmy Carter. And tonight, I mentioned it not only because it is so important to all of us and to our future but because in addition to this being a party gala, it is an American celebration.

When I heard on the way in the themes of the little film you saw on our administra-

tion, I thought to myself that most of those things we have done benefit people without regard to their party and that Democrats in 1992 promised a new direction for our country, one rooted in the real problems and the real promise of this Nation. I had some fairly basic ideas. I thought that we could not be strong abroad unless we were strong at home, that we could never be strong at home if we tried to withdraw from the world, but that we had to rebuild ourselves from the grassroots, based on the real conditions in our country.

I'll never forget when David Wilhelm suggested that we get on that bus. It was easy for him to say; he didn't have to ride on it as long as we did. *[Laughter]* But I think Hillary and Al and Tipper would admit that that bus and those trips not only became the symbol of our campaign but kept us firmly rooted to the American people. We saw individually the people that had been beaten down and had often given up on their National Government, Maybe collectively they were cynical and believed gridlock was inevitable, but individually, they were full of hope and concern. They wanted so much for the promise of America to be alive for their children, and they knew that some tough things would have to be done.

There's no way that TV ads could convey what we saw in the eyes of a woman on the side of the road in the Middle West one night who told us that her husband and she had been married for 35 years, and he had been having increasing difficulty holding on to jobs because of the decline of the economy. And finally, he had taken a job paying just over \$5 an hour, and they had lost their health insurance and she was ill. And she did not know what to do, but she was absolutely sure that they had worked hard and played by the rules.

There's no way a poll or a commercial could recapture the face of the woman I saw in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, one day at a Quaker Oats plant, holding a child of another race while we were being demonstrated against by people who disagreed with my pro-choice position. This woman had a pro-choice sticker on, and she had a baby in her arms of another race. And I said, "Where did you get that baby?" And she said, "This is my

baby." And I said, "Well, where did you get this baby?" She said, "I got this baby from Florida, and she has AIDS. But somebody's got to take care of all these babies with AIDS." This woman had been divorced, was living in an apartment with her own two children, struggling to make ends meet, and she had adopted another child. She said, "I'm for you, and I wish you'd tell those people back there with their signs if they feel so strongly about it, come help me adopt these babies and stand up for their right to grow up and live a good life."

I met a sheriff in east Texas who's got to be the only east Texas sheriff in America that subscribed to Rolling Stone—[laughter]—who told me he wanted me to pass a real tough crime bill, but not to forget that the kids needed something to say yes to as well.

I wish I could just tell you all these stories. But when I showed up here, I knew that, as my Granddaddy used to say, "There would be a lot of slips between the cup and the lip," but if I could just keep remembering all those people, in the end it would come out all right.

And what we have tried to do is exactly what I said I would try to in the campaign. We've tried to restore the economy, to restore the link between the people and the Government, to make it work for ordinary people again, to rebuild a sense of work and family and community and empowerment of individual citizens, and to move this country into the 21st century still the greatest country in the world with the most hopes for our children.

If you look at what has happened in the last 18 months, I think you can make a pretty compelling case that we're doing the right things. Our economy is growing steadily: over 3.4 million new jobs in 16 months, more than in the previous 4 years combined; a point-and-a-half-plus drop in the unemployment rate; in 1993, more new business incorporations than in any year since World War II; the first quarter of this year, the first quarter in over 15 years when there was not a bank failure.

Our Republican friends always talk about how they deplored the deficit and they deplored Government spending. But it just kept getting bigger when they were in office.

And they blamed the Congress. But when you look at the facts, the truth is that, in spite of the exploding deficits, Congress actually appropriated slightly less money in the previous 12 years than the administrations asked for. [Applause] And all that about—there's the Congressmen clapping out there, tell you the truth. [Laughter] But they were very skilled at saying one thing and doing another. And I'm not very good at that, and it embarrasses me, so we decided we'd actually try to bring the deficit down.

Last year, by the narrowest of margins, because we got no help and a lot of hot rhetoric, our economic plan passed. And it began a system of disciplined budgeting, which will be accompanied by this year's budget, the first time in 17 years two Presidents' budgets have been adopted on time by the United States Congress. That will give us 3 years of deficit reduction for the first time since Harry Truman was the President of the United States of America.

And I want you to know, working with this Congress, this budget, the Congress will eliminate over 100 Government programs outright, will cut 200 more, will not only be reducing defense but will reduce domestic discretionary spending for the first time since 1969, in 25 years. And still we will spend more money on Head Start, more money on Women and Infant Children, more money on school-to-work opportunities, more money on education and new technologies for the future. We will invest more in people and still cut Government spending, because we hired on to get things done not to just talk about them, and that is what the Democrats are doing in this town today.

When you put that with the initiatives in trade that this administration has taken—more in 18 months than had been done in a generation—we have the basis for the first growth in America in 30 years that is led by investment and that has no inflation, in 30 years. That is what I asked for a chance to work on and what you helped to give me. And no amount of rhetoric to the contrary can take away those facts.

The second thing I said I would try to do is to make Government work for ordinary people. And I think we've made a pretty good stab at that. With the support of the public

employee unions, we have passed budgets which will reduce the size of the National Government by a quarter of a million by attrition over 5 years, and leave us at the end of a 5-year period with the smallest Federal work force since John Kennedy was the President of the United States. And the money will be used to pay for the crime bill to make our streets safer. That is a matter of record.

We've also begun to make the Government work again. Terry McAuliffe told me yesterday that a reporter for a newspaper that is not exactly a house organ of the Democratic Party called him and said, "How did you get all these business people to contribute to the Democratic Party?" He said, "Well, the President's got a good probusiness position." And a reporter starting laughing. One of the real problems here, you know, you're always in the most trouble when you think you have nothing to learn. *[Laughter]*

The Small Business Administration, under the leadership of Erskine Bowles, will now let you apply for a loan on a one-page form, something small business people have been begging for for years. The Emergency Management Agency, which was the source of ridicule and anger and frustration and revulsion for years because it was dominated by political appointees, now has a Director from my home State who did it for a living. And he's the most popular Federal bureaucrat in the United States because FEMA has been there in earthquakes and fires and tornadoes, when people needed it. Nobody worries about whether the Federal Government is going to be there to do its job anymore. Rice farmers in northern California, a few weeks ago, for the first time ever, shipped their rice out of ports in northern California to sell in Japan, because the Government is working for ordinary people again.

I don't know how many business people I've had come up to me in the last year and say, "You know, I'm a Republican, but you have the only administration where the Commerce Department and the State Department work together to try to help me do business overseas, and I appreciate that."

I wanted to break gridlock. For 7 years, the world trade agreement was tied up. It was ratified last year by the nations, and

we're going to implement it this year. For 7 years, 7 years, even after the attempt on President Reagan's life, with his fine Press Secretary, Jim Brady, surviving by a miracle and campaigning like crazy for the Brady bill, for 7 years the NRA and others tied it up in Congress. But we passed it last year. For 7 years, even though it had some bipartisan support, the Family and Medical Leave Act could not pass the Congress, but we passed it last year. No Presidential vetoes—support for families in the workplace. For 6 years now, politics has kept the crime bill from passing, but we are on the verge of passing the most important piece of anticrime legislation in the history of the United States, more punishment but more prevention, more police. And the ban on assault weapons, which lost just 2 years ago by 70 votes in the House of Representatives, passed. We have brought an end to the gridlock in this country, and we should not let it go back the other way at election time.

Now we're working on health care. First, the other side said there was no crisis; then there was a crisis but we needed a bipartisan solution. I said, "Fine, here's my plan. You tell me how we are going to change it, but we've got to cover everybody." Then they started running ads saying I was trying to give health care to the Government, which wasn't true. But I went out and listened to people, and I said, well, maybe it is too bureaucratic. So we changed it some more and took out some of the mandatory provisions and made it more flexible to try to make it more responsive. And then a Republican Congressman from Iowa named Fred Grandy stood up and told the awful truth that he and his colleagues had been given marching orders to do nothing to cooperate to try to solve the health care problems in this country.

The Governor of Florida was in here today, talking about how he had a bill in Florida that was not mandatory but would make the situation better, that had the support of every organization in his State. And it still died in the senate of the State of Florida because there's a 20-20 split between Republicans and Democrats. And with all the interest groups saying, please do something about health care, every last Republican senator

still voted against it so they couldn't say he did anything on health care.

Now, in the Senate Finance Committee, there are a couple of Republicans who have worked on health care for years, who are trying to come together and reach some accommodation. And I can tell you they are under withering pressure. But folks, those people who say, "Let's just cover 90 percent and forget about it," it won't work. It won't work. Three million working Americans have lost their health insurance in the last 3 years. We are going backwards. We are the only country in the world with an advanced economy that has not figured out how to cover everybody.

Read the article in the Washington Post today about the German health care system. The German health care system today takes up a smaller percentage of the income of Germany than it did 2 years ago. It's about 8.5 percent. Our health care system costs us 14.5 percent of our income, and we still can't figure out how to cover—we're not even at 85 percent anymore.

And all the solutions that say, well, let's just not make any tough decisions and go up to 90 percent, cost you a double-ton of money in taxes, subsidize the poor, most of whom already can at least get Medicare, and not do one single solitary thing for the working middle class, 80 percent of whom are those who don't have insurance and who are terribly insecure. I'm telling you, we have got to face this problem and face it now. Harry Truman tried to get us to do it 50 years ago, and we didn't do it, and we've been paying for it ever since.

Let me say that any time you quote Harry Truman now, the Republicans stand up and clap, and everybody says, "Gosh, I wish we had him around; it's too bad we don't have anybody like Truman anymore." Let me tell you something, folks, I came from one of those families that was for him when he was living. [Laughter] And a lot of the people that brag on him today wouldn't have walked across the street to shake his hand when he was in office because he stood up for ordinary people and he told extraordinary truths and he tried to get us to face the problems of our time. Now, in retrospect, we can see that he did a good job.

Every midterm election in the 20th century except one, when President Roosevelt could not pass Social Security in 1934, every other one has seen a loss in both Houses, or at least one House, for the President in power, his party. Why? Because there is always a disappointment from the bright promise of the Inauguration to the hard reality of governing. Governor Cuomo used to say, "We campaign in poetry, and we govern in prose." [Laughter]

But there is a special problem this year. What is it? It is that there is so much accumulated cynicism in this country, and people are always told about the process, the conflict, the ups, the downs, the differences, that a lot of people don't even know what I have just told you. And our adversaries are banking on two things: Number one, they believe the cynicism of the electorate will, A, cause them to say, "I don't believe it," if they hear what we have done and, B, cause them to blame those of us who are in if we fail to change because they bring back gridlock. And so they think they can be rewarded if they stop anything from happening. And the second thing that they hope is that they can divert the attention of a significant number of our voters from the crying issues that unite us as a people by trying to launch another cultural war. And this is not just my opinion. There's a new book out by David Frum, conservative and former editorial writer of the Wall Street Journal, that you can find adapted in Harper's this week. He says that conservatives fail to control the size and cost of Government, and they've basically given that up. That's true; we've done a better job of that than they did. So instead, he predicts politics in the future will become a lot nastier and that the only way to mobilize and excite voters will be to trade on our differences on moral and ethnic and racial issues.

I can tell you, folks, we have not survived over 200 years as the strongest and oldest democracy in this country by fighting out our differences on moral and racial and ethnic issues. And we did not get where we are by becoming mired in the luxury—and I use the word clearly—the luxury of cynicism.

You know, the biggest honor I think I've had as your President was going to represent us at the D-Day ceremonies. It was one of

the most extraordinary events of Hillary's and my life, going first to Italy and seeing what our soldiers endured there, being shelled and killed on those beaches week after week, not able to get off; going to England and seeing the 3,800 graves of people who fought in the air war for 2 years before the D-Day invasion and the list of 5,000 names of people who never came back, including Joe Kennedy, Jr., and the great American band leader, Glenn Miller; and then going to the beaches at Normandy. And the thing that struck me overwhelmingly was that these people who saved the world, who laid their lives on the line, they didn't have an option. They knew what was at stake. And it makes a mockery of their sacrifice for us to be cynical about fulfilling our own legacy.

This whole atmosphere that permeates this town now—nothing makes any difference, and it's all who's up and down and in and out and all that, this obsession with process and conflict over product—it makes a mockery of what has gotten us here for 200 years.

I'm going to tell you something: Most of the people I've known in politics for 20 years, both parties, have been honest. Most of them have worked hard. Most of them have done what they thought was right. Most of the time we fought over things that were honest differences, worth arguing and fighting over. And we're about to get ourselves in a fix on the dawn of the 21st century. We've got the strongest economy in the world. We are the envy of the world. Our diversity is a source of great strength and the great, great mother lode of wealth for us in the 21st century in the global economy, if we've got sense enough to rescue these kids out of these cities, whose lives are being squandered. And the only thing that can mess it up for us is if we permitted ourselves to have the wrong fights, to believe that we were immoral because we had differences over certain issues, and if we permitted ourselves to become so cynical that we wouldn't even listen to the truth.

And I am here tonight to tell you that what you need to do is to go out of this room tonight and not just be glad that you gave money to this party and to our administration and to our continued efforts but to think of your words as a knife that can cut through

stone. And every time you hear one of your fellow Americans say some cynical and nonsensical thing implying that we're all up here just trying to feather our nest and it doesn't make any difference what's done and everything's in trouble, you tell them the truth, not to benefit me and the Democrats in Congress, although to be sure, we'll be benefited for it because we have broken gridlock and we are moving forward, but to give Americans their citizenship back. We did not get here by being cynics, we got here by being believers.

Thank you, and God bless you all.

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:09 p.m. at the Washington Hilton Hotel. In his remarks, he referred to David Wilhelm, chairman, Democratic National Committee, and his wife, DeGee; dinner chairman Vernon Jordan, and his wife, Ann; and DNC finance chairman Terry McAuliffe.

Remarks at the Democratic National Committee Saxophone Club Reception

June 22, 1994

The President. Thank you, Hillary. Thank you, Chairman Wilhelm and DeGee and Vernon and Ann Jordan. And thank you especially Sean Foley and Jessica Wasserman, for leading the Saxophone Club. I want to thank, too, Sean Burton and Jonathan Mantz for helping to hold the Saxophone Club together—[*applause*—]and the Homebuilders and Occidental Petroleum, that helped to support this event tonight. I also want to thank the entertainers. I'm kind of sorry I didn't see Hootie and the Blowfish. [*Laughter*] And I know Paula Poundstone was funny, because she always is. And I'm hoping I get to hear a little bit of Chaka Khan and the St. Augustine Church Choir. Thank you all for being here.

We just came, as you know, from another event for the Democratic Party, and one that was immensely successful. But it struck me in that moment that the people who were there were a stunning answer to those who say that this is a cynical and selfish country and that you are as well.

We had two pieces of good news already today; one's light, and one's not so light. The