

Week Ending Friday, October 3, 1997

Remarks at San Jacinto Community College in Houston, Texas

September 26, 1997

Thank you. Well, Esmerelda may be getting a degree in mathematics, but today she got an A in public speaking. *[Laughter]* Let's give her another hand. I thought she was great. *[Applause]*

Mayor and Mrs. Lanier, Mayor Isbell, and Commissioner Mauro, Chancellor Horton. I also see out there Mr. George Abbey, the Director of the Johnson Space Center, something that's very close to my heart. I've tried to promote the space program as President. I think Ellen Ochoa may be here as well. But I thank them for their work. And weren't you proud when we landed that little vehicle on Mars, and we got to see those pictures. I loved it. I'd like to say a special word of appreciation, too, to Congressman Ken Bentsen. He has done a very, very fine job for you in the United States Congress, and he has steadfastly supported our efforts to balance the budget, to restore health to the economy, but to do it in a way that kept educational opportunities increasing, not decreasing, for the people of this country and the people of this district. And I thank him for that.

I'm very excited to be here today for a couple of reasons. First of all, I know we're actually close to the place where the battle of San Jacinto occurred. Right? And Sam Houston, in addition to having an interesting life which was amazing—he lived with the Cherokees; he led the Texas army in the battle for independence; he was a president of the Republic of Texas and a United States Senator; he also was a teacher. And if you have read much about Sam Houston, you may have seen that he—and I quote—he said that his time as a classroom teacher was, quote, “the most satisfying time of my life.” I think that I would be remiss if I did not say to all the educators who are here, as I

look at this sea of young people, I thank you for your devotion to education, and I hope that it will always be something that brings you great satisfaction.

Here, so near the site where Texas fought a battle to win its political independence, you are all gaining your economic independence by being in this marvelous institution. And the way the community college system works here in Texas and across America, in my view, is a model of the way America ought to work.

You think about it. This place, first of all, is open to all. Nobody gets turned away because they're too old or too young or because of the color of their skin or because of their gender or anything else. If you're willing to work and take responsibility for yourselves and your course of study, it's open to all—first thing.

Secondly, it very much focuses on results, not rhetoric, because the graduates of community colleges, they either succeed—that is, they get a job, or they go on further with their education—or they don't get a job based on what they studied, and so you have to change the curriculum. So there is not much room for a lot of hot air and talk. You either produce or you don't.

The third thing about the community colleges is that they're always about change, not the status quo. Because of the way they're hooked into the economy of every area in our country, they are—much more than educational institutions or institutions of any kind—supersensitive to what's going on in people's lives, because otherwise the students wouldn't show up after a while if the institution weren't relevant to the future, to their future, and to the community's future.

So, open to all; rhetoric, not results; change, not the status quo; and the last thing that I think is very important is, it's much more about partnerships than politics. Nobody asks you whether you're a Democrat or a Republican. Nobody asks you whether

you like or dislike some person or thing. The whole thing only works when people are working together to build a community. I say that because I really believe, as I have said all over this country, that America would be better if we all worked in the way the community colleges of our country work, in the way San Jacinto works.

Almost 6 years ago, I started my candidacy for President with a vision for what I wanted America to look like in the 21st century and a commitment to prepare us for that. And it's a pretty simple thing. When the century turns, when all of you younger people in this audience have your own children coming up, I want to know that the American dream is still alive for everybody who will work for it. I want to know that our country will still be leading the world for peace and freedom and prosperity. And I want to know that we are coming together across all the lines that divide us into one America. Opportunity for all, responsibility from all, a community of all: That's what I believe we should be doing.

I knew then, and now I know even better than I did 6 years ago, that that would require both new policies and a new kind of Government. Policies that would be focused on the future, not the past; on unity, not division; on partnerships more than politics; on people and values, not power; on keeping America leading, not following; and that we had to start with a good economic policy because in 1991 the economy wasn't working for most of the people.

I also felt then, and I feel more strongly now, that we have to change the very way our Government works. We'd have to make it smaller and less bureaucratic and more flexible. And therefore, we would have to liberate it from the ability of very powerful interests to cripple us and keep us from doing things. Now, we've made a lot of progress. We passed the first balanced budget this year since President Lyndon Johnson's last budget, the first balanced budget in a generation. The Federal Government is now smaller than it was when Lyndon Johnson took office. It's the smallest it's been since John Kennedy was President. We've gotten rid of 16,000 pages of Federal regulations and turned over a lot more things to working with States and local governments and the private sector. We

passed a lobby reform bill to at least disclose what the lobbyists in Washington are doing and to limit their ability to do certain things with Members of Congress and the Government.

But one of the biggest problems we have with our political system—I just want to change the subject just for a moment because I know it's of concern to almost all Americans, and it should be—is that, with the advent of modern communications and the growth of our country, the costs of political campaigns have soared astronomically, and with it, the burdens of raising money, and with it, the questions raised about how much money has to be raised to run for office and how it's raised.

And I ask you all to think about your role in this. You might say, on the one hand, "Well, I don't like those people raising all that money," and then ask yourself, how many times did you vote for a candidate who had the best television ads or the candidate whose ads you saw the most. Or did you ever vote against someone who was attacked in a television ad, and you never saw another television ad responding to the attack, so you thought, "Well, what they said might be true. I don't want to take any chances."

The point I want to make is, we desperately need to reform the way we finance our campaigns, and a part of that has to be changing the cost of the campaigns. And I have worked very hard to do that. But we have to do both.

Now, just today, the United States Senate began debate on a very important bill, the campaign finance reform bill sponsored by Senator John McCain of Arizona, a Republican, and Senator Russ Feingold of Wisconsin, a Democrat, working together to curb special interest money in politics. I called on Congress to stay in session and not go home until it acts on reform. And I'm delighted the debate has begun. But I want to say to you, we have debated this before, and every time we debate it—at least since I have been President—every year we've had a good campaign finance reform bill before the Senate, I have supported it. And every year, it has died under the parliamentary tactic that allows one more than 40 Senators to keep any

bill from being voted on—called the filibuster—so that you never really know.

Now, maybe this year there will be a different strategy. But I pledge to you, you hide and watch, there will be a lot of efforts to make it look like we're going to do something and nothing will happen, unless we all work hard and demand that something happen.

So if you're worried about this and you'd like to see a system where you felt greater confidence in the way campaigns are financed, you should do two things. One is, you should say to your Congressman and Senators, "Pass good campaign finance reform this year, and do it, and we want it." And secondly, you should support our efforts to lower the cost of campaigns by saying that people who follow these limits and don't abuse the system should be given reduced cost for access to you on television, on radio, in the newspapers, and other ways of communications. We have to lower the cost if we're going to clean up the way it's financed. And I hope you'll support them both.

I want to go back now to the economy and talk about the role of education in it, and especially your role in community colleges. We decided that we needed a new economic strategy for the new economy that had three components: one, reduce the deficit; two, find a way even while you're cutting the deficit to invest more money in people, in technology, and the future; and three, expand markets for American products and services abroad.

By removing the deficits, we could free our people of this huge deadweight of high interest rates and other problems that have been on us since the early 1980's. We did that in 1993 when we passed our first deficit reduction plan that had cut the deficit by 87 percent before we passed the balanced budget amendment. And I'm very proud of all the Members of Congress who supported that.

By investing in education and health, we knew we would enable more Americans to actually win the race over the long run that the global economy imposes on all of us. And we did. We've expanded funding for Head Start, for public school programs like putting more computers in the schools and trying to hook up every classroom and library to the

Internet by the year 2000, by expanding Pell grants and work study programs, even before this last budget.

By reducing trade barriers, we thought we could knock down unfairly high hurdles that Americans have had to leap for too long. There's a lot of big debates about trade in Washington, and out here in the country every poll says all Americans always believe we're being treated unfairly. And we do have the most open markets in the world, on the whole, but you should know that we're now the biggest exporter in the world, 220 trade agreements in the last 5 years. We're the number one exporter in the world. We're the number one producer of automobiles again in the world. And we're number one in computers in the world.

And I'm in a big struggle now to try to get Congress to renew my authority to make these kind of trade agreements because we have 4 percent of the world's population and 22 percent of the world's income. And one more fact, every expert says that in the next 10 years the developing economies in Asia and Latin America will grow at 3 times the rate—now, they're much poorer, but they'll grow at 3 times the rate of Europe, Japan, and the United States.

Now, if we have 4 percent of the population and 22 percent of the income and other economies are going to grow 3 times as fast as we are, is there any way that you can think of for us to maintain our standard of living and improve it if we don't sell more to the other 96 percent of the people in the world? I think not. That's my simple case, and I hope you will support my continuing to be able to make these kinds of trade agreements to raise our incomes and give us a better future.

You know that this strategy has worked, that the American people have produced 13 million jobs almost—just under 13 million jobs in the last 4½ years. Unemployment is below 5 percent. We've had the largest drop in welfare in our history. We now have the smallest percentage of people living on welfare in America we've had since 1970, after two decades of immigration, bringing a lot of people in from around the world. A lot of our poorest communities are experiencing a renewal.

We also have seen dramatic drops in the crime rate, nationally, in no small measure because we adopted a strategy pioneered in Houston by Mayor Lanier of putting more police on the streets, putting them on the streets in the areas where they are most needed, supporting their communities. We've done that now for 100,000 police. We need to do it until every American community is safe for children to play in and walk the streets in and be in school in again.

The balanced budget adopted in July reflects these priorities: cut the deficit, balance the budget, expand investment in people. It has, for example, enough funds—\$24 billion—to insure half the kids in this country who don't have health insurance. Almost all of them are in working families where the mother or the father or both can't get health insurance on the job. It provides tax relief for working families, \$500 tax credit a child. It's worth about \$1,000 in income to the typical family with two children.

It also has some other important programs. The America Reads program—we're going to try to mobilize one million volunteers—I hope some of them will be here at this community college—organized by AmeriCorps, our national service program, which has been very active in Texas, and others to get a million volunteers to make sure every 8-year-old can read independently in this country. That's very important with all the diversity we have.

But the most important part of the budget, in my judgment, over the long run, will be the work we did so that we could finally say, for the first time in history, we have opened the doors of college to all Americans who are willing to work for it.

After all, the new economy is a knowledge economy. In the 19th century, opportunity came from access to a land grant, like one that gave many of your ancestors here in Texas a little bit of land to start their homes. In the 21st century, instead of a land grant, people will want a Pell grant, because they know that what they know is their key to the future, not what they own but what they know and what they can learn.

Our goal is simple. By the end of this century, we want education in a community college like this, the 13th and 14th years of edu-

cation, to be as universal when we start the new century as a high school diploma is today. That is a simple goal, and if we achieve it, it will explode opportunity in the United States and change the future of every young person in this room and in this country. And I hope you'll support us in achieving it.

Now, let me just briefly explain how this budget supports that goal. We issued a report from the Department of Education today explaining it, but let me just go through it. First and foremost, this balanced budget gives nearly 6 million students a \$1,500 a year HOPE scholarship. That's a tax cut for the first 2 years of college.

Here at San Jacinto and community colleges across Texas and in six other States, that means that your tuition and your fees will be completely covered by the tax cut you will get because of this program. But in fact, all across America, those who get the maximum HOPE scholarship will find that it covers about 90 percent of the national average, not only of full-time tuition but also of fee costs for community colleges. It is a great thing. Now, the budget also gives further higher education and training tax cuts after the first 2 years to 7 million Americans who are juniors and seniors in college, who are graduate students, or who are older workers who went back to school to take classes to upgrade their skills, because we want to continue education for a lifetime.

What my objectives are here are: number one, open the doors of college to all; number two, make the first 2 years of college as universal as high school is today; number three, make it possible for everybody to keep on learning for a lifetime, so they never have to stop. That's what we're trying to do.

Now, in addition to the tax cuts, because not everybody has enough income to pay income tax, we also had the biggest increase in Pell grants in 20 years. The average Pell grant will be about \$2,000 a year for 1.4 million community college students. We created another 100,000 work-study positions. We created 200,000 more last year. So in 2 years, we will have gone from 700,000 to a million work-study positions. All these things are very, very important.

In addition to that, we have created an IRA, individual retirement account, that you

can put money in every year, and then you can withdraw from it tax-free, penalty-free, if the money is being used for education, health care, or to buy a first-time home. So these are the options that are there.

So I say to you, this, I think—when people look back on this budget 30, 40, 50 years from now, if they can say about it, “This is the first time they opened the doors of college to all. They made the first 2 years of college as universal as a high school diploma. They created a system where people could keep on learning for a lifetime”—that is a legacy that Congressman Bentsen and everybody in the United States Congress who support this can be proud of, because they are giving you the tools you need to make the most of your own lives and your future. And I think they did a great job, and I’m very proud of them.

Let me also make one other point about education. Everyone now accepts—you can go anywhere in the world and people would accept the fact that America has the finest system of higher education in the world, the community colleges, the universities, the graduate work, research institutions—people would say that. Also, people would say their education, kindergarten through 12, is not as good as it ought to be. Now, they would admit that we have more challenges than most people. We have more racial and ethnic diversity; we have more income diversity. We have more challenges. But that cannot be an excuse for us not to achieve high standards. In fact, the poorer the children are, the more they need high academic standards in the early years—the more they need that.

And so I advocated in my State of the Union Address something I have been out there advocating for a decade now, which is that we ought to have national academic standards, at least in the basic courses. What should a fourth grader be able to know in reading? What should an eighth grader be able to know in math? Those are two places to start. And I have advocated that we set up these voluntary standards and have voluntary exams and give them to the students and not have anybody punished who doesn’t do well but at least give every school, every district, and every parent some idea about whether their children know what they’re

supposed to know at an early time so if something needs to be done they can do something about it.

Now, the community colleges—think about how they work. You know if what you’re doing doesn’t work—why?—because your graduates won’t get jobs. If either you don’t give them a good education, they won’t be able to produce, that reputation will get out, and people won’t hire you, or if you get trained in the wrong things, then you will be a mismatch so you won’t get hired. So you have a check, right? We need a check for our children.

The United States is the only major country in the world without a set of national academic standards. Now, because virtually all of our teachers and principals are dedicated, because virtually all of our parents care, a lot of people get a good education anyway, but it is very uneven. So I hope you will support that.

Earlier today I learned that 43 Democratic Senators have signed a letter supporting my standards and saying that they would either stop or vote to uphold a veto if there was a bill passed in Congress to keep us from participating. But the House of Representatives last week passed a bill saying the Federal Government can’t have any funding of these exams. I think that’s a mistake.

So I hope—most of you—you’re up on—in community college now, a lot of you here are out of that. But don’t forget those kids coming behind. And don’t forget what a challenge it’s going to be. And having high expectations of people does not put them down; it lifts them up. It does not put people down; it lifts them up. So I ask you to help.

Here’s the last point I want to make—and some of you may think I’m meddling here, but I plead guilty. *[Laughter]* We need an economy that works for everybody. We need an educational system that works for all. We still have to make sure our country works for everybody. Texas knows all about diversity. This has always been a diverse place. After all, it was Mexico first. So we know about this here. And I might say, I really have appreciated the fact that attitudes toward immigration in Texas, among both Democrats and Republicans, generally have been more con-

structive here than in many other places in the country.

But even you may not have any idea about just how diverse this country is becoming. In the Fairfax County School District, just across the river from Washington, DC, in one public school district there are students from 182 nations whose native languages number more than 100.

Now, because of all the upheavals in the world and because of what America means, more than ever people seek to come here to redeem the promise of this country. We need to find a way to say we value all this diversity. In a global economy—in a global economy—two things will pay off like crazy: one, high levels of education and skills; and two, being able to relate to everybody else. You know, you can go to any continent, and you will find people who are eager to do business with America and have closer ties with America, for one thing because they have kinfolks in America. You can go to any country and find that.

So we have to ask ourselves, are we going to be united or divided in this? Yesterday—you may have seen the news—we celebrated the 40th anniversary of the integration of Little Rock Central High School yesterday. It was a wonderful day. Nine children, 40 years ago, put their necks on the line to do this and really were in danger. Their parents had to undergo the agony of sending their children out the door armed only with their schoolbooks, and they were all threatened with the loss of their jobs. It was a difficult time, but it helped to make us more one America.

Look around the world today. When you see—just pick up the paper on any given day and see what kind of foreign policy problem I'm dealing with. Is it Bosnia? Is it Northern Ireland? Is it the Middle East? Is it tribal slaughter in Rwanda or Burundi? You will be amazed the number of foreign policy problems your President is called upon to deal with because people in other parts of the world insist upon killing each other or hating each other because of their racial, their ethnic, or their religious differences. It is stunning.

There is something almost endemic to human nature which makes people want to

be at odds with folks who are different, from them, just like there is something in the human heart that causes people to reach beyond that and want to embrace people who are different once you realize that down deep we're all the same. So this is a huge thing.

I want to start with a story to get to where I may be meddling. A half a century ago—a half a century ago—Mayor Bob Lanier was a law student at the University of Texas. The school then still denied admission to African-Americans. So he volunteered to go over to a tiny one-room classroom that had been set up for black law students in a basement several blocks from the law school and teach constitutional law to students who had been unconstitutionally barred from the university.

One of his students was a man named Heman Sweatt, who went on to become the first African-American admitted to the University of Texas Law School, after the Supreme Court decision of *Sweatt v. Painter*. Then the Supreme Court decided *Brown v. Board of Education*, which basically said that the schools of this country, the public schools, had to be integrated. It was that case that gave the basic power to those nine children who walked up the steps at Little Rock Central High School 40 years ago yesterday.

Well, 50 years later, Bob Lanier, who is about to end his service as the Mayor of Houston, continues to open doors, reaches out to everybody in the community. Businesses that were run by minorities and women that were once shut out of city hall now have an opportunity to compete for the city's business. And I just want to say that I'd hate to see Houston turn back the clock on the progress of the last 50 years and the progress that Mayor Lanier has made in the last few years.

I'd also like to compliment the work of a group called Houston Together that includes a number of citizens, but including Congresswoman Sheila Jackson Lee and Phil Carroll of Shell and Ken Lay of Enron. By drawing strength and diversity, this whole area is on a remarkable track to the 21st century. Again, the city and the county should work the way San Jac does. That's what you've got to do. You've got to have—everybody has got to feel like they've got a part in this, a voice that will be heard, an interest

that will be taken account of, and then in the end, a way of coming to a unified decision. I think that is terribly important.

Now, let me just close with this thought. A lot of you clapped when I mentioned the 40th anniversary of the Little Rock Central High School. Those little children had a simple vision; they just wanted a decent education. And they literally were able to imagine that they ought to get one in spite of the fact that they were black—simple vision that required all of us to move mountains and requires things of us, still. But because they imagined it, it happened for millions of people who otherwise it would not have happened for—in all probability, including some people who are in this room today.

Now, what you have to do, all of you who are students at this college, you've got to imagine what you would like your country to look like 30 or 40 years from now. And there is a very good chance that if you have the right imagination, and then you live according to the vision you are trying to achieve, that you will get there. And things that may seem impossible today might wind up being much easier than you ever imagined just by the dint of continuous daily effort.

It all begins with having the economy work for people, making sure everybody's got a chance to get the kind of education you're getting, and never forgetting that we have to go forward as one America.

Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2 p.m. in the auditorium. In his remarks, he referred to Mayor Bob Lanier of Houston and his wife, Elyse; Mayor Johnny Isbell of Pasadena; Garry Mauro, Texas State land commissioner; Chancellor James F. Horton, Jr., San Jacinto College District; astronaut Ellen Ochoa; and Esmerelda Hernandez, San Jacinto Community College student who introduced the President. This item was not received in time for publication in the appropriate issue. A portion of these remarks could not be verified because the tape was incomplete.

Remarks at a Democratic National Committee Dinner in Houston

September 26, 1997

Thank you very much. I told Tilman he should have just made the speech. [*Laughter*]

He's about to get the hang of this. [*Laughter*] I'd like to thank Tilman and Paige for having me back. I thank Ken and John Eddie and all the others who made this night such a success. And I thank Alan Solomont for coming down here to be with us. Thank you, Governor Richards, for being here. And thank you, Garry Mauro and Bill White. And thank you, Congresswoman Sheila Jackson Lee.

I had a good day in Texas, and I've had a kind of interesting 2 weeks. Someone asked me when I got here if I knew what State I was in, because I've been traveling around. We took Chelsea to college in California last week, and then I went back to New York for the opening of the United Nations. And then I went to Pittsburgh to speak to the AFL-CIO. And then I came to—I went home to Arkansas for a magnificent day yesterday. We celebrated the 40th anniversary of the Little Rock Central High School crisis.

And then before I came here, I went out to San Jacinto Community College, where I got to talk a little bit about the education provisions of the balanced budget act, some of the issues we are dealing with in Congress now, and a little about the whole issue of affirmative action, and I understand you've got a local initiative here you're dealing with on that.

And so I've had a very full and fascinating week. Tomorrow I'm going back home, and I'm going to the town where I graduated from high school, and we're trying to save our old high school. So I'm dealing with issues big and not so big. The older I get, the so-called little issues seem bigger to me. I want to save my high school, you know. I think it's important.

I was here with many of you exactly one year ago tomorrow. And I think we ought to make this an annual thing. I don't know—[*laughter*]—and maybe we could have another baby every year, too. And we could just celebrate a new birth. That ends my invitations coming here. [*Laughter*] I'm delighted to be back.

Let me make a couple of very brief points. First of all, I said something at the community college today I'd like to reiterate. These community colleges work the way I think America ought to work. You think about it.