

that is humanly possible to know where the stockpiles are, to limit them, and to minimize the chances that they can ever be brought into play against innocent human beings.

This is a huge issue, and it will require enormous discipline by our country and enormous leadership by our country if we're going to prevail. And this is a case when—you know, I care a lot about economics, and I think that it's easy to demean it. The country is in better shape when everybody has a job who wants one. But this is one issue where economic interest in the short run cannot be allowed to override our solemn obligation to the future to try to minimize the chance that we'll have any of this in your future or our children's future.

Now, having said that, again I say the main point I want you to understand is, there is a direct connection between everything I just mentioned and hundreds of things I didn't and your decision to be here supporting our party. And this is a better country today than it was 5 years ago because of the ideas, the values, and the efforts that you helped to make possible.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 7:50 p.m. at the Renaissance Mayflower Hotel. In his remarks, he referred to Gov. Roy Romer of Colorado, general chair, Democratic National Committee; and Jeffrey Soref and Andy Tobias, dinner cochairs.

Remarks at a Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee Dinner Honoring Evan Bayh

December 1, 1997

Thank you very much. Governor, Senator Bayh, Lieutenant Governor Kernan, Senator Kerrey, Senator Torricelli. Ladies and gentlemen, first, thank you very much for being here for Evan Bayh tonight. You could probably tell that—you might have told a lot of things looking at that. You could probably tell we were good friends. When you heard him speak, you might have been thinking there is Joe DiMaggio; why is he introducing Lou Gehrig? [*Laughter*] And then he started talking about what was on Jefferson's gravestone; I thought, my God, it's not—bad enough that he's younger and better looking,

now he's about to write my epitaph. [*Laughter*] But I was spared.

Evan and Susan Bayh have been very close friends of Hillary's and mine for a long time now. I do remember when he was elected the youngest Governor in America, a position that I once held. And I remember how well he served. I remember when Senator Kerrey and I used to sit in the Governors meetings and think about how crazy things were in Washington, and we couldn't imagine how people lived and worked here, what strange decisions were made.

We don't have any excuse for being here, Senator Kerrey and I. [*Laughter*] Senator Torricelli was always in the Congress; he didn't know any better. [*Laughter*] We were actually out there in the real world with Evan Bayh. And here is he about to jump off the same cliff.

I want to tell you seriously that, you know, you meet a lot of people in this business and most of them are good people, honest people. They work hard; they try to do the right thing. Governor Bayh is one of the most extraordinarily talented and fundamentally decent people I have ever met in more than two decades in public life now.

He also gets things done. He ran a great State, had a good economy, advanced the cause of education, had the biggest drop in welfare rolls of any State in the United States with a compassionate and commonsense welfare reform. And he embodies what I believe our party, and indeed our country, ought to stand for on the edge of a new century.

I have spent a lot of time these last 5 years, with varying degrees of success—I'm grateful for that which we've had—trying to get our Nation to grasp the nettle before us, to do the things which need to be done in this dramatically new time to get us into a new century with the American dream alive for everybody who is responsible enough to work for it, and with our country coming together as one America when so many other people around the world are divided, and to maintain our leadership in the world for peace and prosperity and freedom.

Evan Bayh embodies the kind of America I am trying to move us toward. I believe he will win next November. I believe he will render great service to our country. I believe

you will always be proud that you were here on this night about a year before the election. And I hope that, together, those of us—we four in this room that either are now or I think soon will be serving in the Federal Government—will be able over the next 3 years to continue to move this country forward, based on what we believe in: building up, not tearing down; bringing together, not dividing; embracing the future, not the past.

I've spent a lot of time in the last year going back to read American history. I was glad to—I love to go around with Senator Torricelli, we make a pretty good dog-and-pony show, and I'm always learning something from what he has to say. But I love the reference to the American Revolution and the beginning of our country.

I really think that our country has been blessed by enormous political endurance. No other great democracy is as old as we are now, partly because we've had the good sense to maintain in various guises a two-party system that had consequences because the parties embraced different ideas with different consequences for the American people and partly because one of our parties always, against all the fears and reluctance of the moment, embodied the idea of the Nation and was willing to embrace the logical extension of the plain meaning of the American Constitution in each new time.

In the beginning, it was George Washington and John Marshall and their heirs. In the Civil War, a new party, the Republican Party, was required to stand up for the idea of the Union and the logical extension of the Constitution that slavery could not coexist in a country dedicated to the proposition that all of us were created equal. And that was the position the Republican Party occupied through the Presidency of Theodore Roosevelt, during which time they reflected great credit on America and did great things for America.

From the time of Woodrow Wilson to the present day, our party, the Democratic Party, has more clearly, more unambiguously, more consistently embodied the idea of the Nation and extending the Constitution in its logical meaning to the challenges of the moment, from the end of the Progressive Era through the Depression, through World War II,

through the beginning of the cold war under Harry Truman, through the New Frontier and the Great Society down to the present day.

I don't think anyone questions the fact that our country is stronger today than it was 5 years ago because we have worked hard, not always succeeding, but succeeding far more often than failing, to bring to the country a new direction consistent with the age-old meaning of our obligation to form a more perfect Union.

I am very proud of that. I am enormously grateful for the chance that I have had to serve. And I am very comforted that someone of Evan Bayh's quality would present himself to serve in the United States Senate, to join Bob Torricelli and Bob Kerrey and our other hardy band, who often stand alone against some honest philosophical differences and some downright political chicanery from time to time, for what I believe is necessary to move us forward.

I wish we had more like him; then I could get Bill Lee confirmed as head of the Civil Rights Division. I wish we had more like him; then you wouldn't see mainstream judges with impeccable credentials held up purely for political reasons. I wish we had more like him; then we could see the right kind of entitlement reform and the right sort of policies to enable our people to balance work and family and the right sort of policies to expand trade but help people who are left behind put their lives together and become a part of the American mainstream again.

But it's a good thing for our country that Evan Bayh is presenting himself for the Senate. I think he'll be elected. And I think he'll do just as good as that as Joe DiMaggio was at baseball. *[Laughter]*

Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:16 p.m. at the Hotel Carlton. In his remarks, he referred to former Indiana Gov. Evan Bayh, candidate for U.S. Senate and his wife, Susan; former Senator Birch Bayh of Indiana; and Lt. Gov. Joe Kernan of Indiana.

Remarks Announcing Togo D. West, Jr., as Acting Secretary of Veterans Affairs and an Exchange With Reporters

December 2, 1997

The President. Good morning, everyone. Togo and Gail West, and Hershel Gober and the distinguished representatives of our veterans organizations—we have people here from the American Legion, the VFW, Disabled American Veterans, Am-Vets, Paralyzed Veterans of America, Vietnam Veterans, Gold Star Mothers and Gold Star Wives, Retired Officers Association, and the G.I. Forum. I thank you all for coming.

Before I begin I think it is important that I say just a few words about the tragic killing of the three high school students in Paducah yesterday. Like all Americans, I was shocked and heartbroken by the terrible news, which I followed very closely when it broke. Of course, we still don't know all the facts surrounding the tragedy or why a 14-year-old boy would take a pistol and open fire on his classmates in a prayer group. We may never know, but we must redouble our efforts to protect all our children from violence and to make sure our schools are free from violence and the means to wreak it.

I believe that I speak for every American in sending our thoughts and prayers to the parents of Kayce Steger, Jessica James, Nicole Hadley, and the wounded children and the entire community of West Paducah.

Today I have the pleasure of appointing Togo West to be Acting Secretary of the Department of Veterans Affairs. When Congress reconvenes, I will nominate him to become Secretary. I know he will bring the same excellence and leadership to the Department we saw under the stewardship of Secretary Jesse Brown and Acting Secretary Hershel Gober. These men are truly dedicated to our Nation's veterans. They help us every day to do right by the men and women who have served the United States.

Togo West's entire life has been dedicated to excellence and commitment. From his experience as an Army officer, to his work in the Ford and Carter administrations, to his outstanding work as Secretary of the Army, he has always understood the special respon-

sibility we owe to our men and women in uniform both during and after their years of service.

Three years ago, Secretary West told the graduating class at West Point, "You teach the life you live." As long as I have known him he has lived this idea, teaching all around him by his example of his devotion to family, church, and country.

I'm grateful for his exceptional service as Secretary of the Army. So are the men and women in the Army. His leadership helped make the Army part of the greatest, best prepared, most modern fighting force in the world. And he's made sure we take good care of our Army families. They, too, serve with our soldiers.

Having supported our men and women in uniform, Togo West will now turn to the equally important task of taking care of the veterans whose deeds ensured the survival of America's ideals. I'm confident he'll bring a strong voice to the Cabinet on these and other matters and that he will ably champion the enduring interests of our veterans.

Would you like to say a word?

[At this point, Acting Secretary West thanked the President and made brief remarks.]

The President. Thank you, Togo.

Attorney General Reno's Decision

Q. Mr. President, have you already been informed of Janet Reno's decision on whether to recommend that an independent counsel be named?

The President. No.

Q. Well, could you tell us how you feel in these hours before you're officially informed over this apparent rift between two of your appointees, Janet Reno and the FBI Director, Louis Freeh, who seem to be disagreeing strongly on whether or not there should be an independent counsel?

The President. I don't have any particular feelings about it. All I know about it is what I've seen in the press. I think what I would like to emphasize to you is what I have said all along here: This is a decision of law vested in the Attorney General, which should be made based on the law. I don't believe people outside the Department should attempt to influence the decision, and I have not. And