

**Remarks at a Barbecue for
Congressional Candidate Mike
Honda in San Jose, California**

September 23, 2000

Thank you very much. Well, I never, in my wildest dreams, thought I would be introduced by a Japanese-American wearing cowboy boots. *[Laughter]* I mean, you're the walking embodiment of one America right there. *[Laughter]* I love it. Good for you. Look, we've got to have a little fun. It's too nice. You know, we're all having a good time.

I want to thank Jessie and Surinder and the Singh family for welcoming us to their beautiful home, and for so conveniently having such a nice deck so we can all gather. Let's give them all a hand. *[Applause]* That's really great that they had us. Thank you.

I want to thank Secretary Mineta and his wonderful wife for flying out here with me today so he could be here with Mike. You should be very proud of Norm Mineta. He's doing a good job at the Commerce Department; he did a great job for you.

And I want to thank your Representatives who are here. They are some of the best in the Congress, some of the best I've ever seen, and you're very fortunate. I want to thank Anna Eshoo and Zoe Lofgren and Sam Farr. And Paul Pelosi, thank you for coming today. And we look forward to Nancy's continued progress. And I thank Senator Liz Figueroa for coming here. Thank you very much.

I want to thank all of you for coming, and I'd like to say, before I get into any substantive remarks, how profoundly grateful I am to the people of this State, and particularly the people of this community for over 8 years now—partnership and friendship and support for me and the Vice President and our administration. Some of you in this audience were here the very first time I came to Silicon Valley a long time ago, and I am very grateful to you.

I am also grateful because this has been my daughter's home for 3 years now. And I wonder if we'll ever get her back from here. *[Laughter]*

I wanted to be here today because I like Mike Honda, and I admire him, and I strongly support him, and because the stakes in this particular race are quite high.

I've done everything I could do in the last 8 years to show that a Democrat could be pro-business and pro-labor, pro-growth and pro-environmental protection, for a high-tech future and the preservation of traditional American values. And that's what I think he represents. And I can't tell you how important I think it is for Mike and so many of our other good candidates here—I'm going to southern California to help some more of them tonight—to win these House races.

I think it's very important that the American people decide what they think this election's about. I've often found in politics that what people think the election's about determines for whom they vote and how it comes out. And if somebody were to say, "Vote for me because I think Bill Clinton's been a great President, and I won't change anything," I'd vote against that person, because the world is changing.

The question is not whether we're going to change, but how we're going to change and whether we're going to use this moment of incredible prosperity and social progress to meet big challenges and seize big opportunities or whether we're going to be sort of distracted and take some of the siren songs that are being sung in this election.

You know, anybody in this audience that's over 30 years old can remember at least once in your life when you made a mistake, not because things were going so poorly but because things were going so well you thought you no longer had to concentrate. If you live long enough, you'll make one of those mistakes. I see a lot of people nodding their heads. *[Laughter]*.

It is sometimes more difficult to make a good decision in good times than it is in tough times. I mean, I know the people took a big chance on me in California in 1992. I can only imagine how many people on election day in 1992 walked into the ballot box and said, "Should I really vote for this guy? He's only 46. His opponent says he's only the Governor of a small southern State." I was so naive, I thought it was a compliment, and I still do. *[Laughter]* So people think, "You know, this is a big chance." But now, give me a break. Look at what California was

going through in '92. It wasn't that big a chance. We had to do something different.

Now there is a sense of well-being, a sense of progress, a sense of possibility, a sense of confidence. But it's easy for people to lose their concentration. And I'm telling you, in my lifetime, our Nation has never had both the opportunity and the obligation to build the future of our dreams for our children and to fulfill our responsibilities around the world that we have today.

And I have so much greater appreciation than I ever did before I became President of the importance of every single seat in the House, every single seat in the Senate. Our economic plan in 1993 passed by a single vote. Everybody in the other party said it would bring on another recession, lead to a big increase in unemployment. As I said in Los Angeles a couple of weeks ago, time has not been very kind to their prediction.

But we turned the country around, and Al Gore now says the best is still out there. Now, a lot of people just think that's campaign rhetoric. I believe that. I really believe the best is still out there. But we have to decide. We have to decide that we'll meet the challenge of the aging of America so that when all of us baby boomers retire and there's only two people working for every one person on Social Security and Medicare, we won't bankrupt our children and their ability to raise our grandchildren.

We have to decide to talk about what Mike did, that we are going to give a world class education to the largest and most racially, ethnically, and religiously diverse group of schoolchildren in the history of the United States. But it's not like we don't know how to do it.

There are schools all over this State succeeding against all the odds. When I started working on school reform 20 years ago and Hillary and I started trying to rewrite the standards when I was Governor 17 years ago, people sort of had a hunch about what would work. We know now.

And you can see it in a lot of your most successful charter schools in California. You can see it in a lot of the other public schools. I was in a school in Harlem the other day where, 2 years ago, 80 percent of the children were doing math and science and reading in

an elementary school below grade level—80 percent—by any measure, a failing school. Two years later 74 percent of the kids are doing math and reading at or above grade level—in only 2 years.

Look, we can make public schools work, but we need smaller classes, modern facilities, Internet connections, well-trained teachers, high standards, and if the schools that are failing don't turn around, they have to be put under new management and change.

This is not rocket science. We now know how to do this. But we have to decide to do it. We have to make a decision. We have to make a decision. We like running a surplus instead of a deficit and having low interest rates—big decision in this election.

We could get this country out of debt in 12 years for the first time since 1835, when Andrew Jackson was President. Now, what difference does it make here? This area got about 30 percent of all the venture capital invested last year in the United States.

I received a study from my economic advisers a month ago that said if the Vice President was elected and had the support of Congress to stay on the path of paying down the debt as opposed to adopting the tax cut proposals of his opponent, plus privatization of Social Security, which costs another \$1 trillion over the next 10 years, and will take us back to deficits, it will keep interest rates a percent lower.

One percent lower interest rates means \$390 billion in lower home mortgage payments—\$390 billion—\$30 billion in lower car payments, \$15 billion in lower college loan payments, or a \$435-billion and—what does that mean—\$435 billion tax cut, keeping interest rates lower. We have to decide. Are we going to do that, or are we going to go back to the way we used to run our budget?

We have to decide whether we believe we can grow the economy and improve the environment or whether it's too much trouble, we don't want to take the chance, and so we're going to relax all these environmental regulations, repeal my order setting aside \$43 million roadless acres in the national forests, undo some of the national monuments I've set aside.

These are specific, clear choices. We have to decide whether we believe that we can have a health care system we can afford where medical professionals still called the shots instead of allowing people who don't have medical training to make these decisions. That's what the fight over the Patients' Bill of Rights is all about. It's a decision we have to make.

Now, and I can tell you I used to believe, even after I got into politics that, you know, these races for Congress and Senate sometimes could be just decided on local issues and personal feelings without regard to that. Look, I like Mike Honda. If I lived out here, I'd be for him just because I like him and because he's a Democrat. But I'm telling you, there are far bigger stakes here.

Don't take my word. Ask Anna. Ask Zoe. Ask Sam. They've been living with this. We have lived with this for 6 years. And we may never have another time in our lifetime to do this. We also, I might add, have very different views about immigration by and large.

We want to raise the H-1B visa ceiling—all of us do—a lot. But we'd like the permits to cost a little more so we could put the money into training Americans who are still here, who have insufficient skills, who also need to be part of the high-tech economy. We think that's important.

I could give you lots of other examples, but I hope that I'm making the point. Number one, you've got to go out here and convince people that didn't come today that this is a big election and no choice can be taken lightly, and that the decision you make for President and Vice President, for the Congress seats, it has to be rooted in what you want for your country and your State and your family. And I'm telling you, we may never have a chance like this again.

And the last thing I would like to say is, to echo something that's been said earlier, I think the most important difference today, based on 8 years of working at it pretty steadily now, is that our party really does believe that everyone counts, that everyone deserves a chance, and that we all do better when we work together. We believe that we live in a country that is stronger if it's a community, and we believe in a world that is becoming increasingly not only connected through the

net but interconnected through a web of mutual interdependence, and we think it's a good thing, not a bad thing.

We don't like the politics of division. We like the politics of unity. We want to try to find a way for us all to go forward together. And if you just look around the world at all the troubles that I've tried to deal with in the last 8 years that were rooted in people's inability to treat those of different races or ethnic groups or religions as equal in terms of their common humanity and if you look at all the troubles we've had in America that we need not have had, if we hadn't had such bitter partisanship in Washington, there's a pretty good argument for sticking behind our side and trying to build a stronger, more interdependent American community.

I am glad that we have people here—I'm glad we've got people here from all over the world. And if we can get along together within our borders, we can have a much more profound impact on helping people to get along better beyond our borders. If we can be good at home, we can do good around the world.

But there really is an important issue at stake here. I see it all the time, when I make the arguments for expanding trade in the global economy but doing so in a way that lifts people up and improves the environment, improves labor standards, and fights against child labor and other abusive labor conditions.

I see it when I argue that we ought to be out there aggressively reducing the debt of the poorest nations in the world, if they'll have honest governments and be good trading partners with us. I see the same thing here at home, when I argue that we ought to—we should have passed the Brady bill and the assault weapons ban like we did. We ought to close the gun show loophole and ban child trigger locks. And we ought to, not because I'm against people hunting or going and doing their sport shooting but because we have mutual responsibilities to one other, and one of those is that, together we ought to take some special effort to keep guns out of the hands of criminals and kids. That's our common responsibility.

So, that's what the Democrats amount to. We want to go into the future together. And

I just—let me just close with this story. I had an amazing day a couple days ago in Flint, Michigan. I went to one of the community computer centers that we set up. And this one—we're trying to set up a thousand around America so that people who aren't connected in their own homes or in their own businesses can come in, get training, and turn their lives around.

The one in Flint is especially focused on the needs of disabled Americans, and oh, it was quite a kick. I got to see people who were blind work in braille and then put it into the computer and have the computer speak back to them. I got to see people who were deaf work with a computer, and it spoke to those who could hear and wrote to those who couldn't. And I got to see an amazing laser technology where people who had no movement in their bodies and could only use their eyes, could use their eyes on a computer screen to turn the lights on and off in their house, to turn the music on and off on their tape deck, to write messages to their relatives.

And I actually got to use this, and I realize this is about way more than money. I've got a friend with Lou Gehrig's disease, with whom I used to work 20 years ago. He lives in North Carolina. We used to work on economic development in the South. He has no movement anywhere, except in his eyes. And in the next month or two, his latest book will be published, that he wrote with his eyes.

Now, he counts, too. He deserves a chance. We're a better country because he can live and communicate and because he has been empowered. That's what we stand for. So I want you to help Mike, because most of you know him, like him, trust him; he's your friend. But you have to understand, most people who vote on election day never come to one of these events. Most people who vote on election day, no matter how many hands he shakes, have not met the candidate.

And you, every one of you, will see a lot of people between now and the election, and you have got to talk to them and tell them this is the chance of a lifetime for America. And we can meet these really big challenges, and they ought to be for Mike Honda, and

they ought to be for Al Gore and Joe Lieberman, because we believe that we all do better when we help each other.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 3:11 p.m. at a private residence. In his remarks, he referred to barbecue hosts Jessie and Surinder Singh; Paul Pelosi, husband of Representative Nancy Pelosi; and State Senator Liz Figueroa. State Assemblymember Mike Honda is a candidate for California's 15th Congressional District. A tape was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

Statement on the Death of Carl Rowan

September 23, 2000

Hillary and I were saddened to learn of the death of Carl Rowan, one of America's most prolific columnists and social commentators.

Carl Rowan called his autobiography "Breaking Barriers," and that was exactly what he did. He was, without a doubt, one of our Nation's most eloquent voices for human rights and racial justice. Carl's passion for progress led him from a struggling coal mining town to the U.S. Navy, where he served as one of its first African-American commissioned officers. It led him from the newsroom to the corridors of power and back again, to the pages of our Nation's newspapers.

Carl Rowan served two Presidents and represented the United States abroad. But he saw himself first and foremost as a journalist. His gentle, civil tone only heightened the power of his commentary, and he felt a special obligation not only to inform his readers but to enrich them with new ways of thinking.

Hillary and I will miss Carl Rowan and the special perspective that he shared with his Nation. Our thoughts and prayers are with his wife, Vivien, and their three children.