

Remarks at the Congressional Barbecue

June 23, 1994

Thank you very much. We want to welcome you back again this year. We want to thank you for braving, first, late votes and then a late rain in all this heat. And finally it's kind of cooling down and getting better.

We're delighted to see you, all of you here tonight. You are welcome here. This is, after all, your house, and we're sort of the temporary tenants, and we're having a good time. We're really looking forward to hearing Trisha Yearwood tonight. And I hope you've enjoyed all the wonderful food. And I'd like to ask that we give a round of applause to the people who provided that. *[Applause]*

Hillary and I have tried to make this event and the one we had last year fun, relaxing, nonpolitical, which is almost impossible in Washington. And only the heat reminds us of the atmosphere in which we must labor during the daylight hours. *[Laughter]* But we have really enjoyed having you here tonight.

I want to thank the Members who came and brought their family members, their friends, their staff members. It really helps us, I think, to get a feel for the human side of what we hope will be a very enjoyable night for you. And I think there's already been enough talking, and I'm ready for the music.

Would you like to say anything? She wants the music, too.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 9 p.m. on the South Lawn at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to country and western entertainer Trisha Yearwood.

Interview With Kevin Horrigan and Charles Brennan of KMOX Radio in St. Louis, Missouri

June 24, 1994

Representative Richard Gephardt. Hi, Kevin and Charles. We want to welcome the President of the United States today. We're on Air Force One, and we're going to be in St. Louis in a few minutes. And we welcome the President to our great city.

Q. And we welcome you, Mr. Clinton, to the voice of St. Louis, KMOX Radio.

The President. Thank you. It's good to be on KMOX, and it's good to be coming back to St. Louis.

Campaign Finance Reform

[At this point, an interviewer asked the President to justify raising \$40 million in campaign funds after having campaigned during the Presidential election to reform campaign financing.]

The President. I justify it because of the opposition policies of the Republican Party and all the special interest groups that have raised and spent far more money against us, attacking me and my policies and spreading disinformation to the American people. Let me say that all this time, ever since I've been in office, I have worked hard to pass a campaign finance reform bill, which would limit these kinds of contributions right across the board to both political parties and restore basically unfettered debate to the central position it ought to have in our political system.

But I don't believe in unilateral disarmament. The money that I have raised will be used to try to make sure that the Democratic parties throughout the country in these fall elections and our candidates will at least have a fighting chance to talk about our record and the facts and what we've done here. If we could change the rules for everybody, that's what we ought to do.

When I ran for President, I didn't even take any PAC money. And I have worked very, very hard to pass campaign finance reform laws and lobby reform laws which will make the system better. But until I do, it would be a mistake for the Democrats to just lay down and not raise any money, letting the Republicans and a lot of their allied groups have all the money in the world when they already have greater access to a lot of things like a lot of other media outlets than we do.

Q. Wouldn't you be setting a leadership example, though, if you were the first one to say, "Look, these \$15,000-a-table fundraisers basically are way out of hand. I've got to put an end to this"?

The President. Well, I'm trying to put an end to it. All the Congress has to do is to

send me the campaign finance reform bill, and we'll put an end to this so-called soft money. I've been working for a year and a half to do it. But we have enough problems. The Republicans and the far right in this country have their own media networks. We don't have anything like that. They have extra organized political action groups that we can't match. And they have the Republican Party's fundraising apparatus, which has been strengthened by having had the White House for all but 4 years in the last 20 years.

So we have real problems competing. I am more than happy to stop this. I've been out there fighting to stop it. All they have to do is to send me the campaign finance reform bill, and it'll be done.

[Representative Gephardt lauded the administration's efforts to advance campaign finance reform and indicated that both the campaign finance reform bill and the bill to limit lobbyist activities would be on the President's desk in 3 or 4 weeks.]

The President. I'd like to emphasize that the things that are within my control, requirements and limits on my administration and what can be done with regard to lobbying, are stricter now than they have ever been in American history because of the things that I've done, that I can do on my own. And I want this campaign finance law to change. But we ought to change it by the law, and we ought to change it for everyone.

Media Criticism

[An interviewer asked the President if people were becoming more cynical, less tolerant.]

The President. Absolutely. I think there's too much cynicism and too much intolerance. But if you look at the information they get, if you look at how much more negative the news reports are, how much more editorial they are, and how much less direct they are, if you look at how much of talk radio is just a constant unremitting drumbeat of negativism and cynicism, you can't—I don't think the American people are cynical, but you can't blame them for responding that way.

We, for example, we had a meeting the other day, and a group of people were told that under our budgets we were going to bring the deficit down 3 years in a row for

the first time since Harry Truman was President. And some of them said, "Well, I just don't believe you. We never hear that on the news. I just don't believe you." It's a fact. I've worked hard to do it. And we're going to—we're bringing the deficit down. That's what bothers me.

You know, I just got back from Normandy, celebrating the 50th anniversary of D-Day. And when I stood on Normandy beaches and when I saw all those rows of crosses there, it occurred to me that those people did not die so the American people could indulge themselves in the luxury of cynicism. And frankly, that's just what it is. America now has—we have the strongest economic performance of any of the advanced countries in the world. We're bringing the deficit down at a very rapid rate. We're increasing our investment in education and training. We're seriously dealing with crime, with welfare reform, with health care for the first time in decades. We have broken gridlock in the Congress; bills that languished around for 6 or 7 years like the Brady bill and the family and medical leave bill have passed. The economy in St. Louis is booming.

There is no reason to be cynical. But the American people keep being told that things are bad and politicians are corrupt and the system's broken. That's just not true.

You look at what we're coming to St. Louis to celebrate today, this Summer of Service. We've got 7,000 young Americans who are going to be earning money for their college education by working and making their communities safer all across this country; in the fall, 20,000 young Americans, doing community service work, earning money for an education, helping to solve problems. These kids aren't cynical. They know that their country is a good place, and they're going to make it better. We've got a lot of serious problems, and frankly, we can't afford this cynicism. But it's all the rage today.

[An interviewer asked the President if growing cynicism could not be traced to incidents such as the disappearance of towels and bathrobes from the U.S.S. George Washington.]

The President. Well, first of all, we're not sure that just the White House staff did that. There were press people. There were lots

of other people on that boat who were not members of the White House staff. We think it—I'm not entirely sure it was. And the *George Washington* is very, very upset by the press reports that those towels, which were obviously taken as souvenirs, were taken by all the White House staff. They never said that we stole anything. That's the kind of thing I'm talking about.

But let me just say this: Someone in the White House personally reimbursed the *George Washington* for all of them, because they felt so bad. And the people who were running the aircraft carrier said that they were astonished that the White House staff was charged with taking all those things, that there were members of the press there, there were other people there on that carrier. They weren't at all sure that White House staff had done that. But someone on my staff was so upset that anybody had done it that they reimbursed them entirely so that they didn't lose a thing on it.

But you know, I could give you a lot of examples—a year ago there was a widely reported story that I kept airplane traffic waiting an hour in Los Angeles to get a haircut in an airport. That wasn't true either. It wasn't true at the time. And I told the press it wasn't true. They ran the story anyway. Then 4 weeks later when the FAA filed their official report, they said, "No, there were no planes kept waiting."

Now, I am not responsible for stories that are written that are not fully accurate or untrue, but it feeds into this cynicism.

Last year the Congress and the President, according to all nonpartisan reports, had the most productive year working together, getting things done for America, dealing with difficult issues, of any first year of a President since the end of World War II, except Dwight Eisenhower's first year and President Johnson's first year, which were about the same. And to be frank, we did it under more difficult circumstances with tougher issues. I'll bet you nobody in America knows that. Now, that's not entirely our fault.

Look at all the things you could have asked me about, and you just asked me that. Did you know that there were other people on that aircraft carrier? Did you know there were press people on the aircraft carrier? Did

you know that the—that the carrier had been fully reimbursed out of the private pocket of a White House staff member who was so upset about it?

Q. No, I didn't know that the White House—

The President. No. No. Why didn't you know that? Because the press reporting it didn't say so.

Q. Yes.

The President. I mean, part of the problem in this country today is that—this is a good country with a lot of people working hard to get things done. And the American people are entitled to have some balanced and fair picture of what's going on.

We've had 3.5 million new jobs come into this economy since I've been President, far more than in the previous 4 years combined. Most Americans don't even know it, because that's not the purpose of a lot of what's communicated to them.

And I think that—I have a very high responsibility. I don't mind you asking me whether I should set an example on campaign contributions, but there are a lot of other examples that need to be set in this country. And I think the people who communicate to the American people need to ask themselves, what are we telling the people? Are we telling them the whole truth? Do they know what's good as well as what's bad in this country. And when we make a mistake, then we fess up to it.

I think that there is a lot of cynicism in this country. But frankly, I think there are a lot of vested interests that are promoting the cynicism.

The Religious Right

Q. Mr. President, let's talk about that just a little bit. Today, or yesterday, the Republicans in the Senate asked you to disavow a remark that I believe Representative Fazio made about evangelical Christians. At the same time you've talked about extremists in the other party, the Republicans, that you say may be trying to launch a cultural war. They're attacking you in very personal, derogatory, moralistic terms. Is this the state of political debate in America today, where we call each other names?

The President. Of course it is. Let me say, first of all, you have never found me criticizing evangelical Christians. I have welcomed the involvement in our political system of all people and especially people of faith. I have bent over backwards as a Governor and as a President to respect the religious convictions of all Americans. I have strong religious convictions myself.

But that is very different, that is very different from what is going on, when people come into the political system and they say that anybody that doesn't agree with them is Godless, anyone who doesn't agree with them is not a good Christian, anyone who doesn't agree with them is fair game for any wild charge, no matter how false, for any kind of personal, demeaning attack.

I don't suppose there's any public figure that's ever been subject to any more violent, personal attacks than I have, at least in modern history, anybody's who's been President. That's fine. I deal with them. But I don't believe that it's the work of God. And I think that's what the issue is. I do not believe that people should be criticized for their religious convictions. But neither do I believe that people can put on the mantle of religion and then justify anything they say or do. I think that's what Mr. Fazio was talking about.

We don't need a cultural war in this country. We've never done very well when our politics has been devoted to dividing us along grounds of race, religion, creed, morality. We haven't done very well. We've got a lot of serious challenges in this country. And we need to pull together and face them. Should we have arguments about moral issues? Of course we should. But they ought to be honest and careful and straightforward and respectful. And frankly, they're not today.

Q. Are you talking about folks like the Reverend Jerry Falwell, who through his commercials is selling a videotape critical of you?

The President. Absolutely. Look at who he's talking to. Does he make full disclosure to the American people of the backgrounds of the people that he's interviewed that have made these scurrilous and false charges against me? Of course not. Is that in a good Christian spirit? I think it's questionable.

But I think it's very important that the Democrats be careful—let me say this—to

make a clear distinction between tactics with which they do not agree and radical positions with which they do not agree, and the whole notion of evangelical Christians being involved in our politics. I think that evangelical Christians should be good citizens, should be involved in our politics. They can be Republicans or Democrats; they can do whatever they want. But remember that Jesus threw the moneychangers out of the temple. He didn't try to take over the job of the moneychangers.

Decline of the Dollar

Q. Mr. President, world financial markets today report a continued slide of the U.S. dollar against other world currencies. What can or should the United States Government do to halt this slide?

The President. Well, the Secretary of Treasury will have an announcement about it today. Let me say, just make one point about it. This is a development that is puzzling a lot of economists because our economy is performing so well. Our job growth is greater than any other of the advanced countries. Our unemployment rate is lower than any of the advanced countries, except Japan.

In a funny way the currency values are running in the opposite direction of economic strength because Japan has a great trade surplus with us, as you know. If their economy is weak, no matter what they do, they can't lower the trade surplus because they don't have the money to buy more American products if their own economy is weak.

So in a funny way, the perception of a weak economy in Japan has driven the American dollar down against the Japanese yen because their trade surplus has continued to be high. The German economy, thank goodness, is coming back a little bit, and that's a good thing, but it strengthens the German mark. The American dollar is actually stronger against a lot of other currencies in the world than it was a year ago. I think it's important that we not overreact to this. But the Secretary of the Treasury will have a statement today which will demonstrate the course that

we're taking. And I think it's a prudent thing to do.

Q. If I sense anything today, it seems like a frustration on your part about an inability or just—for some reason, you haven't gotten across to the American people the messages that you want to get across. Is that pretty much true?

The President. Well, let me ask you something. I'm coming to St. Louis to inaugurate the Metrolink, a Federal project, which is good for St. Louis; to talk about the Summer of Service and the crime bill, the most important crime legislation in the history of the United States; and the national service program, which is going to have thousands of young people working to make our communities safer, all of those things, initiatives under my administration, and you didn't ask me about any of them.

So I'm not frustrated about it exactly, but I tell you, I have determined that I'm going to be aggressive about it. After I get off the radio today with you, Rush Limbaugh will have 3 hours to say whatever he wants. And I won't have any opportunity to respond. And there's no truth detector. You won't get on afterwards and say what was true and what wasn't. So all I'm telling you is, I'm going to be far more aggressive because the American people are entitled to know what's going on good in this country.

When I go overseas—I just got back from Europe, and the European press came up to me after—on several occasions—members of the press in Europe, and say, "What is going on in your country? You've got things going well; you are nothing like they portray you; the things that are happening are positive; we are bewildered." Members of the press in Europe said that to me repeatedly. So I decided instead of being frustrated, I needed to be aggressive, and I'm going to be aggressive from here on in. I'm going to tell what I know the truth to be.

Q. No more Mr. Nice Guy?

The President. I'm going to be very nice about it, but I'm going to be aggressive about it.

Health Care Reform

Q. Well, let me ask you a little something about health care, because I know this has

been the number one, or at least in the top three in terms of issues for you. And you promised long ago to veto any bill that crossed your desk that did not promise 100 percent health care coverage in the United States. You said you'd veto that, any bill that did not insure every single living American.

The President. [*Inaudible*—universal, we need to have universal coverage. That's what I said.

Q. Are you willing to compromise on this right now if it turns out to be a political reality that Congress cannot go for the full universal health care?

The President. Well, I think Congress will adopt universal health care. There may be some minor debates about exactly how to define that, but the real issue is, will Congress provide health insurance to all working Americans? Will they provide a mechanism to do it? I still think there's a good chance they'll do it.

Now, to go back to the first question you asked, there have been tens of millions of dollars in kind of disinformation spent to falsely characterize the approach that I wanted to take. I am very flexible and always have been about how we do it. But I do believe that it is not rational for the United States to be the only country in the world that can't figure out how to guarantee health care coverage to middle class working Americans. And in fact, we're going in reverse. We're losing ground. We've got a smaller percentage of our people insured than we did 10 years ago. All the other advanced countries insure everybody and yet we spend 40 percent more of our income on health care than anybody else does. It doesn't make any sense to me.

So I think Congress will find a way to do this. I think they'll measure up for the challenge. And I'm going to keep working with them. I think there's lots of different ways to do it, and I think we'll find a way to do it. I'm very, very hopeful now. And I think Mr. Gephardt's hopeful now.

[*Representative Gephardt stated that Congress is making progress on health care reform.*]

Q. Mr. President, on behalf of everyone listening to KMOX, thank you very much for joining us this morning.

The President. Thank you. Goodbye.

NOTE: The interview began at 11:07 a.m. The President spoke from Air Force One en route to St. Louis. In his remarks, he referred to Rev. Jerry Falwell and Rush Limbaugh, conservative radio and television commentators. A tape was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

Exchange With Reporters in St. Louis

June 24, 1994

Crime Legislation

Q. Speaking of the crime bill, Mr. President, do you know where it stands right now? Can you give us a state of play?

The President. Well, I met earlier this week with Senator Biden and Chairman Brooks, and we talked about it. We think that the essential elements are intact. We believe that it will come out with 100,000 police, with "Three strikes and you're out," with prevention programs, with summer jobs for the kids and midnight basketball, the after-school programs, with the assault weapons ban. And they're still working on some of the other issues. I expect that the conference committee will come out with it reasonably soon, and I think it will go through both Houses.

Q. One of the hangups, sir, is racial justice. Have you decided where you come down on that position yet?

The President. Wait and see what the conference committee does. They asked me to give them a few more days to work on it, and we're going to see what they—

Q. Would it help if you came out with—

The President. —know what's going on—the main thing we don't want to do is to change the subject. The subject is how to get the crime rate down, how to get the police out, how to get the assault weapons—the police on the street, the assault weapons ban into law, how to get the prevention funds out here, how to get the "Three strikes and you're out" law out. And I think that they're working on it. I believe everybody in the

Congress is going to work on it in good faith, and I think we'll have a—[*inaudible*].

NOTE: The exchange began at 12:50 p.m. while touring the Fox Park neighborhood. A tape was not available for verification of the content of this exchange.

Remarks to Summer of Safety Program Participants in St. Louis

June 24, 1994

Thank you very much. Thank you so much, ladies and gentlemen. It's an honor for me to be back in St. Louis and to be with all these fine people who have already spoken. Your mayor was on a roll today, wasn't he? [*Applause*] You gave a great speech. Thank you, Mayor. I want to thank the Lieutenant Governor, the other State officials who are here, the legislators, the aldermen. I'd like to say a special word of thanks to your Congressman, Bill Clay, for his outstanding leadership in the Congress and on this issue of national service. And I want to say a special word of thanks to Dick Gephardt, the majority leader of the House. Without him, we would not have been able to turn this economy around, to break the gridlock in Washington, to get this country moving again. His leadership has been extraordinary. I want to thank Chief Harmon for the enlightened leadership he's providing to this city and to this police department and to all the officers, the men and women who work with him to try to make this a safer city. And I want to say a special word of thanks to Tim Hager. Didn't he do a good job introducing me? [*Applause*] You know, Martin Luther King once said that everyone can be great because everyone can serve. This young man had a dream to be a United States marine. He fulfilled it. He proved he could make it through basic training. And then he had to leave. But he came home and joined this program. And I think he captured the essence of his service when he said it.

Let me tell you something, folks, all of us breathed a sigh of relief and had a genuine hope when I was able to announce that the North Koreans had agreed to suspend their nuclear program and talk to us about taking a different course into the future. And that