

Remarks at the Congressional Asian-Pacific American Caucus Institute Dinner

May 16, 1996

Thank you, Admiral, for that wonderful introduction. And I want to thank Tamlyn Tomita and Garrett Wang, your co-emcees, for standing up here with me. I made them come out. I said, I want you to stand up here with me because you make me look young and fresh and alive. [*Laughter*] So I thank them for doing that. To Gloria Caoile, your dinner chair; Francey Youngberg, your executive director; Rona Figueroa, and all the Members of Congress who are here. And a couple of former Members of Congress who are here, my good friend, Norm Mineta, who is being honored tonight, and Frank Horton, who was the primary sponsor of the bill creating Asian-Pacific Heritage Month. I thank you, sir.

I don't know how many Members of Congress are here. I saw Congressman Underwood, Congressman Abercrombie, Congresswoman Pelosi, and I know Congressman Matsui is here—or Doris would stop speaking to him. So however many Members of Congress who are here, I'm delighted to join you tonight.

I was honored to be here last year at your inaugural dinner. I'm proud of what we have accomplished together since then. More than anything else tonight I would like to say a simple thank you—thank you on behalf of the United States for the many contributions that the 9 million Americans who trace their roots to Asia and the islands of the Pacific make to our country every day. And thank you, particularly to those of you and those whom you represent throughout this country who have participated in the efforts of our administration and without whom we would not have been able to accomplish much of what has been done.

As we debate the issue of immigration again this year, we should never forget that America is a great country because we have welcomed successive generations of immigrants to our shores. Because we are a nation of laws we should do everything we can and we should do more than we have to, to stop illegal immigration. I have done more than

has previously been done. But we should avoid bashing immigrants. We are nearly, all of us, immigrants or the children or grandchildren or great-grandchildren of immigrants. The Native Americans were here first, and I think they crossed an ice cap to get here.

This is a country founded on a certain set of ideas, a certain set of values, a certain set of principles. And anybody willing to embrace them, to work hard to make the most of their own lives, to be responsible, can be an American citizen. That is the special thing about the United States, and we should never forget it.

I have been especially fortunate to have so many people from the Asian-Pacific American community in our administration, more than 170 all told, more than any previous administration, and I am grateful. When I took office I learned that it had been 14 years since the last Asian-American had been nominated to the Federal bench. I have nominated four, and I'm proud of every one of them.

I almost hate to start with this, but there are a few Asian-Americans I would feel bad if I didn't mention tonight who have been part of this administration: I thank my Deputy Assistant for Public Liaison, Doris Matsui, who made sure I came tonight; Barbara Chow, Special Assistant for Legislative Affairs; Maria Haley, Director of the Export-Import Bank; Ginger Lew, the Deputy Administrator at SBA; Valerie Lau at Treasury; David Tseng at Labor; Raj Anand at Agriculture; T.S. Chung at Commerce; Dang Pham at Education; Dennis Hayashi at HHS; Will Itoh, now our Ambassador to Thailand, formerly on my National Security Council staff; and Stuart Ishimaru at Justice. Those are a few of the people who serve you every day in the Clinton administration.

Three and a half years ago when I took the Oath of Office, I did so with a clear vision of what I hoped our country could be like as we move into the 21st century. I wanted this to be a country where every person, without regard to race or gender or income, would have a chance to live out his or her dreams. I wanted this to be a country where we were coming together around our basic

values, not being driven apart for cheap, short-term political reasons.

I wanted this to be a country that would continue to be the greatest and strongest country in the world and the world's strongest force for peace and freedom and prosperity. We've still got a good ways to go, but without question, if you compare where we are today with where we were then, we have made progress on all three fronts.

Our economic strategy to reduce the deficit, expand trade, invest more in our people, our technology and our potential for growth means that our deficit is less than half of what it was 4 years ago, but we have 8½ million more jobs, the lowest combined rates of inflation, mortgage rates, and unemployment in 27 years, a 15-year high in homeownership, an all-time high in exports and new business formations for 3 years in a row. Nearly 8,500 SBA loans have been approved to start those new small businesses.

We've increased educational opportunities from more positions for children in Head Start to more affordable college loans to the national service program. We've done our part to help lower the crime rate by passing a crime bill which will put 100,000 police officers on the street—we're more than 40 percent of the way there in less than 2 years—banning assault weapons and passing the Brady bill which has kept 60,000 people with criminal records from getting handguns.

We have worked to dramatically increase our protection of the environment from our cities to our rural areas, including our National Parks. We have worked to strengthen families through the family and medical leave law; a family tax credit for working families on modest incomes; an increased effort to collect child support; going for the V chip and for a television rating system to help parents raise their young children without excessive exposure to violence and other destructive elements; and our campaign against childhood smoking, which has attracted a great deal of opposition, but I would just point out, the biggest health problem in America and 3,000 children a day illegally begin to smoke.

The economy is better off, but its important to point out that the crime rate is down, the welfare rolls are down. There are over

one million fewer families on welfare today than there were 4 years ago. The poverty rate has dropped, and this country is coming together.

I am grateful for what we have been able to do to make this a more peaceful place. There are no nuclear weapons pointed at the children of the United States for the first time since the dawn of the nuclear age. The United States is a force for peace and freedom. From Northern Ireland to Southern Africa, to Haiti, to Bosnia, to the Middle East, we are working to bring the countries of the world together to fight our common enemies of terrorism and organized crime and drug-running and the proliferation of weapons and the destruction of our precious global environment.

But if you ask me to tell you what it is we really have to do to get into the 21st century with these ideals being met, I would say we have to find a way to meet our challenges and protect our values and to do it together.

If you think about so much of the political rhetoric we have heard in America for, well, a long time now, it seems to be designed to divide people, to make neighbors look upon their neighbors as if they're almost alien, to make people believe that public servants that are otherwise perfectly normal people are somehow capable of the utmost depravity.

The truth is, this is a pretty great country, or we wouldn't be here after over 200 years. And we should have our debates and our differences and our heated debates on public policy. But we ought to do it in a way that says that we realize that we all love our country, we all love our Constitution, and we know we're going up or down together. And if we persist in dividing ourselves against one another, we will weaken America. If we unite and make a virtue out of our diversity, there is no country as well-positioned for the 21st century as the United States.

We've tried to do that. In the past year, just for example, we hosted two Asian-Pacific American Education Forums to address the needs of Asian-American students and their teachers. We're approved almost \$2 billion in loans from the Small Business Administration to Asian-American businesses. We funded an SBA program targeted to Asian-Amer-

ican women, to provide training and counseling to thousands of women in Chinatown in New York City. We've done all this while shrinking the size of the Government and the burden of regulation.

I don't believe that there's a big Government answer to every problem. The Chinese philosopher, Lao Tzu, once said that governing a great county is like cooking a small fish; you spoil it with too much poking. [*Laughter*] On the other hand, you can also spoil it if you don't try to cook it in the first place. So the trick is for us to do together those things which will give every American the chance to make the most of his or her life, at work, at home, in the community, and in our great country.

We are going through a period of profound change. The economy is changing more than it has in a hundred years, moving into this information-technology age, moving into this global economy, indeed, a whole global society. It's been a hundred years since we moved from farm to factory and from the country to the city, since we changed this much. In terms of our communications with our fellow human beings, the changes are even more profound. Bill Gates, the famous founder of Microsoft, says that the digital chip is revolutionizing communications more than at any point since Gutenberg printed the first Bible in Europe 500 years ago.

Now, in this environment we have to understand that things will change. There will be some uprooting. We must meet these challenges. But we can do it if we are determined to do it together and determined to pull together and go forward together.

A big part of that is making sure that you are a part of the American dream and that you and the entire Asian-Pacific community feel that we are moving forward together and that we are moving forward with a vision of the world that includes a strong partnership with the Pacific. My first overseas trip as President was to Japan. The first thing I tried to do in organizing the world in a different way was to establish the leadership summit in the Asia-Pacific Economic Council. The first meeting was held in Seattle; we're about to have the fourth one in Manila later this year.

Already we see the fruits of this engagement. Recently, I was in the Pacific, and we reaffirmed our security relationship with Korea. We reaffirmed our efforts with Korea for a new initiative for peace between North and South Korea. We asked our friends in China to join with us in sponsoring an effort to reach this sort of peace. We reaffirmed our security ties with Japan in a very positive way. And we made it clear that what we want—what we want—in Northern Asia is peace between all nations. And we want to see all honest differences resolved peacefully so that people raise their children without the fear that has nagged that region through the World Wars and the regional wars of the 20th century. We can't go back to that, we have to go forward in peace. And the United States intends to be a force for peace and reconciliation in Asia and throughout the Pacific region.

Most of you know this, but a lot of our ticket to the future economically is in the Asian-Pacific region as well. It already accounts for a quarter of the world's output, growing every day. Already more than half our trade is with the nations of the Pacific, sustaining 3 million good American jobs. I am proud to say—and I want to hammer this home—that 68 percent of the 8½ million new jobs that have been created were created in high-wage areas of our economy, not low-wage areas of our economy. And that's because we have emphasized trade, which creates better paying jobs for the American people. A lot of you have been in the forefront of that, and I thank you for that.

Exports to Asia have increased by 44 percent. In the 20 areas covered by our specific agreements with Japan in 3 years, our exports increased by 85 percent. That is a staggering amount of advance. Our late Commerce Secretary, Ron Brown, the best friend that American businesses and trade ever had worked tirelessly to open those markets. His successor, our former Trade Ambassador who was the most effective trade negotiator we ever had—he negotiated 200 separate trade agreements in 3 years—Mickey Kantor will continue on that path.

But a lot of what we have to do must be rooted in mutual trust and respect, and willing, willing partnerships. We know that. And

we know we have a ways to go. I want better relations with China. I recognize the one China policy. I also recognize that an important part of that policy is the commitment that was made by all parties that the differences between China and Taiwan will and must be resolved in a peaceful and lawful manner.

I want a growing understanding between our two countries. I realize that neither of us is perfect, and both of us are going to have a great say over what the future looks like, and we have to work hard to understand each other and to work together. That's why I am committed to securing an extension of the MFN treatment for China and why I want to build better relationships. But it's also why I think we have to insist on fairness in our trade and on honoring all of our commitments in the area of nonproliferation. Some things in this world are more important than money, and not arming rogue nations with weapons that can destroy the future of our children is one of them.

We must be in a position where we don't hesitate to take appropriate action if we can't gain adequate enforcement of the agreement that China has already made with us to stop the piracy of American property. I realize that this has been a problem in developing economies for a long time. But China is not just another developing economy. It is a very great nation, with over one billion people.

A lot of America's meal ticket to the future consists of our ability to take advantage of the information revolution. And today, we are losing as much as \$2 billion in opportunities, many of them opportunities that would belong to Asian-Pacific Americans, in Washington State, in Oregon and California, in New England, in the Middle West, all across this country. I have no choice but to take strong action to try to protect the work of the minds of all Americans, and it's their right to be rewarded in the international marketplace.

The main thing I want to say to all of you tonight is that, again, I thank you for your contributions to America. And I thank you for the people you have supplied, both within and without the administration, who have advanced our cause. I think that your devotion to learning, to hard work, to family, to the

ideas of entrepreneurialism and the idea of engagement with the rest of the world, these are the kinds of things that will keep America great in the 21st century.

We can go into the next century with a country where everybody who is willing to work for it can live out their dreams. We can maintain this country as the world's strongest force for peace and freedom and prosperity. But if we are going to do it, we must be committed to that third element of our vision: We have to be committed to bringing this country together around a mutual ethic of responsibility instead of letting ourselves be divided by differences that ultimately don't matter nearly as much as our devotion to our shared ideals.

You can help bring this country together as well as move it forward, and I'm convinced we can't do one without the other. Asian-Pacific Americans have done both and done them brilliantly. I ask for your continued support as we try to make sure that our entire country does the same.

Thank you, and God bless you all.

NOTE: The President spoke at 7:52 p.m. at the Sheraton Washington Hotel. In his remarks, he referred to Rear Adm. Ming Chang, USN (Ret.), chairman, Congressional Asian-Pacific American Caucus Institute, who introduced the President.

Remarks on Signing Megan's Law and Exchange With Reporters

May 17, 1996

Good morning. I want to welcome Senator Grams and Congressman Zimmer, Congresswoman Lofgren, Bonnie Campbell from the Justice Department.

This has been a week in which our country is moving to combat crime and violence. A couple of days ago we awarded over 9,000 new police officers to some 2,500 communities. That brings us to 43,000 police officers in 20 months along the road to our goal of 100,000. We're ahead of schedule and under budget.

But today, the valiant presence of five American parents reminds us that this fight against crime is so much more a fight for peace and for safety for our people and especially for our children. Richard and Maureen