

Administrator Rodney Slater; and Barbara Pryor, wife of Senator David Pryor.

Remarks at a Labor Day Picnic in DePere, Wisconsin
September 2, 1996

The President. Thank you. Happy Labor Day. Thank you for coming out. I must say when I left home this morning in Arkansas to fly up here, I knew that the people of DePere and the whole Green Bay area would be in an awful good humor after the Packers did so well yesterday. But I never had any idea so many of you would come up to tell me how happy you are. I'm glad to see you. Thank you for this great crowd, for your spirit, for your love for our country, for the signs you've had here.

I want to thank the DePere Band over here. Thank you for coming out to play for us on Labor Day, wearing those hot uniforms when they could be in shorts, drinking lemonade. Give them a hand. [Applause]

Thank you, Senator Feingold, thank you for your leadership for Wisconsin and for the United States. Thank you for your long labor for real, meaningful campaign finance reform. We will get it next time, we will. And we will get it in a bipartisan fashion that will be good for America.

I want to thank all those who are here—Mayor Walsh, thank you for welcoming me here. The people who are on the preprogram; the Attorney General, Jim Doyle; Dr. Margaret Hutchinson; John Benson; Father Cornell—to all of you, thank you very much. Thank you, Alethia. Didn't she make a good talk and isn't she a good representative of the young people of this country?

Let me also say that Senator Feingold mentioned your former Senator, Gaylord Nelson, also a great friend of mine. It was my great honor to present him with the Nation's highest citizen's award, the Presidential Medal of Freedom. Every person from Wisconsin should be very proud of the work Gaylord Nelson has spent since he left the Senate to save the environment for future generations.

My fellow Americans, this is Labor Day. We celebrate labor and we honor labor. We

honor the men and women who have built every bridge in our country's history, because you will have to help us build that bridge to the 21st century.

You may have noticed that in the last several days, often with my wife and daughter and sometimes with the Vice President and Mrs. Gore, I've been on a train, and I've been on a bus to tell the American people we're on the right track and the right road to the 21st century, and we shouldn't change now, we should keep right on going in the right direction and build on it.

I wanted to take that train trip and that bus trip because I get to see more people like you. I get to hear the stories that make America live. I get to see the decisions in human terms that we have to make every day. As I said last Thursday in Chicago, fundamentally this year we face a choice between building a bridge to the future and building a bridge to the past, between whether we're going forward together as one nation arm in arm, or whether we're going to be told, you're on your own.

Just since I have been here today in Wisconsin I had one person come up to me and said, "I'm so glad that I live in a country where we're all helping each other to make the most of our lives. I had a terrible accident in my family; I have someone in my family with a disability. Now I know that the only way we can maintain our lifestyle and our work is to have the kind of help that makes this the great country it is." And we're working hard to build strong families and to be productive.

I had another young man come up to me and say, "Five years ago I was homeless. I just finished my third year of college. I'm so glad that you believe in college loans and you stopped them from cutting it back last year." That's the kind of America I'm proud to live in.

My fellow Americans, 4 years ago when the people of Wisconsin gave Bill Clinton and Al Gore a chance to lead the country, we had a simple message. We want America to go into the 21st century with the American dream alive for everyone responsible enough to work for it; with our great American community growing together, not drifting apart; with our Nation still the strongest force for

peace and freedom and prosperity in the world. We have a simple but profound strategy: more opportunity for all; more responsibility from all; and a place at the table for all people who deserve to be there because they believe in our values and they're willing to work for them.

Now, just think where we are today compared to 4 years ago: 10 million more jobs; 4½ million new homeowners; 10 million homeowners who refinanced their mortgage at lower interest rates; record numbers of new businesses and exports; the lowest combined rates of unemployment, inflation and home mortgages in 28 years. We're better off than we were 4 years ago.

Fifteen million of our hardest pressed working families have received a tax cut, and every single small business person in the country has been eligible for a tax cut when they invest more money in the business to become more productive or hire more workers. Twelve million families have taken advantage of the family leave law when a baby's born or a parent's sick without losing their jobs, and our economy is stronger for it.

Forty million Americans had their pensions secured after the terrible days of insecurity of the 1980's, when people were losing their pensions. We changed the law and we have cracked down on deficient pension funds because we think on Labor Day if people work their whole lives and pay into their pension funds they ought to know it's going to be there for them when that retirement period comes.

Fifty million Americans are breathing cleaner air, and we have cleaned up more toxic waste dumps in 3 years than the previous two administrations did in 12. This country is moving in the right direction.

The crime rate has come down 4 years in a row; 1.8 million fewer people are on welfare; child support collections are up 40 percent; the deficit has been cut by 60 percent. It's the first time since before the Civil War that an administration has brought the Federal deficit down in every one of its 4 years in office. That's something you can all be proud of.

Senator Feingold has worked hard for a balanced budget. What I want you to know when you think about all the proposals you

will hear in the next 60 days about where to go from here is this: Our budget would have been balanced last year and would have a surplus this year except for the interest we have to pay on the debt run up in the 12 years before I took the oath of office. Let's don't make that mistake again. Let's keep going and finish the job. We can finish the job in 4 more years. Will you help me build that kind of bridge to the future?

Audience members. Yes! Four more years! Four more years!

The President. Just a few days ago I signed legislation that is pro-work, pro-business, and pro-family. It's an example of America at its best. We raised the minimum wage for 10 million hard-working Americans, starting October 1st. We made it easier for small businesses, which create most of the jobs in this country, to take out pensions for the owners and the employees, and for those employees to keep those pensions when they move from job to job. It ought to be easier for people in small businesses to have a decent retirement as well. And we adopted a \$5,000 tax credit for families who adopt children. There are a lot of children out there who need a good home today. I hope this helps more of them find it.

We made 25 million Americans eligible to keep their health insurance, even if somebody in the family has been sick, and even when they move from job to job, under the Kennedy-Kassebaum bill. We've been fighting for that for a long time and it's high time, and there are people in this audience today whose lives will be saved because of it because they won't lose their health insurance now if someone in their family gets sick or they have to change jobs.

So I say to you we are moving on the right track, but there is more to do. We have to build a bridge to the 21st century that enables every person in this country, every family, every community to make the most of their God-given potential. We have to build that bridge to the future strong and wide enough for all of us to walk across.

Let me tell you some of the things I hope you'll think about on this Labor Day as we honor work and family. I want to build a bridge to the 21st century in which we amend the family and medical leave law to

say that you can not only take a little time off when a baby is born or in an emergency but also to take your child to those parent-teacher conferences at school and to regular doctor's appointments.

I want to build a bridge to the 21st century in which we have the crime rate going down for 4 more years in a row in the hope that it will finally be down where it ought to be in America. And to do that, we have to finish the work of putting 100,000 police on the street. We have to do a better job of protecting our police officers by banning those cop-killer bullets, which are not necessary to hunt in Wisconsin or Arkansas or anywhere else.

And I believe very strongly that the Brady bill has been a good thing for America. You know, when I signed it and I pushed it so hard and the leaders of the other party led the fight against it, they got a lot of votes in 1994. It may be why they won the Congress, banning assault weapons and the Brady bill, because they convinced a lot of rural people in Wisconsin and Michigan, my home State of Arkansas, up in New England, all over the country that somehow the Democrats were coming to get their guns.

Well, let me tell you something folks, it's been 2 years now and people know the truth. Not a single, solitary hunter has lost a rifle. But 60,000 felons, fugitives, and stalkers did not get handguns because of the Brady bill. It was the right thing to do, and we're a safer country for it.

And I personally don't believe that people who commit acts of domestic violence against their spouse or their children should be able to get guns either. That is a dangerous thing. We should not do that.

We ought to build a bridge to the 21st century that continues to prove we can grow the economy and clean up the environment. Ten million American children still live within four miles of a toxic dump. If you will give us 4 more years, we will speed up the pace of toxic cleanups, even though we've done more in 3 years than the previous administrations did in 12. We'll clean up the two-thirds worst dumps in this country. We want our children to grow up next to parks, not poisons. Will you help us build that kind of bridge to the 21st century?

Now that we have passed the health care protection bill, we ought to recognize that a lot of families need some help when they're between jobs. In my balanced budget plan, there is a provision to help people pay for and keep their health insurance when they and their families are between jobs. It's a good thing. Will you help us build that bridge to the 21st century? [*Applause*]

And let me just mention two more things. This is Labor Day. We can be grateful that we have over 10 million more jobs. But we know we have to keep this recovery going. That means we have to continue to balance the budget, but to do it in a way that grows the economy and keeps us together. We can balance the budget without wrecking Medicare, turning our backs on the medical commitments of Medicaid, which includes families with disabilities, little babies that are poor, pregnant women, and the elderly in nursing homes. We can balance the budget and increase our commitment to education and to research and to the environment, not walk away from it. Will you help us balance the budget in that way? [*Applause*]

And then you have, as Senator Feingold said, the great tax debate. We can have a tax cut that will be good for the economy. I believe the tax cut we had in 1993 for the 15 million hardest pressed workers, for people who invest in new businesses to try to create them, for small businesses to invest more in their business, I think those things were good. Our tax cut plan is fully paid for line-by-line, dime-by-dime. It supports education, health care, homebuying—and that's what it supports—and childrearing. If we can invest money to help people educate their children, care for their children, buy and sell their home, and put into an IRA and let people take out without penalty for education, for health care, for home buying, that's good for America. Those tax cuts will be repaid to us many times over. But we have to do it while we balance the budget.

Now, let me say this. The other guys will say, "We ought to have one that's 5 times as big. We'll give you more money. Vote for us. Why do you care about the deficit." You know in Washington, we have all these political consultants. And if you listen to them, they say, "Don't ever go out to a Labor Day

crowd of middle class people and talk about the deficit. Nobody cares about that.”

Let me tell you why you should care about it. Let me tell you why you should care about it. They say, “We’ll give you a tax cut 5 times as big. You remember that budget I vetoed last year because it had excessive cuts in Medicare, Medicaid, education, and the environment, it allowed a raid on workers’ pension fund—\$15 billion—it raised taxes on the lowest income working people. If you thought that one was bad, you wait til you see what you get with this tax plan that our opposition has proposed. And even when they get through trying to cut things even more than they did in the budget I vetoed, the deficit will still explode.

Why should you care? Because if the Government goes in and borrows money at the same time you’re trying to, what will happen? Interest rates will go up. Our friends in the Republican Congress said last year—this is not me talking, this is them talking just last year—they say if we don’t have a balanced budget plan, interest rates will be 2 percent higher. What does that mean for you? A higher home mortgage payment, a higher car payment, a higher credit card payment. Even more important, what does it mean? All the small business people in this audience, it means higher interest rates for them. It means fewer people borrowing money to invest to create more jobs, to be more productive, to raise incomes. Folks, we tried this once before. Would you go to the bank yourself and borrow money to give yourself a tax cut?

Audience members. No-o-o!

The President. Then why would you hire someone to do it for you? Let’s keep going in the right direction. Let’s balance the budget, keep interest rates down, keep the economy growing and going forward. We can do it. We can do it.

The last and most important thing is, we have to recognize that the world of the 21st century will be the age of greatest possibility in human history, but that there is a greater challenge than ever before to make sure every person in America can participate in that. And that means we have to provide every single solitary American—and not just our children, our adults as well—with what-

ever educational needs they have for a lifetime. Excellent education by worldwide standards for a lifetime, not just for childhood.

In the last 4 years we have done a lot to invest more in education, from expanding Head Start to giving schools the power to try grassroots reforms, to staying open late after school in a lot of high-crime and other tough areas, to give our young people something to say yes to instead of something to say no to. We have expanded scholarships through the Pell grant program. We have got a lower cost college loan program that a huge number of young people are taking advantage of today so they can take loans and pay them back as a percentage of their income. We’re going in the right direction, but we have to do more.

And let me just say this. I want to build a bridge to the 21st century that has a lot of educational advances, but let me just mention three. Number one, every 8-year-old in America ought to be able to read on his or her own by the year 2000, every single one. No one should be left behind, no one.

I want to mobilize 30,000 mentors, our AmeriCorps volunteers who are working their way through college by doing community service, and a volunteer army of a million people to make sure that every single third grader in America can say, “I read it myself.” That will guarantee that the rest of their academic careers and their adult lives will be filled with productive learning and enable every person to have a chance to participate in the bounty of 21st century America. Will you help me build that bridge?

Audience members. Yes!

The President. Number two, I want to make sure we connect every classroom and library in every school in America to the information superhighway by the year 2000 so that for the first time in American history, for the very first time in American history, we can say with confidence, the children in the most remote rural schoolhouses, children in the poorest inner-city schools for the first time not only have computers and trained teachers, but have access to the finest learning in the same time frame, in the same way, as the students in the wealthiest, most successful schools in America. We can do it. Will

you help us build that bridge to the 21st century?

Audience members. Yes!

The President. And finally, I want to make sure that we make a college education available to every single solitary person in this country who is willing to work for it. I want the first 2 years of education after high school, at least a community college degree, to become as universal in 4 years as a high school diploma is today. Now, that's a tax cut worth fighting for, a tax credit for the cost of community college tuition in every State in the country.

Will you help me do that?

Audience members. Yes!

The President. I want college tuition to be tax deductible up to \$10,000 a year. I want to give unemployed and underemployed workers access to a skill grant worth up to \$2600 a year, so that if you lose your job, you're changing jobs, and you need more education, you can get the grant, you can take it to the nearest community college or training facility so that even if you're 45 or 55 or 60, if you need more skills to support your family and improve your lot in life. Instead of being left behind in the race to the 21st century, we will take you along the way. Will you help me build that kind of bridge?

Audience members. Yes!

The President. My fellow Americans, in 4 years we can have a country where every 8-year-old can read, every 12-year-old can log in on the Internet, every 18-year-old can go to college, and every American can have the knowledge that he or she needs to succeed in the 21st century. That is a bridge worth fighting for.

Now, as you look around at this vast sea of people here today, you don't know the life story of everybody who is here. There are a lot of people here who don't agree with each other about a lot of things. I saw one brave soul—thank you, ma'am—has a "Republicans for Clinton" sign. God bless you. I wish I could sign that for you. Give her a hand. [Applause] Let me remind you that this country is not around here after 220 years because we permitted ourselves to be divided by the wrong things. It's because we were always united by the right things.

You have to continue to fight for a country that believes that, without regard to race or religion or income or status in life, if you believe in the Constitution, the Declaration of Independence, the Bill of Rights, and you're willing to show up tomorrow to do your best and play by the rules, you're part of our America. And we're going forward into the future, and you're going on that bridge with us. It's going to be wide enough for every single solitary one of us to walk across. Will you help us build that kind of bridge?

Audience members. Yes!

The President. Thank you. God bless you. Stay with us. We've got a great future. Thank you. Happy Labor Day.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:35 p.m. at Voyageur Park. In his remarks, he referred to Mayor Michael Walsh of DePere; Margaret Hutchinson, former principal, Aldo Leopold Alternative School; John Benson, Wisconsin superintendent of public instruction; Robert Cornell, former State senator; and Alethia Anderson, student, Green Bay East High School.

Remarks at a Labor Day Festival in Milwaukee, Wisconsin

September 2, 1996

The President. Thank you. Thank you.

Audience members. Four more years! Four more years! Four more years!

The President. Thank you. Wow! Thanks for the welcome. Can you keep this spirit until November? Can you spread it to other people in Wisconsin?

Audience members. Yes!

The President. Can we keep the Nation on the right track with it?

Audience members. Yes!

The President. I think so, too. Happy Labor Day. Thank you for letting me be a part of it. Thank you, Senator Herb Kohl, and thank you, Senator Russ Feingold, for representing the people of Wisconsin and the people of the United States here.

I know that Congressman Jerry Kleczka and Congressman Tom Barrett spoke earlier. Will you keep them in the Congress? We need them there. [Applause] And Wisconsin, you will have three, count them, three—one, two, three open seats, three chances to send