

DNC Gala "National Tribute to

President Clinton,"

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REMARKS BY THE PRESIDENT, THE VICE PRESIDENT,
THE FIRST LADY AND MRS. GORE AT THE
DNC GALA "NATIONAL TRIBUTE TO PRESIDENT CLINTON"

MCI Center
Washington, D.C.

8:58 P.M. EDT

THE PRESIDENT: Good job. Thank you. Well, thank you. I think I speak for all of us when I say to Terry McAuliffe, you make fundraising fun. (Laughter.) And thank you so much for breaking the record and all the hard work, Terry. We are really indebted to you. We feel deeply about your commitment to the party. And I also want to thank Dorothy and her family because of all the time you've spent doing this. Thank you for letting him do it. We know what that means with the family's support.

You know, many of us have met our friends at sporting events, where we might be at this MCI Center at another time or to our children through lots of avenues -- through our congregations. But Al and I really met our two friends when we talked to them on the bus as we came out of the convention in New York City years ago, with your help.

And I want you to know that at that time, I was able to talk to them -- well, to President Clinton and to Hillary -- about something that I cared very, very much about. Because he asked me, he said: What is it that you would like to be able to do in the next few years? And I said, I care a lot about mental health care in this country and making sure that people have access to it. (Applause.)

And President Clinton listened to me, and he gave me the opportunity to have a role in our national life and to speak out for the millions and millions of American families that deal with mental health issues. That's because he listens with compassion and because not only in making Al a full partner in the administration, he also allowed me to be the voice of so many people.

But I, tonight, want to, on behalf of all the millions of American families who deal with mental health issues, want to sincerely thank him from the bottom of our hearts for his leadership on this issue. Thank you very, very much. (Applause.) Thank you. I appreciate that.

Because of him, there is a mental health parity law. Because of him, there has been a mention in two State of the Union addresses, never before done by a President of the United States, talking about mental health care, as well as all of health care, to make life better for every American citizen. Thank you, President Clinton, for that, thank you so much. (Applause.)

It's been a privilege and an honor for me to be able to have the opportunities that I've had and I am very, very grateful to a very generous man and to his wife, who is a good friend of mine -- and the next Senator from the state of New York. (Applause.)

What I want to do -- I want you all to join me. I know many of you understand that there are questions about what President Clinton will do after November. Will he write a book? Will he make speeches? Will he teach? Will he play the saxophone again? Well, I have a suggestion. I was once a member of the Senate Spouses' Club, I highly recommend it and we need more men. (Applause.) So I think that we'll see him there.

I want to introduce to you a woman who not only has exemplified friendship on a personal level, but has been a voice for families, for justice, for women and families here in this country, as well as abroad, a terrific First Lady and now a wonderful candidate for the United States Senate, our First Lady, our voice of compassion and justice, a person that we are going to send to the United States Senate, representing New York, a good and dear friend, a fabulous person, Hillary Rodham Clinton, the next Senator from New York. (Applause.)

MRS. CLINTON: Wow. Oh, thank you. Thank you so much. This is the most unbelievable gathering. I cannot thank everyone enough who has worked on it. I want to thank Ed and Joe, and also I want to thank Mayor Dennis Archer and Congresswoman Loretta Sanchez for your leadership of the DNC. (Applause.) And of course, we want to thank Terry, who not only does so many things so well but has such a good time doing them. And we're so grateful to all of you for extraordinary outpouring of support. And it means so much, because for eight years now, the four of us have traveled lots of miles together. And it has been such a unique and special privilege to be part of an administration led by a President and a Vice President who have changed our country. We are a better country than we were in 1992. (Applause.)

And so many of you have been such great friends and supporters; you've been there for the four of us; you have helped across the country; you've worked on issues like what Tipper said about mental health, and so many others. And we thank you -- I personally thank you for the support that you've given day after day and year after year. Because it has enabled the President and the Vice President and all of us to keep focused on what was really important. And because of that, we are now on the brink of another election that will be very important for our country. Because we will make a decision whether or not we continue the progress we've made or do a u-turn back to what was rejected in 1992. Now, will we let that happen, or will we go forward together and build on the progress of the Clinton-Gore administration by a new administration headed by the Vice President as President Gore? I think all of you are ready to work for that and make it happen. (Applause.)

So let me thank you for what you've done, what you are doing and what you will do. Let me also personally thank so many of you for the support you've given me in the Senate race in

New York. I am very grateful for that. (Applause.) And now, we're going to take a few minutes and look backwards and think about what has been done over the last eight -- nearly eight years and we're going to, by watching what has happened recommit ourselves, I hope, to what we need to do to make sure we continue the work that the President and the Vice President started for our country.

So please join me in seeing a video that has been especially prepared that I hope will bring back to you some of the accomplishments and some of the incredible progress that we've made because of you. Thank you all.

(Video shown) (Applause.)

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you. Well, first of all, thank you very much. Let me tell you something -- wait, turn this on. If you'd turn this on, they could hear me.

Now, I don't believe that it's corruption to take money to pass the Brady Bill, instead of beat it. (Applause.) To pass the Family and Medical Leave bill so 21 million ordinary working people can take some time off when their babies are born and their parents are sick, instead of to beat it. (Applause.) To pass the patients' bill of rights, instead of to beat it. (Applause.) To reduce the deficit and get rid of the debt, instead of keep giving big breaks to special interests.

I don't think that is corruption, I think that's good for America -- that's why we're here tonight, that's why you're here tonight. We made a difference and I'm glad you're helping us to win the next election. Thank you. (Applause.)

Let me also say to all of you how grateful I am that you're here, how grateful I am for your support. I thank Ed and Joe and Loretta and Dennis, and all their predecessors in the Democratic Party. I thank my good friends, Dick Gephardt and Tom Daschle, who will be the leaders of their respective chambers after the election. (Applause.)

I thank Terry McAuliffe for making sure we'll be able to stick out there and give our message, to fight for our candidates and elect our President in the year 2000. (Applause.) Thank you, Terry, and thank all of you who helped tonight. And I want to thank Al and Tipper and Hillary, and all the others who were part of our team. All those things that were on that film -- mostly they were just my face up there. We had a great team, the four of us; we had a great White House; we had a great Cabinet; we had all these great young people working for us, who believed in what we were doing every day. To every one of you who had anything to do with any of the progress of this administration, I thank you from the bottom of my heart. (Applause.)

Now, I also want to thank my buddies from Sam's and Lindsay's and the Rendezvous for bringing us barbecue so Al and I could feel at home tonight, and I hope you felt at home tonight, with that barbecue. And besides that, we needed a backdrop for McAuliffe to do that comedy gig he did on the Republicans. So, thank you for bringing the barbecue; it was wonderful. (Applause.)

Now, I don't know about you, but I came here to hear the entertainment, not to hear the politicians speak. (Applause.) So, since I'm really grateful to you for your support, I'm going to spare you much of a speech. But I want to say just two or three things real seriously.

Number one: the election of 2000 is every bit as important as the elections of '92 and '96. (Applause.) And in some ways, we are handicapped by all those good things that were just recounted on the film. A lot of younger voters have even forgotten what the economy was like in 1992. A lot of people have forgotten that seven and a half, eight years ago no one thought the deficit could be brought down, much less the budget balanced, and the debt begin to be repaid. No one thought the crime rate could be brought down, the welfare rolls could be reduced -- (applause) -- that the performance of our public schools would be increasing dramatically. No one believed that back in 1992.

Now, what is the problem. The question is, what are we going to do with our prosperity and with our social progress. And I would argue to all of you, just in one moment of seriousness tonight, that how a great nation handles its success can be an even sterner test of character than how it deals with adversity. (Applause.)

I have sort of mixed feelings looking at that film, actually. I watch myself get grayer and grayer and grayer. (Laughter.) And I thought to myself, before I got into my second term here, I was always the youngest person who did everything. Now I'm up here in my old boots and my old jeans, and I'm just kind of an old, gray-haired redneck trying to put in some good months here. (Laughter.)

But I've learned a few things earning those gray hairs. And what I want to say to you is that if you believe, as I do, that it's just a test of our character that's as severe as any we've had, what are we going to do with our prosperity, this election matters, and I'll tell you what I think we need.

We need to elect someone President who understands the future and knows how to take us there. We need to elect someone President who's actually made tough decisions and not just talked about it. (Applause.) And we need to elect people to the Senate and the House who supported us on our economic program, supported us when we brought the crime rate down, supported us when we cleaned up the environment and grew the economy at the same time, supported us when we protected the individual liberties of America, supported us when we said we could build one America across all the lines that divide us. That's what we need to do in the year 2000, looking toward tomorrow. (Applause.)

Terry has already said this, Ed has already said this, but I want you to know that not only as President, but as something of an historian, there is no one in the history of the vice presidency who has ever, ever had remotely the positive impact on the lives and the future of the people of the United States as Al Gore has these last seven and a half years. It's not even close, ever. (Applause.)

From casting the deciding vote on our economic plan in '93 -- (applause) -- to sticking up for us when we had to go into Haiti, into Bosnia, into Kosovo, to all the tough calls we made, in helping to end the financial crises of the world; to down to voting

to close the gun show loophole that required child trigger locks, Al Gore has led the way. (Applause.)

Now, when you think about the future, what are the questions? Well, how are we going to get the country out of debt, keep the prosperity going and give people who live in poor areas who have been left behind a chance to be part of our prosperity? How are we going to deal with the environmental challenges of global warming and grow the economy? How are we going to give all working people the security of access to health care and world-class education for their kids?

How are we going to proceed in a world full of uncertainty, where you have to make complicated judgments about the security threats out there and still try to build a better and brighter future -- based on trade, not conflict; based on lifting labor standards and environmental standards, not walking away from the human right of the people of the world? How are we going to do these things? (Applause.)

The answer is, we ought to pick the person who is the best qualified person, based on experience. We ought to pick the person who has proved that he makes good decisions, based on lots of evidence. We ought to pick a person whose mind and heart have always been focused on the future that his children -- now his grandchild -- and all of our children ought to have. Al Gore should be -- and with your help, will be -- the next President of the United States of America.

Ladies and gentlemen, Vice President Al Gore. (Applause.)

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Thank you. Thank you, Mr. President. Thank you all, my friends. It is such a great privilege to be able to stand here on this stage with this group. And, Mr. President, I want to thank you for your generous words and your generous help and your generosity of spirit and our partnership for these almost eight years.

You know, the credit for that partnership goes to him, because serving as Vice President, I have been able to undertake a lot of challenges because we have worked as a team. And I'm more grateful to you than I can tell you. And I'm proud -- let me say, I'm awful proud to be on this stage with the next senator from the state of New York, Hillary Clinton. And we're all going to make that happen. (Applause.)

And I, of course, want to say a special word of thanks to the love of my life, the grandmother of my grandson, the mother of my four children, my closest advisor and best friend, with whom I just celebrated our 30th wedding anniversary on Friday: my wife, Tipper. (Applause.)

And I want to thank the greatest fundraiser in the history of the universe, Terry McAuliffe. (Applause.) Thanks for a great, fun evening. And thank you very much, Mr. Chairman -- Ed -- and thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Thank you to Dennis. Thank you, Loretta. I appreciate what all of you are doing and to the next Speaker of the House of

Representatives, Dick Gephardt, and the next Leader of the Senate, Tom Daschle. And to all of you, thank you.

And I want to tell you one other thing -- if you entrust me with the presidency, the good news is that we can all come back here in four years and it won't cost much at all, because we're going to pass McCain-Feingold and the democracy endowment, and make meaningful campaign finance reform the law of the land. That is a commitment in this campaign. (Applause.) It is the first bill that I will send to the United States Congress. It is important. And I want all of you to hear me well. (Applause.)

Now, it was eight years ago this summer that Bill Clinton helped me fulfill a lifelong dream. As I said at the convention in New York, I had always wanted the chance to be the warm-up act for Elvis at Madison Square Garden. Well tonight, we both get to be the warm-up act for Lenny Kravitz and LeAnn Rimes and Darious Rucker, and all of the -- and Stevie Wonder. And we're looking forward to that entertainment.

But you know, I want to say just a brief word about what it's like to be out on the campaign trail. There are a lot of tough special interests who are out there fighting against us. Just last week, Charlton Heston made me the number one target of the gun lobby. (Applause.) Let me tell you, I wear that as a badge of honor. (Applause.) I'm glad that I cast the tie-breaking vote to close the gun show loophole. And I'm not surprised by Charlton Heston's attacks, either, because it was just weeks ago that their leader said that if Governor Bush won, they would be able to work right out of the Oval Office. And if I remember my Bible correctly, the last time that Moses listened to a bush, his people wandered in the desert for 40 years. (Applause.)

And so I'd like to say, Mr. Heston, if you're listening tonight, I extend my hand with its warm, live fingers, and I say to you, let's shake and at least agree to have mandatory child safety trigger locks on all of the guns that are sold in the United States so we can save lives. Let's have some common sense for a change and save some lives. (Applause.)

Now, the truth is that, thanks to President Clinton, America left the economic desert seven years ago. And everybody here remembers with great clarity what it was like when the people of our country had leadership that had no plan, no vision, no suggestions on how we could get out of the economic doldrums, how we could get away from those big deficits and start putting people back to work and getting our country on the right road again. I'm awful proud to have been part of a team that has completely changed all that.

We have the strongest economy in the history of the United States of America, thanks to you, the American people, under the leadership of President Bill Clinton, because of the common sense and good judgment that we have been able to embody in the laws and policies that we have. And now, the question is whether we will keep that prosperity going or whether we will go for a \$2-trillion scheme, coupled with a Social Security privatization plan that would cost another \$1 trillion. You take \$3 trillion out of our budgets over the next 10 years, you're going to see us go right back to the old economic doldrums of the past. You stick with me, I'll keep this prosperity going, we'll continue to balance the budget, pay down the debt every year and pay the debt completely off. (Applause.)

We'll reform Social Security the right way. We won't raise the retirement age. We'll give our seniors a prescription drug benefit -- (applause) -- we'll give the medical decisions back to the doctors and the nurses and take them away from the accountants for the HMOs and the insurance companies. (Applause.) We'll raise the minimum wage \$1 an hour. (Applause.) We'll extend the prosperity to all of those who need to share in the prosperity. (Applause.) We'll make sure everybody participates.

We'll bring our people together. (Applause.) We'll enforce the civil rights laws. We'll have affirmative action and a hate crimes law. (Applause.) We'll see our people lifted up, instead of left behind. But it's up to you. I need your help. We need to keep going. We need to build on the progress that we've had. (Applause.)

Together we can do it. We're here to make sure that we do. Let's win in November for the people of our country. God bless you. (Applause.)

END 9:32 P.M. EDT