

Bill Clinton Remarks 2001

MARY SULLIVAN: Please turn your attention to the screen for a very informative video.

PRESIDENT DONOHUE: Thank you, Brothers and Sisters. We were back watching that video, and President Clinton pointed out to me he started laughing with how young he looked back in 1992. He equally pointed out how young I looked back in 1992. But ladies and gentlemen, let me tell you, it has been 10 years, or just about 10 years, and never once in those 10 years have we ever doubted that the presidential candidate that we picked before anybody else in this country was William Jefferson Clinton. And I know there are a lot of Republicans and Democrats out there who fought like hell over the last eight years to make sure we had a friend to every working man and woman in this country in the White House, and that was under his leadership with Al Gore. And we thank you, Mr. President.

It is always interesting when you hear politicians, as we pointed out over the last 4 days, in times of crisis saying how valuable public employees really are. And as we said, its always interested to see how they treat us while they're saying that. We may have disagreed at times, but there was never a time that William Jefferson Clinton, our friend Bill, was not there to listen, to work and to make this country better for us, the working is men and women of this country.

And in our 91 years of proud service to the public of this state, and to this nation, we have never shined so brightly as the, day we picked our President, our speaker, Bill Clinton.

(Standing ovation).

PRESIDENT CLINTON: Thank you. Thank you very much. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you and good morning. It is wonderful to see you. Thank you, Danny and Mary, Barbara, Maureen, Fran, all the Regional Presidents that are up here. I did come back here basically to say thank you. I am grateful and I still have not forgotten. And I only wish that I still had a little power to help you because I'm very grateful. As I said in that film in December of 1991, when this union became the first to endorse me, and I think at the time-I was running -- I don't know -- somewhere between third and fifth in the New Hampshire primary, you sent people up there to campaign for me. Only my mother thought I could be elected President.

Hillary thought I had a shot, but -- I'm getting to that. She's doing great and she's doing a great job for you in the United States Senate. I'm also profoundly grateful that you stuck with me through eight years of ups and downs, and the tough decisions I had to make, and that you helped Hillary to be elected to the United States Senate. And I thank you for that. Today I want to talk about two things. First I want to briefly review the fact that you made a good decision because together we changed politics and life in America. And secondly, I'd like to talk a little bit about where we are now and where I think we ought to go. We believed in 1992 after having been told for years, and years, and years that government was a problem, that you were all bureaucrats, that we had to chose business over labor. We had to chose the economy over the environment. We had to make a bunch of choices. We didn't believe that. We thought you could be pro labor and pro business; that you could have a strong economy and a good environment. That you could be pro work and pro family. That you could be for diversity and community, and that if we grew the middle class we'd have more

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wealthy people and they'd do quite well if we took care of the middle class and let poor people work their way into it. That's what we believed. We thought government was part of the solution, not the problem, if we all did the right things. It turns out it worked. We have the lowest unemployment rate in 30 years, the lowest welfare roles in 32 years. The lowest crime rate in 27 years, the lows child poverty rate in 27 years, and the largest increase to college aid in 13 years, the largest increase in child health insurance in 35 years, the largest home ownership ever, and the lowest minority unemployment and poverty rates ever recorded. Along the way we paid down 500 billion dollars on the national debt; the first big reduction in 50 years. And that's one of the reasons right now we've got some money to take care of the problems we are presently facing.

And these things effected real people; 40 million people with more secure pensions, 35 million people taking advantage of the Family and Medical Leave Law, 22 and a half million people with new jobs, 1.6 million children in after school programs that weren't there before, 100,000 police, 600,000 people who couldn't get guns because they had a criminal or mental health history-saving 10 God knows how many lives, over a quarter of a million Americans serving their communities in Americorp. Real people. And I am grateful that you gave me the chance to work with you to achieve those results.

We also did it, and proved you could be for the labor movement. We tripled dislocated worker funding, protected pensions, came out against the efforts of the Republican Congress to promote company unions to repeal the prevailing wage, to weaken workplace safety rules, to pass so called paycheck protection and striker replacement laws. We gave you a strong and a positive role in collective bargaining. And it worked. It was good for the economy. I had hoped when I left office, and I still hope and believe that I left the country in good enough shape to deal with the big questions out there still facing our country. How to handle the retirement of the baby boomers? How to guarantee world class education to all of our people? How to extend health insurance to the millions of working families who still don't have it? But of course since September the 11th events have intervened. What happened at the World-Trade Center, and the Pentagon, and the crashing of the plane in Pennsylvania, the anthrax scare since, they have left our country more united than at any time since World War II, but deeply troubled about big questions. Hillary and I went to a school in Lower Manhattan the other day, and we met with children who had been literally blown out of their schools. There were two schools, a high school and a grade school that were destroyed, and the kids had to go somewhere else and double up for school.

So I had these nine and ten year old kids asking me these questions; same questions probably the adults ask. Why do they hate us so much? How did he get those people to commit suicide? What do we do now? And the question the mothers always ask me; is it going to be all right? Mothers all over America call me; people Hillary and I've known for years with little kids say, Bill, just tell me its going to be all right.

Well, I want to give you a few answers today, at least what I believe to be the case. First of all, it is going to be all right if we don't give into it. It is going to be all right. (Applause).

I want to make a few brief points about the terrorism issue, and I don't want to get into the tactical decisions. I think we all should be giving the President, and his team, and our allies public support, not public advice. Now, I've been second guessed in a crisis, and it is not very much fun. So let's just talk about this.

First of all, terrorism, the killing of innocent people, noncombatants for

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political, economic and religious reasons, is as old as combat. Its been around a long time. People from our culture are not blameless. In this country at one time innocent people were killed because they were black slaves and no one would hold them accountable. Innocent Native American were killed, and we're still paying the price of that. But we got beyond it, because we struggled, and we, worked. And that is the point I want to make in a minute.

Way back in the Crusades, in the First Crusades when the Christian European soldiers took Jerusalem they burned not a mosque, a synagogue with 300 Jews in it. And they killed every woman and child that was a Muslim on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. And I'm telling you we're still living with the consequences today in the Middle East. They still tell the story. The good news is that no terror campaign has ever worked. Standing on its own it has always boomeranged. It unites people just like we are.

The second thing I want to say is that throughout the history of combat any offensive strategy always works for a while, but defense by decent people always catches up. That's been the pattern throughout human history. Every since the first guy walked out of a cave with a club and then someone finally figured out if you stretch an animal skin over wood you could build a shield. So our defenses will get better, and they have to. And you'll be a part of that. Over our transportation networks, over our fundamental supplies like water, our defenses will get better. We will get better at tracking people who come into our country, and mean us harm, and finding them. We will get better, and our offensive capacity will get better in breaking these networks.

We have been working at this a long time. In my time there were planned attacks on the Holland Tunnel, on the Pope, on airplanes flying to the Philippines. Over-the Millennium weekend alone there was planned bombs in northeast, northwest of the United States, in Los Angeles Airport, the biggest hotel in Jordan, at a Christian site in the Holy Land all thwarted. We'll get better at this.

The third point I want to make is that as scary as this is, it is unlikely the 21st Century will be as bloody for your children as the 20th century was. In World War I 9 million people died, between the wars 20 million people died, in World War II over 20 million people died, after the war 20 million people died from corrupt governments, a million in Korea, a million in Vietnam, 700,000 a few years ago in Rwanda, a quarter of a million in Bosnia. Most of all these people were non-soldiers. What makes this scary is it is happening here at home, and it happens on television. We see it right away so we're all terrified. We know things we didn't use to know. Now, what I would like to explain to you is from my perspective why its happening here at home, why its inevitable that we are more vulnerable, and therefore, what I think we ought to do about it.

If I had asked you on September 10th what do you think the most important thing happening in the world today? The one factor that is most likely to shape the future; the day before the World Trade Center and Pentagon were hit? What do you think your answer would have been? Well, if you were a positive sort of 3 upbeat person who was doing well in the economy, you might have said well its the global economy because it has lifted more people out of poverty in the last 30 years than any time in history. And it has been great for America. Or you might have said, no it is the information technology revolution. That's making us all more productive. When I became President there were 50 sites on the worldwide web. When I left office eight years later there were 350 million. 30 times as much mail is delivered by e-mail than by the Postal Service everyday.

Or, you might have said no, it is going to be the scientific revolution. We've sequenced the human genome. Mothers will sometime soon in countries with good

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health systems come home from the hospital with new born babies with a life expectancy over 90 years. We are working on digital chips to put in spines to replicate damaged nerves so that people in wheelchairs can get up and walk. This is going to be unbelievable what will happen. Or, you might have said if you're into politics, no, its the growth of democracy and diversity. I had the honor of serving at the first time in history when more than half of the people in the world lived under governments that they chose through elections. And when most societies look around this room, we're growing more and more diverse racially and religiously.

On the other hand, if I'd asked you that question on September 10, and you were a pessimist, if you were what Hillary calls your "family's designated worrier." That's us; Ying and Yang. You might have said "no, you got this economy thing all wrong." Its working well for us, but half the people in the world are living on less than \$2 a day. Think about that the next time you buy a cup of coffee. Billions of people living on less than a dollar a day, billion and a half people with no clean water, or a billion people go to bed hungry every night.

Or, you might have said its these big environmental crises; the shortage of water, pollution of the oceans where our oxygen comes from, global warning. If the a climate warms for 50 years at the rate of the last ten we're going to lose 50 feet of Manhattan Island, the Florida Everglades, the Louisiana sugarcane fields, whole nations in the Pacific, and there'll be millions of food refugees created because places that could grow food won't be there any more and we'll have a lot more violence.

Or, you might have said if you're really worried about things that long before the environment gets us the health care crisis will. Country after country losing their health systems. Something we ought to remember in this country before we fail to support our public health network. And Aids which now claims 8 million infected and 22 million people killed, is projected to grow to a 100 million cases in only four years if we don't turn the trends around. That would make the biggest health problem since the plague killed a quarter of Europe 600 years almost -- 700 years ago.

And the fastest growing rates of Aids are not in Africa where two-thirds of the cases are. They're in the former Soviet Union, on Europe's back door, and the Caribbean on our front door, and India the biggest democracy in the world, and the Chinese just admitted they had twice as many cases as they had thought. And only 16% of the adults know how the disease is contracted and spread in China.

Or even on September 10th you might have said, if like me you'd been worrying about it for years, "no, I'm worried about the marriage of modern weapons of mass destruction to terrorism rooted in ancient religious, tribal, ethnic and racial hatreds."

Now, here's the thing I want all of you to try to get a grip on all of this. What are the four positive things and the four negative things I have said in common. The four positive things I mentioned were the global economy, technology, scientific advances, the growth of democracy and diversity. And the four negative things I mentioned were global poverty, the environment problems, health care problems especially Aids, and terrorism. What they all have in common is they reflect the fact that the world is more interdependent, and we are more related to people beyond our border than ever before. And September the 11th was the dark side of this age of interdependency. We have torn down walls, we have collapsed distances, we've spread information to people all over the world, and we've gotten all kinds of benefits from it. But we have not repealed human nature, solved all the problems, or eliminated all forces of destruction. Therefore, if you care about the benefits of openness you shoulder the vulnerabilities that come with it.

So what we have to do essentially is to construct a defense for the modern age, and we will do it. So again, I'll say what are we going to do now? First thing we've got to do is win the fight we are in. We are Americans. We need to stay together. We need to support the President, we need to support our allies. We'll win the fight we're in. That's what we should do. (Applause). We'll win that fight we are in.

The second thing we've got to do is improve our defenses. And I very much regret this debate that's going on down in Washington over the airport defenses. The Senate voted 100 to 0, all the Republicans and all the Democrats in an evenly divided Senate, voted 100 to 0 to federalize the airport inspection system. The House voted in a bitterly divided vote 218 to 214 not to do it. So now we're going to have a fight. Why not bend over backwards to do the best we can; if it doesn't work we can always change it. But we will have to do other things to improve. The President has asked for some money; maybe we ought to spend even more on this biological warfare issue. We started working on this years ago. Starting 10 years ago there was some worry that our soldiers in the Gulf War were being exposed to anthrax. And when I became President I was very concerned about it, and we got a lot of money devoted to try to build domestic defenses, to try to begin to build the stocks of vaccines and antibiotics, and to try to plan to develop rapidly antidotes for any kind of new biological agents that can be unleashed.

Look, I know, this is scary, but the main thing is getting the defenses right. If you look at how we've responded to anthrax, the people that get the medication quickly get well. So we have to keep working on that.

The second thing we need to do is to try to create a world where we've got more partners and fewer potential terrorists. For a relatively small amount of our national budget we could go a long way toward reducing global poverty, turning the Aids crisis around, and dealing with the other challenges I mentioned.- it doesn't cost a lot of money. For example there's a hundred million kids in the world today that never go to school. And a lot of these terrorists find those kids that wouldn't otherwise be in school and they put them in these schools where they indoctrinate them instead of educating them. We spent 300 million dollars in a 1.7 trillion dollar budget last year to provide a school meal; you only got the meal if you came to school to 9 million of those kids. You can feed 9 million kids a decent meal a day for 300 million dollars. And the results have been dramatic. In Brazil, its a fairly poor county; the poorest 30% of the mothers, not the fathers, the mothers get up to \$30 or \$40 a month from the government if they send all their kids to school. They get a little card; looks like credit card. They show up to the local lottery office, and if the teachers and the principles give them a certificate that their kids showed up 85 percent of the time they get a monthly payment. Guess what? 97% of their kids are in school. Only developing country in the world.

Now, you look at how much money this war is costing us now. How much money did the Gulf War cost? How much money did the conflict in Kosovo cost? And its a lot cheaper for America just to play its part to try to create more partners, educate these kids, roll back these problems. The other point I want to make is almost all these terrorists came from places that are both poor and not democracies. We take our democracy for granted all the time. I talked to somebody yesterday in New York. I got so mad I could spit. Said that he didn't think he'd vote in the Mayor's race because he wasn't excited by either one of them. I said "Let me tell you something; one of the reasons these people hit us is because we are a free county. We take for granted things that other people don't have. If they had a democracy they would not have terrorists, and you ought to show up and vote."

You know, even countries that claim to be our friends, as you know, you've seen this, they're sending mixed signals. Part of the reason is they're scared of dissent inside; scared because they have no way to handle it. It is no

accident that the most stable Muslim country in the inner Middle East is Jordan because 10 years ago the late King of Jordan, Hussein, got together with the all elements of society, including the fundamentalist Muslims, and said, "Look, I'll give you elections, I'll let you run for parliament, we'll have a real political system here. I will give up some of my power, but you have to give up the right to impose your will on other people if you can't win a fair fight in an election. So now the fundamentalists run for office in Jordan. They get elected, but then they get elected - they have to do what you do. They have to sit down with people that don't agree with them and make a deal. And once you get elected, they don't get to, you know, sort of make speeches about death to America. The mother's want to know yeah, that's fine but where is the school for my kids and the doctors? And I don't care about your speeches, if you don't deliver I will vote you out.

If you never let people take responsibility for their own lives and they never have to examine what they can do for themselves, because they never get to, it is kind of like raising kids and never letting them out of their rooms. When they are 21 they'll be like they were when they were 6 if you don't do that. It kind of maintains a state of political immaturity. So, America has to say look we don't want to impose our system on anybody, but if you don't let people vote and have a voice, then they can easily be convinced that their distress is caused by our successes no matter how ridiculous it might be. And then I think the last thing I would like to say is we've got to keep setting a good example here at home. The purpose of terror is to terrorize. I will say it again; no terrorist strategy has ever won a military victory. They want us to be scared; scared to come to the CSEA convention, scared to get on an airplane, scared to send our kids away to school, scared to invest in a new business, scared to expand the business. Scared. Scared. Scared. And they want us to be scared of each other. I met a man at the crisis center in Manhattan when I went down to visit with the victims, families. He was a really big guy, about this tall (indicating), and he had tears in his eyes. And I asked him if he'd lost anyone in his family, and he said not directly. He just came to give support. But he shook his head and said "President Clinton, I am an Egyptian Muslim American. And he said believe it or not I think I hate those people more than you do. But I'm so afraid my fellow Americans will never trust me again."

When the FBI put out a call for 200 Arab speaking people to work with them to fight this battle, there were 15,000 applications. So, we've got to strengthen the hand of the moderate Muslims even as we stand up against the fanatics.

And we have to keep doing a better job here at home. We've got to get over this economic crisis as quickly as we can. We have to support our leaders at the state and national level in doing that. I think Senator Schumer and Hillary have put together a very good plan for the economic revitalization of lower-Manhattan, and it deserves all our support. I think that we need to make sure that the 20 billion dollars that Congress has already given to New York is as well spent as possible, and that everywhere it is needed we invest it.

And I think that we need to say to the Congress, and I can say this now that I'm not a politician and I'm out here now making more than I'm worth, I do not need a tax cut. We should extend unemployment benefits and health care benefits to the working people of this country that need it. That's what we should do with it. That is the right thing to do with this stimulus package.

(Standing ovation).

We've got to keep the public services going. I hope you will be able to work that out. Look, I know money is tight and nothing good lasts forever. But we can't pack it in. Every time they get us to change something that is fundamentally good about our way of life, that's a victory. And every time we stand up and say no, that is good, that's a plus to our side. So that's what I wanted to tell you. We have to make our democracy work. We have to keep being

strong. Terrorism can not succeed unless the people who are terrorized are unwitting accomplices. We have to give them permission to win by how we change our lives. I'm not about to tell you there won't be another terrorist attack in America. What I want you to understand though is that we could not go out into a new world and claim all the benefits of openness without acquiring some greater vulnerability. That horrible things that happen always win in the beginning, but that the defenses of decent people always prevail in the end.

That it is highly unlikely that the 21st Century will be as bloody with the lives and loss of innocence as the 20th Century was. And that our basic job here is to make sure, number one, that people around the world know that we don't want anything for ourselves. We're not willing to help them if they don't work for themselves to get it.

And number 2, that we're still trying to make America a better place. I think you have done a lot to make America a better place, to make New York a better state. And -- (Applause). So when you go home today, I hope you will have more energy to fight for the things you believe in. But keep in mind how you say it, and what you say because what we're really trying to do is to prove that our way of life is better.

When you strip a way all the veneer of all this fight we've been in, this is about two very different views of everything we care about. We believe what we have in common is more important; they believe that our differences are more important. They believe they have the truth, the whole truth; that it has not changed one wit in 1400 years and that we just need to drive people back to it. We believe human beings, whether they are Christians, or Jews, or Buddhists, or Hindus, or Muslims, or whatever are limited imperfect people who can never have the whole truth. Because they believe they have the truth they think anybody that doesn't share it, whether it is a Muslim heretic or a non-Muslim infidel, has a life of no value and we're all legitimate targets. Even a six year old girl that went to work with her mother at the World Trade Center September 11th. Since we believe none of us have the truth, and all need each other, and we're all learning from each other, we think everybody's life has value. We are on a journey that everybody ought to be entitled to take. They believe a community is one -- you've seen it on television. Everybody looks alike, dresses alike, thinks alike, and behaves alike. And if they don't, then men go out and beat women with sticks in public, they paint their windows black so they can't look outside, and once in a while they shoot them because they are wandering around in a way that the truth doesn't permit.

We believe everybody can be part of our community who accepts the rules of the game; everybody counts, everybody has a role to play. We all do better when we work together. This is the age old battle of humanity. It has been America's battle. We fought through slavery, and the persecution of the Native Americans, through segregation through the Klu Klux Klan, through dealing with the challenge of accepting new immigrants. We still have the occasional hate crime in America. We are not perfect, but we have been making progress because we don't think we have the truth. We think we're on a journey to it because we think other people count just as much as we do and because we think everybody can be a part of our community.

Now that's what your union represents; the public, all the public. That what we have in common is more important than our differences. History is on our side, and if we don't give into it we are going to win. So I want you to take the passion you brought to our campaign in 1992, that brought America back from the economic doldrums, from social division, and gave us a whole new future, and apply it to this present challenge.

I wish our country could have avoided it, but we couldn't claim all the benefits of this new world without taking some of the problems as well.. And we will get through them just like America has gotten through everything else, not primarily because of the wisdom of people like me that have been in leadership

capacity but because of the values, and the discipline, and the character, and the strength of the ordinary American. Don't give in. Just rear back and go on, and everything's going to be fine.

Thank you, and God Bless You.

(Applause) (Standing ovation).

PRESIDENT DONOHUE: Mr. President, on behalf of your friends in CSEA we'd like to give you a few gifts.

PRESIDENT CLINTON: I'll put that up in my office today.

PRESIDENT DONOHUE: We understand Hillary may try to steal it from you, but she can get her own when she comes. Ladies and gentlemen, our friend, our President, Bill Clinton.

MARY SULLIVAN: New Business.

ROBERT MOOTRY: Local 403, Buffalo Psychiatric. I make a motion to adjourn.

MARY SULLIVAN: So ordered. We are adjourned.

(Whereupon, the convention was ended)