

The Congresswoman was trying to delicately sidestep the fact that I am the oldest of the baby boomers, but alas, it's true. [Laughter] And when our crowd retires, if we don't now—now—prepare with necessary, prudent reforms in Social Security and Medicare, we will put ourselves in the position of either sacrificing two of the most important accomplishments that have relieved the anxiety from old age and made the elderly people less poor than the rest of us for the first time in history—two fabulous accomplishments—or in order to keep them just like they are, if we're unwilling to change them, we'll have to put a big old tax on our kids that aren't fair and make it harder for them to support their grandchildren. Why? Because there's more of us than there are of them.

This is not a complicated deal. And there's about an 18-year bulge there that we have to get through, after which, because of the childrearing habits of our own children and because of immigration, things will kind of settle out again.

It is irresponsible—I don't know anyone in my generation, anybody in the baby boom generation, who really wants to saddle our kids with an unsustainable economic burden to take care of us in our old age. So we're going to have to make some prudent changes. If we do it now, we're open about it, we don't try to play politics with it, can we do it? We can reduce it nearly to an accounting problem. We'll just do what makes sense and do the commonsense thing and go on. But we have to do it.

We've got to figure a way to stop this climate change, this global warming. Can we do it without wrecking the economy? Of course we can. Look at all the announcements Detroit has been making just in the last few days about new cars. Of course we can.

We've got mountains of natural gas in this country we haven't even begun to use. We stopped using it 20 years ago because we thought we were running out of it. Now we know it's a good thing we didn't use it; now, we need to use it now to stop the climate from warming up too much. We have major challenges. There's another 10 I could give you.

The point I'm making is the country is in good shape now, and we can be glad about that. But when you're doing well the last thing you should do in a time of change is to sit on your laurels. When you're doing well you should say, "I have been given this opportunity

to think long-term about the problem, to think about my children, to think about my grandchildren."

In Washington, some people have criticized me for trying to have this national year—have a dialog on race, because they say we don't have any riots in the cities. My view is, if I don't ever want any more riots in the cities and I don't like what I see in the problems from Northern Ireland to the Middle East to the tribal wars in Africa to Bosnia, why don't we try to do something about it while we're all getting along more or less? I think that's a pretty good idea.

I say that because ideas have consequences. I think the approach that Sheila Jackson Lee embodies—that you can be pro-business and pro-labor; that you can have compassion for people who deserve and need help and still be fiscally responsible; that you can be tough on crime but still smart enough to realize the best approach is to keep kids out of trouble in the first place; that you can grow the economy and preserve the environment; that you can reduce the size of Government and the burden of bureaucracy and still increase your investment in education and the future and science and technology—in other words, a modern, balanced, commonsense, progressive approach—it seems to me that that is what we need for quite a long while to come in the United States, not because things aren't doing well now, not because I'm not grateful, but because I don't think we're anywhere near finishing the transition we have to make as a country if we really want 21st century America to be a place where every single child can live up to his or her God-given capacities if they're responsible enough to do it, where we know we're going to be one America celebrating our diversity but bound together by things that are more important, and where we're still the world's leading force for peace and freedom and prosperity. And I don't think you think it either.

I think every one of you, if you'd be really honest, would say, "I'm really glad we're doing well, but do we have challenges over the long run? You bet we do. It matters. Ideas have consequences. The approach you take matters." This woman has made a positive contribution to the direction of America, and I believe what we're doing needs to continue beyond the service that I can render as President. I believe it needs to continue well into the next century.