

briefly, why I hope you will—if somebody asked you tomorrow why did you come, apart from you wanted to get a picture or you wanted to say something to me about a particular issue, Cyprus or something else—I’ll say more about that in a minute. I just want you to remember, 7 years ago, when I ran for President in 1992, we had economic distress, social division, political conflict, and Government was discredited.

And the only reason I ran—I was actually very happy at home in my job, raising my daughter, with my friends—some of whom have become your friends, some of you, in the last 7 years. But it really bothered me because I knew this was a great country that had more strengths and more potential for the 21st century than at any time in our history. And I felt we had an obligation to the rest of the world because this is the only place that has the kind of economic strength we have and political strength, and also we have people from everywhere else on Earth living in America. We have people from everywhere else on Earth, nearly, in this room tonight. [Laughter] And that’s very important.

So, anyway, we set about our work. And the reason this is so important is now the American people have to decide whether to ratify the approach that has had such a large role in producing the last 7 years, or take a different approach.

John talked about we’ve gone from a big deficit to a big surplus. We’ve got the first back-to-back budget surpluses in 42 years, and in the last 2 days we actually bought in Government debt before it was due, for the first time in the history of the United States. We’re going to get this country out of debt.

And all of you know we’ve got the lowest unemployment rate in 30 years and the longest—in just a few weeks, we’ll have the longest economic expansion in the history of America, including the times we were fully mobilized for war. And I’m grateful for that. And I’m grateful for the fact that we have the lowest welfare rolls in 32 years and the lowest murder rate in 30 years and all of those things.

But what I want to say to you is, elections and public work are just like your work: It’s really always about tomorrow. And I appreciate what John said about the job that we’ve done. But I never will forget when I was thinking about running for a fifth term as Governor—we used to have 2-year terms, and then we

went to 4-year terms—I went out to the State Fair. And this old man in overalls came up to me and said, “Are you going to run for another term?” And I said, “Well, I don’t know. If I run, will you vote for me?” He said, “I guess so. I always have.” [Laughter] I’d been in 10 years. And I said, “Well, aren’t you sick of me after all these years?” He said, “No, I’m not, but nearly everyone else I know is.” [Laughter] So I got my feelings hurt. I said, “Well, don’t you think I’ve done a good job?” He said, “Yeah, but that’s what I hired you to do.” [Laughter] He said, “You drew a check every 2 weeks, didn’t you?” It was a very interesting encounter.

So every time we come around to a decision, we always have to think about the future. And the only thing I want you to think about is this. This is the only time in my lifetime when we have had at the same time dramatic economic progress, dramatic decline in our social problems, the absence of an internal crisis, and the absence of an external threat to our existence. We have never had all those four conditions at one time. Therefore, we have the opportunity of a lifetime to chart the future of our dreams for our children here at home and to be the world’s most responsible nation abroad.

A lot of you came up to me; some talked about the Middle East peace process, which I’m heavily involved in. I hope and pray we can reach an agreement between Syria and Lebanon and the Palestinians in Israel in the next several weeks. And several of you talked to me about how we’ve made some progress in repairing the breach between Turkey and Greece, but we haven’t done enough on Cyprus. You think about it: There’s no other place in the world where people would come and talk to the head of a country and talk about these things. And it’s a great privilege to be an American, to live in a country where we have people from everywhere and where our country has the opportunity and the responsibility to try to move the world toward greater harmony, to go beyond the racial and ethnic and religious conflicts that have caused so much turmoil in the world. And I think that’s important.

We have an opportunity to do the same thing here at home. We have an opportunity now—the reason I’m here today in New York is I came to the Wall Street Project, sponsored by Jesse Jackson, Sandy Weill, and Dick Grasso—now, that’s an interesting trio. [Laughter] And