



**U.S. Conference of Mayors Annual Meeting, Seattle
June 12, 2000**

Vice President Gore

Thank you thank you very much.

It's a great honor and pleasure to be able to join you today. And Mayor Wellington Webb thank you for your friendship to me -- you and Wilma have been wonderful friends of longstanding to Tipper and me. And I also want to thank you for being such a powerful voice to Denver and all American cities and I know that all of you feel the same way. There have been a lot of people who have headed up this organization. I don't know of anybody who's done a better job of bringing all of the cities together. I'd like to commend Mayor Wellington Webb. He's done a tremendous job. I want to thank, congratulate Brent Coles on his upcoming tenure. I want to acknowledge my friend Paul Schell and to thank you. In the words of so many here who have said what a wonderful host city Seattle has been for this meeting. I know everyone appreciates that.

Marc Morial, thank you for your friendship to me. I always gain weight in Marc's city. In any case, my friend Victor Ashe, from Knoxville, Tennessee is a great friend. We have worked together across party lines for many years now. And Victor is a valued friend. And Tom Cochran, the continuity and stamina, the leadership is much appreciated by all.

Let me say to all of you,. its great to be back with the nation's mayors. I feel -- I can't claim to be a mayor-- but I feel like I'm a part of this group because I have met with so many of you so often. I'm not going to make any comment on Wellington's little joke there. I will say it's not so funny around the White House. But seriously, we have met together so many times, I feel as if I know many of your cities extremely well and it has truly been a privilege to be able to work with you. I know a lot of your council chairs and your neighborhood organizations. It is an interesting challenge that you have-- you work right where the rubber meets the road - literally. I'd like to believe that one of the reasons why we have had the kind of economic success we've had in these last eight years is because we have been listening to you and we have been responding to you and we've formed a closer new kind of partnership with America's cities that doesn't rely on sending everything through the states, to the cities. We like to hear directly from

the cities and we like to work directly with the cities. The last time I spoke to this conference, if memory serves correctly, was just two days before I formally announced my candidacy for president. A lot has changed in my life since last summer. I faced a lot of long days when I have had to dig deep on too little sleep to face a tough new challenge. And then there are the days when I am not babysitting my new grandson. Lets face it, a presidential campaign is nothing compared to those 4 a.m. feedings. I haven't had many of them but when we get the privilege of taking care of our grandson, we really have a great time. I know that there are some other grandparents here, my grandson was born on the fourth of July; he has his first birthday coming up. And incidentally, Tipper and I just celebrated our thirtieth wedding anniversary and passed a milestone there. We enjoyed it and celebrated.

And I feel like we've passed a milestone for America's cities; because America's cities have really been coming back strong. I think this new partnership I referred to is part of it. I think the extraordinary quality of the leadership that America's cities enjoys today is a part of it. All of us stand on the shoulders of those who came before us. And we've been, all of us trying to put the lessons of the past to good use. And there's a pretty strong shared set of beliefs in this room about what works and what doesn't work and all of it works better when we've got a strong economy. And one of the reasons why America's cities are back is because America's back. And our economy has turned around. We've turned the biggest deficits into the biggest surpluses. Instead of a tripled dip recession, we've seen a tripling of the stock market. Instead of high unemployment, we've seen the lowest African American unemployment, the lowest Latino unemployment, both in all of history. Some of the lowest unemployment generally in all of history. We've got 21 million new jobs and officially as of two months ago the strongest economy in the entire 211-year history of the United States. And that's making a difference.

That makes a difference and our metro economies are clearly the engines of that growth. When I say America's back because cities are back and vice versa, I'm really referring to the fact that Metro economies have accounted for as much as 90 percent of America's economic growth since 1993. I believe that our biggest challenge today is how we produce progress and prosperity. How do we keep this economic boom going and reach out to make sure no one is left behind. That's clearly the biggest challenge. And in order to solve that challenge we've got to make some very important economic choices and some important policy choices. I'm going to be making a series of speeches next week about progress and prosperity to lay out these big choices that I think we have to make. And many of them, In fact most of them ought to be based on a bipartisan basis because we've never had a challenge like this. Big surpluses stretching out as far as we can see. But there's an illusion that some people fall prey to, fall victim to that somehow the choices concerning the surplus are not as important as choices that we make concerning the deficit. Somehow the danger to the economy of missteps, in squandering of surplus, or mishandling of surplus is less

than the danger that was faced in the decisions concerning the deficit. I say that's an illusion because both sets of decisions determine whether we enjoy progress and prosperity in the future. I believe for example that we, having started to pay down the debt, we should continue to pay down the debt. In the global economy that we face today, when a nation builds confidence in its economic decision-making, investment capital flows toward it. Inflation is lower than it would otherwise be. Economic growth is higher. You've heard about the vicious circle when things start going wrong and everything else starts going wrong. Well now we're in what they call a virtuous circle. Things are going right, leading to other things going right. We want to keep that going. And one of the key factors is keeping the confidence level in our economic stewardship high. Just like cities compete to convince would-be employers and young couples that you want to move to your cities. You try to convince them that your city's on the move, and you've got your act together and your plan is sound. And it all makes sense and you've thought it through. Well, the USA benefits in the world if we have that same impression and we do have that reputation today. But the way we handle the surplus will determine whether or not we keep that image around the world. And whether or not we continue to enjoy the advantages that come with the common accepted assumption that we have our act together.

Having dealt with the deficit, I think we should now deal the so-called entitlement programs. And I think we should start by doing for Medicare what we have already done for Social Security. I think its time to take the Medicare trust fund out of the rest of the budget, put it in a lockbox and protect it from being used for anything except for what it was collected to be used for. I think that will help us pay down the debt quicker, it will insulate that program against political poaching to use it for spending, or tax cuts when actually that money is needed to keep Medicare sound. After all, the baby boom generation is getting ready to retire in 15 years and both Social Security and Medicare must be reformed, their lives extended and both must be handled in a responsible way. In all these decisions, we have to remember the old parable about the golden goose. The golden goose, if you get a golden goose its a great thing to have. But there's one great mistake that you want to avoid, you don't want to kill that golden goose. Thank you, thank you. I've been needing an amen corner. I'm happy I found one here, with the mayors. If we make the wrong decisions on the surplus and undermine that confidence that is so essential to our economic success, we could kill the golden goose. We could end up damaging our prosperity and progress. So everything I say here today, I want you to take in that context, because all the decisions will be easier if we can keep this economy growing strongly and make sure everyone participates in that.

Now, I mentioned the fact that I have tried to form a partnership with many of you. I believe that one of the challenges that we face in this first decade of the new era is to tighten that partnership so that the problems can be solved as efficiently as possible. You do work right where the problems are first seen and where they can most effectively be addressed. And we've got some new tools at

our disposal. Last week, I made a speech about e-government how we can move government services onto the internet and vastly improve the quality of services while reducing the costs at the same time. A citizen, a resident of this country that contacts the government should not have to care what dept or agency or office has jurisdiction over the problem that has to be solved. It ought to be handled seamlessly, very efficiently and well. Now, if we create that vision the way many businesses have already done, what that means is that the partnership between the federal government and cities and states too and counties too is going to have to be much more tightly interwoven because the truth is a citizen with a problem, doesn't really care much what level of government has responsibility for solving that problem, they just want the problem solved. And they have a right to expect the highest quality of service. And let me tell you this that I think that the best thing we can do for our democracy is to greatly improve the quality of the services delivered. I've been in charge of this "Reinventing Government" project, often called "Rego," that's Gore spelled sideways, I've worked very hard on that program. But the next phase of reinventing or streamlining government has to include a much closer working relationship with cities.

Now I have come to believe as a result of the partnership that I have enjoyed with so many of you that just as we need to break down the barriers between different departments and agencies and offices, just as we need to breakdown the barriers between different levels of government, we also need to stop separating our challenges into completely different policy areas and start seeing all the interrelationship the way many of you do. You've taught me this lesson. I've seen how you do it. What do you do if you want to bring back a part of your city that's suffering, that has a lot of boarded up windows and doors, no jobs, a lot of pollution, a lot of crime. What do you do? Is there one thing? No you have to do a lot of things simultaneously. And a lot of times people who are communicating with voters will pick out a very simple prescription, and put it out there and this is what I'm proposing and it sounds good. But the reality of the challenge is that we've got to deal with cities as living and breathing entities. We've got to see neighborhoods as living areas that need to be nurtured and need to have their problems solved. Ill give you an example: If you want to bring back that area that I talked about you've got to find a way bring families with children back into that area, that means you've got to have housing, it means you've got to have lower crime rates, it means you've got to have community police and you've got to get the drug pushers off of the sidewalks and the streets. It means that you've got to clean up the brownfields. It means you have to have a clean enough environment so that the families feel safe there. It means you've got have schools that work so they don't feel like they are sacrificing their children's future by moving back into that neighborhood and bringing that neighborhood back to life. It means that you've got to have a transportation grid that allows the breadwinners in that family to get to and from work without making three or four bus transfers. It means that you have to have jobs nearby and businesses to produce those jobs and facilities for encouraging and

capitalizing entrepreneurs because that the place where you are going to create the most jobs in that community. It means that you have to pay attention to the causes of all those problems.

Lets start with crime. I believe that we need to break through the impasse that we've had in America and finally enact some commonsense restrictions to get guns out of the hands of people who shouldn't have guns--the children, the criminals, those who are unstable. I came from an event earlier where somebody talked about Charlton Heston, he proclaimed me the number one enemy. And I said it didn't surprise me because he had said a few weeks earlier that if somebody else won the race, he'd be working right inside the White House. And I hope the Republicans will forgive this comment, but I caution Mr. Heston about that because the last time Moses listened to a bush, his people wandered in the wilderness for 4 years. Don't count on it. But we've got a flood of guns -- we need mandatory child safety trigger locks, we need to restore the waiting period, we need to close the gun show loophole. This is part of making communities more livable. The COPS program has been a tremendous benefit to many of you here. How many of you here have gotten extra community police officers on the streets of your cities because of the COPS program? And its made a difference, hasn't it? A hundred thousand new police officers almost the entire total out there now. A hundred thousand new community police officers have made a huge difference not only because of the new increased person power but also because of the new philosophy they brought with them: to get out of the squad cars and walk on the sidewalks and form human relationships with the community leaders in each neighborhood, collect intelligence from them openly about what's going on in the community. Invite them to help restore order to the community. Now are we going to continue to move forward on that program or not? I think that we should. I think that we ought to have another 50,000 on top of the ones that we already have out there. I think we need to keep going in that direction.

And in order to improve the schools, is it a good idea to choose this moment to drain money away from the public schools in the form of private school vouchers? The reason I think that's not a good idea is because we have the largest generation of students in history. The 18 and under generation is now much larger than the baby boom ever was, and they're going to school at a time when learning is far more important. It's always been important but its more important now because our economy is moving more and more toward information. And information means training your mind and that means education. Sixty percent of the businesses in America have good, high-paying jobs right now that are open that they cant fill, because they cant find enough people that have the education and skills they need. So it's a national priority. More children than ever need it, its more important to the economy than its ever been and many of your cities find it harder to pass bond issues for schools because the percentage of the voting population made up of parents with children is the smallest its ever been, due to the fact that our population is aging.

And many of you know full well because of reasons rooted deeply in human nature, that parents of school aged children represent the group that you've got to go to and mobilize and turn out, in order to get funding for your schools. For all those reasons, I think that should be a national priority. And that is why I have said all over this country that in my opinion the number one need for new investment in the future is to bring about not gradual but revolutionary improvements in our public schools, and start treating teachers like the professionals that they are, reduce the class size, have high standards, new accountability, along with the new resources. I also think that we need a nationwide program to help form and fund public-private partnerships to expand after school programs all over the United States. That vulnerable period of time has to be filled constructively. You know in your own cities, most of you, that the most common time for youth violence or crime is between 3 and 7 on a weekday afternoon. Its also the most common time for an unwanted teen pregnancy, for first experimentation with drugs, alcohol, tobacco. It is a time when parents are often still at work. The after school athletics or other programs no longer are available in many schools so the children are left to themselves. Parents who have been under pressure to balance work and family for so long, see their children reach adolescence and watch them exercise a little more autonomy and just a smattering of judgement and they try to escape from the pressure thy felt for so long by saying 'well, they're on their own now. We can afford to let them look after themselves'. But the truth is that's the worse time to make that decision. The truth is they need more time and attention then. The truth is that all of our communities and our entire country has to help parents and families do a better job of finding the quality and quantity of time needed to raise these children and give them the values they need to live good productive lives. After school is part of it. Extracurricular activities at school are part of it. The boys' clubs and girls' clubs and YMCA and YWCA. I've been to many of your cities and seen some of these community organizations heroically filling that gap. But typically what happens is that a few motivated people, and all of you know who they are in your cities, will work tirelessly to raise money from private sources and some from public sources and stitch together a good after school program up and running and everybody's proud of it and what you see is less than 10 percent of the children who need to be in that program are able to join that program because those privately led coalitions usually do not have the capacity or access to the resources to put in place a citywide program, or countywide program. This is a national priority. We ought to make it easier for you to do what some have you have led in doing. We have to understand also that families represent the key building block for healthy communities and whenever we relate to families, whether as individuals or city governments, or federal governments, we have to appreciate the interrelationships and we've got to understand the challenges that they are facing. Health care is one of them. There are lots of families in your cities that completely map out their daily lives on who's going to be the caregiver that day. I think its time to have some dramatic changes in our health care system. I think we ought to make a commitment to give high quality, affordable health care to every single child in America by the end of the next four

year period. And use that as the first step toward universal health care. I think by all means, we need to give our seniors financial help in purchasing prescription drugs, and we need to give the medical decisions back to the doctors and nurses, and take them away from the accountants for the insurance companies and the HMO's. We need to include mental health, on the basis of parity out of respect to those families.

We also need to recognize that this neighborhood that we are trying to bring back from life, has some vacant lots that have some environmental problems associated with them and they have become an eyesore over the last couple of years. People walk past them and they don't even notice them anymore but investors notice them, and they steer away from neighborhoods where those eyesores are located. They don't want to incur the liabilities. They don't know what may be involved there. Generally, they are in locations that would otherwise be financially attractive and profitable so we need to greatly expand the very successful pioneering program to reclaim brownfields by establishing certain standards that are reliably enforced for cleanup, help in cleaning up the pollution problems that exist and then give tax credits for the speedy development of those brownfields. Because what happens is that all of a sudden, an eyesore that has pushed investors away becomes an attractive magnet, drawing more investment into the community. It just flips around and instead of a negative becomes a positive. Many of you have success stories that you have shared with me about how important this particular program is.

I think that we also have to pay close attention to the sources of capital that are essential for continued economic prosperity. I strongly support the Community Reinvestment Act, the CDFI, and an increase in the minimum wage. And I think its time for a third round of empowerment zones. I'm glad that we were able to get the legislation improved and we need to fight for the resources to make sure that more communities are able to benefit from being empowerment zones, and enterprise communities and champion communities and that all of them are livable communities.

Now finally, one of the biggest challenges we face, most of all in cities, but all throughout our country is the challenge of bringing our people together, across the boundaries that have too long been used to divide us. Some make the mistake in assessing the great progress we've made in race relations, combating discrimination on the basis of religion or ethnicity. And they believe that this progress has been so great as to justify a slowing down, or even an end to the extra efforts they had underway to try to deal with it. Not me, I don't feel that way. I think that anyone who looks at America in the year 2000 and sees a colorblind nation is just not looking at the same country that we live in. Yes we've made progress and yes we're proud of it. But let me share one fact with you that illustrates for me the remaining challenge. Even though high school completion rates between blacks and whites are now almost equal -- although with Hispanics there is still a major challenge there-- even though the wage gap has narrowed.

If you look at family wealth, you see an interesting story. The average family wealth for an African American family is 11 percent the average family wealth of a majority family. The figures for Latino families are roughly the same. The reason that's true is because family wealth is a category that collects the accumulated impact of many generations of deprived opportunity. Discrimination fifty years ago, or 100 years ago can have a profound impact on the accumulated wealth or savings of a family in this generation. The next Thomas Edison, or Marie Curie may well be in a poor neighborhood, in a minority family. And if that young person graduates and having had the opportunity to reach out for his or her potential and has an idea that may turn into a business that creates jobs in the community and throughout the country. If that person happens to be in a majority family, the first step in forming a new business is to pick up the telephone and call a relative, and get the nest egg started and get the investment started. But that's not possible if the individual is in a poor family where that's not an option, and the investment isn't made and the idea is never taken seriously and the dream is never fulfilled. Who's hurt? That individual surely. Who else? All of us. We have an interest in our nation in making sure all of the talents of all of our people have an opportunity to be expressed and they manifest in creating businesses and jobs and new ventures that add to the success of our country. It happens in cities. Your leadership throughout America has been extremely important in breaking down those barriers. But I believe that we need that kind of leadership nationally. And I believe that our destiny as a nation is indeed to form a more perfect union. To rekindle the American spirit. To unlock the potential of all our people and to make it more possible for our people to reach their dreams. I am very proud to have the opportunity and to be inspired by what you do, each and every day. And I'm here to tell you I am optimistic about America's future and I know in my heart that by working together we can make this new era, the first decade of this new century, the best time in all of American history for all of America's cities.

Thank you very much for having me here today.