

# Remarks at the Republican Governors Club Annual Dinner

**October 15, 1987**

It's a great honor to be with you tonight. Let me just begin by expressing special thanks to Governors Tom Kean and Mike Castle, chairman and vice chairman of the RGA [Republican Governors Association], John Rollins, the finance chairman and vice chairman of the -- or Glen Holden, I should say, who's exceptional efforts have helped to make this evening a success. Thank you all for being so generous. And of course, I must also recognize our national chairman, Frank Fahrenkopf, who is here.

You know, whenever I'm asked to speak at a dinner, I get a little self-conscious about the length of a speech. And this is really inappropriate, but I'm going to tell it anyway. I hope you haven't heard it before, because usually I'm an after-dinner speaker instead of a before-dinner speaker.

But the joke that I was going to tell you was a little story that took place in ancient Rome at the Coliseum. A little band of Christians out there in the sand on the floor of the Coliseum, crowd up there in the seats, and then they were going to turn the lions loose on them. And they did. And the lions came roaring out and charging down on this little huddled mass of people. And one of them stepped forward and said a few quiet words, and the lion stopped and laid down. Well, the crowd was enraged that they weren't going to get the show that they'd expected. Caesar was so mad that he had them bring the man to him, and he said, "What did you say that made the lions act like that?" He said, "I just told them that after they ate there would be speeches." [Laughter]

But it's wonderful to be here. As one chief executive among many, I feel right at home. I've always said one of the greatest strengths of America is the diversity of our Federal system. And you can see it represented here this evening. As we've begun to loosen the bonds of centralized control, the States have shot forward, often showing Federal Government the way.

The American people now look to the Republican Party as the party of new ideas. And it's Republican Governors who are out front, taking risks, breaking new ground, putting those new ideas into practice -- everything from enterprise zones to welfare reform. Yes, we thought of the enterprise zone. We haven't been able to get it through the Congress. But I don't know how many States now around the country have enterprise zones, and they're flourishing and succeeding in their mission. There's one idea many States have implemented that I especially wish the Federal Government would cotton to: Isn't it about time that Washington followed the lead of the States and passed a constitutional amendment to balance the budget? [Applause] And while they're at it, they might give the President what 43 Governors have: the line-item veto.

I remember one new idea I had when I was Governor. It taught me a lot about leadership and its limits. When I first came into the Governor's mansion, I thought it would be a great way to improve efficiency if I asked everybody to work a few extra days a month -- on Saturday. I can't claim a lot of success with that one.

But the best thing about this dinner is seeing how the ranks of Republican Governors have grown since last year. We're talking about a 50-percent increase -- from 16 to 24 Governors. Now, that's progress. And we're looking to add to that number in the elections this year, with Bob Livingston running in Louisiana, Jack Reed in Mississippi, and John Harper in Kentucky. But the critical test will come in 1988. We have 12 gubernatorial races that year. Of these, 8 are seats that we have to hold on to and 4 then that we have to win.

Few races could be more important, few campaigns more crucial, to the future of our country. What happens in those elections will have repercussions that extend far beyond the State capitals and far beyond State lines -- all the way, in fact, to Washington, DC, and the House of Representatives on Capitol Hill. That's because reapportionment comes up in 1991. That's when the congressional districts will be redrawn. And in all too many cases, having a Republican Governor is the only shot we have at getting a fair deal. And that's all we're asking for: an end to the antidemocratic and un-American practice of gerrymandering congressional districts.

In 1984 there were 397 congressional races contested by both parties. In the races, Republicans won half a million more votes than the Democrats, but the Democratic Party won 31 more seats. In California, one of the worst cases of gerrymandering in the country, Republicans received a majority of votes in congressional races, but the Democrats won 60 percent more races. The fact is gerrymandering has become a national scandal. The Democratic-controlled State legislatures have so rigged the electoral process that the will of the people cannot be heard. They vote Republican but elect Democrats.

A look at the district lines shows how corrupt the whole process has become. The congressional map is a horror show of grotesque, contorted shapes. Districts jump back and forth over mountain ranges, cross large bodies of water, send out little tentacles to absorb special communities and ensure safe seats. One Democratic Congressman who helped engineer the gerrymandering of California once described the district lines there as his contribution to modern art. [Laughter] But it isn't just the district lines the Democrats have bent out of shape: it's the American values of fairplay and decency. And it's time we stopped them.

Frank Fahrenkopf and the Republican Party have challenged the Democrats' gerrymandering in court, but ultimately it's in the State legislatures that the battle for fairness must be won. And that's why we need more Republican Governors to oversee the process and why Republicans have to campaign with all heart and soul for Republican State legislative candidates.

I promise you this: As far as the President of the United States is concerned, he's not going to be sitting around the Rose Garden in 1988. I'm going to be out on the campaign trail, telling the American people the truth about how the electoral process has been twisted and distorted, that it's time to give the votes back to the people. And I'm going to be telling them, in the name of the American system and in the name of fairplay: Vote Republican in 1988.

The fact is democratic gerrymandering is just one symptom of a larger problem. We've seen a dimension of this problem this last month on the Hill during the debate over the confirmation of Judge Bork to the Supreme Court. Debate -- that's a polite word for what's been going on. During the hearings, Attorney General William French Smith spoke for many of us when he expressed

his shock and dismay. He said: "I have never seen such misrepresentation, such distortion, and such outright lying. There are people in very important positions in this government who are lying to the American public. I've never seen anything like it, and I hope I never see anything like it again." That's a pretty severe indictment. But former Attorney General William French Smith isn't alone in his opinion. One of the most respected, honorable men in this nation, Chief Justice Warren Burger, echoed this when he accused the opposition to Judge Bork of disinformation.

Judge Bork's nomination will soon be before the full Senate. The purpose of Senate debate is to allow all sides to be heard. Honorable men and women should not be afraid to change their minds if they're based on that debate. There's a crucial principle at stake here. If the campaign of distortion and disinformation used by his opponents is allowed to succeed, it will represent more than a temporary setback for one candidate: It will call into question the idea of free, fair, and civil exchange. And it will mean that on critical issues, like the fight against crime and drugs and keeping those who are unelected from unconstitutionally taking power into their own hands -- each of us and each of our children will be the losers.

I do not believe that nominees to the Supreme Court should have to pass litmus tests administered by single-interest lobbies. Such tactics are better suited for campaigns and elections than for Supreme Court nominations. As I said in my TV address yesterday: Our agenda is quite simple -- to appoint judges who don't confuse the criminals with the victims and who believe the courts should interpret the law, not make it. That starts with the Supreme Court. It takes leadership from the Supreme Court to help shape the attitudes of the courts in our land and to make sure that principles of law are based on the Constitution. This is the standard to judge those who seek to serve on the courts -- qualifications, not distortions; judicial temperament, not campaign disinformation.

As Judge Bork said last Friday, and I quote him: "The process of confirming Justices for our nation's highest court has been transformed in a way that should not and, indeed, must not be permitted to occur again." Yes, it's right to differ. And, yes, people can have different opinions. But when have we ever seen an instance in which the confirmation of a Justice to the Supreme Court has resulted in private interest groups raising money and putting on television ads and campaigns as if they were running an election -- and campaigns based on distortion -- when the men and women of the Senate are supposed to sit, go over the qualifications of the individual that has been appointed, and make their decision on whether they believe those qualifications suit him for the position. Well, that's what we have to get back to.

When the message gets out, I believe the American people will reject the politicization of our judiciary. When the people begin to hear the truth, they will demand an independent judiciary, free from high pressure politics and founded on the principle of judicial restraint. And Judge Bork is a man of courage. He's decided to push forward, to take the vote on his confirmation to the full Senate. And he's going forward because he knows that the wrong done him is nothing compared to the wrong done to our nation and our system of justice. The distortions, the misrepresentations, and lies must be answered and must be rejected. Robert Bork deserves better. America deserves better.

I can't conclude without talking again about an issue that I found so many people are unaware of, and that is getting back to this gerrymandering that has taken place. From 1931 through 1980 -- 50 years -- only two Presidents had a Republican Congress -- both House and Senate. Each one of them only had it for 2 years. One was a Democratic President, Harry Truman, for 2 of his several years, and the other one was Ike Eisenhower, who had a Republican Congress for 2 out of his 8 years. But for 46 out of those 50 years, the opposition party had both Houses of the Congress. In these, going on 8 years that I have been here, I did have one House for 6 years, the Senate, and the House of Representatives continued to be in the other party's hands. And now for this final 2 years, we're back to having them, once again, in control in both Houses.

I've heard people that have interpreted our system of checks and balances to mean that, well, that's fine: You have people on one side out there in the legislature, then people on the other side in the Executive Office. That isn't what the checks and balances were supposed to be. And certainly, when every Democratic President in those 50 years, with the exception of one 2-year period, had a Congress of their own party, and then when the Republicans had a Congress of the other party for everything but 2 years -- all Republican Presidents until my term with having at least one party for a while -- the significant thing is we can look back from the inside, where we are in our administration, and tell you that none of the things we've accomplished could have been accomplished had we not had that one Republican House, the Senate, for those 6 years.

And now we're back to the regular way of doing things if they continue to have their way. And it all stems out there in the States, their legislators and their Governors, where the redistricting takes place. I saw it firsthand, because when I was Governor of California, one of the years for redistricting came up. And I vetoed what they came up with. And we finally ended turning it over to the Supreme Court. But they'd been in power so long that I didn't even have the Supreme Court on my side. [Laughter]

But it's so wonderful for all of you to gather here and to do what you're doing. And I know that I have to let you have your dinner and get out of here. I really was just standing here, hoping that I could think of a good get-off line. [Laughter] But it has been wonderful, and you've got some great Governors here. And this country's strength is based not on what's inside the beltway here in Washington, it is based on the fact that we are a federation of 50 sovereign States with a great independence.

And one of the things that I'll be the happiest about is that one of my goals has been, ever since I came here, to restore the Federal system and return to the States the authority and autonomy that has been unjustly seized by the Democratic Party in the years that have gone past. And let's get back to those 50 different States. Thank you all very much, and God bless you.

*Note: The President spoke at 7:33 p.m. in the Grand Ballroom at the J.W. Marriott Hotel.*