

what problems unite us instead of belaboring those which divide us.” He eloquently insisted civility is not a sign of weakness. If that was true for two great, distant, often alien superpowers like the United States and the Soviet Union, surely it is true for neighbors in Ireland.

Tonight we have here in this room representatives, leaders of all the parties to the peace talks. It is a great night. I was thinking in sort of my impish way that I almost wish I could give them a perfectly harmless—perfectly harmless—3-day cold, which would require them all to be quarantined in the Green Room. [Laughter] It’s not a very big room, the Green Room—[laughter]—and we have a lot of parties to the talks. So in just 3 days of getting over a cold together, I think all these problems would be solved.

Well, the peace talks won’t be that easy, but all of you, you have to seize this historic moment. Just think, in just a few weeks, you could lift this enormous burden from the shoulders of all the children of Ireland.

It has been said that St. Patrick’s Day is the day when the entire world wishes it were Irish. Well, when lasting peace finally comes, the entire world will rejoice. When I heard the wonderful songs up here, and Frank’s wonderful reading, and all the eloquence of Irish passion and pain and joy came flooding out of the performers, young and old, I was reminded of that great line from Yeats, “In dreams begin responsibility.” All the Irish are dreamers. In the next few weeks, if Irish responsibility measures up to Irish dreams, this next year’s celebration here will be the greatest in the history of this great house.

God bless you.

[At this point, the First Lady introduced Prime Minister Bertie Ahern of Ireland, the Taoiseach, who then made brief remarks.]

The President. We’re about to leave. I feel duty bound, because there are so many people from Massachusetts here today—[laughter]—to tell you that in Massachusetts this is a dual holiday. This is also the day when over 200 years ago the British left Massachusetts, so it’s called Evacuation Day. [Laughter]

Now, that means that you must evacuate the White House. [Laughter] I have to say

that so State Secretary Mowlam doesn’t think I made an anti-British slur here. [Laughter] But you needn’t leave until 11:59 p.m.—[laughter]—because it will still be Evacuation Day. [Laughter]

Enjoy. We love having you here. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:35 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Celia Larkin, who accompanied Prime Minister Ahern; George J. Mitchell, independent chairman of the multiparty talks in Northern Ireland; Pulitzer Prize-winning author Frank McCourt; and Marjorie Mowlam, United Kingdom Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

Remarks at the Carpenters Joint Apprenticeship Training Center in Las Vegas, Nevada

March 18, 1998

The President. Thank you. It’s a good thing we’ve got a 22d amendment, or I would run again. Thanks for saying that. Let me begin by saying that when Maggie Carlton was talking, I leaned over to John Sweeney and I said, “John, I’d give anything if we could just get her speech on television tonight. That’s the America we’re trying to build for everybody.”

I know that your husband and your daughters were proud of you, but I think every working man and woman out here was proud of you for what you said and what you represented. Your family is living proof that if we reward people for their work, if we enable people to succeed at work and at home raising their children, if we give them the chance to be good citizens, then America is going to do very well indeed.

I want to thank the others up here on this platform with me. I want to thank John Sweeney for his brilliant, energetic leadership of the labor movement. He has been terrific. I want to thank Doug McCarron for his leadership of the carpenters and his ever-present willingness to let me know exactly what he thinks I should be doing on every issue. [Laughter] I want to thank Bob Georgine for many things, but I want to congratulate him most recently on helping to bring about the major labor agreement in

Nevada between building and construction trade workers, Bechtel, and the Department of Energy, and so many other triumphs on behalf of the working people he represents. Thank you.

I am especially indebted to Linda Chavez-Thompson, the executive vice president of the AFL-CIO, for her membership on the President's National Advisory Panel on Race, in our attempt to build an America in the 21st century where we all get along and work together across all the racial and ethnic lines that divide us. Thank you.

Let me also say I am profoundly grateful to my former colleague and longtime friend, Governor Bob Miller; and to Mayor Jan Jones who was such a great friend of my mother's, as well as a friend of mine, for their personal kindness to me, and their leadership here in this great city and State. You are very well served, and I know you know that. Thank you.

I brought a lot of folks with me today from the administration, but three in particular work with the labor movement. I thank the Deputy Secretary of Labor, Kitty Higgins, and Maria Echaveste and Karen Tramontano coming from the White House. They've worked with a lot of you, and they do a lot of work for you, whether you know it or not, every day. And I'm very proud of them.

Now, you know, I took a tour of what goes on here before I came out, and I told some of the folks on the tour—I thanked Bill Howard and Paul Sonner, who was the instructor in the classroom I visited, and all the people who are in the Joint Apprenticeship Training Center today who helped to enlighten me about what you're doing. But I told some folks that 30 years ago I actually spent a summer building houses, and I decided I didn't want to work that hard, which is how come I got into politics. [Laughter] It didn't strike me as being any easier now than it was 30 years ago. [Laughter]

But there are a lot of interesting things going on in this program. I hope, for example, that just my presence here and the fact that so many members of the media came with us will lead people to know that more and more construction is now being done with reprocessed steel instead of wood in homes and hotels and other things. And that

has enormous environmental and energy implications for the future, if we can make that work, and that you are being trained to do that work.

I do feel that I learned enough today to go home and build a two-bedroom house for Socks and for Buddy, and that's what I intend to do. [Laughter] Unfortunately, when I do it, I won't earn the union wage, but I will have your knowledge.

Let me say to all of you that, first, I just want to thank you for giving me a chance to be here. You know, every now and then you just have to get out here in the country; it helps the President to remember why he ran, what he's trying to do, and for whom he is really working. And I have seen all of that here today.

You here have shown me a model of two-by-fours and teamwork; a model for the Nation of cooperation between business and labor; cooperation of crafts across generations, adapting old-fashioned values to today's workplace. There are just 653 days left in the 20th century; there are just 653 days left in this whole millennium. This century will be remembered as a time when millions of working men and women fought for and won basic freedoms too long denied them: the right to safe workplaces; the freedom to organize; the ability to put an end to abusive child labor; the right to have health insurance and retirement and earn a decent wage for labor. Working families across our country gained their voice in the 20th century, and in so doing, they built the greatest middle class in human history.

Now, what will happen in the new century? Well, what will it be like; how will it be different? The first thing we know is that things will change more and faster for all of you in the new century than it did in the old one. The sheer volume of knowledge is changing—is doubling, doubling, every 5 years. When I became President there were 50 web sites on the Internet—50—5. 0. Now, 65,000 are being added every hour. So your life is going to go by at a faster pace.

The second thing you know is that it will be more global. We will be in a global economy, but we will also be in an increasingly global society. If you doubt that, just look

around the room here. If we had had this meeting 10 years ago—

[*At this point, a member of the audience interrupted the President.*]

Audience member. Shut up!

The President. Couldn't have said it better myself. You ought to run for office. [*Laughter*]

Now look around—if we had had this meeting 10 years ago, think how differently this crowd would have looked. So the world is changing. The way we work, the way we live, the way we relate to each other. What will happen in this new century? What will happen if technology dominates more? We won't run out of work; we'll have different kind of work. The unemployment rate today is very low, but there are almost 400,000 vacancies in America in computer-related jobs. So we know that things will change more and we'll have to educate and train more. And even old jobs will be done in new ways.

But we also know that, if we do it right, we've got a chance finally to include all working people in the American middle class. We've got a chance to bring dignity to the lives of all people. We've got a chance to give every child the chance to live up to his or her God-given abilities. In short, we've got a chance to bring the American dream home to everybody who will work for it. And we ought to seize that chance.

That's the American dream that the employees of Frontier Hotel spent 6 years, 4 months, and 10 days fighting to achieve. And this is important. But maybe even more important, it's the American dream that I learned again today up in that classroom I just visited. It's the American dream that I learned again today that union members want for all working families.

I see it in Washington. John Sweeney has a relatively small percentage of the membership of the AFL-CIO that will get a direct benefit when we raise the minimum wage again. But he works for it just as hard as if 100 percent of his members were going to be benefited by it, because he knows it's the right thing to do.

And today when I was in that classroom upstairs, you know what the students were learning in the classroom? They were learn-

ing about how much of their base pay is in fringe benefits, what's retirement, what's health care, what's continuing education, what does all this money go for? And they asked me questions about Social Security and how we were going to make sure that private pensions were secure. And I talked to them about what we've been doing on that the last 5 years. And they asked about health care and how working families got along that didn't have any health insurance, and why we didn't have health insurance for every single working family. And I said, "If it had been up to me and the AFL-CIO, every working family would have health insurance today, and we ought to see it."

I only wish my wife could have been upstairs to hear that conversation about health care. And they asked me about how people got along who didn't make as much per hour as they earned in fringe benefits alone. One young man said, "There are people building houses in other places who don't make as much per hour as we get in fringe benefits. How do they get along?"

And so we talked about how we try to help them with the family and medical leave, how we tried to help them with different changes in the health insurance laws, and how we tried to help them with changes in retirement systems. But I asked that group of young people when I left, I said, "I just hope you'll never forget this, because we've got to make sure every family can succeed at home and at work, and as long as people like you care about people who aren't making as much per hour as you get in fringe benefits, we'll keep making it better for them." And I hope all of you will always feel that way.

Now, let me just say very quickly, I want to talk to you about what's going on in Washington that will affect your future and ask you for your help. These are good times for the country. We're going to have the first balanced budget in 30 years. And 15 million new jobs in 5 years, the lowest unemployment in 24 years, the lowest crime rate in 24 years, the lowest welfare rolls in 27 years, the lowest inflation in 30 years, and the highest homeownership in the history of the United States of America. That's the time we're living in.

But what I want to say to you is, you don't have to be a carpenter to know that you don't fix the roof when it's raining. You fix the roof when the sun is shining. The sun is shining on America. But as long as there are people who don't have jobs, as long as there are people who can't make a decent living, as long as we don't have a system which guarantees lifetime, high quality, educational opportunities like I saw there today to all working families, the roof of America's house is not as strong as it ought to be.

So what I came here today to tell you today is, this is a great time, but let me say again, it is changing fast. And we have to think about the challenges that all of you are going to face 5 years from now, 10 years from now—what will your children face 15 and 20 years from now? And we have to do those things today, while we have the confidence and the strength and the prosperity to do them, that will secure the future of our children tomorrow in a new century.

One of the main reasons I wanted to be here today is that I think all of you know instinctively that the most important thing we can do in a world where the volume of knowledge is doubling every 5 years is to give every person a world-class education and every adult access to education and training for a lifetime.

Now, we've made a lot of progress in the last 5 years. When we started on—the Vice President and I started to try to hook up all the classrooms and libraries in the country to the Internet by 2000—we started in '94, only 34 percent of our schools were hooked up. Today, 75 percent are. We're doing better. We've got 900 colleges out there with young people earning work-study funds by going into our grade schools and teaching our kids to read, to make sure everybody can read independently by the end of the third grade. That's important.

And perhaps most important to all of you with children, we can literally say now—this is what we've done in the last year: We passed a \$1,500 tax credit for the first 2 years of college; tax credits for junior year, senior year, graduate school; adults going back for further job training; an IRA you can put money into, withdraw from for your kid's education with no tax penalty; tax deductions

for interest on student loans; 300,000 more work-study positions. People can go through our national service program, AmeriCorps, and earn money to go to college. We can literally say now because of the changes we've made in loans, in scholarships and tax breaks, we have opened the doors of college in America to everybody who's willing to work for a college education. That will revolutionize their future.

But let's be candid with one another. Everybody with an informed opinion knows that America has the best system of colleges and universities in the world. There are literally 300, maybe 400—maybe more—places you can go and get a world-class undergraduate education in this country. But no one thinks we have the best elementary and secondary education in the world. Now, we have a lot of great teachers; we have a lot of great schools; our students are just as smart as anybody anywhere. But nobody thinks it's the best in the world. One of the reasons is we have a very diverse student body; we have local control of the schools; we have three different sources of funding from the State, Federal, and local government; and we don't have any national standards of what people should know or measurements of it.

So I think we need more grassroots reform, but we ought to have national standards and voluntary national exams. We ought to spend more money to give smaller classes. We ought to make sure that in these places where they're overflowing with students and the school buildings are old and breaking down or the kids are out in house trailers, they're in decent classrooms.

And I have offered a plan this year to hire 100,000 more teachers to take class size in the first three grades down to an average of 18 students per class; to make child care of higher quality and more affordable; to help schools stay open after instruction hours are over, because most kids get in trouble after school closes down and before their parents get home from work; to rehabilitate or build 5,000 new schools in the country; and also to provide greater health and retirement security to people who have put a lifetime of work in.

Now, these are very important things. We have a balanced budget now; we can afford

to do these things. But there are some troubling signals coming out of Washington that the Republican budget may not embody this commitment to education and our future. The budget they're talking about does meet my goal of achieving a balance and not spending any of the surplus until we fix Social Security. But it shortchanges our Nation's future. We're not fixing the roof for the 21st century, because from Head Start for young children to Pell grants, from job training for older workers, our commitment to education is under fire.

I need your help. This ought not to be a partisan political issue. I can remember a time when, on education, both parties were foursquare for investing in the future of our country if we had the money. I'm telling you, we've got the money; it's time to invest in the future of our country and education.

And if the Republican budget says no to new teachers and smaller classes, no to modernizing our schools, no to investing in higher standards for our children, the American people should say no to that budget. Give us a budget that will prepare our children for the 21st century.

There are a lot of other things that I'd like to ask you to help me with, and I won't bore you with all of them, but just let me mention a few. We've got people in this country between the ages of 55 and 65 who worked hard all their lives and have lost their health insurance, and they're not old enough to get Medicare. And generally, they're in three categories. They are people who are married to folks who are old enough to be on Medicare, and so when their spouse got on Medicare the family lost their health insurance and the younger spouse has no health care and can't afford to buy any.

They are people who lost their jobs, and they're over 55, and they can't afford just a single person's health insurance. They're people who took voluntary early retirement who are over 55, who were promised by their employers they would have health insurance and then the promise was broken. I think we ought to let those people and their families—help them to buy into Medicare at cost. It will not hurt you; it will not hurt Medicare; it will help hundreds of thousands of people.

Two years ago, we raised the minimum wage, and it was a good thing. And 2 years ago we raised the minimum wage, people said, "Oh, this is terrible. It will bring on inflation, and it will slow down job growth." And in the 2 years since we raised the minimum wage, inflation has gone down, and job growth has gone up. It's good for America to pay people at a decent wage.

The minimum wage in real dollar terms is still lower than it was 20 years ago—it's still lower than it was 20 years ago. With our economy as strong as it is, with job growth as good as it is, we can afford to increase the minimum wage by a dollar over the next 2 years, and I think it's the right thing to do.

I also want you to know that we have to continue in Washington to fight for the right to organize and to function in a union that will permit you to have a life you enjoy. We know that workers in unions typically have not only higher pay, but have access to higher skills, better continuing education, which is good for the rest of the country. You make the rest of us stronger as you learn more new things and do more new things and continue to push us in the future. There is a bill now in Congress that would let businesses fire or refuse to hire union organizers. If it passes, I'll veto it. But you ought to help me do this in the first place. [*Applause*]

But let me say—I thank you for that cheer. But what you really want is to never even have to think about cheering for something like that again. Because what really works—what really works is when we all work together. You can help management make a bigger profit. You can help the owners of every enterprise earn more money. You can make the private sector stronger and help create more jobs if we will cooperate in a spirit that says we have to reaffirm the dignity of the people who work for us day-in and day-out. They ought to be able to raise their children in dignity. They ought to be able to educate their children. They ought to be able to know that when their kids get sick they can go to the doctor. They ought to be able to know that when they come of age, they can go on to college. We ought to live in the kind of country that says we are going

to make the future better for our children, and we are going to honor our parents.

On my wall in my private office on the second floor of the White House I have a letter written before I was born to my aunt in Texas by the man who was then the Speaker of the House of Representatives, Sam Rayburn—legendary Speaker of the House of Representatives from Texas. And he wrote my aunt a letter when my father was killed in a car wreck. My aunt gave me that letter last year, 50 years later. But I see that letter all the time, and it reminds me not only of my family ties but of Sam Rayburn and the kind of leadership he gave to our country. Sam Rayburn said something about politics that all of you especially should always remember. He said, “Any old mule can kick a barn down. It takes a carpenter to build one.” And what I’m trying to do is to hold down the barn kickers—[laughter]—and lift up the builders. I want you to be with me.

Thank you. Bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:35 p.m. in the training center shop area. In his remarks, he referred to Maggie Carlton, member, Culinary Workers Union Local 226, who introduced the President; John J. Sweeney, president, AFL-CIO; Douglas J. McCarron, general president, United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners of America; Robert Georgine, president, Building and Construction Trades Department, AFL-CIO; Linda Chavez-Thompson, executive vice president, AFL-CIO; Gov. Bob Miller of Nevada; Mayor Jan Laverty Jones of Las Vegas; and Bill Howard, apprenticeship coordinator, and Paul Sonner, instructor, Carpenters Joint Apprenticeship Training Center.

Remarks on the Safe Schools Initiative

March 19, 1998

Thank you very much, Superintendent Berg; Madam Attorney General; Senator Robb, thank you so much for your efforts. Congressman Castle, thank you. Mayor Donley, welcome, and I want to say a special word of welcome to all of the students. I’m glad you’re here today, and I thank you for the example you’re setting for students throughout our country.

I also want to commend the students who were the winners of the State math and science award earlier this month. This school is proving that by taking the right kind of action, working with law enforcement, enforcing zero tolerance for guns and drugs, involving parents, establishing discipline and order as primary goals, we can keep our schools safe and give our children the chance to reach their highest potential.

Now, in less than 650 days, all of us will enter a new century and a new millennium. At a time when we’re doing everything we can to prepare our children for the opportunities of that new century, at a time when we know that the body of knowledge that human beings have is doubling every 5 years, and therefore, education will be more important than ever before, we cannot let violence, guns, drugs stand between our children and the education they need.

For more than 5 years, we’ve worked now to make our schools places of learning, not fear. We have worked to strengthen and expand the safe and drug-free schools program, to enforce zero tolerance for guns in schools, to encourage communities to crack down on truancies, to support those who wish to adopt school uniform policies. Wearing uniforms instead of gang colors in many places is helping to keep our children safe.

It was just a little over 2 years ago that I went to Long Beach, California, the first large school district to adopt a school uniform policy. Since then, Secretary Riley and the Department of Education have worked to help those schools that wanted to do that. Yesterday the New York City School Board announced that it would adopt a school uniform policy in all its elementary schools. I applaud them for taking this important step, and I predict it will have very beneficial consequences.

Our budget makes an unprecedented commitment as we are moving into balance for the first time in 30 years to invest for our future, by raising standards and improving education for all our children and to make our schools safer. We know schools with the biggest discipline problems also have the highest rates of violence. Very often, there are simply too many students and too few classrooms with not enough teachers. Our