when we passed the balanced budget in '97, overwhelming majorities of both parties in both Houses; when we passed welfare reform in '96, overwhelming majorities of both parties in both Houses. That's the way the country ought to work. And we did that last year. And it will allow us, as I said, if we finish the job, to reduce class size to an average of 18 in the first 3 grades. But if the tax cut passes, and we keep a balanced budget, we'd have to say to a million students, ''No smaller classes.''

So I think this is a big problem. Today, we're helping 400,000 students with after-school programs. This is a huge deal. Every inner-city, tough neighborhood that has after-school programs that are aggressive sees a big drop in the juvenile crime rate and a big increase in learning in the schools. We propose to triple the number of people who would be included in those programs next year. If this tax plan passes, we'd have to cut that in half.

The school construction tax cut I mentioned to you earlier, to help us build or modernize 6,000 schools, ironically, is not in the plan. In this plan, only 10 percent of that many schools would be fixed.

Now, these are not just numbers; these are children. And keep in mind, most of you are going to be fine regardless. I mean, you got to Girls Nation, you got to Boys Nation. Somebody will give you a scholarship if your family doesn't have the money to go to college. You have to ask yourself whether you will be better off if your country is better off. If we try to make sure that we all go forward together—you came here because you believed in the American system, a system that is designed not to just address the needs of the most talented and the most fortunate among us but a system premised on the fact that nearly everybody, nearly everybody in a free country can do what is necessary to be a good, productive, hard-working citizen if given the tools to do so. And I believe that.

The reverse is true, that those of us who are most fortunate will also have the quality of our lives diminished to the extent that we do not provide everyone the chance to live up to their God-given abilities. So that's what's going on now. And believe me, this is an honest, philosophical debate. If the people who disagree with me were here, they would say, ''Well, we just think Government wastes too much money, and this is your money, and you paid the taxes, and we ought to give it back to you.''

There's another element here I want to say to be fair. We might keep spending all this money, but if we did that and pass the tax cut, then we'd be right back in the same fix we were in before I took office—huge debts, higher interest rates dragging down the economy, higher unemployment. So I know it's easier for me to say, maybe, because I'm not running for anything. You know—under our system we have a two-term limit, and I can't run for anything unless I go home and run for the school board some day. [*Laughter*]

But I believe that the American people can be told the truth about our long-term challenges. And I believe the American people feel good about the decisions we made that were hard decisions at the time that have brought our country to this moment. And there are still such big things out there.

So what I say is, let's do first things first. Let's lift the burden of your parents' aging off your shoulders by securing Social Security and Medicare. Let's give you a chance to have an even more successful economy than we have today, by getting this country out of debt for the first time since 1835 and taking extra steps to bring money into these inner-city neighborhoods, the rural neighborhoods, the Indian reservations, where there has been no economic recovery.

Let's continue to make sure that we are investing in the education of our young people. We'll still have money for a tax cut that could include long-term care, child care—for me, helping ordinary families save for retirement; but the main thing is not so much what the elements of it are, but that it's not so big that it either throws us into debt or requires us to compromise our future.

Now, that is the way I see this. I wonder if 36 years from now you will remember what was going on in Washington with the same clarity that I remember. But I can tell you, it was by no means certain that Congress and the country would do the right thing on civil rights. Indeed, President Kennedy, when he

addressed the Boys Nation delegates, thanked us for our resolution on civil rights and bemoaned the fact that the Governors, who had just met a week before we did, could not reach agreement; they could not reach across party lines and regional lines to stand up for the elemental principal of civil rights. And he thanked us for doing it.

Thirty years later, 36 years later, it looks like Boys Nation was right, and the Governors' Association was wrong. [*Laughter*] Just look around this crowd today. Look at all the differences represented by the young men and women here. Who could possibly say that America is not better off for the progress we have made? But you need to know a lot of people lost their jobs in election sticking up for civil rights in places where it wasn't so popular. A lot of Congressmen lost their jobs in 1994 because they voted to bring the deficit down, or they voted for the Brady bill or the assault weapons ban, which helped to give up the lowest crime rate in 26 years.

But sometimes you have to look to the long run. And one of the things that the sad events of the last couple of weeks have reminded us all of is that the gifts of life and the burdens of life do not fall according to some rational plan—that all of our lives, even if we live to be 80—or in the case of Secretary Riley's father, over 90—life is still fleeting. And the great test is to try to enjoy and make the most of every day and still sow the seeds for your children to have a better tomorrow.

That is what we are trying to do here. Thomas Jefferson said every difference of opinion is not a difference of principle. If we can remember that here, I think we can once again reach across the party lines and the regional lines and think about the long-term interest of America. It has been a long, long time since our country has had a chance to make provisions for the next generation with absolute confidence, unencumbered by the burdens of just getting through the day. That is where we are. And I am determined to do everything I can to see that we make the most of it to give you the chance to live your dreams.

Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:52 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Teah Frederick, president, Girls Nation; Ryan Rippel, president, Boys Nation; and authors Donald L. Barlett and James B. Steele.

Statement on Senate Action on Juvenile Crime and Gun Legislation

July 28, 1999

Today, after weeks of partisan delay, the Senate finally appointed conferees on juvenile crime and gun legislation. While I am heartened by this modest progress, more than 3 months have passed since the tragedy at Columbine, and Congress has yet to send me a bill to make commonsense gun reforms the law of the land. I challenge the House to follow the Senate's lead and appoint conferees before the August recess, so that the full Congress can get back to work and pass a bill with strong gun provisions as our children go back to school.

Letter to Congressional Leaders Transmitting a Report on Burdensharing in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization

July 28, 1999

Dear Mr. Chairman:

Pursuant to section 3 of the resolution of advice and consent to ratification of the Protocols to the North Atlantic Treaty of 1949, on the Accession of Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic (the "resolution"), I hereby transmit a report concerning Burdensharing in the Alliance.

This report is comprised of two sections, which provide the information required by section 3(2)(B) of the resolution to the extent that such information is available. The unclassified section covers common NATO budgets, national defense budgets and their adequacy, costs incurred to date in connection with the membership of Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic, and the status of discussions concerning NATO membership for Partnership for Peace countries. A classified addendum covers NATO members'