

The bad news is that the same demons that lead people to commit racial and religious and sexual orientation-related crimes and discrimination in America are sweeping the world in more violent ways. Basically, the conflict in Northern Ireland is a religious conflict. The conflict in the Middle East is an ethnic and religious conflict. The conflicts in Kosovo and Bosnia were ethnic and religious conflicts. The brutal killings in Africa were tribal conflicts. All over the world, people are getting into modern technology, but they're behaving as if they lived 1,000 or 2,000 or 3,000 years ago, because they're afraid of people who are different from them still.

Don't you think that's interesting, that you live in the most modern of all worlds, and yet the biggest problem we've got is the oldest problem of human society, people being scared of people who are different from them? And you can help that.

I had, last week, at the White House—really my wife had this meeting, and I just went along for the ride. But she sponsored this lecture by a man who helped to create the infrastructure of the Internet and a man who knows more than nearly anybody in America about the human genome project, the breaking down of the component parts of the genes, and how it fits in the body. And they talked about how we were going to be able to solve all these health problems by merging computer technology and what we know about genetics.

But let me tell you what the genome specialist said. He said—now listen to this—look around this room, all the different kinds of people that are in this room. He said that 99 percent of us—99.9 percent of each of our bodies is identical to the other. We are 99.9 percent the same genetically. Even more interesting, he said, if you take two ethnic groups, there are more differences in the gene structures within the ethnic groups than there are between the ethnic groups. That is, if you take, let's say, a group of Hispanic kids and a group of Asian kids, there will be more differences within the group than what you average out what the genetic makeup is between the Hispanics and the Asians.

We're getting a message here. Science is reaffirming what our values tell us. And I'm

telling you, if you all can do something about violence and fear and the compulsive alienation of so many of our young people—which turns into their need to look down on people and eventually dehumanize them and eventually think it's okay to act violently against them—if you can deal with that, it's the oldest problem of human society—if you can deal with that, you're going to have the brightest future of any generation of Americans.

You will have a chance to solve diseases, to solve poverty problems, to give people potential that they never would have had before. But the whole thing can be held down by the failure to deal with our violent impulses, which are the product of our most deep-seated fears. So think about that.

If you want to live in the new world of the 21st century, you've got to help people get rid of their old hatreds and old fears. We'll do our part, and we're very proud of your leadership in doing yours.

Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:30 a.m. in the Cannon Caucus Room at the Cannon House Office Building. In his remarks, he referred to Rebecca Hunter, a student from Nashville, TN, who introduced the President; Jeffrey Bleich, Executive Director, National Campaign Against Youth Violence; and Ananda Lewis, host of MTV's "HotZONE." The conference, entitled, Voices Against Violence: A Congressional Teen Conference, was sponsored by House Minority Leader Richard A. Gephardt and the House Democratic caucus.

Statement on the Social Security Administration Cost-of-Living Adjustment

October 19, 1999

Today the Social Security Administration announced the cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) for next year's benefits. This announcement is a reminder that for over 60 years, Social Security has been a cornerstone of American national policy that has enabled generations of Americans to retire with dignity. Each year millions of disabled and elderly Americans are lifted out of poverty by Social Security. As a result, poverty rates among the elderly are at the lowest level ever

recorded. The cost-of-living adjustment announced today ensure that Social Security benefits will continue to be an essential part of retirement and family security for all Americans.

This year we have an historic opportunity to protect and strengthen Social Security, securing it for future generations of retirees. At a minimum, we should agree on a down-payment on reform by passing a Social Security lockbox that extends the life of Social Security to about 2050 and pays down the debt by 2015. I remain committed to working with Congress to move forward in this area.

Statement on Senate Action To Block Campaign Finance Reform Legislation

October 19, 1999

Once again, a minority in the Senate has blocked bipartisan campaign finance reform. The failure of the Senate to adopt real reform is a victory for the politics of cynicism, and it leaves unchecked the influence of moneyed special interests. I will not let the Senate's inaction deter us from our goal, which is to restore the public's faith in our political system. That is why I will continue to fight for passage of real, comprehensive campaign finance reform like that passed recently by the House. The people of this country want reform, and the Senate cannot stand in their way forever.

Statement on the Vote in Indonesia To Accept the East Timor Referendum Results

October 19, 1999

I welcome the historic decision by the People's Consultative Assembly of Indonesia to accept the results of the August 30 referendum in East Timor. The assembly's unequivocal action shows respect for the will of the people of East Timor. It is also an important step forward in Indonesia's own democratic transformation, which the United States strongly supports.

Of course, much work remains to make sure that East Timor's transition succeeds. In the wake of the assembly's decision, the

United Nations must establish a transition administration leading to East Timor's full independence. And Indonesia must take the necessary steps to ensure the safe return of all displaced East Timorese, including allowing the international community full access to displaced persons in west Timor.

The United States is committed to helping the people of East Timor not only obtain the legal recognition of independence but also develop the institutions they need to thrive as an independent state. We are equally determined to help Indonesia achieve its goal of lasting democracy and prosperity. Today's action will bring both goals closer to fruition.

Statement on House Action on the "Work Incentives Improvement Act"

October 19, 1999

I am extremely pleased that the House, by an overwhelming bipartisan vote today, passed legislation that will remove barriers to work for Americans with disabilities. Today's impressive vote for the "Work Incentives Improvement Act" sends a strong signal that all Americans, including people with disabilities, should have the opportunity to work. Now I call on Congress to finish the job so more Americans can start to work.

My administration has helped create more than 19 million new jobs in the last 6½ years, and unemployment is at a 29-year low. Yet almost three out of four Americans with severe disabilities who want to work are not working. Since taking office, I have made empowering and promoting the independence of people with disabilities a priority. Central to this effort is taking down barriers to work for people with disabilities. One of the biggest barriers these Americans face is the fear of losing their health insurance when they get a job. Under current law, many people with disabilities cannot work and keep their Medicaid or Medicare coverage, creating a tremendous disincentive to work.

The "Work Incentives Improvement Act" would help ensure that people with disabilities do not lose their health care when they gain a job. It would give workers with disabilities the option to buy into Medicaid and would extend Medicare coverage for people