

Statement on the Congressional Conference Agreement on Education Reform Legislation

December 11, 2001

The education of every child in America must always be a top priority. I commend the conferees for agreeing on a series of profound reforms to help provide our children the best education possible. I also thank the bipartisan leadership of the conference chair, Congressman Boehner, as well as Senators Kennedy and Gregg and Congressman Miller, for taking major steps toward improving education throughout our country.

The conference agreement will ensure that no child in America is left behind, through historic education reforms based on real accountability, unprecedented flexibility for States and school districts, greater local control, more options for parents, and more funding for what works. I urge Members of the House and Senate to act soon and send me this legislation so that States and school districts can begin implementing these important reforms.

Remarks Following a Meeting With the Economic Team

December 12, 2001

Economic Stimulus Package

Thank you all for coming. I've just met with my top economic team to discuss the importance of an economic stimulus package to our—to the future of our economy. We strongly agree that we need an economic stimulus package, and I'm hopeful we'll be able to achieve one.

Last night I met with people from the United States Senate, Senators Breaux and Nelson and Miller, along with centrist Republicans, and we agree that there is enough votes to get a good package out of the Senate, a package that I think will help our economy, a package that these Democrats and Republicans think will help workers and the economy. And I am hopeful that with good work with the people around this table and with the leadership out of the Senate and the House, that we'll get a good package.

It's important to take care of those workers that have been affected by the attacks of September the 11th, and it's also important to focus on ways to grow our economy. And so this administration is committed to helping the Congress do its job, and that is to respond to the economic times we find ourselves in.

I want to thank you for coming. Happy holidays. Looking forward to seeing you at the event, the Christmas event at the White House. Oh, and see you at the next event. *[Laughter]*

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:55 a.m. in the Roosevelt Room at the White House.

Remarks on Signing the Afghan Women and Children Relief Act of 2001

December 12, 2001

Thank you all. For several years, the people of Afghanistan have suffered under one of the most brutal regimes—brutal regimes—in modern history, a regime allied with terrorists and a regime at war with women. Thanks to our military and our allies and the brave fighters of Afghanistan, the Taliban regime is coming to an end.

Yet, our responsibilities to the people of Afghanistan have not ended. We work for a new era of human rights and human dignity in that country. The agreement reached in Bonn last week means that in 10 days the international community will have a new partner, an interim government of a new Afghanistan.

We join those in the interim government who seek education and better health for every Afghan woman and child. And today, with the Afghan Women and Children Relief Act, we take an important step toward that goal.

I want to thank Laura for her introduction, and I want to thank her for her steadiness during this crisis. I want to thank Farida for her courage. I want to thank the Members of the House and the Senate who sponsored this piece of legislation, and all the Members of Congress who are here today.

I want to thank Sima Wali, who is the president and CEO of Refugee Women in Development, a key advocate for women's

rights at the conference of Bonn negotiations last week.

I thank the members of my Cabinet who are here, Secretary Veneman and Administrator Whitman, thank you all for being here. I want to thank the ambassadors who are here representing the diplomatic corps. Thank you all for coming. And I also want to thank Billie Holladay for opening up this beautiful museum for all of us to come and celebrate this important piece of legislation.

America is beginning to realize that the dreams of the terrorists and the Taliban were a waking nightmare for Afghan women and their children. The Taliban murdered teenagers for laughing in the presence of soldiers. They jailed children as young as 10 years old and tortured them for supposed crimes of their parents.

Afghan women were banned from speaking or laughing loudly. They were banned from riding bicycles or attending school. They were denied basic health care and were killed on suspicion of adultery. One news magazine reports, "It's hard to find a woman in Kabul who does not remember a beating at the hands of the Taliban."

In Afghanistan, America not only fights for our security, but we fight for the values we hold dear. We strongly reject the Taliban way. We strongly reject their brutality toward women and children. They not only violate basic human rights; they're barbaric in their indefensible meting of justice. It's wrong. Their attitude is wrong for any culture. Their attitude is wrong for any religion.

You know, life in Afghanistan wasn't always this way. Before the Taliban came, women played an incredibly important part of that society. Seventy percent of the nation's teachers were women. Half of the government workers in Afghanistan were women, and 40 percent of the doctors in the capital of Kabul were women. The Taliban destroyed that progress. And in the process, they offered us a clear image of the world they and the terrorists would like to impose on the rest of us.

The central goal of the terrorists is the brutal oppression of women, and not only the women of Afghanistan. The terrorists who help rule Afghanistan are found in dozens and dozens of countries around the world.

And that is the reason this great Nation, with our friends and allies, will not rest until we bring them all to justice.

America is so proud of our military and our allies, because like the rest of us here, we've seen the pictures of joy when we liberated city after city in Afghanistan. And none of us will ever forget the laughter and the music and the cheering and the clapping at a stadium that was once used for public execution. Children now fly kites, and they play games. Women now come out of their homes from house arrest, able to walk the streets without chaperons. "It feels like we've all been released from prison," said one young person in Kabul, "that the whole of Afghanistan has been released from prison."

This is an important achievement. Yet, a liberated Afghanistan must now be rebuilt so that it will never again practice terror at home or abroad. This work begins by ensuring the essential rights of all Afghans.

This week is Human Rights Week, when we celebrate the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights more than a century ago—a half-century ago. The preamble to that document declares that the people of the world reaffirm their "faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, and in equal rights of men and women." This is a great goal, and that's why I'm so pleased that Afghanistan's new government will respect the rights of all people, women and men.

America and our allies will do our part in the rebuilding of Afghanistan. We learned our lessons from the past. We will not leave until the mission is complete. We will work with international institutions on long-term development—on the long-term development of Afghanistan. We will provide immediate humanitarian assistance to the people of Afghanistan.

After years of civil war and misrule by the Taliban, this is going to be an incredibly difficult winter in Afghanistan. We're doing what we can to help alleviate the suffering. In the month of November, the United Nations World Food Program, with our strong support, provided enough supplies to feed 4.3 million Afghans. And the Defense Department will continue to make sure that

food is delivered in remote regions of that impoverished, poor, starving country.

The bill I sign today extends and strengthens our efforts. The Afghan Women and Children Relief Act commits the United States to providing education and medical assistance to Afghan women and children and to Afghan refugees in surrounding countries.

The overwhelming support for this legislation sends a clear message: As we drive out the Taliban and the terrorists, we are determined to lift up the people of Afghanistan. The women and children of Afghanistan have suffered enough. This great Nation will work hard to bring them hope and help. To the bill's sponsors, thank you from the bottom of our hearts. You show the true compassion of this great land.

May God bless the women and children of Afghanistan.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:35 a.m. in the Great Hall of the National Museum of Women in the Arts. In his remarks, he referred to Afghan human rights activist Farida; and Wilhelmina "Billie" Cole Holladay, founder and chair of the board, the National Museum of Women in the Arts. S. 1573, approved December 12, was assigned Public Law No. 107-81.

Statement on Representative Richard K. Armey's Decision Not To Seek Reelection

December 12, 2001

The country, the people of Texas, and the Congress have been well served by Congressman Dick Armey. As a fellow Texan, I know his effective leadership firsthand.

When he was a sophomore lawmaker, and a member of the then minority party, Dick Armey proved his mettle by authoring and passing a major base closure initiative that was signed into law. As majority leader, he has skillfully guided legislation through Congress; his dedication to reforming Government, lowering taxes, and simplifying the tax system has deeply influenced public policy.

I know Dick's dedication to public service will remain strong, even during his retire-

ment. His sense of humor, candor, and leadership will be sorely missed in Congress.

Laura and I extend our thanks to Dick, his wife, Susan, and their family, and we wish each of them the best in the future.

Statement on House of Representatives Action on the "Help America Vote Act"

December 12, 2001

I commend the House of Representatives for today's overwhelming passage of the bipartisan "Help America Vote Act." This legislation goes a long way toward adopting reforms advocated by the Ford/Carter Commission on Federal Election Reform and is based on principles I endorsed and recommended to Congress in July. The Ney-Hoyer bill is a good start in achieving these goals—it respects the value of every eligible vote and the primary role of State, county, and local governments in elections. I look forward to working with Congress to enact responsible election reform before the upcoming 2002 elections.

Statement on Congressional Action on Bioterrorism Defense Legislation

December 12, 2001

I commend Congressmen Tauzin and Dingell for successfully passing bipartisan legislation that will help meet our immediate bioterrorism defense needs. Their legislation includes many of my priorities, including proposals to expand the pharmaceutical stockpile, increase our supply of smallpox vaccines, strengthen State and local preparedness, and improve the safety of our food supply.

I look forward to working closely with Congressmen Tauzin and Dingell, as well as Senators Kennedy, Gregg, and Frist, to quickly reach a bipartisan consensus on this important legislation.