Remarks in an Outreach Meeting With Conservatives on the Race Initiative

December 19, 1997

The President. First, let me thank you for coming in what must be a busy time for all of you. What I think may be the most productive thing to do, although Governor Kean, since—[*inaudible*]—may interject something here. I think what I'd like to do, to begin is just to hear from you. I'd like to—on the question of, do you believe that race still matters in America and is still a problem in some ways? And if so, instead of our getting into a big fight about affirmative action—although if you want to discuss it, we can—what bothers me is that even I, who think it works in some ways, believe it works only when people who—it works predominantly for people who are at least in a position for it to work. A lot of the people that I care most about are totally unaffected by it one way or the other.

So what I'd like to talk about today is that I thought that we could at least begin by just getting a feel for where you are and do you think it's still a problem, and if so, what do you think we ought to do about it. And if you want to talk about affirmative action—[*inaudible*]—but I'm happy to do that.

[*Ward Connerly, chairman, American Civil Rights Institute, thanked the President and stated that the country has a serious and complex problem, but one which does not lend itself to a Government solution. He indicated that the Nation could not move forward on the race issue without resolving the issue of racial preferences.*]

The President. What do you think we should do? Since there are—since various racial minorities are represented in groups of people that are at least not doing very well in this society, in numbers disproportionate to their numbers in the country as a whole, how should we respond to that?

[*Mr. Connerly stated that school choice, an overhaul of the K–12 system, smaller class size, and other educational initiatives were appropriate responses. Thaddeus Garrett, Jr., associate pastor, Wesley Temple A.M.E. Zion Church, Akron, OH, and former Bush administration adviser, stated that he hoped that the day's discussion would not get bogged down on affirmative action but rather address race and race relations. He indicated that mechanical programs would not change attitudes, and that Americans did not relate well across racial lines. He commended the President for the Akron meeting on race and said that community leaders, beginning with the President, had to provide leadership to address the divide and that affirmative action only served to divide the Nation further.*]

The President. Maybe you can—[*inaudible*]—maybe for discussion's sake, let's assume we abolished them all tomorrow and we just had to start all over. What would you do?

[*Linda Chavez, director, Center for the New American Community, and former Staff Director, U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, stated that affirmative action put the Government in the role of picking winners and losers on the basis of race and that under those circumstances the Nation would never get beyond racism. She stressed reaching the disadvantaged in society, citing a University of Maryland program not aimed at race but at students who are the first in their family to attend college. Mr. Connerly stated that in addressing the problem, labels should be left behind and the focus placed on people with something to contribute.*]

The President. Okay. Let me just say this, first of all. I think, if you imagine—forget about—think about what the world would look like 30 years from now if things go

well—that is, if all the threats to our collective security—[*inaudible*]—restrained and trade develops as we hope it should and we develop a decent education system that embraces virtually everybody that will work for it. The fact that the United States is becoming—[*inaudible*]—multiethnic country that at some point in the next generation, in the next 50 years will, for the first time in its history, not have a majority of people of European origin, I think will make it an even more fascinating, even more interesting, and even more prosperous and successful place if we're not consumed or limited or handicapped in some ways because of our racial differences.

So, to me, this is—I'm looking at this through the perspective of the future that I want to see our country make for itself. And I don't think anyone has all the answers about how we should make that future.

If you look at—there is no question that—if you just African-Americans, for example, the middle class is growing and a lot of good things have happened. But there is also no question that there are still pockets where crime is greater, incarceration rates are horrendous, that education systems are not working. And even the people who do have some level of it, who are highly industrious, and are dying to get into business very often don't have access to credit and don't have access to the networks. Affirmative action originally, I think, on the economic side was a kind of networking thing, and on the education side it was designed to do what you—the Maryland program you just described. I think if there was ever a shortcoming in college education—we ought to be focusing on people who are educationally disadvantaged without—[*inaudible*]—it was that they didn't get the preparation and continuing support that they needed. The schools that have done that are much better.

[*Stephan A. Thernstrom, Winthrop professor of history at Harvard and coauthor of "America in Black and White: One Nation Indivisible" with his wife, Abigail, a senior fellow at the Manhattan Institute, took issue with two points made by Mr. Connerly. First, he stated that people now know each other better across racial lines than they did a generation ago, and offered some examples. Second, he said he found the Akron meeting troubling and one-sided and gave examples of the lack of dialog. He commented that while most of the discussion was addressed to white racism, recent studies showed that among African-Americans, Asian-Americans, and Hispanic-Americans, each group had stronger negative stereotypes about the other two groups than whites did and that as these populations grew, the problems would become worse, concluding that the issue was not simply one of white racism.*]

The President. But if what you say is true—you say the crime problem is disproportionately African-American; that's like saying the college population is disproportionately white or the business population is disproportionately white. That doesn't justify an affirmative action program to—[*inaudible*]—like Section VIII of the SBA program.

The other day we had a group of African-American journalists in here. Every man in the crowd, to a person—there were, like, 20 of them here—every man in that office, every single, solitary one, had been stopped by the police when he was doing nothing, for no reason other than the fact that he was black. And you say that's because there's a rational fear because of the fact of what occurs in some neighborhoods. Nonetheless, that is a race-based public policy. I'm just saying, it's not as simple as——

Ms. Thernstrom. No, we agree with that. We agree with that. It's unacceptable to me.

Mr. Thernstrom. But doesn't it happen in Detroit, in Atlanta, in other States where——

The President. All I'm saying is it's very difficult to get these things out of our society. And you just made one reason why. Let me give you another example. Because of the—a lot of work that's been done by a lot of people, there's been a dramatic increase in the capacity of the United States to limit the inflow of drugs into the country from the south by land and sea. But the consequence of that—Mexico, which is a big, open country, has had enormous amounts of money invested there to try to undermine what little infrastructure there was to deter the influx of drugs. Five hundred million dollars was spent last year alone trying to bribe Mexican

police. Now, as a result, over half of the cocaine in this country comes across the Mexican border. So, all right, fast forward. What do you do if you're a local police officer with a drug problem? That's what this whole profiling is about—[*inaudible*]—to stop people who are Hispanic if they're driving through town. That's an affirmative action program. That's a race-based affirmative action program. So how do you——

Ms. Chavez. But Mr. President, some of us are opposed to that. I mean, Randall Kennedy has written, I think, very eloquently on exactly that issue. And those of us who oppose race preferences when they benefit groups are also opposed to them when they harm groups.

The President. If you were running a police force and you were trying to figure out how to deal with the drug problem and you had a lot of people who were coming through your town on an interstate and you had a limited amount of resources and you couldn't stop every car, which cars would you stop?

[*Ms. Chavez stated that they should stop every third car and that police should be held to the same standard as business. Representative Charles T. Canady of Florida stated that it was pernicious for the Government to classify people by race because doing so sends a message that people should be judged on that basis, which reinforces prejudice despite the Government's good intentions.*]

The Vice President. Could I ask a question, Mr. President? If you lived in a community that was 50 percent white, 50 percent black and for a variety of historic reasons the level of income, educational attainment, and so forth was lower among the blacks in that community and the police force was 100 percent white, and the problems of the kind that we all deplore took place and other problems took place and the community decided that the police force would be better able to do its job if blacks were much more represented on the police force because then the police force would have a much greater ability to relate to the community effectively and to do its job—under those circumstances, do you think that the community would be justified in making affirmative action efforts to open up a lot more positions on the police force for blacks?

[*Mr. Canady stated that he favors community policing which requires people to live in the neighborhood they police but which doesn't require race-based selection. Vice President Gore emphasized that his example demonstrated a benefit to the whole community. Mr. Canady then noted that the Drug Enforcement Agency had a policy of using African-Americans as undercover agents on the theory that they would be more effective, but was sued for discrimination by African-American agents, concluding that efforts which start out making sense may end up doing harm.*]

The President. Let me ask you this. You don't quarrel with the fact—because I think this is very important. This is something that we really have to deal with all the time. You don't quarrel with the fact that, other things being equal, in cities that are highly racially diverse, it would be a good thing, if it could be done without race preferences, to have a diverse police department.

Mr. Canady. Absolutely. I think we ought to have a police department that can work with——

The President. But you just said that you like this whole idea of—that's what we're doing now at HUD. We're actually encouraging police officers to go back and live in the neighborhoods where they patrol and letting them buy HUD-foreclosed houses—where HUD's got the property, letting them buy houses for half price if they'll serve in the neighborhoods where they live.

I've thought of that, and every time I go to New York or any other big city, I always look at the police and see—so let me just say, I'm Irish—Irish immigrants—[*inaudible*]—many of them, in urban police departments. And many of their children and grandchildren and great-grandchildren are still in urban police departments. And I think—what I think we have to do is to figure out—I think part of this problem will go away if we ask ourselves, are the criteria by which we are making this decision, whatever this decision is, really relevant? Are we really—whether it's college admission—are we keeping score in the right way here?

But it seems to me that we have a vested interest in the objective. If we agree that we need an integrated police department, and that it would be better——

Ms. Thernstrom. We'd like to have an integrated police department.

The President. ——that we would like to have one and that our society would function better if we had one, then we should ask ourselves, ''Okay, how are we going to get there?''

[*Ms. Chavez took exception to the Vice President's example, stating that statistics show significant numbers of African- and Hispanic-American police officers.*]

The Vice President. Partly because of affirmative action.

[*Ms. Chavez stated that, while minority representation was not proportional, it was close and that the issue should be whether or not there was discrimination in a police department, which no one favors. She said that the way to root out discrimination was training and recruitment. Mr. Thernstrom pointed out some of the complexities, stating that white communities are often well served by African-American police officers, who should not be forced to go back to predominantly black communities, and that while Asians do a good job of producing physicists and physicians, they are not very interested in law enforcement careers. He questioned the wisdom of making the police department look like the population. Former New Jersey Governor Thomas Kean, president, Drew University, stated that the amount of immigration requires us to get to know one another. He noted that in his State, the largest college scholarship program was based on poverty, not on race, but still tended to help minorities. He observed that racial groups tended not to mix, but that when there were activities that crossed racial lines, such as athletics, race was less an issue and friendship flourished. Dr. Garrett stressed the need for different racial groups to get to know each other and gave examples. He also indicated that the media were part of the problem, pointing out the contrast in media coverage between the African-American Virginia couple who had six babies and the white Iowa couple who had seven. Ms. Thernstrom stated that all recognized that there was a long way to go on the road to racial equality but asked if we were going in the right direction. She added that the discussion had to focus more on facts and less on emotion, stressing the racial gap in academic performance. She concluded that she thinks the failure of even one child is a national scandal.*]

The President. I do, too. I think what Chicago has done—tells everybody that you've got to go to summer school if you don't measure up and if you don't measure up a second time, you can't go ahead; your self-esteem will be hurt more when you're 50 and you can't read than it will be when you're 16 and you have to stay back another year—I think that's great.

But let me just say, first of all, I think what you generally just said is absolutely right. The reason I wanted you to come here today is that I hope there will be another series of meetings where we'll get an even more diverse group; I mean, diverse by opinion. Because what I'm trying to get to is—here's my theory about this: I think if we could ever get to the point where we would ask ourselves, can we agree on the objective, and then talk about what means will work, and then look at the things we don't like and say, well, did it do any good and what harm did it do?

For example, what I think about affirmative action, a lot of these economic—let's just take the economic affirmative action. What I honestly believe is that it did a profound amount of good for the people who got into the programs who might never have had a chance to be successful business men or women. But I believe the problems with it are twofold. Number one is, once you get in and you start doing it, it's hard to graduate out. This whole theory about graduating out and moving through, going out into the private sector—that theory never really worked very well. And we ought to fess up; those of us who were for it ought to say that's one of the problems that didn't work. The other problem is it doesn't reach the vast majority of the people who have a problem because it doesn't reach down into basically the isolated urban areas with people in the economic underclass.

So if we say, okay—you know, we can all say, ''Okay, here are the facts. It was a pretty good thing, but it didn't do everything it was supposed to do. So should we argue about getting rid of it; should we argue about doing something else; should we argue about what's going to happen to these people?'' I mean, I think there's a lot to be said for that.

Let me go back to what Steve said about the composition of the police force when you got into the tete-a-tete with the Vice President. Let me just mention three things because Governor Kean mentioned this. The seven white septuplets were delivered by two African-American women doctors. Two days later, two black kids were rescued in a Chicago fire by a white fireman. Nobody feels anything but good about that. Why is that? Or why do all these rich white Republicans pay to go down and watch some black guys play basketball at the MCI Center? I would argue there is something that all these things share in common that don't necessarily get answered in the police—[*inaudible*].

One is, in the case of pro basketball, here I am—I don't have a doubt in the world that if I'd been good enough, I could have played pro basketball. I don't; if I'd been good enough, by God, I could have played. I was short, fat, and slow by today's standards. [*Laughter*] I couldn't play. Doesn't have anything to do with my race; I don't have a doubt in the world. If I have a child, I don't have a doubt in the world that my child can play if he or she is good enough. So that's the first threshold. Without regard to race—I think we can all agree with that. In whatever setting, people have to know: if they're good enough, they can play; and if they need a hand up to prepare themselves, that they can get it.

The second thing is, in the case of the black women doctors who delivered the septuplets—which is not always the case in the case of police, which is why I agree with the Vice President—the community, which was of a different race—there was no question about whether they could do their job in a way that would be fair to everybody. In the case of the white fireman who risked his life to go in and get the last two black kids in the Chicago fire, he made a statement that was louder than any words I will ever utter, that he was in tune with the people in that community. He was in tune enough that he was willing to lay his life down to save those two little children. Nobody will ever care again whether that guy is on their fire or sitting idly out in front of the fire station, as I hope he will be.

So there's two criteria. One is, can you play if you're good enough, whatever the thing is? Two is, does everybody in the community have confidence that the people in the positions, whatever they are, have sufficient concern about them, are consistently involved with them, that whatever is supposed to be done is going to get done?

I think in the case of the fireman and the doctors and the basketball players, the answer is yes. I think in the case—huge numbers of urban police departments, huge numbers of the business sector, huge sections of higher education, you can't say that the answer is yes. That's why I'm hung up about it. But I don't think that—I think the reason that I'd get frustrated if the debate is only about affirmative action is, if we win 100 percent of the debate, we're talking about 10 percent of the people. If you win 100 percent of the debate, we're still just talking about 10 percent of the people. What about everybody else?

Ms. Chavez. That has been our argument.

Ms. Thernstrom. But, why don't you have confidence that we can train policemen the way we train firemen so that when a policeman shows up at the door, it doesn't matter what the race of that policeman is?

The President. What I don't have confidence in is that in the police departments where there is not affirmative action that there is a selection process that is not race-based.

Ms. Thernstrom. Why not go after the problem instead. It's like college admissions; instead of going after the problem of the failure of our schools in the K–12 years, we say, ''Okay, we're going to shut our eyes to that problem, and we're going to preferentially admit them and hope something——

The President. What about all the people who are sitting around waiting for that to happen? Are we just going to let them drift away?

[*Elaine Chao, senior fellow at the Heritage Foundation and former Peace Corps Director, commended the President and Vice President for their initiative and leadership in the area of race relations but stated that the debate left out Asian-Americans almost entirely. She related her experience as an immigrant and said that her family got through by knowing they would not always be in that condition. She stated that it was disheartening to find that equal opportunity did not always mean a level playing field and then gave examples of how some affirmative action programs work against Asian-Americans. Mr. Connerly urged that, given the brief time available, the discussion not focus on affirmative action but on the broader subject of race and also suggested that the overall timeframe for the national debate be extended. Ms. Thernstrom stated that the President's Advisory Board on Race was too monolithic, and the group then discussed the diversity of the board.*]

The President. Go ahead. Lynn, you haven't talked enough.

[*Former Representative and former Secretary of Labor Lynn Martin stated that average Americans are really further along than they are given credit for, but that diversity implies differences in perception which people must move beyond. She advocated moving forward with a moderate checklist and reasonable goals.*]

The President. One thing—let me just ask you all to think about this because I agree—one of the things I do agree with what Ward said is that I—before you came in here I was holding my head saying, ''Oh my God, those people are coming in here, and we've got to stay here for 4 hours—[*inaudible*].'' But let me—nearly everybody agrees that the laws that are on the books against discrimination based on race against individuals should be enforced.

Ms. Thernstrom. Everybody agrees with that.

Ms. Chavez. Everybody in this room.

The President. We are grossly under—we have never properly funded the EEOC, but to be fair, we also need to look at—and this may be kind of a bridge between what we've been arguing about and what we agree on—there's a lot of interest—and Chris has given me some information on this—about trying to develop some sort of way the EEOC can get rid of its backlog in part by drawing up consent orders that would go beyond litigation and would change the way people treat their employees, not necessarily on a race—not a race-based treatment but the way you develop, the way you recruit, the way you reach out—and one of the—to go back to Lynn's checklist—one of the things we would like to get everybody to agree to is a certain approach on that, on kind of a comprehensive approach to getting rid of the accumulated backlog of race claims and where you go from there.

The other thing I would like to just say, because I know we're going to have to wrap up pretty soon, is I agree with you, we need a structure for the discussion which permits us to continue to talk, sharply identify in a non-rhetorical way our differences, and ask if there is some way to build on this so we can actually get something done.

I talked to J.C. Watts on the phone—he called me last night, and I was out of pocket, and I called him this morning, and we talked for 20 to 30 minutes because he was—[*inaudible*]—and it was an interesting conversation. I just think, if you're willing, I'm willing to make this not a one-shot deal but to continue to work on this. I really sympathize with how the immigrant—Asian immigrant—particularly first generation Asians feel with the shift in criteria.

Ms. Chao. We're just learning the rules, and goddamn it, they change them on us. [*Laughter*]

The President. The real issue here is, if you go back, there's lot of thought been given in the private schools and universities and Governor Kean, who runs a great one, can talk about it—that a lot of these private universities are thinking, okay, now, what if the colleges—if all the public institutions end affirmative action in their admissions process and they don't really—the State doesn't come up with a comprehensive alternative they'd like, where you've got all the colleges maybe taking over public schools, in effect, in terms of their college prep so you get to—you maintain the diversity of the student

body population with non-race-based policies; then will the private institutions basically have to carry the burden of educating a more diverse student body—or unless we're going to resegregate higher education like we once had.

So there's a reexamination about whether—I'm not saying that what you said is—how you described it, that that's the right way to do it, but there is a genuine, I think, reassessment about whether test scores plus grades should be the only predictor of success in college and success later, the only definer of merit, and whether we can assume that there is somehow an absolute character to that. As a matter of fact, the test scores were—[*inaudible*]—they have been a pretty good rough indicator.

But you know, look at what Texas is doing. It's interesting when you look at Texas, I mean, it's this desperate attempt, I think—I don't mean it's—desperate sounds critical; I'm not being critical. But people are looking around and trying to find a way to honor America, be fair, and still have a society where everybody's got a chance. Keep in mind, go back to basketball and our view of the doctors in Iowa, the people have got to believe everybody had a chance.

[*Ms. Chavez stated that it was not good public policy to have different rules for different groups and that the agreed criteria must be equally applied to every individual.*]

The President. You wouldn't be opposed to affirmative efforts that were not race-based, would you?

Ms. Chavez. That's right. I wouldn't because——

The President. And if they're not race-based, they——

[*Ms. Chavez stated that affirmative efforts that were not raced-based but aimed at educational disadvantage, social disadvantage, or economic disadvantage would be acceptable but should involve more than just letting people in the door. She said she resents the assumption that minorities are incapable of meeting the same standards. The Vice President said that while human nature is vulnerable to prejudice, we have the ability and the national responsibility to overcome this vulnerability and its consequences. He stated that cross-cultural contacts are obviously rewarding, that the opportunity for them should be more available, and that we must keep affirmative efforts going forward. Mr. Canady stated that the conservatives did not want to end the effort but did want to stop classification based on race.*]

The President. Let me ask you a question. One of the things that tickled me about—since I grew up in the South, in addition to being—[*inaudible*]—or the race problems in the country, we were all so obsessed with athletics. One of the things that tickled me about the California affirmative action vote was that there was—preference vote—is that there was an exception made for athletes. So you can give a preference for athletes to get into Berkeley, so Berkeley can have a nice football team and a nice basketball team.

The Vice President. Alumni giving.

The President. But the A student who doesn't get into Berkeley, the Asian A student who doesn't get into Berkeley is just as hurt because he didn't get in so everybody could be tickled at the next basketball game as he would have been hurt if some A student who grew up in a black family in Oakland and didn't go to a good high school and therefore didn't make quite as high a score on the college board—he still loses the opportunity. He just loses it to a basketball player instead of a kid with thick glasses who struggled late at night in Oakland to make good grades but didn't quite make a high enough college board score to get in. What's the difference? Why is it justified? Why is athletic discrimination so wonderful and the race discrimination——

Participant. Well, you can get rid of it. If you want to sign an Executive order——

Participant. And alumni discrimination as well.

Mr. Connerly. Mr. President, I have to say that this has been a great party until now, but just as we're—the clock is ticking, we're ready to go out the door, you ruined my weekend with those very—[*laughter*]——

The President. Is that not true? If it's not true, I don't want to falsely accuse you.

Mr. Connerly. ——very loaded questions, very loaded statements that command far more than the 5 or 10 minutes we have left. Our Founders—they talked for hours

about human nature as the basis of what kind of Government we were going to develop. And it's frightening to me—it is truly frightening to me, at the characterization of human nature, Mr. Vice President, that you portray, because it suggests that we cannot rise above it——

The Vice President. No, I said specifically, we can.

Mr. Connerly. ——unless Government is there demanding, demanding that we be held accountable. The presumption of our people, the presumption of our Nation is that we're good people, that we can be fair, and that we will do the right thing. There are going to be some out there that are going to do wrong, and we'll bring those into line. But it's not that we are prone to do bad. And the whole question here about athletes and alumni, my God, any of us can be athletes or alumni. It has nothing to do with our skin color.

The President. I didn't say anything about alumni.

Mr. Connerly. Well, he did. But there are just certain traits here that we as a society are making a judgment about——

The President. The only point I made—[*laughter*]—don't get our two speeches mixed up. The only point I'm trying to make is, if you ever have any—if you decide what the criteria of academic merit is, and let's say you decide the criteria is the grades plus the college boards—this is the only point, I'm making a narrow point. If you decide the criteria is the grades plus the college boards, and then you decide—you make a decision, which I think you could make a compelling argument is a legitimate decision, that athletics is an important part of university life, that it enriches the lives of all the other students who are there. You can make that argument, but the point is, once you make that argument, that's the argument you could also make for having a racially diverse student body. I was making a very—I'm not making a wholesale assault.

Now, here's my problem with this whole deal—I know we've got to go, so I want to give you a chance to say—what we really said before, which is, how do we give structure to this and what do you think the next step should be? And I'll give anybody else a chance. Look, when I was a Governor, I became the first Governor in the history of the country to sponsor legislation to require—[*inaudible*]—certified. I believe I passed the first law requiring kids in the whole State to have to pass an exam before they could actually go on to high school, because I didn't like the high school graduation—I thought that was closing the barn door after the cattle left. The reason I have consistently supported affirmative action programs—but I really have tried to change them and make them work—is not because—I basically think all that stuff you said is right. I am sick and tired of people telling me poor minority kids who live in desperate circumstances, that they can't make it. I think they should be told they can make it but they have to work harder to make it, and then I think we should give them a hand up to make it. I am tired of that. The reason I have supported affirmative action programs is very different, is I have done it because I didn't want to see all these kids be sacrificed to a principle that I agree with, because the practice of life would not be fixed in time to give them a chance—number one.

And number two, I have had the same feeling about police departments and fire departments and business environments and university admissions that I felt about the athletes—that I really thought that the institutions were better off and the white majority or whoever else, was better off if there was some inter-mixing because of the world they're going to live in.

But I am always—I think we should all be uncomfortable, those of us who support this, for giving something to somebody when we deprive somebody that was otherwise more deserving by the traditional criteria of getting it. But I think on balance, that's why I've been very strongly—but I have never wanted to not have high standards, not be demanding, not do things. I mean, I've paid a pretty good price for this—[*inaudible*]—and I'm not ashamed of having done it. I think that the kids in my State are better off because of it.

But we need to figure out, to recognize that what we'd really like is for people without regard to their race to be able to do the kind of business, go to the kind of schools,

have the kind of public service jobs, and live in the kind of integrated environment that they choose if that is the choice they make, because there would be no differences in traditional measures of merit and how they did, so that people would be making their own choices and having their own choices. I think that's—we all agree that that's the world we want.

So I'd like to know what you think the next step should be. If you want to stay involved in this, you want to keep talking to us, you want to keep working with us, and you want to get some more, different kind of people in here, what do you think we ought to do now?

[*Governor Kean explained that he accepted the invitation to sit on the President's Advisory Board on Race because he believed it was the first time in his life a President was willing to take on this issue and to try to establish a dialog, and he believed it could do some good. He said that initially he believed the board had been to narrow, but that now it was opening up to a broad spectrum of ideas. Ms. Thernstrom said she thought this was a wonderful meeting and that if this continued, it might go somewhere.*]

The President. That's what I think.

Ms. Thernstrom. Yes. We're feeling each other here. We're kind of making—it's a first kind of stiff beginning, but that we might really——

The Vice President. I resemble that remark. [*Laughter*]

The President. If you all are willing to do it and you will help us figure out a way to structure it, I'll do it. Let me just give you—I'll just give you one—outside this door, probably sitting there—I don't know if she's still there—is my diarist for the White House who has lately been in the paper because—[*inaudible*]—[*laughter*]—her name is Janis Kearney. Her daddy was a sharecropper, and her mother was a domestic. And they had 17 children; 13 of them have college degrees, 5 of them are lawyers, and all 17 of them have a first name that starts with the letter "J"—I don't know how they—[*laughter*] Most of them went to school in Arkansas. One of them went all the way to Harvard. And some of them had affirmative action, and some of them didn't, and they all did fine.

Look, somewhere in here there's a way that we can get to where we're trying to do—stop talking past each other and start working together. I cannot believe that 90 percent of the people in this country don't want the same kind of country in terms of racial matters. And I will do my best to find a way for us to move beyond the—[*inaudible*]—honestly and respectfully state our differences and figure out a way to work together. Because it is obvious, if you do not believe that there is any inherent, God-given difference among people based on race, then the differences that we have today must have been rooted in the mistakes that have been made in the past or the breakdown of social institutions or personal institutions like the family, the education system, and the networking of people in business and others. There has to be a way to rebuild those institutions, and we have to do it together.

I think it would be a shame if we didn't try to do this together. I'm trying to put this beyond partisan politics. I'm not trying to use you. I said that deal about the athletics because I might have voted for the athletic thing, too, but I've always been with the race is like athletics and not different from athletics. That's all. So we need to go.

If you have—in addition to your suggestions, which Governor Kean is for, I want to know if you've got process ideas about how we can discipline this debate and to move it forward.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:43 p.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Christopher Edley, consultant to the President's Advisory Board on Race. A portion of these remarks could not be verified because the tape was incomplete. This item was not received in time for publication in the appropriate issue.

Letter to Congressional Leaders Transmitting a Report on Bosnia-Herzegovina

December 19, 1997

Dear Mr. Speaker: (Dear Mr. President:)

In my report to the Congress of June 20, 1997, I provided further information on the