everybody thought we would win the cold war as a matter of course—1964.

Four years later, when I finished college in '68, we had riots in our cities. It was 2 days after Senator Kennedy was killed, 2 months after Martin Luther King was killed, 9 weeks after Lyndon Johnson said he couldn't run for reelection because the country was divided on Vietnam. And before you knew it, the longest expansion in American history was over, and we had failed to meet the large, long-term challenges of America.

Actually, I think we have fewer internal and external crises now than we did then. But the challenge is the same, and because we have fewer crises, the responsibility is greater. I believe our party's had a solid economic policy, a solid technology policy, a solid education policy, a good crime policy, a good welfare reform policy. But we need you. We need more and more partnerships. We need to keep working to create the conditions and give people the tools to do more and better. But we've got to be guided by the right vision. And the right vision is not a tax cut so big that it either puts us back in a deficit or keeps us from meeting our long-term objectives.

The right vision is to have a tax cut we can afford, targeted to purposes that are needed in the context of meeting the big, long-term challenges of America. That's what I stand for. I believe that's what our party stands for. And I hope that it's one of the reasons that you're here tonight.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 8:21 p.m. in the Ballroom at the Phoenix Park Hotel. In his remarks, he referred to Senator Robert G. Torricelli, chair, and Senator Patty Murray, vice chair, Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee.

Remarks and a Question-and-Answer Session With the Education Writers Association in Atlanta, Georgia

April 14, 2000

The President. Thank you very much, Kit. Ladies and gentlemen, I'm delighted to be here with all of you, along with Secretary Riley and Bruce Reed, my Domestic Policy Adviser.

It has been over 20 years now since Dick Riley and I, as young Governors, first began to grapple with the need to reform education. It's been 17 years since the "Nation At Risk" report sounded the alarm about the state of education nationwide; over 10 years since the Education Summit in Charlottesville, which put us on a path to national action; and as Kit said, it was 10 years ago this month that I got up at 4:30 in the morning to fly to Chicago to speak to this group. I hope you'll forgive me if I don't remember exactly what I said in the fog of that early morning. [*Laughter*]

Doubtless, some of the veteran reporters here have been around long enough to have seen this whole fascinating drama unfold. Today I'd like to talk about the progress our public schools have made and the hard work still ahead. First I want to note something astonishing that I think everyone in this room should be proud of: 17 years after the "Nation At Risk" report, over 10 years after Charlottesville, there is still a passionate sense of national urgency about school reform, about lifting standards, improving accountability, increasing learning.

I can think of no other issue that has sustained to such an intense level of commitment from the public, elected officials, business leaders, and the press. If anything, the determination of the American people to improve our schools is greater than ever. That's a tribute to the love of our people for their children, to their understanding of the importance of education in the global information economy, to the realization that we have the largest and most diverse student body in our history, and to the enduring American belief that all our children can and must learn.

It is also a tribute to the commitment and the enterprise of education writers in cities and towns all across this country who have kept the story of education reform in the news year after year.

This intense national commitment has produced real progress. Today I am pleased to announce a new report by the Department of Education which documents the progress of the last 7 years, some of which Kit mentioned. The report makes clear that math and reading scores are rising across the country,

with some of the greatest gains in some of the most disadvantaged communities. For instance, reading scores of 9-year-olds in the highest poverty schools rose almost an entire grade level on the National Assessment of Education Progress between 1992 and 1996, reversing a downward trend.

The report also shows that 67 percent of high school graduates now go on to college, up 10 percent since 1993. This is a copy of it, and it will be available soon, and I hope all of you will read it and then distill it for the people who read you.

Clearly, we're making progress. Our young people are getting the message they need a college education to have the future of their dreams. We've tried to make those dreams more affordable, with the largest expansion of college opportunity since the G.I. bill, including the creation of the HOPE scholarship tax credit, which over 5 million families have already claimed since 1998; education IRA's; more affordable student loans, which have saved students $8 billion—about a third of our student loan recipients are in the direct loan program now—they've saved students $8 billion, and the taxpayers $5 billion more. They have helped us to take the default level from over 22 percent to under 9 percent, and to triple annual loan repayment rates.

We also have more Pell grants; we're up to a million work-study slots; we've had over 150,000 young Americans earn scholarships by serving in AmeriCorps, many of them in our public schools. And the GEAR UP program is now pairing college mentors with a quarter of a million middle school students who are at risk, to prepare them for college and convince them the money will be there when they're ready to go.

College entrance exam scores are rising, even though more students from disadvantaged backgrounds are taking the test. And before the Congress this year is my proposal to provide a tax deduction for college tuition of up to $10,000. If we can do that, along with another increase in the Pell grants and the other proposals I've mentioned, I think when we leave, Dick and I, we'll be able to say that we have truly opened the doors of 4 years of college education to all Americans.

We also see progress in the fact that about two-thirds of all of our classrooms are connected to the Internet, with the help of the E-rate program which the Vice President pioneered. That's up from only 3 percent in 1993. Ninety-five percent of our schools have at least one Internet connection, including 90 percent of our poorest schools. And I think we'll be right at 100 percent by the end of the year for not only the schools but for almost all the classrooms, "except"—and this is a big "except"—in those schools that are literally too dilapidated to be wired for the Internet.

We see progress in falling class sizes in the early grades, and we're trying to help that with our program to hire 100,000 new highly-trained teachers, 30,000 of whom have been funded, and we're trying to go to 50,000 in this year's budget. We see progress in the very large increase we've had for preschool—and I've proposed the largest in history for this year—and in the fact that 1,400 of our colleges and universities are providing volunteers for the America Reads program to help make sure all our third graders can read independently by the time they finish that year.

And we see progress in the growing public consensus about what must be done to reach our ultimate goal, providing a world-class education for every child in America. I think this consensus can be summed up in a simple phrase that has been our mission for the last 7 years: Invest more in our schools; demand more from our schools.

When I became President in 1992 the education debate in Washington, I felt, was fairly stale and predictable and unfortunately divided into what I thought were partisan camps with false choices. On the one side were those, most of them in my party, who believed that money could solve all the problems in our schools, and who feared that setting high standards and holding schools and teachers and students accountable to them would only hold back poor children, especially poor minority children.

On the other side, there were those, mostly in the other party, who fundamentally did not think the public schools were fixable and therefore didn't want to spend much money trying. Also they felt education was a State responsibility and therefore should not have

a comprehensive national response. Some of them, you'll remember, even tried to get rid of the Department of Education.

Vice President Gore and I believed both those positions were wrong. There was plenty of evidence, even then, that high levels of learning were possible in even the most difficult social and economic circumstances. The challenge was to make the school transformation going on in some schools available and active and real in all schools. And we sought to do it by investing more in our schools and demanding more from our schools.

This did not require, as some have charged even recently, micromanagement of our schools by the Department of Education. Indeed, under Secretary Riley's remarkable, steady leadership, Federal regulations on schools K through 12 have been reduced by two-thirds. In addition, we made ed-flex available to all 50 States, which makes it possible for them to reduce even further Federal regulations on the details of how Federal dollars are spent.

In 1993 we passed a new economic plan that cut hundreds of programs in order to reduce the deficit and improve the economy. But even in that harsh budget year, we boosted education spending. Over the last 7 years, we've nearly doubled investment in education and training, even as we've turned record deficits into record surpluses.

In 1994 we overhauled the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, requiring States to set academic standards for what their students should know. We passed the Goals 2000 legislation, which provided States with more resources to create and implement strategies to achieve standards. Since then, we've gone from only a handful of States having standards to nearly every State with them.

Forty-eight States also have assessments in place to measure student progress in meeting those standards—although, as Kit noted, I have been unsuccessful so far in convincing the Congress that we ought to have national standards and a voluntary national test to measure them. But because we insisted in 1994 that Title I funds be better targeted, 95 percent of high-poverty schools get them today, up from 79 percent 7 years ago. And I think it's very important that this progress not be undone as Congress looks at Title I again this year.

In 1994 we began encouraging more competition and more choice for parents within the public school system, including magnet schools, schools within schools, worksite schools, and the creation of public charter schools. We also invested the resources necessary to get the charter school movement off the ground. When I became President, there was just one charter school in all of America, in Minnesota. Today, thanks in part to our investments, there are over 1,700. Vice President Gore has called for tripling that number.

I think the spread of the charter school movement is one of the great underreported stories in education, one that makes the whole debate over vouchers into something of a sideshow. Charter schools provide choice and competition that proponents of vouchers say they want. And unlike private schools, charter schools are accountable to the public for results. They all haven't succeeded, although most of them have done quite well; but then they can be shut down, if they don't. I think we should be working to make all public schools more accountable, not diverting much-needed energy and money away from them.

The strategy of greater accountability and greater investment continues to guide everything we're fighting for in education. I have sent Congress an "Education Accountability Act" to fundamentally change the way the Federal Government invests in our schools, to support more of what we know works and to stop supporting what we know does not work.

We want quality teachers in all classrooms; report cards to parents on school performance, for all parents and all schools; no social promotion, but help for students, not blaming them when the system fails them; a plan to identify failing schools and improve them, or shut them down; a systematic effort to make our schools safe, disciplined, and drug-free.

I've also asked Congress to make a range of other investments to make accountability work. Yes, we must end social promotion. But I say again, we need more investments in after-school and summer school programs.

It is wrong to blame the students for the failure of the system.

We had the first Federal support for after-school programs in 1997, at a million dollars a year; $40 million in '98; $200 million in '99; $453 million in 2000; and we're asking for a billion dollars in 2001. If we get it, we will soon be able to provide after-school programs to every student in a poor-performing school in the United States.

We must also invest in modernizing our schools, to get our kids out of overcrowded classrooms or classrooms where the walls are too old to be wired for the Internet or where it's so stifling hot in the summer that students in summer school can't learn. There are many cities in this country where the average school building is 65 years of age or more. There are schools in New York City that are still being heated by coal-fired furnaces. There are literally school buildings all across the country that cannot be hooked up to the Internet—they simply can't be wired. And we all know the stories of how many of our kids are in trailers. The largest number of trailers I have seen behind the smallest school was 12, outside an elementary school in Jupiter, Florida, a couple of years ago. So I think that is very important.

We have also worked on this for a long time. For 4 years I have tried to get the Congress to approve my tax credit to help to build or modernize 6,000 schools. I have made the proposal again this year, along with an appropriation that would allow us to do renovations on another 5,000 schools a year for the next 5 years, in districts that are so poor it is simply unrealistic to expect that they could float a bond issue and raise the money, even with a tax credit.

Six years ago we passed legislation calling on States and school districts to identify and improve low performing schools. States have now identified some 7,000 low performing schools, and they're working to improve them. The education budget that I have presented last year—that we passed, excuse me, we passed last year required States that failed to turn around their low performing schools to let their students transfer out of those schools to other public schools.

I've asked Congress now to double our investment in the educational accountability fund, so that we'll have adequate funding to help more schools turn around or be shut down. School districts can use this money to make the sweeping systematic changes that have proven so effective in turning around low performing schools, from Dade County to Kentucky to Chicago.

Last year, for example, I gave a Blue Ribbon Schools award to Beaufort County Elementary in Beaufort, South Carolina. Classified as one of the State's worst performing schools 5 years ago, Beaufort embraced accountability and higher academic standards and started after-school and summer school programs for students who were lagging behind. Today, their math and test scores exceed the State average, and local parents are pulling their children out of private school and putting them in the city's public schools.

If, for whatever reason, a school doesn't turn around, our educational accountability fund can be used to allow parents to transfer their students out of these schools into better performing ones, including charter schools.

The standards movement is making a difference. I believe when we passed Goals 2000 and provided funds to help States develop standards and strategies for meeting them, we made a contribution. Now, the real key is—and I think it's embodied in the topic of your conference—is if we have standards in all the States, how do we get them in the classroom? And how do we make sure they're making a difference in the lives of the students? That, to me, is the real key.

And you have to begin, I think, with improving the capacity of principals and teachers to do their jobs. We have $40 million in our budget to help States improve school management and school leadership, instructional leadership, by principals. I have proposed a new teacher quality initiative to recruit more talented people into the classrooms, to reward good teachers for staying there, to give all teachers the training they need. This will build on the strong support we have given for incentives for people to go into inner-city and other underserved areas, that we've given to the National Board for Professional Teacher Certification.

There were no board-certified master teachers when I took office; there are now 5,000. We've done everything we could to

support that program. There are 10,000 teachers who are in the application process at this time. Our goal is to provide funding enough to get up to 100,000 teachers that are board-certified master teachers, with the idea that there ought to be one in every school building in America. When that happens, I think it will significantly change the culture of education in our country, because of the rigorous certification process and the work that is done to make sure that the teachers are actually effective at teaching our children.

We're also trying to help deal with some of our teacher shortages. Secretary Riley has established a commission on math and science teaching, and Senator John Glenn has taken that on as his next mission. In October they will give us a report which I hope will spur further action in that area. The Secretary has also called for the creation of more dual schools, that provide English plus education in at least one other foreign language, which could, I think, help to moot the whole English-only debate, show that we're interested in teaching all of our kids English and teaching them in English, but recognize the vast diversity we have in the country and the need we have to have more teachers who are bilingual and who can teach in an effective manner the students who come to our schools whose first language is not English.

I would also like to mention that in our proposal to create 100,000 new teachers for smaller class sizes, the teachers are required—every new teacher under that proposal is required to be fully qualified. And I think that this whole movement to improve teacher quality is really catching on. I know that you know that today the American Federation of Teachers is proposing a national standard and a national test for all new teachers. And I applaud them for it. I've been fighting for testing for higher standards, for better pay for teachers for almost 20 years now. In 1993 Hillary and I passed a law that made Arkansas the first State in the country to test teachers. That was a really popular law at the time. [*Laughter*] It was an interesting experience. But because our teachers performed, I might add, better than anyone anticipated, it happened that the children began to perform better, as well. Today, I think Al Shanker would be very proud of the AFT, his successor, Sandy Feldman, and all of them. And I think all of you should be proud of them.

We need to demand more of our teachers, but we need to reward them better. We're going to have a couple of million teachers retiring in the next few years. We already have the largest student population and the most diverse one in our history. We're going to have to work very, very hard to get more qualified teachers in the classroom. There are already too many teachers teaching classes for which they're not fully qualified, and this problem is going to be dramatically exacerbated by the size of the student population, combined with the retirement plans and just the ticking of the time clock for many of our teachers. So we have to focus more and more and more attention on this.

And in that connection, let me say I have repeatedly challenged States—I'd like to do it again today—to spend more of their budget surpluses on raising teacher pay. Most of our States are in terrific shape today, but they, too—every one of these States is facing the prospect of too many teacher retirements. With very low unemployment, they're having the same problem recruiting teachers that we're now having in some of our military positions, recruiting and retaining. But they don't have any of the sort of supplemental benefits that you get if you're in the military.

Everybody says this is the most important thing in the world. Most of the money still comes at the State level. When the budget surpluses are there, when the money is there, now is the best time most States have had in a generation to make a dramatic increase in teacher pay, and I hope they will do so.

Now, let me just make a couple of points about where we are and where we're going. The fundamental lesson of the last 7 years, it seems to me, is that an education investment without accountability can be a real waste of money. But accountability without investment can be a real waste of effort. Neither will work without the other. If we want our students to learn more, we should do both.

The strategy is working. But again I say, with the largest, most diverse student body

in history and the educational premium rising every year in the global information society, we must do more. I've been very pleased at the proposals that Vice President Gore has made and the education plans he's put forth. I'm also pleased that, after some struggle, we have had bipartisan majorities for the education budgets of the past few years. Unfortunately, it's still a fight every year. Yesterday the House Education Committee passed a so-called reform bill that eliminates after-school programs, abandons our class size effort, which is totally bipartisan, and fails to modernize a single school in yet another year. This comes on top of the Senate's education bill, which rolls back reform even more.

I believe that the majority of people in the other party in Congress are still resisting the investments our schools need. In the name of accountability, they are still pushing vouchers and block grants that I believe would undermine accountability. And both bills greatly underfund education.

There's an even bigger problem with many of the plans being discussed in this election season, and many of them apparently appealing. But the problem is, even the apparently appealing plans advanced by Republicans are in trouble because of the combined impact of their proposed tax cut and defense spending increases. You know, one of the things—somebody asked me the other day, "Well, Mr. President, what was your major contribution in your economic reform package to this longest expansion in American history?" And you know what my answer was? "The return of arithmetic. We brought arithmetic back to the budget. We replaced supply-side economics with arithmetic." [*Laughter*] And lo and behold, it worked.

And so when anybody says anything—they're for this, that, or the other thing—you have to say, "Well, how does all this add up? Here's the surplus; it's going to be reduced by X amount, depending on what your tax cut is. Then it's going to be reduced by Y amount, depending on what you require for defense. Now, what are your plans for the retirement of the baby boomers? How will you deal with the fact that Social Security today is slated to run out in 2037, before the end of the baby boomers' life expectancy? What about Medicare? What are you going to do with education?" Arithmetic is a very important element in politics and public life. And it is often ignored—you're laughing, but I'm telling the truth, and you know it. [*Laughter*]

And so here's the problem with some of these education proposals. If you take over $1 trillion out over 10 years for a tax cut, and you increase defense even more than I have—and I've been a pro-defense Democrat; we've increased defense spending every year I've been President—there simply will not be the money left to fund a lot of these education and other proposals. I think it's wrong to spend about $100 of the surplus on tax cuts for every dollar you spend on education. I just don't think that is consistent with our national priorities.

A study came out last week showing that the percentage of income the average American family is paying on income taxes is the lowest it's been since 1966. And it is true that income tax for lower income working Americans is now largely negative, because of the impact of the earned-income tax credit. It is true that people in the highest 20 percent are paying higher rates, but because of the way the economy has grown, their after-tax income in real, constant dollars, even with higher rates, is 24 percent higher than it was 12 years ago.

So I support, as I think all of you know, I support a tax cut. But mine is considerably more modest. I want the $10,000 deduction for college tuition. I want a refundable child care tax credit. I want an increase in the earned-income tax credit. I want families to have a $3,000 tax credit for long-term care, to care for an elderly or disabled family member—it's becoming a huge problem, and as the aging of America progresses, it will be a bigger and bigger problem.

I want to give people with money, upper income people, financial incentives to increase philanthropy and to invest in the poor areas of America—the new markets of America that have been left behind—and to invest in new technologies that will help us clean the environment and combat global warming.

But I have applied arithmetic to my proposal. And I think it is very important that we think about this, because it would be tragic if, after we're finally beginning to really

make some nationally measurable progress in education here, not just in the inputs but in the outputs; and we know so much more about how to do it than we did when "Nation At Risk" was issued; so much more than we did in 1989 when the national education goals were written, in that wonderful all-night session in Charlottesville I'll never forget—we know so much more today. And we're able to invest in what works.

But the American people, their wealth, and their welfare will be far more greatly enhanced by making uniform excellence in education, proving that people, without regard to their race, their income or their cultural or linguistic backgrounds, can learn what they need to know and keep learning for a lifetime. That will do so much more for the American economy, for the strength and coherence and fabric of our national community, than a tax cut which cannot be justified and which will either throw us back to the bad old days of deficits or require big cuts in domestic programs, including education, or both.

So one of the things that I hope education writers will talk about is old-fashioned arithmetic.

Now, finally, let me just say, I think when all is said and done, there are only about three things worth focusing on. Do you believe that all children can learn or not? Do you believe that it's more important than ever before, for the quality of an individual's life, for the shape of a family's future, for the strength of the Nation? And do you believe we know how to do that now, with more investment and more accountability for higher standards?

If the answer to all three of those questions is yes, then I will consider that the work that the Secretary and I have done, even though we haven't won every battle, will have been more than worth the effort.

Thank you very much.

[*At this point, the question-and-answer session began, and Kit Lively, president, Education Writers Association, read questions from the audience. The first question was from a journalist with the Los Angeles Times, who asked what the President could do to head off a growing backlash against testing and standards.*]

The President. Well, one of the things—Dick and I were talking about this on the way in today—one of the things that we thought would happen, if we could actually get some accepted national standards and then a voluntary national test that would measure against that, is that would provide an organizing principle, if you will, which we thought might allow some of these other tests to be dropped. I think it is absolutely true that in some districts there may be too many tests. And what are they measuring, and what do they mean?

I also think that on all this testing business, every few years you have to have kind of a mid-course review. You have to see where you are and where you're going. And I think I've earned the right to say that, since you know I believe in them. I mean, I've got a pretty long record here on this subject.

I think we shouldn't obscure the major point, which is, it is very difficult to make progress that you can't measure. There must be some way of measuring our movement. On the other hand, you don't want our children and our teachers to spend 100 percent of the time teaching to a test that does not encompass all the things our students need to know and our schools need to provide. You don't want the test to be so easy that the whole thing is a mockery and looks like a bureaucratic fraud. You don't want it to be so hard that it crowds out all the other endeavors that a school ought to be doing.

But all of that, it seems to me, argues for looking at the number and the types of tests, what you want to measure, and whether you goals are sharply focused. It's not an argument against testing and accountability. I see no possible way to continue to reform all our schools without some sort of testing and accountability.

Look, if none of us had ever come along, ever—including me—you know, it's hard to admit this, especially when you can't run again, but if none of us had ever come along, a lot of the good things that have happened in education would have happened. I've been saying for 15 years, every problem in American education has been solved by somebody somewhere.

How many times have you gone to a school and then you've written this gripping story

about, oh, my goodness, look at this school in this high-crime neighborhood with all these poor kids and all this terrible disadvantage, and the kids have—they live in these little apartments, and they have to go into the bathroom to study at night in the bathtub and read all their books—I mean, how many of those stories have you written? Every one of you have written those stories, right? And look what the kids are doing.

What is the problem in American education? It is not that nobody does this; it is that we still have not figured out how to make achievement universal.

Every one of you has written this story about somebody succeeding against all the odds, about a great teacher, a great principal, a great school. What is the problem? We have not devised a method to make learning occur at a universally high level.

And that's what the voucher people argue. They argue that that's because public schools have a monopoly on revenues and customers. So we sought to break the monopoly without losing the accountability by promoting school choice, charter schools, and other alternatives. But you still have to have standards and measurement.

And let me just say this—I realize I'm talking this question to death, but this is pretty important because it really gets to everything else. If I were to suggest to you that standards and measurement are quite distressing and troubling, and so—and I'm worried about the anxiety they cause, so I think we'll ease up on them in the military—there would be a riot in the country, right? Thank you very much; send them back to the training.

And so I do think it's time to review all this; I think there are too many of these tests and some are too easy; some are too hard; some are too off-beat; some may crowd out other educational missions. But that's why we tried—Dick and I did—to have a set of generally accepted national standards with a voluntary national test to measure them and to have it done by a nonpolitical group and sort of modeling on what the NAEP people do, which I think is quite good, by the way.

And so, anyway, that's my answer. Just because there may be too much or wrong, doesn't mean you don't have to measure. You do have to measure. Might as well not have standards if you're not going to measure whether you're meeting them.

[*Ms. Lively read a question submitted by a journalist from Catalyst Magazine, which asked if the Chicago school system's approach to retention and promotion should be a model for the Nation.*]

The President. Read the first part of the question again. I didn't understand.

[*Ms. Lively repeated that research showed students retained had not benefited and were more likely to drop out.*]

The President. Well, in order to answer that question, I would have to know the answer to something I think is equally important, which is, what happened to the kids that weren't retained because of their performance in summer school? Are they doing better than they were? Are they learning more? Are they more likely to succeed and stay in school?

Keep in mind, in the Chicago system, if you fail, you get retained only if you either don't go to summer school, or you go to summer school and you don't make the grade there. So most of the people—Chicago's summer school is now the sixth biggest school district in America. It's one reason that the juvenile crime rate is way down there. And it's the sixth biggest school district in America.

So I can't answer that question without knowing whether those kids did better and are more likely to stay in school and learn more, because it wouldn't be surprising that kids that are retained get discouraged and drop out. But there was a study a few years ago, and I haven't kept up with the literature as much as I should have since I've been President, which showed that one big reason for dropout after the middle school years was that kids weren't learning. If they weren't learning anything and they were being passed along, they got bored and dropped out, too.

So I don't want to disparage the study, but I don't know if it's right or not. And neither does the person who asked the question, until you follow what happened to the kids that weren't retained because they went to summer school and made the grade, and what are the percentage of those who made

the grade as opposed to those who were retained.

[*A participant cited studies showing that kids in the Chicago system who went to summer school and passed did indeed stay, but she clarified the question by pointing out that 10,000 students were retained in the last several years and, despite efforts to help them, became increased risks.*]

The President. But let me ask you this. Does it follow that they would have been helped by being promoted, or that it's worth promoting them even if they couldn't be helped, because the social stigma of being retained and dropping out makes them more likely to turn to crime? I mean, I think that's the answer.

I don't believe—I guess, fundamentally, what I'd like to see done is—and you may be right—let me go back to that. My answer to your question is, I don't know, so I'll start with that.

But you may be right. But what's hard for me to believe is that we can't help these young people. I mean, one of the things that I thought would happen with the Chicago system, sooner or later—and may be happening sooner, rather than later, from what you say about the study—is that we would identify young people who might not measure out to be special ed kids, for example, but who, for some reason, even though they showed up in class and seemed to be trying, just weren't learning, even though the teachers were trying, everybody was trying.

And I think there may be some of those kind of kids in virtually every district, but in a district, a town as big as Chicago, you'd have a larger number. And one of the things that I would like to see is, before the principle is abandoned, I would like to see some new and different efforts made to see if different kind of strategies would help those kids to learn.

One of the reasons I like the potential of this whole computer revolution in the schools—even though I think it can be oversold and there are a lot of computers being unused because either the software is not good or the teachers haven't been trained or whatever—but one of the things that I do believe is that there is quite a bit of evidence that people of more or less equal intelligence may learn in dramatically different ways and that some of the people who seem to be impervious to the best efforts of education, but they would like to learn, may be able to learn in radically different ways. And Chicago may have enough people to identify a class of folks that we ought to make a special national effort to see if there are some other strategies that would help them.

I don't know the answer to that, but I'd be willing to try if they are, if they want to do it, if they want some help from us.

[*Ms. Lively read a question asking the President's position on gay youth groups in high schools.*]

The President. I think it ought to be decided by the school districts. I don't think the States ought to prohibit them. I think the school districts ought to make a decision based on what the facts are in every district.

Look, I think the real issue here is a lot of parents, even parents that are fairly open-minded on such matters, are worried that if you have these groups when children are still impressionable, that somehow they'll be sanctioning or encouraging people to adopt a lifestyle that they may have a choice not to adopt.

On the other hand, there's a lot of evidence that a sexual stigma for gay kids is one of the reasons that they have high suicide rates and other associated social problems. And I think that the facts will tend to be different from place to place, and that's why I think it would be better if the people who are on the ground who care about the kids and who aren't homophobic—that is, they're not interested in bashing them, but they understand there's got to be at some point below which you would not go, probably an age—were able to make these judgments based on the facts. That's my thinking about it.

Ms. Lively. Those are the three questions.

The President. Go ahead.

Ms. Lively. That's all we have.

The President. Oh, that's all? [*Laughter*] This is the first press group I have ever been with that said, "I'm sorry, we're out of questions." Where were you when I needed you the last several years? [*Laughter*]

Okay, go ahead.

[*Ms. Lively read a question, by a journalist from the Savannah Morning News, who asked if the President remained in favor of charter schools despite studies showing they were not meeting their original goals and were draining funds from local systems.*]

The President. Yes, but what I think the studies show is, some work and some don't. And the idea is that, unlike—when we started them, there were two ideas behind charter schools, let me remind you. There was an upside idea and a downside idea. The upside idea was that if teachers and parents and others organized these charter schools, either to deal with a certain kind of kids or to meet a certain mission or whatever, they would be more likely to succeed.

The downside hope was, if they failed, unlike other schools, the parents and kids could leave immediately and the thing could be shut down—that is, the school district, in return for letting the charter schools be free of a lot of the rules and redtape that other schools would be under, should have the discipline to shut the thing down if it had had enough years to operate to see that it wasn't succeeding. And I think the evidence is, a lot of them are doing quite well. And the ones who aren't, the thing I'm worried about is that the ones that aren't will become just like other schools that aren't doing so well, and nobody will want to shut them down either.

I mean, the whole purpose of the charter school was to bring the sort of hope—the concept of empowerment of the parents and the students into the public education system, and it would work on the upside. And if it didn't work on the upside, it would at least work on the downside. And that's where I think we need to focus.

But I think that some of them have done very well, and some of them have not done so well. And what we need is to make sure the downside potential is present as well. But yes, I do still favor them, based on the ones I've been in and the kinds of things they've been able to do.

And I don't think it's fair to say they drain resources. If you don't spend any more per kid in a charter school than you do per child in another school, and you've got to have those kids somewhere, I don't think it's fair to say that, especially if you're not—unless you're paying for physical facilities you wouldn't otherwise pay for.

Ms. Lively. I've been told that was our last question. So, thank you. We know you have a busy day, and we appreciate you coming.

The President. Thank you again for your interest. I've enjoyed this very much. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:35 a.m. in the Grand Ballroom North at the Sheraton Colony Square Hotel. In his remarks, he referred to Sandra Feldman, president, American Federation of Teachers.

Remarks at a Reception for Representative Cynthia A. McKinney in Atlanta

April 14, 2000

The President. Thank you. Well, first of all, I'm glad to see you. [*Laughter*] And I'm glad to see you in such good spirits. And I want to thank you for being here for Cynthia and thank her for giving me a chance to come here and be with you.

I think we ought to give another hand to our hosts, the Sadris, for letting us come into their beautiful home today. [*Applause*] Beautiful place. I appreciated Governor and Mrs. Barnes and Mayor Campbell for being here. They had to leave. And as Roy and Bill said on the way out, "We've got to go, and besides, we've heard this speech before." [*Laughter*]

That reminds me of something Tina Turner said once. Tina Turner is my favorite political philosopher. [*Laughter*] I went to a concert of hers, and she sang all of these new songs. And at the very end, she started singing "Proud Mary." It was her first hit. And the whole crowd just went nuts, you know, clapping for her. So she didn't start singing; she just waited until they quit clapping. She said, "You know, I've been singing this song for 25 years, and it gets better every time I do it." [*Laughter*] So I thank the rest of you for hanging around.