

President Clinton. Well, first, I think that your Government is very aware of it and very much determined to do something about it, because we have been engaged in talks to establish a joint strike force, to have an FBI presence, to work together. Frankly, I believe that international organized crime is going to be one of the great challenges all of us face, and it, I suppose, is an inevitable result of the new technologies available in the world, that these multinational syndicates now are much bigger than ever before. And I think that the only way to deal with them is to deal with them together. And I am committed to working with you to try to help to reduce the problem in Hungary. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:05 a.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, the President referred to President Slobodan Milosevic of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro); President Boris Yeltsin of Russia; Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu of Israel; and Chairman Yasser Arafat of the Palestinian Authority. The President also referred to the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). Prime Minister Orban spoke in Hungarian to the second group of reporters, and those remarks were translated by an interpreter. A tape was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

Remarks on Signing the Higher Education Amendments of 1998 October 7, 1998

Thank you very much. Just so Harold doesn't mistake all that applause for me, let's give him another hand. I thought he was—[*applause*]. That's what this is all about today.

I want to thank all the previous speakers—Secretary Riley for being the most dedicated, complete, and productive Secretary of Education in the history of this country. I'm very grateful to him. [*Applause*] We always salt the crowd with employees of the Education Department. [*Laughter*] We are very, very grateful to you, sir.

I want to thank Senator Jeffords and Senator Kennedy, Chairman Goodling and Congressman Clay, and as was mentioned previously, Congressman McKeon and Congressman Kildee, all the members of the education committees of the House and the Senate and the staff.

I'd like to also point out that there are Members who care deeply about education who aren't on those committees, and some of them are here. We have over 30 Members of the Congress from both parties here. I'd like to ask the Members of the Congress who are here who aren't on the education committees and, therefore, have not yet stood up, to please stand up, all of you who are here.

I notice Senator Kennedy already acknowledged Senator Specter, understanding how the Appropriations Committee works. [*Laughter*]

But his presence here means he considers it to be an education committee, and we thank you for that.

I'd like to make one big point first. You've all heard about the details of this legislation. What I want us to all be very clear on is that the bill I will sign in a few moments will enhance the economic strength of America. It will strengthen the communities of America. It will improve the lives of the families of America. And it certainly will widen the circle of opportunity.

When I ran for President in 1992, one of the things I most wanted to do was to open the doors of college to all Americans who were willing to work for it. In the 1980's, the cost of a college education was the only really important thing to families that increased at a higher rate than the cost of health care.

And yet, in the world in which we live and certainly in the one in which Harold and his contemporaries will live, college is no longer a luxury for the well-to-do or even an opportunity for hard-working middle class kids whose parents save. It is an economic necessity for every American and for our country as a whole.

That is why we worked so hard in the bipartisan balanced budget agreement to create the \$1,500 HOPE scholarships; the tax credits for the first 2 years of college; tax breaks for junior

and senior years, for graduate school, for adults going back to school. That is why with bipartisan support we dramatically expanded the Pell grant program; created 300,000 more work-study positions; the education IRA's; the education grants for those serving in AmeriCorps now are nearly numbering 100,000 young Americans; student loans payable, or repayable, as a percentage of future incomes, so no one needed to fear borrowing the money and then being broke if they took a job that didn't pay a lot of money; the tax deductibility of the interest on student loans. And today, with this lowering of the interest rates, as has already been said, to the lowest rate in nearly two decades, we can really say that every high school graduate in America, regardless of income, can afford to go to college.

I asked the Congress to slash the interest rates on the student loans. As Chairman Goodling said, it was the lowest rate now in 17 years. Let me tell you what it means to a college student. It's a \$700 tax cut to the average student borrowing for a college degree on the front end. And anybody who can remember what it was like back then knows that \$700 to a college student is still real money.

I asked Congress to use technology to help all Americans, including those in the work force, to upgrade their skills any time, anywhere, and this bill does that. I asked them to help us recruit more and better trained teachers, to improve teacher training, direct our best teachers to schools with the greatest needs. This bill does that.

Finally, I asked Congress to create a nationwide mentoring program. You heard Harold talk about it, the one that affected his life. All of us have at some level come in contact with the pioneer program, Eugene Lang's "I Have a Dream" program in New York City. Many of us have been involved at the State level, as I was, in creating scholarships for all our young people who achieved a certain level of academic excellence. What this bill does is something more and, I think, profoundly important. And again, like others, I want to thank Senator Jim Jeffords, I want to thank Gene Sperling of my staff who worked on this, and I especially want to thank Congressman Chaka Fattah of Philadelphia who pushed this so hard. And we thank you, sir.

This bill seeks to make national what Harold talked about affecting his life. It essentially seeks, first of all, to provide mentors to kids

in their middle school years who need it, and then to give the mentors weapons. At a minimum, the mentors will be able to say, "Look, here's who you are. Here's where you come from. Here's how much money you have. And if this is what your income looks like when you got out of high school and you stay in school and you learn your lessons, we can tell you right now, this is how much money you can get to go to college." Now, it's already there, but they don't know it. So we're not only trying to open the doors of college to all Americans but to make sure all Americans know the doors are open. And those are two very different things.

Secondly, this bill provides funds to enable partnerships to be established between universities and other groups and our middle schools so that they can have more programs, hopefully one for every school and every student in America, eventually, like the one that benefited Harold. So I can't tell you how important I think this is. So now we can say we've opened the doors to college to all Americans, and we have a system by which, if we really implement it, we can make sure all the Americans know the doors are open.

The other day I was in Philadelphia, and Chaka got a bunch of young kids, middle school kids together, and we took them down town and drank a Coke with them. Every one of them wanted to go to college. And we talked about this program, and every one of them was, I think, impressed by the fact that the Congress of the United States actually cared about them—and I might add, probably a little surprised—glad to know that somehow, somebody was trying to set up a system to really reach down into their lives, at one of the most challenging and difficult points in those lives, often under the most difficult circumstances under which they're living, and open the door to a different future.

I don't think anyone would question that when Harold talked about his friend who's now working as a scientist in Utah, that that young person is not only better off, the rest of us are better off as well. America is a better place as well.

I also want to say very briefly, I am personally grateful for the Congress in a bipartisan fashion responding to the problem of alcohol and drug abuse and the health threat it presents on our campuses—we all remember the tragic loss of

five students last fall in Virginia—by changing the law to allow campuses to notify parents when children younger than 21 have alcohol and drug violations. We have no way of knowing, but we believe this will save lives. And I thank the Congress for giving us the chance to do that.

Let me also say something that I think it's important for me to say as President: I am proud not only of what is in this bill but of how this bill passed. This is the way America should work. This is the way Congress should work. Members of Congress, I assure you, brought their different convictions and their partisan views to the debate, and we had the debate. But in the end, we acted together; we put the progress of the country and the people of the country ahead of our partisan differences and reached a principled resolution of the matters in dispute. That's the way America is supposed to work, and that's the way the American people want us to work. And so I want to thank every one of you for making sure on this terribly important issue, that is exactly the way you worked. Thank you very much.

Finally let me just say, in the closing days of this congressional session I hope that there will be similar bipartisan action on the agenda for public school excellence that I offered 8 months ago, an agenda that demands high responsibility and high standards; offers choice and opportunity; calls for voluntary national standards and voluntary exams to measure their performance, supervised by a completely bipartisan committee; an end to social promotion, but help for the school districts that end social promotion, so that we don't brand children a failure when the system fails them but instead give

them access to the mentors, the after-school programs the summer school programs that they need; an effort to make our schools safer, more disciplined, more drug-free; a plan that would provide for 100,000 teachers, for smaller classes in the early grades; funds to modernize or build 5,000 schools at the time when we have the largest student population in history; a plan to connect all of our classrooms to the Internet by the year 2000.

Today we celebrate putting partisanship aside for a historic higher education law. We can do no less for our public schools. We have to pass the agenda, and we must pass, literally, the annual education investment bill which funds a lot of the programs, Head Start, technology, the summer school and after-school programs. So once again we have to put progress ahead of partisanship.

In this room, many Presidents have signed many pieces of legislation into law. Some of them were very momentous. But if, when you leave here today, you remember this life story of the young man who spoke before me and you imagine how many other people there are like him in America, and how many more stories there will be because of this bill, you can all feel very, very proud.

Thank you very much.

Can I ask the Members to come up, and we'll do this.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:48 a.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Harold Shields, a participant in the "Say Yes to Education" mentoring program. H.R. 6, approved October 7, was assigned Public Law No. 105-244.

Statement on Signing the Higher Education Amendments of 1998

October 7, 1998

Today I am pleased to sign into law H.R. 6, the "Higher Education Amendments of 1998." This legislation is the culmination of bipartisan efforts by the Congress and my Administration to increase access to college, make higher education more affordable, improve teacher quality, and modernize the delivery of student aid. I particularly want to thank Senators

Jeffords, Coats, Kennedy, and Dodd, and Representatives Goodling, McKeon, Clay, Kildee, Andrews, and Petri, as well as other Members of the Conference Committee, for their help in guiding this legislation through the Congress.

I also owe a particular debt of gratitude of Representative Fattah, whose consistent and tireless work resulted in a new effort that will