also referred to the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty. Prime Minister D’Alema spoke in Italian, and his remarks were translated by an interpreter. In his remarks, the Prime Minister referred to Prime Minister Tony Blair of the United Kingdom.

Statement on the Kennedy-Murray Amendments to Proposed Education Flexibility Partnership Legislation

March 5, 1999

I strongly support the efforts of Senators Murray and Kennedy to offer a class size amendment to the ed-flex bill. We must make a long-term commitment now to hire 100,000 new, well-prepared teachers to reduce class size in the early grades. The Republican leadership is wrong to try to shut down debate on this bill before a class size amendment can be voted on. I urge them to allow an up-or-down vote on this amendment, and I urge every Senator to vote for it.

Statement on the Death of Billy Jack Gaither

March 5, 1999

I share with many Americans a sense of grief and outrage at the tragic and violent death of Billy Jack Gaither in Alabama. This heinous and cowardly crime touches the conscience of our country, just as the terrible murders of James Byrd in Texas and Matthew Shepard in Wyoming did last year.

In times like this, the American people pull together and speak with one voice, because the acts of hatred that led to the deaths of such innocent men are also acts of defiance against the values our society holds most dear.

That is why I will continue to work for passage of the “Hate Crimes Prevention Act,” which can empower the Federal Government, working with local authorities, to do even more to deter, investigate, and help prosecute crimes of hatred. The legislation would remove needless jurisdictional requirements and give the Department of Justice the power to prosecute hate crimes committed because of the victim’s sexual orientation, gender, or disability.

Laws represent values that we as a society cherish, and among those values is a belief that intolerance is un-American. And intolerance, left unchallenged, can inspire evil deeds that threaten the very fabric of this great country. All Americans deserve protection from hate. Nothing is more important to our country’s future than our standing together against intolerance, prejudice, and violent bigotry. Congress can give power to such shared values by passing the “Hate Crimes Prevention Act.” In so doing, all Americans can be made more safe and secure.

Hillary and I offer our prayers for the family and friends of Mr. Gaither, and our hope that their love for him, together with God’s grace, will carry them through these trying times.

The President’s Radio Address

March 6, 1999

Good morning. This week we learned the good news that our efforts to raise academic standards for our children are beginning to pay off. The National Assessment of Education Progress, or NAEP, released State test scores on Thursday that show that our children’s
reading scores have risen, with some of the
greatest gains in States that once scored below
the national average.

Today I want to talk to you about what I
think we must do to build on our progress,
by putting more teachers in the classroom and
reducing class size in schools around our coun-
try.

We all agree that to build a stronger nation
we must build up our Nation’s public schools.
I have proposed a comprehensive education
agenda to strengthen and improve our schools
with more accountability, higher standards, more
volunteer reading tutors for young children, and
mentors for teenagers, with Internet connections
in every classroom, and with more well-trained
teachers in smaller classes.

As any parent, teacher, or school principal
can tell you, smaller classes make a huge dif-
ference in our children’s lives. Studies show that
teachers in smaller classes spend less time on
discipline and more time teaching. Students
spend less time competing for attention and
more time learning. Students in smaller classes
outperform their peers.

For children in struggling communities, from
remote rural areas to inner-city neighborhoods,
small class size is even more critical. And with
school enrollments at record highs and expected
to keep rising, we must act now to reduce class
size in all our Nation’s public schools.

Across the country, more and more commu-
"nities are recognizing the importance of smaller
class size and trying to do something about it.
To help them meet this challenge, I called on
Congress early last year to pass my initiative
to reduce class size by helping school districts
hire 100,000 highly trained teachers. I’m pleased
that Republican Members of Congress joined
with Democrats and did the right thing in mak-
ing a big downpayment toward meeting our
goal.

Today the Department of Education is releas-
ing guidelines that will let every school district
in our Nation know how much money they will
receive and how best to use the funds to reduce
class size in time for school this fall. But com-
munities deciding now whether to hire and train
new teachers for next year need to know wheth-
er they can count on the commitment Congress
made last year to help them reduce class size
for years to come. It is time to finish the job.

Now, this week the Senate and House will
vote on a bill that gives States the flexibility
they need to improve their public schools in
spending Federal aid they receive. I support
this bill. But I also strongly support efforts by
Senators Murray and Kennedy and Representa-
tives Clay and Wu to add an amendment to
it that will fully fund 100,000 well-trained teach-
ers over the next 6 years.

Unfortunately, Republican leaders are trying
to shut down debate on the ed-flex bill before
this important amendment on more teachers and
smaller classes can even be voted on. Now, last
October, just before the election, Republicans
joined us in promising the American people
more teachers and smaller classes. Less than
5 months later, we now have the first big test
of whether this Congress is really willing to work
together across party lines and with the White
House to get things done for the American peo-
ple, whether the Congress is serious about giv-
ing our children the education they need and
deserve.

The choice is simple: Are we going to give
Americans smaller classes or more partisanship?
Are we going to put politics ahead of progress
or put 100,000 teachers in our Nation’s class-
rooms? I call on the Senate to allow an up-
or-down vote on the Murray-Kennedy class size
amendment, and I urge every Senator to vote
for it. When it comes to our children’s future,
politics must stop at the schoolhouse door.

Thanks for listening.

NOTE: The address was recorded at 4:08 p.m. on
March 5 in the Oval Office at the White House
for broadcast at 10:06 a.m. on March 6. The tran-
script was made available by the Office of the
Press Secretary on March 5 but was embargoed
for release until the broadcast.