

just up to me, if I could sign an Executive order and let them have a sanctioned election, I would do it today. And I view this compromise as an empowerment of the people of Puerto Rico and, to that extent, a ratification of their longstanding grievances.

But the people of Vieques should be able to decide this. And I don't think that—just as I don't think the Pentagon should impose it on them, I don't think the demonstrators should stop them from having a vote either. I think they ought to be able to make a judgment.

Thank you very much. Thank you.

NOTE: The President's 186th news conference began at 2:25 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Nicholas Kunselman and Stephanie Hart, students at Col-

umbine High School, Littleton, CO, who were murdered in a Subway sandwich shop on February 14; Gov. George W. Bush of Texas; Gov. George H. Ryan of Illinois; former Senator George J. Mitchell, who chaired the multiparty talks in Northern Ireland; Gen. John de Chastelain, Canadian Defense Forces, chair, Independent International Commission on Decommissioning; David Trimble, leader, Ulster Unionist Party; Gov. Pedro Rosselló of Puerto Rico; and Mayor Manuela Santiago of Vieques, PR. Reporters referred to Mayor Rudolph W. Giuliani of New York City; Judge Susan Webber Wright, U.S. District Court for Arkansas, who presided over the Paula Jones suit against the President; and former Senator Bill Bradley. The President also referred to LIHEAP, the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program.

Letter to Congressional Leaders on Action Concerning Imports of Steel Wire Rod

February 16, 2000

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

I am pleased to provide to the Congress documents called for by section 203(b) of the Trade Act of 1974, as amended, pertaining to the safeguard action that I proclaimed today on imports of steel wire rod.

Sincerely,

WILLIAM J. CLINTON

NOTE: Identical letters were sent to J. Dennis Hastert, Speaker of the House of Representatives, and Albert Gore, Jr., President of the Senate. The proclamation and memorandum of February 16 on action concerning imports of steel wire rod are listed in Appendix D at the end of this volume.

Remarks at the National Association for Equal Opportunity in Higher Education Dinner

February 16, 2000

Thank you very much. Dr. McClure, my mother is up in heaven smiling at that introduction. And she's probably the only person who heard it who believes every word of it. [*Laughter*] But I liked it, and I thank you. [*Laughter*]

I thank you so much, all of you, for welcoming me. To your chair-elect, Joann Boyd-Scotland, who sat with me for a few moments; your CEO, my long-time friend Dr. Henry Ponder; Dr. Earl Richardson, who welcomed me

to Morgan State not too many years ago, and then Vice President Gore yesterday; to Dr. Iris Ish and all the members of my Board of Advisors on Historically Black Colleges and Universities; to my president, the Arkansas Baptist College president, Dr. William Keaton, my long-time friend.

I want to also have a special word of acknowledgement to your vice president, Dr. Wilma Roscoe. Her daughter, Jena, works in the White

House; that's really why I'm here tonight, to preserve peace in the family. [*Laughter*]

I want to thank all the White House members who are here: the Director of our Office of Public Liaison, Mary Beth Cahill; and Ben Johnson, who has done a wonderful job for us. I know he spoke here earlier today. I also would like to thank Catherine LeBlanc, who is Executive Director of our Initiative on Historically Black Colleges and Universities. And I congratulate all the alumni award winners here tonight.

When Dr. McClure was saying his kind words, what I wanted to say was, I feel like the luckiest person alive, that at this moment in history I was fortunate enough to be given a chance to serve as President and to focus the attention of the Nation on the future, on some old-fashioned ideas: everybody counts; everybody ought to have a chance; everybody's got a role to play; we all do better when we help each other. The work I have done to build one America for a new century was a joy every day. Even on the darkest days, the fact that I had this job to do for you and for our children and our children's children made this a joy.

And I think of all you have done to make the last 7 years possible. Think about what a different country America would be today had it not been for the institutions all of you represent. Think about what a different administration I would have had. We have Alexis Herman, the Secretary of Labor, graduate of Xavier. Togo West, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs; Bob Nash—the hardest job in the White House—he handles my appointments. I get the credit when they get it; he takes the blame when they don't. [*Laughter*] And Judith Winston, who ran our One America initiative when I put my White House committee together on race. All graduated from Howard. Dr. David Satcher, from Morehouse; Terry Edmonds, my chief speechwriter, from Morgan State.

But if you think about this economy we have, which is not only the longest expansion in history but has given us the lowest African-American unemployment rate ever recorded and the lowest poverty rate in 20 years and the lowest female unemployment rate in 40 years—that would not have happened if it hadn't been for the educational opportunities provided by the people in this room and their forebears, and you should be very, very proud of that.

I was very glad to be invited to come by here and to be able to redo our schedule so

I could come, because I wanted to make one simple point to you. Everybody knows how important your institutions were to 20th century America. I want everybody to know how important your institutions will be to 21st century America.

A third of all the undergraduate and advanced degrees awarded to African-Americans are awarded by your institutions. I want America to know that and to know what a vital role you play in building your communities, nurturing new businesses, and revitalizing neighborhoods, as Howard is doing here in our hometown of Washington. I want America to know about your enormous contributions to research. I want every American to know that last November Tennessee State astronomers made the world's first direct detection of a planet orbiting another star.

We've done what we could to play our role. The Vice President and I have worked hard to be good partners to you. I told Earl, Al Gore was so happy that he got to go to Morgan State yesterday, because when I got to go to Morgan State to give a commencement address, to talk about, of all things, science and technology—not him, I got to talk about that—he was so jealous. [*Laughter*] And I just told him, I said, "It won't be long before nobody pulls rank on you anymore, but I'm going there." And he got to go yesterday.

We want people to know what's going on. And we want you to be able to define a mission for the 21st century that will help to create opportunity for every responsible American. We now have 30 agencies in our Government all singing out of the same hymnal, working for you, to help you reach your goals and your aspirations. The budget I just submitted to Congress includes almost a 40 percent increase in HBCU funding, including the new dual degree program Secretary Riley talked about yesterday.

I want to ask you now to think beyond that. In the State of the Union, I said that I thought America should be proud of what we had done together these last 7 years, but not satisfied. There's a big difference. We should remember that we got to where we are as a country with the right vision and the right values and an awful lot of effort—an awful lot of effort. All of you know, because of the work you do, that the one constant of the time in which we live is change; that there is an inherent dynamism in this moment which rewards people who are

educated, who work hard, who can think and create, and punishes the sluggards mercilessly.

And I don't want to see our country become a sluggard in 2000 just because we're feeling good about ourselves. I don't want to see Washington become a sluggard in 2000 just because there's an election on the horizon that will occupy the headlines, because what is rewarded is action. And so I ask you to help me convince our country and our Congress that this may be an election year, but it's still got to be an action year.

We have an action agenda. You know, I think we can really say—with the HOPE scholarships, with the direct student loan program, with a million work-study positions, with the increases in the Pell grants—we've opened the doors of at least 2 years of college now to every American who will work for it. But it's time to open the doors of college for 4 years to every American who will work for it.

That's why we want to raise the Pell grant again. That's why I want to make college tuition tax deductible up to \$10,000, and I want to do it in a progressive way so that whether the family is in the 15 percent income tax bracket or the 28 percent income tax bracket, they get a 28 percent tax deduction for college tuition. This can make a huge difference to help children stay in school.

One of the things that bothers me most is that since 1993 we have a 10 percent increase in the percentage of our high school graduates going on to college. A couple years ago, for the first time in history, the percentage of African-Americans graduating from high school on time was almost identical to the white majority. The percentage going on to college has significantly increased. But the dropout rate is still way too high.

You wait till this census comes in. And it will give you a profile of the American people and their incomes and their prospects. And what it will show is just what the 1990 census showed, but more so: People with an education do well; people without an education work harder for less. We've got to get these kids into college; we've got to keep them in college. And you have to help us, financially, academically, in every way. I have proposed some new college completion grants to try to help schools experiment with new strategies to keep young people in school within the TRIO program. I know

that this is a big concern of yours. This is a big issue to America.

I want you to help me convince the country and the Congress that we ought to bring economic opportunity to every area that hasn't seen it. We ought to increase the number of empowerment zones under the program the Vice President has headed so ably. We ought—in every poor neighborhood in America, an inner city, a rural area, an Indian reservation—we ought to give people the same tax incentives to invest there that we give them to invest overseas, in Latin America or Africa or Asia. I'm for helping Americans to invest overseas, but we ought to give them the same incentives to invest in poor areas here, where people are dying to go to work or start businesses or have a better future.

I want you to help me convince the country and convince the Congress that there are still a lot people out there in poverty; that they ought to have access to jobs and education; and that even though we have 2 million-plus fewer children in poverty, there are still too many. And as rich as we are now, as low as our unemployment rate is now, there is no excuse for any child in America living in poverty. And we ought to say as a goal, we're going to make sure that we increase the earned-income tax credit for working families; we're going to make sure that we increase child care support; we're going to do whatever it takes to make sure that every parent can succeed at home and work, and no child is raised in poverty. I want you to help me convince the Congress and the country that that is the right thing to do.

The one thing you can play a big role in is making sure we close the digital divide—it's okay to clap for that, that's good. [*Applause*] I was so pleased to learn of your new agreement with Gateway to empower your students, your faculty, your alumni with a million affordable new computers; to put in place the E-commerce tools for improving distance learning, on-line admissions, registration, and financial aid. It's a good company, doing what I think we ought to do.

I visited Gateway's offices in Belfast, Northern Ireland. I met with all their young employees who worked there. They had young people from seven, eight, nine different countries working in one office there, talking all over the world where they were selling these computers. And

Ted Waitt and the people at Gateway have decided that if they're trying to bring that kind of opportunity to the rest of the world, they ought to be closing the digital divide here at home. I applaud them, and I applaud you for working with them. We have to do more with that. There is so much we can do to help young people skip a generation of educational and economic development, in terms of time, if we close the digital divide.

I ask you to help me persuade the Congress to give the biggest increase in civil rights enforcement in history—we still have actual problems with bigotry and discrimination out there—to enforce the equal pay laws; and to pass hate crimes legislation; to do things that will give us the tools to create one America.

Let me just say this briefly in closing. I know you all agree with my agenda. I know you do, and I'm grateful for the support you've given us in everything we've worked on through the years together. But the truth is, you're feeling pretty good here tonight, too. Things are going pretty well at home, aren't they? Yes, you know some people in trouble, but more people are doing better. And so we're all feeling pretty good. The great test of our people in this age is what we do with our good feeling. How many times—anybody that's over 30 in this audience will identify with this—how many times in your life have you made a mistake not because things were going badly but because things were going well?

The whole history of the civil rights movement is about people who were saints under fire. People'd burn crosses in their yards, throw rocks or bullets through the front window. Stand up and be counted. March down the street. We're commemorating Selma this year. We honor these people. But how many times have you made a mistake and failed, and your courage and your vision has failed you, not because you were under duress but because things were going so well you thought there were no consequences to taking your eye off the prize? And I want you to have a good time here tonight, but I want you to hear me about this.

I thank you for acknowledging what I've tried to do with you for America. But being President should always be honor enough. If nobody ever did another thing for me in my life, and I spent the rest of my life doing for other people, I would never catch up, not ever. So what I want to say to you is, take a little time tonight while

you're having fun at dinner and clapping for the award recipients and feeling pretty good about where you are and where your institutions are, but think about what you are going to do with this good fortune and what your country is.

You know, you talked about me being a little boy in Hope. I'm talking to you now more as a citizen than as a President. I'm not running for anything, you know. [Laughter] And most days, I'm okay about it. [Laughter] And I think about the young people and how I've always said, don't stop thinking about tomorrow; keep your eyes on the future; always have a vision. But I also know that to understand today and tomorrow, you have to have some sense of what yesterday was like.

This month when we celebrated the longest economic expansion in history, I did a little looking into, and thinking about, what was the longest economic expansion until this one. You know when it was? Nineteen sixty-one to 1968. Now, I remember what that was like. I remember in the beginning how full of hope we were when President Kennedy was elected. I remember when President Kennedy was assassinated, how heartbroken we were, but how we rallied as a country behind President Johnson.

All these people that look back at the sixties and say American cynicism started when President Kennedy was assassinated are just wrong. That's not true. This country was heartbroken, but we stood up together, and we joined hands. And Lyndon Johnson provided great leadership, and he pulled us together. So in 1964, I'm graduating from high school into an America that was the nearest like this America. We had low unemployment, low inflation, high growth. And everybody thought as difficult as the civil rights problems were, they were going to be resolved in a peaceable manner, with this wizard in the White House and the votes in Congress, to lawfully give African-Americans what they were constitutionally entitled to. And all the while we would win the cold war against communism, and we would create the greatest society America had ever known. That's what I believed the night I graduated from high school.

Two years later, we had riots in the streets, a half a million people in Vietnam; the country was beginning to be deeply divided. Two years after that, I graduated from college in this city, 2 days after Robert Kennedy was assassinated, 2 months and 4 days after Martin Luther King

was killed, 5 weeks after Lyndon Johnson said he couldn't see his way clear to run for President again. The streets were burning in Washington, DC and the country was broken and divided. And we decided a Presidential election on the politics of division, the so-called Silent Majority. You remember that? The Silent Majority was, "There are two kinds of folks in America, the Silent Majority and the loud minority, and you're either 'us' or 'them.'" [Laughter] We can laugh about it. But I want you to hear me now. I'm not running for anything.

I have waited 35 years and some months for my country to be in a position again to build the future of our dreams for all our children. We dare not blow this. Every one of you who can remember how we felt in those early days of hope—you don't know whether in your lifetime you'll get a third chance. America has a second chance to do it together, to build one America, to give all our kids a good education, to give health care to all our people, to lead the world to peace and freedom, to figure out how to live together across all the lines that divide us. We have a chance.

And it's so easy to forget that it requires effort, because things are going well. When you go home tonight, before you put your head on the pillow, just remember where you were, if

you're old as I am or just old enough to remember where you were the last time America thought everything was going to be all right, more or less automatically—it would be taken care of by then—and how quickly we lost it all.

I have waited 35 years. You can take us where we need to go—in the heart of every boy and girl who wasn't alive back then, in the spirit as well as the mind. We can do it, but we've got to work at it.

Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 7:52 p.m. in the International Ballroom at the Washington Hilton Hotel. In his remarks, he referred to Wesley C. McClure, chair, Joann R.G. Boyd-Scotland, chair-elect, Henry Ponder, president and chief executive officer, Earl S. Richardson, secretary, and Wilma Roscoe, vice president, National Association for Equal Opportunity in Higher Education; Lucile Ish, Vice-Chair, President's Board of Advisors on Historically Black Colleges and Universities; Jena Roscoe, Associate Director, White House Office of Public Liaison; J. Terry Edmonds, Assistant to the President and Director of Speechwriting; and Ted Waitt, chairman and chief executive officer, Gateway 2000, Inc.

Remarks to the Opening of the National Summit on Africa *February 17, 2000*

Thank you very, very much. It's a wonderful thing to be introduced by an old friend. Old friends and people you have appointed to office will tell false, good stories about you every time. [Laughter]

Africa never had a better friend in America than Andrew Young, and I thank him. I want to say I'm honored to be in the presence today of so many distinguished Africans. Secretary Salim, thank you for your visionary remarks and your leadership. President Moi, thank you for coming to the United States and for giving me another chance to visit with you and for the work we have done together. Vice President Abubakar, thank you for what you are doing in Nigeria to give that great country its true promise at long last. We thank you, sir.

I welcome all our distinguished guests from Africa: Mrs. Taylor, Foreign Ministers, Ambassadors. I thank all the Americans who are here, beginning with Andy's wife, who puts up with this relentless travel of his around Africa. Mayor Williams, thank you for welcoming us to Washington. There are three Members of our Congress here today representing what I hope will be a stronger and stronger bipartisan commitment to the future of Africa, Congressman Royce and Congresswoman Barbara Lee and Congresswoman Sheila Jackson Lee, I thank you for being here.

I want to thank Leonard Robinson and Herschelle Challenor and all the people responsible for this remarkable conference. Thank you, Noah Samara, and thank you, Bishop Ricard,