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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.

I want to acknowledge—in the audience we have Mayor Jack Ellis of Macon and Mayor Patsy Jo Hilliard of East Point and Representative Tyrone Brooks. Thanks for being here. And my old friend and '92 cochairman, Calvin Smyre; Representative Robert Brown; and Billy McKinney is here, Cynthia's daddy; and Senator Butler, thank you for coming. And there may be other members of the legislature here we've missed. State Representative Vernon Jornes—Jones—I can read Cynthia's handwriting; she can't read mine. [*Laughter*]

And Dikembe, I want to thank you for coming. He came to the White House once with his whole family. And I went out to meet him. And you know, I'm not a small man. I felt like a total shrimp standing there. [*Laughter*] You know, all these members of the other party, they've been trying for 8 years to humiliate me. If they'd just gotten the Mutombo family standing around—[*laughter*]—they could have done it in a day. It would have been no problem.

Let me say to all of you, I am here basically for three reasons. One is, I wanted to thank Cynthia McKinney, in front of her constituents, for the support that she has given to our efforts to make America a better place, with a stronger economy, a stronger social fabric, greater equality and opportunity for people; an America that is truly one America across all racial, religious, and other lines that divide us. And you can see by the crowd today that that's the kind of person she's been. And that's the kind of America I've tried to build, and I thank her for that.

The second reason that I'm here is to thank all of you for the work you do here and the example you set. I was listening as the—I saw Iranian-Americans, Chinese-Americans, Pakistani-Americans, Sikhs introduced. I was glad to see so many members of the Muslim community here. I think that I am the first President ever to consistently give messages on the *Eid* to the Muslim community around the world, to have Muslim Americans come into the White House and meet with us.

I look around the world—and I'll just start—the third reason I came here is to tell you what I think this election this year is about. And I feel free to say it since it's the first time in 25 years I'm not running for anything. [*Laughter*] And I'm okay about it most days. [*Laughter*] I'm okay.

But let me begin by saying this. Everybody knows what's going well today, and I won't go back over it except to just briefly say that we not only have the longest economic expansion in our history and the lowest unemployment rate in 30 years, the lowest welfare rolls in 30 years, the lowest crime rate in 25 years, the lowest poverty rate in 20 years, the lowest female unemployment rate in 40 years, highest homeownership in history, the lowest African-American and Hispanic unemployment rates ever recorded; we also have a sense, I think, of optimism and that we can do certain things. And as Cynthia said, we've tried to be a force for peace and freedom around the world.

But since we've got all these folks here, let me say, I think it's very interesting that in this most modern of ages, where we're thrilled that our kids are on the Internet, and they can go to school with people of different cultures and backgrounds, and we're about to decode the mysteries of the human gene—just in the next few weeks, we'll be able to announce the whole gene sequence that's been completed. And after that happens, it won't be long before we'll be able to block the genetic flaws that cause Alzheimer's or Parkinson's. We'll be able to identify certain kinds of cancers when they're—just a few cells congeal. We may even find out early in the next century what's in those black holes in the universe. It will be the most modern of ages.

No country can be isolated from it. Two years ago there were 2 million Internet users in China. Last year there were 9 million. This year there will be over 20 million. Within 2 years, there will be over 100 million, and the country will never be the same again.

I just came back from the Indian subcontinent. I went to Bangladesh and Pakistan and India. And I was in this—and in India, the per capita income is $450 a year. And I was in this little village—I mean, a little village—you may have seen the pictures on the television of me dancing with the village women, and they were pelting me with flowers. It's better than other things I could be pelted with. [*Laughter*] I was delighted.

But anyway, let me say, so here I am in this little remote village. And in the sole public building in the village, I met with the city council, 11 men and 4 women, representing 10 different tribes and castes. And I saw the village's computer. And this new mother comes in, to the village computer. And it was in Hindi, although they have these in all the various languages spoken in India. So she calls up the health department's webpage. And she's just had a baby, and she runs it out to the instructions for what the best care for a newborn is for the first 3 months of his life. And then she hits the print button, and they have this fabulous software, and this beautiful program printed right out on a world-class printer. And she took home information as good as you could take home from any obstetrician in Atlanta. So it's wonderful. This is a very modern world.

I went to another city where they give 18 government services on the Internet; nobody buys a driver's license in a revenue office anymore. I told Governor Barnes if he did that here, there would be no term limits and he could stay until he was 95. [*Laughter*]

So that's the sort of picture we imagine for these children. And it's all modern, it's about science and technology, and we're relating to each other and how interesting it is. Don't you

think it's also interesting that the biggest problems the world faces are rooted in the oldest difficulties of humankind, that we're still basically scared of people that aren't like us?

I mean, I see these Sikhs here, I thank them for coming here. The most heartbreaking thing that happened on my trip to the Indian subcontinent is that about 40 Sikhs were murdered in Kashmir. And I'm sure they were murdered because I was there. Those people lost their lives because I went to India and to Pakistan. And people who don't want their turmoil to be eased used my trip there as a pretext to highlight the difficulties. And somebody, we don't know who, killed 40 perfectly innocent people who, I might add, had never before been targeted in all the conflicts in Kashmir.

In Rwanda—Cynthia talked about Rwanda—Rwanda's not like a lot of other African countries that were formed in 1885 by European powers. It's basically been a coherent country for 500 years, with two dominant tribes, the Hutus and the Tutsis—for 500 years. And they fought from now and then, but they basically worked it out to get along. And in 100 days, 800,000 people were killed, almost with no guns.

In the Middle East, we still are seeing these tensions between the Israelis and their neighbors. In the Balkans, a million Islamic Albanians were driven from their homes like cattle, driven from their countries, in a matter of weeks, until we stopped it and turned it around in Kosovo. Even in Northern Ireland, where the people voted overwhelmingly for peace, the leaders are still so in the grip of their problems they can't get along.

Well, we know about India. We know that—I said before, I think the situation—here's an interesting story. The situation in Kashmir is interesting from an American's point of view for the following reason: Indian-Americans and Pakistani-Americans, of the 200 ethnic groups that exist in America today, both rank in the top 10 in per capita income and education. Obviously, if the difficulties over Kashmir could be resolved, people from South Asia would explode. There is literally no limit to the potential of the life that could be had there. But they are sort of kept back from the modern world by this ancient tension, or at least the tension that grew out of the founding of the nations of India and Pakistan.

I say that to make this point only—I'm basically, you know, a very optimistic person. And I always have been, and I remain so today. But let's take it closer to home. Isn't it interesting that here in Atlanta is the home of more international companies than any other American city, and we're still fighting in the South about whether there ought to be a Confederate flag on our flag? [*Laughter*] So there's something wrong with this picture here, you know? [*Laughter*] At least we can put it on a website. [*Laughter*]

What's the point of all—here's the point of all this: not to get you down but to get you back up, but to remind you that our progress and our good fortune is the product of constant effort, good values, good people, good ideas, hard work. It is not an accident, nor is it inevitable, nor can you depend on it to last forever.

A time like this for any country comes along once in a blue moon. And so the election is not about whether Cynthia McKinney had a good voting record or Bill Clinton was a good President. The real issue is, what are we going to do with this moment?

And you know, I feel very strongly that the American people should be humbled by this good fortune. And I think we should say, we're going to take on the big challenges facing our country. One, we've got to keep the economy going, because if we don't, the wheels will start to run off, and then we'll not be able to think about big things. That's why I want to keep paying the debt down. We can be debt-free for the first time since 1835. I want to do that.

Number two, we ought to bring economic opportunity to people and places that have been left behind in this country. That's why I want to give people the same incentives to invest in poor areas in America they have to invest around the world. That's why I want to close the digital divide and bring computer opportunities to schools and work places and entrepreneurs in distant rural places, Indian reservations, inner-city neighborhoods.

Number three, we ought to give a world-class education to every one of our children. We know how to do it now, so we don't have an excuse.

Number four, we ought to help people whose parents work to better balance the demands of work and family—equal pay for women and men; improved tax treatment for lower income working people; more health care coverage for children and for their parents if they can't afford it now—we have a program I want to expand;

a long-term care tax credit for people that are caring for their elderly relatives or disabled relatives—a lot of people are doing that now, and it's a terrible burden on them. And we want to keep families together, but we ought to help them do that. We ought to help them balance work and family.

Number five, we ought to make America the safest big country in the world. You know, Georgia and my home State of Arkansas are States with a strong hunting culture. But there's no excuse for not doing a background check every time somebody buys a handgun. There's no excuse. The law we've had has kept half a million felons, fugitives, and stalkers from getting handguns, and we got gun crime down 35 percent to a 30-year low in the last 7 years. But we can make America the safest big country in the world if we work at it.

Number six, we ought to prove we can improve our environment and the world's and grow the economy. If we don't do that, we will never get out—50 years from now, the children of the children in this audience will be living on a planet that will be much more difficult to navigate if we do not meet the environmental challenges of our time. And we don't have to mess up the economy to do it.

Number seven, we ought to keep in the lead in science and technology.

Number eight, we ought to do more to be good citizens in the world. I've been trying to pass a bill to buy more products from Africa and our neighbors in the Caribbean Basin. We can afford it in America, and a little bit of effort here does a phenomenal amount of good there. And I want to relieve the debts of the world's poorest nations. I want to head a global effort to develop vaccines for AIDS and malaria and TB. It could save millions of lives.

You know what the number one killer in poor countries still is?

Audience member. I believe it's malaria, no?

The President. No.

Audience member. What is it?

The President. Well, malaria is the second. It's basically problems related to the absence of clean water—still—problems related, including total dehydration, which kills a lot of kids.

I think we ought to do these things. I think we ought to keep trying to help people solve their racial and ethnic and religious problems. I think it is worth it. I also believe we ought to bring China into the world's trading system, because if we don't, they'll think we're isolating them, and there's a greater likelihood of a war there.

I just finished reading President Woodrow Wilson's private secretary's memoirs of the end of World War I, and how the Congress ran off and left him and they stiffed all of our opponents, and how it made World War II inevitable. Somebody asked me the other day, "What have you learned about foreign policy since you've been President?" And I said, "I've learned it's a whole lot more like life than I thought it was." What do I mean by that? That people everywhere, across all different cultures, are far more likely to respond to the outstretched hand than they are to respond to the clenched fist.

Now, there are some people who do things that I think require us to clench our fist. When Mr. Milosevic did what he did in Bosnia and Kosovo, we clenched our fist. But on the whole, we ought to encourage the positive developments around the world and try to help people get together. I think this is important.

And the last point I want to say is what I started with: If we want to do good around the world, we've got to be good at home. We've got to keep working. You know, we haven't solved all of our problems here. We still have racial prejudice; we still have religious prejudice; we still have people who are shot because of their race or because they're gay or for some other reason. And we have to keep working on this.

If I received a message from God tonight and He said, "You can't finish your term. I'm checking you out tomorrow, and you get one wish. I'm not a genie; you don't get three wishes. You get one"—I would not even wish for continued prosperity. I would wish for us to be truly one community, one Nation, because—because just look around this room here. Look at all the intelligence, the experience, the understanding, the energy in this room, from the youngest to the eldest and all in between. If we can just keep our bearings, if we can keep our spirits, if we can keep centered, there is no limit to what we can do.

And what I want you to understand is, that means that we have to pay very close attention in this election. The last thing I will say to you—you have to pay very close attention. People get in a lot of trouble when times are good because they think there are no consequences to what they do. Sometimes you can get in

more trouble in good times than you can in bad times because you break your attention. You've worked so hard, you've labored, you've worked, and you think, "Gosh, I just want to forget about this now."

And I was just talking to Tyrone Brooks. He was at Selma when I was there, celebrating the 35th anniversary of the march over the Pettus Bridge, and it put me to thinking—I will close with this point—when we celebrate the longest economic expansion in American history in February, I got all my advisers together and I said, "Now, when was the longest economic expansion in history?" When many of you weren't here—it was between 1961 and 1969. You either weren't born or you were in another country. I was here. [*Laughter*]

Now, let me tell you what happened. Let me tell you what happened. In the full bloom of expansion in 1964, I graduated from high school. And yes, we were sort of peripherally involved in Vietnam, and yes, we did have a big civil rights challenge. But unemployment was low; inflation was low; growth was high; productivity was high. Most everybody then thought that our new President, Lyndon Johnson, with the great sympathy the country had after President Kennedy had been killed, would solve the civil rights problems of America in the Congress, and those that wouldn't be solved in the Congress would be solved in the courts. And no one believed Vietnam would tear the country up. And we all thought in the course of time we would win the cold war, and we would always just be prosperous.

Now, 4 years later, I graduated from college in Washington, DC—4 years—2 days after Senator Kennedy was killed, 2 months after Martin Luther King was killed, 9 weeks after Lyndon Johnson couldn't run for reelection because the country was split down the middle. And within just a few weeks, the longest economic expansion in American history was itself history.

What's the point? Not to be down but to be determined, to realize it makes a difference who is in the Congress, to realize it makes a difference who is the President, to realize it makes a difference what people think the subject of this election is. The subject of this election is, what are we going to do with this magic moment in our history?

I've done the best I could to turn this country around and to get us moving in the right direction. But the best is still out there. That's what I want you to believe. And forget about me being President; as a citizen, I have waited 35 years for my country again to be in the position to build the future of our dreams for our children.

And it is a so much more interesting country now because so many of you are here. And the world is more interesting, and the potential is so great. But whether we seize it depends upon whether we understand what the issue is about, whether we work and vote, and whether people like Cynthia are in the United States Congress.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:40 p.m. at a private residence. In his remarks, he referred to reception hosts Saeid and Sudabeh Sadri; Gov. Roy Barnes of Georgia and his wife, Marie; Mayor Bill Campbell of Atlanta; State Representatives Tyrone Brooks, Calvin Smyre, and J. E. (Billy) McKinney; State Senators Robert Brown and Gloria S. Butler; NBA Atlanta Hawks player Dikembe Mutombo; and President Slobodan Milosevic of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro).

Statement on Congressional Action on Africa and Caribbean Basin Trade Legislation

April 14, 2000

The bipartisan agreement reached by the House and Senate on the Africa and Caribbean Basin trade legislation is a major step toward enactment of these historic initiatives. This bill is a win-win proposition for the United States and our friends in Africa and the Caribbean Basin. It will boost investment, economic growth, and job creation in these countries, while improving the global competitive position of our own textile industry. It will help promote