

Ira Harkavy, associate vice president and director, Center for Community Partnerships, University of Pennsylvania; high school senior Stephanie Oliver, who founded a children's literacy project at age 13; Capt. Jeff

Kyburz, USAR; Elaine Lander, nurse, American Red Cross disaster response team; and Richard Clemons, AmeriCorps®VISTA member.

Remarks Honoring NCAA Champion Teams *March 12, 2002*

Thank you all. Welcome. I like a good, short introduction. [*Laughter*] Thanks, Chris, for being here. I appreciate you hosting this, and welcome to the White House.

We have never had so many champions inside a room in the White House history, so thank you for making history, not only on—when you won the championship but being here as well. It's such an honor to welcome you here. It's an unimaginable honor to live here and to share this with people from all around the country. This is the people's house. This isn't our house; it's the people's house. And we're glad you're able to see it, and we're glad to herald champs as well.

I love to talk about champs. I love to talk about winning and setting high standards and working hard to achieve those standards. And that's exactly what you all have done, and I really want to congratulate you.

I want to welcome Elaine Chao, who is the Secretary of Labor, who is here, and Mel Martinez, who is the Secretary of Housing and Urban Development. They have got something at stake: One's from Kentucky; one's from Florida. [*Laughter*] Jim Bunning is here, who knows something about athletics himself—he's a Hall of Fame pitcher—fine United States Senator from Kentucky; Jim Kolbe from Arizona; and Ernie Fletcher from Kentucky as well. Thank you all for coming.

I saw Donna Shalala the other day at an event, and she must have a pretty good

touch. [*Laughter*] After all, she becomes the president, and they win two national championships. Congratulations. Welcome back to the White House, and thank you for your service to the country. I appreciate Peter Likins, from the University of Arizona, for being here as well. Where's Peter? Thank you for coming, sir. I appreciate you being here. Father Paul Locatelli from Santa Clara University, thank you, Father, for coming. I appreciate you being here. And of course, we've mentioned the coaches and the captains.

Before we go have our picture taken, I do want to say a few comments about our country. First of all, we defend freedom, and we'll continue to defend freedom to make sure that our children and grandchildren can grow up in a free world. You know, the enemy, when they hit America, didn't understand us. They didn't think we were a nation that could conceivably sacrifice for something greater than ourselves, that we were soft, that we were so self-absorbed and so materialistic that we wouldn't defend anything we believed in. My, were they wrong. They missed—they just were reading the wrong magazine or watching the wrong Springer show. [*Laughter*]

They didn't understand America, and what they really don't understand is the nature of people who care about our society. They don't realize we're a compassionate nation.

And so I hope the champs who are here understand that with being a champion, you

have a responsibility, a responsibility to uphold an example to others. You probably know this; I don't need to tell you this. But when you're playing baseball at the University of Miami, there's some little eighth-grade kid watching your every move, trying to figure out, you know, how cool he can be. If you're a star volleyball player at Stanford, somebody's watching; or from Santa Clara, there's some young child, young girl watching what it means to be a champ. And you have a responsibility as a champ to make the right choices and to set a clear example for others.

And we all have a responsibility to love a neighbor like we'd like to be loved ourselves. We've got a strong military here in America, and that's good. That's how we're going to make sure our homeland is secure, by using our military. But we can all stand up in the face of this evil, collectively stand up, by doing something good in our society.

I hope the athletes understand that. I hope you understand that you have a responsibility as a champ not only to set the right example but to love a neighbor like you'd like to be loved yourself. You have a fantastic opportunity as champs to help define the character of America, to help say loud and clear that we will not tolerate evil and that we will—the collective good

will of our country, the gathering momentum of millions of acts of kindness will define the very nature of America, that we will stand strong against evil by the collective goodness of our country. You've shown that on the playing fields, and I want to congratulate you for being strong and great athletes. Show it on the field of life, as well, and America will be a better place.

It's such an honor to welcome you here. May God bless your futures, may God bless your talent, and may God bless America. Thank you for coming.

NOTE: The President spoke at 3:42 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Chris Fowler, reporter, ESPN, who introduced the President; Donna E. Shalala, president, University of Miami; Peter Likins, president, University of Arizona; and Father Paul Locatelli, president, Santa Clara University. The President honored the University of Arizona women's softball team, the University of Kentucky cheerleaders, the University of Miami baseball and football teams, the University of North Carolina men's soccer team, the Santa Clara University women's soccer team, and the Stanford University women's volleyball team.

Statement on House of Representatives Action on Border Security Legislation

March 12, 2002

I applaud the House for working in a bipartisan fashion to pass legislation that strengthens border security while recognizing the importance of keeping families together and making America a more welcoming society. Many immigrants who are otherwise eligible to become legal residents will be forced to leave the United States and their families unless a temporary extension is granted. The Senate should act

quickly to pass this legislation and send it to my desk for signature.

NOTE: The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language version of this statement.