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Remarks to the Community in Concord, New Hampshire

February 2, 1996

Thank you very much, Mayor Veroneau, Superintendent Sokness, to my host principal today, Mr. Cogswell, thank you. We had a wonderful time at your wonderful school. I want to thank the two people who spoke just before me. It's great to be back in Concord, great to be back in New Hampshire, great to be reminded of what makes our country work.

Cullin Wible, I thought, gave a good talk today for a person of any age, but a remarkable talk for a high school junior. We ought to give him another hand. [*Applause*] It was good. But his service in helping the other students to fully access the learning that can come with being able to use technology is even more important than how well he spoke. And that is symbolic of what we need more of in America, people helping each other to bring out the best in themselves.

I also want to say that I am truly amazed and genuinely admiring of the remarkable work that Stephen Rothenberg has done with his students, in bringing the computers into the classroom and getting private businesses here to help to give more equipment to young people who otherwise never would have been able to afford to have any high technology equipment, especially things they could take home; in letting people work together to put out that remarkable newspaper and taking it to the community, even beyond the school; and in realizing that every child has a contribution to make and a gift to develop. You know, if we had every teacher in America that committed, that innovative, that creative, and every community providing the kind of support I've seen today, our country could cut its social problems in half in a matter of a few years. I thank you, Stephen Rothenberg; you did a great job.

I am delighted to be back here. I want to thank all of you for coming out, from Merrimack Valley, from Pembroke, from Hopkinton, and of course from Concord. Four years ago, I visited Concord High School, 4 years ago this month. I had a horrible cold. I could hardly speak. I'm glad to be in somewhat better voice today. I'm glad to see all the people from the Second Start program again. [*Applause*] Thank you.

You know, every 4 years this State performs a very valuable function for the rest of the country. In the New Hampshire primary system you have the opportunity, face-to-face in small groups and community meetings and real settings, at work and in school, to hold people who would seek the Nation's highest office accountable to the citizens who are ultimately in control of our destiny. You can ask about issues, and you can teach people who come from different lives and different experiences what it's like to see the entire American experience.

In your tradition of town meetings and quiet conversations and genuine dialog, you rebuke the loud slogans and the harsh conflicts and so much of modern political life which sheds more heat than light. I know that, 4 years ago, I think the most valuable experience for me in New Hampshire was not just surviving and going on to be nominated and win but what I learned about America from the people of New Hampshire, including a lot of the students of New Hampshire who told me what their families' lives were like in those difficult days.

I'm thrilled to be here at this Capital Center for the Arts. I know that Bob Hope and George Burns have been here, and I can't promise to be as funny as they were. [*Laughter*] But I can tell you, once I found out that they had been here, I wanted to come, because if they have been here, this is obviously a good place to extend your career. [*Laughter*]

I also want to say a word to you of support for this incredible project, this beautiful, beautiful facility, this breathtaking ceiling that I just learned before I came out took 3,000 hours of volunteer labor. When this theater was condemned in 1989, you could have shrugged your shoulders and gone about your business; if you had done that, we would be holding this meeting in a parking lot today. But community leaders did not do that. Individuals, large companies, small businesses, the government, everybody decided they would work together to turn this challenge into an opportunity; and this grand theater is the result.

To all of the members of the board of directors and all those who worked together to save this wonderful landmark from the wrecking ball, let me say, congratulations, job well done. Thank you for giving America an example of citizenship at its best.

Now, I want to say today, I obviously came to talk to you about education and our challenges in education. But I want to make a larger point to begin. If you think about what Steve and Cullin and the Walker Elementary School and all the businesses that put ads in the newspapers and all the people who supported putting that project together and then putting the community into the information superhighway this week through the schools, what they have in common with all the people that worked to restore the theater, it is clearly one thing: It is a strong sense of community and a willingness to work as a team in ways that help individuals to develop their own abilities but make life better for everybody. That, it seems to me, is the fundamental lesson of America, and that is the fundamental thing we have to reassert today.

If you think about what works in a society, it's not all that different from what works in any kind of contest: You've got to get all your players on the field; you have to make sure they're well prepared; you have to reward them when they succeed; there have to be rules that people follow; you have to trust the other people to follow the rules; and you have to work as a team.

And that is what I think the great issue is in America today. There is no question of whether the Government can solve all of our problems; no one thinks that. No one ever really thought that, but no one seriously asserts that. But neither can we say to our people, this new global marketplace is so wonderful we're just going to leave all of you to fend for yourselves; good luck; call home once a year and see you later.

What works in all human endeavor is this kind of teamwork, what we celebrated at the Walker School today and what we enjoy, having the privilege to sit in this place today. And the questions we should be asking on the edge of the 21st Century are: What are the great challenges we face? How can we help all Americans to live up to the fullest of their God-given abilities? How can we come together instead of being driven apart, because we know when we work together we all do better? How can we continue to make the world a safer and freer place so that our children and our children's children will be able to reach out in this global community in a way that enhances their own lives and lifts those of human beings all across the globe?

Those are the kinds of questions that I tried to ask and answer here 4 years ago, the kinds of questions I had the privilege of dealing with again in my fourth State of the Union Address just last week. As I said to Congress, and as the speakers before me illustrated, we are living in an age of enormous possibility. We have moved from, essentially, an industrial society to one that is dominated by information and technology. We have moved from a world that was organized around two great powers in the cold war into a world where virtually everybody in the world, with a couple of exceptions, have rejected communism. Everybody understands that free people ought to have free economic choices and be able to compete, and we are moving into a global village. And all these changes in the way we work and live have opened up possibilities for people that would never have been imaginable just a few years ago.

Now, that is the good news. And it is a wonderful thing. You can see it manifest in a lot of ways right now. Do you know our country, for example, has produced more self-made millionaires—not people who inherited money, not people who were born with money, people who made it on their own—in each of the last 3 years than in any previous years in the history of America. Why? Because the world is opening up and people who are in the right place and have the right skills and have a little courage and a little energy may really have unparalleled opportunities. And that's exciting.

But as the families of New Hampshire or any other State also know, that anytime you have this kind of big change you not only have great opportunities, you also have challenges. Four years ago when I came here the challenge was people were literally out of work, didn't know when they would get jobs

again. Banks weren't making loans to small businesses. Businesses weren't being started. Businesses were failing at a greater rate than they were starting.

Now a lot of that has been overcome, and I'll say more about that in a minute. But still, because of the changes in this economy a huge number of American families are working harder and harder just to keep up, longer hours without a pay raise, feeling greater uncertainty about whether they'll keep their jobs or their health care for their families or have a pension when they retire or will be able to afford to send their children to college.

So you may think this doesn't make sense. How could things be so good and people be worried? The truth is, it makes perfect sense. When you upset an established pattern and you open all kinds of new possibilities, the people that aren't very well fitted at the moment for those possibilities are likely to get pushed down. It happened 100 years ago when people moved off the farm into the cities and on the factories. A hundred years ago we became an industrial society. We had all kinds of people doing very well, and other people virtually starving in tenement houses in our cities.

Anytime you have a period of big change this happens. You young people should be happy. You've going to live in an age of greater possibility than the world has ever known. And if our generation does its job right, you won't have to worry about anybody blowing the world up, you won't have to worry about people going to war for foolish reasons, you won't have to worry about a lot of things that have dominated the last 100 years. That is wonderful.

But if we're going to keep the American dream alive for everybody, we've all got to think, well, now that all these changes are going on, how can we plug everybody into it? That's why I wanted to go to that classroom at Walker School today. I know every one of those children I visited did not come from a wealthy home. I know not all those children have computers in their own homes. I know this teacher and this student had to work hard to bring the benefits of the technological revolution to all children. That's why I wanted to be there, because that is what we have to do as a country. That is the fundamental challenge before us.

You can look at New Hampshire. Four years ago when I was here the unemployment rate was over 7 percent; today it's almost down to 3 percent. Four years ago when I was here, businesses were closing faster than they were opening; today, new businesses are increasing by 8 percent a year. That's a very healthy rate.

For 3 years now we've had more new businesses formed each year than ever before in American history. That's a good thing. So what we have to do is to take this energy that's out there that we've got going in our economy now, figure out how to spread those opportunities to everyone. It's one of our great, great challenges.

If you look at how the world is, 4 years ago when I was here we were worried about a lot of problems in the world, but now we see from the Middle East to Northern Ireland, to Haiti to Bosnia, the United States has been a force for peace and freedom and dignity. Perhaps more important to the people who live right here, for the first time in the last 2½ years, for the first time since the dawn of the nuclear age, there is not a single nuclear missile pointed at an American city, an American family, an American child. That is not being done anymore. That's a good thing.

Maybe most important of all, we really do seem to be trying to come together to find more teamwork, more common ground around shared values and to move away from destructive conduct. We've had now for 2 years in a row the crime rate, the welfare rolls, the food stamp rolls, the poverty rate, and the teen pregnancy rate and the divorce rate going down in America—2 years in a row. That's a good thing. That's a good thing.

How does all this happen? It happens when people start to work together. Now, you have to decide, all of you, how you want to move into the future and what you think the challenges are. And I came here to say to you that I believe that my role as President is to work not only through the Government but just through the Presidency, through direct appeals to the American people in all walks of life, to try to bring us together to solve these problems in the best way.

I said in the State of the Union, I'll say again: The era of big Government is over. Big, centralized bureaucracies are going to move more and more and more into the past. That is a part of the new technological changes we face. Technology along permits that.

But you need to be sort of skeptical when people tell you that that's the real big problem. The Government of the United States today is the same size it was in 1965. When I came here in '92, I said we would reduce it by 100,000 and put 100,000 police on the street. We did that, except we've reduced the size of the Government by 200,000, and probably nobody has noticed. Why? Because of technology, because of the increasing productivity of the Federal workers who are doing a better job, because we did a humane job of helping those who leave to start new lives in other productive ways, we didn't just put them out on the street.

But the point is, big bureaucracies are not going to be a part of the future of what you think of as the Federal Government. But we still have a responsibility to try to give you a Government that costs less but still does better and that helps you to do your job in the appropriate way. That helps people to work together. That helps people to make the most of their own lives.

In the State of the Union Address, I said that we had seven great challenges, and I'd like to talk just a moment about them, and I'm going to take education out of order, because I'm going to wait until the last for that.

Our first and most important challenge as a people, if we move to the future, is to do a better job of helping all of our children get off to a good start and strengthening our families. If we had strong families in every community in this country, and kids—every child—had a start out of the blocks that was good and adequate, we wouldn't have half the problems we have. You all know that. There are things the Government can do, but most of those things have to be done by people working together and by changes of the heart.

The second thing we have to do is to try to help every American achieve economic security. As I said, we've got almost 8 million more jobs in the last 3½ years. Unemployment is down, but an awful lot of Americans are still working harder and harder just to keep up. How are we going to change that? How are we going to change that? Well, first of all, people ought to have access to an affordable pension they can keep when they change jobs. They ought to have access to affordable health care they can keep when they change jobs.

Your parents, all of you students here, if they lose jobs or they have to change jobs, they ought to have access to lifetime education. Education is no longer the province of childhood. The average age of a college student at a 4-year college today is 26. The average age at a 2-year community college is much higher. We have to view education as the effort of a lifetime, and it has to be seen not with fear by people my age but with hope. It has to be seen as the instrument of growing and going into the future. And it has to be available to people whenever they hit a rough patch in life's road.

We have to, in other words, define a new way of people being secure when the economy is changing as much as it's changing and most of the jobs are being created by small businesses. And we've got to do that.

The third thing we have to do is to keep on with our efforts to take the streets of America back from the forces of crime and drugs and gangs that have made them too unsafe in so many places in America. The crime rate is coming down, but it is still too high in most places, and we've got to keep working on that.

The fourth thing we have to do is to leave our environment safer and cleaner than we found it and while we grow the economy. I say that in this beautiful State where people love the woods and the rivers and all of nature's bounties. There are still people who do not believe you can grow the economy unless you chew up the environment.

But I don't know if you saw it, one of our major news magazines had a huge cover story not just a couple of weeks ago, after we had these bitter winter storms, saying that ironically these bitter winter storms were due to global warming, not to global cooling, because the pattern of global warming is leading us to increasing extremes of temperature. We're getting more rain in many parts of the

world, but it's coming in shorter and shorter spurts and floods, instead of regularly over time.

We had a 500 square mile block of ice break off from Antarctica, it began to float into the ocean. If this continues, slowly it will raise the water levels and mess up the whole environmental balance of the Earth. Now, you may think that's an esoteric issue. It's going to affect these young people, their lives. The strength of American agriculture, for example, will be affected by whether or not we can find a way not to destroy the atmosphere with greenhouse gases, not to have too much global warming.

In addition to which, we have to be concerned about the quality of drinking water, the quality of the water in which we swim and fish, the quality of the air. All the basic things. This is a huge deal. And this is a great economic opportunity for America if we understand that there are opportunities through technology and through innovation to preserve the environment, it will create more jobs than it will cost. But we have to make that decision.

As I said earlier, we have a challenge to keep downsizing the Government but not to give our country a weak Government but to give our country a small Government, a less bureaucratic Government and one that focuses on helping the people who need help, through no fault of their own, empowering people to make the most of their own lives and being good partners to put together the kind of teams that solve the problems and seize the opportunities we discuss here today.

I'll just give you one example. The Small Business Administration, since I've been President, has cut the budget by 40 percent and doubled the loan volume to create more small business. That's the kind of thing you should be able to get out of your Government.

Finally, let me say that, I know because we have so many things going on here in our country, and families and communities have so many challenges, it is tempting to say, "Well, we don't have to worry about the Russians anymore, and we're taking down our nuclear arsenals as quick as we can. So why don't we just forget about the rest of the world?" We can't do that. We can't do that. The drugs that come into this country come from other countries. If we want those other countries to cooperate with us in stopping the drugs—and literally a lot of those people we are asking every day to put their lives on the line—we have to work with them to help them solve our problems together.

The terrorists that are sweeping across the world, many of those who have acted in this country come from other countries. If we want other countries to risk their lives to get those terrorists and send them here so I can make sure that they're tried, and if they're convicted to go to jail or punished in a proper way, we have to work with those countries.

If you want America to be able to sell, we—now, our exports in America are at an all-time high. And for the first time in many years, we are growing our exports faster than our imports are growing. If you want that, we have to be involved with other countries. So that's a big part of our challenge.

But let me say, overarching all of that is the challenge we have for all of you. For the world in which we are living and the one toward which we are going, being dominated by information and technology means that all of us have to know things, all of us have to have high levels of literacy, all of us have to be able to reason, all of us have to learn things about basic math. But even more important, all of us have to be able to keep learning things, learning and learning and learning for a lifetime.

And therefore, the challenge to America to give every single citizen the educational opportunities they need, in some ways is the linchpin of our whole future because of the age toward which we're going.

If you look at the industrial age, the one we just came out of, there are a whole lot of people just a little older than me and even people in my generation—I realize to you that sounds like a lifetime away, you can't imagine being 50 years old, but you will be someday—who were able to get very, very, very good jobs on a high school education. Or maybe they just had a 10th grade education or 11th grade education. But they went to a city; they went to work in a factory, they got a good job, they thought it would be there forever; they thought they would be able to send their kids to college, have

a nice home, take a vacation every summer, always have their health insurance covered; and they would retire with a good retirement, along with their Social Security. And it didn't matter if they didn't have a good education.

Today more and more of our jobs, particularly those that pay well and have some amount of stability, are knowledge-based jobs. And therefore, we have got to do everything we can to up our educational opportunities.

Now, in America, most education is handled at the local level, from preschool and kindergarten through high school. Most colleges and universities, almost 100 percent of them, are public at the State level or private. What is the national government's role? Well, we have some things that we should be doing.

We, for example, send funds to New Hampshire every day to help schools deal with the problems of children who come from very poor homes and may need some extra resources or school districts that, themselves, have a property base that's not adequate so they don't have enough money to deal with the schools, with all the kids that come in there, and they need a little extra help. That's important.

We're doing what we can now at the national level to get people in the telecommunications industry all over America to do what Concord just did. Our goal, I will say again—our goal is to make sure that every classroom and every library in the United States of America and every school is on the information superhighway by the year 2000, every single one. You have to do that.

Beyond that there are things that schools have to do for themselves. We ought to have the highest standards of excellence. And we ought to measure whether we're meeting those standards. And we ought to be willing to change if we're not. And I think every State should be willing to give teachers and parents more flexibility in how they work with the education system to make sure those things are done. I also believe that every school, beginning in elementary school, should teach good citizenship, good character, and good values. I think that is not inconsistent with saying those things should be done in the homes and in our religious institutions. There are certain essential characteristics that it takes to make up a good American citizen, and I think they should be communicated to our children and done at an early time.

Finally, let me say that we need—we know now we need more than ever before to give 100 percent of the people who get out of high school the opportunity to go on to college and that money should never be an obstacle. You know, all the young people here probably know this, but every 10 years our country does a census, and we not only count how many people are living in the United States and break them down by gender, by race, by State, by neighborhood, we also do a lot of other things. We break them down by income and educational level, and we try to find as much as we can out, and then we can look at this census and look at the one before and see how America is changing.

And I want every young person in the audience to listen to this, because it's very important: In the 1990 census, last time we counted everybody, we found that there was a huge break in income in the 1990 census compared with the 1980 census, that came among people who had at least 2 years of education after high school. People who had at least 2 years of education and training after high school tended to get jobs where they made a decent living starting out, and then they had a chance, slowly, to get raises. People who didn't, tended to get jobs where they didn't get a raise or even suffered declines in income, especially compared with inflation, and where they had less stability. And this really hit younger people.

So whether you like it or not, if you're a young American, you need to be thinking about what you're going to do after high school to get enough skills, to get enough knowledge to develop the capacity to learn for a lifetime so that if you go into the work force, you can succeed in this exciting but very challenging new world.

In the last 3 years we have done a number of things to try to make it easier for people to go to college. We redid the student loan program so that you can borrow money on better terms and pay it back on better terms, and no young person should ever refuse to get a loan to go to college for fear of not

being able to pay it back, because now you can always pay it back as a percentage of your income, so the payments will never break you. And that's a very good thing to do.

I might add, we also were able to cut the student loan default rate nearly in half. So this does not mean that we should be weak and not make people pay their loans back, but you just shouldn't ask people to do something they can't do. We should always encourage people to do it. We've increased the number of scholarships and, of course, with a lot of support in States like New Hampshire where I thank both the Republicans and the Democrats who have supported our national service program in New Hampshire, we've got 25,000 young Americans out there working in their communities to solve the problems of their communities and earning money to go to college.

In the State of the Union, I challenged Congress to go further, to make more college opportunities available, to help one million young Americans work their way through college with work-study funds, to give a $1,000 merit scholarship to every single high school graduate in America in the top 5 percent of every high school class in the country, and to give every family a tax deduction of up to $10,000 a year to defray the costs of tuition at colleges and universities.

If we can do these things, if we can hook all our schools up, all our classrooms, all our libraries to the information superhighway, and you have enough computers and good software and well-trained teachers and a supportive community, if we can have schools that hold themselves to high standards and measure whether they're meeting them, if we can make available college education to all Americans, these are the kinds of things that will make a profound difference in the future of our country. And we will do it together or not at all.

You know, again, let me end with where I started. Going to the Walker Elementary School and watching those students put together that ''Walker Talker'' newspaper and then watching them put it into the Internet so people could pull it back, having their own Web page where people could actually say, what is in there that I want to read, it showed again, knowing that there were people in the community that gave equipment so that students without regard to their income could have access to technology in their homes, it proves not only that technology unlocks doors in ways we couldn't have dreamed of 4 years ago, it proves that the modern world will have to be solved by old-fashioned common sense and old-fashioned American hard work and cooperation.

Walker Elementary School—I guess you know this, but I learned this morning, so I rewrote this so I could say this—that school stands on ground that is literally sacred to America's democracy. In 1778, the people of New Hampshire gathered there with their elected representatives and voted to ratify the Constitution. And New Hampshire was the last State to vote—not the last, but the ninth State, so the necessary ninth State we needed for enough States that made the Constitution real in the lives of the American people. And I think that's wonderful.

Well, it's a long way from 1788 to today. And the church where they met is gone. The school is there. But you think about it, in that spot, where over 200 years ago our Constitution moved into history as the most important document for freedom ever, in any country, among any people; on that very spot a student now can log on to the Internet and read the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, all the records from those revolutionary days.

These revolutionary ideas that we now take for granted still count for something. We have to promise ourselves that in every place like Walker School across America revolutionary new ideas will never be a stranger, and that we can incorporate them all, we can take the best of them all if we are able to stay fast and true with our old-fashioned American values and way of doing things.

I believe this country can face every single challenge that it has. We can have better education and stronger families. We can have a cleaner environment and safer streets. We can have access to health care for all Americans. We can do all these things if we work together.

If you think about what we are here celebrating today, if you think about what these two fine gentlemen behind me represent, they represent the way America has met

every challenge in the entire history of our country. And all we have to decide is that that's what we're going to do. I say again, the young people in this audience will live in the age of greatest possibility in human history. The young people in this audience will be able to do things that people their age a generation before could never have even imagined. But it's like everything in life, it is not free.

And this new age, with all of its benefits, carries significant new challenges. We have to meet the challenges if we want the benefits. We can only do it if we do it together. Based on what I saw today, that's exactly what I believe is going to happen in America.

Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:25 p.m. in the Capital Center for the Arts. In his remarks, he referred to William Veroneau, mayor of Concord; Curt Sokness, superintendent of schools; Clint Cogswell, principal, and Steve Rothenberg, sixth grade teacher, Walker Elementary School; and Cullin Wible, senior, Concord High School.

Digest of Other White House Announcements

The following list includes the President's public schedule and other items of general interest announced by the Office of the Press Secretary and not included elsewhere in this issue.

January 27

In the evening, the President and Hillary Clinton attended the Alfalfa Club dinner at the Capital Hilton.

The President declared major disasters in the Commonwealth of Virginia in the area struck by flooding beginning January 19 and continuing, and in the State of Ohio in the area struck by flooding beginning January 20 and continuing, and ordered Federal funds to supplement State and local recovery efforts.

January 29

In an afternoon meeting in the Oval Office, the President received the annual report of the Interagency Committee on Women's Business Enterprise.

In the evening, the President attended a fundraising event for Senator Carol Moseley-Braun.

The President announced the appointment of Henry W. Foster, Jr., as Senior Adviser to the President on Teen Pregnancy and Youth Issues.

January 30

In the morning, the President had an interview in the Oval Office with the Washington Post, followed by a teleconference interview with several New Hampshire newspapers.

In the afternoon, the President had telephone conversations with Prime Minister Konstandinos Simitis of Greece and Prime Minister Tansu Ciller and President Suleyman Demirel of Turkey to discuss the territorial dispute over an island in the Aegean Sea.

In the evening, the President had a telephone conversation with Representative Ron Wyden of Oregon to congratulate him on his election to the Senate.

The President announced his intention to appoint Todd A. Weiler and Richard G. Womack to the Board of Directors of the Federal Prison Industries Corporation.

The President announced his intention to reappoint Ralph G. Hoard as a member of the International Pacific Halibut Commission.

The White House announced that the President invited NATO Secretary General Javier Solana to Washington for a working visit on February 20.

January 31

In the evening, the President and Hillary Clinton hosted a dinner in the Blue Room for military commanders in chief and civilian defense officials.

The President announced his intention to nominate Toni G. Fay, Audrey Tayse Haynes, and Marciene S. Mattleman to the National Institute for Literacy Advisory Board.

The President announced his intention to appoint Nancy G. Guerra to the Coordinating Council on Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.