AUTHENTICATED
U.S. GOVERNMENT
INFORMATION
GPO

Schneider, vice chair, Women's Legal Defense Fund.

Remarks at the Presidential Scholars Awards Presentation Ceremony

June 20, 1996

Thank you very much, Rebekah. You did a terrific job. I hope you weren't nervous; you couldn't tell. [*Laughter*] And I know your parents are here, and your teachers are very proud of you and all the other Presidential scholars who are here. I want to thank Stuart Moldaw and all the members of the commission who have the difficult job of picking Presidential scholars. I want to thank Secretary Riley for the wonderful work he has done as our Secretary of Education, for our many years of personal friendship.

Rebekah did such a good job, we forgive you for your shameless South Carolina pride in mentioning the South Carolina scholars. [*Laughter*] You have given me leave to mention that there are two Presidential scholars here from Arkansas: Martin Beally from Sherwood, and Caroline Rothert, are from my hometown of Hot Springs. So I congratulate them. I also want to thank Alison Tupay for singing ''The Star Spangled Banner'' on the spot. She did a great job, I think.

More than anything else—I'm going to see the scholars tomorrow when we send the Olympic torch off, but I love this moment. And I was jealous that the Vice President got to go to the medal ceremony yesterday. This has been sort of a crazy week around here. I was hoping maybe one of the scholars could explain the chaos theory to me, and I could apply it to what I'm trying to do. [*Laughter*] But I love this program. I believe in it so strongly. And I wanted to have a chance just to meet with not only the scholars but to see the parents and the family members, the teachers, the mentors, the people who helped these young people come to this point. And the most important message I have I'll just say and get out of the way; I wanted to say congratulations to the scholars, but I mostly wanted to come here to thank the families and the teachers who have made these young people's lives possible and better. If every American would follow the example you have set, this country would not have many problems and we would have an unlimited future. And I thank you so much for what you've done.

To the young people, I would say this is an historic hall we are meeting in, Constitution Hall. When I was not much older than you—you'll be embarrassed that I can remember this date so long ago—on June 24, 1967, I had the highest seat up there—I couldn't afford a better one—to hear Ray Charles sing in Constitution Hall. [*Laughter*] He was so magnificent, I was so excited, I literally carried—the reason I remember the date is I carried the ticket stub in my billfold for 15 years afterward. [*Laughter*] And I never forgot the concert.

Not all that long before then, the great American singer, Marian Anderson, was denied the right to sing in Constitution Hall because of her race. And the father of my Deputy Chief of Staff, Harold Ickes, then the Secretary of the Interior, arranged for her to sing on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial, the same place that not so many years later Martin Luther King would deliver his famous address.

So this whole area in here is full of America's history. And it reminds us—I hope all of you really get a chance to look around and sort of soak it in. It reminds us of all this country has done and meant. It reminds us of how far we have come. It reminds us of the continuing struggle we have to live up to the ideals of our Constitution. It also will remind you, if you look closely, that there are still hard-working people struggling to make ends meet within a mile of where we're now sitting or, in the case of the young people, standing. There are young people within a mile of this place who have not had the same opportunities that the young people we honor here today have had. So it is the story of America.

We celebrate our achievements, we declare our loyalty to the Constitution and the values it embodies, and we must rededicate ourselves to making sure that the American dream never dies for every person who's willing to work for it. Every person here, as I said, is indebted—the young people who have been honored, to the teachers who have helped them, the parents who supported them, to others who helped along the way.

And I believe it is the job of every generation to make sure that the next generation has a chance to live out their dreams. That really is the mission of our administration.

I came to Washington at a time of profound change for this country. We were moving from an industrial age into an age dominated by information and technology. The great computer genius, Bill Gates, says that the digital chip is the most significant advance in communications in 500 years, since Gutenberg printed the first Bible in Europe.

We know that we have left the cold war behind, and we're moving into a global society in which we see ideas and information and money and technology and people move around the world in unimaginable speed and variation, compared to just a few years ago. We know that the young people standing on this stage—many of them will actually do work that has not even been invented yet. Within 10 or 15 years, some of them will be doing things that no one has even imagined yet.

So we are moving into a period really unlike any in the history of our country before, when there will be more opportunity for people to live out their dreams than ever before. And the real challenge, I believe, is to make sure that every person has a chance, not a guarantee but a chance, to live out those dreams, that we do it in a way that brings us together as a country, instead of dividing us.

We are, today, more a nation of immigrants that at any time since the beginning of this century that we're about to leave. Just look around this room. Look at them. We see the kaleidoscope of America. And it is a constant, urgent task that we find ways to unite this country around our basic values and not let ourselves be divided.

Just yesterday I had Governor Riley's successor as the Governor of South Carolina and a number of other Governors here and other officials to talk about this recent wave of church burnings that has swept the country in the last year and a half. That is the exact opposite of what this country has always stood for. And it is an example of what is happening in much worse form around the world, where people are tempted to give into their old demons and define themselves by what they're not rather than what they are and what they can become. And we cannot afford that in this country.

We must all be intolerant of that. We cannot be divided by religion or race, and we can never, never, never believe that in America it is permissible to take action against someone in their place of worship. It is wrong, and we must stand against it.

I appreciate what Rebekah said about the commitment of this administration to education. I know that one reason it's so strong is that I wouldn't be here without mine. I lived with my grandparents until I was 4. They started teaching me to read when I was 2 or 3. I still own one of the little readers they started me on. It was printed in 1946, I think. I grew up—my grandparents, my grandfather just barely got out of grade school. My stepfather, who raised me, dropped out right before he got his high school diploma. I was the first person in my direct line to graduate from college.

And if it hadn't been for my education and the gifts that others gave me along the way to help me with it, I never would have become President or had the opportunity to serve my country in the way that I have. I now know that there is something fundamentally different about the role of education in this time than in any other time. Always throughout our history, education has given individuals more opportunity. When we made a commitment to mass education after World War II, including making college education available to veterans who served through the GI bill, it helped to build an enormous middle class and to lift this country up, all of us.

Now, we're in a third stage where education can either be the faultline dividing our country or the bridge by which we all walk into the 21st century. Because now it is not enough, as it was 50 years ago in the GI bill or even 30 years ago, to have a huge number of people with a college education creating economic opportunities for everybody else in a mass-production, industrial society.

For at least 15 years, and actually probably more, our country has become more stratified, more unequal, divided more than anything else by the level of education of adults in the work force, so that you have this para-

doxical situation where in the last 3½ years—when we've been able to cut the deficit in half and take our exports to an all-time high, create opportunities for 3.7 million new people to have their own homes, and see our country produce nearly 10 million new jobs—9.7 million new jobs—we know in spite of all, that about half of the American work force has not gotten a raise after you adjust for inflation and that, compared to 15 years ago, the people in the bottom half are basically working a longer work week, having less time to spend with their children, and not really keeping up with inflation.

There are exceptions to all these statements, but the general rule still holds. The fundamental problem is that in a global economy, where we're all competing with everybody else, everywhere else, including people who work and live in some counties where incomes that no one could live a month on in America, that we have to raise the skill levels of our people so that education has to become more democratic, small "d" democratic, more widely available and more advanced than ever before. It must.

And that is what has driven the work that Secretary Riley and I and others have done in this administration, to try to lift the quality and standards of education but also to make it more broadly available. There are some things that we can do here. And we have tried to do them. We have tried to make available funds for States to come up with their own plans to meet the national education goals, to have high standards and high expectations, and to get free from some outdated rules and regulations. The Secretary's cut the rules of the Department of Education by nearly 50 percent. We have put more poor children into Head Start.

Now, perhaps most important of all, over the long run, we've tried to expand the availability of college. In the last 12 years before I came here, college education was the only thing that increased in cost more rapidly than health care. And a lot of people are—a man who was laughing I assume has just educated two or three kids already in college. And he's laughing to keep from crying, probably. [*Laughter*]

This is a problem with serious implications for our country. If you look at the 1990 census—and pretty soon we'll be doing another in 2000 that will affect the lives these young people will have—you see an utterly stunning fact, that for the first time since we have been really working on the census, you can see clearly in a profile of America after the census in 1990, that American workers, particularly younger American workers that have at least 2 years of education after high school tend to get jobs where they are pretty secure in their jobs. If they lose their job, they're pretty good about getting another one. And they tend to get jobs that have a decent income with pretty good prospects for growth. Those that have less than that tend to be stuck in jobs where they can't change jobs very easily, and they usually lose ground to inflation. And the younger you are, the more profound those trends are likely to be.

Now, that means that we have to do some things to open college to more people. We've tried to expand the Pell grant program, for example. We changed the college loan program. And I want to thank Secretary Riley for something that I believe 10, 20 years from now will be viewed as one of the most revolutionary changes we've made: We started making loans directly to the colleges so that the students could get them with less hassle, pay them back at lower cost, and then pay them back according to a whole range of options, including their ability to repay the loan. So that if, for example, if you take a job as a schoolteacher or a police officer or a nurse and you're not getting rich, and you have a big college loan burden, you still will be able to always pay those loans off because they can be limited to a percentage of your income. And it's changed a lot for people. It's made things more available.

By next year, we'll have 65,000 young people who will have helped to pay their way through college through the AmeriCorps program, earning money to go to college by doing community service. And I see one of our board members is from the State of New Hampshire, a State that has one of the most active AmeriCorps programs in the country, where they really are doing remarkable things to solve problems and pay their way through.

Now, we've got two other big initiatives here on the plate that I think are quite im-

portant, and I just want to mention them because I want to encourage all of you to support these things and to embrace them. The first is, we're determined to see that every classroom and library in America hooked up to the Internet by the year 2000, every single one. And I think it will make a real difference.

We started this effort in California, where we had a lot of private-sector support. And we wired about 20 percent of the schools in one day, and they're already up to 50 percent of the schools now in California. Now, in many other States this whole movement is taking off and working like wildfire. But we also need to make sure that, in addition to being hooked-up, we've got good software, available hardware for all the students and sometimes for the parents as well, to participate, and trained teachers that are being given the support they need.

There is now an alliance of educational groups, teachers, parents, and administrators that have joined together to make sure that we have enough teachers to keep up with the connections. They call themselves the 21st century teachers, and this fall they're going to mobilize a voluntary effort, 100,000 teachers to help 500,000 other teachers master the technology so that they can make the most of it for our young people. This has enormous potential to make educational gains more widely available in poor rural areas, in underserved urban areas, in places where finances have been a real problem. We can use technology in a way that will lift the quality of education and the availability of it if we do it right.

The other thing I think we have to do is to make our goal a national goal, that college will be accessible to all Americans and that the norm will be that everybody would at least do 2 years after high school. That should become the rule. That should become what we all accept. We now have both economic and social evidence that we need to do that. So, in addition to the college loan and in addition to expanding the Head Start program, I have asked the Congress to made the first $10,000 of college tuition tax deductible to every family in the country for both young people and adults.

I have asked Congress to broaden eligibility for families to invest in IRA's and then let people withdraw from their IRA tax-free if it becomes necessary to help finance their children's education or their own re-education as the case may be. And a few weeks ago at Princeton I asked—and by the way, I figured out a way to pay for all this in our balanced budget. This will not increase the deficit. I asked the Congress, in effect, to make access to 2 years of college universal by giving families a $1,500 tax credit for the first 2 years of community college. The average tuition in this country at community college is $1,200 a year. So that would, in effect, make 2 years of community college available to every American family, because we would have a tax credit that you could actually see. In effect, the Government was helping to fund tuition, free for everybody the first year, given to everybody the second year that has at least a B average. I think after the second year you ought to ask people to make the most of their education if the taxpayers are going to fund it.

But it seems to me that these are the kinds of things we ought to do in Washington if we want America to grow together. And when I look at these young people behind me and I think of every young person in this country, that we need to make sure that we reach them when they're young and we keep them in school and we give them something to hope for, this is a way of our being able to say to the poorest kids in this country, "If you hang on you can at least do this. This is something we will give you if you hang on."

Now, the rest of it is obviously up to the rest of you and your counterparts all across America. But I really believe that if we can both raise the quality and the range and reach of education, we can make sure that we grow together as a country instead of being split apart. I cannot tell you how important this is.

One of our counties, the biggest county in this country, Los Angeles County, has already, today, children in it from 150 different racial and ethnic groups, in one county. And still this county is thriving, it's doing well.

I'm just about to leave for a meeting of European leaders, and all over the world

they'll ask me, ''How did you have 9.7 million new jobs in America in the last 3 years?'' You know how many—the largest 7 economies in the world have created a total of 10 million jobs in the last 3½ years, 9.7 in the United States. And that's something you can be proud of.

But if you want this country to grow together, if you want these children to have the kind of future when their children are this age, to see America leading the world for peace and freedom, then we have got to recognize that education for everybody, more of it and better, is the central most important thing we can do to make sure that we go into the 21st century able to meet our challenges and protect our values.

And all of you, because of this experience, all these Presidential scholars because they're now Presidential scholars, and all of you who helped them along the way because you're their family members or you're their teacher, you can have a unique amount of influence in your communities to make sure that we all rededicate our efforts not to leave any child behind, not to leave any stone unturned in opening all the opportunity we can. There is no stopping this country in the 21st century if we do that one thing, if we give everybody who will work for it the chance to live out their dreams. If that is our shared commitment, our best days are still ahead. And 20 years from now they will be celebrating a whole new generation of Presidential scholars in a nation that is stronger and better and closer to the ideal of America than we are today.

Thank you, and God bless you all.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:05 p.m. at Constitution Hall. In his remarks, he referred to Rebekah P. Close, Presidential scholar who introduced the President; Stuart Moldaw, Chairman, Presidential Scholars Commission; Gov. David M. Beasley of South Carolina; and Bill Gates, founder, Microsoft, Inc.

Remarks at a Ceremony for the Departure of the Olympic Torch

June 21, 1996

Good morning. I want to begin by thanking Lang Brown, not only for what he has done this morning in bringing the torch up here, but for what he does every day. He gives his best to help troubled teenagers, to teach them how to live responsible lives and to know that they are not alone as they do their best.

Today, we honor that spirit, the spirit of the Olympics, as we send forth the Olympic torch to light the way to Atlanta. Thank you, Lang Brown.

This torch has seen more of America than most of us Americans will see in a lifetime, and much of America has seen the torch, cheered it, and the people bearing it. The torch, burning bright and strong, stands for the job of athletic competition and more, for the importance of international cooperation and more, for the pride we feel when our strong young Americans win the gold and more. For this Olympic flame also calls upon each of us to be our very best as individuals, to do our best to build strong families and strong communities and a strong country. It tells us that victory comes to the united, not to the divided. Every Olympian has reached within and worked hard to be the fastest, the strongest, the most graceful.

We all have hurdles to leap, to finish high school or college, to be a good parent, a good worker, a good neighbor. Every one of us must summon that spirit of responsibility and best effort in our own lives. Every Olympian stands at the starting block or at the beginning of a great game alone. But they do not win alone. They draw strength from a lifetime of support from family and friends, coaches and role models. And every one of us must summon that spirit of community to meet our challenges.

Every Olympian is proof that for all of our differences, we are one America. We cheer our athletes not because they are men or women, not because of the color of their skin, we cheer them because they are Americans. They represent us all, and they fill us with pride. And every one of us must summon that spirit of unity, to embrace those things that bind us together, and never to succumb to those things that would keep us apart.

My fellow Americans, in the last several months, we have had to deal with some different kinds of flames. But it is this flame