

Students spend less time competing for attention and more time learning. Students in smaller classes out-perform their peers.

For children in struggling communities, from remote rural areas to inner-city neighborhoods, small class size is even more critical. And with school enrollments at record highs and expected to keep rising, we must act now to reduce class size in all our Nation's public schools.

Across the country, more and more communities are recognizing the importance of smaller class size and trying to do something about it. To help them meet this challenge I called on Congress early last year to pass my initiative to reduce class size by helping school districts hire 100,000 highly trained teachers. I'm pleased that Republican Members of Congress joined with Democrats and did the right thing in making a big downpayment toward meeting our goal.

Today the Department of Education is releasing guidelines that will let every school district in our Nation know how much money they will receive and how best to use the funds to reduce class size in time for school this fall. But communities deciding now whether to hire and train new teachers for next year need to know whether they can count on the commitment Congress made last year to help them reduce class size for years to come. It is time to finish the job.

Now, this week the Senate and House will vote on a bill that gives States the flexibility they need to improve their public schools in spending Federal aid they receive. I support this bill. But I also strongly support efforts by Senators Murray and Kennedy, and Representatives Clay and Wu, to add an amendment to it that will fully fund 100,000 well-trained teachers over the next 6 years.

Unfortunately, Republican leaders are trying to shut down debate on the ed-flex bill before this important amendment on more teachers and smaller classes can even be voted on. Now, last October, just before the election, Republicans joined us in promising the American people more teachers and smaller classes. Less than 5 months later, we now have the first big test of whether this Congress is really willing to work together across party lines and with the White House to get things done for the American people,

whether the Congress is serious about giving our children the education they need and deserve.

The choice is simple: Are we going to give Americans smaller classes or more partisanship? Are we going to put politics ahead of progress or put 100,000 teachers in our Nation's classrooms? I call on the Senate to allow an up-or-down vote on the Murray-Kennedy class size amendment, and I urge every Senator to vote for it. When it comes to our children's future, politics must stop at the schoolhouse door.

Thanks for listening.

NOTE: The address was recorded at 4:08 p.m. on March 5 in the Oval Office at the White House for broadcast at 10:06 a.m. on March 6. The transcript was made available by the Office of the Press Secretary on March 5 but was embargoed for release until the broadcast.

Statement on the Death of Amir Essa bin Salman Al-Khalifa of Bahrain

March 6, 1999

I would like to express my deep sadness at the news that Shaikh Essa bin Salman Al-Khalifa of Bahrain has passed away. The prayers and condolences of all Americans go out to the royal family and the people of Bahrain.

The Amir was a good friend of the American people and a good friend of peace. He shared our desire to see a just, comprehensive and lasting peace in the region. I take heart from the personal commitment to forwarding the cause of peace the Amir expressed during his recent June visit to the United States. The Amir shared his heartfelt hope to see peace come to his region in eloquent and passionate words.

Shaikh Essa did much to deepen and strengthen the historic relationship between America and Bahrain. He will be missed.

Remarks to the Community in Posoltega, Nicaragua

March 8, 1999

Thank you very much. President Aleman, Mayor Zeledon, Mayor Palacios, Bishop

Vivas. To our school director, Julia Martinez Toruno, and all the children who are here; to the members of the Government of Nicaragua and the National Assembly; to the—*[inaudible]*—Boys Choir and to the young woman who sang the national anthems of both nations, the granddaughter of former President Violeta Chamorro; and to all the people of Nicaragua: thank you for making us feel so very welcome today.

My fellow Americans and I are moved and humbled to be here in Posoltega, where the terrible mudslide took so many sons and daughters, mothers and fathers, neighbors and friends. I have come to pay my respects to those who lost their lives and to reaffirm the support of the American people for those who were spared and for your rebuilding. In this decade, with courage and strength, you have created a new Nicaragua. You have earned the world's admiration, and now you deserve the world's support in this moment of need.

Somos humanos, y nos ayudamos. We are brothers and sisters, neighbors and friends. We must help each other.

I thank President Aleman for recognizing the work of the United States to provide food, shelter, and health care; to renew the farms and small businesses; to rebuild the roads and bridges and homes. I thank our Armed Forces for all they have done, including building a new health center in Wiwili, north of here. Now our Agency for International Development will provide equipment, training, and immunizations for this health center and others in Nicaragua, so that your people can get back on their feet and stay healthy as they rebuild their lives.

Today we have brought 3,000 pounds of school supplies for the children of Posoltega, donated by organizations all across America and by our own workers at the White House. I know that you need more temporary shelters until permanent homes can be built. I know you need to speed the discovery and the removal of landmines left from the war, because the hurricanes may have moved them and made them more dangerous. With these tasks, too, we will help.

I know that more is needed, and urgently. I have asked our Congress for \$956 million to support our reconstruction effort here. I

am grateful that leaders in our Congress from both political parties have expressed support, and I thank the Members of the United States Congress who have come to Nicaragua with me and are sitting over here—Senator Graham and Congressmen Becerra, Deutsch, and Reyes.

This aid will help to speed the rebuilding of homes, farms, businesses, and roads. It will help your Government to deliver aid better. It will allow us to send more Peace Corps volunteers. And I would like to thank the Peace Corps volunteers who are here today for their service in Nicaragua.

As we see the dust in the wind today, it reminds us that you must rebuild in a way that helps you to manage the environment better by preserving trees that can help prevent a mudslide or curbing pollution that can cause temperatures to rise. We can avoid or lessen future catastrophes. We can manage the land and water and grow your economy, and I know you want to do that.

To help you focus on reviving your economy, my aid package would also forgive or defer much of Nicaragua's—and Honduras'—debts to our Government. And I have asked our Congress to reduce trade barriers between the two of us so that all the people of Central America can work and grow their way back to prosperity and normal life.

We have provided temporary immigration protection for Central Americans in our country, and I will seek a fair solution to all the immigration issues this tragedy has heightened.

In times past, there was conflict, turbulence, and distrust between our two nations, but now we are bound together in our common commitment to democracy. And democracy will light the way to a brighter future for Nicaragua through government, through voluntary organizations, through local officials working with citizens who are participating in decisions that affect their lives, through leaders working to see that no one exploits this tragedy for personal gain and no one is left behind. And we will work with you every step of the way.

A hurricane, a mudslide—they can destroy lives; they can destroy homes; they can destroy a life's work. But they must not be allowed to destroy hope. Not so long ago, your country overcame a terrible war and emerged even stronger. You will overcome this adversity as well. And we will work with you every day until the task is done.

Thank you. God bless you. *Muchas gracias.*

NOTE: The President spoke at 2 p.m. in the outdoor field at Jose Dolores Toruno Lopez High School. In his remarks, he referred to President Arnoldo Aleman of Nicaragua; Mayor Felicita Zeledon of Posoltega; Mayor Eligio Palacios of Chichigalpa; Monsignor Bosco Vivas, Bishop of León; and Maria Andres Chamorro, who sang the national anthems.

Remarks in a Roundtable Discussion With Las Casitas Volcano Mudslide Survivors in Posoltega

March 8, 1999

[President Arnoldo Aleman of Nicaragua opened the discussion by presenting four survivors of Hurricane Mitch and directing them to tell their stories to President Clinton and to express their needs for assistance.]

President Clinton. Could I just say one word? This is Senator Graham, who is from the State of Florida in the United States. First of all, thank you for agreeing to meet with me. I know it must be hard to relive your story. But I think it is very important for us to be able to go home to the United States, having seen not only the President, who is my friend—I enjoy that—but also the people who have lived personally through this terrible tragedy.

It is also important for the health of Nicaragua's democracy that he and I, when we respond to this terrible tragedy, respond in a way that helps you the most and that is consistent with your wishes. So I would like it if, in your own words, you could just tell us a little about what happened to you and your family and what would help most going forward.

[Survivor Ricardo Santeliz thanked the President for his visit and for the assistance from

U.S. and international relief organizations. He described Hurricane Mitch and the resulting mudslide down Las Casitas Volcano as a tragedy which devastated his community and altered its future. Mr. Santeliz described his family's experience attempting to flee from harm and said that he had lost 22 relatives, and his wife had lost 45. President Aleman asked Mr. Santeliz about the death toll from Posoltega and El Porvenir, a neighboring community, and Mr. Santeliz said it must have been about 4,000. President Aleman asked about the experience of a little boy, Juan Pablo Montoya Narvaez, who was present. Mr. Santeliz described finding the boy beneath enormous tree branches and said that Juan Pablo lost his parents, but two of his brothers survived.]

President Clinton. So he has two brothers now?

Mr. Santeliz. One is 13, and one is 21.

President Clinton. And are both of them living with him—he's living with both of them?

President Aleman. Are you going to school, Juan Pablo?

Juan Pablo. No.

President Aleman. Why not, sweetie? You were going to school back in—

Juan Pablo. No.

President Aleman. No? Didn't you go to school back in—but there was a school there, wasn't there?

Juan Pablo. Yes.

President Aleman. Is your other brother going to school?

Juan Pablo. Tonio.

President Aleman. Tonio, is he the one going to school?

Juan Pablo. No, he's not.

President Aleman. And how many of your brothers and sisters died?

Juan Pablo. Three.

Mr. Santeliz. And his mother died.

President Aleman. And you have uncles and aunts?

Juan Pablo. No.

President Aleman. Did your father have any brothers or sisters? What about your mother?

Juan Pablo. One.

President Aleman. And where are your uncles and aunts? Did they die?