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pain of the people in Littleton and not serve to solve the problem. So I will answer that question when I have more facts and after we let a little time pass.

Q. Mr. President, you said America should wake up. Wake up to what, sir?

The President. Well, I think there are a lot of kids out there who have access to weapons—and apparently more than guns here—and who build up these grievances in their own mind and who are not being reached. And it's not just Littleton. We know that now. We've had lots and lots and lots of places. So it's—I don't know how many of you have been there. I've actually been there. I know the community, and it's a wonderful place.

And I think I can't do better than what Patricia Holloway said, the commission chair: If it can happen here, then surely people will recognize that they have to be alive to the possibility that it could occur in any community in America, and maybe that will help us to keep it from happening again.

But you know what we put out before. You know the efforts we've made. And I just think that tonight we need to focus on the families that lost their kids, on the children that are wounded, on the grieving of the community, give this thing a day or two for the facts to emerge. And then I'll try to have more to say to you.

Q. On just that point, Mr. President, at the time you had that conference last year, your administration said the students are still safer sitting in the classroom than they are walking down the street. Do you think Americans still think that's true? Do you think that's true?

The President. Well, statistically, for all the whole 53 million kids in our schools, it's true. But from the fact we're hearing about what happened at this school and the possibility that explosives were out there, that hand grenades were available, that other things were there, it obviously wasn't true there. That was obviously the most dangerous place in Colorado today.

So I don't want to—but that doesn't—that shouldn't make people believe that every school is in danger. What it should make every community do is to study this handbook we put out and see what lessons can be learned here.

But again, tonight I think the American people ought to be thinking about those folks in Littleton. Tomorrow and in the days ahead, we'll have a little more time to kind of gather ourselves and our determination and go back at this again.

Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 7:48 p.m. in the Briefing Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Governor Bill Owens of Colorado and Jefferson County Commissioner Patricia Holloway.

Remarks to the White House Volunteers

April 21, 1999

Thank you. You know, Hillary and I look forward to this day so much every year. We want to thank you for what you do. We want to say to America we could not run the White House without you.

It happens that this day was scheduled on what has turned out to be a very sad day for America. And since, in my mind, you represent the best of American citizenship by what you do here every day as volunteers, I think it is important that we take a little time to ponder how we, as American citizens, should respond to what has occurred in Colorado.

First of all, I think it is important that we remember that we must come together and pray together but also commit to act together. In Littleton, we saw and we continue to see horror and agony. We also see in that horror and agony the ties that bring us together as a national community—the police officers rushing toward the sound of gunfire with bravery and professionalism, the students risking their own lives for their friends, the doctors and paramedics summoning all their skills under astonishing pressure, the parents and neighbors whose love and concern sustained their children through that last long night and who will be called upon to do much more in the days and weeks to come. We see, in a moment of agony, what is best in our community and in our country. I have been particularly struck by the story of Mrs. Miller, the teacher who heard the gunfire and led dozens of students to safety

in the choir room, who worked to keep them calm and quiet for hours while students removed ceiling tiles to let in more air. Doubtless we will learn more stories of quick thinking and grace under pressure as the details unfold. All of us are struggling to understand exactly what happened and why. There is a deep desire to comfort the grieving and counsel the children. We must also focus on what we are going to do.

In Littleton, agents from the ATF and the FBI already are on the ground, providing tactical assistance to local authorities. Highly trained crisis workers are ready to help people cope with their loss. Fortunately, one of the most outstanding centers in the Nation for this sort of work is in Denver.

Perhaps the most important thing all of us can do right now is to reach out to each other and to families and their young children. It is very important to explain to children, all over America, what has happened, and to reassure our own children that they are safe.

We also have to take this moment, once again, to hammer home to all the children of America that violence is wrong. And parents should take this moment to ask what else they can do to shield our children from violent images and experiences that warp young perceptions and obscure the consequences of violence, to show our children, by the power of our own example, how to resolve conflicts peacefully.

And as we learned at the White House Conference on School Safety and as is reflected in the handbook that the Secretary of Education and the Attorney General sent to all of our schools, we must all do more to recognize and look for the early warning signals that deeply troubled young people send often before they explode into violence. Surely more of them can be saved and more innocent victims and tragedies can be avoided.

In the days ahead we will do all we can to see what else can be done. For now, when the school has apparently just been cleared of bombs and not all the children who were slain have been carried out, I think it is important on this day that we continue to offer the people of Colorado, the people of Littleton, the families involved, the sure knowledge that all of America cares for them and is praying for them.

So I ask you to now join me in a moment of silent prayer for those who lost their lives, for those who were wounded, for their families, and those who love them and care for their community.

[*At this point, a moment of silence was observed.*]

Amen.

Now let me say that on this sad day I also want America to know that I came here to be with you because, in many of the sad moments of this administration and many of the greatest moments of our happiness and achievements for the American people, the ability of the White House to connect to them rests solely in the hands of people who are not paid employees of the Federal Government. Most Americans still have utterly no idea how many hundreds and hundreds of people volunteer at the White House, without which we could not do our jobs.

I got a note the other day from a person thanking me because the child of a friend of his had received a letter from the White House. And he said, ''I know you didn't sign that letter, but children expect to get their letters answered.'' That is just one example of things that would not happen, were it not for you. All over America, whenever someone comes up to me and tells me that they've had some contact from the White House that I know came because of a volunteer, I am once again grateful for what you do.

So I thank you for sharing this very profoundly sad moment with me and with our country. But I also thank you for making it possible for us to do our work—for the people of Littleton and the people of America. We are very, very grateful.

Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:37 a.m. in Presidential Hall (formerly Room 450) in the Old Executive Office Building.

Statement on the Nomination of Gen. Eric K. Shinseki To Be Chief of Staff of the United States Army

April 21, 1999

I am pleased to nominate Gen. Eric K. Shinseki to be Chief of Staff of the United States Army. If confirmed by the Senate, General Shinseki will succeed Gen. Dennis J. Reimer, who will be retiring later this year after 37 years of distinguished active duty service.

General Shinseki currently serves as the Vice Chief of Staff of the U.S. Army. Immediately prior to assuming his present position, he served as Commander in Chief of United States Army Europe and concurrently as Commander of NATO's Stabilization Force in Bosnia. He brings to the position of Chief of Staff extensive operational and joint experience as well as proven leadership ability and a deep concern for the soldiers, civilians, and families of the United States Army.

During his distinguished career, General Shinseki served two combat tours in Vietnam and has commanded at every level from company through theater army. As Commander of the Stabilization Force, he directed the operations of the three Multinational Divisions in Bosnia, promoting implementation of the Dayton accords.

General Shinseki assumes the post of Chief of Staff as the U.S. Army proudly celebrates 224 years of dedicated service to our Nation in war and peace. With General Shinseki as Chief of Staff, I am confident that the total Army—active, Reserve, and National Guard—will continue its tradition of excellence, dedication, and professionalism as it enters the 21st century.

Statement on the Nomination of Lt. Gen. James L. Jones, Jr., To Be Commandant of the United States Marine Corps

April 21, 1999

I am pleased to nominate Lt. Gen. James L. Jones, Jr., for appointment to the grade of general and assignment as Commandant of the United States Marine Corps. If confirmed by the Senate, General Jones will succeed Gen. Charles C. Krulak, who will be retiring later this year after 35 years of distinguished active duty service.

General Jones brings to the job of Commandant a wealth of operational experience, exceptional leadership skills, and strong strategic vision.

During his distinguished career, General Jones served a combat tour in Vietnam, commanded the 24th Marine Expeditionary Unit, served as Chief of Staff of Joint Task Force Provide Promise in Bosnia and Macedonia, and was Commanding General of the 2d Marine Division. As Deputy Chief of Staff of the Marine Corps for Plans, Policy and Operations and, most recently, as Senior Military Assistant to Secretary of Defense, he has demonstrated keen insight into defense policy and the crucial role of the Marine Corps in protecting our national security.

General Jones assumes the post of Commandant as the Marine Corps takes on the challenges of the 21st century. With General Jones as Commandant, I am confident that the Marine Corps will continue its long and proud tradition of defending America's interests and values.

Statement on Congressional Action on Proposed Education Flexibility Partnership Legislation

April 21, 1999

I am pleased that a little more than a year after I proposed national ed-flex legislation to the Nation's Governors, an overwhelming majority in Congress has passed a solid ed-flex bill. I look forward to signing it without delay. This bill will offer States more flexibility in their use of Federal funding in exchange for demonstrated increases in student achievement.

I am particularly pleased that the conference report strengthens accountability measures and preserves our effort to reduce class size in the early grades. The bipartisan work on this legislation shows we can and must work together to improve our Nation's schools.

Now Congress can move on to the most important aspects of the Nation's education agenda—finishing the job of hiring 100,000