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he referred to Dorothy I. Height, chair and president emerita, United Council of Negro Women; Mohammad Yunus, founder and managing director, Grameen Bank, Bangladesh; and Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu of Andhra Pradesh, India. The transcript released by the Office of the Press Secretary also included the remarks of the participants.

Remarks at the Third Session of the White House Conference on the New Economy

April 5, 2000

The President. All right. Please be seated, everyone; let's go. The final panel today is one of particular importance—to me at least—and that is, how can the new economy's tools empower civil society and government? And I'm going to call on Esther Dyson first, the founder and chairman of EDventure Holdings, because she has to catch a plane.

Ms. Dyson. I can stay.

The President. But you can go first, anyway—so there. [*Laughter*]

[*Ms. Dyson made brief remarks.*]

The President. Thank you. I think it would be good now—I'll just go over to Kaleil Tuzman, the cofounder and CEO of govWorks.com, to talk. The floor is yours.

[*Mr. Tuzman made brief remarks.*]

The President. Thank you. I'd like to now call on William Julius Wilson, who is now a professor of social policy at Harvard, the JFK School. He's been very generous with his time to me and to this administration over the last 7 years, and who I think, better than anyone else I know, chronicled the disappearance of work for minority males in inner cities as the economy changed and as jobs moved to the suburbs, and the implications that had for economic and social dislocation and racial tensions in our country.

So I would—I think the title of his last book was "When Work Disappears."

[*Professor Wilson made brief remarks.*]

The President. Let me say, as you know, we're trying to get another substantial increase in the earned-income tax credit, including one that would help working families with more than two children. The last time we—we nearly doubled the earned-income tax credit in '93, and it took—that helped us to move over 2 million people out of poverty.

Most of the people in poverty today, by American definitions, are working people, which would surprise a lot of Americans. It wouldn't surprise anybody from any developing country, where all the people in poverty are working people unless they're disabled. But it's also true in America, and I think it's very important.

And clearly, we ought to raise the minimum wage again. It still hasn't recovered its former levels. And indeed, all we will do if we raise it to my proposal is to basically recover where it was about 20 years ago in real dollar-purchasing-power terms. I hope we can do that.

I'd like to call on Professor Robert Putnam now, who is also at Harvard, and who gave us the concept of social capital, defined as "rules, networks, and trust," and has really, I think, broadened the understanding that we have of civil society and its role in how our economy works and how we all live together. And I also have the galley copy of your latest book, so you can hawk it, too, if you like. [*Laughter*] I think you should. "Bowling Alone," it's called. Worth it for the title alone. [*Laughter*] Go ahead.

[*Professor Putnam made brief remarks.*]

The President. Well, first of all, I thank you all, and I want to give you a chance to comment on what each other said. But let me just observe, every time I hear Bob Putnam speak, I think that Washington, DC, needs more social capital. And I'm not kidding. And I think, also, that there is a deep yearning for this sort of thing among young people.

We have a big increase in enrollment in the Peace Corps. We have a huge increase in AmeriCorps. We've had more people in AmeriCorps in 5 years than the Peace Corps had in 20 years. That shows you there's something to what you're saying, and I think it's very real. And I saw it in very stark ways. I'm thinking of this because we're coming up on the fifth anniversary of the Oklahoma

City tragedy, where person after person down there told me they sort of uncritically bought into the anti-government rhetoric, and all of a sudden, there were these people, and their children were in school with their children, and on and on and on, all the obvious things. But there was this instantaneous sense of cohesion. It had nothing to do with Government or the fact that they were Government employees.

And I do—the whole question of whether the Internet will be an atomizing or a unifying, cohesive force in our society is, I think, an open question.

Esther, do you want to talk about it? Bill?

[*The discussion continued.*]

The President. Anybody out here want to say anything, ask any questions?

[*At this point, the question-and-answer portion of the session began.*]

The President. Well, when you talked about that—I want to give you an example. When you talked about all these organizations that were created in the aftermath of the industrial revolution in America, arguably, they were filling need for social capital, for networks that didn't exist when people worked in smaller work units and had more kind of comprehensive relationships with a smaller number of people.

When you did your book and you talked about Italy, for example, and how northern Italy had massive amounts of social capital, partly around the economic units that were patterned on the medieval guilds, I got to thinking about this. I'll just give you an example of something that's going on in the Internet economy.

You know, eBay, the website where you can buy or sell on eBay and you can trade, they keep up with their customer base. I just was out there last weekend, and I always ask, every time I see somebody that has anything to do with them—they're now up to approximately 30,000 people who are making a living on eBay. That's what they do for a living. They buy and sell, swap and trade on eBay. And they know that a significant percentage of these people who are now making a living were actually very poor, were actually moved from being on public assistance, on welfare, to making a living on eBay. So they have, in effect, recreated a small village.

On the other hand, they're working alone on a computer at home. Does this phenomena add to or subtract from the stock of our social capital?

Professor Robert Putnam. Yes. [*Laughter*]

The President. You ought to run for office if that's your answer.

[*The question-and-answer session continued.*]

The President. Let me just give you one other example. I've seen this in several contexts in all of the controversies in which I've been involved here over the last 7 years. You can create a virtual national movement over the Internet in 48 hours.

Professor Putnam. Yes.

The President. Somebody supports my position on the assault weapons ban; somebody opposes my position to close the gun show loophole—I can give you 30 examples. And all of a sudden, you will have 200,000 people that are in touch with each other all for the same thing. And I think in a lot of ways that's empowering and a very, very good thing. And a lot—but the thing that bothers me about it is, even though it has infinite possibilities and it's really reinforcing, in some sense you want communities to be places of different views have to meet and mediate those views——

Professor Putnam. Yes.

The President. ——where you have to confront not only those that agree with you and you want to swell your numbers so you will have a defined political impact, but you have to sit down at the table with people who totally disagree with you and try to figure out what in the Sam Hill you're going to do to live together and work together and move forward. That concerns me as well, because it's like the specialty magazines or the 69 channels on your cable or other stuff. I think all this, on balance, is a big plus. It's more fun for me. I like it, you know, and everybody else does.

But the question is, where do we find the commons? And how can we use the technology to find the commons and to honestly discuss in a respectful way with people with

whom you disagree those matters that have to be dealt with? Because no matter what our opinion is, you know, our action or inaction will define who we are as a people.

You know, for example, I think about a developing country that—what I hope from what Ms. Chatterjee was saying is that, in the beginning of her opening remarks, is that somehow technology can be used to bring decisionmakers face to face with the poor, en masse, and force them to interact with them in a way that in effect creates a community that wouldn't be there, because we all know in every society the people who are really poor and downtrodden tend to be invisible to people until they're intruded upon.

I don't have an answer to this. I just know it's a serious problem. It's a problem—you know, when I leave the White—I don't have an option, as President, not to deal with people who disagree with me. And I think it's a good thing, because I'm constantly having to reexamine my opinions on the issues or wondering whether on the edges I might have been wrong or whether we can do better, you know?

But when I leave here, you know, I can do just fine and be happy and sassy going through the rest of my life just being around people that agree with me all the time. And I don't know that that's the best thing for a community. There needs to be a common space where we come together across the lines that divide us.

[*The question-and-answer session concluded.*]

The President. I agree with that. Let me say to all of you, one of the things in our budget this year, in addition to our efforts to connect all the schools and libraries, is funds to set up 1,000 community centers in poor rural communities, Native American reservations, and relatively isolated urban neighborhoods, so that it will, by definition, build social capital, if you have community centers where people can come and access the net with people there who are trained to help people use it who otherwise would never use it. I think it can make a big difference.

Well, we stayed an hour late, but it was certainly interesting. I think you did a great job, and I thank you all for your patience.

Thank you for being here today. It was great.

NOTE: The President spoke at 4:30 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Robert Putnam, Stanfield Professor of International Peace in the Faculty of Arts and Sciences, Harvard University. The transcript released by the Office of the Press Secretary also included the remarks of the participants.

Statement on Signing the Wendell H. Ford Aviation Investment and Reform Act for the 21st Century

April 5, 2000

Today I am pleased to sign into law H.R. 1000, the "Wendell H. Ford Aviation Investment and Reform Act for the 21st Century." Several of the broad, fundamental improvements in aviation safety supported by Senator Ford are contained in this legislation. It is particularly satisfying to see the Congress bestow this recognition on such an outstanding advocate of U.S. aviation.

Since the last major aviation law was enacted in 1996, both my Administration and the Congress have committed significant time and resources to bring about a new era for aviation. I remember well my trip to the Boeing plant in Washington State in 1993 to signal our concern for the renewal of an industry then facing very difficult economic times. The subsequent focus by this Administration on flexible solutions—from the Open Skies agreements we have negotiated worldwide to the "free flight" rules in the safety and air traffic area—has combined with the Nation's truly impressive economic performance to make this industry a winner.

This bill contains many new provisions to advance aviation safety. Of particular note is the inclusion of the "Aircraft Safety Act of 1999," which my Administration proposed to help stop the indefensible practice of manufacturing, distributing, and installing fraudulently represented, nonconforming aircraft parts. Several significant provisions to provide "whistleblower" protections to the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) and air