

action to make our schools safe and free of gangs, drugs, and violence.

The Long Beach, California, school district recently found that after students started wearing uniforms, there was a substantial decrease in student drug cases, sex offenses, assault and battery cases, and fights. The learning environment improved as teachers could focus more on education and less on discipline. Many other schools—in Baltimore, Cincinnati, Dayton, Detroit, Los Angeles, Miami, Memphis, Milwaukee, Nashville, New Orleans, Phoenix, Seattle, and St. Louis—have also adopted mandatory or voluntary school uniform policies with promising results.

I thus asked you, in consultation with the Attorney General, to develop information about how local school districts have made uniforms part of their school safety and discipline programs. The Department of Education, with input from the Department of Justice, has now developed a new “Manual on School Uniforms,” which sets forth the benefits of school uniforms; provides a road map for establishing a school uniform policy for schools interested in school uniforms; and describes various model uniform programs from a number of school districts across the Nation.

Because maintaining safe and disciplined schools is an urgent priority in every local community, I today direct you promptly to distribute the Manual on School Uniforms to each of the Nation’s 16,000 public school districts. I also direct you to provide copies of the Manual to appropriate organizations representing parents, teachers, and school administrators, and to make it available to interested members of the public.

School uniform programs are just one of the many initiatives undertaken by local school officials and parents to improve school safety and discipline. Other steps—such as truancy reduction programs, student-athlete drug testing, drug and gang prevention initiatives, zero tolerance for weapons, assisting teachers in addressing discipline problems, conflict resolution programs, and character education initiatives—have also been used to improve the education of our children. The Department of Education, in consultation with the Department of Justice, should continue to develop guidance and information about these and other initiatives so that local organizations, families, and educators throughout the Nation have the tools available to make our schools safe, drug-free, and crime-free.

WILLIAM J. CLINTON

Remarks to the Community in Long Beach February 24, 1996

Thank you very much. Thank you, Melissa Machit. Didn’t she do a good job? Give her another hand. *[Applause]* Mayor O’Neill; Superintendent Cohn; Chief Ellis; our host, the principal, Alexis Ruiz-Alessi, the principal of Jackie Robinson Academy, where we are now; to the president of the board of education, Bobbie Smith; to the JROTC groups from Wilson and Poly, thank you very much for being here. And to the Poly High School band, thank you very much for playing so well.

Just before I came out here I had a little roundtable discussion about the school uniform policy with Melissa and another fine student named Maurice Troutman and a number of—I thought he was going to run for office someday; he’s already seeded the crowd—*[laughter]*—and a number of teachers and parents and

the chief and your board president. I would like for all the people who were in our little roundtable to stand and be recognized; they did such a good job of educating me about what was done. Thank you very much. *[Applause]*

I’m glad to be back in Long Beach. It seems like only yesterday when I was here last. *[Laughter]* I do have my pin on today; it’s sort of my uniform. And I’m honored to be here. I came here today to applaud and support the efforts of this remarkable community.

Yesterday the mayor and community leaders briefed me on the remarkable plan that this community has to revive itself and deal with the impact of the defense downsizing of the last several years. Today I’m here to support what over the long run may have an even more profound impact on the future of this commu-

nity and our country, this remarkable progress you have shown in your schools as a result of the school uniform policy, making them safer, more disciplined and orderly, freeing teachers to focus on teaching and students to focus on their job of learning. You are returning their schools to their original purpose and proving that public institutions can excel when they have high standards, high expectations for all children, and a high purpose with a strategy at the grassroots level supported by everybody in the community for carrying it out.

I have to tell you on a very personal note, as I told the panel, this has made my life at home even a little more difficult because for 10 years—10 years—several times a year, before Long Beach finally took this groundbreaking step, the only person who ever talked to me about school uniforms was the First Lady. And six or seven times a year we'd go to Chelsea's school and we'd go to this or that event at school, or we'd visit other public schools, and she'd come home and say, "You know, if we had a uniform policy, it would make things better in these schools." I heard it over and over and over again. And thanks to you, I have to listen to "I told you so." [Laughter] Being able to endure "I told you so" is one of the essential requirements of a successful marriage—[laughter]—and I must say I can't think of a time when I have enjoyed hearing it more. I applaud all of you.

I want to take a few moments today to talk about how what you have done here fits into the larger pattern of what I hope is going on in America and what I am trying to do and what we are trying to do to help you to spread this message throughout the United States.

When I became President I was convinced that our country had to go into the next century making significant changes if we wanted to ensure that the American dream was available to everyone willing to work for it, without regard to their race or income or background, if we wanted to bring the American people together instead of seeing them continue to drift apart, and if we wanted to see our country remain the leading force in the world for peace and freedom and prosperity. We have worked very hard over the last 3 years on all those three objectives, and we see that while progress has been made which is very substantial, serious challenges remain, challenges that can only be met if we do a better job of working together.

If you were to ask me what the single most significant lesson I have learned as your President in the last 3 years is, I would without hesitation answer, it is that when Americans work together we never lose, and when we are divided we defeat ourselves.

Today California newspapers reported 285,000 new jobs in this State in 1995 alone. We are moving this economy; almost 8 million new jobs, a 15-year high in homeownership, 3 years of record highs in new businesses formed. Businesses owned by women alone in the last 3 years have created more new jobs than the Fortune 500 have laid off. The combined rates of unemployment, inflation, and home mortgage interest rates are the lowest they've been in 27 years. We are moving forward.

But we know—we know—that a lot of Americans have not participated in this economic recovery. They haven't gotten a raise, or they live in the inner city or isolated rural areas where there aren't any new jobs, or they work for one of these big companies where sometimes when they're my age and ready to send their own children to college, they've been downsized. So we have more challenges to meet until we can say to every American, "You're going to live in a more rapidly changing economy, but you will still be all right if you're willing to work for it."

If you look at our most fundamental institutions, many of the social problems we've had, the objective indicators clearly point out the fact that on balance our schools are doing a better job. You should know that the welfare rolls are down in this country, the poverty rolls are down in this country. Every State in the country has reported a decline in violent crime. This is all encouraging. That's the good news.

Everybody knows this country is still too violent. It's still too dangerous for children. There are still too many problems out there. There are still too many people trapped in a culture of dependence when they ought to be out working and being successful in supporting their families and contributing to their communities and country. So we have a lot to do.

Now, a lot of the things we have to do involve modernizing our systems. For example, we have reduced the size of your National Government. We have gotten rid of thousands of pages of regulation. We've made it far less bureaucratic. It's the smallest Government you've had in 30 years. But you don't want it to be weak; it's

still strong enough to be there when you need it if there is an earthquake or a fire or a flood. It's still strong enough to be there to help companies change when they have to go from defense to civilian construction. And these are the kinds of things that we need to focus on. I want to give you a Government that is less bureaucratic and smaller but still able to help every person, every family, every neighborhood, every community make the most of their own lives.

And so all the institutions have to change; we have to modernize. In just a couple of weeks the Vice President and I will be out here to celebrate NetDay in California, the biggest next step in our campaign to make sure that by the year 2000 every single classroom and every single library in this country will be hooked up to the Internet. Twenty percent of California's schools will be hooked up this year.

But it's not all modern. Some of what we have to do is to get back to basic values and basic institutions. I see at least two Members of the Congress out here, Congressman Horn and Congressman Martinez; there may be others here. We know that there are things in Washington we cannot do that you have to do. We have to find ways to reassert the vitality of the basic institutions of this country, of the family, of the schools, of the neighborhood and the community.

In the schools, I have always had a very simple formula. I believe I have spent more time in classrooms, more time listening to teachers and parents and students than any person who had the privilege to hold this office. And I believe that all children can learn. I think that we have to have high expectations. I believe in high national standards. I believe in high technology, nationally spread. But I believe in grassroots reform, giving kids a good head start, giving every person access to college, and giving adults a lifetime chance to always, always get education when they need it for economic reasons. But let's not kid ourselves. None of this is going to work unless our schools work and unless our children feel safe and secure, unless the environments of education are disciplined and drug-free.

We saw the tragic consequences of the time in which we live again just a few days ago with the terrible, painful, agonizing, senseless shooting of that fifth-grade teacher in front of his students in Los Angeles. We are praying—I'm

sure all of you will pray along with our family—that Alfredo Perez will pull through and that his wife, who is also a schoolteacher, will have the courage, the bravery to carry on and that those students in that school who underwent that horrible experience will somehow find the courage to believe in their adults who are responsible for their lives, so that they can go and grow and learn again.

We know that most of our schools are safe, but we know that our country is not as safe as it ought to be. We know that every parent who walks a child to the bus stop and waves goodbye in the morning should never worry whether the child will come home safely. Every parent has a right to expect that their children will be safe in school. Every parent has a right to believe that the children are spending their time learning and teachers are able to spend the day teaching.

When we identify national problems that have to be solved by local communities using basic values, what I believe we should do at the national level is to help to define what we ought to do and let you decide how to do it. That's what we're here to celebrate today. We've tried to help promote school safety with the Gun-Free Schools Act. We are educating our children through you, with the funds we provide, about the dangers of drugs with the help of the safe and drug-free schools act. We are tackling student drug use through our random drug testing programs that we have advocated for local school districts. We are getting tough on criminals when they are seriously violent by permitting the prosecution of hardened young criminals as adults. We are promoting greater parental involvement through our family partnership for learning at the Department of Education. We are supporting you and teaching our children the values of hard work, discipline, mutual respect through the introduction of character education programs all across America, again, at the initiative of local school districts, not from Washington. But when you want to do it, we're there for you, and we think you should do it.

And we have worked very hard in this country, where so many people come from such diverse backgrounds and so many different faiths which they want to express in different ways, to say that the first amendment's freedom of religion is the freedom from oppression, but it doesn't make schools religion-free zones. There is a way people can pursue their values and

their faith consistent with the first amendment. We have tried to do all these things.

But I have to say, in the end it matters whether all of you are working together and whether your counterparts in every school district in America are working together. That's why I took some pains in the State of the Union Address to urge that other school districts in our Nation consider following the example of Long Beach on school uniforms.

One of the great hazards of our culture, with all of its wonderful opportunities, is that we can sometimes, as a friend of mine used to say, without meaning to, teach our children to minor in the majors and major in the minors. It's important to be able to make a good living, and it's important to be able to buy things that you'd like to have, but that's not the most important thing in life. And it's tragic when young people without a balanced upbringing, without grounded values, without a secure education wind up believing that it's all right to kill somebody for a pair of sneakers or jewelry or a designer jacket.

In Detroit, a 15-year-old boy was shot recently for his \$86 basketball shoes. In Fort Lauderdale, a 15-year-old student was robbed of his jewelry. Just this past December, near where I live now, in Oxon Hill, Maryland, a 17-year-old honor student was killed at a bus stop, just standing there, caught in the crossfire during the robbery of another student's designer jacket.

As parents, every one of us has been wrenched by these stories. We cannot stand idly by while our children are having their childhoods robbed from them and from us by people who place more value on the material things than even human life, not to mention human learning.

The Long Beach Unified School District and the parents here have not stood idly by. I want to again say, the entire United States of America is in your debt because you took the first step to show that elementary and middle school students could wear uniforms to class, reduce violence, reduce truancy, reduce disorder, and increase learning, and as was said more ably than me by my remarkable introducer, give a sense of unity and purpose and teamwork to the students and the schools that are in this school district. We are all in your debt in the United States.

After the first year of this program, fights between students and other students who bring

guns to school were cut in half. Overall crime in the schools was cut by more than a third in one year. In addition to safety, learning improved; schoolwork became more important for students than showing off what they were wearing or resenting what someone else was wearing. And maybe most important of all over the long run, I think these uniforms do not stamp out individuality among our young people. Instead, they slowly teach our young people one of life's most important lessons, that what really counts is what you are and what you can become on the inside, not what you are wearing on the outside. And at least on that score, I think you can make a serious argument that this school uniform benefits the children of affluent families as much as it benefits the children of poor families, because that is a lesson all our children need to learn.

But in the end, we should remember it should be safety first. I was so moved in this panel listening to Melissa talk about unity and then listening to young Maurice say, "I can walk down the street now and because I have my uniform on, those gangs know that I'm not a problem. I'm just a student. I don't have to look over my shoulder all the time." It is wrong for a young person to look over his or her shoulder walking down the street of the United States of America. That is wrong. And you have helped to stop it.

And let me say finally about you, you did it, reflecting the lesson I said that was the most important I have learned. You did this together. This was not imposed on you. The parents decided to do it, working with the teachers, working with the school board, working with the police department, working with others. You worked this out together.

And I've learned about the differences from school to school. I've learned about the differences in permissible uniforms. I've learned all about this. It has really pleased me to understand just how much of a grassroots endeavor this is. And that also is important.

I do want to say, though, that in all the years that I have spent in public schools, the thing that has frustrated me most is that nearly every problem in America has been solved by somebody somewhere in some school. But ideas don't travel very well. The most heartening thing to me, although I know it's been a headache for your superintendent, is that you've been deluged

with phone calls. That's good. That means people say, "I'm not too proud to learn from them."

You know, the Founding Fathers of this country set up State governments as the laboratories of democracy with the express intent that they would not be too proud to learn from one another. When I was a Governor, whenever we were the first State to do something, I was always proud of that. But I used to tell our people, I'm even more proud when we're the second State to do something because that meant that we weren't too arrogant, hard-headed, and deaf to learn from what somebody else was doing right.

So we want to support what you have done here. And so we have taken on the job of finding out what works and how. And I want you to know that just before I came here today, I signed a directive instructing the Secretary of Education to distribute this new Manual on School Uniforms to every one of the Nation's 16,000 school districts so they will know how to do what you did. The Department of Education worked with the Department of Justice and the Attorney General to develop this. It's a roadmap for the establishment of a policy for school uniforms for schools that want to use the tool. It provides a central source of information about successful programs, yours and those that have followed, that are making a difference all across America.

Let me be clear, this is not a National Government mandate. This is not Washington telling any school or school district what to do. The decision about whether to adopt a uniform policy as a tool in an overall program to promote safety and improve learning is a local decision to be made entirely by parents, teachers, and local school officials. But at least now nobody

will say, "We didn't know about this. We couldn't imagine how to do it, and we're not sure it will work." If they read this, they will know it will work and they'll know about it and they'll understand how to do it.

In the meanwhile, let me leave you with these two thoughts: Please don't grow weary in pursuing this goal. We can never rest until violence against our children is the exception, not the rule; until we are horrified—until we are genuinely surprised when we hear about something bad happening to a child. We can never rest until we have more of our children wearing the colors of school uniforms than the colors of gangs. We cannot rest until that is true.

And please, each and every one of you in your own way, be willing to reach out to your friends and neighbors and anyone with whom you come in contact across this great State and across our beloved country, to tell people the story of how this works. People are desperately looking for ways to restore integrity and meaning and purpose and direction and success to our schools all across America. You have shown that it can be done. Share your knowledge; share your passion; share your conviction. And remember what I said. Whenever we are defeated, we defeat ourselves. If we are divided, we can't win. But when we're together, America never loses.

Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:03 a.m. in the courtyard at Jackie Robinson Academy. In his remarks, he referred to Melissa Machit, Charles Evans Hughes Middle School student; Carl Cohn, Long Beach School District superintendent; Mayor Beverly O'Neill of Long Beach; and Bob Ellis, Long Beach police chief.

Remarks on the Downing of American Civilian Aircraft by Cuba and an Exchange With Reporters in Shoreline, Washington

February 24, 1996

The President. Ladies and gentlemen, I have just been briefed by the National Security Adviser on the shooting down today in broad daylight of two American civilian airplanes by Cuban military aircraft. We are continuing to investigate the circumstances of the incident, in-

cluding the airplanes' flight plan and the flight route and what, if any, warnings were given.

This afternoon I ordered the following actions: First, I directed the United States Coast Guard units in the area to conduct search and rescue operations. That is now underway in the