

Remarks at the National Teacher of the Year Award Ceremony April 23, 1996

The President. Thank you very much. Thank you, Secretary Riley. To all of our Teachers of the Year and their friends and family members; to Senator Wellstone, Senator Grams, Congressman Minge; and to the educators and their supporters who are here, let me say that this is a day I look forward to every year. And every year God has blessed us with good weather in the Rose Garden, and that ought to tell you something about where teachers will stand in the ultimate measure of things. [Laughter]

As I think you know, I have been away now for some days on a trip which literally took me around the world, from Korea to Japan to Russia. And before I make the remarks I'd like to make in honor of our Teacher of the Year and her counterparts here, I think it's important to comment on a couple of events that are unfolding now here in Washington.

Let me begin with a compliment to the Congress for working in a bipartisan way for the American people. Last week Congress passed strong legislation to crack down on terrorism which I expect to sign right here tomorrow. I thank them for that. I also am pleased that Congress is moving forward on the Kassebaum-Kennedy bill which would improve access to health care for 43 million Americans and, if an amendment adopted by the United States Senate is carried through, would include mental health coverage for American families who need that.

I'm also pleased to report that we're continuing to make significant progress on bipartisan agreement for the remaining spending bills this year. There is, of course, more to do. I am very hopeful that Congress will now, as a result of movements in the House and comments in the Senate by Republican Members, go ahead and raise the minimum wage for working people. No one can raise a family on \$4.25 an hour, and if we're going to have family values coming out of Washington, we ought to start by valuing families that are working hard, trying to stay off welfare, and doing their best to raise their kids. We ought to do it with no gimmicks, a bill that I can sign into law.

And finally, let me say that I hope that Congress can now bring this bipartisan momentum

to bear on the challenge of finally passing a 7-year balanced budget plan. Last year and early this year, we had over 50 hours of negotiation between the congressional leaders, the Vice President, and me. We made real progress toward agreeing on a balanced budget. Our plans have in common more than enough savings to balance the budget, provide tax relief to working families, and reflect our values by protecting the fundamental structures of Medicare and Medicaid and our commitments to education and a clean environment.

Last week, the Congressional Budget Office certified that the budget plan I presented to Congress would balance the budget in 7 years. This is the first time in 17 years that the Congressional Budget Office has determined that a President's proposed budget is balanced. Moreover, the CBO has issued new and now more optimistic budget projections which will make the task of agreeing on a balanced budget significantly easier for both sides.

It's been over 3 months now since the negotiations over how to balance the budget were suspended. I think we all understood there were intervening events that required this work to be suspended. But the time for waiting is now over. Now is the moment to finish the job and work toward a balanced budget.

We should resume negotiations over how best to do this in 7 years. My door is open, and it's time to get the job done. We should begin again to seriously talk about this budget process. We should include congressional leaders, obviously the leadership, but also a broad enough range of representatives from both parties and both Houses who represent a broad diversity of views so that we can actually agree on something that can pass. We should put together a mainstream coalition to get the job done.

Now if we do that, that will help all the educators. Why? Because if we have a balanced budget amendment, interest rates will come down, investments will go up, the economy will be stronger, and people will pay more funds in local school taxes so that they can support your educational institutions.

We can make this a season of bipartisan achievement. We're off to a good start. There

will be time enough for us to honestly debate our disagreements in the fall. We don't need a yearlong campaign. Most countries just have campaigns of 5 or 6 or 7 weeks. In the coming weeks, we should take the time to sit down and work together on an area where we are very, very close to real agreement. If we stop fighting about yesterday and balance the budget, we can face the challenges and have the debates of tomorrow.

Let me say, too, that this is really about laying a foundation for the future, the same kind of work that you do. There is nothing more important than building the right kind of future for America, whether it is in balancing the budget or teaching our children. This fact was brought home to me again very forcefully in my recent visits to Korea and Japan and Russia. At each stop, I had discussions with leaders of those countries which focused on a fairly simple but very big question: How can we all work together to preserve world peace, to enhance human freedom and define ways to enable all of our people to seize the opportunities of this new information technology-driven age?

The dimensions of economic change we are now experiencing, because of these sweeping changes and because of the end of the cold war and the growth of a global market, are the most profound changes affecting our economy and, therefore, how our people work and live that this country has experienced in 100 years, since people moved fundamentally from the farm to the factory.

And I might say that Bill Gates, the American computer wizard, gave a speech not very long ago that I had the privilege to hear, and he wrote in his book "The Road From Here" that the changes we are now experiencing in communication are the most profound the world has experienced in 500 years since Gutenberg printed the first Bible in Europe with a printing press.

We have to build a bridge to the 21st century that all Americans who are willing to work for it have a chance to cross. Education is the way we do it, the way we can give every child a future, to live the American dream, to make the most of his or her own life, to build solid families and strong communities and a strong America. If our children succeed, America will do very well indeed.

So we have to renew our schools and throw open the doors of college to all who want to

go who are qualified for it. That's why, even as we cut the deficit in half in 4 years, we have maintained our commitment to invest in education, all the way from Head Start through the Goals 2000 program that Secretary Riley mentioned, through access to college. But we also have to acknowledge that the demands of the 21st century require an honest assessment of what is right and wrong with our educational system, what money will fix, and what cannot be fixed by money alone.

The education agenda Secretary Riley and I are pursuing is consistent with what parents and States have called for, tougher standards and accountability and higher expectations and greater opportunities. I believe that in a fundamental way, education is a matter of high expectations, high standards, good teachers, concerned parents, and a supportive community.

High technology will play a bigger and bigger role, and that's why the Vice President and I are trying to make sure that every school and every library in this country, every classroom and every library in the country, from the smallest rural school to the largest urban one, all of them are connected to the information superhighway by the year 2000.

But we all know that we have to have those other things: the good teachers, the concerned parents, the high expectations, the high standards. We know that these things will make a difference. At last month's National Governors' Association education summit, I challenged the States and the Governors there to create a system that rewards and inspires and demands higher standards for teachers, removing barriers that attract the most talented people, rewarding teachers who meet these high standards, making it easier to remove people who should leave the classroom.

But in the end, we know that what we have to do, all the rest of us who give these speeches, is to support the good teachers. The magic that occurs between the teacher and the student is still the ultimate—the ultimate key to successful education. It is partly a science but largely an art. It is sometimes a mystery and always a wonder.

All of us who ever amounted to anything like to tell people that we were born in a log cabin we built ourselves. We'd like for everybody to believe we were self-made. But the truth is, I don't believe there's a single person in America who is really successful today, at least there

aren't many, who can't point to at least one and sometimes a lot more teachers that had a profound impact on his or her life. I know that is certainly true of me. I carried on a correspondence with my sixth-grade teacher until the day she died at the age of 90; she wrote me a week before she died. I have kept up with many of my teachers from elementary and high school and college all my life, because I know that I wouldn't be here if it weren't for them.

And I'm so glad that our Teacher of the Year not only brought her own fine children who are a pretty good monument to her teaching—Sarah and Christie and Mark—but also five of her students, because they really represent the ultimate success of all of your endeavors.

I want to thank, again, Mary Beth Blegen and all of you for devoting your lives to teaching. Mary Beth has taught humanities, history, writing, and English for more than 30 years at Minnesota's Worthington High School. When she was first hired, it was a violation of the child labor laws.

Mary Beth Blegen. Right. Thank you. Thank you very much. Oh, you are such a good man.

The President. She has seen many of the changes that all of us have witnessed in America. Worthington has evolved from a mostly white and rural middle class community into one that is more economically and ethnically diverse. It is a community that has seen a shift in jobs from primarily agricultural jobs to factory jobs and other supporting jobs.

Her greatest achievement has been her ability to help her students understand the complex

relationships that exist in our changing world. And I might say that that may be the toughest thing we all have to do. We have to figure out how to meet the challenges tomorrow while preserving our basic values. We have to understand that for every complicated problem there is normally a simple, appealing answer that is wrong. That does not mean that our values can't be simple, straightforward, and unbending, but it does mean we have to understand these kind of complex relationships that she has done such a marvelous job of explaining to her students.

She is the embodiment of the all-American teacher, a hard-working, dedicated, caring person, always working to do better. Her approach to teaching, they tell me, is just as fresh and enthusiastic today as it was 30 years ago. I think anyone who can do that and avoid burnout and, instead, keep burning on deserves an award for that, if nothing else. And she's done it while raising these three fine children of her own, one of whom has followed in her footsteps as a teacher.

Mary Beth likes to say, good teaching changes lives. She has changed countless lives in 30 years of teaching, and I am proud that she is here as a symbol of all the good that America's teachers do every day all across America.

[At this point, Ms. Blegen, National Teacher of the Year, made brief remarks.]

The President. Thank you very much. We're adjourned.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:45 p.m. in the Rose Garden at the White House.

Message to the Congress Reporting on Narcotics Traffickers Centered in Colombia

April 23, 1996

To the Congress of the United States:

I hereby report to the Congress on the developments concerning the national emergency with respect to significant narcotics traffickers centered in Colombia that was declared in Executive Order No. 12978 of October 21, 1995. This report is submitted pursuant to section 401(c) of the National Emergencies Act, 50 U.S.C. 1641(c), and section 204(c) of the Inter-

national Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA), 50 U.S.C. 1703(c).

1. On October 21, 1995, I signed Executive Order No. 12978, "Blocking Assets and Prohibiting Transactions with Significant Narcotics Traffickers" (the "Order") (60 *Fed. Reg.* 54579, October 24, 1995). The Order blocks all property subject to U.S. jurisdiction in which there is any interest of four significant foreign narcotics