

Ladies and gentlemen, Robert Smith of the National Gallery of Art will accept the award on behalf of Paul Mellon.

[The President and the First Lady presented the medal to Mr. Smith.]

No one has done more to expand the American library of voices than Studs Terkel. He has quite literally defined the art of the oral history, bringing the stories of ordinary people to life in his unique style and letting the everyday experiences that deepen our history speak for themselves. That is why I am very pleased he has agreed to advise the White House Millennium Program on the best way to collect family and community histories, a project we will launch with the NEH this spring.

Ladies and gentlemen, a true American original, Mr. Studs Terkel.

[The President and the First Lady presented the medal and congratulated Mr. Terkel.]

He just thanked me for coordinating the medal with his trademark shirt, tie, and socks. *[Laughter]* The rest of our honorees will just

have to abide it. We were trying to get the wardrobe right.

Let me again thank all of you for coming and say a special word of thanks to Senator Pell and to Congressman and Mrs. Capps, to Congressman Horn, Congresswoman Maloney, Congresswoman Pelosi, Congressman Serrano, and Congressman Burr. And I thank them. We have talked a lot about all the fights that exist between the President and Congress over the NEH and the NEA. It's important to recognize we've got some good supporters there, too.

Let me invite you to enjoy the Marine Orchestra, to enjoy each other, to enjoy this beautiful day and the rich gifts our honorees have given us.

Thank you very much for coming.

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:45 a.m. in the Rose Garden at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Metropolitan Opera mezzo-soprano Denyce Graves; former Senator Claiborne Pell; and Lois Capps, wife of Representative Walter Capps.

Message on the Observance of National Arts and Humanities Month, 1997 September 29, 1997

America celebrates October as National Arts and Humanities Month to recognize the unique role that the arts and humanities play in the lives of our families, our communities, and our country.

For more than 200 years, the arts and humanities have distinguished us as individuals and united us as a nation. The arts empower us to express ourselves and to understand and appreciate the expressions of others. Through the study of literature, history, and philosophy, we learn to build on the riches of our past to create a firm foundation for a better future. Together, the arts and humanities teach us to celebrate the cultural diversity unique to America, while transcending differences in race, ethnicity, age, or creed.

Each day our world evolves further from our notion of the familiar, and we must adapt to its changing nature. In this challenging time, we look to our artists and scholars to inform our decisions and our actions. Musicians, actors,

philosophers, playwrights, painters, writers, sculptors, dancers, and historians share with us their talent and training, inspiring our finest achievements and giving voice to our deepest aspirations.

Because we discover our greatest possibilities through the exploration of the human spirit, we must encourage our young people to build on this cultural legacy and seek their highest potential in the arts and humanities. Children inspired by their own creative achievements excel in other areas of learning, developing the skills and the confidence to create better lives and brighter futures.

As we observe National Arts and Humanities Month this year, let us reflect on the role of these vital pursuits in our individual lives and in the life of our democracy. Today, on the threshold of a new millennium, they are more essential than ever to the endurance of our values of tolerance, pluralism, and freedom; to our understanding of where we are and where we

need to go. Let us remember that the arts and humanities are a necessity, not a luxury, and that every American deserves to have access to them. And let us resolve to sustain America's national commitment to the arts and humanities so that we may preserve for the generations

to come the great artistic and intellectual life of our nation.

BILL CLINTON

NOTE: This message was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on September 29.

Remarks on the Income and Poverty Report and an Exchange With Reporters

September 29, 1997

The President. I don't know if I can go on. [Laughter]

Good morning. This Friday will mark the sixth anniversary of the day I announced my intention to run for President of the United States. On that day, I challenged America to embrace an urgent mission for the 21st century, to preserve the American dream, restore the hopes of the forgotten middle class, and reclaim the future for our children.

As President, I have worked hard to set America on that track, to fulfill that mission, putting in place a bold strategy to shrink the deficit, invest in our people, and expand the sales of America's products and services abroad. I am pleased to announce today that we have more evidence that our economic strategy is succeeding.

This morning the Census Bureau released its annual Survey of Income and Poverty in America. It shows that last year the typical family benefited from a significant increase in income for the third year in a row. Since we launched our economic plan in 1993, the typical family's annual income has risen by nearly \$2,200 a year. That's an extra \$2,200 that hard-working families can put toward their children's education, a downpayment on a home, or even a much needed vacation. After years and years of stagnant family incomes, today's report proves that America's middle class, no longer forgotten, is rising fast.

It should be noted that these figures do not reflect several other dividends of prosperity we have delivered for the American people. They don't reflect the \$500-per-child tax credit, the \$1,500 HOPE scholarship, the education IRA's, the real benefits of lower interest rates and

mortgage costs worth \$1,000 a year or more to millions of homeowners.

And rising incomes are also lifting families out of poverty. The report shows that while there is clearly much more to be done, the African-American poverty rate has fallen to its lowest level ever. The income of the typical Hispanic household grew more last year than in any single year on record. The child poverty rate has dropped, in the past 3 years, more than in any 3-year period since the 1960's. And the earned-income tax credit, which we have dramatically expanded and then fought hard to preserve, has raised more than 4 million people out of poverty last year.

The report also shows we have more to do to extend opportunity to all Americans. Starting in the 1970's, income inequality rose sharply. Now it has stabilized. Since 1993, every income group has seen its income rise, with those in the lowest 20 percent showing the fastest gains, thanks in part to the minimum wage, to more jobs, and to the earned-income tax credit, which is not measured in the statistics. But we still have to do more to grow together in the 21st century.

Let me say that this report also underscores another important challenge, one that I have been concerned about for a long time. Last year there were 800,000 more children without health insurance than the year before. However, thank goodness, many of these children will now be eligible for coverage under the balanced budget's historic \$24 billion child health initiative, which takes effect this week.

Two years ago we were fighting hard to save Medicaid's guarantee to 4 million children. Now we're looking forward to extending child health insurance to another 5 million children. We have