

NOTE: The President spoke at 1 p.m. in the Cabinet Room at the White House. A tape was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

## Remarks on the Budget Negotiations *October 12, 1998*

Good afternoon. While Columbus Day is a day off for many Americans, here at the White House we have been working hard with the leaders of both parties on Capitol Hill to write a budget to strengthen our Nation for the 21st Century.

I have just spoken with my Chief of Staff, Erskine Bowles. He and our budget team report that they are making progress on important issues, but there are still quite a number of issues still to be resolved; the most critical one, perhaps, is education. Eight months ago, in my State of the Union Address, I asked the Congress to help local communities reduce class size in the early grades by hiring 100,000 new teachers. I also asked Congress to help local communities to build or repair thousands of schools so we would have the classrooms for the teachers to teach in.

A recent study from Congress' own General Accounting Office concluded that as many as one-third of our classrooms are in need of serious modernization and repair. With a third of our children in substandard classrooms, our future is at risk. I believe we can reach across the political divisions here in Washington to take the steps we must to reduce class size, to hire more teachers, to modernize our classrooms. Smaller classes, more teachers, modern classrooms can do for our public schools what 100,000 new police officers are doing to keep our communities safer. This should not be a partisan issue.

I know there's an election coming, but Members of Congress can return home to campaign

knowing that they put progress ahead of partisanship on the important issue of education. We need 21st century schools where teachers can teach and students can learn.

### *Death of Matthew Shepard*

Let me also take a moment here to offer my prayers and my condolences to the family of Matthew Shepard, as well as to the community of Laramie, Wyoming, and the university. While it wouldn't be proper for me to comment on the specifics of this case, I do want to say again, crimes of hate and crimes of violence cannot be tolerated in our country. In our shock and grief, one thing must remain clear: Hate and prejudice are not American values. The public outrage in Laramie and all across America today echoes what we heard at the White House Conference on Hate Crimes last year. There is something we can do about this. Congress needs to pass our tough hate crimes legislation. It can do so even before it adjourns, and it should do so.

I hope that in the grief of this moment for Matthew Shepard's family, and in the shared outrage across America, Americans will once again search their hearts and do what they can to reduce their own fear and anxiety and anger at people who are different. And I hope that Congress will pass the hate crimes legislation.

Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 3:02 p.m. on the South Lawn at the White House, prior to his departure for New York City.