

[At this point, the portrait was unveiled.]

Now, ladies and gentlemen, I think it's high time we heard from the man we came to honor, Secretary Mike Espy.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:52 p.m. at the Department of Agriculture. In his remarks, he referred to Rhoda Glickman, wife of Agriculture Secretary Dan Glickman; civil rights activist Rev. Jesse Jackson; and attorneys Reid H. Weingarten and Ted Wells, Jr.

Statement on the National Education Goals Report *December 10, 1998*

Today's release of the annual National Education Goals Report shows that America has made some progress toward achieving the National Education Goals but still has a long way to go. If we are going to reach these goals, we must strengthen accountability and raise standards for students, teachers, and schools. I will continue to press Congress to help give our students smaller classes, well-prepared teachers, and modernized school buildings. I will continue my efforts to expand access to early childhood programs, increase public school choice, make our schools safe, disciplined, and drug-free, open the doors of college education, and help Americans engage in lifelong learning.

I am pleased at the progress that the report shows in helping our young children arrive at school ready to learn, improving student achievement in math, and increasing the participation of women and minorities in math and science in higher education. Those responsible for such gains—parents and teachers, local and State education officials, colleges and universities, the business community, and students themselves—should be proud of what they have accomplished.

But we must do more. Education is a local function, a State responsibility, and a national priority. The National Education Goals define excellence in education, and Americans at all levels must redouble our efforts to meet them.

Remarks Following Discussions With Central American Leaders *December 11, 1998*

President Clinton. Good morning. I have just concluded a very good meeting with the leaders of five Central American nations: President Rodriguez of Costa Rica, President Flores of Honduras, President Aleman of Nicaragua, President Calderon Sol of El Salvador, and Vice President Flores of Guatemala. We send our best wishes to President Arzu, who is in Guatemala recovering from a bout of pneumonia.

Over the past decade, Central Americans have transformed their countries. Nations where freedom once was denied, where there was once fear and violence, have now joined their neighbors as democracies in peace. Economic development has raised many from poverty. Now nature has put that progress at risk.

Central American nations face in varying degrees the formidable task of rebuilding from the region's deadliest storm in modern history: 9,000 confirmed dead, another 9,000 missing and feared dead, 3 million people homeless or displaced. The hurricane destroyed schools, hospitals, farms, utilities, roads, and bridges.

The governments and people of the region have made tremendous efforts to address this crisis, showing great courage and strength. But they are not, and they never will be, alone. I say to the leaders here and to the people of Central America, the United States will continue to do everything we can. *Ayudaremos a nuestros hermanos.* We will help our brothers and sisters. It is the right thing to do. And I say to my fellow Americans, it also serves