

Message to the Citizens of Oklahoma City Commemorating the Fourth Anniversary of the Bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building *April 14, 1999*

Greetings to everyone gathered in Oklahoma City to remember those who died in the bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building.

The bombing on April 19, 1995, stole the lives of 168 people and brought grief to the victim's families and to our entire nation. This cowardly act of terrorism outraged not only the people of the United States, but also civilized men and women everywhere.

As you gather to mark the fourth anniversary of that tragedy, I know that your memories of the loved ones you lost are undiminished by the passing of time. I know, too, that all Americans still share your sorrow.

Four years ago, you were brought together by your devastating loss. In the years since, you have reached out to forge new ties of community, turning your shared sadness into a source of strength for all Americans. As you prepare to dedicate the national memorial at next year's observance, I commend you for your courage and your dedication in creating a lasting tribute to the memory of your loved ones.

Hillary and I are keeping all of you in our thoughts and prayers.

BILL CLINTON

NOTE: This message was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on April 19.

Remarks at the Award Ceremony for the National Teacher of the Year *April 19, 1999*

Thank you very much. Thank you, Terry. I also want to acknowledge and welcome Congresswoman Patsy Mink from Hawaii, who is here with her husband, John. We're very delighted to see them. I'd like to thank the Chief State School Officers for sponsoring this award along with Scholastic, and I believe Gordon Ambach and Ernie Fleishman are both here.

Terry said I'd given 131 speeches on education. I didn't know that until I just came in here. *[Laughter]* I wasn't keeping count. It is true that a few years ago I started reeling off all my teachers, beginning at kindergarten. And when I started running for office a long time ago now, I remember I asked—the fellow who was helping me put my first campaign together said, “People don't know much about you; we've got to do a little biographical film, and we ought to put one of your teachers in it.” And I said, “Well, I still carry on a correspondence with my sixth grade teacher, Kathleen Scher.” I did until she died at about 91 years of age. And I used to see her about once a year.

“But you can't use her,” I said. And they said, “Well, why? That sounds like a wonderful

story.” I said, “It is, but she's liable to tell you what she told me the day I finished my elementary school career.” *[Laughter]* True story. My sainted sixth grade teacher, who is one of these wonderful—she lived with her first cousin, and they lived until their late eighties or early nineties, and they taught school for a gazillion years. And she looked at me when I left elementary school for the last day and she said, “Bill, I just don't know about you.” *[Laughter]* She said, “You know, if you ever learn when to talk and when to keep quiet, there is nothing you can't achieve. But if you don't learn the difference, I'm not sure whether you're going to be Governor or wind up in the penitentiary.” *[Laughter]* So we found someone else to do the film. *[Laughter]* But Kathleen Scher continued to write me for the rest of her days, including a letter I have that I received just a week before she passed away.

So I want to thank all of you for being here today. I also would like to thank Terry for the magnificent perspective she's provided to us for years now, in the Department of Education, on education and on teachers. And I'd like to thank

her for mentioning Kosovo today. I know a lot of you—probably in every school in the country, now, children are looking at maps and learning about the world we live in. And I think that's very important because it is such a small world, growing smaller.

I went out to San Francisco a couple of days ago to speak to the newspaper editors, and I said that it is truly ironic that here we stand on the verge of a new century and a new millennium, where education is more important than ever before, because we have this explosion in technology, drawing us closer to different people of different cultures, and our own country is becoming more diverse; we can imagine a future that is more prosperous and more peaceful and more interconnected, in a very human way, than ever before; we got by the cold war—thank goodness—without any nuclear weapons falling; and now we've found that that future was threatened by the oldest demon of human society, which is our fear of people who are different from us.

I'm sure at one point it was rational when tribes roamed around in isolated ways in pre-historical times and fought over limited resources and saw people in different tribes who were different from them, and they were maybe afraid for rational reasons. But today we have an opportunity to sort of celebrate our differences and enjoy them, as long as we understand they have to operate within a framework that says, underneath, the common humanity we all share as children of God is more important than those things which distinguish us one from another. That's really what's at stake there.

And it would be ironic, indeed, if after two World Wars and a cold war being fought on the continent of Europe, and all the lessons we have learned over this century, that it would be in southeastern Europe and the Balkans where our vision of the 21st century would come apart.

So this conflict in Kosovo, in a fundamental way, is either the last conflict of the 20th century or the first conflict of the 21st century. And it's very important that our children understand that.

I just want to say one word about it, and then I will come back to the task at hand. But I do have to announce today that I intend to send to Congress an emergency funding package to pay for our military and humanitarian needs for the operation in Kosovo; to ensure that we

have the resources to sustain the air campaign until we achieve our goals, while maintaining our high level of general military readiness; to provide critical humanitarian assistance and relief to the hundreds of thousands of refugees; and to provide for resources for the nations in the region, the neighbors of Kosovo, who have suffered so much from the effects of this conflict.

One of the things that a lot of people don't understand is that this is putting an enormous burden on Albania, the poorest country in the region, taking all those refugees, struggling to maintain a democracy. It's putting enormous burdens on Macedonia, a very small country trying to manage its own ethnic differences, now having these refugees loaded on top of them. It causes real problems for Bulgaria and Romania. This is a difficult thing for the neighborhood.

So I hope that the Congress will act on this. The need for this funding is urgent, immediate, clearly in the national interest. There are literally lives hanging in the balance. And so I hope, in the spirit of genuine bipartisanship, the Congress will move the package right away.

Now, let's talk about why we're here. The first Teacher of the Year Award was presented in 1952 by a man who was one of my heroes as a child growing up, Harry Truman. He did it right here on the White House grounds. The recipient was a Miss Geraldine Jones, who taught first grade in Santa Barbara, California, in a school whose name I rather like, the Hope School. [Laughter] Harry Truman said on that occasion that next to one's mother, a teacher had the greatest influence on what kind of a citizen a child grew up to be.

Every year since, Presidents or members of their families have personally handed out this award, as Terry said, to recognize not only the awardee and all of you, but, through you, all teachers in our country.

Eight hours a day, 5 days a week, 9 months a year, teachers hold the future of America in their hands. They teach our children to read, to write, to calculate, to sing, to play, to paint, to listen, to question, hopefully to work with others, and think for themselves. They excite our children's imaginations, lift their aspirations, open their hearts, and strengthen their values.

Everyone probably can recall a story like the one I told you at the opening of my remarks today. Many of us can remember our teachers

in stunning detail, their faces, their expressions, their voices, their favorite admonitions, the way their hands gripped the chalk at the blackboard. We can still, most of us, summon the pride we felt when they praised us and the absolute chill we felt when we were scolded. [Laughter]

The role of teachers, while hard to exaggerate, unfortunately, is too often easy to overlook. Teachers do their jobs, quietly, largely isolated from other adults. Their work, therefore, is seldom glorified by Hollywood and rarely sufficiently rewarded by society.

Andy Baumgartner is our Teacher of the Year. He spent 2 years in the United States Marines. He gained inner confidence, self-motivation, physical stamina at Parris Island and Camp Lejeune. I imagine they have been useful to him in dealing with young children. [Laughter]

Since he is a former marine, I think it's worth pointing out that today we rightly honor the men and women serving in and around the Balkans as patriots. We should also honor our teachers as patriots.

Andy's colleagues marvel at the way he rivets the attention of his kindergarten students by keeping himself in constant creative motion. That's the first impression I had of him. [Laughter] I have met a person who has even more energy than I do. [Laughter] One minute he's using popcorn and M&M's to teach counting. The next, he's conducting a sing-a-long to "This Land Is Your Land." A few minutes later, he's marching the class up the hill behind the school to conduct a solemn funeral for a departed pet tarantula named "Legs." [Laughter]

As the father of a son with a learning disability, he knows firsthand the struggle many parents go through to get the individual attention their children need. He works hard to give that kind of attention to all his students.

When he's not teaching, he can be found directing a school play, teaching other educators, writing guidebooks for parents, working in community theater, participating actively in his church. He is an example of the kind of vital, active American that Alexis de Tocqueville marveled at when he came here so long ago and talked about the unique quality of our citizenship.

If he were alive today, de Tocqueville, I think, would agree that America could do more to honor classroom teachers like Andy Baumgartner. Perhaps more of our best and brightest young people would choose teaching

as a career if we did more to lift our teachers up and honor them. Even though I am one, we don't need many more lawyers; we have plenty of financial analysts on Wall Street, but we desperately need more teachers.

When our finest young people pass up teaching, they're missing out on rewarding careers, and we're missing out on a chance to put our talent where we need it the most today. With 53 million children in our public schools, the greatest number ever, from more diverse backgrounds than at any time in our history, certainly since the turn of the century, with enrollments growing and a wave of teacher retirements about to hit, our schools will have to hire 2 million more teachers in the next decade.

At the same time, we're trying to bring down class size, and that requires more teachers. And the new teachers must be better trained. A quarter of all secondary school teachers today do not have majors or even minors in the subjects they are teaching. And of course, the deficit is worse in low-income neighborhoods where the need is greatest.

Now, these are enormous challenges. I believe we can meet them if we act now, when our economy is the strongest it has been in a very long time. But we have to act now. There are things the Federal Government can do, to be sure, and I want to talk a little about them. But I'd like to point out that we provide only about 7 percent of the funding of total public school funding in America. That's a higher percentage than it was when I became President. When we were cutting the deficit and cutting programs, we doubled our investment in education in about 5 years. But it's still important to remember that a lot of this has to be done at the State and local level.

And so as the Governors of our various States enjoy great prosperity, and as the crime rate comes down and presumably, therefore, they don't have to keep spending all their new money on building prisons—as was the case when I was a Governor, too often—I certainly hope that as much money as possible will be put into our public school systems to hire those teachers and to raise teacher pay. That has to be done at the State level, primarily, and it is absolutely imperative.

At the national level, we're going to do what we can to pass a bill to build or modernize thousands of schools, to help to hire 100,000 highly trained new teachers to reduce class size

in the early grades. The studies, of course, confirm what a lot of our teachers have been saying for a long time, that smaller classes means more individual attention, more discipline, and more learning. Last fall Congress reached across party lines to put down a downpayment. They paid for about a third of these 100,000 teachers. I certainly hope we can finish the job this year.

We have to redouble our efforts to recruit more of the best and brightest young Americans into teaching. A lot of our young people in the AmeriCorps program are getting some of their college education paid so they can go and become teachers. Our budget now calls for an investment to provide 7,000 college scholarships for students who will commit to teach in the poorest inner-city and rural schools. It calls on an investment to get 1,000 Native American young people to teach on Indian reservations and in other public schools with large Native American populations.

It calls for more money to recruit and train members of the United States military when they retire to become teachers through our Troops for Teachers program, something that has really been very, very successful. Our 25 million veterans represent a vast pool of potential teachers. Many of them, because they're drawing military retirement, can actually afford to be teachers. *[Laughter]* And most of them have their kids grown. So it's a pool that we need to look at and draw on. Our Teacher of the Year, here, is pretty good evidence that soldiers can be quite good teachers. We ought to make it easier for others to do the same thing.

Third, in our budget we provide more funds for teacher training. I think it's quite important that teachers, our new teachers especially, demonstrate that they know what they're supposed to teach. But we cannot expect the schools out there, who have to teach the kids, to be able to do what they're supposed to do unless we provide—we in the public sector—provide the resources we need not only to recruit but to properly train the teachers in the subjects they have to teach.

Fourth, we should do more to make our schools attractive places where people want to work. In our "Educational Accountability Act," we have a lot of funds for better schools and for turning around schools that aren't performing and for after-school and summer school

programs to help the children who need extra help.

Now, last thing I'd like to say is something I've already said. I know I've given 131 speeches on education—I now know that—so I've learned a new fact today, and I love facts. But the larger truth is this: Everybody is for education in general, but not enough people are for it in particular. It's easy to give a talk and harder to foot the bill. And I think it is very important that we not only remain committed to substantive reforms—you know, I believe that every school district should have a "no social promotion" policy, but I don't think the kids should be branded failures. I think if they're not making it, then they should get the extra help they need. And that's why we have moved on from \$1 million, and \$20 million, to \$200 million, to \$600 million this year in Federal support for after-school programs and summer school programs. We're working at this. But America needs to focus on this.

We're going to honor Andy. I'm going to bring him up here to give him his award, and he's going to give a speech, and we're all going to practically laugh or cry. And it will be a wonderful thing. But I want America to hear this when they see you tonight on television. We have 2 million teachers to hire in the next few years. And in the best of all worlds, they would, every one of them, be just as committed and just as knowledgeable and just as effective as you are. And it isn't going to happen unless we make the necessary decisions and put the necessary priorities in place, not only in Washington but in every State capital and every local school district in the country.

So I say today, the best way we can honor America's teachers is for the rest of us to give them the tools to succeed with our children in the 21st century. *[Applause]* Thank you.

Ladies and gentlemen, the 1999 Teacher of the Year, Mr. Andy Baumgartner.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:10 a.m. in Presidential Hall (formerly Room 450) in the Old Executive Office Building. In his remarks, he referred to Therese Knecht Dozier, Special Adviser on Teaching to the Secretary of Education; Gordon M. Ambach, executive director, Council of Chief State School Officers; and Ernest Fleishman, senior vice president, Scholastic, Inc. The transcript released by the Office of the Press Secretary also

included the remarks of Mr. Baumgartner, kindergarten teacher at A. Brian Merry Elementary School in Augusta, GA.

Statement Commemorating the Deportation and Massacre of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire *April 19, 1999*

This week marks the commemoration of one of the saddest chapters of this century: the deportations and massacres of one and a half million Armenians in the closing years of the Ottoman Empire.

We join with Armenian-Americans across the Nation and with the Armenian community abroad to mourn the loss of so many innocent lives. Today, against the background of events in Kosovo, all Americans should recommit themselves to building a world where such events never occur again.

As we learn from the past, we also build for the future. In this country, Armenian-Americans have made great contributions to every field, from science to commerce to culture. Mean-

while, the people of Armenia, who suffered not only from the massacres but the ravages of two World Wars and the pain of 70 years of Soviet rule, at last have obtained their independence and their freedom. Armenia is pursuing democratic and market reforms, assuming its rightful place among the members of the Euro-Atlantic community of nations. We wish the people of Armenia—and all of their neighbors in the Caucasus region—success in their efforts to bring about the lasting peace and prosperity that they deserve. America will continue to support these efforts.

On behalf of the American people, I extend my best wishes to all Armenians at this time of remembrance.

Statement on the Deaths of David and Penny McCall *April 19, 1999*

Hillary and I are saddened to learn of the deaths of David and Penny McCall, two Americans who dedicated their lives to helping people in need around the world. They were killed in an auto accident, along with a French colleague, Yvette Pierpaoli, and their Albanian driver, while engaged in their life's work.

They were in Albania on a mission for Refugees International to explore the possibilities of

setting up a region-wide radio network to help Kosovar-Albanian refugees locate lost family members.

By reaching out to help the Kosovar refugees and war-affected people throughout the world, they stood for the best of the American spirit. Our thoughts and prayers are with their loved ones.