

*Apr. 20 / Administration of William J. Clinton, 1999*

of over 45 African countries. No nation committed to good governments and economic reform should be crushed by a debt burden that it is so heavy it will punish ordinary citizens and prevent growth, no matter what people do.

Now, if we take these steps, we can build an international marketplace that reflects our values. And we can achieve something that I think people in the United States want very badly: We can put a human face on the global

economy. We can show people, here and around the world, that there won't just be economic numbers showing growth, but their lives will be actually improved by the work we do to draw closer together.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 4:34 p.m. in the Roosevelt Room at the White House.

## Message to the Congress Transmitting an Account of Federal Agency Climate Change Programs and Activities

*April 20, 1999*

*To the Congress of the United States:*

In accordance with section 573 of the Foreign Operations, Export Financing, and Related Programs Appropriations Act, 1999, as contained in the Omnibus Consolidated and Emergency Supplemental Appropriations Act, 1999 (Public Law 105-277), I transmit herewith an account of all Federal agency climate change programs

and activities. This report includes both domestic and international programs and activities related to climate change and contains data on both spending and performance goals.

WILLIAM J. CLINTON

The White House,  
April 20, 1999.

## Remarks on the Attack at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado, and an Exchange With Reporters

*April 20, 1999*

*The President.* I want to begin by saying that Hillary and I are profoundly shocked and saddened by the tragedy today in Littleton, where two students opened fire on their classmates before apparently turning their guns on themselves.

I have spoken with Governor Bill Owens and County Commission Chair Patricia Holloway and expressed my profound concern for the people of Littleton. I have spoken to Deputy Attorney General Eric Holder, who, along with Attorney General Reno, is closely monitoring the situation. I've asked the Attorney General and the Secretary of Education to stand ready to assist local law enforcement, the schools, the families, the entire community during this time of crisis and sorrow.

A crisis response team is ready now to travel to Colorado, and I strongly believe that we

should do whatever we can to get enough counselors to the families and the children as quickly as possible. I know the other communities that have been through this are also ready to do whatever they can to help.

I think that Patricia Holloway would not mind if I said that, amidst all the turmoil and grief that she and others are experiencing, she said to me just a moment ago that perhaps now America would wake up to the dimensions of this challenge if it could happen in a place like Littleton, and we could prevent anything like this from happening again. We pray that she is right.

We don't know yet all the hows or whys of this tragedy. Perhaps we may never fully understand it. Saint Paul reminds us that we all see things in this life through a glass darkly, that we only partly understand what is happening.

We do know that we must do more to reach out to our children and teach them to express their anger and to resolve their conflicts with words, not weapons. And we do know we have to do more to recognize the early warning signs that are sent before children act violently.

To the families who have lost their loved ones, to the parents who have lost their beloved children, to the wounded children and their families, to the people of the community of Littleton, I can only say tonight that the prayers of the American people are with you.

Thank you very much.

#### *School Violence*

Q. Mr. President, you tried to get this message out last fall. Is there anything additional that you can say or that the Federal Government can do to prevent things like this from happening?

*The President.* Well, I think on this case it's very, very important that we have the facts, insofar as we can find them out. You know, we had the conference here last fall. The Attorney General and the Secretary of Education prepared the handbook for all the schools that we asked to be widely used. And we do have, from bitter and sad experience, a great cadre of very good, effective grief counselors. My guess is that they will be needed in abundance there for the children.

I think after a little time has passed, we need to have a candid assessment about what more we can do to try to prevent these things from happening.

Q. Mr. President, there seems to be an epidemic of these kinds of incidents now. There was Paducah, Kentucky; Jonesboro, Arkansas; Springfield, Oregon; and several others. Would you characterize this as an epidemic affecting the Nation's school system?

*The President.* I wouldn't want to use that word. What I would like to know is whether we can take—we can learn enough from this, which in its dimensions apparently is much greater than even the others were, and see what else we can do.

I had a very interesting conversation this afternoon with Congresswoman Carolyn McCarthy, who, as all of you know, lost her own husband, and the son sustained a wound as a result of a shooting incident on a commuter train. And that's what we talked about.

I think tonight we owe it to the people of Littleton and to the families involved in this tragedy to let them go through the grieving and deal—and try to get the facts. And then the rest of us have a responsibility to do everything we can to make sure this doesn't make 1999 a year like last year, that we don't have another rash of this, that we really can be more effective in preventing it.

And I wish I could say more tonight, but I don't think I can.

Q. Mr. President, have you been told, sir, that the death toll is as high as the 25 figure that we've heard? And secondly, sir, every time one of these things happens, we go through this chorus of handwringing and say we've got to stop it from happening again. Is there anything specific and concrete that you'd like to see happen that hasn't happened yet?

*The President.* Well, I don't want to make—there are, but what I would like to do is take a couple of days, because we don't know what the facts are here. And keep in mind, the community is an open wound right now. They have suffered as much as anyone can suffer. This is the largest group of fatalities, whatever the numbers are—and I've heard various numbers, even as much as 5 minutes ago, right before I came out.

I'd like to answer that question, but I think anything I say tonight can only add to the pain of the people in Littleton and not serve to solve the problem. So I will answer that question when I have more facts and after we let a little time pass.

Q. Mr. President, you said America should wake up. Wake up to what, sir?

*The President.* Well, I think there are a lot of kids out there who have access to weapons—and apparently more than guns here—and who build up these grievances in their own mind and who are not being reached. And it's not just Littleton. We know that now. We've had lots and lots and lots of places. So it's—I don't know how many of you have been there. I've actually been there. I know the community, and it's a wonderful place.

And I think I can't do better than what Patricia Holloway said, the commission chair: If it can happen here, then surely people will recognize that they have to be alive to the possibility that it could occur in any community in America, and maybe that will help us to keep it from happening again.

But you know what we put out before. You know the efforts we've made. And I just think that tonight we need to focus on the families that lost their kids, on the children that are wounded, on the grieving of the community, give this thing a day or two for the facts to emerge. And then I'll try to have more to say to you.

*Q.* On just that point, Mr. President, at the time you had that conference last year, your administration said the students are still safer sitting in the classroom than they are walking down the street. Do you think Americans still think that's true? Do you think that's true?

*The President.* Well, statistically, for all the whole 53 million kids in our schools, it's true. But from the fact we're hearing about what happened at this school and the possibility that explosives were out there, that hand grenades were available, that other things were there, it obviously wasn't true there. That was obviously the most dangerous place in Colorado today.

So I don't want to—but that doesn't—that shouldn't make people believe that every school is in danger. What it should make every community do is to study this handbook we put out and see what lessons can be learned here.

But again, tonight I think the American people ought to be thinking about those folks in Littleton. Tomorrow and in the days ahead, we'll have a little more time to kind of gather ourselves and our determination and go back at this again.

Thank you.

*NOTE:* The President spoke at 7:48 p.m. in the Briefing Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Columbine High School gunmen Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold; Governor Bill Owens of Colorado; Patricia B. Holloway, chair, Jefferson County Board of Commissioners; and Representative Carolyn McCarthy's son, Kevin.

## Remarks to the White House Volunteers

*April 21, 1999*

Thank you. You know, Hillary and I look forward to this day so much every year. We want to thank you for what you do. We want to say to America we could not run the White House without you.

It happens that this day was scheduled on what has turned out to be a very sad day for America. And since, in my mind, you represent the best of American citizenship by what you do here every day as volunteers, I think it is important that we take a little time to ponder how we, as American citizens, should respond to what has occurred in Colorado.

First of all, I think it is important that we remember that we must come together and pray together but also commit to act together. In Littleton, we saw and we continue to see horror and agony. We also see in that horror and agony the ties that bring us together as a national community: the police officers rushing toward the sound of gunfire with bravery and professionalism, the students risking their own lives for their friends, the doctors and paramedics summoning all their skills under astonishing

pressure, the parents and neighbors whose love and concern sustained their children through that last long night and who will be called upon to do much more in the days and weeks to come. We see, in a moment of agony, what is best in our community and in our country. I have been particularly struck by the story of Mrs. Miller, the teacher who heard the gunfire and led dozens of students to safety in the choir room, who worked to keep them calm and quiet for hours while students removed ceiling tiles to let in more air. Doubtless, we will learn more stories of quick thinking and grace under pressure as the details unfold. All of us are struggling to understand exactly what happened and why. There is a deep desire to comfort the grieving and counsel the children. We must also focus on what we are going to do.

In Littleton, agents from the ATF and the FBI already are on the ground, providing tactical assistance to local authorities. Highly trained crisis workers are ready to help people cope with their loss. Fortunately, one of the