

now, and it is finally a reality—a treaty that has been ratified by 40 other countries, the prospect of dramatically increasing the safety of the American people in the future—and hold it hostage to two matters that are literally not ripe for presentation to the Senate yet would

be a grave error, I think. And I hope that we can find a way around that.

Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:43 a.m. in the Rose Garden at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to President Jiang Zemin of China.

## Remarks to Representatives of the Legal Community

July 20, 1999

Thank you. Let me say to all of you, I can't do any better than that. [*Laughter*] It was terrific. I wish every newspaper in American would reprint those remarks. Thank you, sir. Thank you very much.

I want to thank you all for coming. What a wonderful group we have here. First, I thank Attorney General Reno and Deputy Attorney General Holder for the wonderful job they do in so many ways. Associate Attorney General Fisher is here with them and Bill Lann Lee of the Civil Rights Division. One big civil rights issue is getting him confirmed, I might add.

I thank Secretary Slater and Secretary Daley for joining us, and Ben Johnson, who runs our one America initiative; and Chris Edley, who used to be part of our administration—still is—I just don't have to pay him anymore. [*Laughter*]

Thank you, Senator Leahy and Congressman Becerra, for coming. I think there are at least two people in this room, Jerry Shestack and Bill Taylor, who were here in 1963 with President Kennedy. I thank them for coming. Thank you, Mayor Archer, for coming—former Secretary of State Warren Christopher, former Attorney General Benjamin Civiletti.

There are so many people here—I just have to mention one person because it's my most intimate, personal acquaintance with affirmative action, the president of the American Bar Association, Phil Anderson, gave me a job in 1981, when I was the youngest former Governor in American history—[*laughter*—]with dim future prospects. So I thank him for being here, as well.

And I'd like to say a special word of appreciation to the man who directs our national service program, Senator Harris Wofford, who was very

intimately involved with President Kennedy's civil rights initiatives. Thank you for being here, sir, today.

As has been pointed out, President Kennedy called more than 200 of America's leading lawyers to this room 36 years ago, the summer of 1963, when America was awakening to the fact that in our laws and in our hearts, we were still far short of our ideals.

It is difficult today to imagine an America without civil rights. But when I came here 36 years ago in the summer of 1963, as a delegate to American Legion Boys Nation, there were only four African-American boys there, and the hottest issue was what we were going to do about civil rights.

It didn't seem so inevitable back then. Across my native South, there were sheriffs, mayors, Governors defying the courts; police dogs attacking peaceful demonstrators; firehoses toppling children; protesters led away in handcuffs; and too little refuge in the hallowed sanctuary of the law.

It was in this atmosphere that the President turned to America's lawyers and enlisted them in the fight for equal justice. With Vice President Johnson and Attorney General Robert Kennedy at his side, the President asked the lawyers there to remember their duty to uphold justice, especially in places where the principles of justice had been defied.

The lawyers answered that call, creating a new Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law and a new tradition of pro bono service in the legal profession. I asked you here today because we need your help as much as ever in our most enduring challenge as a nation, the challenge of creating one America. We have worked hard on that here. In the audience today I see

Dr. John Hope Franklin, Governor William Winter, Judy Winston. I think Angela Oh and Dr. Suzan Johnson are here, but I haven't seen them yet—people who worked on this for me to shine a special spotlight on the issues. And we have now institutionalized that effort insofar as we can in the White House. But there is a limit to what we can do without you.

Just as your predecessors, with the Constitution as their shield, stared down the sheriffs of segregation, you must step forward to dismantle our time's most stubborn obstacles to equal justice—poverty, unemployment, and yes, continuing discrimination. Behind every watershed event of the civil rights struggle, lawyers, many pro bono, remain vigilant, securing equal rights for employment, education, housing, voting, and citizenship for all Americans. Their success, as you just heard from Bill—every time a lawyer does that, it inspires a whole new generation of people to seek the law as a career. I suspect many of us were inspired to go to law school because we thought lawyers were standing up for what was right, not simply because they were making a good living.

Thirty-six years ago, in that 200, there were 50 African-American lawyers. They came to the White House, but they couldn't have found the same welcome in the hotels, restaurants, and lunch counters of America—a cruel irony.

Today, thanks in large measure to the efforts of our lawyers, Americans of all backgrounds and colors and religions are working, living, and learning side by side. The doors of opportunity are open wider than ever. We are living in a time of unprecedented prosperity, with the longest peacetime expansion in our history and the lowest African-American and Hispanic unemployment rates ever recorded since we began to keep separate data in the early 1970's. Our social fabric is mending, with declining rates of welfare, crime, teen pregnancy, and drug abuse.

But the challenge to build one America continues. It is different, but it is just as real as it was when Vernon Jordan started with the Urban League as a young man, or before he was working in the South on registering voters. I saw firsthand in the new markets tour I took a couple of weeks ago, we will never be one America when our central cities, our Indian reservations, our small towns and rural areas here in the most prosperous time in history are still living in the shadows of need and want. They're struggling with unemployment and poverty rates

more than twice the national average—over 70 percent on some of our reservations. Your fellow Americans, many of them, are living in houses that it would sicken you to walk through—at the time of our greatest prosperity.

Everything President Johnson worked for and dreamed of that he thought could happen after all these years has still not reached quite a large number of your fellow Americans. So, what are we going to do about it?

We know that two out of five African-American and Latino children under the age of 6 are still in poverty, in spite of all of our prosperity, in spite of the fact that a million children were lifted out of poverty just in the last couple of years. We also know that we can't be one America when a lot of minorities still distrust law enforcement and our legal system generally and shy away from entering the legal profession.

We can't be one America when, here we are, on the eve of the new millennium, when we act as if everything good will happen and all the rationality will fade away, but we still have to read about brutal killings like those in Indiana and Illinois, allegedly conducted on the basis of religious conviction; or what happened in Jasper, Texas; or to Matthew Shepard in Laramie, Wyoming.

The struggle for one America today is more complex than it was 36 years ago, more subtle than it seemed to us that it would be back then. For then, there was the clear enemy of legal segregation and overt hatred. Today, the progress we make in building one America depends more on whether we can expand opportunity and deal with a whole range of social challenges. In 1963 the challenge was to open our schools to all our children. In 1999 the challenge is to make sure all those children get a world-class education.

And of course, if I could just expound on that for a moment, we've worked hard on that. And one of the things we have to do is to bring teachers to the communities where they're needed most. I offered an initiative to give scholarships to young people who would go and teach in inner-city or rural schools that were underserved. And I call for these scholarships as part of our race initiative. I believe they will make a real difference.

The efforts we have made to make the class sizes smaller and to bring the Internet to all of our kids, even in the poorest classrooms, these things are beginning to make a difference.

The hundreds of thousands of people who have gone into the elementary schools to teach people to read are making a difference. I can tell you that in the last 3 years we have seen, for the first time in a very long time, at the 4th, 8th, and 12th grade level substantial improvements in reading scores, our children moving up about half a grade level. But there is a long way to go.

Last year, just before the election, the Congress came together across party lines, and I shouted, "hallelujah," because they voted to create and fund—to create 100,000 school teachers to lower class size in the early grades, something we know that is particularly important to poor children and people who don't come from strong educational backgrounds. And we now have the research that shows it has continuing benefits. I just released the funds to hire the first 30,000 of those teachers.

But now, unbelievably, in this non-election year—although you wouldn't know it from reading the press—[laughter]—there are some who propose to kill the class size initiative and replace it with a program that doesn't guarantee that one red cent will go to hiring a single teacher or reducing the size of a single class. Now, this is very important because we now, finally, for the last 2 years, have a student population that is bigger than the baby boom generation. So it is not only the most diverse in history, it is the largest in history; and about 2 million teachers are scheduled to retire in the next few years.

I'm happy to report, I hope in part because of the importance of education rising in the national consciousness, as the Secretary of Education told me 2 days ago, that we now have 10 percent of our college students saying they're considering being teachers. That's twice the percentage of 5 years ago, and that's encouraging. But we have to get them in the classroom.

So if the research says it's a good idea, if we voted to do it, if we've already funded 30,000 of the teachers, why in the world would we turn around and reverse field? The people who want to kill the 100,000 teacher initiative say they want to do it because they want to improve the quality of the existing teacher core. Well, I'm for that, and we've set aside sums to do it. But that shouldn't be a cover for the fact that we've got to do more to lower class size in the early grades, especially for our poorest children, especially for our minority children,

especially for all these children whose first language is not even English.

Across the river here in Alexandria we have kids who literally speak 100 different languages as their native tongue, from 180 different racial and ethnic groups. We cannot afford to back up on this. I also believe very strongly that it would be wrong to pass a risky tax scheme before we first fund education and make sure we can save Social Security and Medicare, something that also has a big impact on minority communities in our country and will have a huge impact on the ability of the baby boom generation to retire in dignity without imposing new burdens on their children and their grandchildren, just as many of them are moving into the middle class for the first time in their family's history.

So I hope that—this is a nonlegal issue, but since all of us, as our detractors never tire of saying, are overeducated—those of you who believe in education will stand with us as we try to preserve this important reform. Well, strengthening our schools is important, and bringing economic opportunity to those places that I visited and all those places like them in America, it is absolutely essential. But what I asked you here today for was to simply say we still need lawyers. We need the work lawyers do. We need the ideas lawyers get. We need the dreams lawyers dream. We still need people to fight for equal justice.

And so I ask you to do two things today. First, I ask you to recommit yourselves, as Bill has asked, to fighting discrimination, to revitalizing our poorest communities, and to giving people an opportunity to serve in law firms who would not otherwise have it. You can help inner-city entrepreneurs negotiate loans to start new businesses. You can help neighborhood health clinics navigate the regulatory mazes they have to do to stay open. You can help nonprofits secure new supermarkets and merchants in underserved communities. Just for example, those of you who come from urban areas, today in the highest unemployment urban areas in America, there is still at least a 25 percent gap between the money that the people who live there earn and have to spend to support themselves and the opportunities they have to spend it in their own communities.

In East St. Louis, where I visited, there is a 40 percent gap. We went to a Walgreens store that was the first new store to open in the

inner city in 40 years. Mayor Archer here is exhibit A. The unemployment rate in Detroit is less than half what it was in 1993 when I took office, because he convinced people that there were people in his community that could work and that were already working and that had money to spend and that they ought to be part of the future. And we need to do that everywhere, and that work cannot be done without legal assistance.

And it is a civil rights issue. It is a civil rights issue for people to have jobs and dignity and a chance to start businesses and the chance to be able to shop in their own neighborhoods and walk to the grocery store, instead of having to ride a bus and wait on the schedule and stand in the rain and do all the things people have to do. It is a huge issue. And if we can't do it now, we'll never get around to doing it. So I ask you to help us with that.

I hope you will help me to pass my new markets initiative, because what it says is, we're going to give people the same incentives to invest in inner cities and rural areas and Indian reservations, the same incentives to invest there we give them to invest in the Caribbean, in Africa, in Latin America and Asia. I don't want to repeal those incentives; I want Americans to help poor people all over the world rise up. But they ought to have the same incentives to invest in poor people right here at home, and I hope you'll help me do that.

The second thing I want you to do is to set the best possible example. Mr. McBride has spoken better than I can. We may have torn down the walls of segregation, but there are still a lot of walls in our hearts and in our habits. And sometimes, we can—we are not aware of those walls in our hearts, but we have to test them against our habits. So invite more lawyers of all backgrounds to join your firms. How are we going to build one America if the legal profession which is fighting for it doesn't reflect it? We can't do it.

I am so pleased that the organizations here have made the commitments they've made to diversity and to pro bono work. I thank the American Bar Association, the Corporate Counsel Association, for pledging to launch new initiatives to promote greater diversity in the profession. The ABA will bring together lawyers and academics, law firms and bar associations, to provide financial aid to minority law students and to mentor them as they embark on their

legal careers. We've got to do more work to mentor them before, in the places that have tried to do away with affirmative action—I believe wrongly—sometimes under court decisions with which I respectfully disagree. But if you don't get there in the first place, it won't matter if there's someone helping you once you do get there.

The Counsel Association has promised to encourage its 11,000 members to hire more minority-owned law firms and to dedicate more of their resources to pro bono legal work in communities. I thank the hundreds of law firms who have agreed to dedicate at least 3 percent of billable hours—about 50 hours a year per lawyer—to pro bono work, which is the ABA standard. As Bill pointed out, this booming economy has been pretty good to America's lawyers and law firms. Last year, top firms increased their revenues by 15 percent. There will never be a better opportunity to help those who need it most. If Mr. McBride's firm thought it was a good idea, it's probably a pretty good idea for other firms, as well.

And there's one other point I would make, following on what he said. I think it's good business strategy over the long run, not only for all the reasons you said, but because the recovery of the last 6 years has proved a fundamental thing about a community: that is, when other people, particularly people who haven't had a chance, do well, those of us that are in a position to take it, that are going to do all right, regardless, do better. When the least of us do well, the rest of us do better. We are all stronger. And we should never forget that.

So I hope every American firm will meet the ABA standard. Just imagine this: if every lawyer in America—about 800,000—dedicated just 50 hours a year to pro bono work, that would be 40 million hours of legal help. That's a lot of personal problems solved, a lot of headaches gone away, a lot of hurdles overcome, a lot of business started. Think of what we could do.

A 1993 ABA study found that half of all low income households had at least one serious legal problem each year, but three-quarters had no access to a lawyer. Now we can fill that gap. Now America's lawyers can afford to fill that gap. And I would argue, if we really believe in equal justice we cannot afford not to fill that gap.

I want to thank the Association of American Law Schools for pledging to help more schools incorporate community service in their curriculum—something I strongly believe in—so that more law graduates will come out of law school predisposed to do volunteer work and pro bono work. All these are wonderful pledges. I thank the presidents of the ABA, the Minority Bar Associations here, the American Corporate Counsel Association, the representatives of the San Francisco and New York City bars, the co-chairs to the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights for agreeing to meet every month.

You heard what Eric Holder said—for our part the Justice Department, working with Ben Johnson and the White House Office on One America, will do whatever we can to support these efforts. And a year from now, we'll gather again and see where we've succeeded and where we need to do more. I don't want to wait another 36 years. I ask you to work on this. I want it to be steady work for America's lawyers.

I ask Eric Holder and Neal Katyal of the Justice Department to report to me on the progress. We will know we have succeeded if more lawyers begin to make community service a vital part of their practice. We will know we will have succeeded when we have more businesses, more health clinics, more affordable housing in places once bypassed by hope and opportunity. We'll know we'll have succeeded

when our law schools, our bar associations, and our law firms not only represent all Americans, but look like all America.

One of the best things Dr. King ever said was that "the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice." Our Nation's lawyers have bent that arc toward justice. Our Nation has been transformed for the better. So I ask you again to lead us along that arc from the America we know to the one America we all long to live in.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 3 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Robert B. (Ben) Johnson, Assistant to the President and Director of the President's Initiative for One America; Judith A. Winston, Executive Director, One America in the 21st Century; The President's Initiative on Race; John Hope Franklin, Chairman, Christopher Edley, consultant, and Angela E. Oh, Suzan D. Johnson Cook, former Gov. William Winter of Mississippi, and Mayor Dennis W. Archer of Detroit, members, President's Advisory Board on Race; Jerome J. Shestack, former president, American Bar Association; civil rights attorney William W. Taylor III, Zuckerman Spaeder law firm; and Bill McBride, managing partner, Holland & Knight law firm, who introduced the President.

## Statement on Signing the Y2K Act

July 20, 1999

Today I have signed into law H.R. 775, the "Y2K Act." This is extraordinary, time-limited legislation designed to deal with an exceptional and unique circumstance of national significance—the Y2K computer problem.

In signing this legislation, I act in the belief and with the expectation that companies in the high technology sector and throughout the American economy are serious in their remediation efforts and that such efforts will continue. Many have worked hard to identify the potential for Y2K failures among their systems and products, taken reasonable measures to inform those who might be injured from Y2K failures of steps they could take to avoid the harm, and fixed

those systems and products, where feasible. If nonetheless there are significant failures or disruptions as we enter the Year 2000, plaintiffs will turn to the courts seeking compensation. Responsible companies fear that they will spend millions or more defending Y2K suits, even if they bear little or no responsibility for the harm alleged. Frivolous litigation could burden our courts and delay relief for those with legitimate claims. Firms whose productivity is central to our economy could be distracted by the defense of unwarranted lawsuits.