

or Burundi from occurring again, when we labor in America for peace in the Middle East and try to empower ordinary people everywhere, we should remember with humility that we are supposed to behave in our respective positions of citizenship and authority the way those village women did in Senegal, the way the Irish women do in the Vital Voices conference, the way the women did who had the microcredit loans that I have seen my wife visit on the Indian subcontinent or in Southeast Asia or in countless African and Latin American villages. People who have never had it before, you see, when they get it, they know what they want to do.

And we in the United States have a serious responsibility to the rest of the world and to our own people to stand for peace and freedom and democracy and human rights, and to stand for it at home as well as abroad and to never forget that the purpose of power is to liberate the human spirit, not to grasp onto yesterday's arrangements in a fleeting life that no matter how long we hold onto power, will be over all too soon, anyway.

Lane Kirkland was over 75 years old; to me, he was a very young man. We are all just here for a little while. The premise of democracy is, if people are truly empowered to live out their dreams and help other people solve their problems, that will bring more happiness and self-fulfillment than picking a few of us to increase our wealth and power or the power of

our crowd to oppress another. And we need a little humility here along with our devotion to democracy.

We need to remember the travails of a man like President Shevardnadze who puts his life on the line when he shows up for work. And we need to remember the courage of people like those Irish women or those Senegalese women and their hardy male supporters who believe they could change the world if they only had a voice.

I am grateful to you for honoring this President and my wife, who has done more than anyone I know to give those kind of people a voice. But when you leave here, remember that all of us can do that every day, right here.

Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10 p.m. in the ballroom at the Washington Hilton Hotel. In his remarks, he referred to Kenneth Wollack, president, and Paul Kirk, chairman, National Democratic Institute for International Affairs; Irena Kirkland, widow of Lane Kirkland; President Eduard Shevardnadze of Georgia, winner of the 1999 W. Averell Harriman Democracy Award; Monica McWilliams, cofounder, Northern Ireland Women's Coalition, and winner of the 1998 award, who was scheduled to present the 1999 award to Hillary Clinton; and former Senator George J. Mitchell, who chaired the multiparty talks in Northern Ireland.

Remarks Announcing the Adoption Bonus Awards *September 24, 1999*

Thank you very much. When we have events here in this room with people who have come to share their experiences, very often I feel like a fifth wheel. I think everything that needs to be said has already been said. *[Laughter]* But I want to begin by thanking Dawn Keane for her wonderful statement; her husband, Steve; and Sean, Brian, and Sarah. They're beautiful children. They did a good job at the microphone, didn't they? *[Laughter]* I want to thank Olivia Golden and Pat Montoya for their work at HHS on this important issue.

I'd like to thank this remarkable bipartisan delegation from the House of Representatives

here, Dave Camp and Nancy Johnson and Ben Cardin and Maxine Waters, Sandy Levin and Congressman DeLay. This may be the only issue all six of these people agree on. *[Laughter]* Tom's nodding his head up and down. *[Laughter]*

I'll tell you a funny story; this is a true story. The other day I was reading a profile of Tom DeLay in the newspaper. And I got about halfway through, and he was giving me the devil for something. You know, he's very good at that. *[Laughter]* And he started grinding on my golf game and saying that I didn't count my scores and all this, and I was getting really angry.

[*Laughter*] And then I get to the next part of the story, and it talks all about his experience and his commitment to adoption and to foster children and the personal experience that he and his wife had. And my heart just melted. And all of a sudden, I didn't care what he said about my golf game. [*Laughter*]

And I say that to make this point: The Keane family, the Manis, the Brown, the Vasquez families, who are behind me today, they represent what we all know is basic and fundamental about our families and our country, more important than anything else we can think of. And they open their homes and their hearts to children, and they open our hearts to them and to each other as we work for more stories like those we celebrate today.

I'd also like to say a special hello to the Badeau family. Some of you may remember this. Two years ago, almost, Sue and Hector Badeau joined us at the White House when I signed the Adoption and Safe Families Act. They brought 18 of the 22 children they have adopted. Now, you need to know that, as if they didn't have enough to deal with, this summer they also welcomed into their home a family of eight Kosovar refugees. So if you ever need proof that there's no limit to human goodness, you can look at Sue and Hector Badeau. I'd like for them to stand. Where are they? There you go. They've got some of their kids here. Stand up. [*Applause*] Thank you. God bless you.

I would also like to say just a very brief word of thanks to Hillary. You heard her tell the story of her involvement in this, but when we were in law school together, before we were married, she was talking to me about how messed up the foster care and adoption laws were in the country, how many ridiculous barriers there were. And not long after we moved to Little Rock and I became attorney general of our State, she took a case for a young couple who had had a child from foster care for 3 years that they desperately wanted to adopt—this is over 20 years ago. And together they changed the law in our State so that foster parents could be considered for adoption, something that used to be *verboden* in most States in the country.

So I've watched her work on these issues now for almost 30 years, and I am very grateful that one of the many blessings of our time in the White House has been the chance to make a

difference on these adoption and foster care issues, and I thank her for making it possible.

Finally, let me say, again, I want to say a special word of thanks to the Members of Congress in both parties who have come to this event today. We have had a raging, often stimulating, occasionally maddening, debate on what should be the role of Government over the last 5 years in this town. But we have all agreed that Government has a role to try to protect children but to facilitate the most rapid, reasonable, orderly process for both foster care and for transition to adoption.

Hillary said that the House had adopted this provision to let kids coming out of foster care keep their Medicaid until they're 21. I'll just give you one more example of how these issues unify us. Within a 36-hour period, about 6 months ago, my cousin, who runs the public housing unit in the little town where I was born in Arkansas, which has 8,000 or 10,000 people, came up to a HUD conference. And she spent the night with me and we were having breakfast, drinking coffee, and she says, "You know, you've got to do something about these foster kids. They keep going out of the—they come out of the foster homes, and they've got no money, and they need to do some things." And then the next day, literally within 36 hours, I'm talking to these people from New York City who tell me it's maybe the biggest social problem they have now, with all these kids coming out of foster care. So this is an issue that spans the experience of America, the whole sweep of it. And I'm very grateful; I'm grateful that we have this consensus, and I'm grateful that they've acted on it. I urge the Senate to follow suit.

Now, you've already heard about the things that we're doing to try to double the number of children we help move into permanent homes. We have new evidence that these efforts are bearing fruit. The Department of Health and Human Services has just given me a report that tracks our progress in meeting our adoption goals. It shows that the number of adoptions from the foster care system increased from 28,000 in 1996 to 36,000 in 1998. That is the first significant increase in adoptions since the national foster care program was created almost 20 years ago. Now, that's an amazing thing. That's more than—it's about a 30 percent increase. That's a very impressive increase in 2 years. And we are well on our way to meeting

our goal of 56,000 in 2002, doubling the number. For all of you that had anything to do with that, I say thank you. You should be very proud of yourselves.

Now, if you look at this HHS report—and I urge those of you who are interested in it to actually get it and scan it, at least—you will see how much this bipartisan cooperation I talked about and the work that's being done by people in the trenches to clear away the barriers is making a difference, a stunning example of what we can do when we put our children first. You will see that we have acted on each and every one of the 11 recommendations set forth in the original Adoption 2002 report, breaking down barriers to adoptions, ensuring accountability, rewarding innovation, supporting adoptive families themselves.

One of the key recommendations we adopted into law in 1997 was to give States, for the first time, financial incentives to help children move from foster to adoptive homes. Under the new bonus system, States are entitled to up to \$4,000 or \$6,000, depending on whether the child has special needs, for each adoption above their previous average.

Today I have the honor of presenting the first round of these awards, worth \$20 million, to 35 of our 50 States. The good news is that these States did this, using creative new approaches and exceeding their own high goals. Illinois, for example—listen to this—the State of Illinois increased its adoptions 112 percent—112. [*Applause*] Yes, you can clap for Illinois. That's good.

Now, the bad news, if you can call it that, is that even though we believed this would work, we didn't think it would work this well this quickly—[*laughter*—and we didn't put enough money in to give all the States all the money to which they're entitled. So I hope we can rectify that, because I think we all think that we want to give the States the incentives to figure out how best to do this. But the fact is, I think all of us are very proud of what these States have done for some of their most vulnerable citizens. And I look forward to working with the Congress to make up this shortfall and get the other 15 States above their goals as well.

Today I am also awarding \$5.5 million in adoption opportunity grants to outstanding public and private organizations in 16 of our States to help fund research and new ways of increas-

ing interstate adoptions and adoptions of minority children. Together these efforts will help to accelerate the remarkable progress we've seen.

Now, again let me say, I think the big goal we ought to have for this legislative session is to get the Senate to follow the lead of the House and schedule a vote on the Chafee-Rockefeller bill to ensure that the foster children are not cast out in the cold when their time in foster care ends. I hope—I know if we can get it up and get it on the calendar, it will pass with the same overwhelming bipartisan support that we've seen in the House. So I urge all of you to do what you can to make sure that that is a big priority for the Senate, and I will do my part.

Together, we can help our foster children—all of them—first grow up in good homes and, if they turn 18 as foster children, to make a good transition from—transit to independence with health care, education, housing, and counseling.

Now ultimately, let me say the credit in all this does not really belong to all of the political leaders, even though they've worked very hard, all of us have together. It does not belong to all the public servants, even though there is a real new attitude, I think, in the organizations, the social services organizations, to try to do the right thing and move this along.

But none of this will work if there aren't good people in every community like the Keanes, the Manises, the Browns, the Vasquezes, the Badeaus, who are willing to give a child unconditional love and a good upbringing. They are the proof of the unlimited goodness of the human heart. All the rest of us are trying to do is to unleash it. And we need to keep right on doing that.

Thank you, and God bless you all.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10 a.m. in Presidential Hall (formerly Room 450) in the Old Executive Office Building. In his remarks, he referred to Dawn and Steve Keane, and their adopted children Sean, Brian, and Sarah, who introduced the President; Christine DeLay, wife of Representative Tom DeLay; and Myra J. Irvin, program manager, Hope Housing Authority in Arkansas. The transcript released by the Office of the Press Secretary also included the remarks of the First Lady.