

large country with 200 million people, the largest Muslim country in the world and capable, as we have seen periodically over the last few years, of enormous progress and capable of playing an important, positive role in the future of Asia, and that's what I hope and pray will happen. But it will require responsible leader-

ship from Indonesia, as well as appropriate responses from the United States and others.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 8:11 a.m. in the Rose Garden at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to former Beatles Paul McCartney and the late John Lennon.

Remarks at Sophie B. Wright Middle School in New Orleans, Louisiana *September 27, 1999*

Thank you. Thank you so very much. My good friend Congressman Jefferson—I want to say more about him in a minute—and to his wonderful wife, Dr. Andrea Jefferson. Senator Landrieu, thank you for your friendship and support. Mayor Morial, you were very kind to talk about the role that we play in helping to lower the crime rate in New Orleans, but it never could have happened if we hadn't had a visionary mayor down here who made the most of the policies that were there.

Colonel Davis, thank you for taking on the challenge of educating the children of this parish. To Gail Glapion, thank you very much for what you said. And Scott Shea, thank you. And Brenda Mitchell, the leader of our teachers, and especially to our principal, Charlotte Matthew, thank you for leading this school and for making me feel so welcome here.

And I want to say a special word of thanks to all the people of Louisiana. As Congressman Jefferson said, in 1992 and 1996 you gave your electoral votes to Bill Clinton and Al Gore, and we are profoundly grateful, and we've tried to be worthy of them.

I also want to thank the McDonogh High School Band. I want to thank them for being here. The rest of you are hot; they're in those band uniforms. I used to be in one, and I know how hot they are. And I want to thank them for being here.

One other thing I'd like to say about this school, I want to compliment this school on your school uniforms. I like them, and I'm glad so many schools in this parish have them. I've been trying to promote them all across America for years now, and I thank you for that.

You know, folks, I may have visited more schools than any President in history. I've certainly tried to. And I have never met a child that couldn't learn or a school that couldn't do better and be turned around. There is a student standing behind me—and I don't want to embarrass her, but I want her to raise her hand—named Nonya Grove, who scored at the 95th percentile on the science portion of the Iowa basic skills test. Good for you.

Let me tell you, too, I have been in schools in all kinds of places—I've been in schools—I went to a junior high school in Chicago in a neighborhood with the highest murder rate in the city, which was, therefore, the highest murder rate in the State. But there was no violence in the school; there were no weapons; there were no problems. Hundreds of parents came to the school every week, and there were no dropouts, and almost all the kids went on to college. Why? Because they had a good plan, and they worked it hard. And they believe that all kids could learn.

Now, the Federal Government does have an obligation to help you. And I want to thank Senator Landrieu and Congressman Jefferson and Senator Breaux and the others in your delegation and our party who have supported what we have tried to do to help the States, to help the States adopt higher academic standards in the Goals 2000 program, to help them crack down on drugs and gangs and violence. And last fall we fought to get a downpayment on 100,000 new highly trained teachers to lower those class sizes in the early grades, as Congressman Jefferson wants to do.

Already 108 more teachers have been hired in this parish, and your parish got \$12 million

under the E-rate program that the Vice President developed—have cut the cost of hooking up every classroom in America to the Internet by the year 2000.

Now, what we've done in education is a part of an overall strategy to bring America back. We balanced the Federal budget and have a surplus of \$115 billion this year.

When I took office, we were deep in debt 7 years ago, and we had high unemployment rates, high welfare rates, and high crime rates. We were committed to economic reform, welfare reform, reform of the criminal justice system, and education reform. Now we've got the longest peacetime expansion in history, over 19 million new jobs, the lowest unemployment rate in 29 years, the lowest welfare rolls in 32 years, the lowest crime rate in 26 years, the first time we've had two budget surpluses in a row in 42 years, when I was young enough to be in this school.

The question is, what are we going to do with our prosperity? You know we've got a lot of challenges out there. And you know as well as I do that the modern economy requires more education from all people. We've got the largest student population in the history of our country, and we will never do what America ought to do until every child in America can live up to his or her God-given potential.

Last week the congressional majority in the other party in the House unveiled an education budget that was \$3 billion below what I asked for, no money to finish hiring the 100,000 teachers; no money to help modernize or build 6,000 schools. I know you need that now. We need—it can be hot out here, but every school ought to be air-conditioned in Louisiana, and I know they're not. It would deny access to hundreds of thousands of children to after-school programs, so important to improving learning and keeping that juvenile crime rate down—keep kids in school, off the street, and out of trouble; that's very important—and many other programs.

Now, Congressman Jefferson had it right. We have to demand more of our schools and invest more in them. Our balanced budget calls for spending \$200 million to help schools turn around if they're not performing well or shut them down and let parents choose other public schools if they don't turn around. But it is wrong to blame the kid, and it's wrong not to give the schools a chance. And we know these

schools can be turned around if they have the resources and a good plan and they work the plan.

We've got to do better in Washington, and that's my job. But I was, 12 years, Governor of your neighboring State of Arkansas. And I know—I know—how important education is. You know, as President, the future of our children is the most important thing of all. But I have to pursue it in many ways. I have to preserve the national security. I have to work on making sure that we have Social Security and Medicare in a solid way, so that when the baby boomers retire, it doesn't bankrupt our kids and their ability to raise our grandkids. But if you're the Governor, the most important thing you ever have to do is see to the education of our children.

Now, here's why I know Bill Jefferson cares about that. He was too modest to say this, but he was born very poor in a small town, and his parents and his teachers and his school helped him work his way all the way to Harvard University. Then he married a wonderful woman who is even smarter than he is. *[Laughter]* And they have had five magnificent daughters who have all had brilliant academic careers, four of them already gone through Harvard. Why? Because they had a good plan. They believed in education. They had parents and teachers and schools and students, and they worked at it steadily.

So, no matter what I do as your President, you still need in Louisiana a Governor you know will fight for more teachers, for better teacher training, for better pay, for smaller classes, and for modern school buildings, for high standards and strong support.

I can tell you, he's fought with me every step of the way in Washington. When we had to vote in 1993 to bring down the deficit and increase spending in education, and I said we had to balance the budget, but we weren't going to cut education, we were going to do more, all the members of the other party were against me. The bill carried by one vote. To a major extent, the economic prosperity America enjoys today belongs to one vote, and it carried in one vote. If Bill Jefferson hadn't been in Congress and voted the right way, we might not be standing here today.

So let me say, I don't want him to leave, especially while I'm still in Washington. *[Laughter]* But he really can do even more good in

Baton Rouge. And remember, twice he was voted the Outstanding State Legislator in the Louisiana Legislature. He's fought for you in Washington; he'll fight for you and our children's education in Baton Rouge. And I am honored to be here with him today at this wonderful school.

Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:45 a.m. in the courtyard. In his remarks, he referred to Mayor Marc H. Morial of New Orleans; Col. A.G. Davis, USMC, (Ret.), New Orleans superintendent of schools; Gail M. Glapion, president, and Scott P. Shea, vice president, New Orleans Parish School Board; Brenda Mitchell, president, United Teachers of New Orleans, and Representative Jefferson's daughters, Jamila, Jalila, Jelani, Nailah, and Akilah.

Remarks at a Luncheon for Representative William J. Jefferson in New Orleans

September 27, 1999

Thank you very much. Ladies and gentlemen, I've had a wonderful day here. I don't think I've ever had a bad day in New Orleans. [Laughter] And I'm honored to be here with Bill and Andrea, with Vic and Fran Bussie. And Vic, you've done a lot of great things in your life, but you haven't given many better talks. That was very, very good.

I'm honored to be here with your bright young mayor, who has established such a fine record and has recently joined the ranks of the happily married. [Laughter] We're proud of him for that, too.

Let me say to all of you—I was just sitting here listening to what everybody else was saying, wondering if I could offer any unique perspective. I first came to New Orleans 50 years ago. I hate that. [Laughter] I was just a little boy. My mother was in nursing school here. And one of the most vivid memories of my lifetime was seeing my mother kneel by the side of the railroad tracks and cry when I went home with my grandmother, because she had been widowed early, before my father—before I was born. My father died 3 months before I was born. And she came down here to get some education so she could support me.

I came back here when I was 15 and a budding musician. [Laughter] And they wouldn't let me in anyplace to hear anybody—[laughter]—because I was so young. And I saw—I never will forget this—I was walking away from my mother, and I saw Al Hirt sitting there in some big English limousine, reading a newspaper, and he was going to go in and perform. I knocked

on his window, told him who I was, and said I had come all the way down here from Hot Springs, Arkansas, and all I cared about was music. I didn't want to drink anything; I didn't want to gamble; I didn't want anything; I just wanted to go hear him play. He took me in and put me on the front table. It's funny what you remember, isn't it?

I've never forgotten that, and that sort of embodies the generosity that the people of this city and this State have exhibited to me throughout my life. And you did give Al Gore and me, Hillary and Tipper, and our administration the electoral votes of the people of Louisiana twice, and I'm profoundly grateful for that.

I want to say three or four things I think you ought to think about in this election. When I became President, I ran a long, hard campaign. I was written off for dead three or four times along the way, and three or four dozen times since. [Laughter] But Bill Jefferson was one of my first supporters. I remember the first time I came here, when the Jeffersons had me in their home. I met their beautiful, brilliant daughters, and their family members, many of whom are here today. The Congressman's father is here, mother-in-law is here, many others here.

And we went through that campaign, and I found that, to a remarkable degree, we shared the same philosophy. We were proud members of the Democratic Party, but we didn't like the fact that our party had been a part of the leadership of 12 years of Republican Presidents when we had the majority in the Congress, and together they quadrupled the debt of the country;