

a hundred different languages, in one school district.

Now, that means we have work to do. And there is no more important responsibility for the Governor. If I were a citizen of Louisiana, if I were back home just voting in Arkansas—I hate to ever be a single-issue voter, but I would be almost completely a single-issue voter in a Governor's race, based on the person I thought was most likely to do the most for the schools of my State, because if these kids don't have the education they need, nothing else the rest of us do will matter for their future. It is the most important thing.

Last point—I'm the only person here who has been a Governor, and I did it for 12 years, and I loved it every day. And I did not get tired of it. I didn't get bored with it. And when I left to go be President, I was having more fun being Governor before I started running for President than I had ever had in my whole life. It's a wonderful job.

And if you like it, if you like people, if you like to work hard, if you believe in good schools and good jobs, and if it thrills you to get things done for your State, it's a wonderful job. But to be really good at it, you need to be passionate about your convictions, and you need to have a real vision you'll fight for. But you can't be too partisan and mean-spirited. You've got to be someone who can get people together, work with all kinds of different people, and convince people that your vision is the right one. And when other people have a good idea, then do that, too.

That's the kind of person Bill is. That's why he was voted the "Best Legislator" in the State

legislature two different times when he was a State legislator. And I can tell you as someone who has done this job for 12 years, he has the right temperament. He has plenty of sense. He has a magnificent wife to keep his head balanced and to help remind him that education is his first priority—[laughter]—and he has years and years and years of knowledge and skill in getting things done, including in the Congress, that money can't buy and that you can only get by living the way he has lived.

So I think what you ought to do is go out there and say, listen, to everybody—he hasn't asked anybody to vote for him because of his race. All he has asked is that nobody votes against him because of his race. All he said is he wants to treat everybody the same and give every child the chance to live up to his or her God-given capacities.

But I'm telling you, if you look at a man's life, his record, his personal skills, and what the State needs at this time, and how it fits with what we're doing to move America into the 21st century, I can hardly think of anybody who is as well qualified, remotely, as he would be to be the Governor not only of this State but any State. You're lucky to have him running, and I hope you'll keep helping him.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 6:50 p.m. at a private residence. In his remarks, he referred to dinner hosts Arthur Q. and Mary Wineman Davis; Mayor Marc H. Morial of New Orleans; Jefferson Parish Sheriff Harry Lee; lobbyist Thomas Hale Boggs, Jr.; and Representative Jefferson's wife, Andrea.

## Remarks at a Breakfast With Religious Leaders September 28, 1999

Thank you very much, and good morning. I, first of all, would like to thank you for the invocation and let you know that, as with many other Americans, we have been thinking about you and your people in your church.

Hillary and I welcome you here today. As you know, the Vice President and Mrs. Gore are normally here, but he is often otherwise occupied these days. [Laughter] And I hope you

will forgive their absence. They really wanted to be here.

I would like to thank Secretary Shalala, Secretary Riley, Jack Lew for being here. I would also like to thank Barry McCaffrey, the Director of our Office of National Drug Control Policy. And to those of you who come nearly every year, welcome back. To those of you who are

here for the first time, welcome. We are delighted that you are all here.

I have looked forward to this day every year for as long as I have been President and we have been doing this. All of you know that, if you've come to some of the others, that each one of these days has been special. And, as in the 1990's, as America has grown more involved with the rest of the world and more diverse, because of our history of religious liberty and the way our Constitution has worked, more and more religious convictions and affiliations have flowered in our country. And you can look around this room today—see, it would be very unusual if you could have this kind of gathering in any other country in the world. And for that I am profoundly grateful.

Last year was one of the most difficult years in my life, and this occasion, because it has come to mean so much to me, was a very difficult one. For those of you who were part of that, I want to express my particular appreciation. I'd like to say a special word of thanks to my good friend Reverend Wogaman and to Gordon MacDonald—I think he is here back there—and to Tony Campolo, who is not here, who have kept their word to meet with me over the last year, both to help me and to hold me accountable. And I have kept my word to meet with them and to work with them.

I would like to say only this about that: I have been profoundly moved, as few people have, by the pure power of grace, unmerited forgiveness through grace—most of all to my wife and daughter, but to the people I work with, to the legions of American people, and to the God in whom I believe. And I am very grateful to all of you who have had any role in that, and I thank you.

I also want you to know that we are continuing our work. It is interesting and not always comfortable, but always rewarding. And I hope you will pray for us as we do.

What I would like to talk about today, following up on what Hillary said when she welcomed you here, is what we can do together to deal with the question of violence, particularly against our children. And I would like to talk about it first of all to say we've been trying to work out what the proper relationship is between religious individuals and religious groups, and government activity, since we got started as a country.

We've been working on this for a long time now. It probably will always be a work in progress. We don't want to discourage people who are in public office from pursuing their own religious convictions and from stating them, but we must beware, as those of us who are Christians are warned, of practicing piety before others in order to be seen by them. We must be humble in this endeavor and work together.

We also must recognize that there will always be differences of opinion, honestly held and earnestly pursued, about what is the proper role for the government, what is the proper relationship between church and state, in the well-timed and well-used American phrase. But it seems to me that there is kind of an emerging consensus about the ways in which faith organizations and our government can work together, both at the national level and at the State and local levels, in a way that reinforce values that are universally held, and increase the leverage of the good things that the government is funding.

I could just mention one or two. Some of you are involved in faith-based organizations that have received funding for AmeriCorps slots. We now have thousands of young volunteers who have worked in AmeriCorps through various faith-based organizations rendering community service. I don't think that's a violation of the Constitution's establishment clause, and we sure have helped a lot of people out there. And I feel good about that.

Some of you have worked in organizations which have helped poor families move from welfare to work, in a way that reinforces not only the value of work but the value of family, which is even more important. And that's a continuing challenge for us, but I'm encouraged by the progress that has been made there.

Many of you have been involved with us in our efforts to advance the cause of religious freedom at home and around the world. I don't know if Bob Seiple is here today, but I'm very pleased about what we're doing in that, and I'm grateful for the work that you have—those of you who have helped us with that. And that continues to be a concern of mine in many places throughout the world, and I think it will continue to be something the United States will have to work and work and work on.

If you have followed—and I'm sure almost all of you have—the recent troubling events in East Timor, you know that there is a religious

as well as an ethnic element to what is going on there and to the difficulties.

And finally, let me say that as we move toward the millennium, I have been very moved by the way many faith-based organizations have engaged and challenged those of us in public life to reawaken our responsibilities to poor people, both within and beyond our borders.

A couple of people on the way in today mentioned the global initiative to reduce dramatically the debt of the poorest nations in the world. And I was very pleased by the recent moves that the IMF and the World Bank have made in that direction. The United States has pushed very hard for it. It is an entirely appropriate thing to do. But I have to tell you, I don't want this to wind up being like our dues to the United Nations. Now that we have advocated this and gotten everybody else to agree to it, we have to pay our fair share. So I hope all of you will help us pass the legislation through Congress to do that.

There is also much, much more we need to do here at home, especially for our children. And I think one of the most wonderful experiences I've had as President was taking my so-called new markets tour around the country, to Appalachia, to the Mississippi Delta, to the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in South Dakota, to many of our inner-city areas. And I intend to continue to do these for the remainder of my term, to highlight what we can do, what more we can do to try to get investment and opportunity and alleviate poverty among people who have not felt the warm glow of this economic prosperity of ours. And there are still altogether too many of them.

But today I want to just focus just for a few minutes, and then we'll have breakfast, and then we'll have a talk about it. But I wanted to ask you to think about this. And that's why I'm so grateful to our pastor, for his invocation, and for, after what he's been through, for coming here and sharing with us today.

All the rage in Washington today is we finally succeeded in getting, I think, the general public interested in the so-called Y2K problem. You know, we live in a world that is dominated by computers, and now we're trying to make sure we're Y2K ready, and everybody just has all these horrible scenarios of what might happen when the computers turn to 2000 and all the old computers revert back to 1900 and what might happen. We've been working on this

steadily. The United States has worked very hard here, and we've worked very hard to help other countries throughout the world, and especially to avoid any disasters in military operations, in airline operations, things that could really have a profound impact on us.

But I think at this prayer breakfast today I would like to say that there is more to getting ready for Y2K than fixing the computers. And when this kind of seminal event occurs it gives us the opportunity to ask ourselves what it would take to be really ready for the year 2000.

I don't think it's good enough for us to enter the new century as the most prosperous and powerful country in the world, with the lowest unemployment rate in 29 years and the lowest welfare rolls in 32 years and the first back-to-back budget surpluses in 42 years and the longest peacetime expansion ever. That's all very impressive, but I think it's worth noting, as I have on occasion before, that when Alexis de Tocqueville came here over 150 years ago and traveled around America and he noticed how profoundly religious our people were—even though we had no government religion, and in fact, government could not interfere with it—he thought we were the most religious people on Earth. And after he had done a good deal of his tour, de Tocqueville wrote a powerful sentence. He said, "America is great because America is good." Not rich, not powerful, certainly not perfect, but good.

And the question I think we ought to focus on today is, are we good enough? And if we wanted to be better, what's the most important place to start? I think this is especially important when it comes to children. There's too much trouble in too many of their lives. Even here, the trend lines all look good. You have teen pregnancy, divorce, drug abuse, poverty, all going down in America. That's the good news. The bad news is that by comparative standards, all these problems are still far too rampant, and there are too many children with troubled lives.

We could spend all day talking about those things. But today I would like to ask you to focus on this problem of violence, which has dominated so many of our headlines in the last 2 years. Now, even here, you could say it's a mixed picture. It's true we have the lowest crime rate in 26 years, the lowest murder rate in 30 years. But it's also true that the crime rate in this country is way too high, much higher than virtually any place else.

It is true that we have seen over the last 2 years a rash of high-profile shootings, often with children as both the victims and the perpetrators. The mass killing of innocent people I think has been the most painful thing that Hillary and I and Al and Tipper Gore have had to deal with in the discharge of our public responsibilities, the bombing in Oklahoma City; the school violence at Littleton and so many other places; the dragging death of James Byrd in Jasper, Texas; the torture death of Matthew Shepard in Wyoming; the murder of Won-Joon Yoon outside his church in Bloomington, Indiana, on the Fourth of July, and the other killings in that spree by a deranged young man who had been a member of a so-called church of white supremacy. There were the office killings in Atlanta and the family killings associated with it; the shootings at the Jewish community center in Los Angeles; the killing of a Filipino postalworker in that spree; of course, the recent murderous rampage at Wedgewood Baptist Church in Fort Worth.

Now, some of these crimes were motivated by hatred of the victims, because of their race, their religion, their homosexuality. I think we must do more to prosecute such crimes. I hope Congress will soon send me the hate crimes legislation. But some of these crimes do not fit into the category of hate crimes. The murderers were in the grip of some evil force or mental illness.

And, in addition to these high-profile crimes where children were involved, we should never forget a couple of other things. Thirteen children die in this country every day from gun violence. And because they die in ones and twos, in tough neighborhoods and difficult streets, sometimes they're not the lead story; sometimes they're not any story on the evening news. But their numbers add up. And some of you minister to the families of those children.

Beyond that, children die with truly alarming frequency in this country from accidental gun deaths. Yesterday I was in New Orleans, and this whole big neighborhood was just almost groaning with grief over the death of a much-beloved 4-year-old child who shot himself to death playing with a loaded gun he found in his own home.

Now, can we say America is good enough if we still have the highest murder rate in the world and—listen to this—and the rate of accidental shooting deaths for children under 15

in the United States is 9 times higher than the rate for the other 25 industrialized nations in the world combined?

Now, if you go back to what de Tocqueville said, that America is great because America is good, and then you realize somehow we've managed to make the most of this incredibly complex, modern economy, it seems strange, if the murder rate is higher here and the accidental death rate is exponentially higher, why is that? Is that because we're not good, but we're evil? Is it because we're not smart, but we're stupid?

We kind of laugh uncomfortably, but it's worth thinking about. I say the answer to those questions is, of course not. Some people say, well, the reason this happens is we're just not tough enough on offenders, whether they commit crimes with guns or let kids get guns or don't take good enough care of their guns, that we just ought to punish people more. But the truth is we have longer sentences and we keep people in jail longer and we've got a higher percentage of our people behind bars than I think all the countries in the world but one.

So that's not a very good explanation. And I have concluded long since that the truth is we're in the fix we're in because we don't do enough to keep guns out of the hands of criminals and children; because we don't do enough to lead our children away from violent paths into positive paths; and because we don't do enough to intervene in the lives of people who are disturbed, angry, unstable, and mentally ill before it's too late.

In all of these areas, I believe that people of faith could do more to help those of us in public life, to give our children back their childhoods. And I will be very brief about that, and we'll have breakfast, and we'll go on with our discussions. I say that because to those who say, well, this is about evil, of course, that's right; but most of you believe that evil is a darkness within us all that just metastasizes and explodes in a few. If America is to be good, at least according to my faith, we must do more to prevent and overcome evil with good.

And so it's not enough to say that shootings in Los Angeles and Atlanta were evil, or the rampage in Fort Worth was evil. Praying and working for peace is good. Starting grassroots campaigns against youth violence, as we're now trying to do all across the Nation, that's good. Putting more uniform community police officers in our most dangerous neighborhoods is good.

These gun buy-back programs that are springing up across the country that we're trying to help finance here, they're good. And I believe passing commonsense gun legislation to keep guns out of the wrong hands is a good thing to do.

I am convinced that the faith community can play a major role in protecting our children from violence, in supporting commonsense gun legislation, in participating in our campaign against youth violence, in forming community partnerships to identify and intervene in the lives of people before it is too late.

On this last point, I had a very good talk with the pastor of the Wedgewood Baptist Church just a few days ago. You know, so many of your places of worship and your organizations have good counseling and outreach programs. But they're not necessarily connected to the mental health networks and the social service networks and the law enforcement networks in your community. And I'm convinced a lot of these people are known to be profoundly disturbed by others well before they go out and kill people. And somehow—and also a lot of these people—especially this is true of men, I think—are still really hung up about asking for help. I know about that. That's a hard thing for men to do. I know about that.

And I think there are a lot of people who would maybe be less reluctant to ask for help from someone like you than to show up at the social service office of the government, or walk right through the front door of a psychiatrist's or a psychologist's office. And we need to think about this. There is no big magic national solution for this, but I have examined this.

There are many of you here from New York City. There was a profoundly disturbing article on the cover of the New York Times Sunday magazine a few months ago about the break-

down of the mental health network. It was talking about New York, but it could have been a story about any State in America. It just happened to be about New York. And I think that this is something we need to give serious attention to and something I think we could get strong bipartisan support in Congress to work with you on.

The other day I was talking to Mrs. Gore about this. You all know how interested she is. And I had Senator Domenici from New Mexico in the White House on a totally other, different issue, and I talked to him about it. And I said, you know, we've got to do something about this. And he looked at me and said, "You know, a lot of these people are mentally ill, but we're not reaching them in time, and people know that they're troubled before these things happen."

So I ask you to think about this. I think that we have to do more. We've got to do everything we can and much more than we have to protect our children and to give them back their childhoods. If you think about it, we can hardly do more to make America's spirit Y2K ready.

Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:30 a.m. in the State Dining Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Rev. Byungchill Hahn, pastor, Korean United Methodist Church, Bloomington, IN, whose parishioner, Won-Joon Yoon, was murdered near the church on July 4; Rev. J. Phillip Wogaman, Rev. Gordon MacDonald, and Rev. Tony Campolo, the President's spiritual counselors; Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom Robert A. Seiple; and Rev. Albert R. Meredith, senior pastor, Wedgewood Baptist Church, Fort Worth, TX.

## Remarks Prior to Discussions With Prime Minister Bulent Ecevit of Turkey and an Exchange With Reporters

September 28, 1999

*The President.* Let me say it's a great pleasure and an honor for me to welcome the Prime Minister here to the White House. I would like to begin by expressing my deep appreciation to Turkey for the outstanding leadership exhib-

ited during the crisis in Kosovo and the role Turkey played working with our NATO Allies there.

But we have much to discuss today, including the progress in dealing with the aftermath of