

The President. Well, first of all—and I should have said this the very first thing—we are all very concerned, and our thoughts and prayers are with the people in Japan today because of this uranium plant accident. You can only imagine how difficult this must be for them, quite apart from whatever the facts are. This is going to be a very hard day for the people of Japan.

And we are doing our best to determine what, in fact, has happened and what assistance we can give. And we will do whatever we possibly can that will be helpful to them. And we will try to be as comprehensive and prompt about it as possible.

Mortgage for New York Residence

Q. Mr. President, what about your mortgage, sir? Do you now understand why some people felt that it was improper for you to arrange a mortgage with a loan guarantee from Mr. McAuliffe? And are you now planning to get a different kind of mortgage?

The President. Well, I will stay with what Mr. Lockhart has told you about that. We had just a day or two to get that house; a lot of people wanted it for the same reason we liked it. A lot of people like the house. It's a nice place. We liked it. So we did what was necessary to secure it.

Now, we're going to close on it in a little more than a month. And if we change the financing between now and then, we'll let you know as soon as we do. But we did not do it before we got an opinion from the Office of Government Ethics about the mechanics of it, and that it did not constitute a gift under Federal law.

Q. Why wouldn't Bowles and Rubin help?

The President. They were—I don't have anything to say about that. McAuliffe called me the first thing when I was talking to him, and he said, "Look, if you can get somebody else

to do it, fine." I think because everybody thought it was a legitimate business arrangement. No one thought there was anything wrong with it, all the people I talked to about it and all the people anybody else talked to about it.

I think some people didn't want to do it because they know they live in a world where they live in the Larry Klayman political press world in which what's true is not as important as whether you can be dragged around; you have to spend a lot of money you don't have or you'd rather not spend for reasons that have nothing to do with anything that's real.

It's like this television ad campaign, to go back to the budget issue. There is the rest of the world and the way it works and the way people view things, and then there is the way a lot of things around here work. And so I don't—anybody that's ever been through it knows that's true.

You're all smiling because you think, I wonder if the President made a mistake by committing the truth in that last remark. I can see you all smiling and thinking that. *[Laughter]* So all I can tell you is, I feel good about where we are on it. We're going to close on it in a month, and we're excited about it. And if we change the financing, we'll let you know.

Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:55 p.m. in the Briefing Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Larry Klayman, chairman, Judicial Watch, Inc.; former Chief of Staff to the President Erskine B. Bowles; former Secretary of the Treasury Robert E. Rubin; and Terence McAuliffe, loan guarantor of the First Family's residence Chappaqua, NY. H.J. Res. 68, "Making continuing appropriations for the fiscal year 2000," approved September 30, was assigned Public Law No. 106-62.

Remarks at the National Education Summit in Palisades, New York September 30, 1999

Thank you very much. Good afternoon, Governors, education leaders, business leaders. I am delighted to be here. I thank my good friend Governor Hunt for his remarks. This year marks the 20-year anniversary from the time you and

Secretary Riley and I started working together on education.

I want to thank Governor Thompson for his interest in this and so many other issues. Tommy Thompson is the first Governor who

told me that he thought that he could really move, literally, every able-bodied welfare recipient in Wisconsin to work. And I think they've had a 91 percent drop in the rolls. He nearly got it done. Congratulations; that's an amazing achievement.

And I want to especially thank Lou Gerstner and all the business leaders here, because you kept the idea of the summit alive and understood the importance of consistent and systematic followup with the Governors, with the educators. I am very grateful to you for doing this. Most people like you do a project like this for a year or two, and then they forget it and go on to something else. And you haven't done it, and I'm very grateful.

And for all of you who were here 3½ years ago, who stayed involved in this, I thank you.

Governor Hunt—I was watching him on the monitor outside—talked about the issuance of the “Nation At Risk” report 16 years ago, the meeting we had 15 years ago. The first National Education Summit was in Charlottesville 10 years ago this week. And some of us were there then. President Bush, his Education Department, education leaders from around the country, we were all together. And we came together to embrace the concept and specifics of national education goals.

At the second summit, here in Palisades 3½ years ago, we supported the idea that every State should set standards. At this third summit I hope we will embrace with equal fervor the idea of accountability, for only by holding educators, schools, students, and ourselves accountable for meeting the standards we have set will we reach the goals we seek.

We have made significant progress, particularly in the ideas governing the way we look at this. More and more we're leaving behind the old divisions between one side saying, “We need more money,” and the other side saying, “We shouldn't invest any more money in our public schools, it's hopeless.” By and large, there is a new consensus for greater investment and greater accountability, greater investment and higher standards and higher quality teachers to help students reach the standards; holding the schools accountable for the results. That's the agenda of Achieve, the agenda of our administration, clearly the right agenda for the United States.

I think it is another mark of progress and something that many of you in this room can

feel profoundly both proud of and grateful for, that 10 full years after Charlottesville and now more than 16 years after the issuance of the “Nation at Risk” report, there is still a passionate sense of national urgency about school reform and about lifting education standards. And there are people who get up every day full of energy about it, not cynical, not skeptical, not jaded, not tired, still eager to learn, people in Governors' offices, people in the schools of our country, business leaders, education leaders of all kind.

This is quite an astonishing thing. You cannot think of a single other issue that has had this long a life at this level of intense commitment. And I think it is a tribute to the love of the American people for their children, a tribute to the understanding of the American people of the importance of education in the global economy, and a sense that we know that we have both the largest and the most diverse student population in our history.

But if you just think about how people get tired of political issues, how everybody is supposed to want to read something new in the paper or seeing something new on the evening news, month-in and month-out, and you think about how long ago it was when Governor Caperton there decided to make all of his elementary students computer literate; how long Governor Engler has been in office; how long ago it was that Secretary Riley and Governor Hunt and I started fooling with all this—and the country is as hot to do the right thing, to improve the education of our children today as it was the day after the “Nation At Risk” report was issued. And that's a great source of comfort to me, and reassurance. And the business leaders, the educators, and the political leaders here in this room and like-minded people throughout this country deserve a lot of credit for that.

When I came to Washington 6½ years ago, all of you know that the number one problem I had to deal with was the deficit, because we quadrupled the debt in 4 years, interest rates were high, the economy was stagnant. We had to cut hundreds of programs, and we were determined to try to do it in a way that would increase our investment, not decrease our investment in education at the national level, and to do it in a way that, spearheaded by Secretary Riley, to give you more flexibility, but also to

focus on the pressure points of reform that would likely give us the greatest returns.

I am very grateful that we have seen our deficit of \$290 billion turn into a surplus of \$115 billion. This year we'll have the first back-to-back surpluses in 42 years. And today we learned we have the lowest rate of poverty in America in 20 years. I am very grateful for that. But I'm also grateful that during this period we were able to early double the Federal investment in education, to help you provide your children and your schools with more of the tools they need. We've increased early childhood investment through Head Start. We've opened the doors of college wide by basically modeling a national version of Georgia's HOPE scholarship and providing tax credits for beyond the first 2 years of high school.

We have increased Pell grants and established education IRA's. We've begun to organize an army of tutors. We now have a thousand colleges and universities, I believe in every State in the country, involving themselves in America Reads, to try to make sure all 8-year-olds can read when they finish the third grade.

We've made an enormous amount of progress, and a lot of you have been active on this, in hooking up every school and library in the country to the Internet and with the E-rate making sure that the poorest schools can afford to participate in the information superhighway.

Last fall we fought for and won a big bipartisan consensus to make a downpayment of 30,000 teachers, on getting 100,000 more teachers out in the country to lower class sizes in the early grades. And we have supported a huge increase in the number of charter schools in America. When I became President in January of '93 there was only one charter school in the whole country, in the State of Minnesota. There are now 1,300.

We're in New York; the New York Legislature, I think, just authorized the establishment of the first charter schools here. In California, they just took the cap off the number of charter schools that they could have. We still have a lot of interest in magnet schools and other public school choice initiatives along with the other debates on this subject. But I think that we are well on our way to having 3,000 charter schools in the United States by next year, which is the goal that I set for our administration when we started down this path 6 years ago.

Now, in addition to what we've done, what's more important is what you've done and what the country's done. We have made truly remarkable progress in the standards movement, thanks in no small measure to the leadership of Governors and those of you who gathered here 3½ years ago. Our Goals 2000 legislation and the reforms in Title I we made have supported that. Today, almost every State has standards for what children should know in English, math, science, history, social studies. Next year, virtually every State will be testing students to see if they're meeting the standards.

Now, that is all very good news. My friend Hugh Price, who is sitting back there to my left, leader of the Urban League, recently observed that people didn't talk much about standards and test scores 50 years ago because the output of the schools, whether it was good, bad or indifferent, more or less matched with the demands of a blue collar economy that needed strong backs more than well-developed minds. The problem now is that the economy has changed much faster than the schools.

People used to say, "You know, the schools just aren't what they used to be." The problem may be that too many of our schools are too much like they used to be, but the world the children move out into is not at all as it used to be. And that, of course, is what a lot of you are trying to help to change.

Now, as we move into this period of not only having standards but having accountability—that is consequences for the failure to meet them—there will be people who will, first of all, be elated at the evidence of improvement, which you can see all over the country where such things have been done from California to Houston to Chicago to Dade County to many other places in the country. Then there will be those who will want to shrink back because they fear the adverse consequences of failure and many people really don't believe all kids can learn. I think it would be a mistake to give in to those fears.

And one of the things that I would hope will come out of this summit, Lou, is that all of you, in encouraging accountability, which is, I know, something you believe in, ask people not to be afraid when there are consequences.

I just saw the results in New York City, where the first group of children have gone—didn't score at the appropriate level. They went to summer school. Many that went to summer

school are being prompted, but a few that went to summer school aren't, and all the ones that refused to go aren't.

And there may be some mistakes made. But as long as we send the message to these kids that "We're doing this for you. This doesn't mean there's something wrong with you, but we'll be hurting you worse if we tell you you're learning something when you're not. We'll be basically participating in a fraud which, ultimately, will cost you more personally, psychologically, and of course, eventually financially, than any pain that comes in the moment."

But in order to do this, this whole issue will have to be really taken out of and kept out of the closet. Governors will have to look dead in the eye of some child that was held back and say, "That's okay; you can do it," and lift them up. We won't have to pretend that there will never be a moment of pain for anybody in any of this.

And similarly, business people and Governors will have to know that we have done everything we absolutely can to give every kid we can the chance not to be taken down by the system. It's one of the things that I liked about Chicago, where the summer school now for the children that don't make the grade is now the sixth biggest school district in the entire United States of America—the Chicago summer school, the sixth biggest school district in America. Why? Because they don't want to brand the kids as failures when the system didn't do for them what it should have.

And Secretary Riley and I have met with parents whose children have been through the system there, including parents of children who were held back and had to go to summer school. I have been into a poor neighborhood there where virtually all the kids had to go to summer school in a couple of the classes. And because they believed the system is honest and because they believe that the purpose of what is being done is not for some politician or educator to look tough or run up numbers in the polls or, say, have some easy sloganeering answer, but the purpose is to make sure these kids learn what they need to learn to have good lives, they support it. They support the standards. They support the mandatory summer school. They support what's being done in the after-school programs.

And it will happen everywhere in America. But we all have to commit the truth about this.

And we can't pretend there will never be any painful consequences. But where there are painful consequences, all the Governors can do a world of good by going into those schools and say, "I'm doing this because I want you to have a good life. I'm doing this because it's not too late for you. This is just the beginning of your life. I'm doing this because your teachers and your principals and your parents and the business leaders in this community, we care about your future, and we're going to make this work." And I hope we can do that.

Let me just say very quickly, I think we have to have these basic standards in every State, and we have to make it possible, as Achieve has recommended, not only know whether the standards are being met but to give the parents some comparative information about how children in other States and other nations are doing. I think we have to recommit ourselves to extra support.

And Congress, when—I sent this education accountability act to Congress, saying that school districts accepting Federal money must ensure that teachers know the subject they're teaching, have reasonable discipline codes, empower parents with report cards, have a strategy—and I think this is very important—to turn around failing schools or close them down, and finally, a strategy to end social promotion that empowers children who aren't making the grade through the after-school programs, the summer school programs, and all the rest.

Now, we're having a big argument in Washington on the budget today. I don't want to get into a partisan rerun of that, but let me just say this: We can have the kind of budget we need that will help you to do what you need to do without—and we can meet the budget targets without coming up short in education, whether it's for Head Start or more teachers or the initiative to help States build and modernize 6,000 new schools or the American Reads program or this GEAR UP program, all of which the Congress supported last year, by the way, to help mentor kids that are in trouble in junior high school, to try to get them into college by getting them over that rough patch. So I hope we can get that done.

I also wanted to say, emphasize something that I think is very important, our budget would provide \$200 million to help you turn around low-performing schools. I believe that it is not

enough to say, no social promotion, strict accountability, and even summer school and after-school programs for kids, unless there is a strategy to turn around the low-performing schools. And I know that in North Carolina and in several other places where this has been done—I mentioned them earlier, Houston, Dade County, Chicago, and there are other places—but there is evidence now—we don't have to question this either—there is a lot of evidence that these low-performing schools can be turned around.

I went to an elementary school in Chicago, in the Robert Taylor housing project, where the reading scores had tripled and the math scores had doubled in 2 years. Were they on a low base? Yes. Were they where they ought to be? No. But does it prove you can turn things around, even in the most adverse circumstances? Absolutely. So I think that if we're going to have genuine accountability for standards, it is important that we have something to turn the schools around.

And again, I say—a lot of people in Congress don't want to adopt this accountability standard for Federal funds because they say that we shouldn't impose that on you. But I think all of you know that the five elements in the Federal bill were basically ideas we got straight out of local school districts and States. They weren't something that Dick Riley cooked up. It was something that the Education Department developed based on the proven experience and results of local school districts and States.

Finally, let me just give you something to feel good about again, at the end. In 1996, there were only 14 States with measurable standards. Today there are 50. That's the good news. Here's why you ought to focus on accountability. In 1996, there were only 11 States with systems that identify and sanction low-performing schools. Today there are only 16. This is the hard part.

But again, I say, we've got to give the schools the tools they need to do the job. And the Federal Government has an important role to play. We don't provide an enormous amount of the total funds for schools, but that amount was slipping for a while, and we got it going back up now. And I feel very strongly, as the Secretary of Education, that with the largest student population in history and with all this educational evidence about the benefits of smaller classes and with the imperative of ending the

practice of social promotion, finishing the work of 100,000 teachers, helping you to build or remodel 6,000 schools so they'll be modern, and doing these other things are quite important.

Now, let me just make one other point. I'm encouraged by the movement to standards in the 3½ years since you had your last summit here, and you should be, too. That's a rather astonishing move. And it shows what can happen if you meet in an environment where you've got business and education and the political leadership working together, and Republicans and Democrats leave the party labels at the door, and everybody just works on what's good for the kids.

But this is the hard part. It's not an accident that we've gone from 16 to 50 standards and 11 to 16 in genuine accountability. It's hard. But you also can take a lot of pride in the fact that you have evidence, even in big urban areas with a lot of trouble, where this has worked. And the consequences are good.

Now, last February when the Governors were in the White House, I just noted that it took 100 years for laws mandating compulsory, free elementary education to spread from a few States to the whole Nation. When it comes to this accountability agenda, will we follow the model of the last 3½ years with standards and go from 16 to 50 in a hurry, or will we go back to the model of the earlier time? I think all of you know what we ought to do.

And I will say again, I think the fact that we have the largest number of children in our public schools in history, I think the fact that they are more diverse than ever before in terms of their backgrounds and their languages is a godsend for us for the 21st century in a global society if, but only if, we prove not only that they can all learn but that we can teach them all. We know they can all learn from—you can do a brain scan and determine that. That's always been—that's the wrong question. The question is can we teach them all, and are we prepared to do it, and are we prepared to have constructive compassion for their present difficulties by having genuine accountability and also heartfelt support?

The reason that there is still so much enthusiasm for all this after—10 years after the Charlottesville Summit, 16 years after the "Nation at Risk," 20 or 30 years after all the Southerners figured out that it's the only way to lift our States out of the dirt is that everybody knows

that deep down inside it's still the most important public work.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 3:40 p.m. in the Watson Room at the IBM Palisades Executive Conference Center. In his remarks, he referred

to North Carolina Gov. James B. Hunt, Jr.; Wisconsin Gov. Tommy G. Thompson; Louis V. Gerstner, Jr., chairman and chief executive officer, IBM Corp.; former Gov. Gaston Caperton of West Virginia; Gov. John Engler of Michigan; and Hugh B. Price, president and chief executive officer, National Urban League, Inc.

Remarks on the Nuclear Accident in Japan and Social Security and an Exchange With Reporters *October 1, 1999*

The President. Good morning. This morning before I leave for California, I would like to talk about two issues briefly; first, the tragic nuclear accident in Japan. I have just spoken with Prime Minister Obuchi to express our sympathy to those who have been affected, and our readiness to help in any way we can.

He told me the Japanese authorities have been able to bring the situation under control, and he thanked me for the outpouring of support from the United States. Over the last day we've been providing information to Japan on our experiences in dealing with similar incidents in the United States, and making available our experts in atmospheric monitoring and any other areas that might be useful.

Secretary Richardson has been meeting with his counterparts in Russia and discussing ways we can all coordinate our assistance with them. Japan has been our friend and our ally, and we're ready to work together to address the situation and to prevent future accidents.

I would also like to talk about a new important step we're taking to help more Americans make their retirement years more secure. Through war and peace, from recession to expansion, our Nation has always fulfilled its obligation to older Americans. Thankfully, it's hard to remember the time when growing old usually meant growing poor. It seems impossible to believe, but in many cases, retirement before Social Security meant being sent off to long, lonely years of dependence. The normal aches of aging were accompanied by the unbearable pain of becoming a burden on one's children. That's why Social Security means so much to the life of our Nation. For almost 65 years now it's been an unshakable covenant among genera-

tions, between workers and retirees, between the disabled and the able bodied.

But too many Americans, when planning their retirement, take too little account of Social Security. Of course it's hard to fully plan for tomorrow if you don't know where you stand today. Most Americans receive annual statements of their earnings, their savings, and their private pensions. Until today, however, they've never received annual statements on Social Security, the largest source of income for many, many elderly Americans.

I am pleased to announce that today the Social Security Administration is launching a new effort to help workers know what they can plan on, what they can count on, and if need be, what they can rely on during retirement. One hundred twenty-five million American can now look forward to annual estimates of their Social Security benefits. The first half million mailings go out today. This new Social Security statement will help more Americans understand what Social Security means to them. It will form a vital part of any family's financial planning and help more Americans chart a course to retirement that is clear and secure.

For many Americans Social Security, along with savings and pensions, is the foundation of retirement security. It's a rock-solid guarantee. In this time of prosperity we have our best chance yet to see that it remains so. I hope we will do so and extend the life of the Social Security Trust Fund. I will continue to do all I can, not only to strengthen Social Security but also to strengthen and reform Medicare for the next century, to fulfill our obligation not