

Telephone Remarks on the Oprah Winfrey Show October 21, 1999

Ms. Winfrey. Someone is on the phone who wants to speak with you, so you look right there, and then you can hear them speak.

The President. Mary Beth?

Mary Beth Talley. Uh-huh?

The President. It's President Clinton. How are you?

Ms. Talley. Good.

The President. Well, I heard about you when that terrible thing happened, and I had a good visit with your minister at the church. But I just wanted to call and thank you for what you've done and for being so humble about it. You did show great courage. You were selfless. And I think you represent something really good in the young people of our country today.

Yesterday I had a lot of young people here who were serving in our national service program, AmeriCorps—150,000 have in the last 5 years. The day before, I met with young people who came from all over America to lobby Congress to do more things to help combat violence and pass sensible gun legislation.

But you know, I think that everyone watching this program should look at you and see not only that you are a wonderful person who did a wonderful thing, but I think you represent something profoundly good in the young people of our country. And I hope more and more people will follow your lead, in daily life, in ways that may not require as much courage but do require as much commitment to the welfare of other people.

And I hope you'll always be willing to share your story and those terrible moments, which prove that you are a truly wonderful person.

Ms. Winfrey. Thank you, President Clinton. We have a number of young people here today who, in the face of difficult times, have shown that they were willing to make a difference. So I know you wanted to say something to all of them, as well as Mary Beth.

The President. I do. I think, you know, for many years, there was this sort of typecasting of young people today as generation X-ers, people that were only interested in themselves and didn't care about the larger society or the problems of less fortunate people or people in trouble. And I think every day you all prove that it's not true.

I believe today's generation of young Americans is the most idealistic, the most concerned and, in some ways, the most committed to good citizenship of any generation of young people we've ever had. And I just want you to get out there and spread the word and let people know what you're doing and who you are and where you're coming from and try to make sure other young people follow your lead.

I am very proud of you and very grateful for what you do to make our country a better place.

Ms. Winfrey. Thank you, President Clinton. Say hello to Hillary for us.

The President. I'll do it. She's doing great. She said to say hello, Oprah.

Ms. Winfrey. Thank you.

The President. Goodbye, everybody.

Ms. Winfrey. Isn't this great?

The President. Goodbye, Mary Beth.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:52 p.m. from the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to program honoree Mary Beth Talley, who protected her friend Heather McDonald during the shooting at Wedgewood Baptist Church in Fort Worth, TX, on September 15; and Rev. Albert R. Meredith, senior pastor, Wedgewood Baptist Church. These remarks were released by the Office of the Press Secretary on October 27, the day the program aired. A tape was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.