

maybe some of the young people who actually tore down the Berlin Wall or marched in the Velvet Revolution. They will be older then. I hope they will say, "When I was young I sang America's praises with my voice, but I still carry them in my heart." I think that will be true if America stays true. That is what we ought to resolve to do on the anniversary of this marvelous triumph of freedom.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 3:27 p.m. in Gaston Hall at Georgetown University, as part of the Her-

bert Quandt Distinguished Lecture series. In his remarks, he referred to Father Leo J. O'Donovan, president, and Robert L. Gallucci, dean, School of Foreign Service, Georgetown University; Johanna Quandt, widow of Herbert Quandt; James H. Billington, Librarian of Congress; Katherine Graham, chairman of the executive committee, the Washington Post; Prime Minister Milos Zeman of the Czech Republic; Prime Minister Mikulas Dzurinda of Slovakia; and President Slobodan Milosevic of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro).

Remarks in an On-Line Townhall Meeting November 8, 1999

The President. More than 60 years ago, at the dawn of another era of great change, President Franklin Roosevelt told our Nation "new conditions impose new requirements on Government and those who conduct Government." From that simple proposition, Roosevelt shaped the New Deal, which helped to restore our Nation to prosperity and to define the relationship between the American people and their Government for 50 years.

Now, as we move into the information age, we have reclaimed that true legacy of Franklin Roosevelt by making a real commitment to bold experimentation, to the idea that new times demand new approaches and a different kind of Government.

This evening is a perfect example. As Al said, like FDR's fireside chats and President Kennedy's live press conferences on television, the first Presidential townhall meeting on the Internet taps the most modern technology for old-fashioned communication between the American people and their President.

Tonight's event is exciting not only because of the technology involved in its execution but, on a larger scale, for the unbridled potential it represents. You know, when I became President, in January of 1993, the Internet was the province of scientists funded by Government research projects. Back then, there were only 130 sites on the Web, only 1.3 million computers connected to the Internet. Today, over 56 million computers are connected to the Internet,

and there are 3.6 million websites. And we're adding new pages at the rate of over 100,000 an hour.

Since 1993, our administration has worked hard to unleash the power of information technology and to bridge the digital divide. Vice President Gore and I set a goal of connecting every classroom and library to the Internet, and we've come a long way. The number of classrooms connected to the Internet has increased from 4 percent in 1994 to 51 percent in 1998 with the E-rate providing over \$2 billion to help connect all our schools and libraries to the Internet. That's just the kind of thing Vice President Gore and I came to office to do, to replace outmoded and failed ideas of the past with a new vision for the role of Government in the 21st century.

In the early 1990's, long-neglected economic and social problems had piled up. Unemployment and welfare were high. Crime was spiraling; virtually no one believed it could be stopped. Poverty was growing. The real wages of working families were steadily falling. There were deficits as far as the eye could see. Our debt had quadrupled in just 12 years, and some experts were telling us that we couldn't really solve our problems, that Government at best was useless and at worst was the source of all of our problems.

Now, for too long, I felt that both our parties had put ideology above ideas that actually worked. And the American people too often

were presented by Washington with false choices, choosing between work and family, between growing the economy and cleaning up the environment, between helping business and helping working people, between being safer or maintaining freedom, between what makes us different as a people and what makes us equal before the law and in the eyes of God. For too long Government seemed to either try to solve all of our problems or to use the failures of Government as an excuse to do nothing at all.

Now, it was in this environment that the New Democratic movement, which had been developing for nearly a decade by 1992, or what has now become known as the Third Way, began in earnest. We believe, like Franklin Roosevelt and Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson and Abraham Lincoln before him, that new conditions demand a new approach to Government. We said, in 1992, we want opportunity for all, but we also want responsibility from all our citizens, in a community of all Americans.

It was clear to Vice President Gore and to me that we couldn't meet the challenges of our new century by returning to the past but that we also had to overcome the great neglect of the 1980's. We also knew that we needed a new kind of Government which focused not on neglect or solving all the problems, but instead on giving our citizens the tools and conditions they needed to make the most of their own lives. And at the same time, we had to challenge our own citizens to take a far more active role by serving in our communities and shaping our Nation's future.

Because of our commitment to Third Way principles and the hard work of the American people, our country has made a dramatic transformation. Over the last 6½ years, the American people have created almost 20 million new jobs with rising wages, the longest peacetime expansion in history, the highest homeownership ever, a 30-year low in unemployment, a 32-year low in welfare, a 30-year low in the crime rate, the first back-to-back balanced budgets in 42 years, with growing projected surpluses for years to come. And all of this while we were shrinking and reinventing the Government so that it is now the smallest it's been since John Kennedy was here in the White House in 1962.

And I'm trying to continue that process by passing a budget that honors our values and our commitment in the future, with 100,000

new teachers for smaller classes, 50,000 new community police officers to keep the crime rate coming down, stronger efforts to protect and preserve our environment and to meet our responsibilities abroad.

The world is starting to take notice of what's happening here and where we're headed. Now Third Way ideas are influencing governance in Great Britain, France, Germany, Italy, and Brazil, to name just a few.

In closing, let me say that now we have to use the progress we've made and the new tools of Government and technology at our fingertips to meet the big challenges of the 21st century: the aging of America; the largest and most diverse group of schoolchildren we've ever known; extending our prosperity to people in places who haven't felt it yet; genuinely meeting the challenges of the new environment; making the most of biotechnology; getting this country out of debt for the first time since 1835; and continuing to be the world's major force for peace and freedom and against technology that proliferates nuclear weapons and biological and chemical weapons and against terrorism.

But more important than any of that, we have to find a way in this most modern of worlds to use our new knowledge and our new technology as forces for unity, not division. We have to usher in a new age of genuine enlightenment where we are coming together as a people across all the lines that divide us. That's why I've worked for things like the employment non-discrimination act and the hate crimes legislation; why I've done as much as I could to end wars and killing and conflict based on religious or racial or ethnic hatred around the world, from the Balkans to the Middle East to Northern Ireland to Africa.

We believe that this can be a unifying age. We can celebrate our diversity, all the differences. We can respect those genuine differences of opinion as long as we understand that what unites us, our common humanity, is the most important thing of all.

Now I'd like to turn it back to Al and get on with the questions.

[Democratic Leadership Council President Al From, who hosted the townhall discussion, read questions submitted on the Internet]

Prescription Medication

Q. My wife and I are both disabled, with two teenaged children. Our medication expenses take a very large amount of our monthly Social Security income. Will Medicare ever pay for medications?

The President. Well, the answer to that is, I certainly hope so, and I have proposed it.

As a part of our reform of the Medicare system, to deal with the fact that we're going to double the number of people over 65 within 30 years and increasing numbers of people with disabilities will have access to Medicare, I recommended a lot of changes that will actually save some money in the system but also providing a prescription drug option which would be completely voluntary.

Three-quarters of the disabled and seniors on Medicare don't have access to an affordable, adequate prescription drug program. If we were designing the program again today, given the role that prescription medication has in our lives now, as compared with 34 years ago when Medicare was established, we would certainly not even set it up without prescription medication.

We should do it. We should do it as quickly as possible. And we can afford to do it in the budget that I presented and still get the country out of debt in 15 years.

So I hope that next year—Congress is—the Republican majority has refused to deal with it this year. I certainly hope they'll deal with it next year. And maybe the fact it's an election year will make them more interested in doing so.

Health Care Reform

Q. What else can you do in your Presidential term to help the common people to have health care reform before you leave office?

The President. Well, let me just mention two things very quickly. First, we ought to pass the Patients' Bill of Rights to protect people who are in HMO's with the quality of their health care, the right to see a specialist, the right to the nearest emergency room. And we ought to have privacy in medical records. We ought to have a requirement that—and I think we'll get this, by the way—that people who are disabled who get Medicaid can go to work and not lose their Government health insurance. And we now have the funds available to sign up 5 million or more children of lower income working peo-

ple, working families, on health care. We ought to try to do that.

Now one other thing we can do is to get more States to try to let more and more working families buy into the Medicaid system. Tennessee was the first State to do this, and they immediately got up over 90 percent of their people with health insurance. And we're working to try to persuade more States to do this. Then we can provide the Medicaid money, and you can work out, State-by-State, how much people pay for the premiums.

Those are just some of the things that I think we can do in my term. Now in the coming election season, I hope all the candidates will be required to talk about this because, as you know, I think it's terrible that America has so many people without health insurance who are working for a living. And I said back in '94 that if we didn't do something about it, the number would only increase, and that's exactly what's happened.

So there are some things we can do now. Some things you'll probably have to debate in the 2000 election.

Funding Higher Education

Q. How do you feel about the need for less expensive higher education?

The President. Well, you've got to be for that. I mean, everybody's for less expensive higher education. But what I'd like to emphasize is what we have done, because I think that a lot of Americans do not know that in the Balanced Budget Act of 1997, we created something called the HOPE scholarship, which is a \$1,500 tax credit for the first 2 years of college. We also have more generous Pell grants; we have better student loan programs. You can now borrow money through a Government loan program and pay it back at lower interest rates and as a percentage of your income, no matter how much you borrow.

So college is, as a practical matter, less expensive than it has been in many, many years because of the assistance programs that are out there. And I would urge you to look and make sure you know about every single one for which you might be eligible.

[*The discussion continued.*]

Gun Control Legislation

Q. What kind of laws would you like to see Congress pass concerning gun control?

The President. Well, first, Greg, let me say that one of the first laws I signed in 1993 was the Brady law, which requires background checks for people who buy guns in gun stores. The NRA and the others who opposed this said it wouldn't do any good, but now, in 1999, we've had 400,000 people who haven't been able to get guns because of their criminal records or other problems. And the murder rate's at a 31-year low.

So what else would I like to see? I would like to see us close the loophole in the background check law by saying there will also be background checks for guns sold at gun shows and at flea markets. I would like to see more done to limit the importation of big ammunition clips, because we banned assault weapons, but there are still loopholes in that law. I think the Brady law ought to be extended to juveniles who commit serious offenses. I don't think they ought to be able to get handguns. And I think these are very important.

Now, you may know that in the Presidential election, I think both the Democratic Presidential candidates, Vice President Gore and Senator Bradley, have recommended that people who buy handguns at least have to get a license like you get a driver's license, to show that you know how to use the gun safely and that your background's been checked. And I think there's some real merit to that, and that's something the American people are going to have a chance to be heard on.

But we've got the lowest crime rate in 30 years. But we ought not to quit until we're the safest big country in the world. And we won't be until we have reasonable restrictions to keep guns out of the wrong hands. They don't interfere with hunting or sport shooting. And there's more we can do. I'm strongly committed to it, and I hope you will be, too.

Funding for Research and Development

Q. Where do you see the Federal Government's role heading in funding non-defense research in science and technology?

The President. Well, most of that is done at the National Institutes of Health, at the Energy Department. It's done in universities through Federal grants. And I believe we ought to see a dramatic increase of that.

Essentially, if you look at the last few years, Congress has been good about increasing funding for NIH, not so good about increasing fund-

ing for environmental research and other non-defense areas. So good on the health care, not so good on the rest. We need more on the rest.

[*The discussion continued.*]

The Digital Divide

Q. As Government makes it services available via the Internet, how will this affect people who are not computer literate or connected? Will the non-techies be accommodated?

The President. First of all, this is a good question because this illustrates the problem of the so-called digital divide. And the answer to your question is: Number one, we will continue to provide services in non-computer options; and number two, we'll continue to do things to bridge the digital divide. We're trying to hook up all the classrooms and libraries to the Internet by the year 2000. We have community computer centers that we are establishing around the country, where we're trying to make access to computers more universal.

But I will say this: I think we should also be trying to get people who aren't computer literate to be computer literate and then to have access to the technology, because I believe if we have the same density of computer and Internet access that we have of telephone access, that would dramatically improve the economic prospects for a lot of Americans and, I might add, a lot of people around the world.

So we have to keep providing the services in non-Internet, non-computer ways. But I think we also ought to try to get more people hooked up. And we're doing both.

[*The discussion continued.*]

The President. Let me just make one other point before we go on to another question, to go back to my point that we ought to try not only to provide the services for people who aren't computer literate or connected in ways they can access—of course, we have to do that—but why we should try to get more people connected and more people computer literate.

I was out in Silicon Valley in the last few weeks where the number of people from eBay, which all of you know is a remarkable trading company—I learned that in addition to the employees of eBay, some 20,000 people now make a living on eBay just trading. That's the way they make a living. And a lot of them used to be on welfare. So this technology is getting

more and more user-friendly. And I think that if we continue to work toward making it more and more universal, you will create lots of more economic opportunities which will be good for the overall economy and good for people who, today, are kind of non-techies, to use your word.

Class Size

Q. Mr. President, how are you going to decrease the class sizes with the vast shortage of teachers?

The President. I think the most important thing that the Federal Government can do is to give the States the money to continue our class size initiative. Last year the Congress approved a proposal of mine to make a downpayment on putting 100,000 more teachers in our schools, concentrated on reducing class size in the early grades, because we know from lots of research that that increases educational achievement long term. This year Congress is seeking to reverse that commitment, for reasons I do not entirely understand. And I am fighting to keep it, along with the Democrats in our caucus in the House and Senate. I'm hoping that we'll have a successful resolution of this.

But you should know that—maybe you do know, since you asked the question—We have the largest number of schoolchildren in our history, the first group bigger than the baby boomers, over the last 2 years. It's the most diverse group in our history. And about 2 million teachers are going to retire over the next few years. So it's important right now to get these teachers in there that are well-trained and to get them in the early grades.

Now, there's a lot of flexibility in this program. So if class size is already small, this money can be used to retrain teachers, to upgrade their skills, and other things. But the most important thing that we can do to reduce class size is to put 100,000 more teachers in the classroom. That's the main thing I'm fighting for in the remaining budget struggles here in Washington.

That's a good question.

Tax Relief

Q. I would like to know what programs are going to be cut to provide for some of the much-needed tax relief, starting with the marriage penalty.

The President. Well, what you have to do basically to provide tax relief under our system, the rules that we operate up here, is to figure

out what it costs over 10 years and then to slow the rate of growth of other programs. Now, what I did was to present a budget to the Congress which would allocate, as I recall, about \$250 billion to tax relief over a decade. And we slowed the rate of growth of everything else to accommodate that, including defense, where we still were going to have real increases.

Congress passed a \$792 billion tax program, and I vetoed that because I said we couldn't pay for it. And then they proceeded to spend more money than I recommended in this year's budget, in different ways but more money.

So the truth is, you don't have to have any big cuts to pay for, let's say, marriage penalty relief or something like that, that is clearly affordable. All you have to do is to make a decision now that you will manage the rate of growth of all the other expenditures to accommodate the tax relief.

And I still think we ought to have modest tax relief package. I will try again next to pass one, and I will be flexible in working with the Congress on what the contents of the package are. But we just have to make sure that it's something we can afford and still pay down the debt, save Social Security and Medicare, and continue to invest in education and the environment and in research and technology.

Young People and Politics

Q. Mr. President, what would you recommend to high school students who want to get involved in the political process?

The President. Well, I think I would recommend two or three things. First of all, I would recommend that you get involved in the 2000 election. You know, with all the technology and all the television ads and all the money that's raised and spent in elections, candidates still need volunteers. And I think you ought to pick someone who is running, either for President or Governor or Senator or maybe a local office, maybe mayor in your hometown, that you believe in and show up and volunteer and learn everything you can about how the electoral process works, what the issues are, and you'll also learn about different kinds of people and human nature. Secondly, I think you ought to pick an issue you care about in your school and get involved in that. And then the third thing that I would strongly recommend is that you try to make sure you're as well-informed as possible, by accessing information on the

Internet or your local newspaper or however else you want to do it.

But I think that those three things, together, will give you a chance to really get started. And it's not too soon for you to get started, to start working in politics. And I thank you for your interest.

[*The discussion continued.*]

Livability Agenda

The President. If I could just say, Al, the mayor said a lot of good things, but one of the things he said that I'd like to highlight is that they're using computer technology to help manage traffic patterns and alleviate congestion. That is one of the elements in Vice President Gore's livability agenda we're trying to pass through Congress, not just preserving more green space in urban areas but actually using the most up-to-date technology to give people some freedom, give them back some of their time by minimizing traffic congestion and waiting.

I mean, it's becoming a bigger and bigger issue for Americans both in their cars on the street and, unfortunately, in their airports and in their airplanes. So I think anything we can do to give people back time is enhancing their freedom dramatically. And I think that more and more public officials will have to focus on this.

Y2K Readiness

Q. Mr. President, if you were an ordinary citizen, would you save a little food for Y2K?
[*Laughter*]

The President. You know, we've had so many jokes about that, about taking our pickups to Arizona and all. The answer is, no. America is—[*laughter*—]I wouldn't, because I think America is in good shape. We have worked very, very hard on this. I want to thank the Vice President and John Koskinen, who's helped us. I want to thank all the big—the financial institutions, the utilities, the other big sectors in our economy that have gotten Y2K-ready.

The only problems left in the United States that we're aware of are with some of our small businesses who basically haven't yet made sure that they're Y2K compliant. But the United States is doing fine, and I wouldn't hoard food, and I wouldn't hide. I would be trusting, because I think we're going to make it fine.

Internet and E-Commerce

Q. How can citizens be assured that the Internet will not become another political ploy that is harmed rather than helped by politicians?

The President. It's a good question. What we're trying to do, I can tell you, is to protect E-commerce, because it's growing so fast. And I signed legislation that would prohibit taxation on Internet transactions for several years. And I think we need to continue to work. So the first thing you can do as a citizen is to try to protect E-commerce, to let it grow, to let it flourish, to let all the jobs be created, the businesses be created, because of this incredible thing.

Then I think, in terms of objectionable material on the Internet, how do you keep the freedom and the creativity of the Internet without having children too exposed? I think the answer to that is to support the efforts that are being made by many in the industry now to give parents appropriate screening and other technologies, so that you continue to have creativity and growth on the Internet and parents can still do their jobs. I think those are the two most important things.

[*The discussion continued.*]

Presidential Term Limits

Q. Mr. President, would you like to serve another term in office, like you can in the U.K.? Maybe you ought to talk to Tony Blair about that. [*Laughter*]

The President. Well, I love the job, and I would continue to do it if I could. But we've had a two-term system here ever since President Truman's time, and I respect it, and I honor it. And so I'll try to find some way to be useful to my country and to the causes I believe in around the world when I leave the White House. But I love it, and I would not willingly give up any day of the opportunity to serve as President.

AmeriCorps

Q. Will future administrations be able to continue the support for the AmeriCorps program?

The President. You know, for people who are on this hookup who don't know what AmeriCorps is, we ought to say first what it is. It is a national service program of local community efforts so that young people and sometimes not-so-young people of all ages can give

a year and with the option of giving the second year of community service in an AmeriCorps-affiliated program. And we have community groups; we have church groups and other religious groups; we have all kinds of groups who are doing good things in their community. And in the process, they earn credit for college tuition.

So many young people actually do it and use the funds they get from working in AmeriCorps over and above their living stipend to go on to school. And we've had 150,000 young Americans serve in 6 years. To give you some basis for comparison, it took the Peace Corps 20 years to get 100,000 volunteers.

So AmeriCorps is changing America for the better. I believe it has broad bipartisan support and, therefore, I think future administrations will be able to continue to support it. I would like to see us get up to where we have at least 250,000 people a year in it, because I think you could get that many people who want to serve. But at least insofar as funding become available, I'd like to see it continue to expand. It's a wonderful, wonderful thing.

[*The discussion continued.*]

The President. Before we go on, I'd just like to reiterate for the people who are interested in this subject, that thanks to Kathleen Kennedy Townsend, Maryland is the only State in America which presently requires young people to engage in community service as a part of their course study. In order to get a high school diploma, you've got to do some community service. Now, some of us know of specific schools that require that, but Maryland is the only State that requires it.

Twelve years ago the former Republican Governor of New Jersey Tom Kean and I were on a middle school study task force for the Carnegie Corporation, and we recommended that community service ought to be a requirement, an academic requirement. It's part of learning to be a good citizen. It's part of an education. And I'd like to see most States follow Maryland's lead.

[*The discussion continued.*]

School Safety and Youth Violence

Q. I attend a public high school. Considering the events of the past few years, how can you ensure my safety at school?

The President. Well, first of all, I understand why you're concerned about it. We've had all these terrible incidents of school shootings. But I think you should know that, on balance, we have the lowest murder rate in our country in 31 years and that schools are the safest places kids can be.

Now what we have to do to ensure that all our schools are safe, are, number one, have a strict, zero tolerance for weapons in schools. I've announced a zero tolerance for guns policy several years ago out in California. We're trying to get every school to adopt it. We had several thousand young people who were sent home last year and expelled because they brought guns to school.

Number two, we need a system in every school that identifies kids who are troubled, who might cause trouble and get some help before they commit violent acts, whether they're being reported to the authorities, part of a peer mediation group, getting mental health or other counseling. I think you have to have a system in which all the kids are involved in trying to identify people who might be disturbed and might cause these kinds of problems.

And I think, number three, we have to try to make sure that the schools that are in high-crime areas, that there is adequate security there.

So there are lots of things that can be done, but on balance, you should not believe that you're in more trouble at school than you are someplace else, because for almost all of our children, they're safer at school than they would be on their streets or in their neighborhood.

[*The discussion continued.*]

The President. If I could just say one other thing to Joshua, who asked this question, and to others who—particularly young people who might be listening, there. I had a White House Conference on Youth Violence, and then we set up a national effort on youth violence. If you or anybody else that's part of this press conference tonight have any ideas, I want you to send them in. And I can assure you that we will carefully review them. We will do our best to see whether, if they're working in someplace, they can be made to work everywhere. If you have some new ideas, send them to us, because there is hardly anything more important in the whole country than giving our children

the safety and security that they and their families need.

So please, we're still working on this. We have a highly concentrated effort, and we'd like to have your ideas.

[*The discussion continued.*]

Post-Presidential Plans

Q. Mr. President, what are your plans after you leave the White House, beside supporting the First Lady for a possible Senate run?

The President. Well, I will certainly support her in any way that I can, and I'm looking forward to that. But I want to build my library and my public policy center at home in Arkansas. And then I want to be a useful citizen. I'll do what I can to support other people, if they ask me to, who are running for office or when they're in office. But I want to use that public policy center and the educational programs there to bring in people who are interested in public service and to advance a lot of these issues I'm interested in, that I think will have great significance in the future.

For example, how can you maximize the use of technology to bring educational opportunities to poor people in poor areas in America and around the world? How can you grow the economy and improve the environment? How can you use new technologies to prove that we can clean up the environment, reduce greenhouse gases, and create more jobs? How can we minimize racial and religious and ethnic and other tensions, both in our society and around the world?

These things, these big issues I've worked on as President, I want to find a way to continue to work on at my library and center in a way that doesn't get in the way of the next President. I don't want to do that, but I do think I can be a good citizen and help solve a lot of these problems and continue to move us forward.

Mr. From. Mr. President, do you think the people who are sending these questions think we're humorless? Because they have a line on here that says, "Laughing is permitted."

The President. I don't know what that means, but I've already been laughing, so thank you for permission. I never knew we had to give people permission to laugh, but I'm glad to have it. [*Laughter*]

Child Care

Q. What are you going to do about the rising cost of child care?

The President. Let me say, this is a huge issue. If you want to balance work and family in America, you have to have adequate family leave laws, and then affordable quality child care. And given the fact that most parents work and the percentage will go up, one of the most significant issues we have to resolve as a people is how to make people successful at the same time at home and at work because if you have to choose between one or the other, the country's going to be badly hurt.

We had a question earlier about an affordable tax cut. One of the things that I asked the Congress to do was to increase the tax credit for child care so that we could embrace more people. I've also asked the Congress to appropriate more money, because right now, we only serve with Federal subsidies about 10 percent of the working parents who are eligible for child care help.

So the answer to your question is, we have—at the national level and at the State level, we ought to be doing more with both tax credits and with direct subsidies to child care centers to help lower income and middle income people who otherwise can't find affordable quality child care. It's a huge issue out there that I don't believe has gotten the attention it deserves yet. I hope this, too, we'll make progress on, both next year in Congress and in the Presidential election. I'd like to see it heavily debated.

[*The discussion continued.*]

On-Line Townhall Meeting

Q. I commend you, Mr. President, for using the available new technology to stay in touch with the people. It gives anyone the chance to speak to the President, truly a shining example of freedom.

[*The discussion continued.*]

Class Size

Q. What do you think about the fact that in other countries, classrooms have many more children per teacher, yet they are ranked higher than the U.S. in education?

The President. Well, I think you have to, first of all, look at what the differences in those countries and the United States are. Let me also say, the United States is doing better in

these international exams. And among the schools that have set high standards and measure in tests for them, they're doing quite well, indeed.

But if you look at the countries which can have larger classes and have higher achievement levels in the early grades, what you will find is two things. You will find that they are not as diverse as we are, racially and ethnically and linguistically. And secondly, you will find that they don't have the same income and other social variations that you have in American classrooms.

So there is no country in the world with anything like the kind of diversity we have in the classroom, that has much bigger class sizes and higher performance. If the kids are more similar, obviously they would tend to have more similar learning patterns, and you can do things that sort of routinize the educational system more in the early grades. If the kids are vastly dissimilar, in terms of family circumstances and, literally, even language, you need more individual attention in the early grades.

And all I can say to you is that the American context—we have lots and lots and lots of research that well-trained teachers and smaller classes give not only immediate but permanent learning gains. And that's why I favor doing that.

[*The discussion continued.*]

Staying in Touch With the People

The President. Mayor, I want to thank you for that. You know, when I came here in 1993, one of the things that I promised myself I would do is to try to keep in touch with the American people, to try to avoid getting out of touch. And I now, having been President for nearly 7 years, I understand why Presidents get out of touch, how easy it is to happen. And I do think that this technology will help more and more Presidents to kind of be accountable to the American people, stay in touch with them, even in those weeks and sometimes months when they can't be out of Washington in the States and communities very much because of the workload here. So this is very, very hopeful, and I appreciate what you said.

Free and Fair Trade

Q. Do you believe in more open trade between our two countries,* or are you and your party committed to protectionism more than open trade?

The President. Well, the short answer is, I believe in more open trade between our two countries. Our two countries have a huge bilateral trading relationship, the biggest in the world; and it's benefited Canada; it's benefited the United States. Both of us have among the highest growth rates in the developed world now. We're both doing real well.

I would say two things about the trade issue. First of all, it is true that there are still some people in the Democratic Party who do not believe that we grow the economy and benefit people through expanding trade. And that is a difference of opinion we're still having. I will say this: There is a New Democratic majority, a big one, for almost every other issue on how to manage the economy, the importance of paying off the debt, what our education policy ought to be, what our crime policy ought to be, what our welfare policy ought to be. We don't have, in my judgment, the right consensus on trade yet, but we're moving in the right direction. And let me just give you two examples, if I might, of what we are concerned about with trade.

First of all, the United States, even though we've got a budget surplus and we're paying down our debt, has, by far, the biggest trade deficit in the world, because we've tried to keep our markets open. We think they help us to maintain low inflation and to be sharp and to be competitive. But if the competition is unfair, if countries can do things in our markets we can't do in theirs, then we're going to have a distortion of the trading system, and Americans who shouldn't lose their jobs will do so. I don't think that's right.

And so, I believe in open trade, but it ought to be fair. I'll give you just one example. We've won two cases in the World Trade Organization against the Europeans, one on beef and one on bananas, and we still can't get any satisfaction. We won the banana case three times. So it's going to be impossible to sustain support

* Canada and the United States.

for an open trading system if the rules and the rulings are ignored.

Now, the second point I want to make is that we have got to put a human face on the global economy. As we expand trade, ordinary people have to benefit and they have to believe we're not destroying the environment. So I have concluded that we should do more to open up the trading system to labor and environmental groups, let them be a part of the development of trading rules and regulations, and have certain standards for the environment and for labor in these trade agreements. I think in the end, that's the best way to do it.

We've got to succeed in putting a human face on the global economy if you want to have broadbased support for it.

[*The discussion continued.*]

The President. When the Asian financial crisis hit in 1997, we had been increasing our manufacturing employment, including in steel. But in the 1980's and early nineties, we lost 60 percent of our employment in steel. Then we modernized, and we were competitive globally. And other countries started dumping steel on our markets and throwing people out of work who were competitive on the global economy. In other words, they weren't playing by the rules.

So we had antidumping actions, and we worked hard to reverse that and to restore the imports back to their pre-crisis levels. That doesn't mean I'm against free trade, but I had to fight for those jobs. And I can tell you, there are a lot of people out there who don't think we did enough to do that.

So there will always be difficult questions. But on balance, America has 4 percent of the world's people, with 22 percent of the world's income; we've got to sell something to the other 96 percent of the world. And you don't have to be a mathematical genius to figure out, therefore, we should be in favor of expanding trade.

[*The discussion continued.*]

Seattle Round and the Environment

Q. During the WTO summit in Seattle this month, will President Clinton propose to strengthen environmental safeguards?

The President. Yes. Yes, and in addition to that, the involvement of environmental groups in the whole World Trade Organization process. We've got to open this process up.

One of the reasons you're going to have thousands of demonstrators in Seattle telling everybody that this world trading system is some sort of dark conspiracy to destroy the environment and keep down ordinary working families is that they use funny language, and they have big, secret rules, and they meet too much in secret in Switzerland. And I think we've got to open this process up. This is not complicated. If some people produce some things better than others and the more we can work together and lift the fortunes of people everywhere, the better wealthier countries will do. This is not complicated.

But I think it's very—I'm actually kind of glad all these demonstrators are coming to Seattle, even though it may be kind of messy, because we ought to have a big global debate on this. And the people who feel like they've been shut out ought to be brought in and listened to, not just the environmentalists but the others as well.

Middle East Peace Process

Q. What do you feel are the chances that there will be any real progress in the talks between the Palestinians and the Israelis before you leave office?

The President. Oh, I think they're quite good. For one thing, there already has been real progress. Keep in mind, it was back in 1993 that we signed the Israel-PLO accord. We now have the Palestinians with their land in the West Bank and in Gaza. There's a high level of security cooperation between the two. And Prime Minister Barak and Chairman Arafat reaffirmed their commitment to the peace process in Oslo when we went last week to honor the late Prime Minister Rabin. And they are now on, literally, about a 100-day timetable to finish a final framework agreement.

Now I don't want to kid you. The issues are very, very tough. But I think the chances of success are better than 50-50. And with a lot of prayers and a lot of pushing, maybe we'll make it. I feel hopeful.

Education On-Line

Q. How does the President feel about supporting on-line education to serve the increasing number of students?

The President. I'd be for that. And we'll have more of that anyway. That's going to happen.

You want to take these two and then come back?

Q. Yes, we'll do that. What I like is a micro-manager. [Laughter]

The President. At my age, I'm just glad I can read that. [Laughter]

National Defense in the New Millennium

Q. Taking into consideration the fact that the Chinese have developed an ICBM capable of reaching American shores, what is your position on the missile defense system for the United States?

The President. Well, if we can develop a missile defense that will actually work to block incoming missiles that could have nuclear, chemical, or biological warheads, it would be irresponsible not to develop it, assuming we can do so consistent with our obligations under treaties.

However, I don't think the Chinese will be the biggest problem. China does have 20 such missiles; we have 6,000 such missiles. I think the real problem is the danger that in the future, rogue states and terrorist groups might, themselves, get missile technology that could pierce America's traditional defenses. So we're working on missile defense, and we're also working with the Russians to see if we can agree to make some amendments to the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty so that we can put the missile defense up if we can develop it, and they can share the benefits of it.

Now, let me also say to all of you, not to be unnecessarily alarmist, but I think we need to be realistic here. I think in the future, future Presidents will have to tell you that we'll also have to worry about defenses from miniaturized nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons in the hands of terrorists who won't need missiles to try to deliver them.

So it will be a whole new world out there, and there's a lot of blessings from the end of the cold war, but we'll have to deal with more and different threats. And I would favor doing whatever is responsible to enhance the national security of the United States, including deploying the right kind of missile defense system.

Federal Involvement in Education

Q. Can you explain to me why you feel the Federal Government needs to get involved in education and why this can't be left to State and local government?

The President. Well, yes I can. First of all, the Federal Government has been involved in education for over 30 years now and in very discrete ways: in higher education, to help more people afford the costs of college, because that's something most States don't have massive resources to do; in preschool education like Head Start, to help more poor children get started. In public schools, the Federal Government's role traditionally has—first of all, it's always been less than 10 percent of the total budget of the public schools. It's basically designed to give poor children or children whose first language is not English or children with special education needs the access to the best possible education they can have, and then designed to meet discrete needs, like after *Sputnik* we spent more money to train teachers in math and science.

So what I have proposed is consistent with our historic mission: 100,000 teachers, because we have more kids and more teachers retiring, and we now have evidence that smaller classes work; a policy to end social promotion but to dramatically increase the number of after-school and summer school programs and funds to help failing schools turn around or shut down; and then a big DLC favorite, more charter schools. When I became President, we had one; there are now 1,700. We want 3,000 of these schools that are set up and chartered by teachers or parents; that are free of a lot of the redtape of local school districts and are judged and stay in business only on their results.

These, I think, are appropriate roles for the Federal Government. They are limited. We don't tell the States how to achieve excellence in education. We tell them there ought to be standards; here are things that work. If you want to do these things, we'll help you fund them.

President's Legacy

Q. Mr. President, what kind of legacy do you think the American people will remember about your administration?

The President. I think they will see it as a time of dramatic transformation and change; where we restored economic prosperity; where we widened the circle of opportunity to include people who'd been left out; where we deepened the bonds of freedom and community in this country, by helping to solve social problems and bridge a lot of the divisions in our society; and when we essentially assumed the leadership of

the post-cold-war world, whether it's in expanding NATO or fighting against ethnic cleansing in the Balkans or working to deal with the challenges of terrorism in the 21st century. So I think it will be seen as a time of transformation, of hope, of genuine opportunity, and genuine community in America.

So I'm very grateful for the chance I've had to serve. And I'm very grateful for the results that the approach that Al From and I have been working on for 15 years now has had in the lives of the American people. I think it's, by and large, a tribute to the public and the citizens of this country. But for whatever role I've been able to play, I am profoundly grateful. And I believe that the legacy will be transformation, movement, the restoration of prosperity and hope.

[*The discussion continued.*]

The President. Let me say, first of all, I want to thank you, Al, again for giving us all this opportunity and for always being a visionary and thinking about the future. I want to thank the other elected officials who have shared this press conference with me tonight, and commend you and those like you who have taken our New Democratic ideas and actually used them to change the lives of our people for the better.

And finally, let me say to all the people who have been a part of this, I'm not running for anything anymore. I'm doing this because I believe in the enterprise of Government and in the work and impact of citizenship. And if we can use technology to chip away at cynicism and increase participation and give—empower citizens to feel that they're holding their elected officials accountable and they're helping them to do their jobs, that will be a very great thing, indeed.

So I would urge you to keep the E-mails coming into the White House, keep the E-mails coming into the DLC. If you have questions that weren't answered or ideas you want to share, keep pouring them in there.

But let me tell you something. There's a reason this country's been around here for more than 200 years, and there's a reason we're enjoying this enormous level of economic prosperity with our social conditions improving and our leadership in the world unquestioned. America is a great country founded on a great set of ideas, capable of permanent renewal. And the technology of the moment has made it more exciting than ever before. But it still requires, more than anything else, even more than good leaders, good citizens.

Those of you who have been part of this tonight have been good citizens. I thank you, and I want to urge you on because our country's best days lie ahead in the new century.

NOTE: The President spoke at 7:14 p.m. in the Marvin Center Auditorium at George Washington University. In his remarks, he referred to John A. Koskinen, Chairman, President's Council on Year 2000 Conversion; Prime Minister Ehud Barak of Israel; Chairman Yasser Arafat of the Palestinian Authority; and Democratic Presidential candidate former Senator Bill Bradley. The discussion, which was sponsored by the Democratic Leadership Council, included the following participants: Marc Andreessen, founder, Netscape; Gov. Jeanne Shaheen of New Hampshire; Mayor Donald T. Cunningham, Jr., of Bethlehem, PA; Lt. Gov. Kathleen Kennedy Townsend of Maryland; and Wisconsin State Assemblyman Antonio Riley, chairman, Democratic Leadership Council State Legislative Advisory Board. On-line participants used first names only.

Statement on Signing Legislation To Locate and Secure the Return of Zachary Baumel and Israeli Soldiers Missing in Action

November 8, 1999

Today I have signed into law H.R. 1175, "An Act to locate and secure the return of Zachary Baumel, a United States citizen, and other Israeli soldiers missing in action." I deeply sympathize with the families of the missing soldiers

and have made the resolution of these cases a priority throughout my Administration. The United States remains determined to pursue every concrete lead to ascertain their fate. We will continue to consult closely with the families