

Apr. 17 / Administration of William J. Clinton, 2000

had a better chance to build new connections between people, between cultures, between nations. The Navajo Code Talkers gave us one of history's most stirring lessons on the power of communications. They showed us in the most concrete way that our cultural diversity in America can be our greatest strength. And that is why we must do everything in our power to allow all Diné to lend their talents and their skills to the great enterprise of building our future together.

Ahe' hee doo hagoane. Thank you, and good-bye.

NOTE: The President spoke at 5:50 p.m. at the Boys and Girls Club of Shiprock. In his remarks, he referred to Myra Jodie, student, Steamboat Navajo Nation, AZ, who introduced the President; President Kelsey A. Begaye and Vice President Taylor McKenzie of the Navajo Nation; Chief Justice Robert Yazzie, Navajo Nation Supreme Court; Speaker Edward T. Begay, Navajo Nation Council; William Lee, chapter president, Shiprock local government; Special Assistant to the President for Agriculture and Trade Carl S. Whillock, board member, Rural Telephone Bank Agency of the United States; and professional golfer Notah Begay III.

Message on the Observance of Passover, 2000 *April 17, 2000*

Warm greetings to all those celebrating Passover.

Each year, Jews across America and around the world celebrate this sacred holiday by gathering with family and friends to share a festive ritual meal and to retell the story of Passover.

As children read from the Haggadah, a new generation learns the ancient story of God's liberation of the Israelites from slavery in Egypt and of their arduous 40-year journey through the desert. By singing songs, reciting prayers, and sharing food and drink steeped in tradition and symbolism, children learn to appreciate the rich history of the Jewish people, the importance

of religious freedom, and the many blessings God brings to our lives.

This year, as families gather for the seder to once again tell the story of Passover and of the Israelites' journey to the Promised Land, let us all give thanks for God's grace in our lives and for the wonderful blessings of liberty. And let us pray for a future filled with peace, hope, and opportunity for all the children of the world.

Hillary joins me in extending best wishes for a joyous Passover celebration.

BILL CLINTON

Internet Video Conference in Shiprock *April 17, 2000*

The President. Thank you. That was interesting. You did a good job, and I think your Navajo is better than mine. [*Laughter*]

Participant. I'd like to ask some questions, if I may.

The President. Please do.

Participant. Do you like working with the Internet?

The President. I do. I especially like it when I don't have to think, I can just talk to you. [*Laughter*] I don't even have to click the mouse.

I've got it on you, though, right on your hand and microphone. So ask me a nice question. [*Laughter*]

Internet Access for Police Departments

Participant. Mr. President, our—[*inaudible*—] police department is not connected to the Internet.

The President. Your police department?

Participant. Yes. They do not have 911 services. People die because police get their information late. If they had Internet, they could communicate with other police departments better.

The President. Well, we are trying to get Internet service throughout the Navajo Nation and, indeed, throughout all of Indian country. And I will—when I go back, I'm going to see whether we can do anything to accelerate Internet access, especially for police departments. But I think we ought to have it in as many homes as possible, as well. So we have to get telephone service out to everybody. And then we need to get the Internet connections.

But the law enforcement issue is a separate issue. And I will do what I can to speed it up.

Community and Home Internet Access

Participant. Mr. President, we are very thankful for getting the Internet at our school.

The President. Could you ask the question again? I didn't hear you.

Participant. Mr. President, we are very thankful for getting the Internet at Lake Valley Navajo School. How could you make sure the students keep the Internet for future use?

The President. Future use? You mean after you leave school?

Participant. For more than just a year.

The President. Is that what you mean?

Participant. Yes.

The President. I think the most important thing is to make sure that all the students who have Internet access now will be able to go on to college, if they wish to go on, when they finish school, and will also be able to have access to the Internet in their homes. I think making sure that we have universal telephone service and that people's homes will be able to be connected is the most important thing. The cost of the computers will continue to go down, and the technology will become less and less expensive if the infrastructure is there. So I think that, to me, is the most important thing that we can do, in the Government. And there are a lot of companies that are helping us try to make sure that you will be able to have access to the Internet.

The other thing I think we ought to do is to make sure that every community which needs it has a community center where adults, people of all ages can come in and log on and use

the Internet for whatever they need. And we're trying to set up another 1,000 community computer centers around the country right now.

Participant. Okay. Thank you. [Laughter]

The President. I wish you were in the press corps. They never let me get off that light. That's great. You heard what she said; it was okay. [Laughter]

President's Interest in the Navajo Nation

Participant. Mr. President, what is it about the Navajo Nation that interests you?

The President. Oh, many things. I'm interested in the history. I'm interested in the culture. I'm very interested in the creative arts. And I'm interested in the commitment I see from your leaders and your citizens and your young people to education and to using all this modern technology to try to give Navajo people, especially Navajo young people, the chance to fulfill their abilities and live out their dreams without having to give up their culture, their language, their heritage. It's very impressive to me, and I'm very interested in it. I hope that I'm able to help you. I'm certainly going to try.

Participant. Okay. Thank you. [Laughter]

Internet Access for Schools

The President. Let me ask you a question. What do you think the most important thing about access to the Internet is for young people? Why do you care whether you can use this technology or not?

Participant. To communicate and get more information, research projects.

The President. How many of the students who are there, not just you two but all the others who are in the room with you, raise your hand if you want to go to college. That's good.

One of the most important things about the Internet is it enables us to bring information that's available anywhere in the world to people, no matter remote where they live is. So, to me, one of the best things about this is the possibility it offers to give you a world-class education.

If you could change anything about your education and could get any improvement you wanted, what would you do? What change would you make, if you could do better?

Participant. Better schools, more equipment.

The President. Answer again; I didn't hear you.

Participant. Better schools and more equipment.

The President. More equipment and better schools. Anybody else want to answer that question?

Participant. [Inaudible]

The President. Okay, we got you in focus now. You can answer.

Participant. [Inaudible]

The President. I'm sorry, I couldn't hear. Say it one more time.

Participant. Internet access to all schools.

The President. Internet access to all schools, that's good. Right now, over 90 percent of America's schools have Internet access. And what we're trying to do is to make sure that 100 percent do, including all the Native American schools in the country. And we have gotten the cost of Internet access down low enough so that everyone can afford it now. So all schools should be able to get access within a year or so; we should be almost to 100 percent of the schools.

Would any of you like to ask a question? Yes.

President's Age

Participant. How old are you? [Laughter]

The President. I am very old. [Laughter] I'm 53. How old are you?

Participant. Seven.

The President. I wish I could trade places with you. [Laughter] It's going to be a very exciting life for you.

Any other questions? Yes?

President's Childhood

Participant. What is your favorite childhood memory?

The President. My favorite childhood memory? That's hard; I have a lot of good childhood memories. I think going back to the little town where I was born and talking to all my older relatives, listening to them tell me stories of my family's life, the way they used to live; talk to me about things in my past. I loved that. But I have lots of good memories. I had a wonderful childhood.

President's Visit

Participant. [Inaudible]—what inspired you to—[inaudible].

The President. I think, first of all, I wanted to come to the Navajo Nation, and I wanted

to come someplace that was a long way away from any city, because I wanted to make the point that the Internet can bring us all close together, no matter where we live, anywhere in the world, and can make available information. You've got those encyclopedias back there; you can now get all the encyclopedias, or at least I know one or two of the major ones are completely on the Internet.

And so I wanted to come to a place in America where I knew there was a commitment to education, and here this school manifested that—where I knew that the tribal leaders were committed to giving modern opportunities to the children, and that was a long way away. I also always wanted to see Shiprock. [Laughter] I wanted to see that big rock. But I got to—I took the helicopters that we came in today very, very close in. You can't imagine how wonderful it is to see it from the helicopter. So it was a little indulgence on my part.

Computers and the Navajo Nation

Participant. Why are computers important to the Navajo Nation?

The President. Computers are important to the Navajo Nation because they will guarantee that children who go to schools that don't have a lot of money and, therefore, can't buy a lot of things that other schools can buy, that live where they live in big cities or suburbs—whatever they can buy in terms of information can be given to you directly through computers, so that for the first time in history, a child in a district—no matter how far away it is, no matter how rural it is, no matter how small it is—can have access to the same kind of information anyone else can.

Computers are important to the Navajo Nation because they can connect people who give you health care to very sophisticated medical centers. And if someone here gets a strange, rare disease, you can figure out what to do about it through the medical connections. Computers are important, as you heard from this question here, because if the law enforcement agencies are connected to computers, if someone has an emergency they might have enabled you to save lives that otherwise couldn't be saved.

Computers are important because they can enable people in the Navajo Nation to start jobs and create businesses and earn incomes in a way that wouldn't be possible. For example, look

at all this lovely jewelry our heroine here has on. Now, if you could go to a local travel store—maybe I could do it while I'm here—and buy some of these, with the computer you can sell this jewelry without leaving here. You could stay right here; you could sell this beautiful jewelry in any city in America and in any foreign country in the world that is also on the Internet. So that instead of having—instead of being dependent on the customers that happen to drive by your store, which if you're up here may not be many, you can put—you can get on the Internet; you can make sure people know about your website; you can make sure people can get pictures of all these. They can see it. Then anybody anywhere in America or anywhere else in the world that's on the Internet can be your customer.

Computers are important because they can give you pen pals anyplace in the world. You can write letters and have E-mail back and forth to people in Africa or Australia or South America. You could talk to native peoples in Australia and find out how their experience is different from native peoples in the United States. It could change everything. Basically, they're important because they open the world of information to you in a way nothing else ever has.

Do you have another question?

Women's Basketball

Participant. What's your favorite WNBA team? [*Laughter*]

The President. Rebecca's team. Did you meet Rebecca? Whenever she plays, I cheer. [*Laughter*] Actually, what I'm supposed to say is that I cheer for the hometown team, because we have a team in Washington.

Now, you ask a question, and then we'll go back to the—

President's Birthday

Participant. When is your birthday?

The President. My birthday, is that what you said? My birthday is August the 19th. So this August I'll be 54, and I'll be really old. [*Laughter*]

Okay, do you have a question there, back in Lake Valley?

Next Administration and Native Americans

Participant. Yes, I do. Good afternoon, Mr. President.

The President. Good afternoon.

Participant. I'm a student at CIT, which is the Crownpoint Institute of Technology, majoring in accounting. I wanted to ask you a question about the new administration that is going to be coming in. What are you doing—

The President. You ought to be asking—go ahead.

Participant. Okay. What are you doing—the new administration—[*inaudible*]. And how is this going to affect the education of Indians here in the United States?

The President. Well, first, we have supported very strongly a tribal sovereignty relationship that would honor the principle of tribal sovereignty, increase the U.S. Government's investment in education and health care, but would basically be committed to empowering tribal leaders and Native American people all over our country to lift themselves up, and their families, through economic and educational initiatives. And of course, if Vice President Gore is the next President, I think he will continue that policy.

But let me just say this. What I have tried to do is to put this beyond party politics. And I have with me today a Republican Senator, Senator Bennett from Utah, whom I appreciate coming here because he supports the idea of bringing the power of the Internet to tribal peoples throughout America. And what we ought to strive for is a relationship with our tribes so that you can vote in elections like all other Americans do, based on specific issues and whether you like someone better than someone else, or you agree with them on their general economic policy or their general education policy or their general foreign policy.

And the reason I've spent so much time for over 7 years now trying to get this relationship right is because I would like it if it became—my policy became America's policy, and that every leader without regard to party would follow the same path. That's what I really hope will happen, because I think that's what's best for you and what's best for us.

You can only know that as you ask people questions and listen to their answers as the campaign unfolds. I can't make that decision for you, and I shouldn't try.

Participant. Thank you, Mr. President. I would like to ask you first—[*inaudible*—my great grandfather is—[*inaudible*].

The President. Thank you.

President's Hobbies

Participant. Mr. President, do you have any favorite hobbies?

The President. Favorite hobbies? Yes, I like to read. I like to play golf. I like to play my saxophone, and I like to go to the movies. And I like to listen to music, all kinds of music.

Participant. Okay. Thank you. [Laughter]

The President. I have so many hobbies, sometimes I have to remind myself to work. [Laughter] But usually, the people who work for me don't let me forget that I'm supposed to work. So I also do a little work every day.

Do you all have any other questions, anybody else here?

Universal Internet Access

Participant. How are you going to incorporate—[inaudible].

The President. Well, the first thing you have to do is to make sure that there's universal telephone service. You can use a computer, but you can't be on the Internet unless there are telephones. At least now. Pretty soon I think wireless technology will—but right now we have to have universal telephone service. So that's what we're working on.

We made an announcement today that we would be able to provide telephone service to every household in Indian country for no more than a dollar a month, for basic telephone service. So that's important. So then we have to make sure that the access charges for the Internet—that you can afford to do it. And that's what the so-called E-rate is about. That helps public institutions like libraries and schools. And then it's just a question of getting the equipment in and having access to the software. And that's what all these great companies are doing. There are a lot of companies that are helping. And I'm trying to get Congress to pass a bill to give big tax incentives to companies to basically make Internet access universal.

And I think what our goal ought to be, in America and Shiprock, would be to have Internet access as universal as telephone access. That's really what my objective is. Ultimately, I think that it won't be very long anyway before technology will cure all this because you'll be able to hold something in your hand that will do this, that will give you—that will be the source of the Internet and television and movies and telephone and your own files and everything else. But that's what we've got to do.

The more we can make access to this technology universal, the more we will be able to make equal educational opportunities universal. And then, from there, we will be able to move on to making people's economic opportunity more universal. That's my goal.

Okay, do you have a question? Go ahead.

Native American Youth

Participant. In comparison to the youth of inner cities like Washington, how do you perceive the Native American youth as you visit different reservations?

The President. Well, they have their own challenges. By American standards, city standards, the unemployment rate in Washington is still fairly high, and there is a fairly high rate of poverty. But the unemployment rate is far higher on the reservations, mostly because of physical remoteness. The main difference here is physical remoteness.

And yes, you have a different culture and a native language that is different from theirs. But basically, I find young people to have more in common than you would imagine. Those kids want to learn; they want to have access to the Internet. I've been at schools in Washington, DC, that are just now being hooked up to—and where the number of computers and the number of trained teachers and the number of classrooms in the school building have doubled, and it's still nowhere near what I would like to see.

I think what I would like to see you do is to use this technology and have this kind of conversation as we're having with Lake Valley Elementary, with a school in Washington, DC. And then you could ask them questions, and they could ask you questions, and you could figure out for yourselves how you're different and how you're the same. I think you would like it a lot. And you might be surprised at what you find.

You know, when I gave the speech out here, the young lady who introduced me, who won a computer but then couldn't hook up to the Internet in her home—I don't know if you saw the speech, but she introduced me. When she was introduced, Congressman Udall introduced her and said that her favorite musical group was NSYNC. And I can tell you that you could say that about a significant percentage of the children her age in Washington, DC. So I thought, we're not all that different after all.

What were you going to say?

Internet Access Costs

Participant. I have a question. In the future, will the Navajo Reservation be able to connect to the Internet locally, rather than long-distance?

The President. Anybody here who can answer that? Somebody back there.

Federal Communications Commission Chairman William E. Kennard. What's the question?

Participant. I'd like to know, in the future, will the Navajo Reservation be able to connect to the Internet locally, rather than long-distance?

[*Chairman Kennard stated that the FCC was working with the State to redefine the borders for long-distance calls and thereby make it easier to access the Internet.*]

The President. I'm glad you asked that, because I never thought about it before. Good for you. We'll look into that.

Yes, ma'am. Go ahead.

[*A teacher asked the President how he would assist families so they could maintain computer technology at home and still have enough money for essentials.*]

The President. I have two reactions. First of all, I think the basics of life are still, obviously, the most important thing. And one of the things that we have done a lot of work on—Secretary Cuomo is here, the Secretary of Housing and Urban Development, to try to increase the stock of housing in Indian country. I think that is very important.

Now, the second thing is, obviously, to get computers in homes. Right now, we're trying to make them universal in all the schools, in all the classrooms. To get them in all the homes in the short term, we are going to have to have the help of people who will donate them. And if we can make telephone access, monthly telephone access available and affordable, then you will be able to have the computer. And then one of the things we will do is we will create several jobs repairing them for people who live here. It will create all kinds of new businesses.

The answer to the last question you raised is, I will be bitterly disappointed if 50 years from now we have to worry about how to maintain computer technology. First, the stuff that we are putting in now will be obsolete within

5 or 6 years. And I really believe all the lines of communication and all the sources of information are going to merge into a common, user-friendly technology within the next several years, maybe the next few years, that people will then be able to afford and access.

And what I am trying to do is to create an environment here where we can get investment in so that we can start businesses, create jobs, raise incomes, so that within a matter of a few years the income and job opportunity on a place like Shiprock—in a place like Shiprock will be much more like the income and job opportunities in any other place in America.

My whole premise is that the communications revolution is shrinking the meaning, the economic meaning of distance. We know it is shrinking the educational meaning of distance because you've got the Encyclopedia Britannica on the Internet, for example. What we're trying to do is to shrink the economic meaning of distance, so that people can live here or in the Appalachian Mountains or in the remote Ozark Mountains, where I came from, or in little villages they grew up in in the Mississippi Delta, which is the poorest part of America except for the Native American reservations, and still make a living.

So my whole—you've got to understand, my whole goal is to make this irrelevant. I will be deeply disappointed if two Presidents down the road—if a President doesn't come here to celebrate the fact that everybody is in first-class housing, nobody worries about nutrition, unemployment rate is no higher than it is anyplace else in the country, and the children are having a world-class education, and we're all on an Internet connection talking to people in Russia or China or someplace else. I mean, I will be really disappointed if that doesn't happen.

The whole point of this effort is to tell people that the children of Native America are intelligent, and they deserve world-class opportunities, and the adults are able, and they deserve a chance to make a living. That's the whole point of this whole enterprise.

Thank you.

Participant. Thank you.

The President. You guys were great. Thanks.

NOTE: The conference began at 7:09 p.m. in the lobby at Diné College on the Navajo Indian Reservation. Participants included faculty, students,

and guests at the college as well as Internet participants from Lake Valley School, a Bureau of Indian Affairs elementary school remotely located on the reservation about 150 miles southeast of

Shiprock. In his remarks, the President referred to Rebecca Lobo, player, New York Liberty, Women's National Basketball Association.

Remarks to the COMDEX 2000 Spring Conference in Chicago, Illinois *April 18, 2000*

Thank you very much. Thank you, Frederic Rosen, and thank you, Jason Chudnofsky. I am delighted to be here. I want to thank Director Tony Streit and the young people from Street-Level Youth Media who went on my tour with me over in the other part of the McCormick Center to see some of the new wonders of the information technology revolution. I want to thank those who have come with me here today on this last stop of this part of our new markets tour, including several Members of the United States Congress: Jan Schakowsky from Chicago; Stephanie Tubbs Jones from Cleveland; Silvestre Reyes from El Paso, Texas; and Representative Bill Jefferson from New Orleans.

I want to thank Secretary of Transportation Rodney Slater; Federal Communications Chair Bill Kennard; Reverend Jesse Jackson; Bob Johnson, the president of Black Entertainment Television; and Gene Sperling and Maria Echaveste, who operate this program for me out of the White House.

I am glad to be the first President to address this conference, but I am quite sure I will not be the last. Information technology has accounted for about 30 percent of this remarkable economic growth we've had, even though people directly working in IT only account for about 8 percent of our employment.

What we have tried to do in Government is to provide the conditions and give people the tools to make the most of this phenomenal new era in human affairs. What you and people like you all across this country have done, have made the most of that—the balanced budget, the Telecommunications Act, doubling our investment in education and training, and dramatically increasing basic research, opening trade to new countries. And it's given us the longest economic expansion in history, the lowest African-American and Hispanic unemployment rates ever recorded, the lowest female unemployment

rate recorded in 40 years, poverty down to a 20-year low, the lowest welfare rolls in 30 years, the lowest overall unemployment in 30 years. That is the good news. And it was brought about primarily by this incredible environment and the gifted people who have made the most of this celebration of ideas and innovation and ingenuity.

But as Mr. Rosen said when he introduced me, what I have been focused on now in the last year-plus of my term as President is the people and places who have been left behind in this phenomenal new economy, and I have for two reasons. One is, I think that all of us would like to see every American who is willing to work for it have a chance to be a part of this astonishing new era of enterprise. I think, just on pure ethical grounds, we all sense that the American values require that everybody be given a fair chance to participate. But secondly, I think it is in our economic interest to do it.

You know, we spend a lot of time in Washington discussing, how in the world can we keep this economic expansion going? It's already the longest economic expansion in history, far longer than any other one that did not include a major war. How long can it go? What will happen? How will it come to an end? Will we really have inflation that will somehow bring an end to this long boom?

Well, it's clear to me that if we want it to continue, we have to do more to find new markets. New markets mean creating new businesses and new employees, as well as new customers. And if you do both, it means you can have growth without inflation. So this idea of closing the digital divide is good social policy. It's good personal ethics. But it's also very, very important for our continued economic expansion as a nation.