

Remarks at a Ceremony Honoring Presidential Scholars June 28, 2000

The President. Thank you very much. Please be seated. Welcome to the White House. I'm sorry it's a little rainy, but it's a nice place to hide from the rain.

We're delighted to be joined today by Representatives Jack Kingston, Carlos Romero-Barceló, John Isakson, and Ken Bentsen. And I want to thank Deputy Education Secretary Frank Holleman for being here, as well as Chairman Tom Britton and all the members of the Commission on Presidential Scholars, and the members of the Presidential Scholars Foundation who are with us here today.

I have had the privilege of meeting with the Presidential scholars every year since I've been in office. I always enjoy meeting you and your parents, your teachers, your loved ones. I want to congratulate each of you for working hard, for believing in yourselves, for achieving something very special, and for being in a position to play such a large role in our country's future.

I am especially glad that all you young people are here this week, because this is a week which has had a very large impact on the future that you will live. Just 2 days ago some of our Nation's leading scientists came to the White House to announce they had completed mapping the entire human genome, the very book of life. It's one of the most important scientific discoveries of all time. It will launch a new era of discovery that will revolutionize the diagnosis, prevention, and treatment of most, if not all, human diseases, from Alzheimer's to Parkinson's to diabetes to cancer.

Then, we also announced this week that according to the latest budget projections, our budget surplus this year will be the largest in the entire history of the United States, \$211 billion. When I leave office, we will have paid down the national debt by nearly \$400 billion—[*applause*]*—thank you; locked away the taxes the American people pay for Social Security and, I hope, for Medicare, for debt reduction over the next decade, and still leave the American people a projected surplus to be invested in the future of about \$1.5 trillion.*

If Congress works with me, we can map a course to place our Nation in a position we haven't been in since 1835, an America entirely

debt-free. We can do that by 2012. And it will change your future forever.

One thing that I've worked hard to achieve over the last 7½ years—and we've had a surprising amount of bipartisan consensus on this—is to extend the ability to go to college to more young Americans. We've established the HOPE scholarship; the \$1,500 tax credit for the first 2 years of college, which effectively makes community college free to most Americans; a lifetime learning tax credit, which has been very, very important for the last 2 years of college, for graduate school, for adult education. We've allowed families to save in education IRA's. We changed the nature of the student loan program to lower the cost and to provide more repayment options in a way that has saved our students \$8 billion over the last 7 years. And now I'm asking Congress to allow families to deduct the costs of up to \$10,000 of college tuition at a 28 percent rate, which could be worth \$2,800 to virtually every family in America sending a young person to college.

So this, I think, may be one of the most important things we've done in the last 7 years. College-going is higher than ever before. Two-thirds of our high school graduates are immediately going on to college. It's something for which we can all be very, very grateful.

Thirty-five years ago this month, President Johnson welcomed the second class of Presidential scholars here to the White House. And believe it or not, he talked about this very moment. Here's what he said: "In the year 2000, most of you scholars will be no older than I am today. Intricate and subtle problems will confront you along the way. It is your responsibility to bring to the solution of these problems a set of values drawn from the long wisdom of the democratic process."

Now, when he said that, President Johnson didn't know we would map the human genome. He didn't know we'd be talking about a \$1.5 trillion surplus. Before we started running these surpluses, the last time we had a surplus was in 1969, and it was just a few million dollars, and they hardly knew what to do with it.

So he didn't know about the genome; he didn't know about the surplus. But he did know

something Americans have always known: If we stay focused on the future and if we stay true to our values, there is no stopping the power and potential of the spirit of our people.

Now, 35 years from now, you Presidential scholars will be about my age. In this audience, we have students who may one day help us find a cure for AIDS, who may design cars that get hundreds of miles to the gallon, who help us unlock the mysteries of our deepest ocean depths and the dark reaches of outer space.

I think it very likely that your children will be born with a life expectancy of somewhere around 100 years. And I think it possible that you will be able to unite with others across the world, across all the lines—the racial, the ethnic, the religious lines—that divide us, not only because of the way technology and the Internet are bringing us together but because of one of the great lessons we have actually learned from the study of the human genome. Scientists have found already, in mapping the genes of people, that in genetic terms, all human beings, regardless of race, are more than 99.9 percent the same. Even more surprising, the genetic differences within people of the same race are greater than the differences of the genetic profile from group to group of people of different races.

Therefore, what we have learned, perhaps most important, from this stunning breakthrough of modern science, is something that ancient

faiths have already taught us: The most important fact of life on this Earth is our common humanity. I hope that understanding continues to guide all of you as you go out into the best days our country and, I hope, our world have ever known. I am very proud of you for your achievements. I congratulate you and your families. I wish you well.

I only hope that you will always remember this day and the fact that you came to the Nation's Capital and to the people's house at a time of great progress and prosperity. But that progress and prosperity imposes upon you, because of your gifts, a special responsibility to make the most of it.

Congratulations.

Now we're going to bring the Presidential scholars up.

Thank you.

[At this point, the Presidential scholars were introduced.]

The President. Ladies and gentlemen, this concludes our program, but if they don't make you feel better about the future of America, nothing will. Let's give them another hand. [Applause]

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 3 p.m. in a pavilion on the South Lawn at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Thomas E. Britton, Chairman, Commission on Presidential Scholars.

Statement on the Supreme Court Decision on Partial Birth Abortion June 28, 2000

I am pleased with the Supreme Court's decision today in *Stenberg v. Carhart* striking down a Nebraska statute that banned so-called partial birth abortions. The Court's decision is consistent with my past vetoes of similar legislation. I will continue to veto any legislation restricting late-term abortions that lacks a health exception or otherwise unduly burdens a woman's right

to choose. A woman's right to choose must include the right to choose a medical procedure that will not endanger her life or health. Today's decision recognizes this principle and marks an important victory for a woman's freedom of choice.