

would never be perfect but could always be made more perfect.

They knew that we would never fully realize the ideals of the Constitution and the Declaration or the Bill of Rights but that we could always deepen the meaning of freedom, widen the circle of opportunity, and strengthen the bonds of our community. That is what these young immigrants represent today, our future and our steadfast belief that we grow stronger with our diversity in a global world, as long as we reaffirm our common humanity and our common fidelity to the freedom and values of the Constitution.

Now, my fellow Americans, about 4 months from now I will change jobs, and I will be restored to a title that Harry Truman once said was the most important title any American could have, that of citizen. No American citizen in this Republic's history has been more fortunate or more blessed. I hope for the rest of my life I can do a good job with that title. I hope all these young, new citizens behind me will realize that President Truman was right. As important as our Presidents are, as important as our Congresses are, as important as our judges are and our Governors and our mayors, our philanthropists, our artists, our athletes, this country is great because there are good people who get up every day and do their very best to live their dreams and make the most of their own lives and because this country has a system

enshrined in the Constitution that gives them the maximum opportunity to do just that.

You should be very proud of what you are doing here today to make sure everyone knows why America is a special place and being an American is a great gift. I thank you for that. [Applause]

Now, we're just about done, but I'm going to ask one of our citizens, Susan Yuh, who was born in South Korea, to join me in signing, as everyone else has already done, this steel beam to my right, that will be the founding pillar of a building devoted to our Constitution. I think it's quite fitting that the beam should have the signature of a President, and even more fitting that it should have the signature of a new citizen on her first day as an American.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:17 p.m. on Independence Mall. In his remarks, he referred to Mayor John F. Street and former Mayor Edward G. Rendell of Philadelphia; John C. Bogle, chairman, and Joseph M. Torsella, president and chief executive officer, National Constitution Center; James T. Giles, Chief Judge, U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Pennsylvania; Edward R. Becker III, Chief Judge, U.S. Court of Appeals for the Third Circuit; Marie Rust, Regional Director, Northeast Region, National Park Service; Judith Rodin, president, University of Pennsylvania; and Walter H. Annenberg and his wife, Lee, founders, Annenberg Foundation.

Remarks at a State Dinner for Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee of India

September 17, 2000

And Mr. Prime Minister, on behalf of the American people, let me welcome you again to the White House, along with all your party from India.

I hope that in your time with us, we have at least come close to repaying the warm hospitality with which you and the Indian people greeted me, my family, and our fellow Americans on my visit in March.

One of the most remarkable things to me about our relationship is its scope and its increasing interdependence. There are hundreds of American businesses, foundations, and univer-

sities with long commitments to India. When Americans call Microsoft for customer support today, they're as likely to be talking to someone in Bangalore or Hyderabad as to someone in Seattle.

There are more than one million Indians here in America now, and I think more than half of them are here tonight. [Laughter] And I might say, Prime Minister, the other half are disappointed that they're not here. [Laughter]

Indian-Americans now run more than 750 companies in Silicon Valley alone. In India, the best information available on maternal health

and agriculture can now be downloaded by a growing number of villages with Internet hook-ups. And Indian-Americans can now get on-line with people across the world who speak Telugu or Gujarati or Bengali.

Americans have fallen in love with Indian novels. I'm told that Prime Minister Vajpayee, when he's not writing Hindi poetry, actually likes to read John Grisham. [Laughter] You might be interested to note, Prime Minister, that he's a distant relative of mine. All the Grishams with money are distant relatives of mine. [Laughter]

And don't forget, whether we're in California or Calcutta, we all want to be a *crorepati*. Now, for the culturally challenged Americans among us, that's from India's version of "Who Wants To Be a Millionaire?" [Laughter]

Of course, our interdependence is about more than commerce and culture. We are also vulnerable to one another's problems, to the shock of economic turmoil, to the plague of infectious diseases, to the spread of deadly military technology, and as we have all too painfully seen, to the terrorists, drug traffickers, and criminals who take advantage of the openness of societies and borders.

The simple lesson of all this to me, Mr. Prime Minister, is that if we're already all in the same boat together, we had better find a way to steer together. We must overcome the fear some people in both our countries sometimes have, for

different historical reasons, that if we meet our friends halfway, somehow it will threaten our own independence or uniqueness.

That is why I am so gratified that, with your leadership and the efforts of so many people in this room, we have together built the strongest, most mature partnership India and America have ever known.

We have so very much more to learn from each other. In both our societies, you can find virtually every challenge humanity knows. And in both our societies, you can find virtually every solution to those challenges: confidence in democracy, tolerance for diversity, a willingness to embrace economic and social change.

So it is more than a slogan for Americans to say that India's success will be our success and that together India and America can change the world.

Ladies and gentlemen, I ask you now to join me in a toast to Prime Minister Vajpayee, to the Government and people of India, and the enduring partnership between our two great democracies.

NOTE: The President spoke at 8:03 p.m. in a pavilion at the White House. The transcript made available by the Office of the Press Secretary also included the remarks of Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee.

Statement on an Initiative for the Reintegration into Society of Ex-Offenders

September 18, 2000

Working together, we have made great strides in reducing crime across the country. The overall crime rate is at its lowest point in 25 years, and America is the safest it has been in a generation. But I believe we can make America even safer for our families. We must continue to confront emerging public safety challenges if we want to keep reducing crime in the 21st century.

One of the key challenges we must address is ex-offenders returning to their families and communities after their release from prison. While the Nation's prison population growth rate has slowed to its lowest level in two dec-

ades, more than 1.9 million individuals were incarcerated in State and Federal prisons and local jails in 1999. As a result, an unprecedented number of individuals will be released from prison in the coming years—nearly 600,000 in the next year alone. Moreover, this population poses a serious public safety risk. Studies show that nearly two-thirds of all released offenders will be arrested again within 3 years.

That is why I have proposed a new public safety initiative aimed at providing greater supervision for offenders reentering the community. My fiscal year 2001 budget includes a total