

Aug. 6 / Administration of William J. Clinton, 1998

Officers. The transcript released by the Office of the Press Secretary also included the remarks of James Brady. The Brady Handgun Violence Pre-

vention Act, title I of Public Law 103-159, was approved November 30, 1993.

## Statement on House Action on the Executive Order on Prohibiting Discrimination Based on Sexual Orientation in the Federal Civilian Work Force

August 6, 1998

I am gratified that the House has defeated an attempt to overturn my Executive order providing a uniform policy to prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation in the Federal civilian work force.

This vote reflected the values of our Nation. The American people believe in fairness, not discrimination, and the Hefley amendment would have legitimized Government-sponsored discrimination against its own citizens based on their sexual orientation.

It has always been the practice of this administration to prohibit employment discrimination in the Federal civilian work force based on sexual orientation. Most Federal agencies and departments have taken actions to memorialize

that policy. The Executive order does no more than make that policy uniform across the Federal Government. It does not authorize affirmative action or preferences or special rights for anyone.

The Executive order reflects this administration's firm commitment that the Federal Government make employment-related decisions in the civilian work force based on individual ability and not on sexual orientation.

NOTE: Executive Order 13087 of May 28 on equal employment opportunity in the Federal Government was published in the *Federal Register* at 63 FR 30097.

## Remarks to the White House Conference on Building Economic Self-Determination in Indian Communities

August 6, 1998

*The President.* Thank you. Thank you for the wonderful welcome. Thank you for the song. Thank you, Dominic, for giving us a picture of opportunity and hope for the future. I'm very glad that you're not only a good student but a good entrepreneur and a good promoter. Dominic was kind enough to give me one of his bracelets before I came out. [Laughter] So I'm his latest walking advertisement, and I'm glad to shill for him. [Laughter]

I would like to thank the members of the administration, the 15 agencies that have come together with the White House to sponsor this conference. I thank Secretary Daley, Secretary Riley, Secretary Glickman, Small Business Administrator Aida Alvarez, who are here. I'd like

to thank Deputy Assistant Secretary Michael Anderson, Kevin Gover, Mark Van Norman, Angela Hammond, and two young people on our staff, Julie Fernandes and Mary Smith, who work with Mickey Ibarra and Lynn Cutler; all of them worked very hard on this conference. I thank them.

I'm proud to be here with Chief Marge Anderson, Governor Walter Dasheno, Chief Joyce Dugan, Chairman Frank Ettawageshik, Chairman Roland Harris, Chairwoman Kathryn Harrison, President Ivan Makil, Governor Mary Thomas, Chairman Brian Wallace, President John Yellow Bird Steele. I thank all of you.

I have looked forward to this day for quite a long time. The Iroquois teach us that every

decision we make, every action we take, must be judged not only on the impact it makes today but on the impact it makes on the next seven generations. It is, therefore, fitting on the eve of a new century and a new millennium, that we come together today to determine what we must do to build a stronger future for our children, for our grandchildren, for future generations of Native Americans and, indeed, for all Americans.

For too many Americans, our understanding of Native Americans is frozen in time, in sepia-toned photography of legendary chieftains, in the ancient names of rivers, lakes, and mountain ranges, in the chapters of old history books. But as we have all seen at this conference, the more than 2 million members of tribal nations in the United States, from energetic, young entrepreneurs like Dominic to innovative leaders like the ones sitting here with me today, are a vital part of today's America and must be an even more vital part of tomorrow's America.

We are living in a time of great opportunity and hope, with our economy the strongest in a generation. Soon we will have the first balanced budget and surplus in 29 years, the lowest unemployment in 28 years, the highest homeownership in history. Social problems are finally beginning to bend to our efforts as a Nation: the crime rate, the lowest in 25 years; the welfare rolls, the smallest percentage of our people in 29 years. We are taking strong steps toward the America I dreamed of when I first ran for this office beginning in late 1991, an America where there is opportunity for all, responsibility from all, a community of all our people.

It is a time of unprecedented prosperity for some of our tribes as well. Gaming and a variety of innovative enterprises have enabled tribes to free their people from lives of poverty and dependence. The new wealth is sparking a cultural renaissance in parts of Indian country, as tribes build new community centers, museums, language schools, elder care centers.

But we also know the hard truth, that on far too many reservations across America such glowing statistics and reports mean very little indeed. While some tribes have found new success in our new economy, too many more remain caught in a cycle of poverty, unemployment, and disease. The facts are all too familiar. More than a third of all Native Americans still live in poverty. With unemployment at a 28-year low, still, on some reservations more than

70 percent of all adults do not have regular work. Diabetes in Indian country has reached epidemic proportions. Other preventable diseases and alcoholism continue to diminish the quality of life for hundreds of thousands.

At a time of such great prosperity, when we know we don't have a person to waste, this is an unacceptable condition. That's why we're here today, to find new ways to empower our people, especially our children, with the tools and the opportunity to build brighter futures for themselves and their families. Our Government alone cannot solve the problems of Indian country, nor can tribal governments be left to fend alone for themselves.

Everyone must do his or her part, tribal and Federal governments, along with the private sector. We all have to work together to empower our people with the tools they need to succeed. Most of all, every individual must take responsibility to seize the opportunities of this new time and to break the cycle of poverty.

As President, I have worked very hard to honor tribal sovereignty and to strengthen our government-to-government relationships. Long ago, many of your ancestors gave up land, water, and mineral rights in exchange for peace, security, health care, education from the Federal Government. It is a solemn pact. And while the United States Government did not live up to its side of the bargain in the past, we can and we must honor it today and into that new millennium.

Four years ago, when I became the first President since James Monroe in the 1820's to invite the leaders of every tribe to the White House, I issued a memorandum directing all Federal agencies to consult with the Indian tribes before making decisions on matters affecting your people. This spring I strengthened that directive so that decisions made by the Federal Government regarding Indian country are always made in cooperation with the tribes.

In the last 6 months, Jackie Johnson has joined the staff at HUD, Carrie Billy at Education, Rhonda Whiting at the Small Business Administration to help coordinate and promote Native American initiatives at these agencies. Raynell Morris will join the White House Office of Intergovernmental Affairs to help Mickey Ibarra and Lynn Cutler with Native American initiatives and outreach. I welcome all to my administration.

We also, as all of you know, have been working very hard for more than a year now on a race initiative designed to address the opportunity gaps for all Americans, and I thank those of you who have had a role in that. The most recent public event we did with the race initiative was an hour-long conversation on Jim Lehrer's Public Broadcasting System show. The Native American community was represented by a delightful, energetic young man named Sherman Alexie, whose new movie, "Smoke Signals," is receiving very good reviews around the country, and I had it brought to me at the White House and watched it. He's got a great talent, and I wish him well.

Today I want to talk about opportunity and about three tools of opportunity every American needs to thrive in the 21st century, how we can bring these tools to every person in very corner of Indian country, from Pine Ridge, South Dakota, to Window Rock, Arizona, to Cherokee, North Carolina.

[At this point, an audience member cheered.]

*The President.* That's okay. [Laughter]

The first and most important tool of opportunity, of course, is education. Throughout history, in the United States, education has been the key to a better life for generations of Americans. This will clearly be even more true in a global, knowledge-based economy that will reward children, but only children who have the skills to succeed and to keep learning for a lifetime.

Today fewer than two-thirds of our Native Americans over the age of 25 hold high school degrees. Fewer than 10 percent go on to college. If the trend continues, then the future for Native American children will become even bleaker. The opportunity gap between them and their peers will widen to a dangerous chasm. In a few moments, therefore, I will sign an Executive order directing our administration to work together with tribal and State governments to improve Native American achievement in math and reading, to raise high school and post-secondary graduation rates, to reduce the influence of poverty and substance abuse on student performance, to create safe drug-free schools, to expand the use of science and technology. I believe in this. I have done what I could to support Native American higher education and will continue to do so.

We have also tried to open the doors of college to all, with more Pell grants, tax credits which make the first 2 years of college now virtually free to all Americans, increased work-study slots, and AmeriCorps community service slots—other things we have tried to do to make college education more affordable. But we have to have more people who are able to take advantage of it.

The second tool is high-quality health care. Native American communities will never reach their full potential if people continue to be hobbled by disease, diseases often preventable, easily treatable. Native Americans are 3 times as likely to suffer from diabetes as white people. Therefore, they should get 3 times the benefit of the remarkable advances that we made in the last year in the diabetes prevention effort.

The American Diabetes Association said that what we did for diabetes not too long ago was the most important step forward since the discovery of insulin, in treatment, in prevention, in research. Every tribe should know what is in the law, what the benefits are, and should be in a position to take maximum advantage of it.

Last summer, as I said when I signed this legislation, I wanted to make sure that it helped all Americans with diabetes but especially those in our Native American communities. Earlier this year, I launched an initiative to help eliminate health disparities between racial and ethnic minority groups by the year 2010. I want you to make sure Congress fully funds this initiative as well.

Today I am pleased to announce that we're going to make an adjustment in our new children's health insurance program to ensure that Native American children get the health care they need. In the balanced budget bill which passed Congress last year, we had \$24 billion over a 5-year period to extend health insurance to 5 million more children. The action I'm taking today makes sure that the money is fairly allocated so that Native American children who are disproportionately without health insurance will now have their fair chance to be covered.

I also want you to know that I am committed to working with Congress and Secretary Shalala to elevate the Director of the Indian Health Service, Dr. Michael Trujillo, who is here today, to the rank of Assistant Secretary for Health and Human Services. By elevating the head of the Indian Health Service, we can ensure that

the health needs of our Native Americans get the full consideration they deserve when it comes to setting health policy in our country.

The third tool is economic opportunity, in the form of jobs, credit, small business. Very few grocery stores, gas stations, restaurants, and banks are doing business on reservations. As a result, money that could be used to build tribal economies and create jobs is spent too often off reservation.

I've issued a new directive to boost economic development in Indian country. The directive will do three things. It will ask the Department of Commerce to work with the Interior Department and with the tribal governments to study and develop a plan to meet the technology infrastructure needs of Indian country. No tribe will be able to attract new business if it doesn't have the phone, fax, Internet, and other technology capabilities essential to the 21st century.

The directive calls on several agencies to coordinate and strengthen our existing Native American economic development initiatives. And I might say in particular, I think microcredit institutions have a terrific potential to do even more than some of you have already done for the last several years in Indian country. The community development financial institutions that we have established in this country in the last few years have played an important role in providing credit to people who otherwise could not get it to start small businesses or to expand small businesses. I have asked the Congress for a significant expansion in the Community Development Financial Institutions Act. I believe in microlending.

The United States, last year, through our aid programs, financed 2 million small loans in developing nations around the world. Think how much good we could do if we could finance 2 million small loans in developing communities in the United States of America. We're also directing the Department of Treasury and HUD to work with tribal governments to create and improve one-stop mortgage shopping centers to help more Native Americans obtain loans more easily. And our first pilot will be in the Navajo nation.

Last, I am proud to announce the plan by the United States Department of Agriculture to help seven tribes to get a foothold in our high-tech economy. The Department will help these tribes establish small technology companies to

obtain Government contracts for software development and other services.

I have asked HUD Secretary Andrew Cuomo to visit several reservations to determine what more his department and our administration can do to boost economic development there. A few weeks ago he met with leaders of 60 Alaskan native villages; today he's visiting Pine Ridge and Lower Brule Indian reservations in South Dakota.

The next millennium must be a time of great progress and prosperity for our Native American communities, and we can make it so. Today, American Indian population is still very young. In the last census, 39 percent of all Native Americans were under the age of 20. I kind of wish I were one of them. *[Laughter]*

But this statistic is one that should bring us great hope, even as it poses your and my greatest challenge. We have a new large generation of young people who, if given the tools, the encouragement, and the opportunity, can work together to lead their families out of the stifling poverty and despair of the past.

So let us work to bring this generation and the next seven generations a world of abundant hope and opportunity, where all tribes have vanquished poverty and disease and all people have the tools to achieve their greatest potential.

I leave you with the words of the Lakota song we heard a few moments ago. "Beneath the President's flag, the people stand, that they may grow for generations to come." Let us stand together under America's flag to build that kind of future for generations to come.

Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:55 p.m. in the Independence Ballroom at the Grand Hyatt Hotel. In his remarks, he referred to Dominic Ortiz, owner, Pottawatomie Traders; Mark Van Norman, Deputy Director, and Angela Hammond, Conference Coordinator, Office of Tribal Justice, Department of Justice; Mary Smith, Associate Director for Policy Planning, Domestic Policy Council; Marge Anderson, chief, Mille Lacs Reservation; Walter Dasheno, governor, Pueblo Santa Clara; Joyce Dugan, chief, Eastern Band of Cherokee; Frank Ettawageshik, president, Little Traverse Bay Band of Odawa; Roland Harris, chairman, Mohegan Indian Tribe; Kathryn Harrison, chairperson, Confederated Tribes of the Grand Ronde; Ivan Makil, president, Salt River

Maricopa Indian Community; Mary Thomas, governor, Gila River Indian Community; Brian Wallace, chairman, Washoe Tribal Council; and John Yellow Bird Steele, president, Oglala Sioux. The President also referred to his memorandum of April 29, 1994 (59 FR 22951); Executive Order

13084 of May 14 (63 FR 27655); Executive Order 13096 of Aug. 6 (63 FR 42681); and the Medicare, Medicaid, and Children's Health Provisions, title IV of the Balanced Budget Act of 1997, Public Law 105-33, approved August 5, 1997.

## Memorandum on Economic Development in American Indian and Alaska Native Communities

August 6, 1998

*Memorandum for the Secretary of Commerce, the Secretary of Housing and Urban Development, the Secretary of the Interior, the Secretary of the Treasury, Administrator of the Small Business Administration*

*Subject:* Economic Development in American Indian and Alaska Native Communities

Across America, communities are recognizing that technology and information technologies are key to creating economic opportunities and increasing productivity. My Administration has made substantial gains in spurring the development of an advanced information infrastructure in order to bring the benefits of the Information Age to all Americans.

Looking to the future, we know that technology is critical to economic growth. We need to stimulate the growth of modern production facilities, small business incubators, capital access for start-up companies, and strategic planning to develop a vision for technologically competent communities. In particular, as telecommunications and information technologies continue to play a key role in providing new job and educational opportunities, we must ensure that all of our communities are able to participate fully in the new information economy.

Because of their often remote locations, American Indian and Alaska Native communities stand to benefit greatly from the Information Age, yet are in grave danger of being left behind. For example, a recent Department of Commerce study on Internet and computer usage in America shows that, although many more Americans now own computers, minority and low-income households are still far less likely than white and more affluent households to

have personal computers or access to the Internet. Even more disturbing, this study reveals that this "digital divide" between households of different races and income levels is growing. We must act to ensure that American Indian and Alaska Native communities gain the new tools they need to battle high levels of unemployment and low per-capita income.

The ability to own a home and have access to capital are also very important for economic development. Residents of Indian reservations encounter several unique issues when seeking to obtain a mortgage. Trust land status, tribal sovereignty, and requirements to gain clear title from the Bureau of Indian Affairs are examples of issues that lenders and borrowers must grapple with during the mortgage lending process. Thus, individuals seeking to acquire a homesite lease or a residential mortgage are often required to obtain approval from several Federal, tribal, State, and local agencies as well as private providers.

I am proud that the Department of Commerce, particularly through the Economic Development Administration, has a 30-year history of investing over \$730 million in economic development projects in American Indian and Alaska Native communities, working with its existing network of 65 tribal planning organizations. Additionally, the Commerce Department's National Telecommunications and Information Administration has funded demonstration projects that help show Native American communities how they can use technologies to improve the quality of life on reservations. And the Commerce Department's Minority Business Development Agency has funded eight Native American Business Development Centers that