

Remarks on Signing the Adoption Promotion Act of 2003

December 2, 2003

The President. Good to see you all. Thank you. Thanks. Please be seated. Hi, Mary. Thank you, Jim. Thanks for coming. Thank you all for coming. Gosh, we got a lot of great families with us today. We're really proud you all are here. I want to thank you for coming to the Roosevelt Room. I'm delighted you're here.

The adoption of a boy or a girl is a moment of joy for a family, and it's an act of great generosity. When parents share their homes and all they have with a child, the child they adopt and love as their own, all their lives are transformed forever. Isn't that right?

Diana Martin. Yes.

Christopher Martin. Yes. [Laughter]

The President. In every young life, there is a great need to belong. For the sake of our children, this Nation has a responsibility to encourage adoption of children at all ages, from infants to adolescents. The legislation I'm about to sign today sends a clear message: Our society is building a culture that values every life, and our Government strongly supports adoption.

I appreciate Deputy Secretary Claude Allen from the Department of Health and Human Services for joining us. I want to thank three Members of the Congress who have been instrumental in this legislation, and I appreciate their good, hard work. Senator Mary Landrieu of the great State of Louisiana is with us, Jim Oberstar of Minnesota, and Dave Camp of Michigan. Thank you all for coming. I appreciate you taking time to come to herald this important piece of legislation. I'm honored you all are here.

Bruce Willis is not with us, but I do want to thank him for being the national spokesperson on foster care and adoption. His message is helpful. It's important to help spread the word about the joys of adoption, and Bruce has been mighty helpful in doing just that.

I want to thank the parents of adoptive children who are with us today. The Martin family, the Hendrix family are with us, the Morris family and the Schwarzwald family. I'm honored you all are here. I want to thank

you for giving me a chance and the Members of Congress a chance, after the bill signing, to personally thank you for showing America the generosity of spirit that makes our country such a wonderful place. We're really glad you're here.

Thanks to the Congress and thanks to the groups that work on behalf of foster children and to moms and dads across America, these last few years have brought real progress in the cause of adoption. We're making progress here in America.

Six years ago, Congress provided new incentives to the States to promote foster care adoptions, and those incentives have worked. I suspect these Members of Congress worked on that important legislation. In just 5 years, from 1998 to 2002, the States placed more than 230,000 children in adoptive homes—about the same number that had been adopted in the previous 10 years. We're making some progress here in America.

In the same period, 33 States and the District of Columbia have at least doubled foster care adoptions. To further promote adoption, we increased the adoption tax credit in 2001 from \$5,000 to \$10,000. I want to thank the Members for working on that important piece of legislation. I hope it helps families.

In 2002, my administration created a new web site called AdoptUSKids.org, which has already helped to join nearly 2,000 children with adoptive parents. In other words, if you want to be a part of this movement of love in America, go to the web site, and the web site will help you understand how best to become an adoptive parent. Many more still await their chance and their home, and we are determined to help all children in America.

Today in America, more 126,000 foster children still need an adoptive family. And nearly half of these children are past the age of 9. Foster parents bring help and kindness at a crucial point in a child's life, yet foster care is by nature temporary. And the aim of the system and the desire of every child is a permanent home.

The bill I sign this morning will help bring that opportunity to many more children of all ages. The Adoption Promotion Act of 2003 will continue all the current incentives that have created new momentum for the

adoption process in our States. In addition, we will begin monitoring the adoptions of foster children age 9 and older and provide extra incentives for States to increase adoption of older children. This is a proven way to increase the placement of children from foster care to permanent homes, and each one of those homes will be richer for the addition of new family members.

Here's one example standing with me. It's what we call a good-size American family. [Laughter]

Mrs. Martin. Amen.

Mr. Martin. Yes.

The President. Diana and Chris Martin, good, solid Americans, good, loving mom and dad, are with us with seven children, four of them adopted at ages 6, 8, 10, and 11 years old.

You were 6.

Mrs. Martin. That's right.

The President. How old are you?

Terrance Martin. Seven.

The President. Okay, 7. [Laughter] I'll take it up with the fact-checker. [Laughter] Children who, at one time, were 6, 8, 10, and 11. [Laughter]

Chris says, "Besides having to add a whole new wing on the house"—maybe the tax credit helps—[laughter]—"it can be emotionally trying. They have a sense of abandonment, and they came with the fear of bonding to you because they've been let down, and they're afraid." He also said, "It's been rewarding because you can see the love in their eyes when they finally realize they have a place, they have a home, and that I am their dad."

Adoptive parents are giving much, and they are gaining much. The future of many thousands of children depend on the willingness of caring parents to make that personal commitment. It would take less than 1 percent of the American population to provide a home to every child awaiting adoption. Welcoming a child into your home and calling that child your son or daughter is a major decision. It is never to be made lightly. Yet so many parents who have made that decision count it among life's greatest and happiest turning points. And so I hope more Americans, after careful thought and prayer,

will make the decision to adopt a boy or girl of their own.

The act of Congress strongly affirms our national commitment to adoption and will encourage adoption in every part of our land. I want to thank you all for coming. We're honored to be with such loving parents and great Americans.

And now I'd like to ask the Members of Congress to join me as I sign this important piece of legislation, and maybe this great family would like to join us as well. Thanks for coming.

Here, Mary, get in here. All right, is everybody ready?

Audience members. Yes.

Child. Can I come in there too?

The President. You want to come in here? [Laughter]

Children. Yes.

The President. Sure, come on. All right. They won't ask her any questions. [Laughter] You ready?

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:25 a.m. in the Roosevelt Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to actor Bruce Willis, spokesman for Children in Foster Care. H.R. 3182, approved December 2, was assigned Public Law No. 108-145.

Remarks at a Bush-Cheney Luncheon in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

December 2, 2003

I appreciate you coming. Thanks for being here. It's great to be back in Knowledge City—Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Thanks for the warm welcome. I thought I'd start off by talking a little bit about Texas football. [Laughter] Then I ran into Jerome Bettis. [Laughter] I'm a man who listens to good advice. [Laughter] So I'd better talk about thanking you for coming. [Laughter]

I appreciate your strong support. I'm proud to be back in Pennsylvania. We're laying the foundation for what is going to be a victory in Pennsylvania in 2004 and a nationwide victory in 2004.

I'm getting ready. I'm loosening up. [Laughter] But politics will come in its own time. I've got a job to do. I've got a job to