

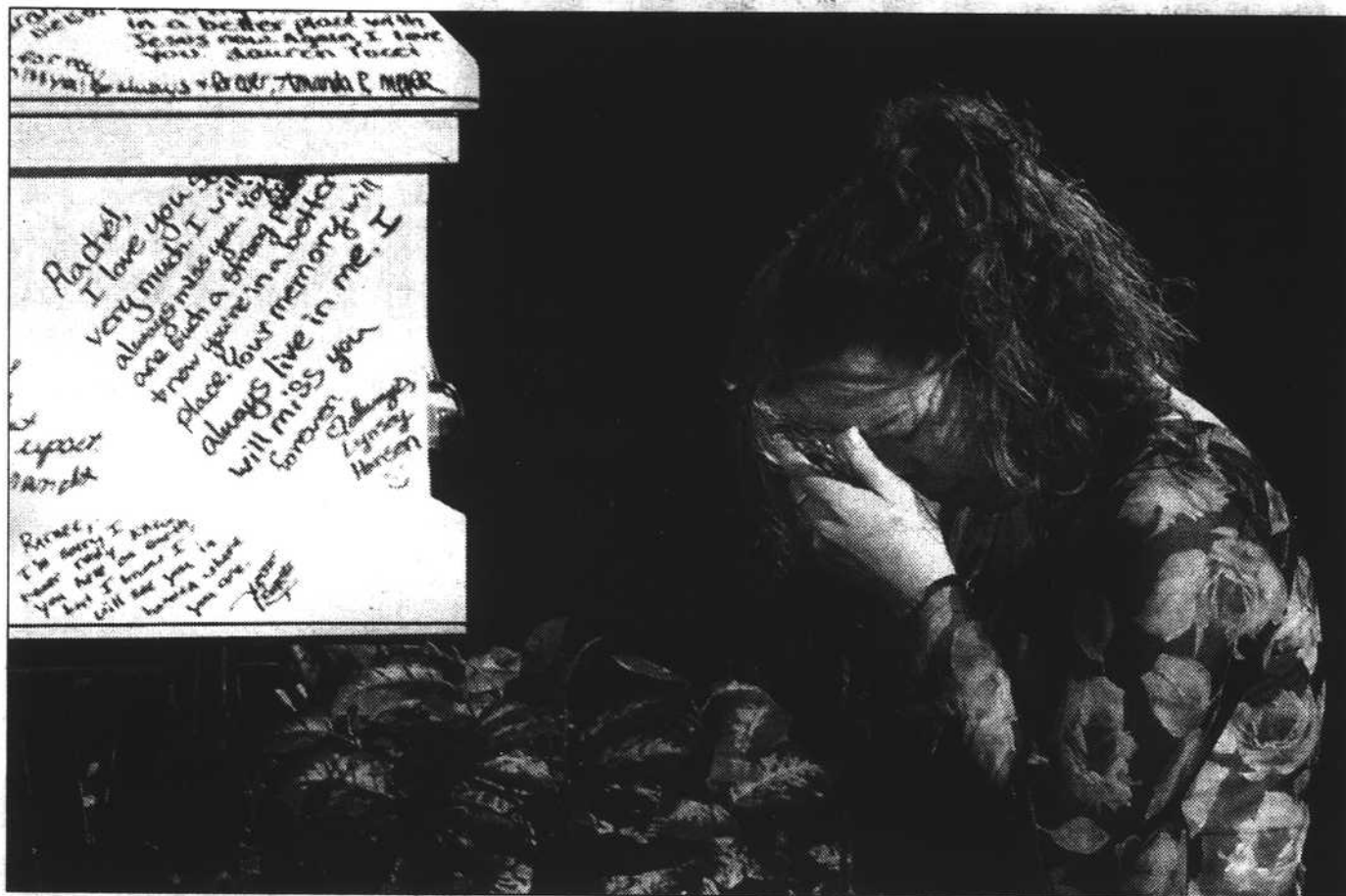
NEWS DIGEST

MONDAY, APRIL 26, 1999

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*"I would be misleading you if I said I understand this.
I don't know why human beings do evil."*

— Vice President Al Gore



CLASSMATES PRAY NEAR the coffin carrying the body of Rachel Scott during her funeral in Littleton, Colo., on Saturday. Scott's family and friends wrote farewell messages on the casket.

RICK WILKINS/NEWSMAKERS

World and Nation DATELINES

■ Washington

Congress gives up on 1999 Social Security

WASHINGTON (AP) — Congress will not act this year to revitalize the Social Security system because President Clinton has failed to lead the way, Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott said Sunday.

Lott, R-Miss., also predicted Congress will add as much as \$6 billion to Clinton's \$6.05 billion emergency request to finance the conflict in Yugoslavia. The money will come from Social Security's surplus.

House Republican leaders spread word last week among GOP members in the House that trying to overhaul Social Security before the 2000 election campaign could involve too much political risk without strong Democratic involvement.

"Once again, we need some leadership from the president," Lott said. "He backed away from real reform of Medicare. He's really proposed nothing on Social Security."

White House economic adviser Gene Sperling said Lott and other Republicans are the ones who have failed to present a plan for Social Security.

■ Thailand

Plaque commemorating American POWs replaced

KANCHANABURI, Thailand (AP) — A defaced plaque commemorating American POWs who died while building the so-called "Death Railway" during World War II was replaced Sunday during a ceremony for the war dead.

The new plaque, which is located next to the bridge over the River Kwai, replaces one that was unveiled in September 1997 and subsequently vandalized by souvenir-seekers who pried pieces off it.

U.S. Ambassador Richard Hecklinger unveiled the new plaque during a ceremony that followed a memorial service hosted by the New Zealand Embassy at Kanchanaburi War Cemetery, where the remains of almost 7,000 Allied POWs are buried.

■ China

Quiet demonstrators take streets of Chinese capital

BEIJING (AP) — In the largest demonstration in Beijing since Tiananmen Square a decade ago, more than 10,000 people silently protested outside China's leadership compound Sunday to demand the right to freely practice a form of meditation.

Instead of loud calls for political change, adherents to Falun Gong — a brand of meditation and exercise — quietly and peacefully occupied sidewalks along the streets outside Zhongnanhai, where China's top leaders work.

From early Sunday until their orderly, peaceful dispersal late in the evening, people of all ages stood or sat on the sidewalks and did not block traffic.

It was unclear what prompted the sudden demonstration.

Funerals held for Denver victims

■ Al Gore, Colin Powell and other U.S. administrators spoke at the Littleton, Colo., funerals, which 70,000 attended.

LITTLETON, Colo. (AP) — Thirteen white doves fluttered in the slate-gray sky Sunday, over the heads of 70,000 people who filled a parking lot to mourn the 12 students and one teacher massacred at Columbine High School.

Families, friends and strangers clung to each other during a 75-minute memorial service. They clutched flowers, blue and silver balloons and Bibles as they wept and wondered why it happened.

"All of us must change our lives to honor these children," Vice President Al Gore told the overflow crowd a few

blocks from where two teen-agers went on a rampage and then killed themselves Tuesday.

"More than ever, I realize every one of us is responsible for all of the children.

"No society can be perfect, but we know the way things should be," Gore said, his voice thundering like a preacher's.

As Gov. Bill Owens read the name of each of the 13 victims, a dove was released. The symbol of peace had a special meaning: Columbine, Colorado's state flower, derives from a Latin word meaning "like a dove."

"God grant them eternal peace," Owens said of the victims.

Mourners — twice as many as had been expected — stood in rapt attention as Gore described how children must be raised.

He never mentioned by name the two classmates, seniors Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold, who went on the

rampage and tried to blow up the high school apparently because they felt like rejected misfits.

Investigators have found a diary plotting the mayhem in precise detail for more than a year, as well as bomb-making materials and weapons in one of the pair's bedroom.

"I would be misleading you if I said I understand this. I don't know why human beings do evil," Gore said.

"We must have the courage not to look away from those who feel despised and rejected," he said. "If you are a parent, they need your attention. If you are a grandparent, they need your time."

Gore and retired Gen. Colin Powell led an array of dignitaries surrounding the makeshift stage in the movie theater parking lot.

The service was punctuated by songs performed by a variety of Christian entertainers, including Amy Grant, and student musicians.

At 1:30 p.m., brothers Jonathan and Stephen Cohen opened the service with a simple "Hi," and sang a song they wrote in tribute to the massacre's victims.

Jonathan Cohen, a junior at Columbine, was trapped in the choir room when gunfire erupted. Stephen, a senior, was in the cafeteria where many students were shot or hit by shrapnel from pipe bombs.

"Can you still hear raging guns ending dreams of precious ones?" they sang. "In God's sun, hope will come, his red stain will take our pain."

Roman Catholic Archbishop Charles Chaput of Denver opened the services with a prayer.

"Surely the past weeks is about as much suffering as any community can bear," Chaput said. "Love is stronger than death. I believe that. Perhaps beyond all this suffering, something good can be achieved."

Other dignitaries included U.S. Sen. Wayne Allard and most of the state's congressional delegation, and state officials, and the Rev. Franklin

Graham, son of evangelist Billy Graham.

"In the face of an unimaginable evil, this community has drawn closer," the governor said. "The community has found in itself a tremendous healing power."

Mourners of all ages began arriving four hours before the service. For some, it was the second or third vigil they had attended since Tuesday's rampage. Many were Columbine High School alumni. One student painted a heart over his face in Columbine blue.

Four F-16 fighter jets from the Colorado National Guard zoomed overhead, led by Columbine graduate Capt. Scott VanBek. A private plane trailed a banner overhead reading:

"Our love and prayers are with you."

The growing crowd was a swarm of dark winter parkas splotted with bright floral bouquets. Florists donated 25,000 bouquets of white and orange lilies, yellow sunflowers and daisies, pink carnations and roses of all hues.

"I wish I could do more," said Margaret Stark, 19, who graduated from high school in nearby Aurora last year. "You can only give so many flowers."

Deputies suspended their investigation and media briefings for the day, concentrating instead on directing traffic for the service.

Later Sunday, the families of victims Daniel Mauser and Kelly Fleming were holding a joint funeral for their children.

Slowly, life in Littleton is returning to normal, even as memorials and investigations continue.

Jefferson County school officials said Columbine's 1,800 students would return to classes Thursday at Chatfield High School, a few miles south. They said Columbine's graduation ceremony will be held May 22 at Fiddler's Green, a large suburban amphitheater normally used for rock concerts and dance performances.

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Questions? Comments?
Ask for the appropriate section editor at
(402) 472-2588
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General Manager: Dan Shattil
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World Wide Web: www.dailyneb.com

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