

July 23 / Administration of George Bush, 1992

My AMERICA 2000 legislation calls for four transforming ideas: (1) a new generation of break-the-mold New American Schools; (2) world class standards and a system of voluntary national exams that measure progress that schools make toward meeting those standards; (3) broad flexibility for teachers and principals to help children achieve greater learning; and (4) parental choice of schools so that middle- and low-income families have more of the same choices of schools for their children that are now the preserve of wealthier families. We cannot afford to accept business-as-usual here in Washington while the country demands change and improvement.

Yesterday, Senator Danforth and Congressman Gradison introduced my “Federal Grants for State and Local ‘GI Bills’ for Children.” It will give middle- and low-income families consumer power—dollars to

spend at any lawfully operating school of their choice—public, private, or religious. Just as the original GI Bill and Pell Grants transformed higher education, the “GI Bills” for Children will help transform elementary and secondary education.

I am pleased to sign the “Higher Education Amendments of 1992.” I look forward to signing the “Federal Grants for State and Local ‘GI Bills’ for Children” in the near future, and I am hopeful we can work together to produce an AMERICA 2000 bill just as we worked together on the bill I am signing today.

GEORGE BUSH

The White House,
July 23, 1992.

Note: S. 1150, approved July 23, was assigned Public Law No. 102–325.

Remarks on Signing the Higher Education Amendments of 1992 in Annandale, Virginia

July 23, 1992

Please be seated, and thank you very, very much. Dr. Ernst, thank you, sir, for that very nice explanation and that wonderful introduction. Let me say how pleased I am to be here on this campus, be here at this marvelous community college about which I’ve heard so many good things.

I’m delighted to be with Lamar Alexander. I know the Members of Congress here have met him and worked with him, but some of the students here and some of the faculty may not have. In my view, non-partisan view, a purely objective view, Lamar Alexander is really doing a superb job for the Nation’s education, and I’m delighted he’s here.

I want to salute the Members of Congress that came all the way over. Lamar was telling me and our own people in the White House have told me that this was truly a bipartisan effort. The leaders out here today reflect that, and they have stood by education for a long, long time. So I welcome them, salute them, particularly the members

of the Senate Labor and Human Resources Committee, the House Committee, the House Education and Labor Committee.

I also want to salute the members of the NOVA community. It’s a pleasure, as I say, to be here in Virginia, the cradle of American education, and then to sign into law this higher education bill, the Higher Education Amendments of 1992, and help thereby move our schools into the 21st century.

After this is over, we’re going to pass these out to everybody, and then tonight we will have a quiz—[laughter]—on the ingredients therein. But I told Dr. Ernst that I’m impressed with NOVA’s mission, curriculum, and most especially your choice of last year’s commencement speaker—[laughter]—a silver-haired philosopher named Barbara Bush, who still feels honored and delighted.

But there are a couple of things I don’t like to do. You know one, eating broccoli.

But the other is speaking where Barbara has already spoken. It's sort of like being asked to play guitar after Garth Brooks. [Laughter] So I want to break my rule one time because this occasion is important and the hospitality that she received was so memorable.

We do gather at a momentous time in our country's history. Over the past 4 years, we've seen changes of almost Biblical proportions in the world. I think we rejoice that the cold war is over. What does that mean for you and your families? Well, I think when children go to bed at night, they'll be safer from the specter of nuclear war and safer than they were a decade ago, safer than they were a year ago, and safer, I think, than just a month or so ago when we had that rather historic agreement with Boris Yeltsin. So I think that's good news. It's good news for the young people that are with us today. It's good news for our country. I happen to feel it's good news for the whole world.

But this new world does pose enormous challenges; big opportunities, though. From Poland to Paraguay, other nations are trying to copy our system of free enterprise. And here's the question: How do we win when more of the world's nations are playing our game? The opportunity is huge. The economists say when we win, we will share in a maximized proportion of ever-increasing global prosperity. I had that translated into English, and that means good, steady jobs for you and your families. So then you've got to ask, how do you win those jobs? I believe we cannot renew America without renewing our schools.

Consider a couple of facts. In 1980, a man with a college education made on an average \$11,000 more per year than a man with only a high school education. By 1990, that gap had increased to more than \$16,000, and the exact same pattern happened with women's income. Those facts shout a simple truth: Education makes the difference. Every American deserves the chance to get on the ladder of opportunity and climb up.

I want to tell you about a woman I admire. She's not someone you'll read about in the paper, won't see her on television. She is someone who might be your neighbor or the mother of one of your kids'

friends. She has two disabled children and a life that's had many good breaks and then a couple of bad ones. But she also has a dream that she won't let go: She wants to be a nurse. Now she will get the financial help that she needs to fulfill that dream. Some day this courageous lady's children will sit in the audience and watch Mom receive her nursing degree. This woman who's done so much for so many will now be able to serve even more people. The president of Phi Theta Kappa, Frances McIntire. When I heard her story and saw her determination, I was mighty proud, proud of Frances, proud that we're giving thousands of men and women like her a better chance to get the education they desire and deserve.

This act that I'm signing today gives a hand up to lower income students who need help the most. But it also reaches out into the middle-income families, the ones who skipped a vacation and drove the old clunker so that their kids could go to college. Too often, the funding cracks have been so big that these solid, decent families have slipped on through, and their children's dreams have been in danger of slipping away. Well, no longer. It's a matter of fairness. It's a matter of our future.

This act also reflects an important new phenomenon. We used to think of education like measles vaccines, like first dates, or like learning to drive, something we only did when we were young. Today, education never ends. Although our temples may be graying and our jogging routes a little shorter, we always have to learn. And this act recognizes that simple fact, just as this great community college has recognized that fact, making Federal aid available for part-time students who are taking a class or two toward their degree while still holding down a job.

How much richer our Nation's future will be. Each year, millions of families will be able to get more Federal assistance and then pass on to their kids the legacy of education. But this higher education act does more than open up Federal funding to middle-income and to part-time students. It also sets tough standards to rid Federal aid programs of fraud and abuse both by sham

schools and by students who default on their loans. In addition, some student aid will now be contingent on academic performance. The act includes parts of what we call proudly our America 2000 program, including academies for teachers and school leaders and something called alternative certification.

Now, that's a program near and dear to my heart, so let me try to explain it. When I lived out in Odessa, Texas, in 1948, I'd just graduated from college, and I went out there and had a little extra time on my hands. I tried to volunteer to teach night courses. My college economics degree was not good enough because I didn't have the required courses, mandatory courses then, in education, and that bothered me. Then I learned that without a teaching degree, even Albert Einstein couldn't teach high school science. Now, I might understand keeping me out of there. I might get embarrassed around the computer or something. But Albert Einstein? Come on.

In my first months in office, I proposed legislation to allow the "Einsteins" to teach without traditional certification. After 3 years and 3 tries, now the Congress has agreed to this. This helps, in my view, open up huge talent pools to bring into our classrooms. Now we can find a way, for example, to encourage more of our men and women who are leaving the armed services to put their skills to work leading future generations in the classroom.

By the way, I'm pleased to note that this past spring I did receive my alternative teaching certificate from the State of Texas. The woman who sent me my certificate, Delia Stafford, is with us today. She's a champion of change, willing to try something different because our children deserve nothing less. I think it's good to give her a round of applause for her innovative approach.

Our system of higher education is indeed the best in the entire world because it's rooted in the American ideals that make it excellent, accessible, and accountable. America 2000 is the revolution that believes those ideals must be transferred to our elementary and secondary schools. Just yesterday Senator Danforth and Senator Gradison introduced my State and local "GI bill" for

children which will transform precollege education by giving middle- and low-income families \$1,000 scholarships to send their kids to their choice of schools. I don't know about you, but that gives me 1,000 reasons to cheer. Higher education thrives on competition, thrives on choice. We must bring those incentives to elementary and secondary schools. It's time we let parents, not the Government, choose their kids' schools, public, private, or religious.

I mentioned earlier how I believe that education is now a lifelong endeavor. So I feel it is only appropriate to conclude with a quote I remember from my own school days, a quote from Longfellow, something about great heights not being achieved by "sudden flight" but by "toiling upward in the night." Longfellow's advice could apply to the task of renewing our schools. It won't be done with headlines; it won't be done with slogans, or even money alone. What it takes is innovation, courage, a willingness in every community to roll up our sleeves and reform this vital American institution.

We are toiling upward in the night, and today we climb a little bit higher. And when we've reached our plateau, we will look out upon a new generation of American schools and a stronger foundation for our Nation.

So now, on behalf of Frances McIntire and the legions of students at NOVA and across the country who will benefit, it is with great pride and great gratitude to the Congress, particularly the Members here today, that I sign into law the Higher Education Amendments of 1992. As I sign I would like to ask Secretary Alexander, Dr. Ernst, and Delia Stafford to come forward, and Frances, you too. Then I'd love to invite the Members of Congress to come up and say hello and turn around to demonstrate at least the nonpartisan or the bipartisan spirit of this occasion.

Again, my thanks to you ladies and gentlemen for being with us today.

Note: The President spoke at 1:48 p.m. at Northern Virginia Community College. In his remarks, he referred to Richard J. Ernst, president of the college; Senator John C. Danforth of Missouri; and Representative Willis D. Gradison, Jr., of Ohio.