

Oct. 7 / Administration of William J. Clinton, 1994

Remarks at the Blue Ribbon Schools Ceremony October 7, 1994

Thank you very much for that wonderful welcome, increasingly rare around here these days. I just wanted to hear the Vice President say those lines from "A Man For All Seasons." [Laughter] They're wonderful, aren't they?

Let me say, as you know, we're about to wind up this session of Congress today, tomorrow—sometime in our lifetime, it will end—and that's why I couldn't be here earlier today. But I did want to come by and say a heartfelt congratulations to all of you.

The Vice President and the Secretary of Education have already talked about what we're trying to do here, but I would like to put in a couple of sentences what I think is very important. It's hardly ever discussed in the common discussion, at least, of what goes on in Washington. But we have been quietly, but effectively, trying to create a dramatic change in the relationship of the National Government to the schools of this country and to the teachers and to what is going on in education. It is a change rooted in the experiences that Secretary Riley and Deputy Secretary Kunin and I had as Governors and the hours and hours and hours that we all spent in public schools, listening to teachers, watching people work in the schools, listening to parents.

We have made the Federal Government both more active in education and, yet, less meddlesome in trying to support what you are trying to do. We have tried to put the National Government on record in favor of globally competitive national standards of excellence in education but also in favor of getting out of the way and letting you achieve those standards of excellence in education. And this is a substantial departure. The elementary and secondary education act that just passed the Congress, overcoming the

perennial filibuster problem, does just that. It provides targeted funding, more directed toward the areas of real need, but also provides for an enormous amount of flexibility for the schools so that every school can be a blue ribbon school. That, in the end, ought to be our objective in America.

So we will keep trying to do our job here. It will make a real difference that no child should ever walk away from going to college because of the cost, because under this new student loan program, you can have lower interest rates and longer repayment terms, and it can be geared to your salary so that if you want to be a schoolteacher or a police officer, something where you're not going to be rich, you can still afford to pay back that student loan. That will make a difference. It will make a difference in hundreds of thousands of more kids in Head Start; that by 1996, every child in this country under the age of 2 will be immunized; that'll make it easier for the kindergarten and the first grade teachers to do their job. Those things will make a difference.

But in the end, we know what will make the difference is you, the teachers, the parents, the principals, the people at the grassroots level. All the magic of education is still in the human interplay that is a long way from Washington, DC. So we'll keep trying to do our job, but a big part of our job is making sure that you have, to use the new Washington buzzword, the empowerment necessary to do your job. That is our commitment to you; we will keep it. And I am glad to see your smiling faces here today.

Bless you all, and thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:15 p.m. on the South Lawn at the White House.

The President's News Conference October 7, 1994

The President. Good afternoon. Ladies and gentlemen, 20 months ago I came here to make a start and to make America work for ordinary

citizens again, to take on some tough issues too long ignored and to get our economic house in order. There have been some tough fights