

Remarks to the National Education Association July 3, 1996

Well, thank you for that wonderful welcome. And thank you for your good spirit and your enthusiasm. And I want you to keep it all the way to November.

Ladies and gentlemen, I'd like to begin by thanking Keith Geiger for 7 magnificent years of leadership for the teachers of America. He has been a great leader, a true champion for educational reform. And I was more moved than I can say by the kind words he spoke before I came out.

I'm sorry that we're a little late, but I understand that our security precautions delayed your voting. *[Laughter]* I'm sorry for that, but I do want to congratulate Bob Chase and all of you who will be leading the NEA.

I also want to thank our Secretary of Education, Dick Riley, who came over here with me. I believe he is the best Secretary of Education we ever had, and I thank him for that. I also want to thank Dick Riley for having what at the time was a novel idea. He thought he ought to have an actual teacher working with him in the Secretary's office. And she's here today. I want to thank Terry Dozier for leaving the classroom and coming to work with Secretary Riley.

I'd like to thank the NEA for sending Sharon Robinson, our Assistant Secretary for Educational Research and Improvement, to our administration. And I also want to thank you for Debra DeLee, who's done a great job managing our convention in Chicago and getting ready for this great new campaign.

Four years ago I had the pleasure of addressing this assembly. And when I looked at the film that you just showed back stage, I saw that address and I said, "Gosh, I had a lot less gray hair then." *[Laughter]* Well, I earned that gray hair. *[Laughter]* But if it advanced the cause of education and ensured a better future for the children of our country, every gray hair was worth it. And I thank you for staying with us in these fights.

As teachers, administrators, custodial workers, the members of the NEA are out there every day working with and for our children. I thank you for that. And today I want to talk to you about where we're going from here.

Four years ago, when you endorsed my candidacy, I told you that I was running because I wanted to see a vision I had of our country in the 21st century fulfilled. I wanted our Nation to go into the next century with the American dream genuinely alive for every American without regard to race or gender or religion or region or the station that he or she starts out in life. I wanted to see our country come together instead of be driven apart by our differences. I was tired of seeing the American people cut up into little pieces at election time for short-term political gain, instead of reveling in our diversity, respecting our differences, and joining hands around shared values. And I wanted to restore the sense of community in America. And I, finally, felt very strongly that our country, at the end of the cold war and the dawn of this new global information age, had to continue to be the world's strongest force for peace and freedom and prosperity.

I had a simple strategy. I wanted to renew the basic bargain in America of opportunity for all, responsibility from all, and a commitment to the community of our country, the idea that we can do more together than we can apart.

Well, we've been working on that for 3½ years. I guess it's about time for a report card before we make a decision on contract renewal. I want to talk about three things here: the record, the alternative, and the future.

When I became President, our economy was stagnant. We had the slowest job growth since the Depression. We had a spiraling deficit. I said, please enact this economic plan, to Congress. We'll cut the deficit in half and produce 8 million jobs in 4 years. Well, you know what the Republicans did. They all voted against it and said it would bring on a recession. Well, they were wrong, and we were right. In 3½ years, we now know the deficit will be cut by more than 50 percent in 4 years. And instead of 8 million new jobs, our economy has produced 9.7 million new jobs in 3½ years.

I asked the Congress to pass a crime bill with 100,000 new police officers, a ban on assault weapons, more funds for punishment and prisons, but more funds for prevention, too, to allow children to do something constructive after

school and on the weekends, and to help them pay for summer jobs in communities that couldn't afford it.

The leadership of the other party fought us every step of the way on that and on the Brady bill. They told a lot of people out in the rural areas of our country who love to hunt that their weapons would be in danger if our dangerous proposals passed, and that nothing would be done to lower the crime rate. Well, we had a couple of years to see now. Do you know that we had two deer seasons in my home State and two duck seasons, and every single hunter is still shooting with the same rifle they had before the Brady bill and the assault weapons ban passed? They did not tell them the truth. But there are some people who didn't get guns: 60,000 felons, fugitives, and stalkers did not get guns under the Brady bill. They were wrong, and we were right about that.

In 1996 the crime rate will go down for the 4th year in a row in America because we're putting more police officers on the street, working with communities, helping kids, giving people something to say yes to, preventing crime as well as catching criminals. They were wrong about that, too. We need to keep on going till we put all those police officers on the street.

When it came to welfare reform, I said we ought to move people from welfare to work, but we should be good to the children and tough on the work requirements, not easy on work and tough on the kids. That's the fight I had with the majority in Congress today, and why I vetoed what they call welfare reform. They said we couldn't do it. But we have now given over 60—60— permissions for experiments to over 40 States. Three-quarters of the people in this country on welfare are already under welfare reform experiments. And you know what? Child support enforcement has gone up 40 percent since I have been in office, and there are 1.3 million fewer people on welfare today than there were the day I took the oath of office.

When it came to families and communities, it seemed to me what we had to do was to make it possible for more people to succeed at home and at work. Most parents are working people today, and most people who work have to work to support their children. We ought to be struggling to make it possible for people to succeed at home and at work. So we cut incomes taxes for 15 million hard-pressed work-

ing families, so that no one who works full time and has a child in the home would be in poverty. We passed the family and medical leave law so people could get a little time off when a baby was born or a family member was sick.

And guess what? Poverty began to go down for the first time in many years. And for the first time in a decade average wages are going up. So I believe we're moving this country in the right direction.

Perhaps most important, as the film and as your speakers have said, thanks to the Congress that was in place in 1993 and 1994, we expanded Head Start dramatically, passed the Goals 2000 program, reformed chapter 1, passed the school-to-work program, expanded Pell grants, passed the direct college loan program which cut the cost and improved the repayment terms so that no person should ever fail to go to college because they were worried about the burden of the loans they would owe afterwards. These things have made a real difference. And we passed a national service program that has allowed 45,000 young people to earn some money for college by serving their communities all across the United States.

That's the first element of the contract evaluation. We had a strategy; it was implemented; the results were good.

The second thing I want to say is that when you're fixing to hire somebody, there's always the question of, well, if you don't hire this person, who will you hire? And in this case, the happy choice for America's educators, for America's parents, and for all American citizens is you don't have to guess in this election. There is no guesswork.

You know what both parties will do. You know what both candidates will do. They've already put their program in. It'd be the law today, except I vetoed it. If you want it, you can get it. Give them the White House and the Congress; it will be the law of the land in 6 months.

You think about that. You just think about that. *[Laughter]* If you want, for example, to back away from our commitment to 100,000 police, you want to repeal the assault weapons ban, you want to undermine protection for the environment and safety in the workplace, and make it easier for corporations to raid their employees' pension funds—if those are the things that you want, you can have it. Just give them the Congress and the White House, and they'll

give it to you. They already tried to do it once. We stopped them, and we will stop them again.

If you believe we ought to drastically cut or eliminate all these education reforms, even the Eisenhower Professional Development Program, which you have continued to support in your own way, and I congratulate you on your commitment to that, well, you can get that. Give them the White House and the Congress, and they'll give it to you. They tried once, and we stopped them. If you want, in other words, people who believe it was a mistake to pass the family and medical leave law, a mistake to pass the Brady bill, a mistake to pass the crime bill, a mistake to pass the economic program, you can have it.

But that is the choice. And let's not be muddle-headed about this. We now have the evidence. The American people can simply choose. One position is the one that I embrace and that virtually all the members of our party embrace who are running for the Congress. And that is that the American people should have opportunity, not guarantees but opportunity, to make the most of their own lives if they're willing to be responsible for it. That is the clear understanding that we become a greater country when we work together. The other side says, Government is always the problem, and you're better off if you're on your own. I think that we're right, and they're wrong. But the American people are being given the chance to decide, and you have to help them make that decision.

Finally, there is the third element of the contract decision and maybe the most important, and that is, so what if you did a good job, that's what we hired you for. *[Laughter]* What are you going to do tomorrow and next year and for the next 4 years? And that's very important, because while things are better now than they were 4 years ago, this country still has significant challenges. The crime rate is down, but juvenile crime is up. The economy is up, but not every American who works is up. The country is closer to peace than it was, but as we saw again last week, we still face the problems of terrorism, organized crime, the proliferation of dangerous weapons. And we have to work together with our friends around the world to continue to push for peace and freedom.

So what about the next 4 years? Well, there's plenty to do, folks. In the area of the economy, unless we can get this Congress to act, we've

got to raise the minimum wage. We can't let it fall to a 40-year low. It's not right.

Yesterday I was in Chicago, and I had an occasion to go to Grant Park to that great Taste of Chicago festival they have every year. I hated this; I had to go from food booth to food booth to food booth. *[Laughter]* And it was a burden, but someone had to do it. *[Laughter]* But anyway, I was at one of these booths talking to the folks who work there, and this young woman looked at me and she said, "You know, I really appreciate the fact that you're trying to raise the minimum wage. And I hear these people who are opposed to it say everybody in the minimum wage is some middle class kid living at home with his parents." And she said, "Let me tell you something. I'm a 28-year-old single mother with two children, I work for the minimum wage, and I go to college at night. And it's not true, and I need a raise." And that's the truth. And we need to do it.

We need to pass the Kennedy-Kassebaum bill so that people don't lose their health insurance when they change jobs or someone in their family has been sick. We need to pass a real welfare reform bill that is tough on work but good to kids, that lifts up families and enables people to succeed at home and at work. That's what we want for everybody.

We need to finish the job of putting 100,000 police on our streets, because we're not through. The crime rate is still too high, and it will be too high until you go home at night, turn on the television, and you're genuinely surprised if the lead story on your evening news is the latest terrible crime. I want you to be surprised about it again, and we can bring that kind of safety back to America if we work at it.

We need to pass "family leave II" and give working people the opportunity to have more flexible work hours and let people take a little time off not just when a baby's born or when there's a family emergency but also to take their parents or their kids to regular doctor's appointment and to go to parent-teacher conferences at the school.

And in education we have a lot to do together. I am committed to see every classroom and library in every school in this country hooked up to the Internet by the year 2000, and we're going to keep doing it.

I want to thank our teachers who are working—100,000 of them—with the support of the NEA and other groups, to teach another 500,000

teachers in what they call the 21st Century Teachers Effort, to be the kind of teachers who can make maximum use of the new technology going into the classrooms. We need to do that.

We need to make college education even more available. That's why I proposed a \$10,000 tax deduction per year for the cost of college tuition. That's the right kind of tax cut, and it would help a lot of teachers who are parents.

But I think we should do even more. I believe if you look at all the evidence, it is clear that it is simply not enough to have a high school education if you want to get a good job with a growing income. And I believe the time has come to make 2 years of education after high school just as universal as a high school education is.

I believe the way to do that is to give the American people a tax credit, every single person a tax credit of \$1,500 a year for the cost of going to your local community college and make it refundable so that everybody can afford to go. Give it to everybody the first year; give it to everybody that keeps a B average the second year; let everybody at least have access to a diploma from a community college, and we will raise incomes in this country and bring this country together. It is the right thing to do. [Applause] Thank you.

I believe that we should do even more for people who are in the work force. I proposed, with the help of the Secretary of Labor and the Secretary of Education, that we take 70 big Federal job training programs and consolidate them and put them into a block of money and give people who are unemployed or underemployed a certificate that basically says, you can take this to your local community college or to any training facility you want for up to 2 years. If you lose your job, you can immediately begin to get retraining at the place of your choice in your community that will help you the most to start your life again.

I also think we need to do more to help you in your work. I think we should. I want you to understand that if the budget process this year works out like it did last year—I hope it won't; I'm working hard with the Congress—but I am not going to tolerate an assault on the fundamental structure of educational opportunity and educational excellence in this country. It is wrong. It is wrong.

We have to do more to help you to make schools safe and going to and from school safe.

We have worked hard, but still no teacher should ever fear when he or she is in the classroom or going to and from school. No student should be so afraid that they cannot learn. And we work very hard to preserve funding for the safe and drug-free schools program, to enforce our zero tolerance for guns in the schools policy. And we will continue to work to help schools deal with the problems that they face every day, that teachers face every day, and to try to find opportunities to bring people together.

Last year I had the opportunity to work with the Secretary of Education and the Justice Department on a set of guidelines to schools to deal with the complex questions that often arise when children seek to practice or at least express their religious convictions. We didn't want to turn our schools into religion-free zones, and we didn't want to violate the first amendment. Because of the work that Secretary Riley and the Attorney General did, we have heard from schools all over America saying, this is not an issue anymore; we have resolved this; we thank you very much. And I hope it has helped you in your school.

We said to people in California and around the country who wanted to try experimenting with school uniforms, "Well, they did it in Long Beach, and you can do it, too, if you want to do it." And I went to Long Beach, California, and I heard young people tell me amazing stories about this. A young man stood up and said, "We picked our uniforms in our school. We picked green and white because the gang colors are red and blue. And for the first time, all our kids can now walk to and from school, and they're not scared anymore." He said, "It's the first time in 2 years I can walk to school without having to look over my shoulder."

I had another young woman say that even the wealthiest kids in the school district were better off after they adopted their policy because now, people judged themselves based on what was on the inside instead of what was on the outside. I thought it was pretty perceptive. It may or may not be the right thing to do. But I sure think you ought to have the right to do it.

We have worked hard with other communities to develop community curfews. One of our suburban communities here in the Washington area adopted one just last week. I was in New Orleans talking about the community curfew there. There was a huge drop—a huge drop—in juve-

nile crime in the city of New Orleans after they adopted their curfews. Kids don't need to be out on the street at all hours of the night, they need to be home or in a secure place.

And by the way, the thing I really liked about what they did in New Orleans is that they didn't punish people who were on the streets. They took them to a community curfew center, and they started working with them, and they found out what the children needed and what they were facing, so that it would not only have the disciplinary effect of getting kids off the street, it has the positive effect of giving at least them a chance to meet with people who could help them to put their lives in good order and take it in the right direction.

Now, I want to propose today one other thing that I think is quite important, that I have cared a lot about for a long time. One of the most important things we can do to promote learning and to keep our children safe is the most obvious, old-fashioned thing that I dealt with when I was in school myself, back in the dark ages—[laughter]—and that is to insist that children be in school and not on the streets.

Truancy is a warning signal that a child is in trouble and is often a gateway to crime. The difference between success and failure in life for our children is whether they're learning on the streets or in the school where they belong. The street is not an acceptable alternative to the classroom.

When I was Governor we actually passed a bill which made it possible for local communities to fine parents if they refused to show up at parent-teacher conferences or permitted their children to be chronically absent. I know the NEA has called for Federal action to crack down on truancy. So I want to tell you about two things that we're doing in response to the call that you issued. First, earlier today I directed the Department of Education to send this manual—I don't know if you can see it; it says, "Manual to Combat Truancy"—to every school district in America. It shows that when parents are held accountable and when communities come together, you can do something about this problem.

In Milwaukee, for example, attendance is taken at every period in all high schools. Police pick up truants and take them to counseling, again, not just negative but positive. Parents are called at home if their child did not attend school. Daytime burglaries: down by one-third.

In Atlantic County, New Jersey—[applause]. I'd say that's the highest density of teachers per capita in America based on the cheers there. Listen to this. In Atlantic County, New Jersey, families of truants receive intensive counseling, and the vast majority of the students wind up going back to school.

In New Haven, middle school truants go before a panel of high school students. This is very interesting. In New Haven, middle school students go before a panel of high school students and have to sign responsibility contracts.

So these are good things to do. The Federal Government should not decide what to do; we should help you determine what you're going to do. We should support you when you do it. We should make sure it's legally defensible. And we should encourage every community to do the same thing to put our children back in school.

Yesterday Secretary Riley announced that he would give a total of \$10 million to 25 school districts to help them keep their children in school. This is a beginning. But I want you to know because of what you and others in education have said to me all across the country, this will become a national priority, and we will keep at it with you until we turn this issue around. And I thank you for that.

Now, those are the three points I want to make. One, when you helped me and Al Gore and indeed our entire administration family—and by the way, I wish the First Lady were here, but she's in Central Europe today, representing the cause of freedom, and I thank you for that. When you helped us, we said, we have a vision for what we want our country to look like in this extraordinary era of possibility. We have a strategy to achieve that vision. Well, 3½ years later, we did what we said we'd do, or we got caught trying. [Laughter] The results have been positive. Second, there's a clear difference here. And third, we've got good ideas for the future, and a lot of work still to do.

Now, what I want you to think about as I leave—we've had a great time today, and I loved all the cheering and the shouting, and it made chills run up and down my spine and kind of got me in the humor for the next 3 or 4 months to do what we have to do. And I thank you for that.

But this is what we used to call back home, preaching to the saved. [Laughter] And there's

something to be said for that, but it's not enough. And I want you to take just one moment to be serious before I go. I want you to just ask yourself, now or when you leave, to take a few moments to think about everything you can think about about your country today, all the good and the things that you think are not so good, and then say, "What would I like America to look like when my children or my grandchildren are my age? What do I want America to be like 20, 30, 40, 50 years from now?"

We are going to walk across a bridge into the next century beginning with this election. And it's not like 1992 where you can say credibly, this is change against the status quo. That's not so. There is no status quo option. These are two very different visions of how we should walk into the 21st century and what kind of bridge we should build to go there. And the decisions we make will profoundly affect what America looks like when your children and your grandchildren are your age.

Now, in the end, that matters more than all the petty concerns we might have. It matters more than even the immediate and serious personal concerns we might have. Because in the end, for the same reason you decided to commit your careers to education, our fundamental obligation is to maintain and strengthen this country. And we have never been able to do it except by broadening opportunity and by bringing more and more people together, by breaking down the barriers of bigotry and prejudice and fear and bringing this country together in this vast melting pot of freedom that is the most remark-

able experiment in self-government in all of human history. We are being given an historic responsibility now, you and I, to pick which bridge we're going to walk into the 21st century. And that will determine what this country will be like when our children and grandchildren reach our age.

So, what I want to ask you to do is to go beyond the preaching to the saved. I want to ask you to walk out this hall determined, with all your other responsibilities and all your other pressures and all the challenges of the classroom and the schoolhouse, to spend whatever time you can between now and November talking to your family, your friends, people who don't work with you every day, people who don't have the same insight you may have into what goes on here, about these big questions.

Because I believe with all my heart, if the American people are given back this choice, if they get to look at the big things, not the divisive, distractive, destructive, puny elements that too often dominate our politics, the American people will do what they've been doing for over 200 years; they will make the right decision. And your children and your grandchildren will be the richer for it.

Thank you, and God bless you all.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:22 p.m. at the Washington Convention Center. In his remarks, he referred to Keith Geiger, outgoing president, and Bob Chase, incoming president, National Education Association; and Terry Dozier, former Teacher of the Year and Special Adviser to the Secretary of Education.

Statement on the Russian Presidential Election

July 3, 1996

As we wait to receive the final results of the Russian elections, and as our Nation prepares to celebrate our own freedom and independence, I want to recognize the historic significance of what we have seen in Russia today.

From Vladivostok to Kaliningrad, tens of millions of Russians returned to the polls to complete the process of selecting their President. The Russian people can take real pride in this

extraordinary achievement. After centuries of imperial rule and decades of Communist oppression, they have asserted their right to have a voice in the decisions that affect their lives. This election process shows just how far Russia's political reform has come over the last 5 years.