

Remarks at Valencia Community College in Orlando September 6, 1996

Thank you. Let me say—well, sit down and relax here. [*Laughter*] First of all, I want to thank Christy Grabowski. It's not the easiest thing in the world to stand up here in front of all of you and do this, and she did a great job, didn't she? Let's give her a hand. [*Applause*]

I thank Governor Chiles and Lieutenant Governor MacKay for being here. And thank you, Governor Chiles, for what you said and for your support of education and especially of these community colleges. I thank your Congresswoman Corrine Brown, who is also here, along with Congressman John Conyers from Michigan. Thank you very much.

Dr. Kinser, thank you for welcoming me here. And to your Board of Trustees chair, Marcia Tompkins, thank you for making me feel welcome here. I know we have three people who are trying to go to the Congress, George Stuart, John Byron, and Al Krulick; thank you for coming. I hope you'll support these programs and tell people you do.

I want to thank Bob Koch and Tom Christian for speaking here first, to talk along with Dr. Kinser about the work that Valencia has done with AT&T, with Lucent, with the IBEW Local 2000, all working together. That is how I think America ought to work, and that's why I'm here today. America ought to work more like you work in this community college. You are truly building that bridge to the 21st century that I talked to the American people about in Chicago last week.

You know, I spent a wonderful several days before and after the Democratic National Convention first on a train going through West Virginia, Kentucky, Ohio, Michigan, and Indiana, and then on a bus going through Missouri and Illinois and Kentucky and Tennessee before I went back home. And I saw all kinds of people there. If you get out on the back roads of America and you go to places that normally Presidents don't visit, you see the people that really deserve to be worked for and fought for. But you can also see them if you go to any community college in the United States of America, because that's where our—[*applause*].

Community colleges represent what I think America ought to be, because it is opportunity for all, no matter who you are or what your background is. People are, by definition, responsible because no one's giving you anything except a chance. And there is a real community, that is, people band together across the lines that too often divide us, across lines of race, religion, gender, economy, you name it. All you've got to do is show up and play by the rules, and you're part of this community. That's the way America ought to work; that's the way I want America to work in the 21st century.

This strategy is working. Just today we learned that we had more good economic news: 250,000 more new jobs for Americans in the month of July. That means we have now seen the American economy produce, since January of 1993, 10½ million new jobs. The national unemployment rate, the national rate is now 5.1 percent, the lowest in 7½ years. This country is moving in the right direction. We're on the right track for the 21st century.

I think it's very important to me that you understand that one of the reasons we've been able to create the conditions and give Americans the tools to make the most of their own lives is that I have tried to change the way our national politics work so that it would work more like you work here. I want to move beyond what I consider to be the hot-air rhetoric of American politics of who's to blame and focus more on what to do. What are we going to do to move this country forward? And I just want to talk very briefly about two things that are very important, the focus of the work of the community college: the economy and education.

The first thing we have to do is, we have to keep this economic growth going. We know that there are business cycles that go up and down, but we also know that countries have periods where they're growing and periods when they're not. And we had too long when too many people worked harder and harder and harder just to hang on by their fingernails, just to barely support their kids, never getting a raise, never looking forward to a better future.

We now have seen not only 10½ million new jobs but record numbers of new businesses formed and wages finally going up again for the first time in a decade. We need to keep that going. That's what we have to keep going. We need to make sure—and that means that we have to have the right kind of conditions, first of all, in which our economy can grow. And I'll just mention two or three.

First of all, I want to mention something that every political consultant that I ever talked to says never works. They say—for years I've been told, "Oh, Bill, don't talk about the deficit except when the economy is bad. When the economy is bad, people really worry about the deficit. When the economy is good, they could give a rip about it; it bores them. They want to hear about tax cuts." Well, what I want to tell you is, the reason the economy is good is because this is the first administration since before the Civil War that brought the deficit down in every year, bringing interest rates down, making investment possible, making the economy grow.

It is imperative that we stay on this path to balancing the budget, because we've got to keep the interest rates down so we can have more companies affording to borrow the money to invest, to build the new facilities, to create the new jobs, to raise the incomes; not to mention the fact that if interest rates are down, for you that means lower home payments, car payments, and interest rate payments. So it's very important. We've got to keep the economy going.

The second thing we have to do is to have tax cuts that are paid for, therefore, as Governor Chiles said. That's why, yes, I want tax cuts for education, for childrearing, for people to save in an IRA and be able to withdraw tax-free for education or buying a new home or a health care emergency; but we've got to pay for them. They have to be paid for in the context of balancing the budget. And that's the critical distinction here.

Now, the third thing we have to do is to invest enough money on your behalf, for you as a country, to grow the economy. That means we have to invest in research. That means we have to invest in education. And let me just give you a couple of examples that would really affect Florida.

I think if we build a bridge to the 21st century that's the right kind of bridge, it will be

very much a bridge that will keep America on the cutting edge of all the latest investments in new technology. That means we have to keep the economy growing with projects like the proposed high-speed rail project here in Florida. And I support that, and I will do what I can to continue to support it with flexibility, with resources, with cutting redtape. The Lieutenant Governor talks to me about that every time I see him. I haven't yet wanted to run away from him when I see him because I don't get tired of hearing about it, but these are important issues. I'll give you another example.

We have to continue to invest money in research. A lot of you were very moved I'm sure at our convention when Christopher Reeve gave that passionate speech about research. But let me tell you, we now have for the first time ever laboratory animals that were—sustained serious spinal cord injuries, that were paraplegic, that had nerve transplants and for the first time ever moved their lower limbs. The boundaries of medical research are enormous. In the last 4 years, research and the more rapid movement of drugs to market has more than doubled—more than doubled in only 4 years—the life expectancy of people with HIV and AIDS—way more than doubled in only 4 years.

We are making breathtaking discoveries in what can be done to preserve the environment while you're growing the economy, whether it's in agriculture or industry, through research. The Internet, something a lot of you use regularly now, you should know, is the product of Government research. It was first developed in a Government research project. Then when it had commercial potential, the Government did exactly what should be done. The Government got out of it, let the private sector run it so it could grow in the proper way.

We are now building with IBM—I heard you talking about the computer chip and the transistor capacity—we are building with IBM a supercomputer that will be finished in a few years that, when finished, will have the capacity to do in one second the number of calculations it would take you on a hand-held calculator 30,000 years to do.

So I say to you, when people tell you that the Government's all bad and all that, just remember, research is an important part of our common future. Technology is an important part of our common future. You are going to be trained here for jobs—when I look at Christy

talking—for jobs that some day in the past were just a gleam in someone's eye, were just part of someone's imagination. And the young people in this audience, within a decade, will be doing jobs that have not been invented yet. Some of them will be doing jobs that have not even been imagined yet. So we have to keep the economy growing.

The second thing we have to do, if you look out across this sea of students here, is we have to find a way to grow together and to give, with all of our diversity, everybody who is willing to work for it a chance to live up to their own God-given capacity. And there is no other way to do it except through education; there is no other way to do it. There is no shortcut.

Now, it is true that in the last 4 years we've tried to do a lot, everything from expanding Head Start to helping the schools do a better job, to lowering the cost and improving the repayment terms on college loans and saving the education programs, especially the financial aid programs, from the assault of the Congress in the last budget. We did do that, but we have to do more.

And let me just say, I want to mention three or four things that I think are very important. One involves our younger children. Forty percent of the 8-year-olds in this country can still not read on their own. And that is wrong. It is very hard for people to get where you are today unless they can learn what they're supposed to learn at each step along the way. Yes, it's true that you may be—a lot of you probably are nontraditional students or considerably—maybe you're in your late twenties, your thirties, your forties, your fifties, maybe even in your sixties, maybe even older, but you have to learn what you're supposed to learn at each step along the way.

One of the things that I think is very important to do in building that bridge to the 21st century in the next 4 years is to mobilize a corps of reading mentors—from AmeriCorps volunteers, from work-study students in college, from others that we can bring in and pay for—to get other volunteers, up to a million volunteers to make sure that every 8-year-old can read on his or her own by the year 2000, every single one. That's important.

The second thing that I think it's important to get—this goes back to technology and research and some work that I have seen done by AT&T and by Bell Atlantic and others in

other school districts in the country—but it's very important to understand what the Internet means in terms of education of children. We are trying to, right now—we've had a project going where we've had 100,000 teachers teaching 500,000 more how to make the most of computers in the classroom, and we are working to get every school the computers that they need, good educational software, and trained teachers.

But it's very important to understand that if you do all of that and you can hook up every classroom and library in America to the Internet by the year 2000, it will make it possible for the first time in American history—think about this—for the children in the most isolated rural districts in the mountains of Appalachia or in the far plains of North Dakota and the children in the most isolated inner-city urban areas in the poorest school districts to have access in the same way at the same time at the same level of quality and quantity to the information that the children in the wealthiest districts in America have. It has never happened before. This is an enormously significant thing. And it could democratize education in a way we never have been able to do before. And if we do all those things, that's important. Then you would have—every 8-year-old would be able to read, every 12-year-old could log in on the Internet, and high school graduates all over America could be expected to meet the same high standards.

It's still not enough, you and I know. If you just look at the census or you look at your own experience—do we need a doctor here? We're okay? I asked my medical team to show up here. That's the Presidential service; we carry people everywhere. *[Laughter]*

But let me say, it's not enough. We already know. You wouldn't be here if you didn't know this, but let me tell you, I first saw it when I reviewed the 1990 Census, which may look like a boring document to a lot of people, but it tells you what's happening to America. It took my breath away to see how the earnings of our people were dividing by education, not by race, not by region, not by anything, by education.

And we know now that people who have a community college degree are likely to get jobs in industries with a good future, with the prospect of a growing income. We also know that people who don't, who have less, are likely not

to. So I say to you, we can't build the bridge to the future we want and give everybody a chance unless we say we want to make it possible for every person to go to a community college, and we're going to make 2 years of education after high school just as universal in 4 years as a high school diploma is today. And I want you to help me do that.

If we provide a refundable tax credit of up to \$1,500 a year, we can cover the costs through a tax cut of the tuition at the typical community college in any State in the country, and we can revolutionize access to community college. That's what I want. That's my idea of the HOPE scholarship. And it is modeled on a program I saw in Georgia and on a more limited thing we tried to do at home when I was Governor of Arkansas. I just think we ought to say, okay, you get out of high school, you get into community college, here's your tax credit, we'll pay your way; you've just got to do a good job, keep your grades up, and keep going, and we'll see you through it. For those who go on, let me say again, I think we ought to have a tax deduction of up to \$10,000 a year for the cost of any education after high school.

For people who lose their jobs and who are underemployed, who used to have to wonder whether they were eligible or not for some Government training program, I propose collapsing—because nearly every American is within driving distance of a community college—I propose collapsing all these different Government training programs into one big block and saying, if you're eligible because you're unemployed or grossly underemployed, we'll give you a skills grant and you can take it where you want. You're all within driving distance of a community college; go get it.

There are many other things that we have to do to build that bridge to the 21st century. We have to make it possible for families to succeed at home and at work. That's why I'm for an IRA that you can contribute to and withdraw without penalty for education, for the first-time homebuying, for medical emergency. That's why I don't think people should ever have to pay taxes when they sell a home and they buy another one, on the gain. That's why I believe that we have to do more to expand the Family and Medical Leave Act so parents can take a little time off from work to go to their children's parent-teacher conference. I think these things are important.

We have to find a way—we have had 4 years of declining crime rates. It has been a long time since America has done that. But we need 4 more. And after 4 more years, if we could put together 8 years of declining crime rates, it might finally be down to a bearable level. We have to keep putting these police officers on the street. We have to keep finding ways to keep our kids out of trouble and giving them things to say yes to, not just things to say no to. We have to keep working on that.

We have to find a way not just to talk about welfare reform but to do it. Now, we've moved 1.8 million people—1,800,000 people—from welfare to work since I've been President. Now we passed the welfare reform bill that says, we'll give you health care, we'll give you nutrition, we'll give you child care, but if you're able-bodied, you have to go to work. Now there has to be work for those folks to do. We have to work on making sure that we create those jobs for people who have lower skills and that we don't block them off from coming back to community college or doing other things that will raise their skills.

I will say again, we have to find a way to grow the economy while protecting the environment. We still have 10 million of our children living within 4 miles of toxic waste dumps. Even though we've cleaned up more in the last 3 years than we did in the previous 12, I want to do better. If we clean up the two-thirds worst then we can say our children are growing up next to parks, not poison, and we're growing the economy while we're doing it. And I want you to help me do that. That's important.

Again I will say, we have to grow the economy and we have to grow together through educational opportunity and through a belief that the country ought to run the way a community college runs. You have no idea how much time I have to spend as your President on foreign policy problems that arise because people in other parts of the world insist upon hating each other because of their religious, their racial, their ethnic, or their tribal differences.

And if you look around at America now, look around this room—I've told many people, when the Olympics came to Atlanta and we had people there from 197 different national and ethnic groups, our biggest county, Los Angeles County, had over 150 of those groups represented in one American county. This is not a country where we define ourselves by our race, our reli-

gion, our ethnic group. Everybody is welcome here who believes in the Constitution and is willing to stand up and work for what's right.

Will you help me build that bridge to the 21st century? [Applause] I want you to help because you represent where we all need to go.

Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:03 p.m. in the college gymnasium. In his remarks, he referred

to electronics engineering student Christy Grabowski; Gov. Lawton Chiles and Lt. Gov. Buddy MacKay of Florida; Paul Kinser, provost, west campus, Valencia Community College; George Stuart, John Byron, and Al Krulick, candidates for Florida's 7th, 15th, and 8th Congressional Districts, respectively; Bob Koch, vice president for operations, Lucent Technologies; Tom Christian, president, International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Local 2000; and actor Christopher Reeve.

Remarks at Gulf Coast Community College in Panama City, Florida September 6, 1996

The President. Thank you. Wow! Well, on the way up here Governor Chiles told me that—can you hear? We lost our sound. Can you hear me in the back? I'll just speak up—there it is. On the way up here Governor Chiles told me that as nearly as they could determine, I am the first sitting President ever to come to Panama City. Based on what I saw along the road coming in and the reception you've given us, I'd say the others don't know what they were missing. I'm glad to be here. [Applause] Thank you.

I'd like to thank President McSpadden and all the others here at the community college for making me feel so welcome. I'd like to thank these excellent young musicians who played for us, called the Optimistics. They were great, weren't they? Thank you very much.

Thank you, Dawn, for the power of your example and for your fine introduction, but mostly because you embody what the American dream is all about and the role of education in the American dream. I know all of you here who are students must have been very proud when Dawn Roberts was up here speaking, but I was proud just to be an American, to know that we have people like this and that there are opportunities like this school has given her to make the most of her own life.

I'd like to thank all the military people who serve our country who live in this area. And I'd like to thank all the people who work for Sallie Mae here, who have worked so hard to make college education affordable.

I want to thank Governor Lawton Chiles for being my friend of many years and for what he said today. A lot of people say, "Well, why are you going up there? They never vote for Democrats." And I said, "Well, I remember when Lawton Chiles ran for Governor in 1994, and the Republicans said it was their year and that people in Florida would never reelect him. He kept coming up here and saying that he was going to remind everybody that the 'he-coon' walked just before the light of dawn. And I figured if I came up here, maybe I could find myself a 'he-coon.'" So I'm looking around trying to find one.

I thought I had personally used every down-home expression known to man until he said that. [Laughter] And I'm still learning things from Lawton Chiles after all of these years.

I want to say a special word of thanks and honor to your retiring Congressman, Pete Peterson. He has—as all of you know, he has served his country magnificently and at great sacrifice to himself and his family for a very long time, and I honor him. And I was honored to be able to nominate him to be our Nation's first Ambassador to Vietnam since the end of the Vietnam war. He will be terrific at it.

Now, in order for me to see his nomination through, I have to get my contract renewed. But if I do, that's a campaign commitment you can put in the bank. He will be the next Ambassador to Vietnam.

Ladies and gentlemen, it's hot in here, and I'm proud you came to see me, and most of what I have to say is preaching to the saved;