

Feb. 20 / Administration of William J. Clinton, 1997

I believe he will give her a hearing. But it's imperative that it be done. It's now midway through February, and I think it's time to get on with this.

Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:05 a.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Bruce Vladeck, Administrator,

Health Care Financing Administration; Bruce Fried, Director, HCFA Office of Managed Care; Gen. Jesus Gutierrez Rebollo, Director of Mexico's National Institute to Combat Drugs, dismissed for allegedly protecting a Mexican drug trafficker; President Ernesto Zedillo of Mexico; Deng Xiaoping, former President of China; and Anthony Lake, nominee for Director of Central Intelligence.

Remarks Announcing the District of Columbia College Reading Tutor Initiative

February 21, 1997

Thank you very much. Thank you, General Becton, for the introduction. Thank you, Principal Andrea Robinson, for making the First Lady and me feel so very welcome here in Garrison today. Delegate Norton, Mr. Mayor, all the college presidents who are here, some out in the audience, but especially those here behind me who are part of our announcement today: Dr. Ladner of American University, Brother Patrick Ellis of Catholic, Dr. I. King Jordan of Gallaudet, Father Leo O'Donovan of Georgetown, Stephen Trachtenberg of George Washington, Pat McGuire of Trinity, Patrick Swygert of Howard.

To the Council members who are here today, Hilda Mason and Harry Thomas, Judge Hamilton. To the School Board members who are here and others who are here who are part of our endeavor. I would like to especially acknowledge the Librarian of Congress, Dr. Jim Billington; the Secretary of Education, Secretary Dick Riley; Carol Rasco, the National Director of our America Reads program; Frank Raines, the Director of the Office of Management and Budget; and Harris Wofford, who heads our national service program.

I'd also like to thank Dr. Robert Corrigan from San Francisco State University, who is here. He and Father O'Donovan are two of the 21 steering committee members for our national effort to get volunteers in colleges all over America involved in helping our children to read. So I'm delighted to be here with this distinguished assemblage.

Two weeks ago in my State of the Union Address I spoke of the importance of renewing

our great Capital City to make it the finest place to learn, to work, to live, to make it once again the proud face America shows to the world. This is a city of truly remarkable strengths. I saw that when I lived here as a student so very many years ago now. I see it now, having come back as President. We see the majesty of the monuments, the beauty of the parks, the commitment of community and business leaders. But most importantly, we see it in the eyes of our children.

I was just in Stephanie Abney's first grade class, where Hillary and I read "The Tortoise and the Hare" to the students, and they could have been reading it back to us. And I thought about those wonderful children and all the others who are here. They deserve the best future we can give them, and we can give them a better future. And that is what this is all about.

As the First Lady said, this endeavor will require us to be more like the tortoise than the hare. We will have to move slowly but deliberately, and we will not be able to sit down and rest. But if we do that, like the tortoise, we will win the race. This is our city. All of us who live here, all of us who work here, all of us who want America's Capital to be a world capital, second to none; all of us have an obligation to work with the mayor, with General Becton, with the control board, with Delegate Norton, with all the leaders of the city to help to renew and to revitalize Washington, DC. I pledge to you today that we, my personal family and my official family, will be with you as you make those efforts, every step of the way.

I'd like to say a special word of appreciation to three people who have been particularly important to me in this endeavor: First, to the First Lady, who has been telling me for a long time that we had to do more, we owed it to Washington to do more, and that we could do more. Second, to Frank Raines, the Director of the Office of Management and Budget, who came up with the proposal we have made to relieve the District of Columbia of some of its unfair and unnecessary financial burdens and reallocate responsibility among the State and Federal Government. And third—I didn't know if she was here with us today, but I finally spotted her in the audience—to Carol Thompson-Cole, thank you very much for all that you have done to help us to get this effort off the ground.

So we've made this proposal to the Congress to relieve the District government of some of its financial burdens. As I have said many times, one of the major problems of the District of Columbia is that it has too often been a "not quite" place. It's not quite a State, but it's not quite a city. So it has been loaded up with responsibilities that normally are only borne by States. I think that is wrong, and I think we should do better about that.

To strengthen the city's economic base, we also must provide some financial incentives for people to move businesses and to move themselves back into the city. We must expand the empowerment approach that has worked so well across the country. In Detroit, one of our empowerment zone cities, the unemployment rate was cut in half in 4 years—in half—and investment was flooding back, business was coming back, people were coming back to live in the city. We can do this in every city in America, and we must.

To help home rule succeed, we have to change the relationship between the District and our Nation's Government. Sometimes the District gets the worst of all worlds. It's not quite independent, but the dependencies it has carry burdens that cannot be borne by any community. So we need to work that out.

But let's not kid ourselves, there are some things that have to be done here that must be done by the people of the District of Columbia. And the two that are most important in my view are making the schools work for these children and making the streets safe for them to walk and live on.

What I want to say to you today is that I know you can do this. I have been not only here at Garrison, but I have been in the Kramer Junior High School in Anacostia, which has been adopted by my Secret Service detail—it's one of the presents they gave me for a birthday once—best present I could ever be given by my Secret Service detail. And they go to Kramer—they're in there all the time—and I get regular reports about the progress they're making. I have been to Thomas Jefferson Junior High School, which is near the Capitol, probably 5 times in the last 10 years. I've been to Eastern High School and to a number of other schools in the District. You can do this. This school system can be great for all of its children, and what we want to do is to help.

I'd also like to say that you can do the other things you have to do, too. Public safety can succeed here. I started the week in Boston, where no child has been murdered in a year and a half, not a single child in a year and a half, not one. And no manna dropped from Heaven, no outside force lifted them up. They did some things together in a disciplined, organized, determined way that changed the future of children. And now it can be done everywhere. So I am hopeful.

But let's begin with education. All of you know that the world we are moving toward will put a higher premium on education than ever before. It has always been important. A certain amount of it has always been essential for people to get along in life. It is now more critical than ever before, not only for the individual futures of every one of these little kids here but for how the rest of us do as well. For the skeptics who are about my age, I could only say that we ought to be working hard to give these children a good education so they will support us in our old age—[laughter]—in a style that we'll be comfortable with.

We can only be a strong, united community if we can educate all our people. If you look around—just look at these children today. America is building the most genuinely diverse democracy in all of human history. No one has ever tried to do this before, and we did it almost without thinking, just by being a nation of successive waves of immigrants. We became more and more and more diverse. And by continuing to advance the cause of civil rights and civil liberties, we've made different people more and more and more at home in our country. And

then all of a sudden we wake up on the edge of the 21st century with 4 school districts in our country where children's native tongues number more than 100—in 4 different school districts.

This is a great challenge because all children, even of the same race and the same religious background, as every teacher could tell you, are different. All children are different anyway. And when you think of this diversity we have to manage, it's even a greater challenge. But it's also the greatest opportunity that has ever been served up to any people in human history. And if we seize that opportunity, if we prove that all of our children can learn and they can all be given opportunities and they can all make a contribution, we will be richly rewarded.

We know that there are some remarkable success stories in the District of Columbia, and we know the District's schools have to do better. That's why I am so grateful that, after a lifetime of service to his nation, General Becton has taken on yet another important challenge and a true act of patriotism. We are committed to supporting him.

We know that we have to mobilize people from all walks of life, and I was glad to hear all the different volunteer groups recognized, particularly the seniors and the VISTA volunteers and, of course, a great personal pride of mine, the AmeriCorps volunteers. And I thank some of them who are here today, and I thank them for being here.

We need to start with simple, clear goals that we know are important, number one, and, number two, that we can determine whether we have met. One of the real problems that I find in all human endeavors is that sometimes we don't clarify our goals and make sure we're going after the important ones. And then sometimes, even if we've got a good goal, we set it up so we never can tell whether we've met it or not.

One of our goals has to be to make sure every 8-year-old in this country can read a book on his or her own, and every 8-year-old in this school and every 8-year-old in this city can do the same in the next 4 years. That is a very important thing, and we can find out whether that is being done.

The Secretary of Education and I intend to make it possible for States and the District, by the year 1999, to give an examination to every fourth grader in reading and every eighth grader

in math to see whether they know what they're supposed to know, based on national basic standards. And so we will know whether every 8-year-old can read in 1999. And we are being given a few years to get the job done. We also know that these children can do the job if they're given the support, the discipline, the love that they need.

But today, in America as a whole, 40 percent—4 of every 10—8-year-olds cannot read as well as they should read. Now, part of that is because so many of them's first language is not English. But a lot of it is because—indeed, the lion's share of it is because they simply are not learning as they should. Many times the teachers have more than they can do. Many times the teachers don't have the support they need for all the different challenges that the children bring into the classroom in their early lives. Many times, as General Becton indicated, we need more help from the parents at home. Many times the parents themselves need help to learn to read well enough to read to their children.

So we know that this is a complicated problem. That does not, however, relieve us of the burden of solving it. In fact, what it does is impose upon more of us the responsibility to help to solve it. I'm glad to see my friend Bill Milliken here, and I was glad to hear General Becton recognize the Cities and Communities in Schools program because they have for years, in small rural cities in my home State and in big urban places like Washington, tried to remind the community that our children are everyone's responsibility and there must be a community approach to dealing with this.

And that's what we're here to talk about today with regard to a simple but profoundly important goal, that every 8-year-old must be able to read independently. We intend to use thousands of AmeriCorps volunteers to mobilize and train a citizen army of one million reading tutors. We want at least 100,000 college students to help, to build our army of reading tutors on college campuses all across America. That's what the America Reads program Secretary Riley and Carol Rasco are spearheading is all about.

Last fall, I worked with the Congress to create over 200,000 new work-study jobs on America's college campuses, the program that enables young people to work their way through college. My present budget calls for another 100,000

work-study positions to be made available to our college campuses. I want a portion of those new positions to be devoted to community service—to letting people work not just on the campus but, more importantly, in the community and especially teaching our children to read.

College presidents nationwide have answered the call. Many of them are here today, the local college presidents behind me, others in the audience. They have pledged thousands of their work-study students and thousands who do not receive work-study assistance to serve for one year as reading tutors.

The District of Columbia is rising to meet that challenge. Today, thanks to the support of General Becton and the willing leadership of the university presidents behind me, over the next 5 years, thousands of college students, AmeriCorps participants, volunteers, parents, and teachers will work together to help DC's children learn to read so that they can meet that national goal.

The presidents of seven DC area colleges and universities—American, Catholic, Gallaudet, Georgetown, George Washington, Howard, and Trinity—have pledged nearly 700 students next year and thousands of students over the next 5 years to serve as reading tutors in DC's public schools. And we should all thank them for it. And we should note, too, that there are several hundred students from these seven schools who are already working in our city as tutors and as other public servants.

These new tutors, the vast majority of whom will be work-study students, will begin in the 18 District schools General Becton has identified as most in need of this kind of partnership, including Garrison. But we hope the effort will expand to many more of DC's schools. In each of the 18 schools we will place two AmeriCorps participants who will work full time to coordinate the effort and recruit more volunteers.

I might say that one of the things I have learned in visiting schools all across America, in all different kinds of settings, is that it requires an organized effort by the schools to effectively use the volunteers, and sometimes volunteers aren't in the schools simply because the school either hasn't taken the time or doesn't have the resources to organize bringing them in and using them effectively. So that's one of the things that we hope we can accomplish with our AmeriCorps volunteers.

Finally, with the help of AmeriCorps and DC businesses, General Becton will open a family resource center in each school so that parents have the support and assistance they need to read to their own children, so that they can be the first and best teachers for our students.

After Hillary and I read the book to the 6-year-olds today—out of the mouths of babes—the children came up to see us. The first question they asked was, "Now, did you read to your daughter when she was a little girl?" [Laughter] "Every night," I said. And the second question was, "Now, did your parents read to you when you were a little boy?" The first two questions they asked. So we do have to make it possible for these parents to do their jobs.

That's another thing I've noticed over the years: Almost every parent, no matter how young they might be, no matter how uneducated they might be, desperately wants to do a good job. And we have to give them the resources to do it and the strength and self-confidence to do it.

Now, as I said, we're plotting out a race here for a tortoise, not a hare. This is not going to be done overnight. Children are not built in a day. But it is a very important start. To truly renew our Capital City, we clearly have to start with our children. With the creation of this new DC Reads partnership, thousands of college students and volunteers will help our public school children learn to read. In so doing, they'll be taking more responsibility for their city that has given them an opportunity to get an education. They'll be creating more opportunity for the children who live here. They'll be building a stronger and a better-prepared community for the 21st century. I believe they will inspire this entire community to pitch in and work together to lift up the children of the District of Columbia and make this Capital worthy of its great heritage and the bright future of our Nation.

We want to do more to improve education throughout the District. We'll offer more support to the Department of Education, to the District schools, sharing our expertise in a broad range of areas. Our Cabinet agencies will build on the many partnerships they've established over the past years. We'll continue to adopt schools, to donate computers and educational software and supplies, to become engaged ourselves as tutors and volunteers throughout the

public schools. AmeriCorps will build on the work that it has done, not just in tutoring but also in repairing crumbling schools and correcting fire code violations so schools can open on time and recruiting even more volunteers.

But the most important work will be done by parents and teachers, by students and volunteers, by government and business working together. The spirit of common cause is how we must meet this challenge and, indeed, all the challenges of the District of Columbia in education, in building safe streets, in economic development, in restoring the health of the city's finances, and the proper balance of responsibilities between the city and the National Government. We are committed to this task.

Hillary and I are honored to be here with you today, and we thank every one of you for what you're doing to give our children the future they deserve.

Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:25 a.m. in the auditorium at Garrison Elementary School. In his remarks, he referred to Gen. Julius Becton, USA (ret.), superintendent, District of Columbia public schools; Andrea Robinson, principal, Garrison Elementary School; Delegate Eleanor Holmes Norton and Mayor Marion Barry, Jr., of the District of Columbia; Benjamin Ladner, president, American University; Hilda Mason and Harry L. Thomas, Sr., members of the District of Columbia City Council; Eugene N. Hamilton, Chief Judge of the Superior Court of the District of Columbia; Robert A. Corrigan, president, San Francisco State University; Carol Thompson-Cole, adviser to the President for the District of Columbia; and William E. Milliken, president, Communities In Schools, Inc.

The President's Radio Address

February 22, 1997

Good morning. Today I want to talk with you about our economy, what we can do to keep it growing, offering opportunities to all Americans who work for them.

When I took office 4 years ago, my most important job was to renew our economy. We put in place an economic plan that cut the deficit even as we increased investments in our people and expanded exports to record levels. We cut the deficit by 63 percent, from \$290 billion a year in 1992 to \$107 billion last year. Proportionally, it is now the smallest of any major economy. This has created the conditions for American businesses and workers to thrive, and they have.

Over the last several weeks, we've received the full data on our country's economic progress for the last 4 years. The economy created 11½ million new jobs for the first time ever in a single term. That includes a million construction jobs and millions of other good paying jobs. Entrepreneurs have started a record number of new businesses, hundreds of thousands of them owned by women and minorities. We've had the largest increase in homeownership ever, a big drop in the poverty rate, and a big increase

in family income. And just this week, we learned that the combined rate of unemployment and inflation over the last 4 years is the lowest for a Presidential term since the 1960's.

Now we must continue our progress. We cut the deficit by two-thirds; it's time to finish the job. We must balance the budget to keep interest rates down and investment up and jobs coming in. But we must do it the right way. Today our economy is growing steady and strong. If we want to keep it growing, producing jobs and opportunity for our people as we enter a new century, then we simply must finish the job of balancing the budget, and we must do it this year. That is the only way to keep interest rates low, to keep confidence high, to give businesses the ability to innovate for tomorrow. We must pass a balanced budget plan this year or face the consequences in years to come.

This month I submitted my plan to balance the budget by 2002. Our plan makes the hard decisions necessary to lock in the savings achieved and to ensure that the budget remains in balance in the future. It saves \$350 billion over the next 5 years, enough not only to balance the budget but also to cut taxes. It makes