

member to college. The balanced budget also includes a \$10,000 tax deduction to help families pay for college and a \$1,500 HOPE scholarship tax credit, which is enough to pay for the tuition at the typical community college in America for 2 years.

This college opportunity agenda will open the doors of college wider than ever before. Now we need to work to make sure that the Congress, without regard to party, will enact these changes into law.

Before I answer questions now, I'd like to ask for your help with one more thing. We all know that literacy is the basic tool of learning. But 40 percent of our children cannot read independently by the time they're 8 years old. We can and must do better. My budget includes more than \$2 billion to help us with the literacy challenge, but that is not enough.

I launched our America Reads initiative to mobilize an army of reading tutors all across America. And I asked college and university presidents to help me achieve that. I sent a senior member of the White House staff, Carol Rasco, to the Department of Education to work with Secretary Riley to make sure the America Reads initiative does that. We have dedicated several thousand AmeriCorps volunteers to becoming trained so they can, in turn, train reading tutors to work with schools, with parents, and with children to help make sure our children can read.

But now we need a lot of volunteers—as many as a million—and a lot of them will have

to come from students. I am pleased to say that over 80 college presidents have already committed thousands of their work-study students to participate as reading tutors. I hope you will join them and commit a percentage of your own work-study students to help our children learn to read, because without literacy, the job manuals and the history books are both closed, and so are the doors of college. We need your help to open them wider.

I'm looking forward to working with you in the months and the years ahead but especially this year to make sure that we pass this education agenda in Congress, number one, and number two, that we enlist the idealism, the ability, and the energy of our young college students in helping us to teach our children to read.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:50 a.m. in the State Dining Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Henry Ponder, president, and Harrison Wilson, board of directors chairman, National Association for Equal Opportunity in Higher Education; Talbert O. Shaw, president, Shaw University; William H. Gray III, president, United Negro College Fund; Joyce Payne, director, Office for the Advancement of Public Black Colleges; and Vic Hackley, chair, President's Advisory Board on Historically Black Colleges and Universities.

Remarks to the American Council on Education February 24, 1997

Thank you very much. Mr. Secretary, that was a good speech—[laughter]—and fully illustrated Clinton's third law of politics, which is, whenever possible, be introduced by someone you have appointed to high position. [Laughter] Their objectivity is stunning. [Laughter]

I thank Secretary Riley and all the people at the Department of Education for the work that they do. Stan Ikenberry, I'm glad to be here today with all of you. President Knapp, thank you for your moving remarks about the HOPE scholarship. You all laughed when Barry

said he was making a great sacrifice by going to the Aspen Institute, but in Georgia, that's what they think. [Laughter]

President-elect Myers, and to my friend Barry Munitz—you know, we're all in a lather up here in Washington these days about campaign contributions. Everybody hates them, but nobody wants to go to public funding. So we seem destined to some period of handwringing. And since we're in a spirit of full disclosure, I have to tell you that in addition to my coming here today, I received a gratuity, which I intend to

disclose before the whole world. I complimented Barry on his watch, and he gave it to me. [Laughter] And cravenly, as we politicians are, I took it without blinking. [Laughter] He swears it cost \$18. [Laughter]

But I'll tell you why I bragged on it—and all of you more or less of my age group can identify with this—look how big the numbers are. I can—[laughter]—it's the first watch I've ever seen that I don't need glasses for. The more expensive they are, the smaller the numbers get. [Laughter] So, thank you, Barry.

I would like to begin today, if I might, with a very personal and serious word. This is the first opportunity I have had, really, to say something publicly about the death of Al Shanker yesterday, one of the greatest educators of the 20th century in this country. He was my friend for many years. I considered him my colleague. He believed that all children could learn with high expectations and high standards, high-quality teaching, and high accountability. He literally lived a life that was nothing less than a crusade, with intense passion and power. And I know that all of you will join me in wishing his wife and his family and the members of the American Federation of Teachers the best, and giving them our sadness and our thanks for a remarkable American who did his job very, very well.

I also want to come here to thank you. Secretary Riley said, in his inimitable way, that this is a big day for us—and this is a big day for us—starting with the community colleges and their trustees and then going to this organization which represents, I thought at last count, almost 1,700 2- and 4-year colleges and universities. Your views matter, your voice is heard, and your endorsement of our college opportunity agenda, including the HOPE scholarships, the tax deduction for tuition, and the large increase in Pell grants, will help to bring that opportunity into reality and to fulfill my dream of opening the doors of college to every single American who wants to go. Thank you very, very much. I'm grateful to you.

This is a remarkable time in the history of our democracy. At the end of the cold war we find ourselves as the world's remaining superpower, with a special responsibility to try to shape the future in a way that will advance the cause of peace and prosperity. We find our own economy strong and growing, producing more jobs in the last 4 years than in any comparable term in our history, with record num-

bers of new businesses being formed each and every year.

We know that this is a time of enormous change, but the impulse to satisfaction, I'm sure, is great. Normally, when democracies have times this good, one of two things happens, sometimes both at the same time: People get very self-satisfied and begin to relax and therefore miss the underlying currents of what is really going on for the future, or they become too easily preoccupied with small matters and begin to divide among themselves over things that bring them down instead of lift them up. We must give in to neither impulse.

Because the growth of the global economy and the absolute explosion in scientific and technical information associated with the information age give us an opportunity but not a guarantee, an opportunity for undreamed of new jobs and careers, for greater knowledge and understanding, not just for greater material wealth but for enhancements in the quality of lives for families and communities, it is literally true that in the era toward which we are moving more people than ever before in all of human history will have a chance to live out their dreams. But it is also true that the chance cannot be realized unless we give them the power to make the most of their own lives. So this is no time to rest.

Four years ago we knew we couldn't rest, and we set about laying the foundation for progress by changing the economic policy of the country to focus on investing in our people, getting our fiscal house in order, emphasizing science and technology, and opening the doors of trade with the rest of the world. We changed our social policy, centering it clearly on family and community and focusing on action instead of rhetoric. The result is that we've had marked drops in crime, the biggest drop in welfare rolls in the history of the country, the family and medical leave law, action to stop teenagers from being exposed illegally to the sales and marketing of cigarettes, and a number of other initiatives.

Our foreign policy has begun to articulate the world that we want to make, working in an interdependent way with allies and friends of like mind throughout the world not only to advance the cause of peace and freedom and prosperity but to stand up against the new threats to our security.

Along the way, we have fought—and I hope largely resolved—the battle that has dominated America for nearly 20 years now over what the proper role of our Nation's Government should be. You hardly hear anyone saying anymore that Government is the enemy.

It was interesting—in the last couple of days Hillary and I went to see—or brought in the movie—we have a theater at the White House; it's the best perk of the job, I think—[*laughter*—but we had about all the seriousness we could stand, and we watched that movie “Dante's Peak,” about the volcano exploding. And I couldn't help thinking, you know, the hero works for the U.S. Geological Service, and his life is saved in the end by a contraption developed not here at home for uses on the ground but by NASA for use in space. And I thought, the Government is not the enemy. The role of the Government is to create the conditions and to give people the tools to build strong lives and families and communities and a strong nation, and to give people the chance to live out their dreams.

Now that that foundation has been laid, and now that I believe we have also moved away from the very dangerous rhetoric of the last several years that seeks to divide us against one another based on our racial or ethnic or religious or other differences, toward an understanding that it is actually a great godsend for us to be the world's most multiethnic, multiracial, multireligious democracy, we now can actually seize the opportunities that are before us. But the first and most important thing we have to do is to recognize that, beginning at the beginning, our education system will not provide us the opportunity to do that unless we change it.

For the beginning years, we have to raise standards. For our colleges and universities, which are plainly the finest in the world, we simply have to make sure that the access is there for everyone who should go to have a chance to go.

The main point I want to make is that we actually are in a position now to mold our future untroubled by war abroad or disruption at home in a way that is very, very rare in human history. We have no idea how long this moment of tranquility will last. We have no idea how long we will be fully free to wake up and say, “what am I going to do today,” without being impinged

upon by some external force that will shape us.

I was interested when the Secretary talked about Abraham Lincoln and the land grant. I used to teach at a land grant school, so I like that. But it's interesting that President Lincoln signed that land grant bill during the Civil War. And Lincoln once said during the Civil War—he gave a statement today that I would be ridiculed nationwide if I said—he said, “My policy is to have no policy. I am controlled by events.” Well, of course, he did have a policy. He had the most important one of all: “I'm going to hold this Union together if we all have to die to do it, including me.” That was his policy. But he also told an important truth. When the wheel runs off and things fall apart, you are to some extent controlled by events.

Today, in a rare moment, America is not especially controlled by events, but we cannot be unmindful of the larger historical trends which will shape our future. And it is the moral obligation of every person in a position of responsibility in the United States to take this opportunity not to lay down on the job and not to fall into mindless debates but to lift our sights and our visions to take advantage of this rare moment and make the most of it. And we could do no better than to give our people the finest set of educational opportunities in the world and to make sure very single one of them has those opportunities.

I was encouraged by the report I got out back, very brief, about the words that Senator Lott said earlier here today. During the cold war we had a bipartisan foreign policy, because—literally because the future of the country was at stake. Everybody agreed: We'd like to fight with you, and we'd like to kick you out if you're not in our party, but politics should stop at the water's edge.

Today, in the information age, politics should stop at the schoolhouse door, because our security depends upon our ability to give all our people the finest education in the world. My shorthand expression for what we're trying to do, and you will all recognize there are many other things at stake, is that we have to create an America in which every 8-year-old can read, every 12-year-old can log on to the Internet, every 18-year-old can go on to college, and every adult can keep on learning for a lifetime. My balanced budget makes an unprecedented

commitment to these goals: \$51 billion next year. But far more than money is required.

Three weeks ago at the State of the Union, I issued a call to action for American education based on 10 principles necessary to prepare our people for the 21st century:

First, we have to set world-class standards for our schools and develop a system of accountability, beginning for the first time with national standards-based reading tests in the fourth grade and math tests in the eighth grade.

Second, we have to make sure we have the best teachers in the world.

Third, we must make sure that every child can read on his or her own by the third grade. I see my friend the president of the Miami-Dade Community College out here, the largest community college in our country and one of the most diverse student bodies. Forty percent of the 8-year-olds in this country cannot read a book on their own, 40 percent. And we have to do better than that if we want all of our children to be in 2- and 4-year colleges when their time comes.

Fourth, we have to make sure parents are more deeply involved in a constructive way in their child's learning from birth. The First Lady and I are going to host a conference on early childhood learning and brain development in the spring here.

Fifth, we have to give parents more power to choose the right public schools for their children and encourage school reforms like charter schools that set and meet high standards.

Sixth, we should encourage the teaching of character education in our schools—and Secretary Riley has done a marvelous job of that—and promote order and discipline at the same time by supporting local school initiatives like school uniforms or truancy enforcements or curfews and demanding zero tolerance for guns and drugs. I have seen in the most difficult neighborhoods in this country that children do not have to put up with violent, disruptive, and destructive school environments. There are schools that are succeeding against all the odds. And if some can, all can. And until they all do, none of us should be satisfied.

Seventh, we should support school construction at the national level. I believe, for the very first time—because we have record numbers of school populations now—for the first time we've got a group bigger than the baby boomers coming through, and the schools are growing at

record rates while their facilities are deteriorating at record rates.

Eighth, we should make sure that learning is available for a lifetime by transforming what can only be described as a tangle of Federal training programs into a simple skill grant that goes directly to workers. People who need and are eligible for Federal training help, nearly all of them, live within driving distance of a community-based educational institution that can give them what they need. And we do not need a lot of Federal programs to get between them and those institutions. I have been trying for 4 years to pass this program. I hope you will help me get this done in this session of Congress, to create a new "GI bill" for America's workers that simply gives people a skills grant and lets them take it to the institution of education nearest them most able to meet their needs.

Ninth, we are determined to connect every classroom and library in this country to the Internet by the year 2000, and we're making good progress on that.

But finally, and the thing that you have endorsed today, is our effort to meet the last goal, to throw open the doors of college to all people who are willing to work for the opportunity.

As the Secretary said, we have always expanded education. He began with Abraham Lincoln, and we might have begun with Thomas Jefferson, who advocated, even as he advocated buying Louisiana—for which I'm very grateful; otherwise I wouldn't be President—[laughter]—and America becoming a continental nation, that we should educate all of our children. Thomas Jefferson even advocated the education of every single child, boy or girl, of slave families in America. And we know from the beginning that it was the education of our leaders that gave them the vision to chart the course which has brought us to this day.

I do believe, based on the sheer economic realities and the need for greater understanding of our interdependence in the world in which we're living, that we have to make the first 2 years of college as universal as a high school education is today. Fifteen years ago, the typical worker with a college degree earned 38 percent more than a high school graduate; today, it is 69 percent. Two years of college alone means a 20 percent increase in learning and a quarter of a million dollars more in earnings over a lifetime.

Now, over the past 4 years we have put in place an unprecedented college opportunity strategy: student loans provided directly to people who need them and that enable people to repay those loans as a percentage of their income; AmeriCorps, which has already helped 70,000 young people earn their way through college by serving their communities and their country; 200,000 more students in work-study as a result of last year's budget; and a very large increase in Pell grants last year, taking the maximum grant to \$2,700 and expanding the number of people eligible.

The plan I have put before the Congress in my balanced budget would expand work-study again so that one million students will be able to work their way through college by the year 2000. We want 100,000 of these new work-study students to join our America Reads efforts to help make sure all our 8-year-olds can read independently by the year 2000.

I know that more than 80 college presidents have already committed thousands of their work-study students to work as reading tutors. I thank those of you who are here leading this effort, many of you on the front row here, and I'd like to ask all the rest of you to join us. Go back home, look at how many people you've got in work-study, see how many you could allocate to this effort.

We're going to have about 35,000 AmeriCorps students trained especially to train tutors. We're going to challenge the parents and the schools to open up to make sure we can get these volunteers in there to teach these kids to read. We cannot expect the schools to operate efficiently if children have to leave the third grade not even being able to read. They will never learn what they need to know. And college students will relate well to these young kids and have a chance to literally revolutionize future learning in America.

A lot of these children are not just poor kids, they simply—many of them come out of cultures where their first language is not English, and they did not learn to read properly. We should not let them go past the third grade without knowing we have all done everything we humanly can to make sure that they can read independently. So I thank those of you from the bottom of my heart who have volunteered already, and I ask the rest of you to join in that crusade. We need you, and it will make all the difference.

Finally, let me say we have got to do more in other areas. For 3 years in a row now we've expanded Pell grants for deserving students. But our budget this year—our balanced budget contains the largest increase in Pell grant scholarships in 20 years. We are adding \$1.7 billion in grants, a 25 percent increase, which will make 348,000 more students eligible, many of them older students, and will increase the maximum grant to \$3,000. And for 4 million low and middle income students, the budget will cut student loan fees in half.

But if we're truly going to set a new standard, a 14-year standard, we've got to do more. That's why I have proposed America's HOPE scholarship based on the Georgia pioneering program: 2 years of a tax credit of \$1,500 for college tuition, enough to pay for the typical community college. We know it will work because of the testimonial you have already heard from President Knapp.

Second, I propose a tax deduction of up to \$10,000 a year for all tuition after high school to help families send children or parents to college or to graduate or medical school or any other education after high school.

Third, I propose an expanded IRA, expanded in terms of eligibility, in terms of who can save, and in terms of purpose, so that families can save tax-free to pay for education. Together these proposals mean that a family could save money for college tuition and never pay a penny of taxes on it. For example, families could put up to \$2,000 of income into the IRA each year without paying taxes, then withdraw up to \$10,000 a year for tuition and deduct that from income so that there will not be any taxes when they're paid out.

Cutting taxes to help people pay directly for college has never been done before on a national level. But we have cut taxes for years to help people buy a home or invest in a business because that's the way we thought we could encourage people to invest in their future and build the American dream. And it has worked. In the last 4 years we have seen homeownership rise to a 15-year high, and if the rate of increase continues, by the year 2000 more than two-thirds of Americans will live in their own home, an all-time record. In the last 4 years we have seen in each successive year a record number of new businesses formed in America. Today

we ought to have that same kind of encouragement to invest in education, an even more important investment for the future. And I think that it is highly appropriate to adopt this device to achieve that goal.

Let me assure you, the Treasury Department is committed to working with the Department of Education and all of you to make this tax plan work. The IRS will not interfere with the affairs of educational institutions. We are committed to making this simple and straightforward for the academic community and especially for the students of every age. The plan will give families the power to choose the right education for themselves and the flexibility to decide the best way in which to pay for that education.

Now, just think about what this could mean. A young person who can't afford tuition or whose family can't afford it can now go down to a local community college right away and sign up if they meet the standards, because the HOPE scholarship will pay for it. Someone with a new family who is worried about college costs down the road can multiply his or her savings power by putting tuition money in an IRA tax-free every year while the children are growing up. Then, when they're 40 and worried they might need more education to move ahead but can't spare time off from work, not only can they withdraw from the IRA for the kids but the parents can go part time or at night. But all can go to college without tax consequences.

My plan is simple: \$1,500-a-year tax cut for individuals to pay for college for 2 years; a \$10,000-a-year tax deduction for families for any year of tuition after high school; an expanded

IRA to help families save tax-free for education; plus the more and larger Pell grant scholarships for deserving students, 300,000 more work-study positions, AmeriCorps, the direct loan program.

This plan will throw open the doors of college and give every American the great chance to make the most of the world that we are moving into. College is opportunity for tomorrow. And creating that opportunity is our responsibility today.

I thank you again for your support of this plan. As we work in the weeks and months ahead to craft a bipartisan balanced budget, your endorsement today will be an historic element in making sure that this will be part of the ultimate budget plan. We need a balanced budget, but it has to reflect our values, and it has to pave the way to a better future.

Today we have committed to expanding educational opportunities by enacting the HOPE scholarship tax cut, the college tax deduction, the Pell grant increases, the work-study increases. I thank you for standing with us. You are standing for opportunity for generations to come in a way that will change America forever for the better.

Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:14 p.m. at the Grand Hyatt Hotel. In his remarks, he referred to Stanley O. Ikenberry, president, Michelle Tolela Myers, incoming chair, and Barry Munitz, outgoing chair, American Council on Education; Charles Knapp, incoming president, Aspen Institute, Washington, DC; and Eduardo Padron, president, Miami-Dade Community College.

Statement on the Death of Martin Slate

February 24, 1997

Hillary and I were deeply saddened to learn of the death of Marty Slate. Marty has been a dear friend since our years at Yale Law School and was the quintessential public servant.

From his days as a Freedom Rider in Mississippi to his years as a senior civil servant at the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission and the Internal Revenue Service, Marty spent his entire life working to make sure our laws were fair and applied justly.

Four years ago, I was delighted when Marty answered my call to return to public service. As Executive Director of the Pension Benefit Guaranty Corporation, he brought a new standard of excellence to that agency. He improved the PBGC's level of customer service and its financial management, winning an Innovation in American Government Award from the John F. Kennedy School and several Vice Presidential Hammer Awards for Excellence in Government.