

more charter schools to more communities, to bring computers to every classroom, to create safe and drug-free schools across our country, all these would virtually be abolished by an amendment which would throw all our education funds into a pot and distribute it in an arbitrary way to the States.

Today I'm going to see firsthand just how high these stakes are. I'm visiting the San Carlos Charter Learning Center in California, one of many charter schools across our country and in the State of California that are bringing new life, new energy, and new creativity into public education. Charter schools are established by educators with less redtape but higher expectations. Students must choose to attend them, and they exist only as long as they're doing a good job.

Our administration has been helping charter schools to get started all across our country, and our balanced budget contains funds to establish hundreds more of them all around America. This is an innovation we cannot afford to lose. Making sure 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, these are national goals, and we must support national efforts to meet them.

In the 21st century, our children must have a world-class education. We must strengthen our schools, raise our standards, insist that our students master the basics, and demand excellence at every level. So if Congress sends me partisan legislation that denies our children high national standards or weakens our national commitment to stronger schools, I'll have to give it the failing grade it deserves, and I'll veto it.

Bringing vital change and progress to our schools will take courage and the steadfast commitment of all. But throughout our history, we have always risen to the challenge of building better futures for our children. If we all work together, we are up to the task today as well.

Thank you.

NOTE: The address was recorded at 3:16 p.m. on September 18 in the Oval Office at the White House for broadcast at 10:06 a.m. on September 20.

Remarks in a Roundtable Discussion on Charter Schools at the San Carlos Charter Learning Center in San Carlos, California September 20, 1997

The President. Thank you very much. First, thank all of you for coming here today and sharing your Saturday morning. I thank the superintendent for his really marvelous remarks. He talked about all the things that we have in common. I saw a living symbol of his dedication to education above all else and one thing that we have in common that he didn't mention. If you look closely at his tie, you will see it is a pattern of golf balls and tees. And on this beautiful Saturday morning, he's here with us. [Laughter]

Let me thank your instructional coordinator, too, for being here, leaving her 11-day-old baby. I would like to see the 11-day-old baby, but I think it's—where's the baby? A wise mother leaves the baby outside. [Laughter]

Hillary and I are delighted to be here. And I want to spend most of my time just at this panel today. But I thank all of you for coming

because I believe in charter schools, and I believe they are an important part of helping us to lift our standards and renew our schools and achieve the kind of educational excellence that all of our children need as we move into the 21st century.

I congratulate the San Carlos Learning Center for being the first of its kind in California, which obviously makes it among the very first in the United States.

Let me just give you a little brief personal history here. When I was Governor of my State for 12 years, I spent a great deal of time working on school reform—and so did Hillary—spent lots of time in the schools, talking to teachers, talking to parents, talking to students, dealing with issues of curriculum development and teacher training and all those things. And when we were active in the 1980's, the State of Minnesota became the first State in the country

to pass a public school choice law, to give parents and their children more choice among the public schools their children attended. I think we were the second State to pass that law. And we used it quite a lot.

Then, when I began to run for President in 1991, Minnesota became the first State in the country again to pass a charter school law, recognizing that sometimes it wasn't enough just to give the parents and the students choices but that we needed to give the educators and the parents and the students with whom they worked options to create schools that fit the mission needed by the children in the area, and that if you gave them options and held them accountable, we might be able to do something really spectacular. Then, 5 years ago today, I think, California became the second State in the country to adopt a charter school law, and then you became the first of those schools.

In 1994, I passed legislation in Congress to help us support more charter schools. By the end of 1995, there were about 300 charter schools in the country. Today, there are 700 charter schools in the country. Many of them have been helped by the program we passed in Washington in 1994.

The historic balanced budget agreement that we just passed into law includes the largest commitment to new investment in education since 1965, among other things, expansion of Head Start programs, more funds to support computers in the schools—I'll say more about that in a moment—our America Reads initiative to help make sure every 8-year-old can read independently, and the biggest increased investment in helping people go to college since the GI bill passed 50 years ago: tax credits for the first 2 years of college, credits for the remainder of college, IRA's, Pell grants, work-study positions. All these together mean that for the first time ever we can really say, if you're responsible enough to work for it, no matter what your income or your difficulties, college is now a real option for you in America, for every single American. And I'm very proud of all of that.

But one of the things that was in this balanced budget that didn't get a lot of notice is enough money for us to help to set up literally thousands more charter schools in America—because excellence in education is more than money. And from my point of view, having spent years and years and years working on this, we need two things. We need a set of national

standards of academic excellence that will be internationally competitive in basic subjects, and then we need grassroots, school-based reform, because education is the magic that takes place in every classroom and indeed in every student's mind, involving every teacher, every student, and also, hopefully, support from home.

So that's why these charter schools are so important to me. And that's why we've tried to help a lot more schools like San Carlos get started on the path that you've been on now for some years.

For people who don't know exactly what they are, let me say that charter schools are public schools that make a simple agreement. In exchange for public funding, they get fewer regulations and less redtape, but they have to meet high expectations, and they keep their charter only so long as their customers are satisfied they're doing a good job.

As I said, we've gone from—the day I took office, there was only one charter school in America—January of '93. Then, a couple years ago, we were up to 300. Now there are 700. And what started as a movement in Minnesota and California now encompasses 29 States; 27 more States have passed charter school laws.

These funds in our budget, as I said, should allow us to set up several thousand more over the next 4 years. Today I am pleased to announce that we're going to release \$40 million in grants to help charter schools open. Startup costs are often the biggest obstacle. And in States that can't afford to help, it's a terrible problem. I see a lot of people nodding their heads out there who have had experience with this.

So we have curriculum development costs, teacher training costs, new technology costs—all these things can help. The \$40 million we're releasing today, of which about \$3.4 million will come to California, will help us to establish another 500 charter schools in 21 States. So we'll go from 700 to 500 in one pop here.

And as I said, pretty soon—and if all the States will join in, we obviously can help all of them—we'll have well over 3,000, perhaps even over 4,000 by the year 2000, which is enough to have a seismic echo effect in all the public school systems of America. So that's what we're trying to do.

Let me say that there are a couple of problems that we're going to face. Last week, the U.S. Senate, by a very narrow margin, supported

an amendment that would make these charter schools' funding that I just announced the last such announcement that would ever be made, because it would lump all the education funds together and arbitrarily distribute them to the State without regard to whether these programs were continued or not. And in the process, it would abolish very specific and highly successful education reform programs like the charter schools, where we work with local communities and school districts. It would abolish our highly successful effort to put computers in the classrooms—I'll tell you how much movement has happened on there in just 2 years—and to create safe and drug-free schools. I think that would be a mistake.

The House of Representatives recently passed, although the Senate opposed them, an amendment that would prohibit us to pay for—not to develop but to pay for—a nonpolitical, private organization to develop voluntary national tests of excellence in mathematics and reading. I think that would be a mistake. This is the first time, last year, in history that our students in elementary schools scored above the international average in math and science. We're doing much better in America, but we don't test all of our kids. We just test a representative sample. I think we need to know how we're doing based on a common standard.

So we have these problems in the Congress, and if either one of these provisions makes it into the final bill, I will have to veto it. So I hope that we can continue to work on moving forward in the right direction. And in that connection, I'd like to say a special word of appreciation to Congresswoman Anna Eshoo, who I think is one of the—absolutely—even I would say this if I were in Washington—she really is one of the finest, most forward-looking Members of the United States Congress, and she's made a big difference in our country today.

Now, running these charter schools, as we are about to hear, is not easy. It's not self-evident how to do all this. It sounds great to say, "We'll cut you free of redtape and bureaucracy. You have to perform at a higher level. You've got to get the parents involved." There are all kinds of practical problems, and we'll hear about some of them.

The Secretary of Education, Dick Riley, is going to convene a national conference on charter schools in Washington this November to bring together teachers, administrators, parents,

others who are interested in this to share best practices and look to the road ahead. But just think about where we can go with this. If we go—we've gone from one to 700, to 500 more, with a budget that calls for funds for 3,000 more—just this year's budget alone, that will be funded starting October 1st, if we get the funds for it, will give us enough funds for another 700—or 900 to 1,000 schools.

So this movement can sweep the country and can literally revolutionize both community control and standards of excellence in education if we do it right. That's what the panel is about.

And before we start, let me just thank some of the business leaders who are here today for their commitment to educational excellence: Regis McKenna, David Ellington, Brook Byers, Terry Yang, Paul Lippe. And I'd like to say a special word of thanks to Larry Ellison who is up here on the platform. He's the chairman and CEO of Oracle Corporation.

Two years ago this week, I met with Larry and a number of other high-tech executives to talk about another one of my passions, which is to connect every classroom and library in every school in America to the Internet by the year 2000. And that, like everything else, it turned out to be more complicated. It sounded great, but we not only had to connect them, we had to make sure we had the hardware, the software, and the trained teachers to do the job.

So we got this group of business people who knew about all this, who are working very hard to try to make sure that we can do that, give all the support services to every school. We got the Federal Communications Commission to give what amounts to a \$2¼ billion a year subsidy to schools, to lower the rates they have to pay to hook onto the Internet. But to give you an example of what we can do when we work together, since we made that announcement 2 years ago, California has 65 percent of the schools connected, which is twice the percentage you had 2 years ago, and 4 times as many classrooms connected as just 2 years ago. That shows you how quickly we can move.

And Larry has not only sponsored the San Carlos Learning Center but yesterday he announced Oracle's promise to spend \$100 million in a foundation to help schools across America who need support to get the kind of connection

to the future through telecommunications technology that we all want. So thank you, Larry, for doing that.

So this is a good news day, but what I want to do now is to turn it over to the panel, and let's get into the facts of the charter school movement and see. Hopefully, by being here today, this will encourage the 21 States who do not have charter school legislation to adopt it; it will encourage the Congress to fully fund the charter schools program for the next 4 years; and it will help us to take what you have done here and spread it all across America in a way that will guarantee international standards of excellence in the education of all of our children.

Thank you very much.

[At this point, the roundtable discussion proceeded, after which the First Lady made closing remarks.]

The President. First of all, let me say I agree with everything she said. [Laughter] I'd just like to make a couple of brief points to build on what Hillary said. I want to say, first of all, I have no hidden agenda here. I believe the only way public schools can survive as the instrument by which we educate our children and socialize them and bring them together across all the lines that divide us is if all of our schools eventually—and hopefully sooner rather than later—are run like these charter schools. That's what I believe. I am not running for office anymore. I have no political interest in this. I am thinking about what our country is going to be like 20, 30, 40, 50 years from now.

And you know what Tom said about the industrial model, that's part of the problem. A lot of our schools are organized on an industrial model—a lot of our middle schools are almost—are organized for when families were like Ozzie and Harriet, instead of like they are today. There are a lot of organizational problems. It's also true that our schools get money from a lot of different places and have to suffer rules from a lot of different places, and a lot of people think if they give up their rulemaking, they won't matter anymore. And in some way, the most important person here is the superintendent because he's here supporting this instead of figuring out how he can control it. And I think that's important.

And so Hillary and I have been working at this business for a long time now, seriously since 1983—really seriously. There has been a dra-

matic change in the attitudes of the teacher unions, which is positive. There have been dramatic advances in the attitude of administrators, which is positive.

But I just want to say, we cannot—there are a lot of people who believe in the information age, with things changing as fast as they are and with standards needing to be as high as they are, that we ought to just basically send everybody money and let them do whatever they want to about education and forget about the public education network—let it sink or swim. The problem with that theory is that the short-term costs to people who got left behind would be staggering.

But if we want to preserve excellence and the socially unifying impact of public schools over the next generation, I am telling you, every school in the country has got to become like this one. The power needs to be with the parents, with the children, with the teachers, with the principals. And those of us who are up the lines somewhere, up the food chain, what are we interested in? We're interested in what Kim said. We're interested in results. We don't need to make rules. We're interested in results, and we want to be able to measure them. We want to know our kids are going to be all right and our country is going to be all right.

Let them make the rules in the schools. Let them figure it out. And then education will be something that will get bright young lawyers to leave their more lucrative law practices to do something that doesn't pay as much but makes them feel good when they go to bed every night and get up in the morning. That's what we want. And until every school is run like that, you and I should not rest.

Thank you. God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:19 a.m. in the gymnasium. In his remarks, he referred to Don Shalvey, superintendent, San Carlos School District; Elise Darwish, instructional coordinator, San Carlos Charter Learning Center; Regis McKenna, president, Regis McKenna, Inc.; David Ellington, chief executive officer, Net Noir; Brook Byers, partner, Kleiner, Perkins, Caufield & Byers; Terry Yang, cofounder, Yahoo!; Paul Lippe, vice president, Synopsis; Tom Ruiz, teacher, International Studies Academy Charter School; and Kimberly Polese, president and chief executive officer, Marimba, Inc.