

Remarks to the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards Honoring Board-Certified Master Teachers *October 24, 1997*

Thank you very much, ladies and gentlemen. I have to say the Vice President always says when—we have this arrangement, he always says, thank you for the standing ovation. [*Laughter*] I'd also like to thank the United States Marine Band for being here for us today. I know you enjoyed them very much. You know, when I have to leave this job, in 3 years and a couple of months, I'll miss a lot of things about Washington and the White House—a few things I won't. [*Laughter*] But I'll really miss the Marine Band. It's a great honor to be around them every day. They're terrific.

I want to thank Rebecca Palacios for her introduction and for her lifetime of dedication. We wanted her up here because she stands for all of you. And she first came to my attention when she spoke at Al Shanker's memorial service, and I know that a lot of you feel as I do. I wish he were here today. He'd be tickled to see this crowd and the progress of this endeavor.

I'd like to thank Congressman Bob Etheridge and our good friend Senator Jim Jeffords from Vermont for being here and for the support we have received in the Congress with the leadership that they have given, and others, to this endeavor.

I thank Secretary Riley. You know, I got a little nostalgic when Dick Riley was up here talking—Governor Hunt and Governor Riley and Governor Clinton—we've been at this since the 1970's. And none of us are very young anymore, and we're a little beat up, but it's been, I must say, one of the great treasures of my life to be friends with these two great leaders, to get to know their wives and their families, and to feel like we were giving a lifetime to this endeavor of advancing education. And I agree with Jim Hunt, Dick Riley is the best Secretary of Education we've ever had, and I thank him for that.

Governor Hunt, I thank you for your leadership yesterday at the first-ever White House Conference on Child Care that Hillary and I sponsored, and I thank you for what you're doing in North Carolina to get a systematic approach to giving all of our children in their

preschool years the best preparation and support they can have. I thank you for 10 years at the helm of this extraordinary organization. Because of the work that you and the national board, with support from the business community and from States all across America, have done, more teachers are now being challenged to fulfill their greatest potential, and just as important, they're finally being rewarded for doing so. And I thank you for that.

And thank you, Barbara Kelley, for stepping in to fill Governor Hunt's shoes. You've worked tirelessly to improve education in Maine, and you've served the board well as vice chair. And I must say, you've got quite a crowd up for your first day on the job here. Congratulations. I'd also like to thank James Kelly and Sarah Mernissi for their leadership on the board.

Ladies and gentlemen, I'd like to take just a couple of minutes and try to put what you're doing here in this truly historic endeavor into the larger context of the journey that your Nation is on. Six years ago this month, when I began to seek the Presidency, I did it because I thought we had to change course, become more focused, more united, and more energetic if we were going to succeed in preparing America for the 21st century. And I had a simple but, I think, quite profound vision of what I wanted our country to be like when we crossed that next divide.

With all of our challenges, all of our difficulties, and all of our diversity, I want this to be a country where the American dream is alive for everybody who is responsible enough to work for it. I want America to still be the world's leading force for peace and freedom and prosperity. And I want us to be able to reach across all the lines that divide us, to make one America.

Together, we've made a lot of progress: The economy is growing; crime is down; the social fabric is mending. That happened in no small part, I think, because we underwent as a nation our own educational process. We had to think anew and learn anew about what the role of Government is and what we ought to be doing in all of these areas that are important to us.

I had listened for years as a Governor to a debate here about whether the Government should do nothing or try to do everything, neither of which made any sense to me in my own life. So we've given America a smaller and more focused Government that focuses on giving people the tools and creating the conditions to make the most of their own lives.

I also believed that we had to go beyond a lot of other kind of false choices. In the economy, the argument used to be, are we going to do something about the deficit, in which case we won't do anything else, or are we going to just keep spending and betray the future of all the children in the audience? We have shown that you can reduce the deficit and balance the budget and still invest in America's children and its future, and that is the right approach. [*Applause*] Thank you.

On the environment, the debate was, well, if we clean up the environment, we'll wreck the economy—in spite of the fact that that contradicted all our experiences. So we have energetically embraced the proposition that we have to dramatically improve the environment, dramatically reduce our greenhouse gases, and we're going to do it and grow the economy. When you start new things in an innovative way, you create more jobs and more opportunities. Doing the right thing is normally something that benefits you economically, and it will here as well.

On crime, I thought there was a totally false debate about people who talked tough on the one hand, and people who were genuinely compassionate about the circumstances that bred crime on the other. I thought we ought to be both tough and compassionate in trying to prevent people from getting into trouble in the first place. And that approach is working, and the crime rate is dropping.

On welfare, there was a debate which basically treated everybody on welfare on the one hand as if they never wanted to go to work and say we ought to impose a lot of requirements on them, and other people who were genuinely concerned about the welfare of children of people on welfare but never wanted to hold them to higher standards. So we took an approach to welfare reform that required everybody to work who can, but take care of the children. That's our most important job. And in the process our country has learned and

grown and gained self-confidence, just the way your students do in the class.

And we are still engaged in this debate here in Washington about education. You know, there are those who say that the Federal Government should do next to nothing in education and that basically it should be left alone. Or some people think it should be abandoned altogether. I believe that we have to go beyond either giving up on the one hand or giving more money to the status quo on the other. None of you represent the status quo. You represent standards, reform, and investment. That is the proper path for education in the future and every area.

I know we've been saying this all our lives, but it is really true that the greatest challenge America faces to realizing our entire vision is the challenge of giving every child in this country a world-class education. If we don't do it, how can we preserve the American dream for people who are responsible enough to work for it? There are a lot of people today in America—every day I think about all the people out there who are willing to work, are willing to work harder, who are trapped in circumstances that they find totally unsatisfactory, that are difficult for their children, simply because they never got a good education to develop their abilities.

How can we lead the world toward peace and freedom and prosperity if we are weak at home because we don't have strength in the minds and hearts and spirits and the self-confidence of all of our people? How can we have enough sense to overcome all of our diversity and be one America, at a time when racial and ethnic and religious tensions are causing people to kill each other all over the world, if we don't have the education that makes us understand that deep down inside what we have in common will always be more important than the things that divide us? You are carrying us into the future.

Now, therefore, in a very fundamental sense, you are at the center of America's mission to the 21st century. And you know some things that sometimes it seems like we forget here in Washington when you hear these debates: Meeting the challenge will not be easy. There is no quick fix. There is no single proposal that will magically give all our children the education that they need and deserve.

I might say that I do not believe that a proposal that takes resources away from public schools, most of which are already underfunded,

will do anything for the 90 percent of the children who are going to remain there. But I would also say, we make a great mistake when we stop at the denial. We cannot afford to be in denial. What's that story all the children say? "Denial is not just a river in Egypt." [Laughter] We know, and you have proved by what you have done, that we all have to be impatient. If you believe in the education of all children, if you believe in the potential of the public schools, we have to be impatient and focused and determined and willing not just to settle for isolated successes but to do systematic things.

That is the genius of the national board. I think, of all the many contributions Jim Hunt has made to our public life, when his whole career is over, two will stand out: the work he's done on this board, and the work he's done in North Carolina to take a systematic approach to all children between birth and age 5 to get them ready to go to school.

We must be impatient. We have to change the system for everyone. It's got to work for everyone. Isolated examples of success are not enough. Therefore, we have to fight to raise standards for students and teachers. We ought to give more choice and competition among public schools. We ought to equip all of our schools with the latest technology and people who know how to use it. [Laughter]

We ought to empower our parents to take a more active role in their children's education. We ought to recognize that people can't succeed in school unless our schools, all of them, are safe and disciplined and drug-free. We have to do more to bring high-quality teachers to difficult, underserved, poor areas, where the children need them the most. We ought to make it easier for all schools to reform, to be less bureaucratic. If people aren't performing, it ought to be easier for them to be moved out. But the most important thing we can do is to train and reward the finest teachers in America, to get them and keep them in the classroom.

So that debate is going on here now, and we face a choice. There are those of us, like Governor Hunt and our master teachers, who are doing all they can to sustain and improve and strengthen public education in America. And there are those whose answer is to do nothing or, worse, to walk away. It's a choice between those who look at the challenge of public

education and throw up their hands and those who, like you, roll up their sleeves.

I have called upon all of our people 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 to college, and every American can keep on learning for lifetime.

Let us say one thing here for the record. You and people like you all over the country have been working on this for more than a decade, and our schools—against all odds and great challenges, our schools are getting better. Everybody should know that. They are getting better. We are taking in ever more diverse student populations. We are learning more about how to deal with each other, and we are getting better results. Secretary Riley mentioned North Carolina's results. We are getting better results, but only when we are impatient, focused, determined, relentless, and systematic in our approach.

The balanced budget I signed last summer will help us to do this. It will throw open the doors of college to everybody who is willing to work for it through more Pell grants, 300,000 more work-study slots, education IRA's, the historic HOPE scholarship for the first 2 years of college, and other tax credits for all higher education. The budget goes a long way toward completing our mission to connect every classroom and library to the Internet by the year 2000, which I think we're going to meet. And I thank you.

We're fighting to fully fund America Reads, which has already involved AmeriCorps volunteers, tens of thousands of college students from 800 campuses now, many other people in churches and other volunteer groups going into our schools to help tutor individually young children. And Congress has taken the first step toward funding that, and I appreciate that.

But all these things will mean little unless the classroom works. Ultimately, the magic of education is what goes on in the class, between the teachers and the students, hopefully supported at home by the parents. That's why we have to set high national standards of academic excellence. That's why I'm fighting for these fourth grade reading and eighth grade math tests. And I thank Governor Hunt and the other States and cities who have supported it.

Through voluntary national standards, parents and teachers can make sure that all their children in all of our schools get the skills they

need. I thank Governor Hunt again for his leadership here, and I hope he can have even more members of the National Governors' Association following the lead of the heads of the biggest school districts in the country and many city governments all across the country who are doing this.

Again I will say that if there is any attempt in Congress to kill this effort at national standards and voluntary testing, I will have to veto it.

So this is the context in which your efforts are working, and we have to see it against that. It is the great frontier of our national effort to come to grips with all the challenges we face to get this country into the 21st century in the shape that we all know it must be in. Raising the quality of teaching has to come at the top of the list.

We all know a single extraordinary teacher can change the lives of many students. We all know we should reward excellence in teaching. Now we know that national board certification defines excellence in teaching. That's why I've asked the Congress for \$105 million over the next 5 years to help us get 100,000 board-certified master teachers.

Now, just think of the difference a master teacher could make if we had a master teacher in every single school in America. All of you know that one of the things teachers do a good job of is talking. *[Laughter]* In the classroom, in the teachers' lounge, in the halls, before and after school, you talk for a living, and you're good at it. If we could get at least one master teacher in every single school building in America, then all the process through which you go, you will be, without even thinking about it and sometimes consciously, imparting to the other teachers, to the principals, changing the culture of our schools in ways that no one could write out a form book and predict. But we know if we can get enough of these master teachers, we will have a critical mass that will then impact on all the other teachers, on the teaching environment, and therefore, on the learning of all of our children.

That is why I asked for the \$100 million. That's why I want 100,000 board teachers. I do not want to stop until we've got a master teacher in every single school building in the United States of America—eventually, I hope, in every classroom—but every school building. We should not stop until we do that.

That's the sort of thing that Jim Hunt has visualized all this time, a system—not isolated successes, a system—where we give our teachers, our schools, our children a chance to be the best they can be. That is what we have to do, and that is our mission. And that's why we've got to get this through the Congress and why I'm so glad to see Senator Jeffords here. And I know that he stands for a lot of other people who will do it.

I must say, when Congressman Etheridge gave up being head of the North Carolina education effort to come to Congress, he didn't really do that—he's basically got two jobs in one—and I think he's going to ask Governor Hunt for a second salary to support it. *[Laughter]*

Now, let me also say to you that you're getting a lot more support around the country now in local school districts and in businesses who are stepping up to the challenge. Last month, the Los Angeles Unified School District and the United Teachers of Los Angeles agreed to reward board-certified teachers with a 15 percent raise. You know, one of Clinton's laws of politics is when someone—people always say in Washington, "That's not a money problem." When they say that, they're talking about someone else's problem. *[Laughter]* It does matter. We must pay people more if they're doing well, if they're better prepared, and if they're willing to stand out and stake out a new frontier, and it's important.

Just a few days ago the McGraw-Hill company joined forces with the New York City Board of Education and the United Federation of Teachers there, along with New York universities to prepare more teachers for board certification. These things are crucial to our success. We can appropriate the money here. We can help you implement it. But we've got to have friends out there who believe in it and then people who will reward the teachers once they get the certification. So I want every State, every school board, every business to help more of our teachers become master teachers.

As the national board continues to define what teachers should know and be able to do, I also hope you will make even more use of effective technology. Every teacher should be as comfortable with a computer as a chalkboard. You should not be as technologically challenged as I am. *[Laughter]*

And finally, let me say I think we have to do more to attract more young people into teaching as a career, particularly where the kids need it the most. I have called upon Congress to support a \$350-million scholarship program modeled on the National Medical Service Corps. Those of us who come from rural States can all remember how blessed our rural communities have been over the last several years, the last couple of decades, by the doctors who were educated in medical school with the National Medical Service Corps and then went out to some place where people had never seen a doctor for years or where the town doctor had died and no other young people would go and how many people were helped by that. We need to do that for our inner-city schools, for our rural schools, for our poorest children.

This proposal would basically give a talented young person an education in exchange for a promise to teach children growing up in our most underprivileged communities. It will strengthen teacher training in colleges that work directly with inner cities and with poor rural schools. It is a good idea, and I hope you will help me pass it, because the kids out there who have the toughest neighborhoods to live in and the toughest obstacles to overcome and the parents in the most difficult circumstances, they need the best teachers. They need them, and we ought to try to help them get them.

And finally let me say just a simple thank you for making a decision to spend your lives on the future. If you really think about it, most

of us do things every day where, at the end of the day, we can know that the major impact of what we've done comes more or less right after we do it. The major impact of what you do will come perhaps after we're not even around anymore. You literally live your lives based on a faith in the innate dignity and potential of every child that you may never see realized. They may go off to some far-distant place and do something, and the connection will be broken. But you know what you're doing is renewing this country in a constant and profound way. And I think you for that.

Henry Adams once said that "Our teachers affect eternity. They can never tell where their influence stops." You will never know where your influence stops, but I can tell you, you will know that it always begins here in Washington as long as Dick Riley and Jim Hunt and Bill Clinton and the people that agree with us have a job to do—[laughter]—have a job to do and the energy to do it.

Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:40 a.m. in a pavilion on the South Lawn at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to board-certified master teacher Rebecca Palacios, who introduced the President; Gov. James B. Hunt, Jr., of North Carolina; and Barbara Kelley, chair, James A. Kelly, president and chief executive officer, and Sarah "Sally" Mernissi, vice president for government relations, National Board for Professional Teaching Standards.

Remarks to the Asia Society and the United States-China Education Foundation Board

October 24, 1997

Thank you very much, Ambassador Platt. I thank the Asia Society and the U.S.-China Education Foundation for bringing us together today. I thank Senator Baucus and Congressmen Dreier, Matsui, and Roemer for being here; Secretary Albright, Ambassador Barshefsky, National Security Adviser Berger, the other distinguished officials from the State Department. And I thank especially the members of the diplomatic corps who are here and the students. And especially let me thank two of my favorite

people, Joe Duffey and Evelyn Lieberman, for the work of the Voice of America and the USIA, all that they do to promote the free flow of ideas around the world.

Next week, when President Jiang Zemin comes to Washington, it will be the first state visit by a Chinese leader to the United States for more than a decade. The visit gives us the opportunity and the responsibility to chart a course for the future that is more positive and