

I call on the Congress to act—before it adjourns for the year—on a multi-year reauthorization bill that will give transportation planners and decision-makers the assurance of multi-year funding levels that they can use to continue to improve America's vital transportation network. My Administration stands ready to assist

the Congress to resolve the issues and agree on a multi-year bill.

WILLIAM J. CLINTON

The White House,  
October 27, 1997.

NOTE: H.R. 2169, approved October 27, was assigned Public Law No. 105–66.

### Remarks at a Birthday Party for the First Lady in Chicago, Illinois October 27, 1997

*The President.* Thank you very much. You can hear I'm a little hoarse tonight, but I'll do my best to be heard over the din. Let me say to all of you, first of all, thank you, Mr. Mayor; thank you, Mrs. Daley; thank you, Lois Weisberg. I thank all the committee, everybody who had anything to do with this day today. You have made Hillary and, I might say, her mother and her brothers who came with her today—you've made their whole family very happy. This has been an unforgettable day in her life, and I am profoundly grateful to all of you, and I thank you very much.

You know, before I met Hillary, you could put what I knew about Chicago in a thimble and have space left over. [*Laughter*] About a week after I met Hillary, I thought there was no other city on the face of the Earth. [*Laughter*] I'll never forget the first time I came here to visit Hillary. I remember only two things: her father would not come outside to say hello to me—[*laughter*]—which I thought showed good judgment on his part—[*laughter*]—and she took me to Chicago and showed me the city. And I fell in love with it then—that was a long time ago now—and I have been ever since.

This is a magnificent place. You have done unbelievable things. You're in the process of

doing other unbelievable things. They may well make a larger chapter in the history of this city, but you will never have a kinder, better, warmer gesture than the one you've given Hillary today, and I will never forget it as long as I live. Thank you very, very much.

*Audience member.* Four more years!

*The President.* It's not constitutional. [*Laughter*]

I want to ask Hillary to come up now. You have to remember—this birthday—she wore it lightly for a long time, but her staff started celebrating it 50 days before the event. They wanted her to recognize precisely how old she was by giving her one present a day for 50 days up to the blessed event—[*laughter*]—which occurred yesterday. Now she's still celebrating it as if she's going to hold on for dear life. [*Laughter*] Whatever she wants to do, I'm for.

Ladies and gentlemen, our First Lady.

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:25 p.m. in Gar Hall at the Chicago Cultural Center. In his remarks, he referred to Mayor Richard M. Daley of Chicago and his wife, Margaret; Chicago Commissioner of Culture Affairs Lois Weisberg; and the First Lady's mother, Dorothy Rodham, and brothers Tony Rodham and Hugh Rodham, Jr.

### Remarks at Oscar Mayer Elementary School in Chicago October 28, 1997

Thank you very much. Thank you, Evaline, and thank you, Mary. Thank you, Maggie Sul-

livan. Mr. Blitstein, thank you for welcoming me here.

I have been officially welcomed. [Laughter] I have my Oscar Mayer wiener here. When Hillary was teaching me about Chicago so long ago, we learned to sing the Oscar Mayer song. [Laughter]

Congressman, Mayor, Mr. Chico, Mr. Vallas, Ms. Buckney, Alderman Bernardina, Alderman O'Connor, Recorder White. I don't know if my friend John Stroger is here or not, but if he is, hello. I am delighted to be here today.

As all of you know, I'm sure, my wife had a wonderful day in Chicago yesterday, and her whole family was here. And I was regaled with it last night, everything that happened. Chicago is a really special place, and the people who are tied to it have this almost psychic energy, I think, about what's going on.

For example, on the way into Chicago, my brother-in-law told me, he said, "I've got good feelings about this." He said, "I even think the Bears are going to win." [Laughter] I swear he did. So there is something quite mystical about all this but also something very wonderful. I thank you for letting me come here.

I wanted to be here today because this school is the embodiment of the effort that I have asked Americans to make to prepare our country for the 21st century, to make sure we have an America where every person who is responsible enough to work for it can live the American dream, where we're still strong enough to lead the world for peace and freedom and prosperity, and where we look across all of our diversity and come together as one America.

I know today a lot of Americans are focused on the stock market. It may be disappointing, but I think it is neither prudent nor appropriate for any President to comment on the hour-by-hour or the day-by-day movements of the market. I'd like to ask all of us to remember that our economy is as strong and vibrant today as it has been in a generation. We saw yesterday that our deficit has come down to \$22 billion from \$290 billion. That's the lowest since 1970.

With unemployment and inflation at their lowest levels in two decades, businesses and banks healthy and sound, new jobs being created every day, our economy is continuing to grow steady and strong. That's why we have to feel confident and continue our economic strategy. We've got to balance the budget, expand trade, and invest in the education of all our people.

Now, on that last score—in spite of all the economic progress we're making, in spite of the

fact that crime is down 5 years in a row, that we have the lowest percentage of people on welfare we've had since 1970—millions of people have left the rolls—on education, we know we've got a lot more to do to make sure all children receive the world-class education they deserve to thrive in the information economy of the 21st century. That's why I've put educational excellence and opportunity at the top of America's agenda, and that's why I've come to Oscar Mayer school, to thank the mayor, the principals, the teachers, the students, the parents, and the people of Chicago for leading this crusade.

Because of what you are doing, the city that works now has a school system on the move. Chicago has shown us that having high expectations for our children, setting high standards and holding students accountable for them, and above all, making sure we stay at it systematically, school-by-school, child-by-child—Chicago has shown us that this works.

By abolishing the destructive practice of social promotion and giving all children the chance to learn what they need to know, Chicago is leading the way to an educated America in which every 8-year-old can read independently, every 12-year-old can log on to the Internet, every 18-year-old can go on to college, every adult can keep on learning for a lifetime. That is the vision I want for every American community, and Chicago is leading the way.

Last summer, I signed into law the historic Balanced Budget Act, which will help to bring us closer to these goals. It will open the doors to college for everyone who is willing to work for it, through more Pell grants and work-study positions, better student loans, tax-free education IRA's, the HOPE scholarship, and other tax credits for all forms of education after high school. We're also well on our way to putting computers in all our classrooms by the year 2000 and hooking them up to the Internet.

But none of it will matter if our children don't master the basics. That's why I'm fighting to bring our America Reads program to every community in the country, gathering an army of volunteers led by our AmeriCorps young people to go in and offer to tutor one-on-one all children who are having trouble reading. Today, we already have 800 colleges, tens of thousands of students who are moving into our schools and supporting our children in this way.

I'm also fighting to introduce more choice and competition into our public schools and to establish thousands of charter schools within the public school network so people, where they need it, can actually fashion schools designed to meet the special needs of special populations.

I want to support communities in making our schools places of learning and values, not violence and disorder. And I applaud what your principal said about the character education program here. We ought to have that in every school in the United States. And I think we have to do more to empower parents to take an active role in their children's education. I always love to come to a school where a parent and a student talk, and I was glad to see them both doing such a good job today. Yes, give them a hand. That's good. *[Applause]*

But you can do all this and you still have to have high expectations, high standards, and some accountability, because people have to be working toward a goal and they have to know what the goal is. That's why I've worked so hard for the concept of academic standards in the basics that we say should apply to every child in America, and to establish voluntary tests to measure the students' performance, beginning with fourth-grade reading and eighth-grade math. This will give our parents and our teachers the assurance that their children have mastered the basics. This will let every employer know that a diploma means something, a job applicant can read a manual, tally a check, analyze and solve a problem, and become a dependable employee.

I want to thank the mayor for his early support of national standards, and I thank the city of Chicago for joining with 14 other major American cities for pledging to make sure their students meet them. This is a truly groundbreaking development. If anyone had told any of us who had been working for 20 years in the area of school improvement 10 years ago that 15 of the biggest cities in America would be leading, not bringing up the rear but leading the fight for higher standards for our children, recognizing that our poorest children and the kids that grow up in the toughest neighborhoods are the ones who need the standards the most, no one would have believed it. This is an astonishing, positive development, and you should all be very proud of it.

I can remember a few years ago when the only news those of us who didn't live in Illinois

got about the Chicago school system was the annual strike. *[Laughter]* I can remember we used to see a picture of the Governor's daughter in his office, waiting for the strike to be over, hanging around with her dad. And I now see what has happened: A whole people, led by a strong mayor and dedicated educators, have rejected low test scores, high drop-out rates, students earning diplomas they couldn't read, and instead have demanded results from their principals, their teachers, their schools, and most importantly, the students, letting them know they can't move on to the next grade unless they know what they're supposed to know from the grade they're finishing. You've strengthened curricula, renovated buildings, retrained teachers, expanded preschool education, kept schools open longer in the summertime to give children who need it extra help.

I'd like to say here, for the rest of America that might be watching this today, something that you have taught us: Ending social promotion does not put children down; it gives us a chance to lift all children up. We are not punishing children by making sure they know what they need to know and that when they move from grade to grade, it means something. And we don't do anyone, especially our poorest children in our toughest neighborhoods, a favor by giving them a pass on high standards. All of our children can succeed, and they deserve a chance to do it, even, if all else fails, repeating a grade.

You know, people used to say that asking a child to repeat a grade was too high a price to pay for learning because of the damage to self-esteem. But we know that children develop in different ways at different times. And we know that while a year seems like an eternity to an 8-year-old child or a 16-year-old child, when you're 50 it seems like nothing. *[Laughter]*

I care a lot about the self-esteem of the American people. But I would ask you to think about the thousands of Americans who are sitting in GED classes today, struggling in literacy programs, standing in unemployment lines, who can tell you there is nothing more damaging to self-esteem than wanting a job and not being able to get one; wanting to get an improvement, a promotion, a raise, and not having the skills necessary to get it. And if we adults send our children the right messages now, their self-esteem will not be harmed by an expression of

love and hope for their future that prevents that sort of problem for them later on.

I want what is happening in Chicago to happen all over America. I challenge every school district to adopt high standards, to abolish social promotion, to move aggressively to help all students make the grade through tutoring and summer school, and to hold schools accountable for results, giving them the tools and the leadership and the parental involvement to do the job.

Today I am directing the Department of Education to share promising approaches to improving low-performing schools, such as those that Chicago has developed, with people all across America. And I'm directing the Department of Education to strengthen its own efforts to help districts use the Federal money that we have now to transform schools that aren't performing into world-class learning centers.

There is nothing wrong with America that can't be fixed by what's right with America. I said that in my first Inaugural; I see it again today. If you did it here, it can be done everywhere. If it's happened to one child, it can hap-

pen to every child. What is working in Chicago must blow like a wind of change into every city and every school in America. We owe it to our kids, and because you have done it, you've given us the courage and the conviction to believe we can do it for all of our children.

Thank you. Stay with it. God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:34 a.m., in the gymnasium. In his remarks, he referred to Evaline Medina, fourth-grade student who introduced the President, and her mother, Mary Medina; Maggie Sullivan, sixth-grade teacher, and Robert Blitstein, principal, Oscar Mayer Elementary School; Representative Rod Blagojevich of Illinois; Mayor Richard M. Daley of Chicago; Gery J. Chico, president, reform board of trustees, Paul Vallas, chief executive officer, and Cozette Buckney, chief education officer, Chicago Public Schools; Charles R. Bernardina, alderman, 43d ward; Patrick J. O'Connor, alderman, 40th ward; Jesse C. White, Jr., Cook County recorder of deeds; and John Stroger, president, Cook County board of commissioners.

## Memorandum on Low-Performing Public Schools

October 28, 1997

*Memorandum for the Secretary of Education*

**Subject:** Turning Around Low-Performing Public Schools

Since taking office in 1993, and with your strong leadership, my Administration has pursued a comprehensive effort to strengthen public schools. We have worked to raise academic standards, promote accountability, and provide greater competition and choice within the public schools, including support for a dramatic increase in charter schools. Moreover, we have worked to make the investments necessary to improve teaching and learning in classrooms across America, through efforts to keep our schools safe and free of drugs; to provide students who need it extra help to master the basics; to increase parental and community involvement; to recruit, prepare, and provide continuing training to teachers and reward excellence in teaching; and to make sure every school

has access to and can effectively use 21st century technology.

This strategy is starting to produce results. We know that all students can learn to high standards, and that every school can succeed if it has clear instructional goals and high expectations for all of its students; if it creates a safe, disciplined and orderly environment for learning; helps parents be involved in their children's education; and uses proven instructional practices. All schools must be given the resources, tools, and flexibility to help every student reach high standards.

Yet, no school improvement strategy can succeed without real accountability for results, as measured by student achievement. Excellent schools and schools that show significant improvement must be recognized and rewarded. At the same time, schools that demonstrate persistently poor academic performance—schools that fail to make adequate progress in educating all students to high standards—must be held