

I'm proud of you for being here and very grateful. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:54 p.m. at a private residence. In his remarks, he referred to dinner hosts John W. and Peggy Henry.

Remarks During the Education Session of the Democratic National Committee's Autumn Retreat on Amelia Island, Florida
November 1, 1997

[*The discussion is joined in progress.*]

The President. I'll try to get through this. I think I'll get better as we go along. We'll see.

First of all, I believe that the condition of our children will continue to be one of the major issues for the country for the next 10 to 20 years. And I think we have to admit that with all our economic success, with the fact that we've got 3 million fewer people on welfare and crime is down and the schools are getting better, there are still a lot of kids in this country who don't have the childhood they need and that we need for them to have. And I'd just like to make a few comments on the issues that all of you have raised.

First, I think almost every family, even families in comfortable incomes, feel the tension of their job in the workplace and their job at home. Americans, we know, in general, are working longer than they were 20 years ago. There are more hours spent at work today by the average American family at all income levels than 20 years ago. And I think that means that things like child care and family leave are much more important.

Now, if I might just make a comment, the family leave law has probably touched more people in a profoundly personal way than just about anything else we've done. People still come up to me on the street all over the country and talk about it. And I believe we should go beyond it. I think we ought to expand the law to require that people should be able to get a little time off to go to regular parent conferences with the teachers at school and regular medical appointments.

And I believe we ought to have more flextime options for people in the workplace, so that if they build up overtime—a lot of people are required to work overtime; others wish to work overtime—I personally believe that if the employee makes that choice, then he or she should

be able to take the overtime in cash or in time with their families. So I don't think—when we talk about all these other things we need, I don't think we should get away from first base.

The other thing I think Valerie said, there's very little the Federal Government can do about this except in some of our specific programs like Early Head Start. But there are some States that have social service and public outreach programs that do a very good job in visiting families before babies are born and trying to help young people, especially without much background, get the basics of parenting down. Now, we take that for granted, but it's a big mistake. An enormous amount of good can be done in that.

And I guess Ellen's probably already talked, but you know, when we had this conference on early childhood and the brain, I read a lot of the scientific data, and one research project I reviewed said that a child in a supportive family in a child care environment would get 700,000 positive contacts in the first 4 years of life. A child in an environment that might be loving but ignorant, just not knowing what to do, where the child was left in front of the television a lot, might get as few as 150,000 positive contacts in life. It's not rocket science to figure out what the difference in impact is.

So, beyond the work and family issue, if I could talk just a moment about child care, the United States basically doesn't have the national systems in many areas that other countries take for granted but especially in health and in child care. Businesses can do more. We are now reviewing whether we should change the tax laws to try to accelerate the activity of larger businesses and make it more possible for small businesses to contribute in some way to their employees' child care. We also need to raise the standards. That entails costs. We have to meet them either directly or indirectly, helping people to do that.

And we are going to try to do more to train child care workers and to contribute to that because it is phenomenally important what is done with all those hours those babies have, starting at very early ages, like Richie said, in the child care centers.

Then there is a second issue we haven't talked about much, although Diana alluded to it when she mentioned the lady who had been on welfare with an 8-year-old child, and that is the need of children for supervision after they start school when their parents are working after school hours. And we're working very hard and have put some funds into and proposed more to help schools design programs to stay open to give kids things to do in the after-school hours. I think that's terribly important.

I think what we're trying to do in education—I still think we've got a lot of work to do there. We're working very hard—I had a long talk with Governor Chiles yesterday to make sure that the money we have for children's health will be used to add 5 million children to the rolls of the health insured.

Then the last big issue I think is very important is how do you connect children to the larger society. And safety is important. Having positive role models and specific help is important. That's why this mentoring issue is so terribly important. It's one of the goals that was set at the Presidents' Summit of Service in Philadelphia. The most important mentoring now being done—new mentoring project in America is America Reads. We have 800 colleges signed up, tens of thousands of college students working today with young children, helping them to read, also serving as role models. And there are countless other organizations. The church that Hillary and I attend in Washington has 45 America Reads volunteers. We're going to try to mobilize a million people to make sure that all our 8-year-olds have reading confidence by the end of the third grade—huge issue. I think children should be given a chance to serve, themselves, when they reach an appropriate age.

And finally, I think it's very important that we broaden our focus of education. Children need to understand the relationship of the social environment to the natural environment. They're natural environmentalists anyway. But we need to build a mindset among our kids that they can grow the economy and have a stable family life, they can grow the economy and preserve

their environment, and that we are living in a period where we've got all these conflicts that we have to resolve as a society if we want to have people living a good life in the 21st century.

And finally, I think it's very important that children from earliest childhood, through the use of the Internet or whatever else is available, gain a greater understanding of the relationship of the United States to the rest of the world.

I must say that when my voice is working, sometimes I get credit for being a reasonably effective communicator. But I have completely failed—according to every public opinion survey, I have completely failed to convince a substantial majority of American people of the importance of trade to our economic development and the importance—although specifically they understand it, but as a general principle—and the importance of our involvement in the rest of the world to our own success here at home, whether it's in peacemaking efforts or contributing to the United Nations or participating in other international efforts.

So these are some of my thoughts: First start with work and family, with child care and family supports; then look at education, health care; then look at how the children relate to the larger society and how children from difficult circumstances can have a safe environment with a mentor, with positive experiences, learning about how we can build a seamless life between the social environment, the natural environment, and the larger world. That's the way I look at this. And I think if we keep our focus on children, number one, we'll be doing the right thing, and second, I think the American people will like the Democratic Party, because we'll be doing the right thing.

Thank you.

[At this point, the discussion continued.]

The President. Before I go, I just want to talk about the standards issue. You should all understand, the good news is schools are getting better. They're getting better. The troubling news is they are not getting better uniformly, and the United States is the only major country that has no national academic standard—not Federal Government standard, not federally enforced but just a national measurement—so that every parent, every teacher, every school can know how kids are doing.

The more diverse we get within our country and the more we compete with people around the world, the more we need some common standard. And that's the biggest fight we've got going in Washington right now in terms of what will really affect our children's future.

So I hope you'll all talk about this. Governor Romer is not only in better voice, he knows more about it than I do. But we've been fighting for this for 10 years, and it's crazy that we haven't done it. So I hope we can rally our party behind it.

Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:52 a.m. in Salon Two at the Ritz-Carlton Hotel. In his remarks, he referred to Valerie Rogers, wife of Annapolis, MD, energy executive Wayne Rogers; Ellen Galinsky, president and cofounder, Families and Work Institute; Richie Garcia, teacher, Music Institute of Hollywood; Diana Lawrence, wife of Cincinnati, OH, attorney Richard Lawrence; Gov. Lawton Chiles of Florida; and Gov. Roy Romer of Colorado.

Remarks in the Globalization and Trade Session of the Democratic National Committee's Autumn Retreat on Amelia Island *November 1, 1997*

[The discussion is joined in progress.]

Role of National Economic Council

Q. Perhaps the time has come to elevate the National Economic Council to the level of stature that the National Security Council has had. Yesterday I attended in Washington a Council on Foreign Relations meeting which was a retrospective of the first 50 years of the National Security Council, at which a half-dozen former and the current National Security Adviser were present. And the scope of their remarks and their ability to integrate across the disparate organizational interests of Defense, State, other U.S. Government and nongovernmental organizations to create policy synthesis was, although not perfect, very impressive. And I was wondering whether you had a comment on whether the United States Government perhaps needed at this time a comparable structure.

[At this point, the moderator invited the President to respond.]

The President. First of all, while it doesn't have a 50-year history, I think the record will reflect that's exactly what we've done. I brought Bob Rubin in to be the head of a new National Economic Council to reconcile all the different economic agencies. And then Laura Tyson did it. Now Gene Sperling and Dan Tarullo do it. As a result of it, for the first time in most business people's experience, you have the State Department aggressively working in Embassies

around the world to help American business; you have the Export-Import Bank, Overseas Private Investment Council working with the Agriculture Department, the Commerce Department, and all the other economic agencies, especially, obviously, the Treasury Department.

And it works like the NSC does. We try to get everybody together, reach a common policy, and then all back it. Sometimes we don't quite get there, but we've had a remarkable amount of success, and I think that it is the single most significant organizational innovation that our administration has made in the White House. And I think that the economic record of the administration is due at least in part to the institution of the National Economic Council.

[The discussion continued.]

Integration of Diplomatic and Economic Policy

Q. —I think the question is whether, organizationally the Government needs to think about different ways to both create that and sustain a free trade area of the Americas.

The President. Well, basically, I agree with you. The reason that I asked Mack McLarty to take on that job is that I thought our relationship with Latin America was of profound importance and that it cut across economic and political lines, and we needed to have somebody concentrating on it who could deal with not just specific diplomatic or security issues but the whole range of political and economic issues. And it's worked.