

Remarks to the National Council of Jewish Women February 24, 1998

The President. Thank you very much. Nan did such a good job, I could resort to that old parliamentary device; I can say I associate myself with the previous speaker's remarks and sit down. [Laughter]

I thank all of you for making me feel welcome. I'm delighted to be here with a number of members of our administration today, including my Director of Communications, Ann Lewis; my Director of Public Liaison, Maria Echaveste, and her aide, Debbie Mohile, and Lynn Cutler, who is known to many of you I know; and our HHS Assistant Secretary for Children and Families, Olivia Golden. I thank all of them for coming with me.

This has been a very busy week in Washington, and I think that there are a couple of issues I ought to make a remark or two about before I begin what I came here to visit with you about. First, let me say a few words about Iraq. As you know, yesterday the Government of Iraq agreed to give the United Nations inspectors immediate, unrestricted, and unconditional access to any site they suspect may be hiding weapons of mass destruction or the means to make or deliver them. If fully implemented, this means that, finally, and for the first time in 7 years, all of Iraq will be open to U.N. inspections, including many sites previously declared off limits. This would be an important step forward.

I'm proud of all of our men and women in uniform in the Gulf. Once again we have seen that diplomacy backed by resolve and strength can have positive results for humanity. We have to be watching very closely now to see not just what Iraq says, but what it does; not just the stated commitments, but the actual compliance. Let there be no doubt, we must remain committed to see that Saddam Hussein does not menace the world with weapons of mass destruction.

I think that there has been a lot of talk, pro and con, about this issue in the last several days. I would just tell you that I think that many of you are in a position to launch an effort to educate all the people of our country about the potential future dangers of chemical and biological warfare: how such weapons can

be made, how they can be delivered, how easy it is to disseminate them to irresponsible groups in small quantities that do large amounts of damage. And because you are in a position to know that, and because all of you have friends, many family members in Israel that feel vulnerable to such things, and because you understand that every civilized community in the world could be exposed to them in the 21st century, I ask you as citizens just to share what you know with your friends and neighbors back home so that we can continue, as a nation, to remain vigilant on this issue wherever we have to stand against it.

I'd also like to say a word about campaign finance reform, an issue of concern to many of you. We've been working on this for years now, and finally we may have a chance to actually have a vote in the Senate. During my first term, every single year, a vote on campaign finance reform was put off in the House to see what would happen in the Senate. And then the leaders of the other party always killed it with a filibuster in the Senate. Now, this year, the McCain-Feingold bill, which has—obviously, it's supported by Senator McCain, the Republican, Senator Feingold, the Democrat—every Member of the Democratic caucus has endorsed the McCain-Feingold bill which ends soft money and imposes other limits on the present system of campaign finance.

There was a difficulty with the bill which was keeping us from generating any more Republican support. Senator Snowe of Maine and Senator Jeffords of Vermont have brokered a compromise. Just before I left to come over here, I was told that all the Democrats are going to vote for that. So we're doing our best to do our part to get campaign finance reform. If a majority will back the Snowe-Jeffords compromise, then once again you will see that it is a minority keeping the country from getting it. So when you go up to the Hill today, if you can put in a plug for a meaningful campaign finance reform bill, I would appreciate it. And we need it.

I have a lot to be grateful to the National Council of Jewish Women for. Many of you have participated in White House conferences

on hate crimes, on early childhood learning and the brain, on child care. You've been involved in our national initiative on race. And I'm grateful for all of that. I was talking to Hillary late last night about my impending visit here, and she reminded me that the thing that I should be most grateful for is that in 1986—I can hardly remember it, it was so long ago—[laughter]—Nan Rich came to Arkansas to talk to Hillary and me about the HIPPY program. And we embraced it. We were the first State in the country—there were a lot of communities that had embraced it, but we were the first State that ever tried to go statewide with the program. It was a resounding success there, and now I believe there are 28 States which have statewide efforts for the home instruction program for preschool youngsters. It has been a wonderful thing.

And I might say I don't think I ever did anything as Governor that was more moving to me than to go to those HIPPY graduation programs and talk to the mothers and see the kids. And so I want to say on behalf of the First Lady and myself again, thank you, Nan, and thanks to all of you for supporting that. If every child could be in that kind of program, it would do as much to strengthen families and later success of children who are otherwise at risk as anything we could do. And I want to urge you to stick with it and keep going.

These are good times for America. We have almost 15 million new jobs in the last 5 years, the lowest unemployment rate in 24 years, the lowest inflation in 30 years, the lowest crime rate in 24 years, the lowest welfare rolls in 27 years, the highest homeownership in history. Today we learned some more good news. First, that in spite of the growth of the last year, the inflation rate and Consumer Price Index remained absolutely stable and very low.

So we are doing something that I was told after I got elected President we could not do. They said we could not grow consistently at 3 percent or more a year without inflation, and that is not so. We are doing that. And I'm very grateful for everybody who is involved in that.

We also learned just today that the American people are upbeat about their prospects not only in the moment but in the future. There are two major measurements of consumer confidence in America: one put out by something called—a group called the Conference Board;

the other put out by the University of Michigan. In the figures that will be released today, the Conference Board Index is the highest it's been in 30 years, and the University of Michigan measurement the highest ever recorded in the confidence of the consumers in the United States of America in our prospects. And that's good, too.

But I'd like to reiterate something I said in the State of the Union. Good times are a blessing, and they should be enjoyed. But we all know, in the nature of humankind and the rhythm of human affairs, no condition endures forever without interruption. And therefore, the good times impose upon us an opportunity and an obligation to prepare for the future, to create a framework within which long-term prosperity and health and well-being will be supported. That's why I said in the State of the Union that before we spend a penny—a penny—of the surplus that we estimate will materialize over the next 5 years, we should make sure we have secured Social Security in the 21st century so that the baby boom generation does not bankrupt the system.

And that is why we have to tend to the health care of our people. We have to continue the work and actually finish the job of insuring 5 million more children. I hope that Congress will pass my proposal to allow people over 55 who, for one reason or other, have lost all their health insurance to buy into the Medicare system. We can do that without imposing any financial burdens on Medicare, and even though the premiums are fairly high, a lot of these folks have children who will help them pay the premiums and they're much, much cheaper than just one trip to the hospital. So I hope we can do that.

I hope that we will pass the Patients' Bill of Rights this year, because we have 160 million people now in managed care programs, and even others in nonmanaged care situations, who don't have the elemental rights and protections that I think everyone in the health care system should have. I hope that we will continue to move forward with environmental protection with the new clean water initiative and with the anti-global warming initiatives that I have recommended to help us deal with the problem of climate change, which a lot of you, depending on where you live, may have been experiencing over the last decade and even in this winter, if we can call it a winter.

I hope that we will continue to make this a safer world. I have asked the Congress to vote for the expansion of NATO, to ratify the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty, to strengthen the Biological Weapons Convention to give us some teeth to deal with the kind of problems we've been discussing in Iraq throughout the world. And I hope that the idea that was inspired by the First Lady of a gift to the millennium that honors our past and imagines the future will find favor in Congress where we save our precious historical documents and the Star-Spangled Banner, and also devote the largest amount of money in history to medical and other research, scientific research to the future.

But if you think about what the leading indicator—you know, economists—if you ever listen to any of these talk shows where these economists are talking and they always are talking about what the leading indicators are, which means they're always trying to figure out what happened. And they're kind of like me, half the time they're guessing, and they don't want you to know it. *[Laughter]* So they talk gravely about leading indicators as if that will pave the way. But there are some leading indicators I think that will tell us something about our future. For me, perhaps the most important leading indicator of where we'll be 10, 20, or 30 years from now is where our children are right now in terms of educational attainment. Now, that I think is clearly a leading indicator.

And I believe, if we are being honest, we would have to say the leading indicators are mixed. That's what an honest assessment would be. Now, we can do one of two things when we look at the bad news as well as the good news. We can say, "Well, what do you expect? America is a big, diverse country; we're the most ethnically, religiously, racially diverse democracy in the world, and besides that, there's so much difference in the incomes in America and so much difference in the neighborhoods, and what do you expect?"

We can do that, or we can do what we ought to do and just say, "Most of this is not rocket science." Way over 90 percent of the people are capable of learning 100 percent of what they need to know to function well in a modern society. And if our children don't do it, it's our fault, and we're going to do something about it. This is not rocket science, and we can do better.

Let's just look at where we are. For the last 5 years—and I'll speak more about the specifics later—but for the last 5 years, I have tried to bring to bear what I learned in 12 years as a Governor to the work of having the United States Government do what we could to help improve the educational enterprise in America, to raise standards, to promote reforms, to increase accountability, to improve teaching, to improve quality of education.

Now, let's start with a certain premise here. I think everybody in America believes, and rightly, that we are blessed with the finest system of higher education in the world. I don't think anyone in America believes that, for all of our children, we have the best system of education, kindergarten through 12th grade, in the world.

Therefore, it has been easier, in my judgment, to do the best things in higher education because you don't have to do so many hard things. All I tried to do in college when it came to college education was to open the doors of college to all, because college costs were the only thing that went up more than health care costs in the 1980's, in percentage terms. So what have we done? We passed the HOPE scholarship, a \$1,500 tax credit for the first 2 years of college, a lifetime learning tax credit for the junior and senior years and graduate schools and for adults going back for job training; education IRA's; interest on students loans as tax-deductible; direct college loans that cost less money and are easier to repay; 300,000 more work-study positions; a lot more Pell grant scholarships; the biggest increase in aid to college since the GI bill. We can actually say we have opened the doors of college to any American who is willing to work for a college education. That is a very important achievement of which we can be proud.

[At this point, a child in the audience cried.]

The President. That child obviously doesn't understand that yet. *[Laughter]* But in time.

Now, when you back up from there, the going gets harder. And let me just give you one example. And I want you to ask yourselves as I go through this list what do you think caused this. Today our administration is announcing the results of the Third International Math and Science Study. And I talked about it last year and the year before. This is—the TIMSS test, it's called—the Third International Math and

Science Study, are tests given in math and science to 4th, 8th, and 12th graders to a relatively large and representative sample—we believe representative sample—of students not only in our country, but throughout the world.

Now, the past TIMSS tests showed that the fourth graders in America do very well; that in the eighth grade we begin to fall back to the middle. And we believe it's in no small measure because as kids go through school, children in other parts of the world begin to take harder courses than our kids do and undergo a more rigorous learning pattern. And a lot of the problems associated with the socioeconomic difficulties begin to manifest themselves.

Today we learned that by the 12th grade, our children trail far behind in math and science. Of the 21 countries measured, our 12th graders outperformed only 2. So we start near the top, we fall to the middle, and we come out at the end.

Now, let me say, first of all, there's some good news in this. The 4th graders represent the same socioeconomic diversity and indeed they are more diverse because of the changing patterns than the 12th graders. Therefore, there is something wrong with the system that we are using to teach them. I do not believe these kids cannot learn. I am tired of seeing children patronized because they happen to be poor or from different cultural backgrounds than the majority. That is not true. That is not true.

And let me tell you, just a couple of days ago—I can't remember exactly what day, the days fly by up here—but a couple of days ago I went to Baltimore, and I visited something called Living Classroom. And I walked along the waterway there in downtown, and I watched some kids rebuilding wetlands. And literally on the inland harbor, they've got egrets now coming back to a wetland site. And I watched inner-city kids, many of whom had never focused on a harbor before, seen a waterway, measuring water quality, having very sophisticated conversations with me about the acidic content of the water and what caused it, and what the various sources of pollution in seawater are and what could be—what that might do to various kinds of fish and other life in the water.

I watched inner-city kids working a fairly sophisticated computer program, monitoring a sailboat race, the Whitbread Race, and monitoring the American boat they were watching as it went around Cape Horn. So I don't believe all this

business about how some kids are just so burdened down with their background they just can't learn all this modern stuff; that's just not true. But it is true that too many people are not learning. And so, I recommend that we take another look at this. Now, in '97 in the State of the Union Address, I outlined a 10-point plan to help education and ask that politics stop at the schoolhouse door, and then in 1998, just a few weeks ago, I talked again about what I thought we ought to do about education. And I would like to briefly review the list of things that I think are important.

First of all, I still believe we have to start with the basics. We need smaller classes, better teaching, harder courses, higher standards. We have smaller classes, better teaching, harder courses, higher standards, greater accountability, and more reform. That's basically what I think we should be focused on. Even though we do pretty well in the fourth grade international tests, I think you know as well as I do there are still too many kids that don't get off to the start they need. And I appreciate what Nan said about the child care initiative. I ask for your support.

We have substantially increased the number of kids in Head Start. We've increased our investment in Federal child care supports by 70 percent in the last 5 years. We have doubled the earned-income tax credit, and that's lifted more and more children out of poverty. But we have to do more.

The budget that I have presented on child care would double the number of low-income children receiving Federal assistance subsidies to 2 million; it would give 3 million more working families an expanded child care credit. It would actually mean that a family of four with an income of \$35,000 a year or less that had high child care costs would actually not pay any Federal income tax.

It would improve the safety and quality of child care. It would also provide scholarships for good providers to help to train them. And it recognizes that we need to do more on the educational component of child care. As we learned at the White House conference on early learning and the brain, which the First Lady put together, an enormous amount of the development of the infrastructure of learning is done in the first 3 years. So I'm proposing an early learning fund that would help to reduce child-to-staff ratios and also help to educate parents

more so that we could increase the learning component of the preschool years.

I guess what I'd like to say is that I want to believe that if this plan passes, the lessons that are taught through the HIPPY program could be taught in homes all across America and all kinds of programs. That's what I want.

One more thing I'd like to say about this, sort of about the out-of-school hours; another big part of our budget contains funds, through both the Educational Department and the Justice Department, to help schools stay open after hours. An enormous percentage of the kids who get in trouble, juveniles who commit serious offenses, do so after the school day is over, but before their parents get home. Literally, if there were no juvenile offenses between like 2 to 3 in the afternoon and 6 to 7 in the evening, the juvenile crime rate would be cut by way over 50 percent. So I think it's important to give these children something to say yes to. And these after-school programs that we propose would help about a half a million children to say yes to soccer and computers, and no to drugs and crime. And I think that's a very important thing.

Now, let's talk about what I hope the Congress will do this year to help to deal with the K through 12 years and what we have to continue to build on that has been started already. First of all, we need a national commitment to reduce class size in the early grades. Our budget would enable local school districts to hire 100,000 more teachers and lower the class size to an average of 18 in the first, second, and third grades and also to modernize or rebuild 5,000 schools so there would be classrooms for that to occur in. I think that's important.

Second, we would continue the America Reads program, which now has literally tens of thousands of college students and other volunteers now going into elementary schools every week to make sure that no child gets out of the third grade without being able to read independently. That is very important.

Next, we would continue our movement toward national academic standards and voluntary national exams to measure how our children are doing according to high national standards. Last year we took the first steps toward a fourth grade reading and an eighth grade math test, and I hope that eventually we will have every State testing their children in these basics and

measuring them by a common national standard, so that we can continue on up the ladder academically to deal with the courses and the measurement.

Next, I think it is very important that we support better teacher development. One of the problems is in a lot of these later years—and you have to pay the teachers well, too—in a lot of these later years in these senior-level courses is you have a lot of schools who have to offer courses that are taught by people who did not have sufficient academic background in the math or science course at issue. And I think that is very, very important.

One of the most important developments potentially over the long run in American education in the last few years and gets almost no publicity—it's called the National Board for Professional Teacher Certification. And it basically is a national board set up to certify master teachers in a way that specialists in medicine and other professionals get certified. But the teachers are basically picked not only because of their substantive knowledge but because of their teaching ability, and they are trained. And the idea is that we will try to have a core—and there's just a few hundred of them now—a core of these teachers all across America. In my budget there's enough money to identify, train, and certify 100,000 master teachers. If you put one of these people in every school building in America, I believe it can revolutionize the culture of learning, and the quality of teaching has got to be a big part of what we're trying to do.

The next thing I'd like to do—I want to talk about two other things that I think would really help performance in the later grades. I think it's important that we encourage the school districts to end the process of social promotion, but to do it in a way that lifts kids up, not puts them down. That is, if you look at what Chicago is doing now—an example which is truly astonishing—I mean Chicago used to be known by the annual teachers' strike. We all saw a picture in the paper of the Chicago teachers' strike every year. They have adopted a policy that basically says—and it's school by school, supported by grassroots parents groups—if the children do not perform at grade level, they cannot go on. But they have mandatory summer school, which also, by the way, has done wonderful—wonders for juvenile problems.

They have mandatory summer school. So nobody just gets held back for spite or because of carelessness or callousness. There's a serious, disciplined comprehensive effort to give all the kids a chance to learn at grade level. I think that's very important. The Secretary of Education got a directive from me this week to come up with, basically, a plan and a program to help every school district in the country adopt a similar approach, particularly those that have a significant problem.

Now, in addition to that, we are trying to pass in Congress this year some funds that will help universities comprehensively adopt schools where there are large numbers of disadvantaged children, starting in the sixth grade. So we can go to sixth and seventh graders, and not only give them college students as models and mentors but say to them in the sixth or seventh grade, look, here's the deal: If you make your grades and you take these courses and you learn these things, we'll be able to tell them now, here is the amount of college aid you can get. You will be able to go to college; this is the aid you will get; and this is what the college that is working with you is prepared to do.

Now, this has the chance, I think, to dramatically lift learning levels in inner-city schools and other isolated schools with large numbers of poor children. And it's based on a number of different programs that have been banded around in America over the last 20 years, and especially the work of a Congressman from Philadelphia named Chaka Fattah. So I'm very excited about it. I hope you will support it.

You just think, if every troubled school in America or every school with a lot of kids who are poor in America had a college adopting it, with kids in that school from the sixth grade on from the college, and at the same time actually contracting with the children and their parents, saying, this is the amount of college aid you're going to get if you do what you're supposed to do for the next 6 years, I believe you would see these scores begin to go up dramatically. And I hope that we can get a lot of support for that.

Finally, let me say, we have to continue to support the reforms that are already underway, more school choice, more charter schools, and we have to finish the job of connecting every classroom and library to the Internet by the year 2000. That will enable more stories like the one I told you about Baltimore, because

once you get everybody on the Internet, we can use technology to dramatically increase the quality and quantity and sophistication of material pouring into every school in America without regard to its resources and wealth. The Federal Communications Commission is helping us with an E-rate which will save the schools a couple of billion dollars a year in hookup costs and payment for time used. So that's very, very important.

I say all these things to you again to point out that it is not inevitable that we have low scores on comparative exams, but it is a leading indicator. There's a coalition of schools in northern Illinois called the First in the World Coalition, and they take these 10 steps; they prepare for them; they work on them, and they do well with them. Now, most of the schools are in upper income neighborhoods. That's not why the kids do well. They do well because they prepare. They take hard courses, they work hard at it, and they believe they're going to do well. And if we do that for every school in America, if we can give them the hard courses taught by well-qualified teachers in an environment that's supportive, and convince them that they can do well, they will do very well.

Our present levels of performance are unacceptable. They are not a good leading indicator. But we have lots of indicators that we can do what we need to do.

So I want—I ask you again; you have to really think. You clapped when I said this before; you have to think about whether you believe this. Do you believe all children can learn? The HIPPO program shows that's right. The Israeli experience of the HIPPO program shows that's right. If you believe that, and if it's not happening, then there is something wrong with the systems. And it is our generation's responsibility to fix it. You cannot blame the schoolchildren. And if their parents don't have a lot of education and don't know what to do, you sure can't blame them. We have to—this is—this cannot be rocket science. There is no excuse for this. So again, I say, I am hoping and praying that we can continue to put aside partisan politics when it comes to education and continue to move forward on these things, because it's so important for our future.

If you think about it, a lot of the challenges we're facing today are not so different than they were back in 1893 when this organization was founded. Think about it, right? *[Laughter]*

Feb. 24 / Administration of William J. Clinton, 1998

We've got a new economy. And there was a new economy in 1893. And we've got to figure out how to make it work for everybody instead of just a few people.

We are overwhelmed by a big influx of immigrants from different kinds of countries, and so were we in 1893, and we have to bring everybody into the American mainstream. We are about to enter a new century with a lot of confidence but a lot of challenges. We have to do what we've always had to do at such times as Americans. We have to make sure we deepen the meaning of our freedom, we widen the circle of opportunity, we strengthen the Union of our people.

The Talmud says every blade of grass has its angel that bends over it and whispers, "Grow, grow." Our children are blades of grass. You must be the angels.

Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:28 a.m. in the Regency Ballroom at the Hyatt Regency Hotel. In his remarks, he referred to Nan Rich, national president, National Council of Jewish Women; the Home Instruction Program for Preschool Youngsters (HIPPY); and the First in the World Consortium. The President also referred to his memorandum of February 23 on helping schools end social promotions.

Statement on Campaign Finance Reform Legislation *February 24, 1998*

Today a clear, bipartisan majority of the Senate voted for campaign finance reform. Now, only the obstruction of a minority stands in the way of a law that would strengthen our democracy. The opponents of reform are seeking to block this measure with partisan, unacceptable amendments, even an amendment to block the

Federal Communications Commission from providing free air time to candidates. Let's be clear: A vote for these amendments is a vote for soft money, unregulated campaign contributions, and backdoor campaign spending. And that vote would be very difficult to explain to the American people.

Message to the Congress on Ordering the Selected Reserve of the Armed Forces to Active Duty *February 24, 1998*

To the Congress of the United States:

Pursuant to title 10, United States Code, section 12304, I have authorized the Secretary of Defense, and the Secretary of Transportation with respect to the Coast Guard, when it is not operating as a Service within the Department of the Navy, to order to active duty Selected Reserve units and individuals not assigned to units to augment the Active components in support of operations in and around Southwest Asia.

A copy of the Executive order implementing this action is attached.

WILLIAM J. CLINTON

The White House,
February 24, 1998.

NOTE: The Executive order is listed in Appendix D at the end of this volume.