

watched all those little kids in that room, those two rooms, these beautiful children—every single day, even though it is illegal in every State in America, 3,000 more children begin to smoke; 1,000 of those 3,000 children will die sooner because of that decision. Hardly anybody becomes a chronic, lifetime smoker who does not start in their teenage years.

So I know there are only 70 days left, and I know this is a big bill. But I know that there are Democrats and Republicans in substantial numbers who want to do this. We should not let the calendar get in the way of the urgent need for action. We can pass the child care reforms, and we can fund them. And we can pass the tobacco legislation, and we must. Just think about it: 1,000 kids every day that wants—just like all these children did in here. Just think about it, every single day. There is no need to wait. There is no excuse for waiting. The time to act is now.

I leave you with this thought. I'm glad you clapped when I said these are good times for America. And you ought to be proud of yourselves, because the whole country helped to create these good times. And the efforts that we make in different areas, from the economy to crime to welfare reform to early childhood to health and education, they all reinforce each other. But sometimes when times are good and people clap and they feel good, they relax. I tell you, when times are good but challenges are large and the future is coming at you like a fast train down a track—and that's how the 21st century is coming at you, with things chang-

ing more rapidly than ever before—then an obligation is imposed to use the good times to act, not to relax.

So I say to all of you, the Members of Congress who are here are ready to act, so give them all a pat on the back, but do everything you can to send a clear and unambiguous signal that you do not want the election year to be a relaxation year; you want it to be a legislating year for the children of this country to make them stronger in the new century. After all, it's only 700 days away. Let's spend 70 days to make sure that in 700 days we'll have the healthiest, strongest children in the history of our Nation.

Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:30 a.m. in the Performing Arts Building. In his remarks, he referred to Pamela A. Price, a student with a young daughter in the college's child care program, who introduced the President, and her teenage son, Anthony; Mayor Joseph P. Ganim of Bridgeport, and his wife, Jennifer; State Attorney General Richard Blumenthal; State Treasurer Paul Sylvester; Thomas D. Ritter, speaker, Connecticut House of Representatives; Janis M. Wertz, president, Housatonic Community-Technical College; and Marie Nulty, director, Early Childhood Laboratory School. The President also referred to a March 6 incident in which a Connecticut State Lottery employee killed four coworkers at the headquarters building in Newington before killing himself.

Memorandum on Steps To Improve Federally Sponsored Child Care

March 10, 1998

*Memorandum for the Heads of Executive
Departments and Agencies*

Subject: Steps to Improve Federally Sponsored
Child Care

Now more than ever, America's working parents are struggling to balance their obligations to be good workers—and their more important obligations to be good parents. By choice or by financial necessity, millions of Americans rely on child care to care for their children for part

of each day. Parents deserve to know that their children are safe and nurtured in child care.

One of my highest priorities is to make child care better, safer, and more affordable. That is why my balanced budget includes the most significant investment in child care in our Nation's history and proposes specific measures to improve child care quality.

As a supplier of child care and as an employer that must recruit and retain a strong workforce, the Federal Government should lead the way

in improving child care. I am proud that our military has developed one of the finest child care delivery systems in the world, and that the Department of Defense, at my request, is sharing its expertise with the public and private sectors. Still, we need to do more. The executive branch of the Federal Government has responsibility for over 1,000 child care centers—788 through the military, 109 through the General Services Administration, and 127 through other Federal departments. In addition, the military oversees nearly 10,000 professional family child care providers. In total, approximately 215,000 children are in our care.

Today I am directing my Administration to take significant new steps to improve the quality of Federally sponsored child care in the executive branch by (1) ensuring proper background checks of child care workers; (2) achieving 100 percent independent accreditation of all eligible centers; (3) exploring partnerships among Federal agencies and with the private sector to improve child care quality and affordability; and (4) ensuring that all Federal workers become better informed of child care benefits and the options available to them.

First, all child care workers in Federally sponsored centers should undergo thorough background checks to make sure that our children are safe. The vast majority of child care workers are caring people who have dedicated their lives to teaching and nurturing children. But one tragedy in child care is too many, and criminal and civil background checks are necessary to determine whether the people caring for our children are fit for this responsibility. The military already has a model system to conduct background checks of child care workers. I now want to guarantee that workers at all non-military, Federal child care facilities undergo such background checks in a thorough and timely fashion.

I therefore direct the Administrator of General Services (“Administrator”) to report to me, within 90 days, with a plan to ensure complete and timely background checks, to the fullest extent possible, for all child care workers in non-military, Federally sponsored child care settings.

Agencies with oversight of nonmilitary child care settings will report to the Administrator within 60 days on this matter.

Second, all Federally sponsored child care centers should receive nationally recognized, independent accreditation as soon as they are eligible to do so. Currently, only 76 percent of military centers, and 35 percent of other Federally sponsored centers, are accredited. By the year 2000, 100 percent should be accredited. I therefore direct the Secretary of Defense and the Administrator to provide me, within 90 days, with a plan to ensure, to the fullest extent possible, independent, nationally recognized accreditation of all eligible, Federally sponsored child care by the year 2000. Agencies with oversight of non-military child care settings shall report to the Administrator within 60 days on this matter.

Third, partnerships among Federal agencies and with the private sector are an increasingly important way to maximize existing resources and improve child care. I therefore direct the Administrator to work with the heads of all Federal departments and agencies to explore opportunities for collaboration both within Government and with the private sector to improve child care quality and affordability in Federally sponsored settings.

Finally, employers have a responsibility to make sure that their workers are better informed on child care and the options available to them at the national, State, and local levels. I therefore direct the Director of the Office of Personnel Management (“Director”) to ensure that, to the fullest extent possible, all Federal workers receive full information about child care benefits available to them on the Federal, State, and local levels, including information on resource and referral networks, available tax credits such as the Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit and Child Tax Credit, as well as public subsidies. The Director shall also host a nationwide summit designed to showcase model public and private sector solutions to child care needs.

WILLIAM J. CLINTON