

Remarks on the Child Care Initiative and an Exchange With Reporters April 23, 1998

The President. Thank you, ladies and gentlemen. Hillary and I are delighted to have all of you here. We thank Mr. Tobias for his work and the power of his example. I thank Secretary Shalala and Secretary Herman for their extraordinary work, and Secretary Rubin, in his absence. And I note the presence here by SBA Director, Aida Alvarez, and our OMB Director, Frank Raines, in the back. I thank the Members of Congress who are here: Representatives Lois Capps, Rosa DeLauro, Sheila Jackson Lee, Sandy Levin, Patsy Mink, Tim Roemer, Ellen Tauscher, Lynn Woolsey, and Steny Hoyer.

There are many other Members of Congress who are supporting this child care initiative, two who are not here; three that I think I should mention are Senators Dodd, Jeffords, and Kohl, along with Senator Specter, who have given real bipartisan leadership to the child care initiative in the Senate.

Let me also say I'm delighted to see all the children here today. I like Take Our Daughters to Work Day. As Representative Capps pointed out, since her daughter works in the White House, she came to work with her daughter today instead of the other way around. *[Laughter]* But, for the rest of you, I like this day.

When my daughter started preschool and she was asked what her father did, she said that he works at McDonald's. *[Laughter]* So I decided I'd better take her to work with me, even though I realized it would result in a diminution of my status in her eyes. *[Laughter]* So then by the time she went to kindergarten, she had actually been to work with me, and they asked her what I did for a living, and she said, "Well, he drinks coffee, makes speeches, and talks on the telephone." *[Laughter]* So I'm delighted that all the children are here.

The idea of merging work and family is embodied in Take Our Daughters to Work Day. There's also another important idea embodied in it, which is that we want our daughters to believe, along with our sons, that they can aspire to do whatever it is they want to do, whatever they're willing to do, whatever they're prepared to make the effort to do. Now, if you want that to be a reality, we have to make a commit-

ment to give all of our children the best possible childhoods. That's really what all this is about.

Last year Hillary and I sponsored two conferences that many of our administration people helped on and many of you participated, one on child care and the other one on early childhood and the brain. Now, what they showed is what all of you already know but what is still not widely accepted by decisionmakers in our society. They showed, first of all, that the early years are profoundly important and that an even greater percentage of a child's learning capacity and intellectual infrastructure is built up in those very early years. And they showed what we in the child care conference, what we've all been here to say today, that people are worried about whether they can find child care, whether they can afford it, and whether it will be good child care.

We've been very fortunate in our country in the last few years, and I know we're all grateful to have the best economy in a generation and the lowest welfare rolls in 30 years and the lowest crime rates in a generation. But if we really want Americans to succeed over the long run, we have to allow every family the opportunity to succeed at home and at work. It is the most fundamental decision we have to make. There is no more important job in a society than raising children well. Nothing even compares with it. In the end, if you fail at that job, all the other jobs will, by definition, fail.

Therefore, there is virtually nothing worse you can do to a parent than to put a parent in the position of basically just being knotted up every day, worrying about whether he or she has fulfilled the responsibilities to the child. How can you be at work worrying about your kids and if you have to leave work to take care of your kids, except in emergency situations or for appropriate events; there's a sacrifice there.

One of the reasons the business community is interested in this is that enlightened business leaders understand that, actually, if you permit people to do the right thing by their children, you wind up having a happier, more upbeat, more affirmative, more positive business environment, and ultimately the business enterprise will be more successful because the workers are

also successful at home. That's what this whole business is about: taking care of their children and not asking their parents to choose between being good parents and good workers. It all comes down to that.

The private sector obviously can and should do more. We should have more companies that are willing to follow the example of these fine leaders who are here and who have been acknowledged. The Treasury working group that Secretary Rubin has led has done a very important job in participating in and presenting this report to me, and I am glad to receive it.

I'm also releasing a report today, that Secretary Herman has provided, that highlights other family-friendly businesses, giving them sort of an honor roll status. I think it's well-deserved, and I hope that the work the Labor Department will now do in serving as a clearinghouse for companies interested in child care and setting up mentoring programs between businesses on child care will get more and more private sector folks involved. Secretary Shalala pointed out that in the welfare reform bill—the one we finally got—we fought like crazy to get \$4 billion in child care for States. But, believe it or not, there's still a lot of demand out there that's not being met, in State after State after State.

Hillary said, before we came out of the Oval Office this morning, that everybody talks about how important child care is, but if you look at higher education—and this may be hard for some of you to believe if you have staggering tuition bills, but still, nationwide, families directly pay only about 25 percent of the costs of their children's move through college.

No one questions that we have the best system of higher education in the world. No one questions that it's not only been good to let our children live out their dreams, but it's also been very, very good for the American economy. By contrast, with child care, the average family—at an earlier age with a lower income, just getting started out in the work force with young children—on the whole, pays over 60 percent of the cost out of pocket.

So I would suggest to you that we basically have a choice to make here. I have put a proposal before Congress that deals with affordability, accessibility, the training of the workers, the quality of the child care. But the fundamental question is not so much over the specifics of our proposal, but whether the National Government has a responsibility to do more.

And we have a fundamental choice: Do you believe that the early years are as important as all the evidence says? Do you believe that we could hardly do anything better for America's families than to relieve them of the burden of being terribly worried about their children while they're at work? In other words, do you believe that this should be an urgent priority for America?

That is the decision every Member of Congress should make. And this year, we shouldn't slide by it. Everybody should just stand up and say, yes or no. Because the budget is going to be in balance, we have the money to make a major step forward.

Now, there's a highway bill making its way through Congress, and I support a good highway bill. I presented a good highway bill that would have significant increase in our infrastructure. But I hope that, as Congress continues to consider this and determine how much money should be put in it, they will remember some other things. We've got to build a lot of highways—or bridges, if you will—to the 21st century. We have to have a road that will make Social Security strong in the 21st century. We have to have a road that will make our children's environment better in the 21st century. We have to have a road that will guarantee universal high-quality, high-standards education in the 21st century.

I think we have to have a road that will guarantee that people will not have to choose between being good parents and good children and that we will act on the overwhelming weight of the evidence about the importance of the earliest years in the child's life.

Now, there are choices to be made, and it is wrong to pretend that there are no choices here. We now have the opportunity, because of the good fortune that we enjoy as a people, because of the solvency of the budget, to take a major step forward in child care, to build that part of our national infrastructure. You look around at all these children today and at their parents beaming about them; I don't really believe that any part of our infrastructure is more important than they are.

Thank you very much.

Tax Cuts

Q. Mr. President, do you propose tax cuts for mothers who want to stay home?

The President. I'm glad you didn't stay home today, Sam [Sam Donaldson, ABC News]. [Laughter]

Q. What do you think of the idea of tax cuts for a stay-at-home mom?

The President. Well, we need to get into a negotiation. We need to get started talking seriously about what we're going to do.

Q. Would you be open to it?

The President. I'll be happy to talk to them, but we've got to—are we going to make a serious effort here? We need to have a discussion about it.

Q. So you are willing to negotiate, then?

The President. I'm willing to negotiate with anybody who wants to help people raise their children better so that people can succeed at home and at work. It's not an either-or deal. That's why we had the \$500 tax credit last time,

children's tax credit, because we wanted to help all parents. We're not against helping all parents. But the question is, most parents are in the work force and we have to do something serious about it. We have to decide, are we going to do it, or not?

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:20 a.m. in the Rose Garden at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Treasury Department Working Group on Child Care member Randall L. Tobias, president, chairman, and chief executive officer, Eli Lilly and Co. He also referred to the Treasury working group report entitled "Investing in Child Care," and the Department of Labor report "Meeting the Needs of Today's Workforce: Child Care Best Practices." The exchange portion of these remarks could not be verified because the tape was incomplete.

Statement on Senate Action on Education Legislation

April 23, 1998

I am disappointed that Republicans in the United States Senate have passed up a major opportunity to improve public education in this country.

Instead of investing in modern schools for the 21st century, the Senate chose to provide tax incentives skewed to high-income taxpayers. Instead of helping make classes smaller and improving student learning, the Senate chose to eliminate accountability by prohibiting voluntary national tests. Instead of giving kids new learn-

ing opportunities after school to keep them out of trouble, the Senate chose to undermine the critical safe and drug-free schools initiative. Instead of working to strengthen public education, the Coverdell bill returns us to the days when Republicans waged a campaign to eliminate the Department of Education.

As I have said before, if this bill reaches my desk, I will veto it, because it weakens our commitment to making America's schools the best they can be in the 21st century.

Statement on Protecting the Northern Right Whale

April 23, 1998

Today I instructed the United States representatives to the International Maritime Organization to seek strong measures to protect the northern right whale, one of the world's most endangered marine mammals.

Like many other species of whale, the northern right whale was once hunted nearly to extinction. The 300 or so that survive spend much of the year in waters off of Cape Cod and off

the Georgia and Florida coasts. Biologists believe the greatest human threat they face today is collisions with large ships. We must address this threat so these magnificent creatures can flourish once again.

Under our proposal, which the IMO will address when it meets in July, commercial ships entering the whales' calving and feeding grounds will be required to report by radio to the U.S.