

Remarks at Forest Knolls Elementary School in Silver Spring October 13, 1998

Thank you very, very much. Well, first of all, I'd like to thank Carolyn Starek for that marvelous statement. Didn't she do a good job? [Applause] And she talked about teachers using visual aids, and then pointed the press, helpfully, to the visual aid back here. [Laughter] I'm glad you're here, but if you'd ever like a job in communications at the White House, I think we might be able to arrange that. [Laughter]

Let me say to all of you how delighted I am to be here. I want to thank Nancy King for her devotion to education and her remarks, and Dr. Paul Vance, the other local officials who are here, Mr. Leggett and the delegates and the school board members. If I come out here to this school district one more time, I think you ought to devise a special assessment for me so I can contribute to the building fund of the schools—I have been here so much.

My great partner in our efforts to improve education is the Secretary of Education, Dick Riley, I believe, the best Secretary of Education America ever had, and I'd like to thank him for being here.

I want to thank Governor Parris Glendening and Lieutenant Governor Kathleen Kennedy Townsend for their extraordinary work and leadership. This is one of the most innovative State governments in America. Maryland is always at the forefront of whatever is happening in education and the environment and economic incentives. And as a person who served as Governor for 12 years, I believe I know a little something about that, and one of the things that I always love to do is to steal ideas from other Governors. You know, that's not a very delicate way of saying what the framers of our Constitution had in mind when they called the States the laboratories of democracy. That's what a laboratory is—you find a discovery, then no one else has to discover it; they can just borrow it. If I were a Governor today, I would be paying a lot of attention to what goes on in Maryland. And I thank them for what they have done.

I would also like to thank Senator Daschle and Congressman Gephardt. I think you could see the intensity, the passion they feel for our determination after nearly a year of trying to

get education on the agenda of this Congress before it goes home. We cannot allow a budget to pass without a serious consideration of these issues. And their leadership and their passion and their commitment have made it possible.

A President—if the Congress is in the hands of the other party, and they passionately and genuinely, I think, disagree with us on whether we should put 100,000 teachers out there, or help build or repair thousands of schools—none of this would be possible if it weren't for their leadership. And I want you to understand that. I can give speeches until the cows come home, but until the majority party wanted to go home for the election, and our guys said no, my "no" was not enough. And so I thank them and all of their colleagues who are here today.

I want to introduce them just to show you the depth and the national sweep of our feeling about this. Senator Daschle is from South Dakota. He is joined by our leader in the Senate on education issues, Senator Ted Kennedy of Massachusetts, and Senator Byron Dorgan from North Dakota. You know Mr. Gephardt is from St. Louis; he said that. He's joined by David Bonior, from Michigan; Charles Rangel, from New York; Ted Strickland, from Ohio; Nita Lowey, from New York; Ruben Hinojosa, from South Texas; and two Congress Members from Maryland, Steny Hoyer and Albert Wynn.

I'd also like to acknowledge a longtime friend of mine who is a candidate for Congress. And as Ted Kennedy reminded me before I came up here, back in the great days when America was fighting for equal rights for all of these children, without regard to their race, Ralph Neas was known as the "101st United States Senator" for civil rights. And we're glad to have him here. Thank you.

When I ran for President 6 years ago, I had an absolute conviction—and a lot of people thought I was dead wrong—but I had an absolute conviction that we could reduce the deficit and eventually balance the budget and still invest more in our children and in our future. And we have been working to do that. The strategy has worked. We've got the strongest economy in a generation, the first balanced budget and surplus in 29 years, the lowest crime

rate in 25 years, and the doors of college are more open than ever before.

I think it is literally possible to say now that because of the Pell grants, and the deductibility of student loan interest, and the fact that young people can pay back their college loans as a percentage of their incomes, and because of the widespread tax credits for \$1,500 a year for the 2 years of college, and then tax credits for other years of college—that you—literally possible to say now that any young person that works for it will find the doors of college open to them and not barred by money. And I am very proud of that. I think we have done the right thing.

But we now have to decide as a people—not just because it's 3 weeks from an election, but because it's a very momentous time in our country's history—what we are going to do with this moment of prosperity, and whether we're going to fritter it away or build on it. Whether we're going to be divided and distracted, or focused on our children and our future.

This country still has a lot of challenges. If you've been following the news, you know there's a lot of turmoil in the international economy. And the United States has to take the lead in settling that down, because a lot of our growth comes from selling what we make here overseas. And eventually, if everybody else is in trouble, we'll be in trouble, too.

If you've been following the debates, you know that when the baby boomers retire, Social Security will be in trouble unless we move now to save it—which is why I don't want to spend this surplus until we save Social Security. If you've been following the national news, you know we still have big debates in Washington and in Congress over the environment. And I passionately believe that we can grow the economy and improve the environment. You know we've had big debates over whether the 160 million Americans in HMO's should be protected by a Patients' Bill of Rights.

But there is no bigger issue affecting our long-term security than education. And we cannot stop until this record number of children—whether or not they live in Maryland, or Utah, or someplace in between; whether they're rich or poor; whether they're African-Americans, Hispanic, Asian-Americans, Irish-Americans, or you have it; whether they are physically challenged or completely able-bodied; whether they're rich or poor; whether they live in an inner city or a rural area or a nice suburban community like

this one—until all of our children have access to a world-class elementary and secondary education. We owe that to them. And that is what this is all about.

Eight months ago in my State of the Union Address, I asked Congress to use this moment of confidence and prosperity and the money—that the fact that—that you've paid into the Treasury, because more of you are working than ever before—to make a critical downpayment on American excellence in education. I asked them to do a number of things, but I want to emphasize two.

First, I asked them to help local communities reduce class size in the early grades by hiring 100,000 new teachers. Study after study after study confirms what every parent and teachers know: smaller classes and better trained teachers make a huge, huge difference, especially in the early grades. They lead to permanent benefits from improved test scores to improved discipline.

Let me just tell you one story, just one. A few years ago when I was Governor, I used to spend a lot of time in classrooms—unfortunately, more time than I can now spend. And I enjoyed going into the classroom and meeting your students who were over there a few moments ago, but I can't do what Governor Glendening still does, go in and tutor and actually spend a lot of time and talk and listen. But there was a very poor rural school district in my State that had a visionary leader. And they came to me and said, "You know, Governor, we don't have much money, but if you could get the Federal Government to let us take our Title I money and some other money we're getting, some special education money, and put it all together, we'd like to try for a year or two to put all of our first graders in the same class." And the per capita income of this school district was way, way, way below even our State average, not to mention the national average.

Well anyway, to make a long story short, we were able to give permission to do that. We pooled all the money. We created four elementary school first grade classes of 15 kids each. Here's what happened. The overall performance of the children on the measured test increased by 60 percent. The performance in one year—the performance of the Title I kids doubled. Four children had been held back because they

hadn't learned anything the first year. Their performance quadrupled.

And when Hillary and I were promoting education reform in Arkansas, one of the things we worked the hardest for was to bring average class size down to 20. If this 100,000 teachers proposal goes through, we can bring it down to an average of 18 in the early grades. It will make a huge difference—a huge difference.

In the wake of all the terrible school violence our country sustained in the last years—particularly in the last year or so—I asked Secretary Riley and Attorney General Reno to prepare a booklet that could be sent to every school in the country about how to identify kids that might be in trouble, how to stop bad things from happening in the first place. And so they went out across the country to listen to educators, and they came back and said, in place after place after place they were told, “Give us smaller classes in the early grades; we’ll find the kids that are troubled, and we’ll have a chance to help them lead good, productive lives.”

I just want to echo what Mr. Gephardt said. Every time you see a State legislature having to build another prison—because the court will order you to build prisons that aren't overcrowded, but not schools that aren't overcrowded—every time you see that, you can bet your bottom dollar that 90 percent of the people going into that prison, if they had a little different childhood, could have been somewhere else. And we should never forget that.

The second thing I asked Congress to do was to give us the tools to help local communities modernize crowded and crumbling schools. We had a record number of schoolchildren start school this year—52.7 million, a half-million more than last year, more than at the height of the baby boom generation. In a recent study from the General Accounting Office, it concluded that as many as a third of our classrooms—a third—are in need of serious modernization or repair; one-third of our kids in substandard classrooms. I have seen old school buildings that are fine and strong—buildings, frankly, we couldn't afford to build today with the materials and the dimensions they have. But they have peeling paint and broken windows, bad wiring. They can't be hooked up to the Internet and the lights are too dim. And I have seen today, and in many other places, trailers that we call “temporary,” but unless we do

something about it, they are anything but temporary. Now, we see stories of teachers holding classes in trailers and hallways and gyms. I don't believe a country that says it's okay for a huge number of its children to stay in trailers indefinitely is serious about preparing them all for the 21st century. And I believe we can do better. I believe you believe we can do better.

Now, this proposal, which has been championed in the Senate especially by Senator Carol Moseley-Braun from Illinois, and by Congressman Charles Rangel from New York and others in the House—Nita Lowey—I want to say to you, we want to come clean here; this has never been done before. And the members of the Republican majority are philosophically opposed to it. They say somehow it's an intrusion into local control—I frankly don't see—if we help the State provide more classrooms for this school. From what I just saw of her, I think your principal would still be in control. I do not believe that we would be running this school. *[Laughter]*

We want these classrooms to be more accessible to people with disabilities. We want these classrooms to be more accessible so they'll all be able to be hooked up to the Internet. We want them to be physically connected. You know, Senator Daschle and I were talking on the way out here. If you live in the Dakotas in the wintertime and you've got to walk just this far, you may be walking in 30-degree-below-zero temperatures.

And we believe that this proposal is good. It targets the investments where they're needed the most. It maintains our balanced budget. And it works in this way: There are targeted school construction tax cuts that are fully paid for; we don't take any money from the surplus. Yesterday, since Congress has not acted on this in 8 months, my budget team brought to Capitol Hill a detailed proposal to pay for these badly needed cuts, dollar for dollar, by closing various corporate loopholes.

Right here in Maryland, our plan would mean tax credits on more than \$300 million of the bonds to build or modernize schools. That would save a ton of money for Maryland in building or modernizing schools. In Florida, where in the small community of Jupiter, I visited a school like this one and saw 12 facilities like this outside one small building—12—the

Vice President is visiting today. There, our proposal would help to build or modernize more than 300 schools.

As I said, there are a lot of other important elements in our plan: funds for after-school programs, before-school programs, summer school programs, money to connect all our classrooms to the Internet, money to promote the development of voluntary national standards into basics, and a nonpartisan, supervised exam to measure fourth grade reading and eighth grade math. But if you think about the most pressing big issues, the numbers of teachers and the conditions in crowded classrooms demand immediate national attention.

I wish I had time to win the philosophical debate with our friends on the other side, who somehow see helping more teachers teach and providing more school buildings as an intrusion into local affairs. It is not. Secretary Riley has dramatically reduced the regulations on local school districts and States' departments of education that were in place when we arrived here. What we are trying to do is to make sure people like you can give children like this the future they deserve. I think it's worth fighting for, and I don't think we should go home and pass a budget that doesn't take account of the educational needs of our children and the future of our country.

Let me remind you that in 1993 and '94, when I said we ought to put 100,000 more police officers on the street, I was told the same thing by the same people. They said, "Oh, this won't work; it won't help anything; it's an unwarranted intrusion into local government." It was weird—I had police departments begging me for the police, and I had Congressmen on the other side telling me, "Oh, these police chiefs don't know what they're talking about. You're really trying to run their business."

And anyway, we prevailed. And today, we've paid for 88,000 of those 100,000 police, and we have the lowest crime rate in 25 years. Wouldn't it be nice if we had 100,000 more teachers and we had the highest educational attainment in 25 years, or the highest educational attainment in history? [Applause]

Now, school is almost out of session on Capitol Hill. The Members are eager to return home for the election holiday. But we haven't finished our coursework yet, and the final exam has not been passed. And so I say to you—and let me say once again, I don't really relish education as a partisan debate because over the long run, that's not good for America. I don't have a clue whether these kids' parents are Democrats or Republicans or independents, and frankly, I could care less. I want them to have the best. I want America's future to be the best.

We are here fighting this fight because we have no other way, no other recourse to prevail on this important issue. We have worked quietly and earnestly for 8 months with no result. So now, for a few days, we are shouting loudly to the heavens; we have a moment of prosperity and a heavy responsibility to build these children the brightest possible future we can.

Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:40 p.m. in the schoolyard. In his remarks, he referred to Carolyn Starek, principal, Forest Knolls Elementary School; Nancy J. King, president, Montgomery County School Board; Paul L. Vance, superintendent, Montgomery County Schools; Isaiah Leggett, president, Montgomery County Council; Gov. Parris N. Glendening and Lt. Gov. Kathleen Kennedy Townsend of Maryland; and Ralph G. Neas, candidate for Maryland's Eighth Congressional District.

Message to the Congress Transmitting the Estonia-United States Fishery Agreement

October 14, 1998

To the Congress of the United States:

In accordance with the Magnuson Fishery Conservation and Management Act of 1976 (16 U.S.C. 1801 *et seq.*), I transmit herewith an

Agreement between the Government of the United States of America and the Government of the Republic of Estonia extending the Agreement of June 1, 1992, Concerning Fisheries Off