

This legislation puts us well on our way to creating 3,000 charter schools by the year 2000.

On charter schools, Congress did put progress over partisanship. But on too many other issues, Congress has left town and left the work of the American people behind. This Congress' failure to act in many areas has had real costs for our families. Partisanship killed my proposal to use tax cuts, fully paid for in the balanced budget, to build or modernize 5,000 schools. Partisanship killed the Patients' Bill of Rights, which would guarantee your right to see a specialist, to medical privacy, to the nearest emergency care, to keep your doctor during the course of treatment, to have medical decisions made by doctors, not insurance company accountants. Partisanship killed tough legislation to crack down on teen smoking, even as teen smoking continues to rise and is the number one public health problem our young people face. Partisanship killed an increase in the minimum wage, which would give a much needed pay raise to our hardest pressed working families. Partisanship killed our best chance in years for tough campaign finance reform. And par-

tisanship blocked our efforts to make child care more affordable for working families.

The American people deserve better. I hope when the next Congress convenes, it will put progress ahead of partisanship in a way that this Congress has not done.

Wye River Middle East Peace Talks

Now I am returning to the Middle East talks on the Eastern Shore of Maryland. The hardest decisions now, at last, are on the table. Israel, the Palestinians, the region, and the world have very much at stake today. I hope the parties will seize this opportunity and not retreat from the clear moment to capture the momentum of peace and keep it moving forward.

NOTE: The President spoke at 8:55 a.m. on the South Lawn at the White House, prior to his departure for the Wye River Middle East peace talks. The 105th Congress adjourned *sine die* on October 21. H.R. 2616, the Charter School Expansion Act of 1998, approved October 22, was assigned Public Law No. 105-278.

Statement on Signing the Charter School Expansion Act of 1998

October 22, 1998

Today I am pleased to sign into law H.R. 2616, the "Charter School Expansion Act of 1998." This bill will help foster the development of high-quality charter schools, consistent with my goal of having 3,000 charter schools operating by early in the next century, and will help lead to improvements in public education more generally. I am particularly gratified by the bipartisan manner in which this bill passed the House and Senate.

I have long championed charter schools—public schools started by parents, teachers, and communities, open to all students regardless of background or ability, and given great flexibility in exchange for high levels of accountability. When I was elected President there was only one charter school in the Nation, and now there are more than 1,000 serving more than 200,000 students. This bill will help strengthen our efforts to support charter schools, providing parents and students with better schools, more

choice, and higher levels of accountability in public education.

As the charter school movement spreads throughout the country, it is important that these schools have clear and measurable educational performance objectives and are held accountable to the same high standards expected of all public schools. To further this goal, H.R. 2616 requires the Department of Education to give priority in awarding grants to States in which the performance of every charter school is reviewed at least once every 5 years to ensure the school is fulfilling the terms of its charter and students are meeting achievement requirements and goals. It also will reward States that have made progress in increasing the number of high-quality, accountable charter schools. Finally, it makes clear that any charter school receiving funding under this program must be measured by the same State assessments as other public schools. These important quality-

control measures will help charter schools fulfill their potential to become models of accountability for public education.

I am also pleased that H.R. 2616 provides new authority for successful charter schools to serve as models, not just for other charter schools, but for public schools generally. At a relatively low cost, such model schools will provide in-depth advice, materials, and other information on various aspects of their programs—helping to start up new public schools and helping existing schools learn from their successes. By drawing on the experience of high-performing charter schools throughout our Nation, this legislation will help bring the benefits of

innovation and creativity to hundreds of thousands of additional children.

I am confident that this legislation will augment the ability of parents, teachers, and others to strengthen public education in their communities. This bill represents an integral part of our effort to improve public schools and help all of our students get the high-quality public education they need and deserve.

WILLIAM J. CLINTON

The White House,
October 22, 1998.

NOTE: H.R. 2616, approved October 22, was assigned Public Law No. 105–278.

Statement on the National Rate of Homeownership *October 22, 1998*

This morning the Census Bureau released fresh evidence that our strong economy continues to widen the circle of opportunity to more American families. Last quarter the national homeownership rate reached another record high. For the first time in history, more than two-thirds of American families own their own homes. Since I took office, 7.4 million families have become homeowners. I am especially pleased that these gains are being shared broadly, with African-American and Hispanic homeownership climbing even more rapidly than the overall rate.

Six years ago I put in place an economic strategy which helped produce a cycle of lower deficits, lower interest rates, stronger investment, higher incomes, and greater confidence. That virtuous cycle opened the door of homeownership to millions of Americans. Now the challenge is to keep our economy strong—which is why we must continue to maintain fiscal discipline, invest in our people, and lead the global economy. I will continue to work hard to take the steps necessary to make the dream of homeownership a reality for more Americans.

Letter to Congressional Leaders Reporting Budget Deferrals *October 22, 1998*

Dear Mr. Speaker: (Dear Mr. President:)

In accordance with the Congressional Budget and Impoundment Control Act of 1974, I herewith report two deferrals of budgetary resources, totaling \$167.6 million.

The deferrals affect programs of the Department of State and International Security Assistance.

Sincerely,

WILLIAM J. CLINTON

NOTE: Identical letters were sent to Newt Gingrich, Speaker of the House of Representatives, and Albert Gore, Jr., President of the Senate. This letter was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on October 23. The report detailing the deferrals was published in the *Federal Register* on November 17.