

Memorandum on the Creation of the Military and Veterans Health Coordinating Board

November 11, 1998

Memorandum for the Secretary of Defense, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, the Secretary of Health and Human Services

Subject: Creation of Military and Veterans Health Coordinating Board

Our Nation is truly indebted to our active duty military, reservist, National Guard, and veterans for protecting America's interests around the globe. From small peacekeeping missions to large combat operations, these men and women put their lives on the line to ensure our peace and prosperity at home and abroad. We owe them and their families a great debt. We have an obligation to protect their health while they serve and to care for their service-connected injuries or illnesses for as long as they live.

Our experience with the Gulf War demonstrated that we were not adequately prepared to deal with the health consequences resulting from a large-scale combat deployment in the unique environment our soldiers faced. The aftermath of this conflict underscored the need to improve significantly our ability to address post-deployment health problems. Your extensive efforts to understand the causes and treat the illnesses experienced by Gulf War veterans have identified numerous deficiencies in the way we prepare for and deal with the health of our military, veterans, and their families. I am pleased that we are applying these lessons learned from the Gulf War and other recent military missions to current and future military deployments.

In its December 31, 1996, report, my Presidential Advisory Committee on Gulf War Veterans' Illnesses recommended that the National Science and Technology Council (NSTC) review existing Federal policies and programs and develop an interagency plan "to address health preparedness for and readjustment of veterans and families after future conflicts and peacekeeping missions." The NSTC's plan, developed by your departments, identifies numerous actions, including improved health protection for military forces, which must be taken to avoid the mistakes of the past. One of the key recommendations contained in the plan is to establish a Military and Veterans Health Coordinating Board to continue improving the coordination among your departments and to oversee the implementation of the NSTC's plan.

Therefore, I direct you to establish the Military and Veterans Health Coordinating Board and report annually to the Assistants to the President for National Security Affairs and for Science and Technology on its progress. Specifically, the Board should focus on issues associated with deployment health, research, and communications regarding health risks. In addition, the Board must ensure that record-keeping requirements linked to military and veterans health preparedness, health protection for military forces, disease prevention, and medical care are incorporated into your departments' relevant information technology and information management systems.

WILLIAM J. CLINTON

Remarks Announcing Grants for After-School Programs

November 12, 1998

The President. Thank you very much, Rose, for giving us a wonderful example of what these endeavors are all about. Hillary and I are delighted to have all of you—parents, administrators and teachers, child care advocates, grant recipients—here in the White House today. We

especially thank Congressman Castle, Congresswoman Lowey, Senator Robb, Senator Specter, Congressmen Hoyer and Cardin and King and Levin and Quinn.

I thank Olivia Golden, our HHS Administrator for Children and Families, for being here,

along with Mike Smith and Kent McGuire from the Education Department. We welcome Mayor Davis, Mayor Ganim, Mayor Schundler, and all of you.

I have enjoyed this day very much already because Hillary and I are, I think it's fair to say, virtually obsessed with the idea of expanding after-school programs and affordable child care. And to see this reaching across party lines to support our children, our families, and our communities is a deeply moving thing to me. But I'd like to begin my remarks, since I essentially can't add much to what has already been said—I want to ask you to think about a question that we have—all of us who are parents, at least, who have ever taken our children on trips when they were young—have heard them say, “Are we there yet? Are we there yet?” [*Laughter*]

So in spite of what we come to celebrate today, the truth is that when it comes to raising our children in this new era, we are not there yet. But when I look at the people on this podium and the faces out in this crowd, I realize that this is clearly an area where we can put the progress of our people ahead of our partisan differences and that, if we continue to do that, we might be able to give a different answer to our children.

Even though our economy is the strongest in a generation, all of you know that one of the principal struggles faced by real people out there in America was the one that Rose Bolz told us about today. Even with the lowest unemployment rate in 28 years, even with the fastest rising wage rates in over 20 years, how are people doing at balancing the work of parenting and the work of working? How do people fulfill their obligation to their children and to their workplace?

Well, first of all, it's not easy. In spite of the program that the First Lady described, in spite of the marvelous experience that Rose, as a parent, with her child have had, on any given day in America as many as 15 million school-age children are left to fend for themselves on the streets or alone at home. Half of all juvenile crime occurs in the few hours just after school lets out. And for families with children between the ages of 3 and 5, child care is the second or third greatest household expense.

Now, obviously, only parents can find the proper balance between work and child rearing, one that works for them or one that is imposed

on them by their economic circumstances. What we have to do is to help them do the very best they can to meet their obligations at home and at work. That is the only responsible thing to do on the verge of this new century when the patterns of work and life are so very different.

As I have said many times, if you will indulge me I'd like to say once more, I know that all life is filled with choices and some of them are bound to be hard, but this is a choice we should not require our people to make, because if they have to choose, they lose, and we lose. If a person cannot function at work for worrying about the children at home, but economically they must work, then that weakens the fabric of the American economy. If in order to fulfill one's responsibility at work a parent has to neglect children, that is an even higher price, because in every society that is always the most important work that can be done.

That is why we have worked hard to help people reconcile these two obligations with the family and medical leave law, with policies designed to promote the idea that if people who work full-time and have children in the home should not be in poverty, the doubling of the earned-income tax credit, the \$500-per-child tax credit that was a part of the bipartisan balanced budget bill passed last year, the raise in the minimum wage, the dramatic increase in tax credits and scholarships and loan program options for college education, the welfare reform that I believe did a great deal. Mike Castle and I were talking about this, because we've been working on this subject for more than 10 years together now, and we believe it makes a very good start at striking the proper balance between work and family, protecting the health care and the nutrition of children as a national guarantee, providing many more resources for child care and for transportation, giving States the flexibility to design programs that are more likely to move people more quickly from welfare to work without sacrificing their parental responsibilities. And since we have the smallest percentage of our people on welfare in 29 years, I'd say we're off to a pretty good start.

Now, since those initiatives, we have focused on two other major priorities: first, the after-school programs; and second, child care for lower income working families who may not

have been on welfare and therefore are not eligible for the funds that were provided in welfare reform.

Last month, the bipartisan balanced budget bill, to which Senator Specter and others have referred, expanded Head Start and made new investments in improving the quality of child care. Thanks to that bill, and especially to the extra child care put in under the welfare reform law, I can tell you that there are nearly one and a quarter million low income children now receiving child care under the child care block grant program. That is up from one million the year before. That's a 25 percent increase in one year. And to all these Members of Congress who are here who supported this across party lines, I want to say a special thank-you for doing that.

Now, that is the good news. But if a child asks you, "Are we there yet?" here is the rest of the story. We've gone from a million to one and a quarter million in one year, a 25 percent increase; by income, under the law, another 8.75 million children in low income working families are eligible for child care assistance, but cannot receive it because we have not put sufficient funds into the program.

So this should continue to be a priority in the next Congress. Even though we were successful—and I appreciate what Senator Specter said about the nature of the budget process—Congress was very generous in the end in investing more money in education, we did not pass the child care proposal. I hope we can do better next time because of the large number of people out there.

Now I'd like to say just a little word about the after-school programs because I, too, think they're so important. The budget I signed last month included a fivefold increase in the number of children who will receive after-school programs. This program, this increase, was funded under the 21st century community learning center initiative initially sponsored by Senator Jeffords of Vermont. It was strongly supported by Senator Boxer, Senator Kennedy, Congresswoman Lowey, and others.

I want to tell you how fast and how far Congress has moved on this after-school program, again in a bipartisan fashion. In 1996 there was \$1 million in this program. In 1997 there was \$40 million in the program. In 1998, in this Congress—thank you, Mr. Appropriator—there was \$200 million in the program. That's why

183 communities in 44 States and the District of Columbia today can receive \$60 million to set up these academically enriched after-school programs. Roughly 75,000 more children will now have someplace to go other than the streets when school lets out. That's good news for America.

One of these recipients is Chicago's Lighthouse program, which the First Lady and I have both visited. Every day Lighthouse—listen to this—keeps 112,000 children in 248 Chicago schools off the street and out of trouble, while drilling them in math and reading, providing everything from computer instruction to supervised sports to a hot evening meal. Over 40,000 children in that school system now get 3 meals a day.

After-school programs like this honor our values and benefit our Nation. They offer opportunity and peace of mind to hard-working parents who can't always be at home when school lets out. They bolster responsibility and academic achievement among students. Math and reading scores have shot up in nearly every one of the 40 Chicago schools where the program began 2 years ago.

And I might add, parenthetically—I'll plug something I believe in—I am all for the proposition that in our most troubled inner-city schools we must raise academic standards, raise learning levels, and end social promotion, but it is wrong to brand a child a failure when the system has failed the child. So there have to be after-school programs and summer school programs. So Chicago has ended social promotion. But they've got 112,000 kids in after-school programs, and the summer school program is now the sixth largest school district in America.

So if we want our children to do well and if we believe our children can do well across racial and income lines, no matter where they were born, where they grow up—whether they're on the most distant rural Native American tribal reservation or in an absolutely abandoned inner-city neighborhood—and if we want to say, "Look, because we love you we're going to hold you to high standards," then we have to give them the tools they need to succeed.

So this is a terribly important thing to the strengthening of our community, to reducing juvenile crime, to doing the things that we all know we ought to do. Just think, in this huge budget of over \$1.5 trillion, what started with

\$1 million, then went to \$40 million, then went to \$200 million, has the potential to have a bigger impact on more children's lives, more families, and more communities' futures than virtually anything else we're doing around here—because it empowers people, like the people who work with Rose Bolz' daughter, to do more of that daily.

Now, again, are we there yet? When it comes to the end of the speech, the answer is “nearly.” [Laughter] But back to the subject—are we there yet?

Audience members. No-o-o!

The President. A hundred and eighty-three new after-school grants, that's the good news. The rest of the news is, for every community that received a grant today, there were seven more which applied. Actually, that's also good news if you think about it. Everybody gets this now. But because they get it, we have to try harder. Like child care, the need for after-school programs simply outstrips our investment.

So when children ask from the back of the car, “Are we there yet?” it's always hard to give them a satisfactory answer. And how many of us as parents have explained how far we've come and that we've come further than we've

still got to go—all the answers that satisfy adults and never make it with kids. [Laughter]

On these issues, we should be as impatient as our children in the back seat of the car. We should be proud of what has been done. We should lift up the teachers, the community leaders, the parents, the child care workers who have done the right thing. But we should remember the impatience of our children. In the new economy, we can no longer think of high-quality child care and after-school programs as luxury items. In every period of economic and social change, what once was a luxury item becomes quickly standard equipment.

So are we there yet? No. But we'll get there together. Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:54 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks he referred to Rose Bolz, single working mother from Tucson, AZ, who introduced the President; Kent McGuire, Assistant Secretary, and Marshall S. Smith, Deputy Secretary, Department of Education; Mayor Ernest D. Davis of Mount Vernon, NY; Mayor Joseph P. Ganim of Bridgeport, CT; and Mayor Bret Schundler of Jersey City, NJ. A portion of these remarks could not be verified because the tape was incomplete.

Statement on the Retirement of Lewis Merletti as Director of the United States Secret Service

November 12, 1998

Lewis Merletti has done an outstanding job as Director of the United States Secret Service, and I am accepting his retirement with the deepest regret. I have great admiration for Lew and for what he has accomplished in service to our country.

From Lew's service in the United States Army with the Special Forces to his Secret Service assignments in Philadelphia, New York, and Washington, DC, and finally as Director, he has distinguished himself at every level.

I would like to thank Lew's wife, Patty, and their sons, Mike, Matt, and Chris, for accepting the pressures and difficulties that arise from being a part of the Secret Service family. Like many Secret Service families, they endured a number of moves from one city to another.

Their move to Cleveland and the Cleveland Browns organization will be one more challenge in Lew's accomplished career, one that he will undoubtedly meet with enthusiasm and great success. I also hope it will give Lew and Patty more time to spend with their children in the coming years.

On behalf of Hillary, Chelsea, the Vice President and his family, the former Presidents and their families—indeed, on behalf of everyone who has felt the reassurance of being in the care of Lew Merletti and the Secret Service agents he led—I want to thank this distinguished Director for his remarkable devotion to duty and country. I will miss him very much.