

years will have to meet together. It is what we must do in Washington this year.

All over America, most of what happens to Americans are being done by people that don't have anything to do with the Government. They're making their decisions for their families, for their businesses, for their education, for their future. But we can prevent them from making the most of their lives if we do not lift these burdens from them. And if we do, we will dramatically increase the number of Americans that will be able to live out their dreams and, therefore, keep the American dream going forever.

The decisions we make here and now are going to have a huge impact for a long, long time. We have a special obligation, because our predecessors for the last several years never had this opportunity. They never had the option to do what we can now do. It is now here before us, thanks to the hard work of the people of this country, and we had better fulfill our duty. I believe we will.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:50 a.m. in the East Room at the White House.

Remarks to the National School Boards Association *February 1, 1999*

Thank you very much. First of all, Barbara Wheeler, thank you for your remarks. You covered everything I was going to say. *[Laughter]* You talked about the Capitol Steps. *[Laughter]* I think they're funny, too, but you must surely know, having heard them, that it is not the school boards association that is the Rodney Dangerfield in this town. *[Laughter]*

Let me say I'm delighted to be on this platform with Anne Bryant and your other leaders behind me and to be here with all of you. I see Delegate Member of Congress Robert Underwood from Guam here. I'm delighted to see him. I was in Guam with him recently. If you haven't been, I recommend it.

And I want to thank you for the wonderful, wonderful welcome you gave to Secretary Riley. We have been working on education together since we first met, over 20 years ago, and he is not only the longest serving, I think, clearly, the finest Secretary of Education this country ever had.

We've had a very good day at the White House today, and I thought I would tell you about something we did at the beginning of the day that does not directly, but surely will indirectly impact on you and what you do. This morning I presented my budget for this coming year, and there are a lot of good things in it for education. But the point I want to make is that we were illustrating today that with last year's surplus and the surplus we project this year, that if the Congress will do what I rec-

ommend and set aside over 75 percent of this surplus for 15 years so that we can secure the retirement of the baby boomers with Social Security and Medicare—since we won't need the money while it's being set aside for about, in the case of Medicare, 11 years, in the case of Social Security, more—we will, while we're saving it, be paying down the national debt.

Now, when I took office, the national debt was 50 percent of our annual income, and it was projected to grow to 80 percent. When I took office, we were spending over 14 cents on the dollar of every tax dollar just servicing the debt. It's now down to 44 percent of our annual income, the debt; we're spending a little over 13 cents on the dollar. But if we set it aside for 15 years, we will take the debt down to 7 percent of our annual income, a third of what it was in 1981 when we started this deficit binge, the lowest it's been since 1917 before we got into World War I. And it will only cost 2 cents of every tax dollar you pay to pay interest on the debt.

That will, as compared with now, free up another 11 cents on the tax dollar every year from then on, that we could be investing in our children and in education and in the future. It's an amazing statistic. It will also keep interest rates low and will free up trillions of dollars to invest in the economy. And all of you know, running local school boards, that if the economy is strong, then you'll have your tax revenues coming in at the local and State level.

So this is a compact among the generations. It's not simply a way to save Social Security and Medicare, although that, too, is good for younger people because it means that when we baby boomers retire, our kids won't have to give money to us that they could be investing in their grandchildren—in our grandchildren.

But it was a very good day. And it is a part of what I am trying to get our country to focus on, which is that we have opportunities now that people who came before us, over the last several decades, could only have dreamed of. And we have to decide how we're going to use those opportunities.

I think our most profound obligation is to say that at a time like this with the economy running well, with the lowest peacetime unemployment rate since 1957, with all the economic indicators strong, but with trouble overseas which could affect our economy, we have got to take this opportunity to deal with the long-term challenges our country faces, finally, not only to have America working again but to really build that bridge to the 21st century I've been talking about for so long.

And all of you know that education has to be a critical part of that. You know better than I all the problems that your president just mentioned. You know better than I that we have the largest group of school children we've ever had and that it is more diverse in every way than it has ever been. The future of our whole country rests so much on how well we educate our children, and you have been chosen in your communities to carry that torch into a new century. It is a great honor and a heavy responsibility, and I thank you for assuming it.

I believe that here in Washington, our duty is to help to give you the tools you need to meet the challenge. And we've worked hard for 6 years, with all the economic challenges we faced at first, to do that duty.

In the last 6 years, while we have reduced the size of the Federal Government to its lowest point since President Kennedy was in office and eliminated hundreds of programs in order to balance the budget, at the same time we have almost doubled our investment in education and training. We've helped States who adopted tougher standards. We've helped school districts to deal with the challenges of drugs and gangs and violence and guns. We've cut regulations in our Federal programs affecting elementary and secondary education by two-

thirds, thanks to Secretary Riley's efforts. We've granted dozens of waivers to States and school districts to give them the flexibility they need to try new approaches. We've begun to organize an army of tutors, including young people in the America Reads program from a thousand colleges to help in schools to make sure our young people can read at elementary school, and a new group of mentors in the GEAR UP program to mentor middle school and high school students to prepare them for college and to make sure they know they can go.

We have increased our investment in early childhood, including Head Start, as Barbara said. We are making dramatic progress in connecting all our classrooms and libraries to the Internet by early in the next century. And this year the new E-rate, the education rate, comes on-line, and that should save about a billion dollars in the cost of hookups, something for which we've fought very hard.

Also, something—I think it's very important that all the high school seniors and juniors, and maybe even earlier, know that in many different ways we have basically opened the doors of college. Millions of young people this year will get the HOPE scholarship tax credit, which is worth about \$1,500 for the first 2 years of school. There are tax credits for junior and senior years of college, for graduate school. We've increased the size and reach of the Pell grant program, lowered the cost of student loans, added hundreds of thousands of work-study positions, and tried to basically put you in a position to say to the children in your school districts, "Look, if you make the grades, if you don't have any money, you can still go to college. No matter what the cost is, you can still go."

Last year, we got the first big downpayment on our goal of helping you to hire 100,000 highly trained teachers to lower class sizes in the early grades. And that, plus what all of you have been doing, is really paying off. I mean, the SAT scores are up, the math scores are up almost everywhere in the country. We see in some of the most difficult learning environments dramatic turnarounds where the proper attention has been paid to schools.

But if you look at the country as a whole, there are still some very challenging problems. Number one, reading scores haven't budged. Now, I think that's pretty explainable when you

consider the increasing percentage of our children whose parents don't speak English at home. You couldn't expect aggregate reading scores to be going through the roof. That doesn't mean that we can give up on making sure those kids are fluent in English. It just means we have to work harder; we have to work smarter; we have to do better.

Even more troubling to me is the fact that our relative standing on these test scores goes down as the kids go up in school. Our fourth graders were ranked in the top of the world last year in comparative math and science scores. And keep in mind, when we engage in this, we take a representative sample of kids—by income, by race, by region, every demographic category—and they're doing well. Our 8th graders are about the international average, and our 12th graders rank near the bottom. That tells us that there are things we have to do if we expect to be globally competitive that we're not doing. And I believe we can do better.

Probably most of you heard my State of the Union Address, in which I said that we, in my judgment, in the Federal Government, should change the way we invest Federal funds to emphasize what you have proved to us works and to stop investing in things that don't work. We will have an opportunity—and again, I believe, an obligation—to do that this year, because Congress must reauthorize the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. I intend to send them, later this year, an "Education Accountability Act" to require States and school districts receiving Federal help to take five steps that most of you are probably already taking and that I think all of us would admit have been shown to work.

The components of this bill basically came to us from educators, from people like you, from principals especially, from teachers in some cases, and from our own on-site observation, not just mine and Secretary Riley's but all of us, of what we have seen working.

We believe that every district should have a policy of no social promotion but not identifying the children as failures, and therefore there should be after-school and summer school programs to support their continued learning.

All over America, teachers groups, not just the national organizations but grassroots teachers groups, have pleaded with us to say, if you're going to invest Federal money, say that every

school district must have a reasonable discipline code and it must be enforced.

We believe that parents should get report cards on their children's schools. We believe there should be a strategy in every school district to turn around or shut down schools that fail.

I appreciated the comment you made about vouchers. You know, I have steadfastly opposed them. I believe when I was a Governor, I think we were the second State in the country after Minnesota to have a statewide public school choice bill pass the legislature. And I have steadfastly supported the charter school movement in America, and I still do. But we must have a strategy that deals with failing schools. If you want to win the argument with people who don't do what you do every day—on vouchers—you must have a strategy that deals with failing schools. And it's very important.

I think we have to do more to ensure that all of our teachers are as well-trained as they possibly can be in the subjects they are teaching. Sometimes I think our teachers get a little bit of a bum rap, with the schools exploding and all of you having to compete for bright people with other forms of work, not just teaching. It should hardly be surprising to people that we have, in many of our school districts, teachers teaching subjects which they don't have degrees in, which they may not even have college minors in. But we have to do something about it. We have to do more to try to help support teachers. And the teachers, through their organizations, are clamoring for more investment to help develop skills and learning, to raise their qualifications in these academic subjects.

I'm going up to Boston tomorrow, and I'll be able to discuss some of this in greater detail. But what I wanted to say to you today is we need your help. We need your help. We need Congress to understand that—I do not believe the Federal Government should run the schools. I didn't wake up one morning and come up with these five ideas. I believe that you were showing us what works, and that is what we should invest in. And I think that, both as taxpayers and school board members, knowing the challenges we face, you should expect us to invest this money based on what you believe will work and what you have seen will work.

Nothing we can do here involves picking this person or that person or the other person to teach; involves how you select your principals;

involves how the climate of learning or the culture of the school is developed, school by school. We can't do any of that. But with limited Federal funds, which I have done my best to increase, and an enormous challenge out there, we ought to be investing in what works, and we ought to stop investing in what doesn't. And I ask for your help to persuade the Congress that that is in the interests of the local school districts of the United States. Essentially, we ought to try to take what is common sense to all of you and make it common practice in all of our schools.

Today, as I said, I released my budget, and I wanted to talk a little bit about what it does. First of all, it calls upon Congress to invest \$1.4 billion to hire new, better trained teachers to reduce class sizes in the early grades. This is a 17 percent increase over the budget I signed last fall, and it brings us another step closer to our goal of 100,000 new teachers. We have to make sure that Congress continues this financial support.

I might say, there were some people who didn't want to do that, but the arguments I heard about this were the same arguments I heard in 1994 against my crime bill when local police officers said, "Mr. President, the violent crime rate has tripled in the last 30 years, and the police forces have increased by 10 percent." It was not rocket science to think that if you had more police officers and they were walking the streets and working with neighborhood groups and others, that they could prevent crime from happening in the first place, catch criminals when they commit crimes, and drive the crime rate down. We now have the lowest violent crime rate in 30 years, the lowest overall crime rate in 25 years.

It is not rocket science to know that if you've got a teacher shortage now and a looming one in the future, that the Federal Government, if we have the resources, ought to be giving you the tools to hire more teachers. So I ask you to help us pass this through the Congress.

The budget also calls for investing \$35 million to provide 7,000 college scholarships for bright young people who commit to teach in places where the need is greatest, in the poorest inner-city and rural schools. That's 5 times the investment that Congress made in these scholarships last year when we inaugurated the program. It increases by \$25 million funding to train bilingual and English-as-second-language teachers. It

contains \$30 million to train middle school teachers to use technology in the classroom. It calls for \$10 million to train 1,000 Native Americans to teach in Indian reservations and other public schools with large Native American enrollments. It has \$18 million to recruit and train retired military members to become teachers.

We had an event on this at the White House last week, and we had this marvelous retired Army sergeant who is teaching in the Baltimore schools come and make a presentation. He's a special education teacher in the Baltimore schools. It was an overwhelming, emotional event.

And I remember when I was in Korea recently I met a senior master sergeant there who gave me one of his little military coins. And I said, "How long have you been in the service?" And he said, "Twenty-nine years." And I said, "How much longer are you going to stay?" He said, "About a year." And I said, "What are you going to do?" He said, "I'm going home to Kentucky to be a teacher." So I hope you will continue to support this.

The budget continues support for the master teacher program, to make sure our finest teachers get the recognition, the reward they deserve, and the opportunity to spread the skills they develop in going through the certification process with others in their schools. Our goal there is to try to get up to 100,000 board-certified master teachers in the country, enough to make sure that, with your help, we can have one in every school building in America. And I think that would be a very good thing, indeed.

The budget increases by \$26 million funding to mobilize tutors and trained teachers, to make sure all of our third graders can read adequately. It doubles funding for our efforts to provide middle school students with tutors, with mentors, to spark their interest and their capacity in going on to college.

We also, again, will try to pass the provision of the budget that would use tax breaks to enable us to build or modernize 5,000 schools. And that is very important, indeed. Again, I heard the argument last year, "Well, this is really not something that the Federal Government ought to be doing." Well, the Federal Government puts a lot of money into State highways, and this is our road to the future.

I, frankly, wish we were doing more. I don't know how many schools I've been in where

there were as many kids back in the house-trailers as there were in regular classrooms. I don't know how many I've been in where there were rooms closed off because the buildings were breaking down. We have schools buildings in some of our cities now that are so old they literally cannot be hooked up to the Internet without a whole rewiring. I think this is very important.

But again, I say it's important that you understand that you've got to go out and talk to Members of Congress of both parties and say, "Listen, this is not some cockamamie idea that the President had some person with a Ph.D. think up in a windowless office in the White House"—[laughter]—"you know, you go out and stroll around the schools of America, and it will come screaming back at you: We need some help here."

So I ask for your help. And finally, let me say, our Federal after-school programs began just 2 years ago with a million bucks; that's all I could get for it. And we went to \$40 million. Then in the third year, in our last budget, that I signed just a couple of months ago, we went to 200 million. This budget calls for 600 million, and that's enough to keep one million children in school and off the streets, learning and safe, in after-school programs. I ask for your support for that.

So this budget comes from Secretary Riley and me, two old—increasingly old—[laughter]—Governors who believe deeply in education and its promise, who believe deeply in the leadership of people like you at the local level. We don't want to micromanage the schools. We don't want to take resources away from people who need it. But it is unconscionable to continue to support that which doesn't work and to fail to support that which does. So we ask for a partnership that will invest more in our public schools and to invest in ways that you, out on the frontlines of change, have demonstrated will work so that our children will learn more. That's all we ask.

Again, I say, as I was thinking today when we started the day, Dick and I did, with the

rest of the Cabinet and 31 Members of Congress and we were looking at this line with the debt going down and what was going to happen in the future—you just think about where America is and you think about people who were Presidents, Secretaries of Education, Members of Congress, Governors and school board members, 10 years ago, 15 years ago, 20 years ago. There were people who would have killed to have had an opportunity like this. This is a high-class dilemma we've got here. [Laughter] You know? Why are we worried about the aging of America? Because before you know it, our average life expectancy will be over 80. That's a big problem. I like it better as the days go by—[laughter]—and the same thing with the surplus. But history is full of examples of people who had golden opportunities and squandered them because there was an easier, more well-trodden path to take.

And so I ask you—I don't think you know the influence you can have if you're determined to bring it to bear. This is a time for decisive action. Don't just go up to Congress and ask them to reauthorize the act the way it was and give you as much more money as you can get. You've got 53 million kids out there. They're from 200 or more different racial or ethnic groups, every religion in the world, every linguistic background in the world, and they are America's gold mine for tomorrow as the world becomes smaller and more and more interdependent.

This is a gift. It is a high-class challenge. And we have the resources, and we have the knowledge to do what is right. We have to do it.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 4:55 p.m. at the Grand Hyatt Hotel. In his remarks, he referred to Barbara M. Wheeler, president, and Anne L. Bryant, executive director, National School Boards Association; and Sgt. Arthur Moore, USA (Ret.), teacher, Harlem Park Community School, Baltimore, MD. The President also referred to the comedy troupe Capitol Steps.