

Remarks on Proposed Legislation To Reauthorize the Elementary and Secondary Education Act

May 19, 1999

Good morning. I'm delighted to be joined this morning by the Secretary of Education and by my Domestic Policy Adviser, Bruce Reed, to discuss the very important issue of our children's schools.

In my State of the Union Address this year, I said that in order to meet our responsibility to create 21st century schools for all our children, we have to do a far, far better job of spending the \$15 billion in Federal aid we send to our schools every year.

Building these kinds of schools has been a passion for me, for the Vice President, for Secretary Riley, for our entire administration. We have worked with Members of Congress and education leaders, people in every State of the country, for over 6 years now. We have supported higher standards, better teachers, new technology, modern facilities, innovations like charter schools, character education, school uniforms.

But we know fundamentally that if we are going to change the way our schools work, we must change the way we invest Federal aid in our schools.

On the way down here, just down the walk, the Secretary of Education said we have been working very hard to promote school standards around the country; now we have to get the standards actually into the schools. This week I am sending legislation to Congress designed to do just that.

First, this legislation strengthens accountability for results. It says that States and school districts that choose to accept Federal aid must take responsibility for turning around failing schools or shutting them down. It says they must give parents report cards not just on their children but on the children's schools. It says school districts must have strong discipline codes that are fair, consistent, and focused on prevention. It says they must make sure that teachers actually know the subjects they are teaching. It says they must stop the practice of social promotion, not by holding students back but by making sure they have the support to meet the higher standards.

This legislation triples funding for after-school and summer school programs, provides for smaller classes, and requires other early interventions that lift students up.

Second, this legislation will put more highly trained teachers in our Nation's schools. It requires that all new teachers pass subject matter and skills tests, that all teachers be given the support they need to improve their knowledge and skills. It allows Congress to finish the job we started last fall of hiring 100,000 new, highly trained teachers to reduce class size in the early grades.

Finally, the legislation will help give all our children safe, healthy, and disciplined learning environments. For the first time, it will require schools to adopt comprehensive school safety plans, use proven antidrug and antiviolence prevention programs, intervene with troubled youth, establish security procedures for schools, and give parents an annual report of drug and violent incidents at their children's schools.

It also expands the character education efforts the Secretary of Education has done so much to advance, promotes alternative schools for disruptive students, and strengthens our policy of zero tolerance for guns by requiring that any student expelled for bringing a gun to school receive appropriate treatment and counseling before being allowed back into class.

As I said yesterday, we must do everything we can to keep guns out of the hands of our children. I want to commend the Senate for yesterday's overwhelming, bipartisan support for child safety locks. And I commend Speaker Hastert for his leadership in supporting background checks at gun shows and for raising the age of handgun ownership to 21. I urge the Senate to keep working on the justice bill—the juvenile justice bill—and to bring these commonsense measures to a vote.

Now, these education ideas are not Democratic or Republican, nor were they dreamed up in Washington. They were invented and proven successful in the laboratories of democracy at the school, city, and State levels. They preserve and enhance the flexibility that States and districts need to run successful schools. If

the Federal Government fails to act, the best of these practices will spread, but much more slowly. Just remember, it took 100 years for laws mandating universal education to spread from a few States to every State. That pace of change might have been all right in the 19th century; it won't do in the 21st. We do not have the luxury of waiting and continuing to subsidize failure.

Nothing we can do will more surely unite our people and strengthen our Nation than giving all of our children a high-quality education.

We know what works. Our schools, our educators have shown us what works. It is time to put that as a condition of success in the investment of Federal aid in every child in America. And I want to thank the Secretary of Education and Mr. Reed and everyone else who has worked on this program.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 8:40 a.m. on the South Lawn at the White House, prior to his departure for New York City.

Remarks at the Launching of the Pennsylvania Station Redevelopment Corporation in New York City

May 19, 1999

Thank you very much. Chairman Gargano, Governor, Secretary Slater, thank you all for all you have done to make this day come to pass. I thank the leaders of Amtrak, the MTA, the Port Authority, the Post Office; Mr. Peck, the Commissioner of Public Buildings; the distinguished architect who has drawn a beautiful plan. Speaker Vallone, Mr. Green, Senator D'Amato, thank you for pushing this. And Mrs. Moynihan, you haven't yet been acknowledged, but you had a lot to do with the arm twisting on this, and I thank you, too. Thank you very much.

Senator Moynihan has been called the Nation's best thinker among politicians since Lincoln, and its best politician among thinkers since Jefferson. Today we might say he also may be the best arm twister since Farley. *[Laughter]* You know, it was said that Jim Farley actually knew the names of 50,000 people by heart. Pat Moynihan knows 50,000 ways to get any politician to do what he wants. *[Laughter]*

I cannot tell you how much I appreciate the fact that he gave me an opportunity to be a small part of this day and this project. For decades he has worked to give voice to the dreams of New Yorkers, to create a new Penn Station truly worthy of the name and of this wonderful city.

If I can borrow a few words from the famous inscription on this building: Neither snow, nor rain, nor heat, nor gloom of night could have

stopped Pat Moynihan from bringing this day to pass.

Throughout his public career, which has spanned so many different jobs in so many different places in the United States and abroad, Senator Moynihan has always cared about preserving our history and our spirit through our great buildings. Nearly 40 years ago, President Kennedy challenged him to revitalize Washington's Pennsylvania Avenue, to bring back civic pride to the heart of our Nation's Capital. He never gave up on that goal, a job he completed with the dedication of the Ronald Reagan Building a year ago this month.

Thirty-five years ago, when I went to Washington, DC, for the first time as a wide-eyed college student, Pennsylvania Avenue was a mess and a disaster. Today, it is a tribute to our history, to our values, and to our future, thanks to the vision of Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan.

Many people also forget that in addition to helping to rescue Union Station in Washington and Grand Central Station here—which he was whispering in my ear about while we were waiting for our turn—back in 1962 he authored the wise principles that guide the Federal Government's architecture decisions today. In the words of your distinguished architect, David Childs, Senator Moynihan is a true inspiration to everyone working in architecture and urban design.