

May 21 / Administration of William J. Clinton, 1999

Radio Remarks on Agriculture Provisions in the 1999 Emergency Supplemental Appropriations Act May 21, 1999

We are living through the longest peacetime expansion in our Nation's history, the strongest economy in a generation, the lowest unemployment in nearly 30 years, over 18 million new jobs since 1993.

Our farmers and ranchers helped to create this new prosperity, giving us good, inexpensive food at home and exporting a lot abroad. Unfortunately, today, too many of them are not reaping the benefits of the prosperity they helped to create. In fact, many of our farmers and ranchers are in the grip of the worst crisis in over a decade. We have to do more to help them.

Three months ago, I called on Congress to give farmers the loan assistance they needed to start the spring planting. Congress didn't act then, and every day they waited brought more farms closer to foreclosure.

So in March our administration took extraordinary action to make \$300 million in loans available to America's farming families now, instead of at the end of the year when they normally would have come up. Congress, Friday, acted to provide funds for those loans and more. On Friday I signed an emergency appropriations bill that will restore the \$300 million to the

loan program to help our farmers, ranchers, and rural communities.

But with thousands of them still in danger of failing, we must continue our efforts. My balanced budget for next year includes additional help for agriculture. Unfortunately, next week the House of Representatives will vote on a bill that would gut some of those commitments, and the Senate is considering even deeper cuts. Our farmers and ranchers feed us. They've helped us to get this prosperity we're enjoying. Now they're in need, and we should help them.

After passing a bill that will do so much good, it would be a real shame and a bad mistake for Congress to reverse course and cut back on our commitment to America's farming and ranching families. I'm committed to working with Congress to give them the support they need.

NOTE: The President's remarks were recorded at approximately 1:30 p.m. on May 21 in the Oval Office at the White House for later broadcast. These remarks were also made available on the White House Press Office Radio Actuality Line.

Message to the Congress Transmitting Proposed Legislation To Reauthorize the Elementary and Secondary Education Act May 21, 1999

To the Congress of the United States:

I am pleased to transmit for your immediate consideration the "Educational Excellence for All Children Act of 1999," my Administration's proposal for reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA) and other elementary and secondary education programs.

My proposal builds on the positive trends achieved under current law. The "Improving America's Schools Act of 1994," which reauthorized the ESEA 5 years ago, and the "Goals 2000: Educate America Act" gave States and

school districts a framework for integrating Federal resources in support of State and local reforms based on high academic standards. In response, 48 States, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico have adopted State-level standards. Recent results of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) show improved performance for the economically disadvantaged and other at-risk students who are the primary focus of ESEA programs. NAEP reading scores for 9-year olds in high-poverty schools have improved significantly since 1992, while mathematics achievement has also increased nationally.

Students in high-poverty schools and the lowest-performing students—the specific target populations for the ESEA Title I program—have registered gains in both reading and math achievement.

I am encouraged by these positive trends, but educational results for many children remain far below what they should be. My proposal to reauthorize the ESEA is based on four themes reflecting lessons from research and the experience of implementing the 1994 Act.

First, we would continue to focus on high academic standards for all children. The underlying purpose of every program within the ESEA is to help all children reach challenging State and local academic standards. States have largely completed the first stage of standards-based reform by developing content standards for all children. My bill would support the next stage of reform by helping States, school districts, schools, and teachers use these standards to guide classroom instruction and assessment.

My proposal for reauthorizing Title I, for example, would require States to hold school districts and schools accountable for student performance against State standards, including helping the lowest-performing students continually to improve. The bill also would continue to target Federal elementary and secondary education resources on those students furthest from meeting State and local standards, with a particular emphasis on narrowing the gap in achievement between disadvantaged students and their more affluent peers. In this regard, my proposal would phase in equal treatment of Puerto Rico in ESEA funding formulas, so that poor children in Puerto Rico are treated similarly to those in the rest of the country for the purpose of formula allocations.

Second, my proposal responds to research showing that while qualified teachers are critical to improving student achievement, far too many teachers are not prepared to teach to high standards. Teacher quality is a particular problem in high-poverty schools, and the problem is often exacerbated by the use of paraprofessionals in instructional roles.

My bill addresses teacher quality by holding States accountable for stronger enforcement of their own certification and licensure requirements, while at the same time providing substantial support for State and local professional development efforts. The Teaching to High Standards initiative in Title II would help move

challenging educational standards into every classroom by providing teachers with sustained and intensive high-quality professional development in core academic subjects, supporting new teachers during their first 3 years in the classroom, and ensuring that all teachers are proficient in relevant content knowledge and teaching skills.

The Technology for Education initiative under Title III would expand the availability of educational technology as a tool to help teachers implement high standards in the classroom, particularly in high-poverty schools. My bill also would extend, over the next 7 years, the Class-Size Reduction initiative, which aims to reduce class sizes in the early grades by helping districts to hire and train 100,000 teachers. And the Title VII Bilingual Education proposal would help ensure that all teachers are well trained to teach students with limited English proficiency, who are found in more and more classrooms with each passing year.

Third, my bill would increase support for safe, healthy, disciplined, and drug-free learning environments where all children feel connected, motivated, and challenged to learn and where parents are welcomed and involved. The recent tragedy at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado, reminds us that we must be ever vigilant against the risks of violence and other dangerous behaviors in our schools. Our reauthorization bill includes several measures to help mitigate these risks.

We would strengthen the Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities Act by concentrating funds on districts with the greatest need for drug- and violence-prevention programs, and by emphasizing the use of research-based programs of proven effectiveness. Moreover, with respect to students who bring weapons to school, this proposal would require schools to refer such students to a mental health professional for assessment and require counseling for those who pose an imminent threat to themselves or others; allow funding for programs that educate students about the risks associated with guns; expand character education programs; and promote alternative schools and second chance programs. A new School Emergency Response to Violence program would provide rapid assistance to school districts that have experienced violence or other trauma that disrupts the learning environment.

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My High School Reform initiative would support innovative reforms to improve student achievement in high schools, such as expanding the connections between adults and students that are necessary for effective learning and healthy personal development. This new initiative would provide resources to help transform 5,000 high schools into places where students receive individual attention, are motivated to learn, are provided with challenging courses, and are encouraged to develop and pursue long-term educational and career goals.

Fourth, in response to clear evidence that standards-based reforms work best when States have strong accountability systems in place, my proposal would encourage each State to establish a single, rigorous accountability system for all schools. The bill also would require States to end social promotion and traditional retention practices; phase out the use of teachers with emergency certificates and the practice of assigning teachers “out-of-field;” and implement sound discipline policies in every school. Finally,

the bill would give parents an important new accountability tool by requiring State, district, and school-level report cards that will help them evaluate the quality of the schools their children attend.

Based on high standards for all students, high-quality professional development for teachers, safe and disciplined learning environments, and accountability to parents and taxpayers, the Educational Excellence for All Children Act of 1999 provides a solid foundation for raising student achievement and narrowing the achievement gap between disadvantaged students and their more advantaged peers. More important, it will help prepare all of our children, and thus the Nation, for the challenges of the 21st century. I urge the Congress to take prompt and favorable action on this proposal.

WILLIAM J. CLINTON

The White House,
May 21, 1999.

The President’s Radio Address *May 22, 1999*

Good morning. It’s been just over a month since 15 students and a teacher lost their lives at Columbine High School. On Thursday Hillary and I traveled to Littleton, Colorado, to visit with the families of the victims and the students of Columbine. They’re brave, good people, full of faith, determined that the children lost will not be forgotten, dedicated to doing whatever they can to make our schools and our children safe. All of us in Washington and in every community in America owe them the same dedication.

As if we needed another reminder, on Thursday, as I was going to Littleton, a young man opened fire at his high school in Conyers, Georgia, wounding several of his classmates. No child should have to worry that a classmate is carrying a loaded gun to school. No parent should have to fear sending a child to school. And no American should tolerate this level of violence against our children. There is no task more urgent. Every one of us has a role to play.

First, Government must do more to protect our children from guns. We’re making progress. This week was a turning point in our long efforts. I’m so pleased that the Senate passed key elements of my commonsense plan to address gun violence: mandatory child safety locks with every new handgun; a lifetime ban on gun purchases by violent juveniles; a nationwide ban on the importation of high-capacity ammunition clips and juvenile possession of assault weapons; and finally, after a tie-breaking vote cast by Vice President Gore, mandatory background checks on gun sales at gun shows.

I’m pleased that Speaker Hastert has agreed that we should also close that deadly loophole and also raise the age of handgun ownership to 21. Now I call on the House to take immediate action. I hope the House of Representatives will pass every one of these commonsense efforts that the Senate has passed to protect our children from guns. And I hope they’ll do it before school lets out.