

the people in Congress like Senator Robb and Bobby Scott and Norm Sisisky; and going all the way down to the grassroots in America, the people like you that voted for us.

So, on this Labor Day, as you leave here, if somebody asks you, what did the President say, tell them he said, "We had an idea and it worked. That helping ordinary people works,

and it requires people like you to be good citizens and keep people like them in office. And if you do, it will keep right on working."

Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 5:10 p.m., at a private residence. In his remarks, he referred to State Delegate Flora Davis Crittenden.

Remarks at Brooke Grove Elementary School in Olney, Maryland *September 7, 1999*

Thank you so much. You know, when I was in grade school, we used to joke that our favorite class was assembly. [*Laughter*] But you've been out here so long, and it's so hot, I'm not sure it's true anymore. [*Laughter*] I will try to be brief.

I want to, first of all, say how greatly honored I am to be here with Governor Glendening and Senator Sarbanes and Congressman Cardin and your Representative, Congresswoman Morella; with Senator Miller and the other members of the Maryland legislature; with your principal, Eoline Cary; Jerry Weast, the Montgomery County superintendent. I want to thank the teachers in the classes whom I visited, Ms. Tepper and Ms. Husted, and their students, who asked good questions and got me to read a book, a book about friendship, which I could use a little of myself from time to time. [*Laughter*] I want to thank the teachers, the parents, and the students. And I want to thank Nancy Grasmick, and Reggie Felton, the chair of the Montgomery County School Board, and all the people in Maryland for their dedication. And I thank you, Robin Davis, for your introduction and for your devotion to teaching. And we have also on the stage with us Jessica Goldstein, who is another one of the reading specialists, also hired under our program.

Most of all, if I might, I'd like to say a special word of thanks to my friend of over 20 years, the Secretary of Education, Dick Riley. I think, plainly, the finest Education Secretary this country has ever had. And I really thank him for his leadership.

I knew before I came here that this was a blue ribbon school. Now that I've been here, I know why. I loved walking down the halls;

I loved reading the posters on the walls; I loved talking to the students and watching the instruction. Education is the priority in this school. Education must be America's priority, as well.

We now have in our schools, starting last year for the first time since the end of World War II, we've got a group of students in our schools bigger than the baby boom generation, the largest number of children ever in the schools of the United States, and as all of you know, it's also the most diverse group of students ever, racially, religiously, culturally. We have the largest number of students in our schools whose first language is not English, by far in the history of the country. And yet, we know that in a global society our diversity can be an enormous asset if, but only if, we can give every one of our children a world-class education. And we don't have a moment to lose.

I'm here because for 6½ years we have worked very hard to raise standards, to raise expectations, to raise accountability, and to raise the level of support so that every child in America could have an education like the children of Brooke Grove Elementary get. And I think that's what all of you want.

As I indicated, Dick Riley and I have been working on this issue for more than 20 years now. Both Hillary and I made it our first priority when I was Governor of my State for 12 years. Earlier this year I proposed an education accountability plan based on what I have seen working for more than a decade now, to help raise standards, make good schools even better, and have specific initiatives to help turn around schools that aren't making the grade; to provide more funds for after-school and summer school programs for the kids who need it; to expand

early reading programs; to reach our goal of connecting every classroom and library in the country, in every school, to the Internet by the year 2000. We now have HOPE scholarships, more Pell grants, other student loans, grants, and tax credits, which have literally opened the doors of college to virtually every single American.

And last fall, as you've heard, we persuaded a huge bipartisan majority in Congress to come together across party lines and put a downpayment on hiring 100,000 well-prepared teachers to lower class sizes in the early grades, teachers like Robin Davis and Jessica Goldstein, and over 160 others in Montgomery County alone, part of the 30,000 teachers nationwide who are now meeting their students this year, under this initiative.

Everybody knows what Robin said: Students learn better, especially early, in smaller classes. Now we have research which confirms that those early learning gains are maintained by the children all the way through high school. We're not talking about some theory, here. You heard a teacher with 20 years of experience stand up and say what she just said. We now have academic research, objective evidence, that we now have no excuse not to act on.

We have to have more teachers for these swelling classrooms, to get the classes down in the early grades. Just yesterday I talked to a friend of mine who had just come back from a major city in the Midwest, where he had visited an elementary school where the average class size was 37. That is wrong. We can do better. Our children's future is at stake. And I saw the kind of learning in these classes today that we need for every single school in the country.

So why are we here? Because it's budget time again on Capitol Hill. *[Laughter]* And last year, right before the election, we had this truly astonishing and heartwarming coalition of forces across party lines to say, "Okay, we'll support the 100,000 more teachers. We'll make the 30,000 downpayment." We didn't have enough money to hire them all in one year and sustain it, but we could do nearly a third in one year.

So now it's budget time again in Washington, and the question of whether we will continue to move toward our commitment of 100,000 teachers is one of the major questions there. It is all caught up in what you've read about

tax cut debate, should there be one and, if so, what size should it be?

But the larger question is this. We have waited, for a person my age, a lifetime—a lifetime—for the kind of economics we have today. Compared to the day I took office, we've gone from the biggest deficit to the biggest surplus in history, the longest peacetime expansion in history, a 29-year low in unemployment, a 32-year low in welfare, a 26-year low in the crime rate, and we have money. We have some money. Now, the question is, what are we going to do with our prosperity?

There is broad agreement that we ought to save the money that you have given in your Social Security taxes to pay down the debt and to keep it for Social Security. There is a huge disagreement about what to do with the rest. The leadership of the Republican Party wants to give it all, virtually all of it in a tax cut. If we do, it means we can't add any time to the life of the Social Security Trust Fund or the Medicare Trust Fund or add the prescription drug coverage that, I think, are necessary as we look forward to the baby boomers' retirement.

I can tell you, folks, I'm the oldest of the baby boomers. One of our biggest worries, my whole generation, is that because we are so big, and bigger than our children's generation, that we will retire and impose such a burden on our children that they won't be able to do right by our grandchildren. We can avoid that now if we save Social Security and Medicare. We're not just doing it for the older people; we're doing it for the children and their future. I think it's important to do that.

I think it's important to pay the debt down. We can get this country out of debt for the first time since—listen to this—1835, when Andrew Jackson was President. Now, what's that got to do with these children? You all read the press; you all see these people speculating how long can these economic good times go on, how can we keep it going without inflation. If we pay our debt down, it means the Government's not borrowing money; it means there is more for you to borrow; it means home loans, it means car loans, it means credit card loans, it means college loans, it means business loans will be less costly; they will be cheaper. That means there will be more investment, more jobs, and higher incomes, and greater prosperity for

a whole generation of Americans. It's important, and we ought to do it.

And finally, we ought to figure out what we need to do to invest in the things that are critical to these children's future, in the environment, in research, in health care, in defense, and most important, in education. And when we do that, then I think we ought to give the rest of it back to you in a tax cut. But we ought to, first of all, think about the long-term welfare of the country, save Social Security and Medicare, get the country out of debt, invest what we have to do in education and other things, then give the rest in a tax cut. Don't put the cart before the horse and then figure out what in the wide world we're going to do.

Let me give you an idea of the differences, because that's what we did, and we proposed a substantial tax cut for middle class Americans. We still have the money in our balanced budget to expand Head Start, to help State and local schools build or modernize 6,000 schools. You don't have that problem here, but a third of our schools are in terrible shape.

I was in a 75-year-old school in Virginia yesterday where they cannot hook the classrooms up to the Internet because the circuits go out every time they put the pressure on the system. And that's important. To help communities expand or start after-school programs and summer schools programs; to help have higher accountability and standards for schools but provide extra help to turn around schools that aren't doing it; and to finish the job of putting the 100,000 teachers in the classroom in ways that also enable us to help improve teacher quality and skills and new technologies.

Now, last month Secretary Riley announced funds to help improve our teacher force. Today we're releasing another \$33 million to create teacher quality partnerships in 22 States, to help recruit, train, and license new teachers and support them once they're in the classroom. We have to work on teacher quality, but you can't have a quality teacher unless you have a teacher in the first place.

Here is the arithmetic problem. If their budget passes with a tax cut, it will require us to reduce our investment in education, in Head Start, early reading, and other programs by about 50 percent over the next 10 years. And over and above their tax cut, even this year they have put themselves in a position where they are going to have to cut education now.

Either they have to dip into the Social Security surplus, something they said they wouldn't do, or cut next year's education budget by nearly 20 percent.

Now, this is basic arithmetic, the kind of things you learn in Brooke Grove. It's basic arithmetic that if schools have record enrollments for 4 years in a row and a third of the schools are in need of repair, you need more teachers and better schools. It's basic arithmetic when 2 million teachers are about to retire, and all the evidence says smaller classes produce higher learning, that you need more teachers, especially in the early grades. It is basic arithmetic, in other words, that if we want the kind of America for our children that they deserve in the new century, we must invest more, not less, in education.

And let me say, this should not be a partisan issue. I think in most communities in America, it isn't. Congresswoman Morella's presence here today and the truly fine record she has established in education proved that Republicans and Democrats can get along on this issue. This is a dispute we're having with the leadership. But it is not too late.

The nature of things in Washington is everything gets done in the 11th hour. It's now about 10:30. *[Laughter]* And I'm here because I want America to see what you have done, and because I want America to believe that what you have done can be done in every classroom in this country, and because I want America to say, "Let's put first things first." Nothing is more important than our children. Let's take care of them, their economic future, what will happen to their parents and grandparents, and America will do fine.

Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:02 p.m. In his remarks, he referred to Gov. Parris N. Glendening of Maryland; State Senate President Thomas V. (Mike) Miller, Jr.; Nancy S. Grasmick, State superintendent of schools; Reginald M. Felton, president, Montgomery County Board of Education; teachers Dale Tepper and Barbara Husted; and reading specialist Susan Robin Davis, who introduced the President.