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America has lost a great public servant and another immigrant who became a great American.

Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:28 a.m. on the South Lawn at the White House, prior to his departure for Augusta, GA.

Remarks Prior to a Roundtable Discussion on Education in Augusta, Georgia

February 5, 1997

The President. First of all, I want to thank all of you for agreeing to be part of this, and I'll be very brief because I want to hear from you.

I very much appreciate the fact that Senator Coverdell and Senator Cleland and Congressman Norwood came down with me today, along with Governor and Mrs. Miller. And I wanted to, after the State of the Union last night—which I believe was the most extensive treatment a President has ever given to the question of education in the State of the Union—I wanted to come here because I know a lot about what you've done here and what you're trying to do, and I think it's very important that the American people respond to the challenge that I laid out last night to make American education the best in the world, to understand that it won't be done overnight, and not to be afraid of trying to reach higher standards.

I went over—and I won't belabor it now, but this is a little booklet that I had done that Secretary of Education Riley, who is here with us today, put together for us, incorporating the 10 points that I made in the State of the Union last night. But in virtually every one of these areas, the State of Georgia is trying to move forward, and that's the important thing, whether it's opening the doors of college education with a HOPE scholarship or the pre-kindergarten program or the remarkable thing you're trying to do on the Internet, which will have a huge impact around the country if you do it, because then a lot of other States will get in here and help us. The Vice President and I have been trying to get all the schools hooked up by the year 2000, but we might get there ahead of time if every State would take the kind of action that you're taking here.

Then the thing that I really want to focus on is how we can achieve the objectives that were set out way back in 1989 by the Governors and then-President Bush. How can we achieve those national education goals? The only way we can ever do it is if we maintain the right blend of local control of our schools, State leadership, but adherence to high national standards so everybody understands what the bar is we're trying to reach.

And what we're going to try to do is to get the States and the school districts of the country and all the teachers organizations, the other educators, and the parents especially to accept the notion that there ought to be high standards and we ought to measure to see how our kids are doing, not to put them down but to lift them up and to support the whole educational process and make a specific effort to mobilize a lot of people to make sure our children are literate and that they can read independently at the appropriate level, at least by the time they get out of the third grade. So that's what we're going to do. And I think—what I hope will come out of this today is that by our being here people will see what you're trying to do in Georgia. They'll be interested in it, it will spark similar activities around the country, and we'll see a kind of a cascading effect.

You know, when the American people make up their mind to do something, they can get out ahead of the leaders in a hurry, and that's a good thing. When we started this hooking up the Internet, for example, we went to California, which is our biggest State, and had a NetDay and hooked up 20 percent of the schools in California. And we had this organized effort to get everybody else to do it. And within no time, the amount of activity outstripped the organization; people just went on and did it, just like you're doing. And that's what you want to happen.

So I'm very hopeful, I'm very excited, and I hope that now we can just hear from you. And Mr. Swearingen, I think you're going to run this show, so——

Carl Swearingen. We'll try, sir.

The President. ——the floor is yours.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:17 p.m. in the Physical Education Athletic Complex at Augusta State University. In his remarks, he referred to Gov. Zell Miller of Georgia and Carl Swearingen, chairman, Georgia's Partnership for Excellence in Education. A portion of these remarks could not be verified because the tape was incomplete.

Remarks at Augusta State University in Augusta
February 5, 1997

Thank you so much, Tanya. She did a great job, didn't she? Let's give her a hand. I thought she was terrific. [*Applause*]

Dr. Bloodworth, thank you for making me feel so welcome here at Augusta State today. I must say, when I came in, Dr. Bloodworth had his whole family there, and you can't say that he's not trying to practice what he preaches. His son, Paul, has a Georgia HOPE scholarship, and his daughter, Nicole, was an AmeriCorps volunteer last year. If we could get everybody to follow that lead, we'd have no problems at all in America within no time. That's great.

I thank Mayor Sconyers for coming to meet me at the airport and for being here. He made a politician's promise. He promised that I would get some good barbecue before I left town, and I'm going to see if he keeps it.

I thank the many members of the Georgia Legislature who are here, and I know they have a pivotal role in education. My good friend Commissioner Tommy Irvin, I thank him for being here. I thank Secretary Riley for being willing to serve as Education Secretary. He has established a remarkable record already, and we just got started. And I thank him.

I thank Senator Coverdell and Congressman Norwood for coming down here with me on Air Force One today, along with Senator Cleland. I have to tell you this. I've known Max Cleland for a long time; I admire him for many things. When we go back home on Air Force One today, he will be landing at Andrews Air Force Base for the first time since he landed there as a terribly wounded veteran from the Vietnam war. He has come a long way, and we are proud of him.

I'd like to thank the other students who are here from the Augusta Technical Institute and its president, Terry Elam; Dr. Francis Tedesco and the students of the Medical College of Georgia; Dr. Shirley Lewis and the students of Payne College; and of course, the students and faculty of Augusta State. Thank you for being here.

When I arrived today, to read the local paper, I was wondering if any of you would come, because the local paper had a history of Presidents coming to Augusta, and there were so many and they came so often, I thought this might just be another day at the office. [*Laughter*] I read that my very first predecessor, George Washington, visited a precursor of your school, the Richmond School, in 1791—Richmond Academy. And he, George Washington, apparently did not give a speech; instead, he sat through oral exams. [*Laughter*] I'm glad you're letting me talk today. [*Laughter*] After the State of the Union last night, I'm so tired I couldn't pass any exam, written or oral. But it's certainly good to be at a place where no one I hear speaking has an accent. [*Laughter*]

In my State of the Union Address last night, I sought to challenge all of you to rise to the moment of preparing America for the 21st century. What I want all of you to understand is two things.

Number one, we really are moving into a time where more people from more walks of life will have a chance to rise higher and to live out more of their dreams than at any time in history. You must believe that. That is true—not a guarantee but a chance.

Number two, we all tend to think that the times we live in are normal. If you look at the whole sweep of human history, if you look at the whole sweep of American history, this is a highly unusual time. Why? Because we now