

how diverse we are, we can still offer a world-class education to every single American child.

I'm sure all of you know this, but virtually everyone in the world believes that America has the finest system of higher education anywhere. We are flooded every year with students and graduate students coming from every other country in the world to our colleges and universities because they think they're the best in the world, and they have made us very strong. But we now know that, in the world we're living in, it's not enough just to educate half the people very well through university; you must educate 100 percent of the people very well in elementary and secondary school.

We know we've got a lot of challenges. Our kids come from different places. A lot of them have different cultures. They have different learning patterns. They speak different languages as their native language. A lot of them are poor. A lot of them live in neighborhoods that are difficult. And so this is a great challenge for us. But it is a worthy challenge. It's a worthy challenge for a great country to prove that we can take all this diversity, not just racial and

ethnic and religious diversity but diversity of life circumstance, and still give every single child a shot at living his or her dream. That is what this is all about, and that's why I'm here today.

This is just as much a part of our national security as that trip I'm taking to Russia, and I want you to understand that I believe that. So when we finish the roundtable, I want to say a little about what we can do to help and what's going on in Congress and what will happen in Congress over the next month, because it's very important. But the most important thing, as the Secretary said, is what's happening here. So I'd like to stop talking and start listening now, and we'll do the roundtable. And I think we should start with Michele Freeman and let her talk about this school and her experiences and her challenges and what she's doing about it.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:40 a.m. in the gymnasium at Herndon Elementary School. In his remarks, he referred to Michele J. Freeman, principal, Herndon Elementary School; and suspected terrorist leader Usama bin Ladin.

Remarks During a Roundtable Discussion on Education in Herndon August 31, 1998

The President. Let me just say very briefly before I move on, you probably know this because you talked about how your school was growing. But I believe, Secretary Riley, I think it was last year was the first year that we actually had a school class from kindergarten through high school bigger than the baby boom generation. And this explosion of children into our schools has created enormous strains on school districts all across America.

I was in a school in Florida. I believe it had 17 trailers outside.

Fairfax County Superintendent of Schools Daniel A. Domenech. We have that beat, Mr. President. [*Laughter*]

The President. This was just one school, not a school district, and it was amazing. But there was an article in *The Washington Post* and in other newspapers over the weekend about the teacher shortage in America, and I'm very concerned about it. We have two proposals. One

is to put 35,000 teachers in the most difficult and underserved areas in the country—it's part of our budget—the other would put 100,000 teachers out there across the country in the first 3 grades, to try to keep class size down below 20. And I think those things are very, very important.

One of the things I'm hoping I can do is to persuade the Congress in the next month to embrace the idea that we clearly have a national obligation now to support what is a national phenomenon, the explosion of the number of schoolchildren in our schools. So when you say what you did, it made me want to think about that.

I'd like to go on now to JoAnn Shackelford, because it seems to be a logical followup to what you said about the diversity of your student body and teaching people to read and this Saturday program, which I'm very interested in. It

sounds to me like something everybody ought to be doing.

Ms. Shackelford. Thank you. First of all, I wanted to tell you, welcome to our school. We're so excited you're here. Miss Freeman is a hard act to follow, so I won't try. But I do have a few things to ask for. [Laughter]

The President. Who picked this questioner? [Laughter]

[At this point, Ms. Shackelford, a reading specialist, expressed the faculty's conviction that students could learn to read by the end of the third grade. She described the Reading Recovery program, focusing on building on the strengths of the weakest first grade students, and the Excel Saturday program, consisting of high school student and teacher volunteers tutoring elementary school children on Saturdays. Ms. Shackelford then said more funding was needed to expand the outreach of the programs and suggested scholarships for high school tutors.]

The President. I'd just like to make a couple of observations. First of all, I'll think about this high school scholarship thing. The only high school scholarships directly for service, community service we have are the ones that I announced at Penn State a couple of years ago, where we give a modest scholarship that's matched in the local community to one person for outstanding community service in high school.

So we now have 1,000 colleges and universities providing reading volunteers through the America Reads program to go into schools to help young children learn to read, and most of them are work-study students. But a lot of them are not eligible for work-study, and they just do it anyway. There may be something we can do on that, and I'll think about it.

The other thing I'd say is that I'm a big fan of the Reading Recovery program. And if you look at the research, it has about the best long-term results of any strategy. But there is a reason for it. It's very expensive, because it's so labor intensive. And it's something that maybe Secretary Riley wants to talk about this a little bit.

We've discussed before that whether the generalized assistance we give to school districts for supportive programs like this, or the States, which then the school districts get, should be more focused. And we've tried not to sort of pick and choose among the various reading strat-

egies because of the limited amount of money and the large number of programs underway in the country.

But there's no question that the Reading Recovery strategy, particularly when you've got a lot of young people whose first language is not English, has had, I believe, the best long-term results, but it's because it's so labor intensive and is quite expensive, and it's something we need to look at.

Dick, you want to say anything about this?

[Secretary of Education Richard W. Riley praised the Reading Recovery program's contribution to national education goals.]

The President. Maybe we should go on now to, since we're talking about this subject, to Maria Gorski, who is a parent liaison. And you talked about involving the parents, so talk a little about that for us, Maria.

[Ms. Gorski, liaison to parents of Spanish-speaking immigrant students, noted the difficulty some parents had in helping their children with homework because of language barriers and lack of time. She asked for the President's support of the United Neighborhood program, run by the Herndon Police Department, in which volunteers tutored students in the evenings.]

The President. Thank you. How many parents volunteer in this school? Do you know how many?

[Herndon Elementary School Principal Michele J. Freeman said there were about 500 volunteers a year, in addition to volunteers who worked from home, sending in materials for use at the school.]

The President. What about the children who have both parents work and maybe have two jobs? How do you work out time for them to meet with the teachers?

[Ms. Gorski said that due to parents' schedules, such meetings usually occurred on Saturdays.]

The President. What about—how does the school work? What does the assistant principal do to make sure that there are no fires started and everybody sort of shows up more or less on time and all of that? [Laughter]

[Herndon Elementary School Assistant Principal Jude Isaacson noted the staff's dedication to educating and nurturing every child, using discipline with dignity, and getting to know the

students' families through extracurricular activities. She said the school's counselors aided in peer mediation and conflict resolution and offered classes on parenting skills. Ms. Isaacson noted the visible and proactive presence of the school administration among the students and described the Adopt-a-Cop program, which allowed local police to have lunch with students and discuss safety awareness. She expressed pride in the school staff and their interaction with the community to foster discipline and safety.]

The President. Last week, I went up to Worcester, Massachusetts, and released there this handbook that Secretary Riley and Attorney General Reno did for all the schools on trying to identify children that have problems and trying to prevent things from happening before they go too far. But I tried to emphasize to them that the schools—still, schools are basically the safest places in the country for our kids. But when something goes wrong, it can be terribly tragic.

But I think it's important that the American people know that most schools have people like you in them and other people who are really working hard to do their part to help the children grow up in a safe, secure environment so they can learn. And I know Secretary Riley—he mentioned the character education program; he's been promoting that and worked hard for it ever since we've been here, and I thank him.

What about the teachers? It's about time we heard—[inaudible].

[First grade teacher Martha Bell noted that teachers looked at the challenges of each individual student and tried to learn how best to communicate with the parents. She stressed the need to convince middle school and high school students of the rewards of a career in teaching and urged more funding for higher education.]

The President. What's the most challenging thing that new teachers face—first-year teachers?

[Ms. Bell replied that it was a teacher's first conference or phone call with parents, and she stressed the importance of establishing a rapport with them.]

The President. I could use her in any number of positions—[laughter]—in the Federal Government. We've got an airplane strike in the Mid-

west I think you could settle—[laughter]—by tonight, and I'd appreciate it.

Principal Freeman. Mr. President, she's taken. [Laughter]

The President. But one of those parents who is sitting to your left—Mr. Lewis, you're the PTA president. First of all, I know this is not what you are going to say, but what do you do when you're not the PTA president, and why did you decide to do this?

[E. Tracey Lewis commended the President on his education policies. He remarked on his work with Bill Milliken in the Communities in Schools program, the largest stay-in-school program in the Nation. Mr. Lewis stressed a citizen's obligation to the community and likened the Herndon Elementary School PTA to the President's theme of building bridges to the 21st century. He noted the PTA's emphasis on building a community context around the school and its students. He then outlined 10 guiding principles that directed the PTA's decisionmaking.]

The President. I would just like to say a couple of things and ask you one question. First of all, I want to thank you for your work with the Cities in Schools program. I brought it to Arkansas with Bill Milliken probably 15 years ago, and that's a long time ago. Secondly, I want to thank you for your work in the PTA, and as a father who used to be an active participant in all our school events, I think it's a good thing to have men as well as women be present. And I think that's good.

How many members does your PTA have? How many parent members?

Mr. Lewis. Last year, 47 percent of the parent population of Herndon Elementary School were members of the PTA. This year, under the able leadership of Mary Mann, who is our vice president for membership, we expect to go to scale, 100 percent. [Laughter]

The President. I'd say that's pretty good.

Ms. Mann. We think big here.

The President. Well, Mr. Superintendent, are all your schools like this? [Laughter]

[Superintendent Domenech noted that the county had the Nation's 12th largest and best school system. He attributed its success to dedicated staff and community and to the diversity of the county's overall student body. He remarked on the challenges that confronted the county in providing more facilities for handling overcrowding]

and obtaining better technology for the classroom. He described the Success by Eight program, whereby all students were expected to be able to read by the time they were 8 years old, and stressed the need for smaller class sizes to achieve that goal.]

The President. Well, let me say, I think this is a truly extraordinary school district. And I have done my part to promote you, you know, around the country. [*Laughter*] I always talk about what an amazing school district this is. Some of your schools, particular schools are as diverse as any in America and a stunning array of people coming from different places. So I'm very impressed, and I thank you for what you're doing.

I wonder if—Secretary Riley, would you like to say anything before I talk a little bit about the congressional agenda?

[Secretary Riley announced the availability within days of guidebooks on early warning signals to help detect school violence before it happened. He then commended the members of the roundtable for their participation in the discussion.]

The President. Didn't they do a great job? [*Applause*]

[Secretary Riley then introduced the President.]

The President. The way I was prepared for this, I was supposed to go up there to the podium and give a little talk, and it's way too past that. [*Laughter*] We've had too much fun.

But what I would like to do is to outline to you—there are six things that the Congress should pass that are in my budget that don't break the balanced budget, that are in our balanced budget, that they can pass or not pass in the next few days, that I think would really help our children a lot. Five of them bear directly on our schools, one indirectly. But I'd like to just mention them so you would know, because I would like to see them get broad bipartisan support. I don't really believe we're best served when education is a partisan issue. I think we're best served when it's an American issue that crosses party lines.

First of all, I have given Congress a plan for smaller classes, better-trained teachers, and more modern schools. Let's begin with the teacher shortage. You know what's acute here; it is profound in many places. Now, let me say one other word of introduction. There has been what I consider to be a legitimate question

raised of me by many Members of Congress who say, "Well, now, look Mr. President, you're trying to get the Federal Government into financing things that the Federal Government has never before financed. We've never been into building or repairing schools, for example—there are many States in this country where the States don't even do that, where it all has to be done at the local level—or putting 100,000 teachers out there for smaller classes in the early grades."

My answer is as follows: Number one, it's hard to think of a more important national issue. Number two, I'm not doing anything to interfere with the local direction of the schools or the States' constitutional responsibility to set the framework of public education. And number three, in some places, like this district, the level of growth and, in other places, the level of poverty make it simply inconceivable that they can achieve these objectives otherwise.

So I think, if we have the money, this is what we ought to do. But I want to prepare you in case any of you feel moved by the spirit to call or write your Congressman or Senator. [*Laughter*] There is a legitimate historic pattern here where they'll say, "Well, you know, President Clinton's got a lot of energy, but he may have gone too far this time because the Federal Government's never done this." There is a reason we're doing it now. There's a reason we're doing it now. We have to prove that our elementary and secondary schools can be uniformly as excellent as our colleges and universities are and give all of our kids world-class education. And unless we do this, I am convinced there won't be the resources out there to get the job done.

So let me say first of all, the teacher shortage—I've asked Congress to pass a plan to help school districts hire 100,000 new teachers, all trained, tested, and certified by State education authorities, targeted to smaller classes in the early grades. Again, where all the research shows, there are permanent gains if kids get the kind of individual attention they need in the early grades.

I've also asked them to help me support better teacher training programs not directed by Washington, those things that all of you know work, all educators know work. There is not today, in my opinion, a sufficient commitment to helping teachers continue to improve their skills, upgrade their skills, work with other

teachers, to have the time necessary to try to continue to improve, to avoid burnout under all the pressures that they're under. When I go out and talk to educators, there's really a lot of support for increased investment in teacher training. So I hope that Congress will fully fund this class size reduction program. It would get us down to an average of 18 children per class once we do it.

The second problem is, it's hard to have a small class without a classroom. [Laughter] What did you call them, learning cottages? Learning cottages. That sounds like someplace you're sent when you misbehave—[laughter]—learning cottages. Anyway, so I have also presented a plan to help to modernize or build new, 5,000 schools. Next Tuesday, when I get back from my trip, the Secretary and I and others are going to hold school modernization days all across America to highlight our proposal which would provide tax credit to build or modernize or rebuild 5,000 public schools.

I have been to schools in this country where whole floors were closed because they were so old. But they're wonderful buildings. Structurally, no one could afford to build such buildings today because of the cost of construction. But if you go to an inner-city school, for example, think of what message it gives a 7-year-old child to walk up the steps of a school where the paint's peeling off and the windows are broken. Think of the message you're sending your child. You want to say, "Oh, every child is a treasure," all these things that your PTA president said; I believe every one of them. But sometimes, the actions speak louder than words. You can tell those children that, but if they have to keep walking up steps into broken-down buildings, do they really think we believe it?

The other day, I was in Philadelphia in a school—the average school building—the average age of school buildings in Philadelphia is 65 years. That's the average age. Now, the good news is those structures, by and large, are magnificent. The bad news is a whole lot of them are in terrible shape, and I think it's a worthy investment. I think it's a worthy investment of our money.

So, we want to give fast-growing districts like this one and districts with good structures but old, run-down buildings the chance they need to go forward. So that's the first: more teachers for smaller classes and more classes.

Second, we want to fully fund my plan to equip our Nation's classrooms with computers and cutting-edge educational software and to train teachers to be there to make sure that the technology is properly used. I want to hook up every classroom and library in the entire country to the Internet by the year 2000 and make sure that the software is good and that the teachers are trained to make the most of it. And we have to help you do that. You shouldn't have to fully fund that.

Third, I want to strengthen the charter school movement. There are some school districts that have been greatly advanced by letting teachers and others get together and start new schools within the framework of the school district where the whole district's not reforming, but they want to try something new. We've got now about almost 1,000 of those schools out there. When I became President, there was only one in the whole country. When I was talking about it in 1992, I might have been trying to explain the theory of relativity. Everybody thought I was nuts. [Laughter] But now, first we had one, now we've got nearly 1,000, and if my budget passes, we'll have 3,000 funded by the year 2000.

Fourth, I want to continue to open the doors of college to all Americans who will work for it by reauthorizing the Higher Education Act. Now, that doesn't mean anything, so let me tell you what that means, that reauthorization. [Laughter]

This legislation will help more children reach their potential by improving teacher education. It will help struggling communities to hire 35,000 well-qualified teachers. It will expand mentoring programs, something that you've already said is important to you. It will reduce interest rates on student loans. It will extend Pell grants and the Federal work-study program. We've taken it from 700,000 work-study positions to a million in 3 years. So these things are very important.

You know, we have provided for lower interest rates on student loans, better repayment, 300,000 more work-study slots, and now tax credits worth about \$1,500 a year for the first 2 years of college, and then for junior and senior year and graduate school. I am determined that when I leave office, no American will ever, ever walk away from college because of the cost. We can open the doors of college to everybody who is qualified, and it's important.

Fifth, let's go back to what we were talking about on reading. We want to pass a bipartisan early literacy bill to help to train teachers and mobilize an army of volunteer tutors, because as I said, we already have 1,000 colleges participating in this program. And I think it's very, very important.

Sixth, we have a general program to strengthen our schools that would expand Head Start, strengthen after-school programs for hundreds of thousands of children. This is a huge deal in areas with a lot of juvenile crime, with a lot of dangerous streets, with a lot of gangs. These after-school programs and summer school programs have dramatically reduced student problems while increasing student achievement, and I think that's very, very important.

We have a special initiative aimed at Hispanic young people because the school dropout rate is still much higher for Hispanics than for any other group, largely because of language barriers and economic problems. And we also have, in this package program I just mentioned, our Safe and Drug-Free Schools program. We've tried to take the initiatives that we know work in schools like this one and make sure they are in every single school in America.

Now, the bill that the House Republican majority has proposed falls short of these goals in every single one of these areas. But it's not too late. The bill has to be considered in the Senate; then both the Senate and the House must vote on it. So I would implore you, without regard to your political party, just to contact your Members of Congress, your Senators and ask them to support this agenda. We have the money.

We have worked hard to balance the budget. We've worked hard to show fiscal discipline, to get the economy going again. There is no more important area in which to spend the money now that we have it, and so I hope you will help us to do that.

Let me just say one final thing. The Senate tomorrow takes up the summer jobs program. Now, that's not for this summer, but—the one we just passed—but for the summer about to come. It provides more than 500,000 young people a chance to work. It is a godsend to this country. And because of the funding—Federal-funded summer jobs program, we have a lot of places which we are able then to go out and get other people to put up money to expand the program. For reasons I do not understand,

the House committee wants to disband it, and I think it would be a disastrous error.

It comes up in the Senate tomorrow, and again, this is fundamentally an education issue, because if kids get in trouble over the summer or they have problems and they don't have something to do or if they need the money and they can't earn it, it increases the chances that they'll drop out. So I hope that you will also support the summer jobs program. The Senate is taking it up quite soon. I believe the Senate, across party lines, will vote to extend it, but we need help.

So I just wanted to close by trying to close this circle here. We started, in this roundtable, talking about what you are doing to give to children in your charge the future they deserve and a future America desperately needs for them to have. But we think we have a role here if we're going to build those bridges to the 21st century. And I've done my best to define that role based on 20 years now of working with people in education. I think it's a good agenda. Secretary Riley and I, ourselves, started working together almost 20 years ago on public education. I guess next year will be our 20th anniversary of working together on these things when we were young Governors.

I know that you know that there are things we should do, and I believe if we don't be harsh and political in our rhetoric, we talk about our children and what we know to be true of education, we can get a listening ear among enough thoughtful Republicans to join our Democrats to build a bipartisan coalition to do what the National Government should do to help make possible more stories like the ones we've heard around this table today. That is my whole goal. And I know that we won't have all the stories we need unless we also do our part. So I ask you: Whatever you can do to contact your Representatives and Senators, whatever you can do to make it clear that these are not partisan issues, these are people issues, and that our future is riding on it, if you can do that, I would be very grateful. And thank you for what you do here every day.

Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:45 p.m. in the gymnasium at Herndon Elementary School. In his remarks, he referred to William E. Milliken, president, Communities in Schools, Inc. (formerly, Cities in Schools, Inc.).