

The President's Radio Address

August 7, 1999

Good morning. At the edge of a new century and an increasingly competitive global economy, we know that our children's futures will be determined in large part by the quality of the education they receive. More and more, what you earn depends upon what you learn.

Our administration has made education a high priority, focusing on standards, accountability, and choice in public schools and on making a college education available to every American, with increased Pell grant scholarships, better student loan and work-study programs, and the HOPE scholarship and other tax credits to help families pay for college tuition. Because of these efforts, more young people have the chance to make the most of their God-given abilities, and take their place in the high-tech world of the 21st century.

Today I want to talk about what we're doing to build on our progress, by reaching out to young people and challenging all of them to reach for their dreams by preparing for college. Because as far as we've come, we know, still, there is much to do; for too many children, especially in economically distressed communities, aren't getting the chance to reach their highest potential.

That's why we've worked hard to expand Head Start; to connect every classroom in America, even in our poorest communities, to the Internet; to launch the America Reads program, which has mobilized tens of thousands of student tutors to help millions of children learn to read; and to expand after-school programs to keep kids in school and learning, not on the street and losing their way.

But to really make a difference in disadvantaged children's lives, we must instill in them the unshakable belief that if they work hard, they will be able to go on to college. And we must give them the tools to achieve that dream.

I know how important this can be. No one in my family had ever gone to college before me. But I never doubted I was going to college, because everyone in my life guided me to reach that goal. That's what I want for every child in America. For years now, Congressman Chaka Fattah, Eugene Lang—who started the "I Have a Dream" Foundation—and the Ford Founda-

tion have been dedicated to supporting new partnerships to meet that challenge.

Last year, in my State of the Union Address, I asked Congress to support our plan to create hundreds of these partnerships between universities, colleges, middle schools, and community and business organizations. These innovative programs start early, reaching out to students no later than seventh grade, staying with them all the way, from providing students with mentors who encourage them to have high hopes and high expectations for themselves, to ensuring that schools teach the classes that prepare young people for college entrance exams, to helping families figure out how to pay for college. These programs can make all the difference in whether a young person goes to college.

Last year, with bipartisan support, Congress passed and I signed legislation creating the GEAR UP program. With the leadership of Senator Specter of Pennsylvania and Senator Harkin of Iowa, we secured the funds to put this plan into action. Today I am pleased to announce the first \$120 million in GEAR UP grants to help States and communities all over the country inspire and guide their children from the playground to the college classroom.

I'm glad to be joined here today by Congressman Fattah, by Senator Specter, and also by Congressman Becerra from California, who supports this program. And I ask Congress to fully fund my request to double our commitment to these programs now, so that we can reach more of our children than ever. GEAR UP is a great example of what we can accomplish when we put progress ahead of partisanship and put our children's future first.

Unfortunately, this is exactly the kind of program that the Republican large tax plan would jeopardize. Families don't take a costly vacation and then say they'll figure out when they get home whether they can make the mortgage payments or pay the college tuition. And I don't think we should decide on this big tax cut and just hope there's enough left over to pay for education and to save Social Security and Medicare and pay off our national debt. We have worked very hard to turn around the deficit.

Now is not the time to turn our backs on our children's future.

So today I say again, let's join together across party lines to put first things first and build a stronger America for the 21st century.

Thanks for listening.

NOTE: The address was recorded at 12:17 p.m. on August 5 in the Roosevelt Room at the White House for broadcast at 10:06 a.m. on August 7. The transcript was made available by the Office of the Press Secretary on August 6 but was embargoed for release until the broadcast.

Remarks at a Gore 2000 Meeting in Little Rock, Arkansas August 7, 1999

The President. Thank you. Well, Myreon, you did a great job. I don't know what you're running for, but you've got a good chance. [*Laughter*] Congratulations.

Let me thank all of you for coming here on this hot summer Saturday afternoon. Especially, I want to thank Congressman Bill Jefferson, Congresswoman Eddie Bernice Johnson, Congresswoman Sheila Jackson Lee, Congressman Bennie Thompson for coming from out of State to join our Senator Blanche Lambert Lincoln and Congressman Marion Berry back there. And I believe Congressman Vic Snyder is here. And also, a former Governor of Tennessee, Ned McWherter, our great friend, thank you for being here, sir.

I thank all the pastors and educators and businesspeople and community activists who are here. Many of you have been my friends for over 20 years, and all of you helped me to be elected President, with my friend and partner Al Gore. And then you helped us to be re-elected for the first time a Democrat had done that in 60 years. And we know it could not have happened without your support.

I want to say just a couple of things and turn the microphone over to the Vice President. Oh, let me also thank our Secretary of Transportation, Rodney Slater, who's from the Arkansas Delta. We're glad that he's here.

When we took office—a lot of people have forgotten what it was like when we took office. We had high unemployment, low growth, increasing social division, and gridlock in Washington. It was not a good time. We had social unrest in Los Angeles. A lot of you remember that. And we decided that we could pull this country together and turn it around if the people would help us.

Now, 7 years later we've got—yesterday we announced over 19 million new jobs, the longest peacetime expansion in history, the lowest minority unemployment rate ever recorded, the highest homeownership ever recorded, a 30-year low in unemployment, a 32-year low in the welfare rolls, and a 26-year low in the crime rate. And I think that's a pretty good record.

Now, I want to say two things to you about that. First of all, I could not have accomplished anything I have as President without the absolutely unprecedented role that Vice President Gore played. A year ago—6 years ago the day before yesterday, he cast the deciding vote on our economic plan, which all the Republicans said would ruin the country, and they used their fear tactics to take over the Congress. And that's what has given us the biggest surplus in history and this strong economic recovery. And he did it, and you should know that.

He has supported efforts to help families and communities. A lot of the pastors here appreciate the fact that he helped—he actually was our leading person in developing the television rating system and the Internet—the video game rating system and the V-chip for families.

He has led all our efforts in technology. We passed the Telecommunications Act, which has already produced over 300,000 new jobs for America. And he led the way in saying, we cannot let America get caught on a digital divide. We have to have an E-rate, a special rate, so that the poorest schools and libraries and hospitals in America—like those in the Mississippi Delta—have to be able to get big discounts so poor children can have those computers in schools, too, and have access to everything kids in the richest part of America do. Al Gore did that for America and for its future.