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William J. Clinton

NOTE: This memorandum was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on May 29.

Remarks Honoring Blue Ribbon Schools

May 29, 1996

Thank you so much. Secretary Riley, thank you for the wonderful job that you do and your clear, strong voice for education. Mr. Vice President, thank you for the work you have done in advancing our technology initiative. I forgive you for mentioning all those Tennessee schools. [*Laughter*] We're always doing this. You know, there's a school from Arkansas here—from Bentonville, Arkansas. And I have spoken at the high school graduation there more than once. Now, have you spoken at all those Tennessee schools' graduation? [*Laughter*] We'll do this for 3 or 4 more days until—[*laughter*].

And I want to say to Jill Mahler how very much we appreciate not only the excellent work being done in your school—and I think I—they are so proud of her, I think I'd like to ask the representatives from Mainland High School in Daytona Beach to stand up here, and thank you very much. [*Applause*] Thank you.

But it also reminds us that teaching and learning are a lot more than technology. And this fine young lady is also the captain of her cross-country team and obviously very well-spoken. And we were honored to have her here on the stage with us today to remind us about what all these endeavors are truly all about.

In Mainland High School, which is, as Jill said, a model technology school, the students can actually download images from satellites from the space shuttle, from weather satellites. I wish they had downloaded better weather for us today. [*Laughter*] But, nonetheless, it's an exciting prospect to think about what young people are doing.

Let me say to all of you here in the Blue Ribbon schools, from all across America, you

are, as the Secretary said, a living textbook of the best lessons American education has to offer. I am filled with hope as I look around this tent; there's not a classroom problem anywhere in America that somebody somewhere hasn't solved. In the 21st century, America must have—must have—the best-educated citizens in the world. If we keep doing what you are doing, that is exactly what we will have.

One of the things that has always perplexed me, having spent a great deal of time in public school classrooms in the 12 years I served as Governor of my State and since I've been President, going around the country, is that we don't do enough learning from each other. So Secretary Riley makes all the Blue Ribbon schools work when they come up here and learn from each other. But it is a model that I think if that were followed in every other State, every State in our country across this great land, we'd have even more rapid improvements in education.

I also want to point out that today this ceremony is honoring not just a single student, or even a single teacher, but entire schools and the communities that sustain them. The Blue Ribbon Awards are rooted in the belief that schools work only if everyone does his or her part, if principals set high standards, if teachers teach well, if students work and learn, if parents and other community leaders stay involved and stay supportive.

If you read through the list of the schools honored today, it is truly amazing what you have been able to accomplish by working together. In some schools, revolutionary science and math curriculums have been developed. In others, parents are volunteering in the classroom, and students are helping out in child care centers. In others, the whole community has joined together to kick gangs and drugs out of the schools, to wipe away graffiti, to restore safety to the classrooms and the learning environment.

You are literally making learning a jump off the dusty shelves of libraries and into the imaginations of our children, our leaders of tomorrow. So to every single one of you, more than anything else, we wanted you to be here today on the lawn of the White House so that I could say on behalf of all the American people, we thank you, we are

proud of you, and we hope that today you'll all be very proud of yourselves. Thank you very much.

You know, I've had the chance, as I said, to be in a lot of different schools: elementary, middle, and high schools all across the country; public schools, parochial schools. I've seen science classes and English classes and history classes and economics classes. I've been in schools that were well over 100 years old in their physical facilities and schools that had been opened just a few days. I have seen in all the schools that really work, clearly, one uniform characteristic. It was the schools, every one of them, had high standards and high expectations. They actually believed that students could learn and that they would learn if given the right kind of standards, the right kind of support, the right kind of environment.

I told the country's Governors at their Education Summit in March that we have to have those kinds of expectations for all of our students. And somehow we have to make sure that they have those expectations of themselves. We have to make every child in this country believe in himself or herself, believe they can learn difficult things. We have to hold them accountable, but we also need to reward them and pat them on the back when they do well.

This is more important than it has been ever in our country's history because at this peculiar moment we are moving at a rapid rate toward a new century and a new millennium. We are already into an entirely different sort of economy than that which most of us in this tent have lived most of our lives in. We are moving away from a national economy into a global economy and a global society. We are moving away from the industrial age to the information and technology age. We are moving into an era where most people will be working with their minds far more than their hands, and many of them will be working in businesses and industries that have not even been invented yet.

I am—I suppose it's not too strong to say—literally obsessed with making sure that our country will do well in the next century, that we'll continue to be the world's strongest force for peace and freedom, that we'll continue to be a beacon within our own land

of the ideals that have made this country great, and that every person will have a chance to live out his or her dreams. I believe that we can do that.

We spent a lot of time here working on things to get our economic house in order, cutting the deficit by more than half and opening trade to new countries and new products and new services and trying to get ahead of the technology curve and trying to generate more jobs from small businesses, where so many of the new jobs are being created. But nothing—nothing—is as important as preparing the American people and our young people for the 21st century world in which they will live. And that means they have to not only learn things today, but be able to learn for a lifetime. And nothing—nothing—will replace that.

As long as we have a well-educated citizenry, as long as we have people who can learn whatever they need to learn whenever they need to learn it and who understand that this is related to the work of citizenship, this country will do just fine. If you succeed, America succeeds. That is the ultimate lesson of today.

You know, if you ask most citizens, "Well, what do we really need to do in our schools," they might say, "Well, we ought to get back to the basics." You've heard it a thousand times, I'm sure. And at one level it's quite true; that is, if you look at any human endeavor, it's very difficult to succeed unless you're quite good in the basic requirements of whatever the activity is.

But what I'd like to say today is that there are at least some new basics, as well as the old basics. For the better part of the last 15 years the United States has been working hard to get back to doing a better job at the old basics. Half of all of our 4-year-olds are now in preschool. When the kids get to elementary school, they will find a much better title I program back on course, with a more focused, more rigorous curriculum that challenges our children to meet high standards. The number of young people taking core courses has jumped from just 13 percent in 1982 to 52 percent in 1984, and math and science scores have risen by one full grade.

So there's been a great emphasis on the basics, but more needs to be done. Unfortu-

nately, the reading scores for our young children have stayed about flat. That may be because there's a higher and higher percentage of our students whose first language is not English, and we haven't factored that into account, and we need to do a better job of moving them through the bilingual programs into the mainstream. But nonetheless, by any standard, we haven't done as well as we should.

I think every American child should be able to read independently by the 3d grade. I believe every American middle or high schooler should be able to spend an afternoon with Mark Twain or Willa Cather or Nathaniel Hawthorne. I believe every American looking for a job should be able to read and fill out an application. And we all know the kinds of things we need to do. Here's just one of them: This summer, Secretary Riley's Read, Write Now Challenge will encourage one million young people to keep up their reading straight through summer vacation. That's the sort of thing that would enable us to close the book on low reading scores for good. And we all need to do more of that until we can close that book once and for all.

We are also committed to educational excellence in other core academic courses, like physics and chemistry and biology and American history and geography. But we know even that is not enough in this day and time. We have to imagine what the world is like today with its problems and its promise, and ask ourselves whether there ought not to be some new basics. I would like to mention just two that I think have to be incorporated into the fabric of every educational curriculum in America: citizenship and computer literacy, new basics that build up and strengthen our traditional educational effort, that give our young people the tools they need to succeed and to make a contribution to our country.

If you think about basic literacy and citizenship, it may be something that we think we can take for granted. But clearly it's not, especially since we are becoming once again, just as we were 100 years ago, more and more a nation of immigrants. In our largest county today, Los Angeles County, there are children from 150 different racial and ethnic

groups. And all over America, in all school districts, you see a greater and greater need for people to understand exactly what it means not only to be a learner in school but a good citizen. At this time of tremendous change, much of it, but not all of it, is positive, and we need to do what we can to help our children stay true to a course in a world that often seems to spin off-course.

I've done what I could. We've offered two White House conferences on character education; we've had grassroots character education programs that the Secretary of Education has funded and promoted. We've done what we could to clarify the confusion that existed about the role of religion and people's religious convictions in the schools. We have provided our schools with guidelines that tell them how they can protect the religious rights of their students without turning their schools into religion-free zones. We have worked with those schools who are trying experiments like school uniforms. We have done the things that we could do. But in the end, the magic of citizenship is a learned—a learned characteristic. And you have to help your students to do that. I know you do or you wouldn't be successful in other ways. But every school should, without apology, teach its students to be responsible for themselves, to respect other people and be concerned about them, to love our country and be willing to do what it takes to contribute to our country.

Schools can help parents teach children right from wrong through good rules, teach the value of hard work through homework, teach the importance of resolving conflicts peacefully by having zero tolerance for all forms of violence. We have to teach these young people to turn away from that.

We have to teach our young people to define themselves in terms of what they are and what is good about them, not what is bad about someone else. We have to be able to do that. We can teach our young people to become voters and good neighbors and good citizens and good advocates and good servants. We have to be able to do that. I will say again, without that, the learning cannot occur.

I look around at all these bright-eyed students behind me, right before I got up here

I tried to look at every one of them and think, you know, I feel pretty good about my country's future. It would be hard not to feel good about your country's future looking at them. Every one of you can think about the work you do in your schools. But there's something wrong with an America where we have all these wonderful things going on, but violence among children under 18 is still going up. There's still too many of these kids out here raising themselves. There are too many of these kids that don't have support. And I know that too many of you have been asked to do too much in the past. And sometimes you are judged by someone else's failure, the people at home, the people in the church, the people in the community that might have done more.

But you are sometimes the only thing that stands between these young people and the opportunity to have a good, wholesome, constructive life. And we have got to turn around these trends of violence and destructive conduct. The number of young people coming into our schools is going up again. Soon the schools will be full of people, so full that the years will be even larger—the classes will be even larger than they were in the peak baby-boom years. By the time that happens, we must have turned around this trend toward destructive behavior and violence among our young people. And we can only do it by teaching them to live in an affirmative way, as good responsible citizens.

We need you on this. This is something that cannot be done unless it can be done by our teachers and our schools, with the support of caring parents and a community. And we're pulling for you. You have to understand that we must not let the largest group of school children in the history of the United States come into our classes without doing something about the violence and the other destructive behavior. We can build a generation of good citizens, and I'm determined to see us do it.

The other thing I'd like to talk about very briefly is the issue the Vice President discussed, our technology literacy challenge, to bring information and technology to every classroom in this country by the year 2000. We got off to a good start. Many of you—many of you—are part of that. And when we

had NetDay in California and hooked up 20 percent of the classrooms in the State in one day, it started off a chain reaction of a lot of things like that happening in other places throughout the country. Much has already been done. But there is more that has to be done.

One of the things that we know—I was just talking to the Governor of West Virginia, where they have done a lot of work in bringing computers into the schools—he said he was very proud of the fact that they spent one-third of their money on teacher training—one-third, one full third—because no computer, no aid in learning is worth anything without the magic of learning between the teacher and the student.

Today I am pleased to announce a remarkable initiative in our education community. Working with our administration, leading organizations in education, from the national PTA and the NEA to the AFT and the national school boards associations, have joined together to make sure America's teachers are as comfortable with computers as they are with chalk boards.

They call themselves "21st Century Teachers." And to launch their effort they will do what they do best: teach. This fall these groups will mobilize 100,000 teachers to teach 500,000 other teachers how to teach using computers, software, and networks. When they are done, we will have a half a million more teachers who are computer and technology literate and an infinite number of new learning opportunities. The teachers will have new and exciting ways to teach traditional subjects. They'll be able to exchange lesson plans with other teachers, communicate more frequently with parents, help students unfamiliar with computers, and keep up with students who already are.

Through this enormous effort, teachers will be doing what they have always done, dedicating themselves to a brighter future, joining together to say that computer and technology literacy is truly a new basic for our time, just as they continue to teach our other fundamental basics. They are helping to create opportunity, assuming responsibility, working together as a community.

To every one of these groups and the 100,000 teachers who will be involved in this,

I say thank you. The rest of America is deeply in your debt. This is a very great project.

Now as we close this formal ceremony, let me say again to each and every one of you: I'm proud of you; I'm grateful to you. What you are doing is building America's future. Because of the nature of the economic and social changes going on in the world today, your work is more important to America's success than ever before.

I ask you to leave here with one idea in mind. I ask you to do what you can back in your hometowns, back in your home districts, back in your home States to make sure that every single school in America works to be a Blue Ribbon school.

Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:54 p.m. on the South Lawn at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Jill Mahler, a student at Mainland High School in Daytona Beach, FL.

Statement on the Appointment of the Special Assistant for Civilian Implementation in Bosnia

May 29, 1996

I am pleased to announce the appointment of Mr. Richard Sklar as Special Representative of the President and the Secretary of State for Civilian Implementation in Bosnia. This appointment underscores that, with success in meeting the principal military tasks under the Dayton Accords, we must give high priority now to making the peace irreversible by accelerating efforts to rebuild the political and economic fabric of Bosnian society.

Mr. Sklar will be the senior U.S. official resident in Bosnia responsible for coordinating the work of all U.S. civilian agencies involved in the reconstruction effort, under the authority of the U.S. Ambassador to Bosnia. His responsibilities will encompass humanitarian assistance, economic revitalization and reconstruction, the resettlement of refugees, the conduct of elections, and strengthening of public security. He will also serve as liaison to his counterparts from other countries and the heads and staffs of all the international institutions engaged in civilian implementation activities.

I can think of no one more qualified to spearhead this critically important endeavor than Richard Sklar. Mr. Sklar has had a distinguished 35 year career in private and public sector management. Prior to accepting this appointment, he has served as president and chief operating officer of O'Brien-Kreizberg Inc. (OK), the oldest and largest "pure" project and construction management firm in the United States. OK is now managing over 100 major construction projects in the United States and abroad, from airports and rail systems to facilities for the Atlanta Olympics. Mr. Sklar served on the administration's transition team for the Agency for International Development during the administration's first 3 months, and then became a member of the Board of Directors of the Russian-American Enterprise Fund. He has continued to serve as an adviser to AID Administrator Brian Atwood and to Richard Morningstar, coordinator for assistance to the New Independent States. Mr. Sklar has built and led two businesses, both world leaders in the construction industry. In addition, he served in major public management roles for the city of San Francisco. Mr. Sklar was an officer in the U.S. Army artillery following his graduation as a mechanical engineer from Cornell University in 1956.

I am deeply grateful that Mr. Sklar has accepted this appointment, and for his willingness to serve our Nation in helping to build an enduring peace in Bosnia.

Remarks on Departure for New Orleans, Louisiana, and an Exchange With Reporters

May 30, 1996

Israeli Election

The President. Good morning. My goodness, the sun is out. I'd like to make just a couple of brief comments about the election in Israel last night.

First of all, it was a cliffhanger. A lot of us were up late waiting for the returns, but I want to just make a couple of points. The United States—first, we don't know how—we don't have final returns. We have to wait for the postal ballots to be cast, counted.