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Statement on Proposed Child Care Legislation

March 16, 1999

Making child care better, safer, and more affordable is at the heart of my effort to help America's parents balance their responsibilities at home and at work. Today, more than ever, parents struggle to find high quality, affordable child care for their children. That is why I have proposed significant new investments in child care, expanding subsidies and providing greater tax relief for working families, increasing after-school opportunities for children, improving child care quality, and providing new tax relief for parents who choose to stay at home.

I am pleased that today key Members of the House of Representatives took steps to move us closer to enacting meaningful child care legislation. Representative Ben Cardin introduced important new legislation—the "Child Care Improvement Act of 1999"—that, like my proposal, addresses the critical child care needs of working families. And Representative Ellen Tauscher and numerous Democratic colleagues introduced a comprehensive child care package—the "Affordable Child Care, Education, and Security Act"—that incorporates many of my proposals and would go a long way to fully addressing the child care demands of working families. These bills would help Americans fulfill their responsibilities as workers and their even more important responsibilities as parents. I look forward to working with Representative Cardin, Representative Tauscher, and other Members of Congress on both sides of the aisle to meet the child care needs of America's families.

Remarks at a Democratic National Committee Dinner in Stuart, Florida

March 16, 1998

If I had any judgment at all, I would not say a word. [*Laughter*] I had forgotten we did some of those things. [*Laughter*]

You know, when we came in this magnificent home tonight and I was looking around and commenting on the spiral staircase, Reverend Jackson said, "You know, Mr. President, you and Hillary live in the White House. Willie and Gloria live in a white house. The only difference is they've got more floor space, and they're not term-limited." [*Laughter*]

Let me say to the Garys, to Willie, to Gloria, to your mother, your children, your grandchildren how honored I am to be here with all of our crew from the White House tonight, along with Joe Andrew and Beth Dozoretz from the Democratic Party; how delighted I am to be here with my good friend Reverend Jackson who is also my Special Envoy to Africa. And I'll say a little more about that in a moment.

I thank Congressman Hastings and Congressman Deutsch for coming down here with me tonight. I thank Bishop Ray and my good friend Bishop Graves and the other members of the clergy who are here, and the college presidents. I thought the Drifters and Ernestine Diller were both just great. And I thank them for entertaining us. And I'd like to thank the people who prepared and served our food and our drinks tonight. I thank them very much for what they did.

You know, when Willie was talking about raising the average income of African-American households, I thought, you know, I didn't have to do anything; he did that all by himself. [*Laughter*]

Let me say—I have to say one thing on a serious note—some of you are here tonight who meant to be here at noon in Palm Beach. I was supposed to have a lunch in Palm Beach at noon. And the reason we couldn't do that is that the son of two of our hosts, Mel and Bren Simon, dropped dead of a tragic heart attack at a very young age in London a couple of days ago. And they're good friends of mine; they're wonderful people. They're part owners of the Indiana Pacers basketball team, among other things. And I would just like to ask all of you tonight—I know that all of us—I called Hillary who knows Mrs. Simon, in particular. I called her today when we heard about this, and I just talked to them. It just took her breath away. All of us who have been parents can only imagine the agony that we would feel. So I ask for you tonight, I want to go back to having a good time, but I ask you to say a little prayer for them when you go home tonight.

It's going to be a hard night for them and a hard few days. And they were very generous and very kind. They've been very, very good to me, and they've been good citizens for our country. And I just would like for you to all remember them.

Let me say—I really admire—I made a little fun of Willie tonight, but I really admire him and Gloria. And I love the fact that they have not forgotten where they came from. I love the fact that they had all these children up here. I know that we have at least one person here from North Carolina who is involved in a similar program of giving young people college scholarships for when they're at pivotal points in their life, and telling them, "Look, if you'll just stay in school and make your grades, you can go to college." And I want to say a little more about that in a minute, but that says a lot.

Now, I was thinking about—I've had all this on my mind a lot because, some of you may have noticed, over the weekend I went home to this little town in Arkansas where I was born, and they dedicated the house that I lived in with my grandparents until I was 4. And they've rebuilt it, and they've gotten some of the things back, some pictures we had on the walls when I lived there—unbelievable things they've done. It's just a little two-story, wood-frame house that my grandparents lived in when my grandfather ran a store, little grocery store, and my grandmother was a private-duty nurse.

And before that, my grandfather was a night watchman at a sawmill. That was my favorite job he had because I used to go and spend the night in the back seat of his car and climb in the sawdust pile. And some of you from the South may be old enough to remember when not all sawmills were big; they used to be little bitty sawmills and ordinary people could go and fool around in them. It was a great thing.

And I was thinking about Willie's upbringing and Gloria's upbringing and Jesse's upbringing that I know a lot about. And I thought the four of us sitting here tonight—all people in politics would like for you to believe they were born in a log cabin they built all by themselves. [*Laughter*] And the truth is not any of us would be here tonight at this nice dinner if we hadn't gotten a lot of helping hands along the way. But still it is a great testament to the enduring power of the idea of this country that people who have the backgrounds of we four, and the backgrounds of many of the rest of you, could be here.

It is also a great testament to the enduring power of the American idea that those of you here who were born prosperous and got more prosperous came here tonight to help us and our party because we believe we can do better when more Americans do better.

And I've been thinking a lot about this because I had to go home and speak at my birthplace and talk to, among other things, three boys that I went to kindergarten with and all my kinfolks, many of whom are way up in years now, and think about my remarkable grandfather who—I was born on his birthday, and I loved him more than life. He died when I was young. But he was the first white person I ever knew in the segregated South who told me that segregation was wrong. And he had a fourth or a fifth grade education.

And I watched him live it every day. It was a great gift. I watched him run a grocery store before food stamps, and if people came in, they were honest and working hard, and they didn't have any money, he gave them food anyway. And when he died, my mother told me what it was like when they finally found his old books from his grocery store. And he had been gone from there 10 or 15 years, and all these people who had owed him money—he carefully kept it in his book, and when they paid off a little, he'd carefully keep it. But he never—he always said, "They're working hard. They're doing the best they can. I've got food. They should have it, too."

And I was raised in those heady days after World War II, with two simple ideas that I've tried to bring back to America in the last 6 years. One is the idea that everybody should have a chance to live his or her dreams. And the second is that we are part of a community. It gives us a sense of belonging and imposes on us a sense of responsibility, that we can never fully realize our own aspirations unless we are doing our part to give others the same chance.

And I believe that it's very important that we think about that today. Willie told you about all the good things that have happened in the last 6 years, and I'm glad he did because it would be unseemly for me to talk about them. But also because I don't think that that's the most important thing. I said to the American people in my State of the Union Address that one of the things that I knew before I became President but I couldn't see and feel until I took this job, is just how profoundly and how rapidly the world is changing and how we are changing the way we work and live and relate to each other, not just in our neighborhoods but in our States, in our Nation, and with people way beyond our borders.

And I'll bet whatever it is you do for a living, if you think about it, it's different than it used to be because of technology and because of who can participate. And what I'd like for you to think about just for a few moments tonight is not just how far we've come but what do we still have to do. What will the 21st century look like? What about all these young people around here who are going to be alive much longer than I am; what's it going to be like for them when they raise their children and their grandchildren? And what could we do now at this unbelievable moment of prosperity and confidence, where our security is not seriously threatened, what can we do now to keep the good times going, but also to deal with the challenges of America over the long run, so that more people have a chance to live their dreams and so we have a better chance to come together as a community?

And I'll just mention a few. Willie mentioned one. America is aging, and it's aging for two reasons. One is, health care is better and life expectancy is going up. It's already over 76 years. Anybody in this audience tonight over 60 who's still healthy has got a life expectancy of well over 80 years already. Children being born will do better still. And then the baby boomers are going to retire—I'm the oldest of the baby boomers, and when we all retire there will only be two people working for every one person eligible to draw Social Security.

So we have to prepare for the aging of America. The first thing I'd like to say is, this a high-class problem. We shouldn't bemoan this. The only big country in the world where the life expectancy is dropping is in Russia because their economy has collapsed; their health care system has collapsed; their rate of disease and other problems have gone up. They don't have a Social Security problem. We do. And other wealthy countries do. It's a high-class problem. We should be happy for this. And the older I get, the better it looks. [*Laughter*]

But it is wrong for us to let all these folks retire and let us all get older, and then say, ''Well, we're not going take care of that, even though we have the money to do it now, because we know our children will.'' That would be a terrible thing to do, because the last thing we need to do is to have all of us in my generation retire and impose on our children a big burden which will undermine their ability to raise our grandchildren. It is not right.

And the reason I've said we ought to save more than half of this surplus for Social Security is that we can save the Social Security system without imposing a burden on our children. We have to do the same for Medicare. We have to give families tax credits for long-term care. More and more people are taking care of their own parents, or their parents are doing something other than going into a nursing home. We need to make provisions for this. There are going to be a multitude of different things that older people will do when they need some help, but they don't have to be completely taken care of 24 hours a day. And we've got to help families deal with that.

So that's the first thing. The second thing we have to do is to keep the economy going and reach out to people who have not been part of this free enterprise system yet. And let me say—I just went up to Wall Street with Reverend Jackson for his second annual conference where we're trying to get the people on Wall Street and in New York to invest in the areas of America from neighborhoods in New York City to Appalachia, to the Mississippi Delta, to south Texas, to the Indian reservations of this country, to east Los Angeles, which still haven't felt the economic recovery. And increasingly, that includes more

and more farmers who are getting hurt because of the problems around the world.

And I presented to the Congress a plan that would get private capital—not Government money, private capital—into the inner cities, into these small rural areas, on the same terms that we give people to invest in other countries today. And I think we ought to do it.

We've got all these people who are dying to go to work, and there aren't any jobs in their neighborhoods; there aren't any jobs in their towns; they don't have any investment opportunities; or they're businesses that would like to expand, and they can't get capital. And all I've asked the Congress to do is to provide the tax credits and the loan guarantees for people to invest in high-unemployment areas in America that we give them to invest in other parts of the world, not to take away the investments from the other part of the world but to just give poor American communities the same shot we're trying to give to people in other countries. And I think it's the right thing to do.

The third thing we have to do is to guarantee 100 percent of our kids a world-class education. I like this college program because I tried to open the doors of college to all Americans. Now every child in this country who comes from an upper-middle-income family down can get a $1,500 tax credit for the first 2 years of college, tax credits for the last 2 for graduate school. We've improved the student loan program and more work-study programs. We've now got a mentoring program going on where we're bringing college kids in to help work with children who are in the seventh and eighth grade, to get them to think about going to college.

But if we can have more people doing what you're doing and telling these kids, "Okay, here's what you can get from the Government in tax credits; here's what you can get in the student loans; and by the way, here's a scholarship to help defray your costs," it will make a huge difference.

We did pass the first installment on that 100,000 teachers. Let me tell you what a big deal that is. We have 53 million kids in school today. We've got the largest number of children we've ever had and by far the most diverse student population. In my little hometown in southwest Arkansas, there is an elementary school they have named for me, in a little town with 9,700 people now—it's a lot bigger than it was when I was born there—9,700 people. In my one little grade school in southwest Arkansas, there are 27 children whose parents were not born in America and whose first language is not English.

In Fairfax County School District, across the Potomac River from Washington, DC, there are children from 180—let me say this again—180 different racial, national, and ethnic groups speaking over 100 different native languages—in one school district.

Now, if we're growing more diverse—this also is a high-class problem—if we're living in a global society, where we have to relate to people all around the world, it is good that America is the place that has the largest number of people that come from everywhere if, but only if, we can have a uniform educational system that gives opportunity to everybody and then if everybody has a chance to make a decent living. But it's got to start with the schools, which is why we want smaller classes, better trained teachers, higher standards, no social promotion. But don't brand the kids failures if the system fails them. Give them the after-school programs. Give them the summer school program. Give them the tutoring programs they need. That is what we need to do.

So the fourth thing we have to do, let me mention, is to deal with the problem of balancing work and family. Hillary and I had an evening at the White House last night, one of these Millennial Evenings that she has organized to discuss big issues that we'll face in the next 20 years. And we talked about the changing role of women, what had happened to women in the 20th century, how women got the vote, how women began to get economic rights, how women assumed larger and larger influence in our national life. And I said something about the role of women that also might be true for the role of African-Americans and other racial groups. I said, you know, for most of this century we've been focused on giving people more rights, stopping them from being oppressed, then making sure they had absolute

opportunity. Once you get those things, you then run into questions of how you balance the different rights you have, how people work out the different opportunities they have. With most families now, both the husband and wife work if there are two parents in the home. And most families, they have to do it. Others, they choose to do it, and everyone should have the right to do it. But I predict to you that one of the biggest challenges for this country for the next 10 or 20 years will be how we're going to work out the balance at home and work, because no society has any more important job than raising children. And if we could do that just right, we'd have about 10 percent of the problems we have today. There is no more important job.

So if we put parents in the position of having to choose between being successful at home and successful at work, we have lost before we start. There is no way to win that, no way for America to come out ahead.

That is why I've asked to expand the family and medical leave law. That's why I've asked for another increase in the minimum wage. I don't think anybody that works 40 hours a week and has a kid at home should be in poverty. I just don't believe that. I don't think that's right. That's why I've asked Congress to pass a child care program that would give families on modest incomes a tax credit and other support, so they could get quality child care while they have to be at work. That's why we have tripled the amount of money we want to give to the schools for the after-school programs and the summer school programs—to help people balance home and work.

And the next thing I'd like to say is I think we have to broaden our horizon of community and what it means to be a good citizen. I think we need, all of us, to think of ourselves in terms of not just the jobs we do and how well we do it, not just whether we pay taxes or not and obey the law, but whether we have some way of serving our community.

I was very moved when the bishop told me that these fine young athletes who were all introduced earlier, and their families, are members of his church and participating in the mission of reaching children and helping them. And I thank them for that. One of the things that I am proudest of is that we passed what I like to think of as a domestic Peace Corps bill to set up AmeriCorps, our national service corps, and now over 100,000 young people, some from very poor backgrounds, some from wealthy, many in-between, have taken a year or 2 years of their lives, earned some money for college, just like GI's do under the GI bill, and served in their communities, helping to do all kinds of things.

We need to create in our children an ethic of service. And it needs to be a part of what it means to be an American. And we need to do it in a way that gets us all in touch with people who are different from us, so we can learn what the world will be like.

We need to make sure that we relate not only to ourselves but to the rest of the world. I told you Reverend Jackson is my Special Envoy to Africa. Today we had members of the governments of 46 African nations meeting in Washington. They'll be there tomorrow. I talked to them today. He's going to talk to them tomorrow. We're trying to have a new partnership with Africa. We're trying to turn a new page. We're trying not just to say, ''Oh, yes, 30 million Americans have roots in Africa, and yes, we're sorry about the legacy of colonialism and slavery.'' We're trying to say, ''Let's open a new chapter. Let's have a new future. Let's help both countries. Let's do something good.''

And I just got back from Central America last week. We have millions of people in the United States who trace their roots to Central America, one of the few regions of the world where we have a trade surplus. All those countries racked by civil war, military dictatorship, all kinds of oppression—for decades. Now they're all governed by people who got elected in honest elections. They all have parliaments full of people that used to be at war with each other. They want to be our friends and neighbors.

We see all kinds of people concerned about illegal immigration. We ought to be good neighbors. If we're good neighbors, good partners, and they can make a living at home by selling to us and buying our things, then they won't be coming up here

as illegal immigrants. They'll be home, raising their kids, because they can make a decent living. That's being a decent neighbor, and we ought to do it.

So I want you—tomorrow my people are coming to the White House. Tomorrow is Saint Patrick's Day. And it has been my great honor to be the first American President deeply involved in the Irish peace process. The next day we have a group from Israel coming. And many people in this audience tonight have worked with me on the Middle East peace process. I have tried to do this because I want America not to see the world as either a hostile place or just a place where we try to make a buck. I want us to have a larger conception of our community responsibilities.

We have common environmental challenges, like global warming. We have common public health challenges, like HIV and AIDS. We have a common future to make. And I believe with all my heart if we think about the 21st century as a period where we will work on creating opportunity and community, where we will realize our interdependence, one with another, where we will celebrate all these differences and all this diversity, but underneath understand that we're basically all the same, I think we're going to have a very good future.

And let me just close with this story. I want to tell you a story that I thought about that I told the folks at home when I went to dedicate my birthplace. Last year I had a 91-year-old great uncle who died. He was my grandmother's brother. And I loved him very much, and he helped to raise me when my mother was widowed and went off to study so she could be a nurse anesthetist, and my grandparents were raising me. And this old man and I were close from the time I was born.

He and his wife were married for over 50 years, and she came down with Alzheimer's. And they had one of these old-fashioned houses with gas stoves, so they had to take her to the local nursing facility that was tied to our nursing home in this little town because they were afraid she'd turn on the stove and forget about it and blow the house up. We can laugh—we all laughed about it. It's okay to laugh. I've lost two relatives to Alzheimer's. You have to laugh to keep from crying half the time.

And it was an amazing deal. When she got over to the nursing facility, for weeks she'd know who she was for about 15 minutes a day. And she'd call my uncle, and she said, "How can you abandon me in this old place? Get your rear end over here, and take me home. We've been married for 56 years." And he'd get over there, and half the time by the time he got there she wouldn't know him again. [*Laughter*]

And any of you who have had this in your family know. I mean, I lost an aunt and an uncle, and you have to laugh to keep from crying. It grinds on you. So anyway, my uncle, who also had a grade-school education, was one of the smartest men I ever knew. All he ever did the whole time I was a boy, no matter how sad I was, or I missed my mother or whatever, or whatever was going on, or when I got to be a grown man and I lost an election, all he did was keep me in a good humor. He'd tell me jokes. He'd tell me not to feel sorry for myself. He'd always say funny things.

So I went to see him one night, about 10 years ago, after his wife went into this nursing home. And they'd been married over 50 years. And the first 20 or 30 minutes we talked, all he did was tell me jokes and tell me stories and think about the old days. And I was walking out and for the only time in our life, he grabbed me by the arm. And I looked around and he had big old tears in his eyes. And I said, "This is really hard on you, isn't it." And he said this, he said, "Yes, it is." "But," he said, "you know, I signed on for the whole load, and most of it was pretty good."

When you were up there singing "Stand By Me" tonight and I thought about how the American people have stood by me through thick and thin, I would just like to say to all of you, when I talk about community, that's what I mean. [*Applause*] Now, wait a minute. You don't have to sit down, because I'm nearly through. [*Laughter*] Don't sit down. Don't sit down. I'm nearly through. Here's the point I want to make: The reason I wanted you to come here tonight, the reason I'm thankful for your contributions, the reason I'm thankful for what you do is, this

country has got to get over believing that our political life is about beating each other up and hurting people, instead of lifting people up and bringing them together. That is what I've tried to do. That is what we stand for. And if we remember that, we're going to do just fine in the 21st century.

Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:55 p.m. at a private residence. In his remarks, he referred to Willie E. Gary and Gloria Gary, dinner hosts; Joseph J. Andrew, national chair-designate, and Beth Dozoretz, national finance chair-designate, Democratic National Committee; Bishop Harold C. Ray, Redemptive Life Fellowship, who gave the invocation; and Bishop William H. Graves, vice chairman NAACP Board of Directors, and Ernestine Diller, who sang the National Anthem.

Remarks at the Speaker's Saint Patrick's Day Luncheon

March 17, 1999

Well, I'd like to say, first of all, Mr. Speaker, thank you for inviting us here, for a wonderful lunch. We welcome all of our friends from Northern Ireland and the Republic—[*inaudible*]—welcome them home.

Father, we thank you for your invocation and for the plug for the town of my roots. You should know that after—I'm convinced that the chamber of commerce there encouraged this, because after the invocation he came over to me and said, ''Don't you ever come back to Ireland without going there.'' [*Laughter*] So I thank you.

Taoiseach, Secretary Albright, Secretary Daley, and to all the Members of Congress. I congratulate Senator Kennedy on his award from the American Ireland Fund.

The Speaker said something I'd like to pick up on. You know, normally, at this time of year, for the last several years, John, David, Gerry, Seamus—somebody's come here and thanked some American for supporting the Irish peace process. But the truth is that we should all be thanking you, because it's only when you come here that you bring us all together—[*inaudible*]—add to that, to your citation. [*Laughter*] But we're very grateful.

Let me also say that we look forward to the day when this will be a total celebration. What a different year we had this year, *Taoiseach*, because of the Good Friday accords. We're grateful that Senator Mitchell was able to take a leading role—[*inaudible*]—all you have done. We know not only in Ireland but, indeed, in other places, that the closer you get to peace, the more desperate the enemies of peace become. And we have seen the tragedy of the Omagh bombing. We have seen the tragedy of the murder of Rosemary Nelson. We just had another loss last night—[*inaudible*].

This is perfectly predictable. It happened in the Middle East. I've seen it happen all over the world. Whenever people in responsible positions stick their necks out, there's always someone who knows the best way to rekindle a sense of mistrust necessary to destroy the peace is to kill someone and focus on violence.

Your presence here today is a strong commitment to the peace process and therefore gratefully noted. And all I can say is, I think I can speak for every Member of Congress in this room without regard to party, for every member of our administration—you know that we feel, *Taoiseach*, almost an overwhelming and inexpressible bond to the Irish people. We want to help all of you succeed. It probably seems meddlesome sometimes, but we look forward to the day when Irish children will look at The Troubles as if they were some part of mystic Celtic folklore, and all of us who were alive during that period will seem like relics of a bygone history.

We hope we can help you to achieve that. And believe me, all of us are quite mindful that it is much harder for you—every one of you here in this room who have been a part of this—than it is for us. We don't mean to meddle, but we do want to help.

And we've had a lot of great Speakers of the House who were Irish: McCormack, O'Neill, Foley. I think we ought to rename the Speaker ''O'Hastert'' after—[*laughter*]—his words today, because they were right on point.

So you know that across all the gulfs of American politics, we join in welcoming all of our Irish friends. And right now, I'll ask *Taoiseach* Bertie Ahern to take the floor and give us a few remarks.

Thank you, and God bless you.