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the people of the United States to observe this month with appropriate programs, ceremonies, and activities.

**In Witness Whereof,** I have hereunto set my hand this nineteenth day of January, in the year of our Lord two thousand, and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and twenty-fourth.

**William J. Clinton**

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NOTE: This proclamation was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on January 20, and it was published in the *Federal Register* on January 24.

## Remarks on Launching the Agenda for Higher Education and Lifetime Learning

*January 20, 2000*

Thank you very much, Nina, for being exhibit A for the announcement that we're here for today. Thank you, Secretary Riley, for your leadership in every aspect of education and especially in this one.

I thank Secretary Slater for coming. I suspect he's here for two reasons. One is, Rodney Slater grew up in a county that, when I was Governor, was one of the 10 poorest counties in America. And he happened to be a good football player and was able to go to college in Michigan and play football. And he, later in his career, became an officer at a university in our home State. So he also is exhibit A for why every child should be able to go to college.

I want to thank Representative Rush Holt for being here. He is not only a former distinguished professor at Princeton, but he has a task force on access to higher education in his congressional district. And the people who live in his district actually are among those who will be most benefited if this entire proposal passes, as we hope it will.

In their absence, I want to thank Congressman Ford and Senator Olympia Snowe, who had been very, very strong on this issue. And the two people I want to thank most obviously, are Senator Schumer and the First Lady, who lobbied me relentlessly on this for the better part of a year. If you've ever been lobbied by either one of them, you know—[*laughter*]—it's sort of like, are you going to say yes now, or put yourself through all this misery and say yes later? But it's been very interesting. I'll say more about it in a moment. [*Laughter*]

We know when we open the doors to college, we open the doors to opportunity. When we make college more affordable, we make the American dream more achievable. That's why we're all here today. I'm glad there are so many young people here today. They're probably sorry that they're not really getting out of school; they could have gotten out of school anyway—[*laughter*]—but I'm glad you all came and waited.

Some in Congress, I note, are saying that because this is an election year, we really shouldn't try to do anything for the American people. We're here today to give perhaps the most powerful example for why we should reject that view. Nothing, not a national election or a Washington snowstorm, should get in the way of making a college education more affordable for all Americans. [*Applause*] Thank you. Students can't put off their growing up for a year; families can't put off going to work for a year; and neither should we.

Today is a happy day for me. This is my seventh anniversary as President of the United States. I am profoundly grateful for the long way we have come as a nation in these last 7 years, that today we have the lowest poverty rate in 20 years, the lowest unemployment and welfare rates in 30 years, the first back-to-back budget surpluses in over 40 years. I am grateful that we are coming together, that we have the lowest African-American and Hispanic unemployment rates we have ever recorded, that we have the lowest female unemployment rate in 40 years, the lowest single-parent household poverty rate in 46 years, and that in the last couple of years we have finally begun to see a reversal in the increase in inequality of incomes of working people, which was going on for nearly three decades.

So the family of America is growing stronger, and that is fundamentally a tribute to the hard work and adaptability of the American people. It has also been helped along the way

by our hard-won economic strategy of increasing trade, getting rid of the deficit, and investing in the education of our people and in the economy in which they will live.

More than ever, with globalization and the information-based economy, investing in the minds of our people is the most important thing we can do to assure our continued success as a nation. But that has been the American policy for quite a long time now. The land grant college system was established under Abraham Lincoln; the GI bill after World War II; the Pell grants in the 1970's; and the HOPE scholarship in 1997. We have made education and access to higher education a bipartisan, national priority for quite a long while.

You heard the other stories that were told. I was sitting here thinking, I was the first person in my family to go to college. And I remember when I was accepted to Georgetown—rather late, I might add, in the year. [*Laughter*] And they gave me a $500 scholarship, for which I was very grateful. And I think the tuition back then was about $6,000, which 37 years ago, -6 years ago, seemed like all the money in the world to me. And I was literally guilt-ridden when I went off to college to think of the burden I was imposing on my family.

And I remember we had a family meeting about it. I remember my high school guidance counselor called me in the office and said I was nuts, that I'd pay it back many times over in the future. But it bothered me a lot. And then later, as I stayed in school and went on to law school, I was able to do it all because I had the help of scholarships and loans and jobs. And if I hadn't had that help, there's no way in the world I would be standing here today. I know that.

And because of the changes in the financial costs of higher education that Senator Schumer talked about and because of the changes in the economy, it's even more important that we do more today, not only for individual students but for the health and well-being of the American system. So that's why we're here. You have already heard that we have been working on this hard for 7 years. We've more than doubled college aid in those 7 years, increasing Pell grants by more than 50 percent, rewriting the student loan program to make it easier and cheaper to get student loans, and then importantly, to let students pay off their loans as a percentage of their income, so there would never be an incentive for people who had those loans to drop out of school for fear that they could never repay them anyway.

We established AmeriCorps, which now has allowed 150,000 of our fellow citizens to serve in their communities and earn some money to go to college. We've expanded the work-study program from 700,000 to a million work-study slots. We've allowed families to save more in their IRA's and then to withdraw the money tax-free if it's being used to pay for a college education. And of course, as Secretary Riley said, we created the $1,500 HOPE scholarship tax credit to make 2 years of high school after education through a community college just as universal as a high school education is today.

That HOPE scholarship tax credit and the lifetime learning tax credit, which helps families pay for the last 2 years of college, graduate schools, or going back to school or to a training program, were designed to open the doors of college to all, and to recognize that in this economy, learning must go on for a lifetime. And it's working.

Today—listen to this—today, 67 percent of high school graduates will be enrolling in college next fall. That's an increase of 10 percent just since 1993. But we know we haven't truly succeeded in opening the doors of college to all if you mean everybody who wants to should be able to go to a 4-year school and stay—and stay—until they finish.

Parents all across the country are genuinely stretched. And parents in a surprisingly wide range of income groups are stretched because of the loan eligibility, the Pell grant eligibility limits, and other things. So today what we're attempting to do is to launch an agenda for higher education and lifetime learning for the 21st century that will make college more affordable for more families and, in the process, genuinely open the doors of college to everybody.

But we also want to encourage more people to stay in college once they go. And we

want to do more to guide young people, starting in their middle school years, to be thinking about college so that if they can't afford it, they'll be able to get in and go.

First, the centerpiece of this budget for the coming year will be a landmark $30-billion college opportunity tax cut to help millions of middle class families pay for college. It will give families a tax deduction of up to $10,000 in tuition costs, providing as much as $2,800 in much-needed tax relief. And as Senator Schumer said, this has never been done before.

Now, let me tell you how this works. I am for this, and I believe it's the right thing to do. But all of you need to know that we think there's a pretty strict limit on what the total aggregate tax cuts I can propose and sign into law is. I had to veto one last year, because I thought it was to big. Why? Because the main thing that's brought us all along is the strength of our economy and that requires us, in my judgment, to keep this budget balanced, to keep running surpluses, and to get this country out of debt over the next 15 years for the first time since 1835.

So as you might imagine, one of the things that we have to do, we have these huge, fascinating debates at this time every year about what does or doesn't go in the administration's budget. And that's where the arm-twisting from Senator Schumer and the First Lady came in. And they made the compelling argument—and you heard Chuck say he and Olympia had this bill in the Senate—that there was no benefit we could give to middle class people that would benefit more families more than this one and no benefit we could give to families that would benefit America more than this one.

So again, I say we know this idea has bipartisan support, even in Washington. And I'll bet you'd have to take a magnifying glass to find anybody out in the country who is against it, once I can explain that it won't affect our ability to balance the budget and pay off the debt.

So this is the core—this has never been done before by our country. And when you take this, plus what we've done with the HOPE scholarships, with the other lifetime tax credits, with the Pell grants, with the work-study slots, and with the changes in the student loan program, we will really be able to say, everybody who wants to go to college can go. It is important that it pass, and I want to ask all of you to help me to pass it in this session of Congress.

Nina talked a little about her situation, but she was too modest to tell you that she's on the dean's list, so that helps her qualify for additional scholarship aid. But her father works overtime when he can, her mother works two jobs. Now, what does all this mean to her? For her family in their income group, with the HOPE scholarship, the new college opportunity tax cut would translate into a $4,300 tax break for her family by the time her brother, George, enters college. That's real money. That will make a difference to her family, and it will make a difference to America.

This plan, I say again, is important for families, but it's also important for the state of our economy. We give tax relief today for businesses that invest in new plants and equipment; in an economy that runs on brainpower we ought to give tax credits and tax cuts for people that invest in that brainpower. With this action we are much closer toward taking the worry out of paying for a child's college education. We're another step forward toward helping the middle class with a targeted tax cut. And we're another step forward again in saying that we have literally opened the doors of college to all.

I am also pleased to announce that we will increase Pell grants to up to $3,500, and that will benefit nearly 4 million Pell grant recipients. And that's important.

Now, for all of you who are in higher education—this is the second thing I want to say that's important—the second element of our plan is to strengthen our efforts to help Americans stay in college. We have really good numbers now, and it's going to get better with this—with the number of young people going to college. But the dropout rate is way, way too high, given the needs of the economy and the benefits to young people in staying and getting their degrees.

One-third of the lowest income students drop out of college and less than half of them earn degrees within 5 years. Our budget will establish the college competition challenge

grants to reduce the dropout rate and improve the changes of success for nearly 18,000 of these students. We're also going to expand the successful TRIO program to help even more students stay in college. We will launch a dual degree initiative to expand opportunities for students at minority institutions to allow about 3,000 minority students to earn a degree in fields where minorities today are woefully under-represented.

The third and final part of our higher education agenda is focused on helping young people get on the right track to college and to stay there. We need to encourage more students at an early age to get them excited about academic achievement and to give them a sense that they actually can go to college and get a degree and have the life of their dreams.

We passed an initiative we called GEAR UP, which does just that. It reaches out to middle school students who are at risk, using college students to mentor them, to encourage them to set high expectations, to stay in school, to study hard, to take the right courses to go to college, and to make sure they know exactly what kind of aid they would qualify for, so they didn't decide when they're 12 or 13 or 14 that they won't be able to afford to go.

Our budget will double the number of students who can participate in GEAR UP to include 1.4 million young people. Many of them come from families where they would never entertain the prospect of going to college and where the message they get now—on the street, in the school—is that because of their circumstances, they won't be able to make it. We're giving them the exact reverse message, that they will absolutely be able to make it. And young people in universities all across America who have participated in mentoring these kids deserve the thanks of a grateful nation. We're going to double this program, and I hope you'll help us pass that as well.

One more aspect of this is our youth opportunity grants, under the leadership of Secretary Herman at Labor and the Youthbuild initiative at HUD. These things are working again to reach young people who otherwise too often get let out and left behind. Taken together, these steps will provide families with the college relief they need, students with the support they need, our economy with the skilled work force we need, and our communities and our Nation with the better citizens we all need.

People who decide to invest in their futures through education are taking the long look ahead, making sacrifices today for rewards tomorrow. That is the challenge we face today as a nation. We have, for the first time in my lifetime, economic prosperity, social progress, national self-confidence, the absence of serious crisis at home or paralyzing threat from abroad. All those conditions have not existed at one point in my lifetime. And it is imperative that we take the long look ahead. There is no better way to make the most of this magic moment than by helping all Americans make the most of their God-given abilities.

Thanks for being here. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:55 p.m. in the Presidential Hall in the Dwight D. Eisenhower Executive Office Building. In his remarks, he referred to Nina McLaughlin, student, who introduced the President. The transcript released by the Office of the Press Secretary also included the remarks of the First Lady.

## Remarks Prior to Discussions With Chairman Yasser Arafat of the Palestinian Authority and an Exchange With Reporters

*January 20, 2000*

### *Israel-Palestinian Peace Talks*

***President Clinton.*** Let me just say I am delighted to have Chairman Arafat back in the White House. As all of you know, I am absolutely committed to seeing a comprehensive peace agreement involving the Palestinians and the Israelis, committed to doing whatever I can to achieve that. The resolution of the issues between Palestinians and Israelis is at the core of the comprehensive effort that we all want to make for peace throughout the Middle East, and we have to work through them.

As in any process like this, there must be inevitable and difficult compromises. No one can get everything that either side wants. But