

So I predict we're going to have a big debate about education in the closing months of this congressional session. I welcome it, but I need your support.

We're trying to do things to help families—the Medicare buy-in for people over 55 who have lost their jobs and their health insurance. The Congress Budget Office—not me—the Congress Budget Office says we can allow that to be done without putting any burden on the Medicare system. It will not impact our efforts to reform Medicare at all.

The HMO bill of rights, the child care initiatives that we talked about so much yesterday—we have all this evidence now that what happens in a child's first 3 years of life is so important to the child's development. More than half the parents of children in the first 3 years of life are in the work force, and people are panicked all over the country about not being able to afford quality child care. We have a proposal on the floor which can fund that sort of quality child care for millions more children within the balanced budget amendment. We need to pass it.

We're finally going to get a vote on campaign finance reform in the House, thanks to that brave band, that small band of Republicans that joined with the House Democratic Caucus and forced a majority position on the Congress. I thank them for that.

And we are also going to have a chance to pass for the 21st century the most impressive commitment to scientific and biomedical research in modern history, as a part of our gift to the 21st century.

That's a pretty big agenda. And I just want you to know that you're a part of all this; your support makes this possible. But I would like to ask you to urge all of our fellow Democrats to urge the Congress to act. There are so many of these things we can do, and we'll still have plenty to argue about in November on the election, but we're Democrats; we believe the purpose of the Government is not to give us sinecures of power but to do things that help people advance their own lives. And that's what we're here trying to do, and we need to bear down and do it. That's why the country is in good shape today, because we have put aside short-term considerations to lift up the long-term interests of the country. No one can

quarrel with the results. We just need to do more of it. And I'm going to do my best to make your support a catapult for getting those results.

Thank you again, and God bless you all. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:35 p.m. in the ballroom at the Sheraton Carlton Hotel. In his remarks, he referred to Gov. Roy Romer of Colorado, general chair, and Leonard Barrack, national finance chair, Democratic National Committee.

Remarks at the Award Ceremony for the National Teacher of the Year

April 24, 1998

The President. Ladies and gentlemen, I was sitting here listening to Secretary Riley and Senator Robb, thinking about how very long we've been working together, principally on education—more than 15 years, the 3 of us, and I've noticed a few changes. For one thing, I was looking at Chuck's remarks, and as the years go by, the print on our notes gets bigger. [*Laughter*]

But I must say, their fidelity to the cause has never wavered. I continue to be astonished by Dick Riley's energy and passion and devotion to education. We couldn't have a better champion as Secretary of Education. And I am very grateful for a man with Senator Robb's raw courage, to have him in the Senate and on the side of our children.

I'd also like to thank Congressman Tom Davis and Congressman Tom Petri for being here to honor their respective Teachers of the Year. Congressman Davis swears that he went to junior high school with our honoree's wife, who is also a teacher. But the age disparity appears to be too great for that to be true. [*Laughter*]

I'd also like to welcome Gordon Ambach, the Executive Director of the Council of Chief State School Officers; Mary Beth Blegen, the 1997 Teacher of the Year; and say a special word of appreciation to all the other Teachers of the Year who are here from all the States and the territories.

You know, this is the Rose Garden, and from these steps we have, at various times, paid tribute to our bravest soldiers, our pioneering astronauts, our greatest athletes.

Americans who, in offering up their personal best made our spirits soar, and sometimes changed the course of history, and in so doing, earned the title of “hero.” But nothing could be more fitting than to celebrate the men and women whose great deeds are too often unsung, but who, in offering up their personal best every day, help to create those other heroes. For every soldier, every astronaut, every scientist, every athlete, every artist can thank in no small measure a teacher, or more than one, for what he or she ultimately was able to become.

In that sense, we celebrate heroes here today who build up our children and America’s future. We’re especially glad to honor this year’s National Teacher of the Year, Mr. Philip Bigler, but all the other teachers, too. I’m sure he would be the first to say—and I’m sure all of you would be the first to say—that you really stand here in the shoes of tens of thousands of others who every day do their best to lift our children up.

Your tools have changed over the years—textbooks have been updated, slates have given way to computers. But the most important tools—the heart and soul and compassion—are still the same. The passion for opening young minds to knowledge; the unshakable faith in the potential and possibility of every child; the commitment every now and then to stay after class to help a struggling student; the vigilance to answer every child’s discouraged “I can’t” with a determined “Yes, you can.”

Our national honoree, Philip Bigler, brings all these gifts to his history classes at, appropriately, Thomas Jefferson High School for Science and Technology in Virginia. For more than 20 years, his students haven’t just studied history, they have lived it. He’s transformed his classroom into a virtual time machine, challenging students to debate each other as members of rival ancient Greek city states, as lawyers before the Supreme Court, as Presidential candidates named Thomas Jefferson and John Adams.

Through these historic simulations, his students have learned lessons about democracy and the meaning of citizenship, lessons that will last a lifetime—lessons we want every American to know.

We need more teachers like Philip Bigler and all our other honorees in every classroom in America today. For it is they who can make our schools the best in the world. It is they who can guarantee that America will have another American Century in the 21st century.

Of course, we have to help them, and here in Washington, as Senator Robb said, we’re doing our best to push an agenda for educational excellence for all. Secretary Riley has labored for it every day since we’ve been here, to empower teachers and students and principals and parents, through national standards and accountability, through smaller classes and better classrooms and more hook-ups to the Internet, through more master teachers and more charter schools.

For 4 years and more, the Congress and the President worked together in bipartisan fashion toward higher standards, greater accountability, and more opportunity. Indeed, in just the Balanced Budget Act last year, we had the biggest increase investment in public education in 35 years, and the biggest expansion of opportunity for our children to go on to college since the GI bill 50 years ago.

As Senator Robb said, this week Congress did a little about-face. The Senate voted against the school construction program to modernize our schools, against national standards, against reducing class sizes in the early grades. It voted to weaken the movement to charter schools and our efforts to hook all our classrooms and libraries up to the Internet by the year 2000.

Instead, they voted for a very small, as Senator Robb said, tax incentive proposal that allegedly will help parents meet elementary and secondary school expenses. But the truth is, this bill, though it cost \$1.6 billion, which is a lot of money in Federal assistance to education, would offer an average of \$7 in tax relief for parents of the 90 percent of our children who are in public schools, and just \$37 in tax relief on average for those with children in private schools. Upper income families would get a disproportionate share of the money. Families struggling to make ends meet wouldn’t get one red cent. Public education would be weakened by siphoning limited Federal resources away. Now, we can

do better than that. And I'd like to ask the teachers to help me prepare the right lesson plan to ensure that we do.

Earlier this month, a House committee took in some ways an even more shocking step in our effort reward outstanding teachers all across America by actually eliminating funding for the important work of the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, which certifies the master teachers—something that one of our colleagues, Governor Jim Hunt from North Carolina, has devoted a major part of the last 10 years to working for.

By defining the standards of excellence in teaching, the National Board helps to focus and upgrade teacher training, recognize outstanding teachers, keep our best teachers in the classroom, and help them help other teachers. National Board certification helps our teachers test themselves against the toughest standards. I believe it would be a terrible mistake to end national support for the work of the board, and I'm going to work with Congress to make sure that this provision never reaches my desk.

Every school in America ought to have at least one board certified teacher who can inspire and help all his or her colleagues. Now is no time to walk away from our commitment to public education or to reject our common obligation to help our children—and to help you help our children. It's no time for Congress to set a poor example for students by ignoring the evidence, the lessons that are plainly there from all the educational research that has been done in the last 15 years, since the issuance of the Nation at Risk report; from all the anecdotal evidence they could pick up by talking to any one of you who have been honored by your fellow teachers and your States.

This should not be a partisan issue; it should not be an ideological issue. It ought to be, purely and simply, what can we do to help you do what is best for our children and their future.

The most encouraging thing I can say about looking at all of you is, while we go on and debate all this, you're going back to your classes, back to our kids, and because of you they're going to do just fine while we argue about often the wrong things. [*Laugh-*

ter] And I think that should be deeply encouraging to the American people.

Now, I close with these words, so that we can give our honoree the last word. The great Daniel Webster once said, "If we work upon marble, it will perish. If we work upon brass, time will efface it. If we rear temples, they will crumble into dust. But if we work upon immortal minds, we engrave on those tablets something that will brighten to all eternity."

Thank you, Philip Bigler, for brightening those minds to all eternity.

[*At this point, Mr. Bigler made brief remarks.*]

The President. I think we're supposed to say, class dismissed. Thank you. [*Laughter*]

NOTE: The President spoke at 3:22 p.m. in the Rose Garden at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Mary Beth Blegen, 1996 National Teacher of the Year.

Proclamation 7087—Jewish Heritage Week, 1998

April 24, 1998

By the President of the United States of America

A Proclamation

America's first Jewish immigrants arrived on our shores from Europe more than 100 years before the American Revolution. In subsequent decades, millions more Jewish men and women would follow, fleeing persecution, pogroms, and the horrors of the Holocaust, seeking a new life of freedom and opportunity for themselves and their children. While many came here in poverty, they brought with them the riches of their ancient Jewish heritage: faith in God; a strong commitment to family and community; a tradition of service to others; and a deep love of learning and the arts.

Drawing on these many strengths, Jewish citizens have made extraordinary contributions to every aspect of American life. Acutely conscious of the dangers of racism, prejudice, and political oppression, American Jews have been strong and effective advocates in the cause of social justice. They have dedicated their energies, talents, and resources