THE EDUCATION LEGACY of the Clinton Administration

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NOTE: ALL FIGURES ARE IN U.S. DOLLARS.

DISCUSSING THE EDUCATION LEGACY OF THE CLINTON ADMINISTRATION IS SOMETHING IN WHICH I TAKE PARTICULAR PRIDE IN AS I PREPARE TO LEAVE MY POSITION AS THE UNITED STATES' SECRETARY OF EDUCATION. WHEN BILL CLINTON BECAME PRESIDENT ON JANUARY 20, 1993, HE SAID THAT ONE OF HIS TOP PRIORITIES WOULD BE TO IMPROVE THE STATE OF AMERICAN EDUCATION. HE WAS NOT SPOUTING EMPTY WORDS. THE EDUCATION SUCCESSES HE ACHIEVED AS ARKANSAS' GOVERNOR CERTAINLY INDICATED HE PROBABLY WOULD BE THE MOST PRO-EDUCATION PRESIDENT EVER. REMAINING TRUE TO HIS WORD, PRESIDENT CLINTON, ALONG WITH VICE PRESIDENT GORE, WORKED TIRELESSLY THROUGHOUT EIGHT YEARS IN OFFICE ON BEHALF OF BETTER EDUCATION. AND WE NOW CAN SAY THAT THE CLINTON ADMINISTRATION INDEED WAS THE MOST PRO-EDUCATION PRESIDENTIAL ADMINISTRATION IN THE HISTORY OF THE UNITED STATES.

Of course, the efforts of countless American teachers, parents, community leaders, and education administrators (along with those of us in the administration), who believed that the nation could and should do a better job of educating its people, have reaped rewards. American education, by most any measure, is in a far better condition today than it was in 1993. Support and interest in education is greater today than at any time in our nation's history. Of course, we still have a great deal of work to do in many areas. They include modernising and building new schools to accommodate increasing enrolments, boosting mathematics and science performance, reducing class sizes (especially in the early grades), expanding after-school learning opportunities, improving teacher quantity and quality, and further narrowing the gaps in performance among racial groups, among others. Still, our record of accomplishments is as worthy as were our intentions.

Between 1993 and 2001, the Clinton Administration made the largest overall financial investment in American education in 30 years. It made the greatest investment in higher education since the G.I. Bill was enacted after World War II by doubling student financial aid to help students and families pay for college or university to nearly $60 billion per year.

At their core, all of these investments and efforts were basically intended to challenge students, teachers, parents, and school staff to achieve high expectations. Still, an overriding concern was that if we were to expect the most of American education, our schools must first be safe.

SAFE SCHOOLS, PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT AND AN INCREASED EMPHASIS ON TECHNOLOGY

Despite the intense media coverage surrounding events such as those in Littleton, Colo. and Taber, Alta., statistics confirm that American schools have become safer since 1993. In fact, schools are the safest places in most communities. A full 90 percent of our schools have experienced no serious crime on their premises. Still, if one person is injured or killed in a school, that is one person too many.

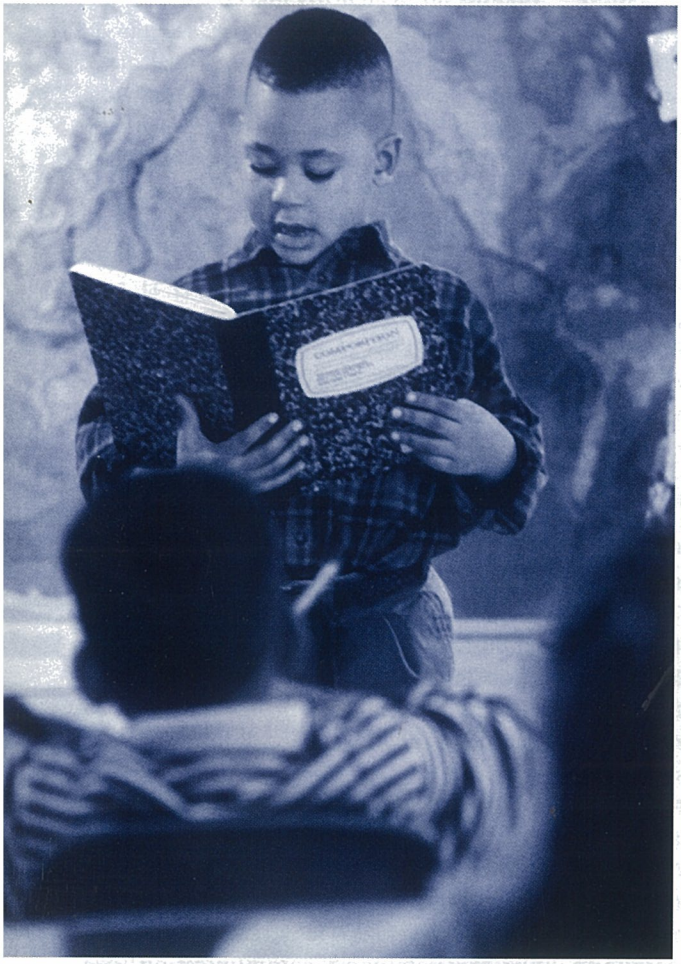
One thing we accomplished to help make schools safer was the enactment of the Gun-Free Schools Act in 1994. The act requires the expulsion of any student who brings a firearm to school. The act also recommends involving parents in the process as soon as possible.

Whether we are in Canada or the United States, we all know that increased parent involvement in education can help make our schools both safer and more productive. To that end, in 1994, we inaugurated the Partnership for Family Involvement in Education. We started the partnership to strengthen family-school-community links through good communication and mutual responsibility for children's learning. What began with just 33 member organisations has grown to more than 6,000 partner groups.

One of the partnership's priorities that was shared by all in the administration was an emphasis on safe and smart after-school programs. Our 21st Century Community Learning Centres program allows schools to stay open longer to provide enriched learning opportunities. We know that the hours between 3 and 6 p.m. can be among the most dangerous for students and that is why quality after-school education is so necessary for so many children. Some 850,000 students were served in fiscal year 2000. The centres offer many services, including: youth tutoring; college and university preparation work; music classes; technology education; drug and violence prevention counselling; and, services for youth with disabilities.

A critical part of many after-school programs is an emphasis on using technology for learning. A growing concern in both of our countries is the "digital divide." Thanks to the leadership of Vice President Gore, schools across the United States had increased access to technology through both the Technology Literacy Challenge Fund and the "E-rate." The E-rate is a discount

program that makes technology more readily available and affordable to education institutions like schools and libraries. It made a difference, providing more than $4 billion in discounts to connect schools to the Internet. Put another way, some 95 percent of public schools were connected to the Internet in 1999, up from 35 percent in 1994. In 1999, 63 percent of all public school classrooms were connected to the Internet. Only 3 percent enjoyed such access in 1994.



SAFE AND UP-TO-DATE SCHOOL FACILITIES, QUALITY PRE-SCHOOL EDUCATION AND A NEED TO IMPROVE MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCE EDUCATION

Of course, safe and challenging teaching and learning that takes advantage of current technology can only occur in sound and healthy school facilities. Unfortunately, many American schools do not provide suitable environments for enrolments that are expected to climb to a record 44.4 million elementary and secondary students in 2006. In 2000, the administration proposed a federal tax credit program that would pay the interest on nearly $25 billion in state and local bonds to modernise and rebuild up to 6,000 public schools that are overcrowded, out-of-date, and unsafe. The fiscal year 2001 budget included a $1.3 billion renovation loan and grant proposal that would immediately repair 5,000 schools.

It has been estimated that $127 billion is needed to bring U.S. schools into good overall condition. My sincere hope is that the new administration will do its best to see that all American children go to schools that are safe, healthy, and conducive to good learning and teaching. While we were blocked by the majority in Congress from moving aggressively to help solve this problem, we were the first administration to hold a national debate on this issue. This is important because many communities can't raise local funds to pay for construction or renovation.

Another way in which we improved American education was to reduce class sizes. Research has proven that children, especially those in the early grades, learn more in smaller classes. The Class Size Reduction Initiative that we put into place in 1998 has placed some 29,000 more teachers into the nation's classrooms. More funds will be needed if President Clinton's goal of putting an additional 100,000 well-prepared teachers in our schools is to be realised.

Our administration's concern for young children extended to our pre-school program for low-income children known as Head Start (originally created by President Lyndon B. Johnson in 1965). Head Start has been proven to give low-income children a real chance to do well once they start elementary school. Head Start funding was increased by 90 percent between 1993 and 2001 and the program served 880,000 children in fiscal year 2000. The administration also created Early Head Start, which brings Head Start's successful comprehensive services to families with children from birth to age three.

Of course, one of the most important parts of any good school, whether it be Canadian or American, is quality teaching. As I often say, teachers make all other professions possible. Currently, the United States is facing a teacher shortage. We need 2.2 million new teachers over the next 10 years, with a particular need for mathematics and science teachers. I appointed a commission chaired by former astronaut and U.S. Senator John Glenn, which presented a report to me last September as to how we must improve the training, recruitment, and retention of mathematics and science teachers. It is now up to the new administration to decide if it wishes to fully consider the report's recommendations.

With regard to mathematics and science, it is worth noting that the very strong Canadian showing in the 1999 Third International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) is to be commended and studied. Canada's placement in the scores goes a long way towards achieving the goal set by your finance minister, Paul Martin, when he said that if Canada is to compete in the new knowledge-based economy, your students must reach the top five world rankings in mathematics and science achievement. Of course, we in the United States plan to be right there with you.

A QUEST FOR HIGH STANDARDS

The quest for high standards extended to other subjects, including reading. President Clinton challenged the nation to ensure that all children be able to read well and independently by Grade 3. The America Reads program was put into place early in the administration and more than 1,400 colleges and universities have committed more than 26,000 students to tutor children in reading. In addition, more than two million children have been taught, tutored, or mentored by national service programs. President Clinton also said that each Grade 4 student should be tested in reading to ascertain achievement.

Another program intended to achieve high standards is Goals 2000, an education reform initiative enacted in 1994. The program helped states establish standards of excellence for all children and plan and implement steps to raise educational achievement. Communities in almost

every state received Goals 2000 funds to upgrade curriculum, improve teaching, increase parental involvement in schools, and make better use of computers in classrooms. We also made a special effort to remind Americans that good schools include the study of music and the arts.

BOOSTING LOCAL INVOLVEMENT AND MAKING HIGHER EDUCATION AVAILABLE TO ALL

Local communities are necessary to American education because local communities do the bulk of the work in providing quality public education. One way in which the administration tried to help communities, along with parents and students, was to expand choice and accountability in public schools. "Charter schools," which are public schools that have been given flexibility from some local, state, and federal regulations in order to achieve high standards, have been a tremendous success. Only one charter school existed in the U.S. in 1993. Now there are more than 1,700, enrolling more than 250,000 students in 30 states and the District of Columbia. And the president also supported local education reform efforts by signing the Education Flexibility Partnership Act of 1999 that gives all states the ability to use federal resources in ways that best complement local efforts and innovation.

By encouraging public school choice, charter schools offer a very positive contrast with the use of vouchers, which involves the transfer of public monies to pay for private school tuition. Vouchers are very divisive and take away from the American ideal of the free public school. For almost a century, 89 percent of American students have been educated in public schools. Vouchers take precious resources away from public schools and are, I believe, a mistake.

I've talked a fair amount about what we accomplished in supporting elementary and secondary education. But the Clinton Administration also will be remembered for its tremendous efforts to help students and families pay for higher education as well as in changing the American view of higher education. There is a growing recognition, caused in part by ideas advocated by the Clinton Administration, that at least two years of post-secondary education should be the norm for all Americans.

To help make this possible, we enacted scholarships and tax credits that were claimed by 10 million American families in 1999. The scholarships, known as HOPE scholarships, provide a tax credit of up to $1,500 for tuition and fees for the first two years of college or university. The Lifetime Learning tax credits provide a 20 percent tax credit on the first $5,000 of tuition and fees for students beyond the first two years of college or university. In 2000, 5.6 million families received $5 billion in HOPE scholarships and 7.2 million families received $2.4 billion in Lifetime Learning tax credits.

The Clinton Administration also expanded work-study programs and Pell Grants, a program of direct grants of up to $3,750 per student. We lowered fees and interest rates that have saved the average student loan borrower over $500, and we also instituted more flexible repayment terms, and restored tax deductions for student loan interest. We also lowered the default rate on loan paybacks. The AmeriCorps program, established in 1995, has allowed some 150,000 young people to serve in their communities while earning money for college or university or skills training.

Minority students (or what Canadians call visible minorities) and those from disadvantaged backgrounds also received our help in obtaining higher education. In 1993, we started a program known as TRIO to motivate and support students from disadvantaged backgrounds as they progress from middle school to post-secondary education. Some 760,000 students now take part in TRIO. We also established a program known as GEAR-UP, which is a national mentoring initiative that helps over 750,000 low-income middle school children finish school and prepare for college or university.

The Clinton Administration also increased funding and grants for historically black and Hispanic-serving colleges and universities. As well, support for a new program, the Hispanic Education Action Plan, was designed to help Hispanic youth graduate from high school and then go on to college or university.

One final subject I wish to discuss is the emphasis we tried to place on the matter of learning other languages and gaining a better sense of the world beyond the United States. American students must develop a broad understanding of the world, including other languages and cultures, if we are to remain both competitive and intellectually keen. There's an old joke that says a great deal about the way our nation historically has treated the study of foreign countries and languages. The joke goes like this: What do you call a person who knows two languages? Bilingual. What do you call a person who knows three languages? Trilingual. And what do you call a person who knows only one language? An American. The truth behind this joke is no longer funny. We need to increase our efforts to make sure American students learn additional languages and increase their exposure to, and interest in, the world at large.

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Former Prime Minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau made an excellent point back in 1962, some years before he entered elected politics. Writing in Cité Libre, he said, "the day of language barriers is finished, as least as far as science and culture are concerned." In this technology-driven economy in which we now live, where borders and barriers are invisible or fibre-optic thin, his words have never rung more true.

In closing, I'd like to say that the Clinton Administration's efforts to make the phrase "knowledge is power (or connaissance est force)" a working mantra for all Americans have resulted in great achievements. And I believe many in Canada share our goals. As President John F. Kennedy said when discussing the U.S.-Canada relationship back in May 1961, "Geography has made us neighbours. History has made us friends. Economics has made us partners. And necessity has made us allies. We are co-tenants of the same continent; heirs of the same legacy."

I am hopeful that the American people will continue down the path we have started and I have great hope that the march towards better education will not diminish.