

Jan. 9 / Administration of William J. Clinton, 1998

But we must make sure that more of our young people stay in school, graduate from high school, and when they graduate, they know what they're supposed to know. There are still too many of our children who graduate from high school not knowing that. That's why I have pushed our national goals of making sure every 8-year-old can read, every 12-year-old can log on to the Internet, and every 18-year-old can go on to college with high standards, proven reforms, hooking up every classroom and library to the Internet by the year 2000, making sure that every eligible child has a chance to be in a Head Start program or another good pre-school program. We have to do these things so that all of our children can learn.

Let me also say that one of the most troubling things to me is that the high school graduation rates in America now are getting quite high—they're well above 80 percent, moving toward the 90 percent level they should reach—for every ethnic group in America except Hispanic young people. Too many of our Hispanic young people still drop out of high school, very often out of good motivation. They think, "I ought to drop out. I ought to go to work. I can support myself. I won't be a burden on my family. I can help my family make a living." That has been true for generations. That is simply not true anymore, and we have to change that attitude. It is not true anymore.

It has been clear now for at least 10 years that there is a huge and growing gap in the job prospects and the earning prospects of people who have 2 years or more of college and people who drop out of high school. It is imperative that we get 100 percent of our kids to stay in school, get their high school diploma,

go back and get their GED if they have already dropped out, and then go on to at least 2 years of college. The financial obstacles have been removed. We have to tear down the walls in the minds of people that are keeping them from doing this.

I have asked Secretary Riley to work with Mickey Ibarra and Maria Echaveste, two Assistants to the President, and Gene Sperling, Director of my National Economic Council, to help us do everything we can do to deal with this. I have talked to Representative Hinojosa and Representative Ortiz about this, but I'm telling you, you folks have got to change this at the grassroots level. Every single child has got to stay in school, graduate, and they need to know what they're supposed to know when they get their high school diploma.

You can make it happen. We can open the doors. We can have the opportunity. We can set the standards. You have to make it happen. That's the way we can build a bridge to the 21st century that every single American can walk across. I want you to help me.

Thank you. God bless you. It's great to be back.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:15 p.m. in the Confederate Air Force Museum Hangar at the Brownsville South Padre International Airport. In his remarks, he referred to Alma Garcia, principal, Yturria Elementary School, Brownsville; Texas State Representatives Rene O. Oliveira and Jim Solis; Cameron County Judge Gilberto Hinojosa; Brownsville City Commissioners Carlton Richards, Ernie Hernandez, and Harry E. McNair, Jr., and City Manager Carlos Rubenstein; and Mayor Henry Gonzalez of Brownsville.

Remarks to High School Teachers, Students, and Parents in Houston, Texas

January 9, 1998

Thank you. Let's give Ronald another hand. Didn't he do a great job? [Applause] Thank you very much. Let me say, first of all, thank you for the warm welcome; thank you for coming. I welcome all the students here from all the schools around the area, the college and the university presidents. And I understand we

also have the student body presidents from the University of Houston, Texas Southern, Prairie View, and I believe the University of Texas at Austin. I welcome all of them here.

I also want to say a special word of thanks to the AmeriCorps volunteers because I believe all of us should serve, and I believe we should