

Remarks at a Reception for Representative Sheila Jackson Lee in Houston January 9, 1998

I was just getting my last-minute instructions. [Laughter] Thank you for being here. Thank you for the warm welcome. Let me begin by saying that I am honored to be here on behalf of Sheila Jackson Lee and I'm delighted that you're here.

I want to thank her family for sharing her with the people of this congressional district and the United States Congress. It's not easy to do. It is easy to forget the rigors of public service, but ask yourself if you could do a job, even one you loved, if you had to fly back and forth from here to Washington every week, if you were away from your spouse and your children for prolonged periods of time, and when you came back to see them, over 100,000 people could call you on the phone and say why you should be with them instead of with your family. [Laughter]

It's a difficult job being in Congress, but Sheila Jackson Lee does it well. She does it with enormous energy, and she has had an unusual impact for a person with no more seniority than she has, just by the sheer force of will and work. I know I'm no different than other people—when I see her coming at me with that look in her eye—[laughter]—I don't even want to hear what she has to say. I just say, yes, yes. [Laughter] That way I don't have to keep dealing with it. I just say yes. [Laughter] Because if I say no or maybe, eventually I'm going to get around to yes anyway. [Laughter]

She just became the chairman of the House Children's Caucus. And we had a great announcement earlier this week at the White House where I announced a program to involve millions of more children in child care, to raise the standards, to train more trained child care workers, to make them safer and better—the child care centers of America. We still have to pass it through the Congress. I'll bet you it will pass this year, and when it does—you mark my words—Sheila Jackson Lee will deserve a lot of the credit, the largest effort by the National Government to help communities provide quality child care in the history of the United States of America. So I'm very hopeful about that.

We had a great meeting today over at the George Brown Auditorium with, I don't know, several thousand people, and at least half of them were young people, to talk about the fact that in the Balanced Budget Act, which Sheila Jackson Lee supported last year, we had the biggest expansion in aid to college since the GI bill was passed at the end of World War II 50 years ago.

Consider this: In that bill we gave the vast majority of American families of modest incomes, even upper middle-class incomes and down, access to a \$1,500-a-year tax credit for the first 2 years of college—that makes community college virtually free for virtually everybody in the country—amazing thing; a \$1,000 tax credit for the junior and the senior year, for graduate schools, to help people go to school. We had the biggest increase in Pell grant scholarships for students with modest incomes in 20 years. We redid the student loan program so you can get the loans quicker, where the fees cost less money, and now you can pay the loans back as a percentage of your income. So no one need ever fear borrowing money to go to school again, because you're not going to be bankrupted by paying the loans back because you can limit the loan to a percentage of your income.

And today I announced Texas has been one of the States that has made the most use of AmeriCorps, our community national service program. We've had 100,000 young people in this country who've earned money to go to college by serving in their communities. And today I announced we're going to ask for 1 million work-study slots next year, so people can work their way through college.

So I thank Sheila Jackson Lee for supporting my education program. She has supported my economic program, including my trade policies. And even when they were controversial. She understands we can't help people who are losing out in the global economy at home by cutting off opportunities to create more jobs by selling American products abroad. And I thank her for that, and you ought to thank her for that. She's done a very good job.