

Today I am proud to propose the single largest national commitment to child care in the history of the United States. It is a comprehensive and fiscally responsible plan to make child care more affordable and accessible, to raise the quality of child care, to assure the safety of care for millions of American children.

This is an issue that touches nearly every family, and I believe it must rise above politics and partisan interests. I welcome the bipartisan effort to improve child care that is already going on in the Congress. I thank the Members who are here and many who could not come today for their leadership and for demonstrating that this is an American issue that both Democrats and Republicans are embracing.

This proposal will be an important part of the budget I send to Congress next month. It will be the first balanced budget in 30 years. It will build on the achievements of the year just passed, one that was very good for working families. As has already been mentioned, last summer's historic balanced budget agreement provided working families with a \$500-per-child tax credit; it made the first 2 years of college—community college—virtually free for almost every American family and made college more affordable for American families; expanded health coverage to 5 million uninsured people; advanced the cause of placing more children into solid, adoptive homes; and continued our efforts to collect more child support.

Over the past 5 years, we have worked hard to abandon the false choices of the past, including the false choice of having to choose between responsibilities at work and responsibilities at home. Our new economic strategy is designed in no small measure to get over that divide. From the Family and Medical Leave Act, to the earned-income tax credit, to the minimum wage increase, we have tried to demonstrate that it is not only possible but imperative to the survival of the American dream to help people meet their responsibilities at home and at work. Strengthening child care has always been a part of this strategy. Since we came here, we've helped a million children and their families to afford the child care that they need, but we have to do a lot more.

Now, this new proposal has three fundamental goals: first, to make child care more affordable and available to all Americans. With increased block grants to States, we will double the number of children receiving child care subsidies

to more than 2 million. One of the reasons welfare reform has worked as well as it has is because of the increased investment in child care. Now we have to help the lower income families who have never been on welfare in the first place but still struggle to pay for child care. We also will help more than 3 million working families to meet their child care expenses by dramatically expanding the child care tax credit. These tax credits will mean that a family of four making \$35,000 and saddled with high child care bills will no longer pay one penny in Federal income taxes.

I'm also supporting new tax credits to encourage more businesses to provide child care for their employees. When I met the Members of Congress before coming in here, that's the first thing Congresswoman DeLauro said. She had just come from the opening of a corporate child care center. We need more businesses to do more, and we need to help the smaller businesses who can use this tax credit and cannot afford to do it on their own without a little help from the public.

Second, we must make sure that every child has a safe and enriching place to go after school. As the Vice President said, there are simply too many children who, through no fault of their parents, are left to fend for themselves in the hours between 2 and 6 o'clock—too many children roaming the streets, idling in front of the television, or getting into trouble.

I cannot emphasize the importance of this too much. The crime rate in this country has dropped dramatically in the last 5 years. All Americans should be proud of that. The juvenile crime rate has not dropped so much. And where it has dropped, almost without exception, it has dropped because people have found something positive for children to do in the hours between the time school ends and the time their parents come home at night. We do not need to keep building jail after jail after jail to house children who wouldn't be there in the first place if we took care of them while they're out free and able to build constructive, law-abiding, positive lives.

I am proposing the expansion of before- and after-school programs to help some 500,000 children say no to drugs and alcohol and crime and yes to reading, soccer, computers, and a brighter future for themselves. I thank the Vice President especially for his hard work on this issue.