



Education: Empowering Our People

Excerpts from speeches by Governor Bill Clinton

Let me make this clear: Education is economic development. We can only be a high-wage, high-growth country if we are a high-skills country. In a world in which money and production are mobile, the only way middle-class people can keep good jobs with growing incomes is to be lifetime learners and innovators. Without world-class skills, the middle class will surely continue to decline. With them, middle-class workers will generate more high-wage jobs in America in the '90s.

Empowering everybody begins with preschool for every child who needs it, and fully funding Head Start. It includes a national examination system to push our students to meet world-class standards in core subjects like math and science, and an annual report card for every state, every school district, and every school to measure our progress in meeting those standards.

Empowerment means training young people for high-wage jobs, not dead-end ones. Young Americans with only a high school education make 25 percent less today than they would have 15 years ago. In a Clinton Administration we'll have a national apprenticeship program that will enable high school students who aren't bound for college to enter a course of study, designed by schools and local businesses, to teach them valuable skills, with a promise of a real job with growing incomes when they graduate.

Empowerment means challenging our students and every American with a system of voluntary national service. In a Clinton Administration we will offer a domestic GI Bill that will say to middle class as well as low income people: We want you to go to college and we're glad to pay for it, but you've got to give something back to your country in return. As President, I'll ask Congress to establish a trust fund out of which any American can borrow money for a college education, so long as they pay it back either as a small percentage of their income over time or with a couple of years of national service as teachers, police officers, child care workers -- doing work our country urgently needs. The fund would be financed with a portion of the peace dividend and by redirecting the present student loan program, which is nowhere near as cost-effective as it should be. This program will pay for itself many times over.

But in an era when what you can earn depends largely on what you can learn, education can't stop at the schoolhouse door. From now on, anyone who's willing to work will have a chance to learn. In a Clinton Administration, we'll make adult literacy programs available to all who need it, by working with states to make sure every state has a clear, achievable plan to teach everyone with a job to read, to give them a chance to earn a GED, and wherever possible,

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to do it where they work. In Arkansas we had 14,000 people in adult education programs in 1987. Today we have over 50,000. By 1993, we'll have over 70,000. Every state can do the same for a modest cost with a disciplined plan and a flexible delivery system.

And we will ensure that every working American has the opportunity to learn new skills every year. Today, American business spends billions of dollars on training -- the equivalent of 1.5 percent of the costs of their payrolls -- but 70 percent of it goes to the 10 percent at the top of the ladder. In a Clinton Administration, we'll require employers to offer every worker his or her share of those training dollars, or contribute the equivalent to a national training fund. Workers will get the training they need, and companies will learn that the more you train workers, the more your profits will increase.

I know Americans worry about the quality of education in this country and want the best for their children. The Clinton Administration will set high national standards based on international competition for what everybody ought to know, and a national examination system to measure whether they're learning it. It's not enough to put money into schools. We need to challenge the schools to produce and we've got to insist on results.

The New Covenant will challenge the students of America to stay in school. Students who drop out of school or fail to learn as much as they can are not just letting down themselves and their families. They're failing their communities, because from that point on, chances are they're subtracting from society, not adding to it. In Arkansas, we've tried to enhance responsibility for students by saying that if they drop out for no good reason, they lose the privilege of a driver's license.