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Subseries:

OA/ID Number: 5914

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Folder Title:

Remarks by POTUS- School to Work Opportunities Act

Stack:

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Row:

30

Section:

1

Shelf:

3

Position:

1

May 17, 1995

**REMARKS BY THE PRESIDENT
ON THE FIRST ANNIVERSARY OF THE
SCHOOL-TO-WORK OPPORTUNITIES ACT**

**Automated Graphic Systems
White Plains, Maryland**

I want to thank Nancy and Laurie and the other students who showed me around this fine place and showed me what they do here. I thank you for that. I thank Secretary Reich and Secretary Riley for the work they have done to put this school-to-work partnership together with the Education Department and the Labor Department. I thank Senator Kennedy for his sponsorship of this legislation, and your Congressman, Steny Hoyer, for the work he did to pass it.

I'm glad to see Mr. Pestillo here, and I thank him and all those who have worked so hard on this. I'll never forget the conversation I had with the Ford CEO, Alex Trotman, about this issue in the White House not all that long ago, in urging more corporate involvement in business sponsorship of the school-to-work concept.

President Sine, I thank you for being here and for the work that all the community education institutions in America are doing to help prepare young Americans to succeed in the global economy. They may be the most important institutions in the United States today, and I thank you for that.

I want to thank all the state and local officials from Maryland who are here -- Lt. Governor Kathleen Kennedy Townsend, and Senator Miller -- I'm glad to see you. And I know that, Governor McKernan, you shouldn't feel alone, there are lots of Republicans here today. County commissioners, members of the House of Delegates, county officials here, the Sheriff and others.

This ought not to be a partisan issue. And I thank you, sir, for your leadership. He wrote a fine book about it, which Mr. Pestillo referenced in his introduction. And Governor McKernan sent me a copy of it, autographed it, and I read it. And I thought if my dear mother were still living, she would wonder which of us were more successful, because she always thought whether you wrote books or not was a real standard of whether you'd done anything in life. So according to my mother's life, you've done something very important. And we are very grateful to you, sir, for the leadership you have given this movement all across America. The United States needs desperately for every young person in this country to have the opportunity that these young people have had. And thanks to you and your efforts, more will have that chance. I thank you.

I would also like to thank our host here, Automated Graphic. Thank you very much for having us here. We are grateful, and we appreciate it.

I want to say a little about this in a larger context. What we are doing here today to celebrate the one-year anniversary of the School-to-Work Program is really adapting to the information age in the 21st century, one of the oldest traditions in the United States. Just imagine, for example -- here we are in Maryland -- what if we were here 200 years ago? You would be a young person living in a settlement in Maryland called Port Tobacco, which was then a big town around these pats. You'd be in a promising new country. George Washington would be your President. John Adams would be your Vice President. Pretty good lineup. (Laughter.) And everybody would be optimistic, and most people would be like Nancy -- they'd get up at 5:00 a.m. or 5:30 a.m. every morning and go to work.

If you wanted a better job, you'd probably leave the country and come into town, where you would walk down a main street, and you would look at the people who were working. Two hundred years ago, you'd see a blacksmith, a carpenter and, of course, a printer. If you wanted to learn how to do those jobs, you'd simply knock on one of the doors and hope that in return for hard work, you could get a craftsman to teach you those skills. That's the way it was done 200 years ago.

And for a long time, that's the way it was done, as one generation kept faith with the next. Well, we know that we can't exactly do it that way anymore, but if you think about it, that's what the School-to-Work Program is all about in modern terms for the modern economy. And it's very, very important.

This year we are seeing grants that involve over 100,000 students nationwide, over 40,000 employers, including very large and very powerful employers in this country, but also some very, very small ones. And there are over 2,500 schools all across America involved in this program. The act was a genuine partnership; it set up no bureaucracy whatever. It simply made grants to local partnerships, many of them in poor areas, and gave students the chance to show what their hard work could do.

This year, we are doubling the school-to-work funding for the eight pioneer states that already have programs. Seed grants will go out to 20 new states so that all 50 states will have some participation in the School-to-Work Program. By 1997, every state in America will have a school-to-work program up and running.

One thing that I want to emphasize that is very important is that the school-to-work program rests on a few very big ideas. One of the ones that's most important to me is that there is no choice to be made between practical workplace skills and academic knowledge; that the two reinforce each other and go hand in hand. When I was growing up, there was always this bright line between what was a vocational practical skill and what was an academic skill. It was probably a mistake then; it is certainly a mistake now. We have to abolish that line.

School-to-work is for all kinds of students -- after high school, some will go straight to a job, some will go on to a community college, others may go to a four-year college. Some who hadn't planned on getting more education will get more education because they were in the school-to-work program and because they see it will help them in their work lives.

Our country has enormous potential and a few very large problems. You know what they are as well as I do. You know we have too much crime and violence. You know we have major pressures on the family and the community in our country. What you may or may not know is that underlying a lot of this is the fact that more than half the people in this country today are working a longer work week than they were 10 years ago for the same or lower wages. And the reason is we have not created in this country the kind of education and training programs we need to adapt to a global economy, where everybody's earnings are to some extent conditioned on the pressures being put on us from around the world, and where everybody's earnings more and more depend upon not only what they know, but what they are capable of learning.

In the last 15 years, for example, earnings for high school dropouts in the work force have dropped at breathtaking rates. They're about 25 percent lower than they were 15 years ago. Earnings for high school graduates are not down that much, but they're also down significantly.

The only people for whom earnings have increased in the last 15 years are people who get out of high school with usable skills and have at least some kind of education and training for about two years after high school. It can be in the work place; it could be in the service; it could be in a community college; it can be in a college, but you have to create this sense of ongoing upgrading of the skills if we're going to grow the middle class and shrink the underclass in this country. If we could do that, a lot of our other problems would be smaller.

I want to emphasize again that this has been a bipartisan effort, which perhaps ought more properly to be a nonpartisan effort. After all, in the post-Cold War era, there are certain things that are critical to the American Dream -- growing the middle class and shrinking the underclass and giving people the chance to help themselves is clearly that. We ought to have partisan differences over how best to achieve that goal, but we ought to be committed to that goal. And if you're committed to a goal, very often you wind up agreeing on the details.

For example, there's been a remarkable amount of bipartisan support in the United States Congress and in the administration on what the defense budget ought to be at the end of the Cold War. Everybody knows it has to go down, and everybody knows it shouldn't go down too much because every time in our history we've taken it down too much, we have wound up getting ourselves in trouble, and we have to build it up all over again. Better to spend enough money to maintain the strongest military in the world to prevent bad things from happening. So we argue a little bit around the edges, but more or less we are moving in the same direction, because we understand that's important to our security. The same thing could be said today about the other problems we have.

We have two big deficits in America today. We've got a huge government deficit -- a budget deficit. But we also have an education and training deficit. And we can't solve one without the other. We ought to bring both into balance. We ought to get rid of both deficits. And I think we can.

In the last two years, we've made a remarkable amount of progress. Over a seven-year period, the budgets that were adopted in the last couple of years reduced the deficit by \$1 trillion. Your budget deficit would be gone today, we would be in balance today, were in not for the interest we have to pay on the debt we ran up in just the 12 years before I took office. So this is a -- what I want to say to you is that this idea of having a big structural deficit in America with our budget is a new idea, but it didn't happen overnight. And we can't solve it overnight, but we have to solve it. And we are moving on it, and we will continue to do so.

We also see in the last two years, thanks to Senator Kennedy and others, a remarkable bipartisan assault on the education deficit -- big increase in Head Start; the Goals 2000 initiative, which is designed to see that more of our schools meet really high standards, and that we measure them and tell people the truth about how our schools are doing, but that we help our schools to achieve those standards through grass-roots reforms. We've reformed the student loan program, to lower the cost of college loans, make the repayment terms easier, but be tougher on collecting the bills so that the defaults have gone from \$2.8 billion a year down to \$1 billion a year, but we're making more loans to more young people at lower costs. Those are the kinds of things that we did all in a bipartisan manner.

Now we've asked the Congress to collapse a lot of these training programs into a big voucher so that when someone loses a job, or if someone's working for a very low wage and they need to go back to the community college or participate in a program like this, they can just get a voucher from the government and use it for two years to get training throughout a lifetime. Because all of you who are in this program, you'll have to continue to upgrade your skills over the course of your working life if the objective is to have good jobs, good jobs, good jobs. These are all things that we have been doing together. And we need to continue to do it.

There is this bill that I have spoken about, this rescission bill. I want to tell you about it. A rescission bill is a bill that cuts the budget in the year where you're in right now. That's what this rescission bill -- the rescission bill proposes cuts to the present budget year. I believe we ought to make some cuts. We've got to keep bringing the deficit down. The problem I have with the rescission bill that was reported out of the conference committee between the Senate and the House is that it makes the education deficit worse. And it doesn't even make the education deficit worse to reduce the budget deficit, it makes it worse to increase pork barrel spending.

Earlier this year, I worked with the United States Senate on a rescission bill which would cut exactly the same amount in federal spending as this bill does and provide needed funds to the Federal Emergency Management Agency to deal with the horrible problem in Oklahoma City, to help to finish the work of rebuilding California after the earthquake, to help us to fight domestic terrorism, to do things that really need to be done and still reduce the deficit.

But there's a right way and wrong way to do it. I think you have to cut pork barrel projects before you cut people. Unfortunately, in this conference committee what was, I think, a pretty good bill became a bad bill. It cuts our efforts to help people and puts pork back in the bill.

I want more than \$16 billion in spending cuts, but there's a wrong way and right way to do it. This bill that came out of the committee cuts out efforts to make sure our schools are safe drug-free, which is a big deal in a lot of places in America. It cuts our efforts to help our schools meet new higher standards through innovative reforms, cuts our efforts to provide college aid to young people who will work in community service projects in AmeriCorps, the national service program; and, yes, it also cuts school-to-work programs.

Now, in this bill, they found a way to pay for \$1.5 billion worth of courthouses and special-interest highway projects and other low-priority spending. They kept in the law an unforgivable tax loophole which lets billionaires beat their U.S. taxes by giving up their citizenship after they've earned the money as American citizens. But they cut more from education, away from the Senate bill that I had already agreed to.

Now, I believe a bill that cuts education to put in pork is the wrong way to balance the budget, and I will veto it. We should be cutting pork to give more people like these young people standing behind me a chance to be at school-to-work.

I want to make it very clear: I am not against cutting spending. I have a bill right here which will cut out their pork, restore education, and reduce the deficit by more than the bill they're sending to my desk. So, yes, I'm going to veto that bill, but I want them to pass this bill. Let's cut the deficit and put education back.

I want to say this again: I have no problem with cutting spending. I've been doing it for two years. We've got to keep doing it. This proposal cuts the pork, restores education, and reduces the deficit by more than they propose to do it. So, yes, I will veto the rescission bill, but I want to cut the spending. And I will send this to Congress immediately. We shouldn't -- we shouldn't be cutting education to build courthouses. We should be cutting courthouses to build education. That is the right way to do it.

Let me also say that in the bill that went into this conference committee between the House and the Senate there was a so-called lock box, which I supported, which basically said, if we're going to cut this spending, let's reduce the deficit. Let's don't spend -- let's don't take these cuts and put them into paying for tax cuts when we've still got a big budget deficit. The lock box was taken out in the conference, too. And I think that was a big mistake.

You know, we cut some other things that weren't all that easy to cut because we thought we had to bring the deficit down. I don't think we should start by getting our priorities reversed.

And finally, let me just mention, I was with Congressman Hoyer on Earth Day not very long ago, and I was in Maryland. We talked about the environment. There's another thing which is in this bill which I really object to, which would basically direct us to make timber sales to large companies, subsidized by the taxpayers, mostly in the Pacific Northwest, that will essentially throw out all of our environmental laws and the protections that we have that surround such timber sales. It will also put us back into the courts. So it would seem to allow to cut more timber, but actually it means lawsuits and threats to the environment.

I don't want to spend too much of your time on it, but this kept our country tied up in court for years and years and years. We finally got out of court with a plan that would cut trees, save the environment and help communities in logging areas to go through economic transformation to diversify their economy. That is the right way to do this.

So let's go back and make this bill what it ought to be -- a deficit reduction bill that also takes care of Oklahoma City, the California earthquake, the terrorism threat, and reduces the deficit and keeps programs like School-to-Work in place. That is the proper way to do it.

Remember, we have two great deficits. It is true that for the first time in our history we let the budget deficit get out of hand. That is true. We are bringing it down. We've got to bring the budget to balance. That is true. But you can not do it by ignoring the fact that one of the reasons that we're hurting is that people aren't making enough money. And when they don't make much money, they don't pay much taxes and that also increases government deficits not just in Washington, but at the statehouse in Maryland, in the local school districts, in the local communities, in the local counties.

We have to attach both of these deficits together. And we can do it. This is a very great country, and this is not the biggest problem in the world. This is not the second world war; this is not the Great Depression; this is not the Civil War. We do not need to throw up our hands. We do not need to get into a shouting match about it. And we ought to be able to agree, just as we agreed on the goal of national security to win the Cold War, that we are going to win the war for the American Dream in the 21st century by getting rid of both of these deficits, the budget deficit and the education deficit. You have helped us by being here today.

Thank you and God bless you all.