

State of the Union 96

PHOTOCOPY
PRESERVATION

EDUCATION:

Putting the Lever of Opportunity in the Hands of Every American

Theme. We are in the midst of a great transition -- from the Cold-War industrial age of mass production in the 20th century to the information age of global networks in the 21st century. This transformation presents new challenges and offers unprecedented opportunity and freedom for every American. The skill, commitment, imagination, and cooperation of Americans working with their neighbors and colleagues holds the key to building a brighter future for our children, families and communities. Americans are willing to ask more of themselves and to do more for their families and neighbors; and education offers the lever of opportunity by which every American can continuously learn how to meet the challenges and to seize the rewards of this new age. We are challenging the nation to put this lever of opportunity directly in the hands of every American so they can take charge of their own destiny.

1. 21st Century Schools and 21st Century Skills for our Children. The Information Age is emerging all around us, giving us great entertainment on demand, riveting video games, instant access to the world's storehouse of knowledge, local and global networks for convenient commerce and on-going communication. We challenge America's businesses, teachers, parents and children all across the country to take these new technologies into schools and mold them into powerful new levers for learning. It's time for every community to join together to build the little red electronic schoolhouse of the 21st century that will enable all children to learn at school and at home the skills they need to thrive in the new information age. The four pillars upon which people in every community can join together to raise 21st century schools are:

- (1) connections to the worldwide networks of knowledge and discovery on the emerging information superhighways;
- (2) interactive, multi-media computers through which each student can learn, make mistakes, discover, analyze, communicate and solve problems, at his own pace and in her own style;
- (3) teachers and parents able to serve as navigators, guides and coaches for their students to use these new learning resources; and
- (4) educational software that is as engaging as the best video games and as enlightening as learning with expert tutors.

This electronic generation of kids is ready to lead this revolution in learning. For the first time ever every child can learn the skills they need to realize Archimedes' 2300 year-old vision: "Give me a lever long enough, and a fulcrum strong enough, and single-handed I can move the world." With the four pillars providing a firm foundation for the fulcrum of 21st century schools, the new skills that all children can learn will provide each with a lever long enough to move the world in the 21st century as far and as fast as their own imagination and drive permit. [Note.: We have a multi-media presentation that captures this vision in moving pictures, as well as words. Major elements of the private sector, parents and teachers, many states and communities are already preparing to join in answering this call.]

2. Information and Public School Choice. Pursuant to Goals 2000, states and communities all across the country are now developing and implementing high standards -- for safe and disciplined schools; high levels of achievement in math, science, reading, writing, and communication; capacity to solve new problems, to work cooperatively with peers, to become full citizens in the longest running and greatest democracy in the world. The ultimate goal is to enable all children to learn the skills they need to meet the challenges and to seize the rewards of the next century. It's time to take the next steps to realize this goal: First, we call upon each public school to report to parents the extent to which the performance of their students meets high standards and to publish the results by school in plain English. Second, we call upon states and localities to offer any parent who is dissatisfied with either their own child's or the school's performance the opportunity to choose a public school that will do better. Information, competition, and choice among public schools should be the rule, not the exception. It's the best way to assure that all of our children -- and all of our schools -- are prepared to meet the demands and to realize the promise of the next century. [Note: Charter schools are prime examples of such performance-based choice and competition -- the charter is contingent on the school meeting performance standards and the school's enrollment depends on the family's choice. But every public school should publish its goals and results so that parents can choose which school will best meet their own child's needs and aspirations.]

3. A G.I. Bill for America's Workers. Every American should have the opportunity to invest their own time, energy and commitment to learn the skills each chooses to get ahead. That's the way the G.I. Bill of Rights worked for America following World War II. It helped the nation make a successful transition from World War to Cold War by empowering a whole generation of Americans for the first time to make their own choices about college education and how best to build a brighter future for themselves and their families. As the nation embarks on the next great transition to a new information age at the dawn of the 21st century, that's why we challenged the Congress in December of 1994 to enact a new G.I. Bill for America's workers and students of all ages. We proposed to consolidate dozens of federal education and job-training programs and to put the resources and responsibility for learning new and rewarding skills directly in the hands of the individual; and we challenged Congress to provide a tax cut to persons who choose to invest in learning new skills for themselves or their children. We now call upon Congress to enact this bill to empower all Americans to learn and to apply the skills they choose to earn rising middle class prosperity.

That's also why we are fighting so hard in this budget debate to preserve full funding for more affordable and convenient student loans and scholarships that can be made directly by community colleges, 4-year schools and universities to students of all ages wherever they choose to enroll. We've demonstrated that we can balance the budget and put precious investments for learning new skills -- and our faith in the future -- directly in the hands of individual Americans. We should be confident their informed choices will provide the best ways to meet the challenges and to seize the rewards of the dawning of a new century. We call upon Congress to join with us in making this the bi-partisan common ground upon which we move forward together as a nation.