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**Remarks for Vice President Al Gore
Lifelong Learning Conference
Tuesday, November 18, 1997**

Thank you for having me here today -- to talk about our administration's commitment to lifelong learning, and to make some important new announcements about our efforts to ensure that every American worker can keep learning -- and earning -- for a lifetime.

Today, we face not only a new century, but a new economy. It is an economy driven by information, research, and technology. An economy that values the skills and productivity of our people above all else. An economy that holds out the promise of a better life for all Americans -- but only if we prepare them for it, and give everyone the tools to make the

Above all, that means that the next generation must be the best-educated in American history -- and that education can no longer stop when our students walk out of those schoolhouse doors.

Before I get into more detail about the importance of lifelong learning, I want to share a small parable -- to show that the seeds of today's knowledge-based economy were planted a long, long time ago.

Recently, thanks to a new book and TV documentary, many of us have been reading and watching the travels of Lewis and Clark.

Toward the end of their 6,000-mile journey of discovery, they were headed back toward St. Louis on the Missouri river -- their stock of supplies down nearly to nothing.

The exhausted expedition met fur trappers and explorers who were headed back up the Missouri, and whose boats were filled with supplies. With no hard goods to barter, the Lewis and Clark expedition got the supplies they needed by trading information -- about distance, geography, plant life, Indian tribes, elk and antelope, wind and weather. They found they had something very valuable to trade, and they also found that after they had sold that information to one traveler, they had no less to sell to the next.

Of course, that information was far from free. It was purchased with two-and-a-half years of painstaking research -- and many more years of intensive study in mapmaking, geography, and different aspects of plant and wildlife.

Many of the principles of gaining new knowledge are no different today. But what is different today is that the success of virtually all Americans in the new economy now depends on their ability to gain new knowledge and learn new skills. For example, a good job in a high-growth field almost certainly demands an understanding of information technology. That fact -- coupled with ever-accelerating advances in technology -- means that the vast majority of workers need to constantly learn new skills to have a strong future.

The Commission for a Nation of Lifelong Learners pointed out in its report that over the next decade, 75 percent of the current workforce will need significant retraining. And, sadly, the percentage of people who pursue retraining is lowest among those whose need is highest -- only 5% of high school dropouts and 15% of high school graduates, compared with 35% of college graduates and 50% of those with Masters degrees.

The urgent fact is that we are not now equipped to assist or encourage all our people in the pursuit of lifelong learning. We place tremendous emphasis on making sure that higher education is available to all our young people. This is important; it is vital that every American receive an education beyond high school.

That's why our balanced budget included the greatest single increase in helping people pay for college since the G.I. Bill fifty years ago -- making it possible, for the first time in history, for any American to attend college, regardless of financial means.

Opening the doors to college for all our young people is essential -- but still insufficient. It does not help the millions of Americans already in the workplace whose economic prospects depend heavily on what they will learn in the next few years. Nor does it assure that today's college students will have the lifelong learning opportunities they will need to advance in their careers.

One muscular employee of U.S. West described the need by saying: “When I was hired it was for the size of my coat, but now what matters is what’s under my hat.” We must give that man and others like him the tools he needs to make the most of what’s under his hat -- for the sake of those who live under his roof.

That’s why our administration fought for and won provisions in the balanced-budget bill that offer financial assistance to those pursuing lifelong learning. As a result, Americans of any age can now receive a “lifetime learning” tax credit of 20% of all educational costs up to \$5,000 a year. After the year 2000, the tax credit will apply to the first \$10,000.

We also pushed for and won an extension of Section 127, which will allow people to exclude for income tax purposes up to \$5,250 in college costs paid by their employer. Congress rejected our effort to include graduate education -- but with some lifelong learning on Capitol Hill, perhaps they'll come around. Meanwhile, this provision will take some of the financial burden of lifelong learning away from both employers and employees. And that will make a significant difference in the cost of some of the impressive programs going on today.

One example is the Alliance for Employee Growth and Development. Made up of AT&T, Communication Workers of America, the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, and Lucent Technologies -- this program has provided over 5 million hours of training to more than 100,000 workers. Just last year, 36% of eligible employees participated by taking courses at any one of more than 200 participating community colleges and universities. Courses are delivered via satellite, through computer-based programs, in lecture halls, and through self-paced learning. This arrangement was reached through collective bargaining agreements, and every three years since the program's inception in 1986, the companies and unions have agreed to renew and expand the program.

Another example is the “Next Step” program between Bell Atlantic, Communications Workers of America and community colleges in New York state. The one thousand students currently enrolled are pursuing a specially-tailored Associate’s degree in Applied Science. They are given one day off a week to attend class. The company pays their usual salary, and also pays for tuition, books, and lap-top computers. Upon graduation, employees receive a five percent salary hike. Last year, more than 200 students had a straight 4.0, and 72% were on the Dean’s List.

These are impressive programs, and I hope similarly successful efforts to promote lifelong learning take hold across the country.

But not everyone is fortunate enough to be employed by a progressive company with the foresight to invest in the training of its workforce. That's why today I am announcing new steps our Administration will take to encourage, support, and supplement successful lifelong learning programs.

First, we will continue to push for the G.I. Bill for Workers that Congress has repeatedly rejected -- to collapse the confusing tangle of federal job training programs into a single skill grant that a worker can use -- to get the training they need when and where they need it.

Second, I'm pleased to announce "America's Career Kit" -- a set of websites designed by the Department of Labor with the help of several states and communities that provide a desktop career advisor, 24 hours a day. Today, we are launching a website called America's Career InfoNet (www.acinet.org), that will provide an extensive library of career resources, including information on job opportunities, salaries, growth potential, and relevant training. In the next several months we will add another website, called "America's Learning Exchange." It will allow people to search for training programs that match their skills, interests, and career goals.

Together with the Job bank and the Talent Bank, which you heard about on Sunday, these four websites will represent the most comprehensive job hunting, skill-building, career-planning resource available anywhere.

Third, once individuals learn the kind of training they need, we are committed to making sure they can get it -- anytime, anywhere -- and we know that can be done through the use of 21st Century technology. Therefore, the President is asking the National Economic Council to lead a government-wide effort to look for ways to use new technology to expand access to education and training. Our goal is to promote a private market for these kinds of high-tech, high-quality training and educational programs.

The President is also directing all Federal agencies to strengthen their efforts to use emerging technologies to train agency employees.

Through these initiatives, we are committed to making sure that no barriers of money, information, or geography stand between willing workers and the training they need to advance in the workplace.

Finally, you noted in your report that, in February of this year, I expressed interest in working together to promote lifelong learning following the release of this report. I believe we should begin that work immediately.

I am pleased to announce that a major summit on lifelong learning will be held next year, where leaders from business, labor, higher education, government, and philanthropy can come together to make commitments that will help all Americans get access to quality lifelong learning. I look forward to taking a personal and active role in this summit, which will be organized by the Departments of Education, Labor, Commerce, and the Office of Personnel Management.

In closing, let me say that at its heart, lifelong learning is about more than dollars and cents. As Aristotle wrote in his *Ethics*, “The best and most pleasant life is the life of the intellect, since the intellect is in the fullest sense the human being.”

Human beings are born to learn. There is no matching the satisfaction and exhilaration of learning -- whether it is a triumphant two-year old tying a shoe, an adventurous eighty-year old sending an E-mail, or even a Vice President who tries to balance a hectic schedule with the latest readings in science and technology.

The point is, lifelong learning is essential to good living, as well as a good standard of living. We must do more to help all Americans pursue lifelong learning -- for their sake, for the sake of their families, and for the sake of our nation. I look forward to working with you as we pursue this goal, in partnership, to build the future we deserve.