

**NLWJC - Kagan**

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**Women's Issues-Paid Leave/UI  
Regulation**

Women's issues -  
paid leave/UI

May 22, 1999

## GRAMBLING STATE UNIVERSITY COMMENCEMENT SPEECH

**DATE:** May 23, 1999  
**LOCATION:** Eddie Robinson Stadium  
Grambling State University  
**EVENT TIME:** 9:15am – 10:30am  
**FROM:** Bruce Reed

### I. PURPOSE

To make remarks on the challenges facing families in the new economy. You will announce two new proposals to make leave more affordable for American workers, and release a new report that examines the “time crunch” that parents increasingly feel as they struggle to balance their responsibilities at home and at work.

### II. BACKGROUND

You will be addressing an audience of over 20,000 students, faculty, graduates and their families, and community members. Grambling State University has a student population of 5,770, and approximately 500 are graduating this year. The student body is 83% African-American, and 58% of students are between the ages of 20-25. Approximately 95% of students receive financial aid, with 66% receiving PELL grants in 1998. The university is ranked 5<sup>th</sup> among all American colleges and universities in conferring baccalaureate degrees in all disciplines to African-Americans, and 1<sup>st</sup> in conferring bachelor or science degrees to African-Americans in the field of Computer and Information Science.

Grambling State University is a public, coeducational, historically black university, and was founded in 1901 as a relief school for black farmers. At the request of the Farmers' Relief Association of Ruston, LA, Dr. Booker T. Washington sent Charles P. Adams from Tuskegee Institute to establish the Colored Industrial and Agricultural School of Lincoln Parish in 1901. In 1905 the school moved to its current location, and was renamed the North Louisiana Agricultural and Industrial Institute. The school expanded over the years, and was ultimately granted university status in 1974, at which time it adopted its present name. The Grambling State University motto is “The Place Where Everyone is Somebody”.

In April the Board of Supervisors of the University of Louisiana System approved a request to confer upon you the honorary degree, *Doctor of Laws*. This honorary degree will be presented to you during the commencement ceremony.

At today's commencement you will make the following announcements:

**Working to Make Parental Leave More Affordable.** A 1996 study by the Commission on Family and Medical Leave found that loss of wages was the most significant barrier to parents taking advantage of unpaid leave following the birth or adoption of a child. Today, you will direct the Secretary of Labor to propose new regulations and model state legislation to enable states to develop innovative ways of using the Unemployment Insurance (UI) system to support parents taking leave to care for a newborn or adopted child. Several states recently have asked the Administration whether they could use the UI system for this purpose consistent with federal law. The new regulations will authorize this expansion of the UI system, thereby allowing states that wish to use unemployment insurance to assist new parents to put their plans into effect.

**Enabling Federal Workers to Take Paid Leave to Care for Sick Family Members.**

In an effort to set an example for all employers, you will also direct the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) to revise its government-wide regulations to allow federal employees to use up to 12 weeks of accrued sick leave each year to care for a spouse, son, daughter, or parent with a "serious health condition," as that term is defined for the purpose of applying the Family and Medical Leave Act. Currently, the amount of sick leave that can be used to care for a family member who is ill is limited to 13 days each year for most federal employees. By enabling federal workers to use the sick leave they have earned, according to conditions established by the FMLA, this measure will remove a significant barrier to caring for a family member with a serious health condition. You will also direct the OPM to establish an Interagency Family Friendly Workplace Working Group to develop, promote, and evaluate federal family friendly workplace initiatives. You have previously taken other actions to ensure that the federal government is a model employer, including: allowing federal employees to donate annual leave to other employees; expanding flexible family-friendly work arrangements, such as job sharing, career part-time employment, alternative work schedules, telecommuting, and satellite work locations; and directing improvements in the quality of federally sponsored child care.

**A New Study on the Amount of Time Available for Families.** You will release a report by your Council of Economic Advisers (CEA) today that details the factors that have led to decreased amounts of time available for parents to spend with their children. The report, *Families and the Labor Market, 1969-1999: Analyzing the "Time Crunch,"* demonstrates that the increase in hours mothers spend in paid work, combined with the shift toward single-parent families, has resulted in families experiencing an average decrease of 22 hours a week (14 percent) in time that parents spend with their children. The report concludes that the increased time at work among parents requires policy-makers to seek new ways to promote strong families, including greater flexibility in paid

work hours, more affordable child care, better support for families with low-wage earning parents, and methods for encouraging two-parent families to form and stay together.

**Advancing An Agenda To Help Parents Balance Their Responsibilities At Home And At Work.** In your balanced budget request, you put forward a bold agenda to provide families with greater tools to meet their responsibilities at home and at work. This agenda includes: an historic initiative to make child care better, safer, and more affordable for working families; a tripling of our investment in after-school programs through the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Center program; a new tax credit to help Americans struggling with long-term care costs; and proposals to expand the Family and Medical Leave law to cover more workers and allow leave for more parental activities, including parent-teacher conferences and routine doctor's visits.

### III. PARTICIPANTS

#### Stage Participants:

Secretary Rodney Slater

Senator Mary Landrieu (D-LA)

Representative William Jefferson (D-LA)

State Senator Randy Ewing

State Representative Pinkie Wilkerson

E. Joseph Sovoie, Louisiana Commissioner of Higher Education

Dr. Eddie Robinson, Sr., Retired GSU Football Coach

Doug Williams, GSU Head Football Coach and Super Bowl MVP

Members of the University of LA Board of Supervisors, Board of Regents, and Southern University Board of Supervisors

Grambling State University Administrators

Grambling State University "Golden Reunion Graduates" (27)

#### Program Participants:

Mayor John Williams

Reverend E. Edward Jones, President, National Baptist Convention of America

Bobby Jindal, Acting President, University of Louisiana System

Dr. Steve Favors, President, Grambling State University

*This is Dr. Favors' first year as president, and this is his first commencement at the university. He served previously as vice president of student affairs and athletic director at Howard University.*

Tony Eason, Jr., President, Grambling State University Student Government

Martha Fondel, Miss Grambling State University

### IV. PRESS PLAN

Open Press.

## V. SEQUENCE OF EVENTS

- **YOU** will meet approximately 12 Grambling State University faculty and students.
- **YOU** will be announced onto the stage, accompanied by President Steve Favors.
- The National Anthem will be performed.
- Reverend E. Edward Jones will deliver the invocation.
- Mayor John Williams will deliver a greeting.
- Bobby Jindal will make brief remarks.
- Tony Eason, Jr. will make brief remarks.
- Martha Fondel will make brief remarks.
- The Grambling State University Marching Band will perform a musical selection.
- President Steve Favors will make brief remarks and present **YOU** with an Honorary Doctor of Law.
- **YOU** will make remarks and depart.

## VI. REMARKS

To be provided by speechwriting.

## VI. ATTACHMENT

- Council of Economic Advisers' Report *Families and the Labor Market, 1969-1999: Analyzing the "Time Crunch"* Executive Summary

**PRESIDENT CLINTON: HELPING PARENTS  
MEET THEIR RESPONSIBILITIES AT HOME AND AT WORK**

May 23, 1999

Today, in a commencement speech at Grambling State University, President Clinton announced new steps to help workers meet their responsibilities to their jobs, and their more important responsibilities to their families. The President put forward two new proposals to make leave more affordable for American workers. In addition, he released a new report that examines the "time crunch" that parents increasingly feel as they struggle to balance their responsibilities at home and at work.

**Working to Make Parental Leave More Affordable.** A 1996 study by the Commission on Family and Medical Leave found that loss of wages was the most significant barrier to parents taking advantage of unpaid leave following the birth or adoption of a child. Today, President Clinton directed the Secretary of Labor to propose new regulations and model state legislation to enable states to develop innovative ways of using the Unemployment Insurance (UI) system to support parents taking leave to care for a newborn or adopted child. Several States recently have asked the Administration whether they could use the UI system for this purpose consistent with federal law. The new regulations will authorize this expansion of the UI system, thereby allowing states that wish to use unemployment insurance to assist new parents to put their plans into effect.

**Enabling Federal Workers to Take Paid Leave to Care for Sick Family Members.** In an effort to set an example for all employers, President Clinton also today directed the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) to revise its government-wide regulations to allow federal employees to use up to 12 weeks of accrued sick leave each year to care for a spouse, son, daughter, or parent with a "serious health condition," as that term is defined for the purpose of applying the Family and Medical Leave Act. Currently, the amount of sick leave that can be used to care for a family member who is ill is limited to 13 days each year for most federal employees. By enabling federal workers to use more of the sick leave they have earned, according to conditions established by the FMLA, this measure will remove a significant barrier to caring for an ill family member. The President also has directed the OPM to establish an Interagency Family Friendly Workplace Working Group to develop, promote, and evaluate federal family-friendly workplace initiatives. The President previously has taken other actions to ensure that federal government is a model employer, including: allowing federal employees to donate annual leave to other employees; expanding flexible family-friendly work arrangements, such as job sharing, career part-time employment, alternative work schedules, telecommuting, and satellite work locations; and directing improvements in the quality of federally sponsored child care.

**A New Study on the Amount of Time Available for Families.** The President released a report by his Council of Economic Advisers (CEA) today that details the factors that have led to decreased amounts of time available for parents to spend with their children. The report, *Families and the Labor Market, 1969-1999: Analyzing the "Time Crunch,"* demonstrates that the increase in hours mothers spend in paid work, combined with the shift toward single-parent

families, has resulted in families experiencing an average decrease of 22 hours a week (14 percent) in time that parents spend with their children. The report concludes that the increased time at work among parents requires policy-makers to seek new ways to promote strong families, including greater flexibility in paid work hours, more affordable child care, better support for families with low-wage earning parents, and methods for encouraging two-parent families to form and stay together.

**Advancing An Agenda To Help Parents Balance Their Responsibilities At Home And At Work.** In his balanced budget request, the President put forward a bold agenda to provide families with greater tools to meet their responsibilities at home and at work. This agenda includes: an historic initiative to make child care better, safer, and more affordable for working families; a tripling of our investment in after-school programs through the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Center program; a new tax credit to help Americans struggling with long-term care costs; and proposals to expand the Family and Medical Leave law to cover more workers and allow leave for more parental activities, including parent-teacher conferences and routine doctor's visits.

**GRAMBLING COMMENCEMENT SPEECH**  
**INTERNAL Q&A**  
**May 23, 1999**

**DOL DIRECTIVE**

**Q. What is this Directive to the Department of Labor?**

A. Today, President Clinton directed the Secretary of Labor to propose new regulations and model state legislation to enable states to develop innovative ways of using the Unemployment Insurance (UI) system to support parents taking leave to care for a newborn or adopted child. States today have significant flexibility in designing their own UI systems. Four states this year have introduced legislation to provide UI benefits to workers on some form of leave, and others have done so in prior years. These states have asked the Administration whether they could use the UI system for this purpose consistent with Federal law. The new regulations that DOL will propose will authorize the expansion of the UI system to assist new parents, thereby allowing states that wish to use unemployment insurance in this way to do so.

**Q. Why are you issuing this directive?**

A. The President believes that we all must think of creative ways to enable parents to meet their responsibilities at home and at work – and to enable parents to take leave when they need to. Making leave more affordable for workers is a critical step toward that goal. The President's FY 2000 balanced budget includes a new \$10 million research and evaluation fund to look at ways to make leave more affordable for workers and to work with states that are interested in pursuing that goal. This proposal provides states with one way to break down the cost barrier to new parents taking leave. We know from the Commission on Family and Medical Leave study that loss of wages was the most significant barrier to parents taking advantage of unpaid leave following the birth or adoption of a child.

**Q. Isn't this new benefit unfair to employers who are taxed to pay for this system of Unemployment Insurance? Why should employers have to pay for paid parental leave?**

A. States may believe that using the UI system to provide benefits to workers following birth or adoption is a logical application of the unemployment insurance program and a good way to enable working parents to meet all their responsibilities. It is worth noting that today all states provide benefits to workers who are laid off but whom the employer expects to recall. Providing benefits to

workers who need to take time off following birth or adoption but want and intend to go back to work is in many respects analogous.

**Q. Is this an unfunded mandate to the states?**

A. No. Participation in this program will be wholly voluntary by the states. The new regulation will simply allow states that wish to use Unemployment Insurance to assist new parents to implement their plans to do so.

**Q. What's your authority for advancing this proposal? Doesn't it require legislation?**

A. The Department of Labor (DOL) has the authority to determine how states can structure, and for what purposes they can use, their Unemployment Insurance programs. Four states have asked for DOL guidance in this area, and DOL will work with them in the rulemaking process.

**Q. When will individuals be able to receive benefits?**

A. That is difficult to predict. The Department must first issue regulations and model state legislation, and states must then change their own laws.

**Q. Who would qualify for the new benefits?**

A. The President has directed the Secretary to enable states to provide these benefits to parents of newborns and newly-adopted children, who also meet State unemployment insurance law requirements.

**Q. Will this effort cover the same people as the Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA)?**

A. In the process of rulemaking, DOL will address this issue.

**Q. If this new benefit was available to workers not covered by the FMLA, could they get fired for taking leave?**

A. This is a hypothetical case, since the DOL has not issued its regulation. However, if the benefit were available to workers not covered by the FMLA, they would not be guaranteed job-protected leave.

**Q. Why is the proposal limited only to parents of newborn or newly-adopted children rather than extending, for example, to individuals attending ill family members?**

A. In a 1996 study conducted by the Commission on Family and Medical Leave, lost wages was the most significant barrier to parents taking advantage of unpaid leave after the birth or adoption of a child. Also, maternity leave tends to be unpaid or partially paid, while all other types of leave are significantly more likely to be fully paid.

**Q. How long can these new benefits be collected?**

A. In the process of rulemaking, DOL will address this issue. The duration is not expected to exceed 12 weeks, which is the length of leave protected under the FMLA.

**Q. How many states can participate in the program?**

Any states that wish to will be able to take advantage of the President's directive.

**Q. Why are we doing the rule at this time?**

A. Interest has been shown this year in four State legislatures – Maryland, Massachusetts, Washington, and Vermont – as well as many others during the last two years. This rule will allow us to accommodate known interest and to encourage other states to consider similar proposals.

**Q. Four states have introduced legislation that would pay all or some of these individuals. How does the proposal affect them?**

A. The Department of Labor will work with these states in the course of issuing its regulation so that the states will be in a position to implement, at the first possible opportunity, appropriately structured plans to use UI to assist new parents.

**Q. Will this proposal be “experience-rated,” meaning that employers pay into the system based on their workers’ use of it?**

A. The Department of Labor will address this issue more fully in its rulemaking process. We expect that the proposal will spread costs broadly throughout the system, rather than on the particular industries or companies whose employees must use this benefit.

**Q. Who is covered by the unemployment insurance system?**

A. Specific qualifying rules vary from State to State, but individuals must generally show a certain attachment to the workforce in both length of employment and amount of earnings.

**Q. How does the unemployment insurance program work?**

A. The unemployment insurance program provides partial wage replacement to workers who are unemployed. It is authorized under the Social Security Act and the Federal Unemployment Tax Act but operates under laws specific to each state. These state laws determine how workers qualify for benefits within federal guidelines. States would need to amend their laws to participate in the program proposed by the President.

**Q. Why use the unemployment insurance program for this purpose?**

A. States interested in paying unemployment insurance to parents on leave following birth or adoption believe this is a logical application of the unemployment insurance program. All states already pay unemployment insurance to workers who are laid off but whom the employer expects to recall. Providing paid leave for employees who have just become parents and need to take some time away from the job is analogous to this and other current uses of the program.

**Q. How many people will benefit from this proposal?**

A. That is difficult to estimate. The number of people who benefit, of course, depends on how many states elect to participate in this program. Across the country, we know that there were over 3.3 million women with children under 1 in 1998; 57.9 percent of these mothers were in the workforce [1.9 m]. Depending on the design of the programs, if all 50 states passed such legislation, as many as 6 million parents a year could be eligible for assistance.

**Q. What will be the average benefit for a parent?**

A. The Department of Labor will address this issue in its rulemaking process. Today, a typical unemployed worker receiving benefits gets \$200 a week.

**Q. What will be the cost of providing this new benefit?**

A. It is premature to estimate, as the Department of Labor has not designed the parameters of the program. Since participation in this program by the states will be wholly voluntary, the cost will depend on the number of states that participate.

**Q. Is cost really an obstacle for parents who want to take leave following a birth or adoption?**

A. According to the Family and Medical Leave Commission, 65% of those who needed but did not take leave to care for their newborn or newly adopted or foster child said they did not take leave because they could not afford to. Cost was, by far, the biggest reason that they did not take leave.

## **OPM DIRECTIVE**

**Q. How is the new sick leave policy for federal employees different from the current policy on using sick leave for family care purposes?**

A. Currently, most Federal employees may use a total of up to 13 days of sick leave for family care purposes, and then must use either annual leave, donated annual leave, or leave without pay, even when they still have sick leave available. The revised regulations will permit employees caring for a spouse, son, daughter, or parent with a serious health condition to use a total of up to 12 weeks of sick leave for this purpose – the amount of unpaid leave allotted for these purposes under the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA).

**Q. Won't this proposal encourage the use of sick leave and therefore result in increased costs to the Government?**

A. The cost of this program will be very small (about \$60 million annually, across all the agencies). This is primarily because only a small percentage of the Federal workforce will need to use large amounts of sick leave for family care purposes; we anticipate that only 0.5 percent of the Federal workforce will use the maximum amount of sick leave. Also, Federal workers only will be able to use the sick leave they have accrued over time for this purpose.

**Q. Doesn't this policy invite abuse of the leave system?**

A. No. Under the new sick leave policy, the requirements for using paid sick leave to care for a spouse, son, daughter, or parent with a serious health condition will be the same as the requirements for using unpaid leave for this purpose under the FMLA. Generally, an employee must give 30 days advance notice of his or her intent to use FMLA leave, if practicable. In addition, an agency may require an employee to provide medical certification for a serious health condition. If necessary, a second or third opinion from a health care provider may be requested.

**Q. What other actions has this Administration taken to improve the quality of workplace arrangements and family life for Federal employees?**

A. Today's action builds on a variety of initiatives the Administration has undertaken to make the workplace more family-friendly. This Administration has led the way in introducing new work and family initiatives for the Federal workforce.

- In February 1993, the President signed the Family and Medical Leave Act providing Federal employees with 12 weeks of job-protected unpaid leave each year to care for a newborn or adopted child, to attend to their own health needs or to care for a seriously ill parent, child or spouse.

- On October 8, the President signed the Federal Employees Leave Sharing Act, which allows Federal employees to donate annual leave to other employees who have personal or family medical emergencies and who have exhausted their own leave.
- On July 11, 1994, the President issued a directive to Heads of Executive Departments and Agencies, calling for expanded use of “flexible family-friendly work arrangements, including job sharing; career part-time employment; alternative work schedules; telecommuting and satellite work locations.”
- In February 1995, the President issued Executive Order 12953, calling upon the Federal government to become a model employer in promoting and facilitating the establishment and enforcement of child support.
- On June 16, 1995, President Clinton directed Heads of Executive Departments and Agencies to review all of their programs, policies, and initiatives pertaining to families to ensure that they are father-friendly.
- On June 21, 1996, President Clinton reaffirmed his commitment to creating a family-friendly workplace by issuing a second memorandum to Heads of Executive Departments and Agencies to expand their programs and report back to him.
- On March 10, 1998, President Clinton issued a memorandum to Heads of Executive Departments and Agencies, “Steps to Improve Federally Sponsored Child Care” which directed the General Services Administration, Department of Defense, and OPM to take improved the quality and affordability of Federally sponsored child care centers.

## **CEA REPORT**

### **Q. What does the Report say?**

- A. The President released a report by his Council of Economic Advisers that details the factors that have led to decreased amounts of time available for parents to spend with their children. The Report demonstrates that the increase in hours mothers spend in paid work, combined with the shift toward single-parent families, has resulted in families experiencing an average decrease of 22 hours a week (14 percent) in time that parents can spend with their children since 1969. The Report concludes that the increased time at work among parents requires policy-makers to seek new ways to promote strong families, including greater flexibility in paid work hours, more affordable child care, better support for

families with low-wage earning parents, and methods for encouraging two-parent families to form and stay together.

**Q. What about the burden on women?**

A. Virtually all of the increase in total hours families spend on paid work has come from increases in women's hours. While annual hours of paid work by all wives increased greatly – by 576 hours, or 93 percent – husbands' hours of paid work decreased slightly from 1969 to 1996. Employed women now spend over one third less time on child care and household tasks than women without paid jobs, but still have 25 to 30 percent less free time.

**Q. Do single parents have a different experience?**

A. The Report shows that the share of families with a single parent has expanded greatly since 1969. Single parents have half as much total time as two parents have and typically have less than half as much potential income. The rising number of single parents has increased the proportion of families that are “cash-strapped” and “time-poor.”

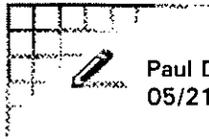
**Q. What does the Report say about changes in the amount of time available for children?**

A. Although the evidence on time use within families is limited and needs further study, the Report shows that an increase in work from 1969 to 1996 has produced a reduction in the time available for parents to spend with children. The increase in hours mothers spend in paid work, combined with the shift toward single-parent families, resulted in families on average experiencing a decrease of 22 hours a week (14 percent) in time available outside of paid work that parents could spend with their children.

**Q. What does the Report recommend?**

A. The Report suggests that policy-makers must seek to promote policies that help families in this challenging environment. These policies include flexibility in paid work hours, available and affordable child care, ways to support the earnings of families with low-wage earning parents, and proposals to encourage two-parent families to form and stay together.

Women's issue -  
Paid Leave/Ut regulation



Paul D. Glastris  
05/21/99 11:29:55 PM

Record Type: Record

To: See the distribution list at the bottom of this message

cc:

Subject: final gambling

Draft 5/21/99 10:00 pm

Glastris/Shih

**PRESIDENT WILLIAM J. CLINTON  
"NEW TOOLS FOR PARENTS IN THE NEW ECONOMY"  
COMMENCEMENT ADDRESS  
GRAMBLING STATE UNIVERSITY  
GRAMBLING, LOUISIANA  
MAY 23, 1999**

Acknowledgments: Rev. Edwards; Mayor John Williams; Grambling student gov. pres. Tony Easton Jr.; "Miss Grambling" Martha Fondel; Grambling pres. Steve Favors; Sen. Mary Landrieu; Rep. William Jefferson;

When I heard that I'd been invited to Grambling State University, there wasn't much discussion about whether or not I would be here today. I told my staff in Washington, a place where everybody thinks they're somebody, that I wanted to go to "A Place Where Everybody is Somebody." [*school motto*] And I was not about to miss a chance to see the "Best Band in the Land" -- the Grambling State Marching Tigers -- play without having to buy a ticket to the Super Bowl [*they have played in four*].

It is an honor to join the last Grambling class of the 20th Century on this very important day in your lives. In so many ways, the story of this fine institution embodies the African American experience in our 20th century. In 1901, no public school in this part of Louisiana would welcome an African-American student into its classrooms. But the visionary farmers of this community -- the children and grandchildren of slaves -- were determined to give their children the education, the pride, and the power to rise above bigotry and injustice. They raised some money and wrote to Booker T. Washington, asking him to send a teacher to help build a school in these piney woods.

Out of that determination and vision, Grambling has grown into a university for the 21st Century. This beautiful campus has nurtured some of America's best educators and lawyers, pastors and public servants, nurses and business leaders. Of course the NFL recruits here -- thanks to your legendary coach Eddie Robinson and his successor, Superbowl MVP

Doug Williams. But America's top technology firms recruit here, too, because they know that Grambling State confers more Computer and Information Science degrees to African-Americans than any other university in the nation.

You join a proud tradition and I congratulate each and every one of you. This day marks a great achievement. You have gained knowledge that will enrich you for the rest of your lives and made friends who will stand by you the rest of your lives. Through long hours in the classroom and late nights in the library, through moments of self-doubt and triumph, you have gained the prize: an education that will help you succeed in one of the most exciting times in human history.

And I congratulate and honor your parents, your grandparents, your aunts and uncles, all those who had a hand in raising you. They should be proud not only of you, but of themselves. To raise a child from infancy to college graduation is no small feat. I understand that one of the most beloved Presidents of Grambling, Ralph Waldo Emerson Jones, would often say to his students, "When you go home, be sure to kiss everybody, including the mule. Because the mule is the one who pulls the plow and keeps the family going." Well, I'm not asking you to kiss any mules today, but I am asking each of you to thank the people who kept your families going.

People like Joyce Gaines of Vallejo, California. Even through the pain of five ruptured disks in her back, Joyce worked three jobs, commuting 200 miles a day to put her daughter Tiaesha [Tie - EE - sha] through Grambling. Today Tiaesha is graduating with a degree in Sociology and plans to open a home for abused children. People like James and Lillie Bedford of Shreveport. James is a plumber; Lillie is a cook. Both took on extra work at night and on weekends to help their youngest son Terrence pay for college. Lillie was a student at Grambling back in the 1950s, but she had to leave before graduating. Now Terrence is the second of seven Bedford children to earn a Grambling degree—and he's the senior class president. It's been said that to have a child is to have your heart go walking outside your body. I think James and Lillie Bedford know that feeling today.

Stories like these remind us of what Americans can achieve when they set their minds on reaching a high goal. But they also remind us of the hard work it takes to raise a child right, especially in our demanding modern economy. This spring, in commencement addresses to the class of '99, I will be speaking about how this bold new economy is transforming virtually every facet of our lives. Next month, at the University of Chicago, I will talk about how we must put a human face on the dynamic but sometimes disruptive international marketplace. And today, I want to talk about how we as a nation must respond to the new challenges facing families in the new economy. We must reshape our institutions in ways that give parents more time with their children. No government can raise a child. Mothers and fathers do. But we have a duty to help parents -- to give them the tools they need to meet their responsibilities at home and work; and to pass on their values to their children.

It may seem a million years away to those of you graduating today, but soon, most of you will become parents. When that happens, you will look at the clock on the wall in a

whole different way. Today, you may think nothing of being out with your friends or at the library working at nine at night. But soon enough, you will want to be home at nine at night, putting your children to bed. We must have an economy that will give you the chance to do that.

The class of '99 is entering an era of unparalleled opportunity and possibility. We have created one of the strongest economies in American history, with more than 18 million new jobs since 1993. We have achieved the lowest African-American unemployment and poverty rates on record, and the highest African-American homeownership rates in history. We have opened the doors of college to more and more Americans, with increased Pell grants, Hope Scholarships and lower-cost student loans—tools many of you have used to finance your educations. And we are now seeing throughout our economy an explosion of productivity powered by technology – from the Internet that links offices around the world to the computers used to track warehouse inventory. America has a tremendous capacity for more growth, greater investment, higher salaries, and even faster technological innovation. With your diplomas in hand, you will have the opportunity to shape that new era, to lead lives of greater accomplishment and affluence than your parents ever dreamed of.

But as your parents can attest, we still have far to go before we have fully adapted to the demands of this new era. In our modern economy, companies compete not just with others down the street, but with firms across the globe. To stay competitive, they have had to produce more with fewer employees -- and the pace of work has picked up. Jobs today feel like two jobs. And to make ends meet, many people have had to take on yet another job. Working parents are feeling enormous stress -- and they are bringing that stress home with them. This will only get worse as the Class of '99 moves through its careers—unless we act today.

I have asked the President's Council of Economic Advisers to study the sweeping changes the modern economy has brought to our families. It has been said that if every economist on Earth were laid end to end they still wouldn't reach a conclusion. But on this question a team of America's top economists has reached a conclusion, one that confirms our common sense and common experience. They found that because more and more parents are working outside the home, they have less time for their children. The percentage of married mothers in the workforce has nearly doubled in a generation, from 38 percent in 1969 to 68 percent in 1996. To African Americans, that is nothing new. African American mothers have always had to work outside the home. Today, all Americans are experiencing challenges African Americans have always known.

Because more mothers are working outside the home, and because the number of single parent families has grown, parents in the average family have 22 fewer hours per week to spend at home. That's nearly one full day less time per week for parents to devote to their children.

We as a nation must find a way to give some of that time back.

The vast majority of today's parents are doing everything they can to give their

children whole and happy childhoods. But no matter how hard they try, they worry that it is still not enough. They worry that waking up early and staying up late to make time for a child might not be enough, when that child still has to go home alone to an empty house after school. They worry that all those Sunday morning sermons about a world of love might not be enough, when the movies their children watch, the music they listen to, the video games they play show a world of hate and violence. They worry that all those nights working overtime to buy a computer so that a child can visit some of the world's finest libraries on the Internet might not be enough, when that same Internet can also lead them to recipes for pipe bombs and explosives.

One of the gravest tasks I've had to perform as President is comforting families who have lost loved ones to senseless violence. Last week, Hillary and I visited with the students and families of Columbine High School in Colorado. I came away more certain than ever that as we work to strengthen our gun laws, we must also work to strengthen our families.

When America last experienced a time like today -- a period of sweeping technological and wrenching social change -- our government acted. In the previous century, America moved from farm to factory. Families migrated to cities, husbands went to work in factories, and wives were left alone in cramped apartments, their children roaming the streets or, worse, toiling in dangerous factories. Alarmed by the condition in the cities, America responded with big, practical solutions -- labor unions, settlement houses, child labor laws, and universal elementary education. America made the industrial age safe for families. Today, we must make the information age safe for families.

The modern economy poses four great challenges for families.

The greatest and most obvious of these is time. In our round-the-world, round-the-clock economy, there just don't seem to be enough hours in the day for parents to do everything they need to at home and at work. I am proud that the first bill I signed into law was the Family and Medical Leave Act. Since 1993, millions of Americans have used it to take up to 12 weeks of unpaid leave to care for a newborn or a sick relative without losing their jobs. The current law, however, meets just a fraction of the need. Too many people and too many family obligations are not covered. And too many families cannot take advantage of the law at all because they simply cannot survive without their paychecks.

We must think bigger. On the eve of the 21st Century, let us set a goal that all working Americans can take the time they need to care for their families without losing the income they need to support their families.

Achieving this goal will require a significant shift in how our nation helps families succeed at home and at work. It will demand enormous thought, creativity -- and a willingness to experiment. It must be done in a way that gives families flexibility and promotes a dynamic and growing economy.

Today, using my executive authority as President, I am taking important steps toward

this goal. I am directing the Office of Personnel Management to allow all federal workers to use the sick leave they have earned to take time off to care for sick family members. Currently, the most sick leave a worker can use in these cases is 13 days. With the new policy I am proposing today, federal employees will be able to take up to 12 weeks paid sick leave to nurse an ailing child or parent back to health.

Just as the federal government was the first major employer to desegregate its workplaces, today, our government can blaze a path toward paid family leave that other employers can follow. If every company in America that offers sick leave to its workers adopted the policy we are adopting today, half of all American workers would have this important benefit for their families.

We must find other creative new ways to help more Americans use benefits they have worked for to finance the time off they need for their families. Some states have asked the federal government if it would be possible to try a bold idea: Allow workers who have earned unemployment insurance coverage to collect payments while they are on leave caring for a newborn or a newly-adopted child. This is a very promising idea. Today, I am directing the Secretary of Labor to put forth a rule that will allow states to offer paid leave to new mothers and fathers. We can do this in ways that preserve the fiscal soundness of the unemployment insurance system and promote economic growth. Those first few months with a newborn are precious. No parent should have to miss them.

I also challenge Congress to do its part. I have proposed expanding family leave to cover more workers and more parental responsibilities. Congress should act on this proposal. Parents should not have to fear a boss' wrath because they left work to take a child to the doctor. They should not have to call in sick to attend a parent teacher conference.

The second challenge parents face in the modern economy is finding affordable, high-quality child care. Low-income families spend up to a quarter of their income on child care, and studies show that only one in seven child care centers are of good quality. I am supporting child care subsidies and tax credits, better training for caregivers and stronger enforcement of safety standards. And I challenge businesses to do their part by helping their own workers find and afford quality child care.

Today, millions of working parents start eyeing the clock every day at three in the afternoon, wondering if their children have made it safely back from school, and wondering how they will fare, at home alone. The hours after the schoolbell rings and before parents come home from work are a perilous time for children, the time they are most tempted to try drugs and alcohol, and most likely to become victims of a crime. That is why I have called for tripling our investment in quality after school care. I challenge school districts all across America to unlock their empty classrooms in the late afternoons and fill them with the sounds of children playing and reciting their multiplication tables.

The third challenge parents face in the modern economy is that they are physically separated from their children for longer and longer periods of time. We can close that

distance by bringing back an old idea: that children can be with parents when they work. I have experienced the benefits of this myself. When I was a boy, living with my widowed mother and her parents in Hope, Arkansas, I spent many happy hours in my grandfather's tiny grocery store. I'd watch him with his customers, black and white, and usually poor. He'd give credit to whoever needed it, and they always paid him back. In that little family business, I absorbed lessons and values that have stayed with me all my life.

As a father, I have had the privilege of living, as it were, "above the store," first in the Governor's Mansion, then in the White House. I can "commute" from my office to the family dinner table in about three minutes when the lights are with me. So I challenge more of America's employers to bring workers and their children closer together during the day, by allowing employees to telecommute -- that is, work from home with a modem. I challenge employers to open more on-site child care centers, and I support tax breaks to help them do so. And I challenge employers to team up with school districts to build public schools at worksites. Dozens of companies have already built such innovative public schools and I have called for a new federal effort to encourage more of them. Employees can carve out more time for their children by enrolling them in these workplace schools. They can commute to work together in the mornings, do homework on the ride home at night, even have lunch together.

The fourth great challenge that parents face in the modern economy is cultural. The new economy has enriched our lives with lower-priced electronic gear and a growing variety of media entertainment. But too often, TV, radio, and the Internet bombard our children with images and ideas that no parent would ever want them to see or learn. We need tools that can protect free speech but also give parents more control over what their children see and read and hear. Under the leadership of Vice President Al Gore, those tools are now being crafted. Soon, half of all TV sets sold in America will come with V-chips: devices parents can use to screen out sex, violence, or any program they don't want their children to see. And soon, with just a click of the mouse, parents will be able to make offensive web-sites off-limits to their children.

But the entertainment industry must do its part. I challenge the industry to stop showing guns in any ads children might see, to enforce their movie rating systems more strictly; and to determine whether that system is allowing children to see too much gratuitous violence.

If we provide these tools -- to screen out bad influences, to bring home and work closer, to improve child care, to spend more time at home -- we can help working parents succeed at the most important job of all: the job of raising children.

It is the government's responsibility to make these tools available. But is the responsibility of parents to use them. More working parents must take advantage of tools already available. And all across American society, we must get serious about putting our children first.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. once wrote, "It is quite easy for me to think of a God of love mainly because I grew up in a family where love was central and loving relationships were ever present." I hope and pray that the Class of 1999 will have the chance to build those ever-present relationships with their children.

To raise your children well, you will have to make many sacrifices. But then, your parents made many sacrifices for you. I want all of you to take a minute to think of how you got to this day. How many of you would have made it if it weren't for your families? If it weren't for the precious hours your mom or dad found between shifts to help you with your homework, or read you a story. If it weren't for mornings your mother rose at the crack of dawn to go to work so that she could be home when you got back from school. If it weren't for the hugs and home-cooked meals that conveyed more powerfully than words, unconditional love, support and faith. Your parents have worked and sacrificed. Ask them today: "Was it worth it?"

Until you watch your own child graduate from school, you may never know just how proud your parents are today. But let me just add that all America is proud today.

Congratulations.

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