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**Education Event
The White House
January 21, 1999**

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Remarks by First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton
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Good morning, and welcome to the White House. It is a great pleasure for the President and I to have you here this morning for this important subject and these announcements, and to be joined by Secretary Riley, and also to have so many members of Congress with us. I want to mention the members who are here and say that our two senators, Senator Kennedy and Senator Inouye, will have to excuse themselves shortly, but I am very pleased that they both could be here. They've been long-time supporters and advocates for quality education.

We're also pleased that we could have joining with us from the House of Representatives, Representatives Cummings, Edwards, Holt, Kilde, Mink, Sanchez, and Stepanow. And I am very grateful that they could be here.

I also know, packing this room, literally making it standing room only, there are many other elected officials, teachers, education leaders, and public school advocates who have taken the time to be here. I want to give a special word of welcome to Arthur Moore, who you will hear from in a few minutes. A former soldier who is now teaching in an inner-city school in Baltimore, he knows firsthand the challenges and rewards of being a teacher today.

We're all here because, as the President so clearly stated in the State of the Union, we know that education is not only the key to our children's futures, but the key that will unlock the future of our nation in the 21st century. We know that to create world-class schools in every community, we need qualified teachers in every classroom.

In the State of the Union address, the President spoke about the urgent need to raise educational standards, not only for our schools, but for those who teach in them. And I think all of us are here because we want to underscore how critical his proposals are to our children—and therefore to our future.

I can remember back, it seems now many, many years ago, but about 16 years ago, when my husband first asked me to chair the Education Standards Committee in Arkansas back in 1983. I traveled to schools in every corner of that state, talking to parents, teachers, administrators, business leaders, and concerned citizens about what we needed to do to try to improve educational opportunities.

And in the past years, since being here in the White House, I have visited schools across

our country, in both wealthy and distressed neighborhoods, in rural areas and inner cities. And I have learned, as I think none of us needs to keep learning, but we always see it in very bold relief when we're in schools, and that is that the most essential ingredient in any school are the teachers.

Quality teachers make the difference between a child achieving his or her dream score or reaching a dead end. And when we talk about teachers, we know from our own lives those teachers who inspired us, pushed us farther than we thought we could go, and certainly asked everyone in the community to join with them in being partners in educating children. Now nobody, I think, can negate the importance of teachers, but too often in the last several years we haven't shown the respect and accorded the honor to our teachers that they deserve. And one of the reasons why we are gathered today is that we want to acknowledge and recognize that our teachers here in our country are dedicated and hard-working and committed.

Yet in too many schools, they don't have the academic background or training that should prepare them for the subjects they teach or the classrooms of children they face every day. They are not given the help they need and the training and professional development that will not only help them be the best teachers they can be, but will improve student achievement and increase expectations and outcomes.

Studies confirm what every parent instinctively knows and what all of us, I think, would agree—that qualified, effective teachers produce students who excel and want to learn, and who have a lasting impact on individual students, on schools, and even on whole communities. Now in every other field of professional endeavor, we do require proper training to do the job that we expect that professional to do. And certainly when it comes to teaching, one of the most important of all professions, we have to do more to support teachers. That's why improving teacher quality—and expanding the pool of qualified teachers—is such an integral part of the President's education agenda.

And we also have to do something else, and that is to encourage those who are not teaching now but who have the gifts and the motivation to do so, like Mr. Moore, to enter the teaching profession. Through efforts like recruiting outstanding new teachers for poor neighborhoods in rural areas, lowering class size, and helping our teachers meet high standards, the President's plan is moving our schools—and our nation—forward.

Now he is joined in that great effort by someone with whom he and I have worked for many years, who has been passionately devoted to education, children, and teachers, and has put into action the principles that we believe and have evidence to prove will demonstrate that improving the quality of the teachers will enable all of us to enjoy better educational outcomes.

It is now my great honor and my personal pleasure to introduce the Secretary of Education, Richard Riley.