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Transcript of Mr. Shanker's comments at the
Little Rock Economic Conference:

MR. ALBERT SHANKER, AMERICAN FEDERATION OF TEACHERS: Governor Clinton, Senator Gore, you're calling for a tremendous amount of change, change which I strongly support, I think the country needs. But I don't think the country will support the change unless they realize the seriousness of the problem. We may have this business cycle upturn and maybe quite a few people will think the problem is solved, so at least with respect to life-long learning they ought to look at and become familiar with some of the achievement results in this country.

Youngsters who graduate high school -- we can't test those who quit. We can only test those who are still there, but youngsters who are still there and about to graduate, only three percent who graduate are able to write a good letter or essay. Only six percent are able to read any of the books you talked about and it's going to be great to have a president who reads good books. And only five percent of them can perform the mathematics which is required for college entry in any other industrial country in the world.

So we've got a lot of very satisfied parents out there because their kids are going to college and they don't realize that their kids are going to college and getting an education which in every other industrial country would be their high school education or their junior high school education. So we've kind of found a way to make people happy by changing the standards.

And I think that these achievement results point out that while we have very special and very difficult problems with youngsters who are in poverty, and I think everything that's been said today about the special things that need to be done for them and their communities and their families and their schools are certainly true, that this shows that we have

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an overall problem with almost all the kids in this country who are students.

Now what's good about what you're proposing is that it's not a magic bullet, just do this and it's going to handle all the problems. If we were businessmen and we were losing to some competitors, the first thing we'd probably do is take a look at what are they doing that we're not doing. And it seems to me that that's pretty easy to see.

Other industrial countries do not have the childhood poverty that we have in this country. These other countries have early childhood and day care systems and they're not targeted only to poor youngsters. They are for all parents. I think it's time that we had an integrated high quality early childhood system, and people who can afford to pay ought to pay. I'm not saying that the whole thing ought to be a government-financed program. I think that's one of the things that education is about, is having all kinds of kids be with each other, from a very early age. While Head Start has been great, I think it's about time that we made it greater by getting everybody into it and having kids start with each other. Kids in these other countries don't have to worry about medical care. There are policies which don't force women, especially to make the horrible choices that they have to between caring for family and work.

These are some of the things, but there are other things, too. All these countries have national standards in place so that every teacher and every youngster and every parent and every employer, they all know what you're supposed to know when you're 18 or 19 years of age.

By the way, those figures of three percent, five percent, six percent, reaching those standards in the United States, in Germany it's over 30 percent who reach that top standard. In France it's 26 percent, and they're not throwing their other kids away. These are the college entry kids. Most of those countries, except for the English-speaking countries, are really doing a good job for all the kids.

They have national high standards so that everybody works hard to achieve them. Until we deal with that -- and there's a lot of talk about how we can't have national standards. I'm not talking about federally mandated standards. I'm talking about standards which as a nation we grow to accept, and I think if you put good standards out there there'll be a lot of states that accept them.

But they have assessment systems. They have teachers who have different status than our teachers do. By the way, part of that status has to do with income distribution in those countries. If you look at it in dollar terms, their teachers may make about what teachers make here, but in the United States you're looking at what other college graduates make and so that makes a difference.

They've got textbooks that are geared to the curriculum and they're able to have very good ones because they've thought about the curriculum over a period of time and textbook publishers in this country try to sell in eight or 10 states so they've got to have a big fat, boring, unfocused book that corresponds to what 10 different states think should happen.

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The other thing they've got there is that they have got very clear and visible consequences for youngsters and teachers and others. That is, a youngster knows that if he doesn't reach a certain standard, he doesn't go to college. If he doesn't make another standard, he doesn't qualify for the apprenticeship program or he doesn't qualify for something else and that makes people work harder and makes them achieve.

What we've been doing in this country for a good many years, which is essentially fooling people and giving them pieces of paper that don't stand for anything, we're not helping the kids because eventually there's a marketplace out there that sorts the kids out in terms of what they really know and are able to do.

These other countries do have this widespread apprenticeship program and I want to say something that others have said. I don't think it's going to work on a voluntary basis. I think you need something like pay or play. There's no reason why if I were an employer I should train lots of people who would then be stolen by somebody next — taken away by somebody down the road who isn't making that sort of investment. So it's the kind of thing where the whole country and all employers ought to make that sort of a contribution. And they have systems of lifelong retraining.

I'd like to just say one or two other things and conclude quickly. John Scully talked about a new type of workplace. Well, the school is a workplace. It's a workplace for students and it's a workplace for teachers. And if we're going to educate students to work in new types of workplaces, the school has to be a new type of workplace because the schools that we have today resemble the old-fashioned factories and if we're going to have new types of workplaces, the school has to reflect that and youngsters have to start working in a very different environment.

I too want to underline Jonathan Kozol's "Savage Inequalities." We talk about equality of educational opportunity. I don't see what we can possibly mean by that phrase if we take the youngsters who start with the greatest handicaps, the greatest difficulties and give them less of a chance in all sorts of ways in how we distribute books and money and teachers and buildings and everything else. We need to do something about that.

Finally, in this audience, Ernie Boyer is here and about 20 years ago he gave a speech which he sent to me at that time. He said, we now have Medicare in this country and other countries have had these systems of caring for the body from the cradle to the grave. He said, well it's about time we had a similar notion for education because education is not something that just starts when you're five or six and ends when you're 18, and he said we need to have a concept of education which goes from the cradle to the grave, which he in that speech called Educare.

I'm sure that as he's sitting in the audience and listening to your proposals for this great new vision of what education is about, it's too bad we had to wait all these years but thank God it's finally happening.

PRESIDENT-ELECT CLINTON: Let me just say one of the things -- I would invite particularly those who care about this educational equality issue, equality of funding, to give me any suggestions that they think are

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appropriate, for federal incentives at least, to try to get states to equalize funding.

You know, over 90 percent of the funds for public education come from the state and local level. The federal government share used to be about 10 percent. It's now I think something just under seven. We're going to try to get it up again. Keith says it's less than that. But our leverage is a little less.

But I'll say this. It's interesting to me. A lot of the same people who will tell you that it's not a money problem all of a sudden change their opinion if you want to redistribute the way the money's spent. And it's one of my rules of politics is when somebody tells you it's not a money problem, they're talking about somebody else's problem.

But it isn't entirely a money problem but there is the resource relationship. There's no question about it.

Leon, did you have a question, comment?

REP. PANETTA: No, I'm glad you said what you said, because I think a word of caution is order. We've talked about a lot of programs and we've talked about a lot of efforts that have to be made, and most of these programs I think most of us would support strongly.

But as you do it with limited resources, it's going to be very important that we target this assistance to the programs that work and not simply think that we can shoot money at a whole sphere of other programs. We're going to have to be very targeted.

We did this last year as a matter of fact. Even we tried to fully fund Head Start, we recognized that in funding Head Start we wanted to transition it in because we didn't want to just throw a lot of money out there so that people assumed that they could just start a Head Start without making sure that that program worked.

So I guess just several cautionary notes here. One, it ought to be highly targeted to the programs that work. Secondly, we ought to transition some of this money in, as we see that it's able to perform according to the standards that we want, and thirdly, I would hope that people would use their imagination in terms of funding because with the kind of limited resources and the other constraints we're facing, we're going to have to use our imagination about how we approach some of these programs.

PRESIDENT-ELECT CLINTON: You know, I think we ought to quit, unless somebody else around the table who hasn't talked wants to say anything. It's 8:00 o'clock and we all have got to go over to the Arts Center and have dinner. Hillary doesn't want to talk. She already said that.

This has been a fascinating session. I'd like to give the panelists another hand. They were great.

END OF DAY ONE CONFERENCE ACTIVITIES