

for parents and students, and prepare all of our students for the 21st century.

The Department of Education has historically targeted its funding to schools that serve disadvantaged students. If the Gorton amendment became law, the wealthiest school districts would be the winners and the rest of our communities would inevitably be the losers.

Politics must stop at the schoolhouse door. The Gorton amendment is unacceptable. I understand a similar provision may be offered in the House. Let me be clear. If necessary, I will use my veto power to make sure that no such provision becomes the law of the land.

**Statement on House of Representatives Action on Voluntary National Testing for Basic Education Skills**

*September 16, 1997*

I am disappointed that the House of Representatives voted tonight to block my proposal for voluntary national tests in the basic skills. These tests will help raise expectations for our students, provide clear standards of achievement in fourth-grade reading and eighth-grade math, and give parents the tools they need to measure the progress their children are making. They will help our students learn and our schools continue to improve.

Yet the House of Representatives tonight cast a vote for the status quo and against better schools. The same old forces that have resisted education reform over the past decade came together to defeat high national standards in the basics. They have voted against a plan to improve our schools by raising standards, empowering parents, and increasing accountability.

The House vote is unacceptable, and it will not stand. Last week, by a bipartisan vote of 87–13, the Senate endorsed my plan for voluntary national tests to help students master the basics and embraced my proposal to place them under the control of the independent, bipartisan National Assessment Governing Board. My administration will work hard to make sure that the final legislation reflects the bipartisan support of the

Senate and the broad support of the American people.

**Proclamation 7022—Citizenship Day and Constitution Week, 1997**

*September 16, 1997*

*By the President of the United States of America*

**A Proclamation**

Of all the dates in American history, one of the most important is perhaps the least well-known—September 17, 1787. On that day, our Nation’s Founders signed the Constitution of the United States, a document that has steadily grown in stature throughout the world as a model for democratic government under the rule of law.

As with most human enterprises, the Constitution was the product of compromise. The delegates to the Constitutional Convention brought with them to Philadelphia conflicting local and regional concerns, differing viewpoints, fears of creating a government that was either too powerful or too weak. When the convention seemed close to dissolving with nothing accomplished, Benjamin Franklin reminded his fellow delegates that history would judge them harshly if they failed in this great experiment of self-government: “. . . [M]ankind may hereafter, from this unfortunate instance, despair of establishing governments by human wisdom, and leave it to chance, war and conquest.”

But human wisdom did prevail. The delegates devised a framework for democracy with an ingenious design of checks and balances, broad protection of individual rights, and a mechanism for amendment to ensure that it would be able to respond to the ever-changing needs of our people. This remarkable document has rightly earned the world’s admiration for its success in combining structural solidity with practical adaptability—a combination that has served our Nation through times of rapid change as well as times of stability.

We can measure that success by the thousands of men, women, and children who travel to our shores each year, seeking a chance to live out their dreams. Many of them know what life can be like without the blessings