

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

of our Constitution, and their experience is a powerful reminder to us of the importance of protecting the Constitution if we are to preserve freedom for ourselves and for the generations of Americans to follow. We can also learn much from their deep desire for American citizenship and their enthusiasm to embrace not only its privileges, but also its responsibilities—knowledge of and respect for our laws, a willingness to exercise their vote, and reverence for the fundamental American values of freedom, tolerance, and equality.

But today American citizenship requires more. At the Presidents' Summit for America's Future in Philadelphia this past April, I joined with Vice President Gore; former Presidents Ford, Carter, and Bush; General Colin Powell; and other national and community leaders in calling for a redefinition of American citizenship—a definition that includes a profound commitment to community service. Each of us must look into our own neighborhoods and communities and reach out to help our fellow Americans succeed. We can only fulfill America's bright promise of freedom and opportunity by ensuring that every citizen shares in that promise.

In commemorating the signing of the Constitution and in recognition of the importance of active, responsible citizenship to preserve its blessings for our Nation, the Congress, by joint resolution of February 29, 1952 (36 U.S.C. 153), designated September 17 as "Citizenship Day," and by joint resolution of August 2, 1956 (36 U.S.C. 159), requested the President to proclaim the week beginning September 17 and ending September 23 of each year as "Constitution Week."

Now, Therefore, I, William J. Clinton, President of the United States of America, do hereby proclaim September 17, 1997, as Citizenship Day and September 17 through September 23, 1997, as Constitution Week. I call upon Federal, State, and local officials, as well as leaders of civic, educational, and religious organizations, to conduct meaningful ceremonies and programs in our schools, churches, and other community centers to foster a greater understanding and appreciation of the Constitution and the rights and duties of citizenship.

In Witness Whereof, I have hereunto set my hand this sixteenth day of September, in the year of our Lord nineteen hundred and ninety-seven, and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and twenty-second.

William J. Clinton

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**Proclamation 7023—National POW/
MIA Recognition Day, 1997**

September 16, 1997

*By the President of the United States
of America*

A Proclamation

Throughout our Nation's history, the men and women of America's Armed Forces have preserved our freedom, protected our security, and upheld our democratic values. From the battles of the American Revolution through the crucible of two world wars to the challenging peacekeeping and humanitarian missions of today's post-Cold War era, our men and women in uniform have stood proudly in defense of the United States and in the cause of liberty. In the two centuries since our Nation's birth, more than a million have paid the price of that liberty with their lives.

Joining the ranks of these heroes are the thousands who have been held as prisoners of war or whose fate has never been resolved. Many have been lost in the chaos of battle, the grief of their loss made more acute for their families and their fellow Americans because of the inability to determine whether they perished or survived. Captive Americans, cruelly stripped of their freedom, treated with contempt and brutality, or used as pawns by their captors in a larger political struggle, have fought long, lonely battles against despair, physical and psychological torture, and the ultimate fear of being forgotten.

But Americans will never forget those who have borne the indignities and sufferings of