

Week Ending Friday, March 6, 1998

The President's Radio Address

February 28, 1998

Good morning. This morning I want to talk to you about one of the most important ways we can help all children live up to their God-given potential—giving them the tools they need to master the fundamentals of reading.

This week America got a wakeup call on education. We learned that our high school seniors are lagging behind those in most other industrialized nations in math and science. In a global economy that is increasingly powered by information and technology, this is a very sobering fact. It tells me we can have no higher priority than to transform our K through 12 classrooms in every community. We need smaller classes, better teaching, higher standards, more discipline, greater accountability.

And clearly, we must give our children more help with reading. Currently, 40 percent of our Nation's 8-year-olds are not reading even at the basic level. And those students are far more likely to get discouraged and drop out of school or never to learn what they need to know while they're in school. Failing to read early on is a burden that can bog down a child for life. That's why I launched the America Reads challenge, to make sure all our children can read on their own by the end of the third grade.

Thanks to an amazing outpouring of support, tens of thousands of volunteer tutors are already at work in our communities, giving our children the intensive reading help they need. More than 900 colleges have committed to give their students work study credit for devoting after-school hours to tutoring children. And this year 3,000 new AmeriCorps members and thousands of new senior volunteers will recruit more than 100,000 volunteer reading tutors for our children. We are on track to give extra reading help to 3 million children at risk of falling behind.

But we need Congress' help to meet this goal. This past November, the House of Representatives voted with bipartisan support to promote literacy efforts in the home, the school, the community. Legislation with these goals is now awaiting action in the Senate, which means \$210 million in targeted assistance is now on hold in Washington, not at work in our communities. So today I call on the Senate to pass this legislation without delay. We need it. Our children need it.

This coming Monday, reading out loud to children will be the talk of the Nation. To celebrate the birthday of the late Dr. Seuss, whose much beloved books have sparked the imaginations of children and parents alike for generations, the National Education Association and many other groups are sponsoring the first Read Across America Day. Thousands of people, from baseball star Cal Ripken to the leaders of the Cherokee Nation to the sailors of the U.S.S. *Austin*, will read favorite books and share the joy of reading with children in every part of our country. I encourage parents and grandparents to get involved. Read with your child on Read Across America Day and every day.

Scientists have now shown reading to your children every night before bed can help lay the foundation for his or her life and, in turn, for our Nation's future. Literacy is the key to all learning. Without it, history is a haze, math is a muddle, the Internet is indecipherable, the promise of America is a closed book. But we can change all that. With an army of reading tutors, well-trained teachers, and involved parents, we can make sure every child can read by the third grade. And if we do that, there is no limit, in the words of Dr. Seuss, on the places our children will go.

Thanks for listening.

NOTE: The address was recorded at 3:22 p.m. on February 26 at the Spanish Rights Center in Oakland, CA, for broadcast at 10:06 a.m. on February 28.

Remarks on Arrival in Los Angeles, California

February 28, 1998

Good evening ladies and gentlemen. I'd like to begin by thanking Congressman Gallegly, Congresswoman Millender-McDonald, Congressman Sherman, and Gloria Molina and Zev Yaroslavsky for joining me here.

I have just met with some of the people who were hurt by the terrible weather you've had in southern California over the last week, as well as a number of the people who were involved in the rescue effort. Let me begin by saying that our hearts and prayers are with the families who lost their loved ones. I especially want to send our condolences to the families of Officer Rick Stovall and Officer Brit Irvine who gave their lives in the line of service as they responded to the emergency in Santa Maria.

There were many people of all ages who lost their lives in this terrible tragedy. I received a fax from a friend of mine yesterday whose son lost a childhood friend of his, a young fellow student. I met a young woman in there in the meeting who lost her fiance after he had saved the lives of a woman and her three young children.

There is very little that anyone can say at this moment to ease the human loss. We do know that the weather we are experiencing now has been dramatically aggravated because of El Niño. I have visited with families in Florida where 39 people were killed in the worst tornadoes in 50 years, in northern California, and now here today.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency has spent a lot of time in southern California in the last 5 years and couple of months since I've been President. I talked with James Lee Witt in some detail before I came down here today. We are determined to do all we can. FEMA is responding swiftly to provide disaster relief funds in 35 counties, including over \$2 million more for Glenn County. The SBA has an outreach office in Orange County, and Federal Highway Administration personnel have already released \$40 million to California for road repairs.

There will be a lot more to be done. The Members of Congress and the local officials

have talked to me about other things that we need to do to deal with the particular problems of people who lost everything or who are still at risk of further natural calamities.

Let me just say today, I want more than anything else to praise the courage of those who worked so hard during this disaster—the fire, the police personnel, the emergency personnel, all the others who were involved; many of them risked their lives, and as we know, two lost their lives—and to praise the courage of the people who have lost everything they have but still have their lives. I want to encourage them, to tell them their fellow Americans are thinking about them, and to pray for tranquil weather as we begin the rebuilding process.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 6:05 p.m. on the tarmac at Los Angeles International Airport. In his remarks, he referred to Gloria Molina and Zev Yaroslavsky, members, Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors; and California Highway Patrol officers Rick Stovall and Brit Irvine.

Remarks at a Dinner for Senator Barbara Boxer in Los Angeles

February 28, 1998

Thank you very, very much. First I want to thank all of you for being here for Senator Boxer and for your country. Thank you, Senator Torricelli, not only for being here and for your leadership on behalf of your fellow Democrats in the Senate and some of the people we hope will be joining us, but for always being willing to stand up and fight for what you believe in and not just standing—[*applause*—]thank you. The longer I stay in Washington, the more I come to appreciate people who will stand up and fight. And I thank you, Senator. [*Laughter*]

I want to thank Ron and Jan for having us here. I don't believe, if I live to be 100, I don't believe I'd ever get tired of coming to this magnificent place. I'm sure they would get tired of me coming—[*laughter*—]and are doubtless glad that I am term-limited, but I love coming here.

I want to say just a couple of things tonight—and I've already eliminated all the