

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.

Remarks to the Congressional Hispanic Caucus September 16, 1997

Thank you very much. Thank you for the wonderful welcome you have given to the Vice President and me. Thank you, Xavier. Thank you, Carmen, Carolina. To the Members of Congress who are here, members of the Hispanic Caucus Institute, members of our administration—all those who were introduced by the Vice President. I'd also like to acknowledge the presence here of the general chairman of our political party, the Democratic Party, Governor Roy Romer of Colorado. Welcome, Governor Romer.

Xavier pointed out that I have been here all 5 years I have been President. I come because I have a good time. *[Laughter]* I like it. I know that here I will see the future of America, the vitality, the energy, the commitment, the passion necessary to make this country what it ought to be. But I have been here five times. *[Laughter]* I mean, those of us who are linguistically challenged—*[laughter]*—always learn a few phrases—you know, *su voto es su voz; mi casa es su casa*. *[Laughter]* Now I can say, *su caucus es mi caucus*. I come here because when I leave here, I feel more alive, I feel more committed, I feel new energy, and I like what I see.

I thank the Members of Congress for their service. I thank the Hispanics who have served in our administration, more than in any other in the past; the members of the Cabinet who are here—Secretary Peña, Ambassador Richardson, Aida Alvarez. To all those in the White House—Maria Echaveste, Mickey Ibarra, Janet Murguia, and others. To my speechwriter, Carolyn Curiel, who I will soon nominate to be Ambassador to Belize; Gloria Tristani, whom I have just selected to serve as the newest member of the Federal Communications Commission.

There is also another person here I want to acknowledge who will have a lot to do with seeing that the face of the Federal Government and the policies of the Federal Government reflect the face and the heart of America. And here with me tonight is my nominee for Assistant Attorney General for Civil Rights, Bill Lee. And I'd like to ask him to be recognized.

He grew up a Chinese-American in New York, has spent a lot of his life working for the NAACP Legal Defense Fund. He has worked to defend and protect the civil rights of the most vulnerable among us. And I thank