

The Agreement improves the ability of SPREP to serve the interests of American Samoa, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, and Guam. Its ratification is supported by our territories and will demonstrate continued United States commitment to, and concern for, the South Pacific region.

Under its terms, the Agreement entered into force on August 31, 1995. To date, Australia, Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, France, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Nauru,

New Zealand, Niue, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Tonga, and Western Samoa have become parties to the Agreement.

I recommend that the Senate give early and favorable consideration to the Agreement and give its advice and consent to ratification.

WILLIAM J. CLINTON

The White House,
November 7, 1997.

Statement on House of Representatives Action on Voluntary National Testing for Basic Education Skills *November 7, 1997*

Legislation passed by the House of Representatives this evening provides an impressive victory for American education. It moves us down the road to high national standards and voluntary national tests in the basic skills, and it invests in providing our country with better schools and increased educational opportunities.

I am very pleased that we have reached an agreement on one of my top priorities for this year and for my Presidency: making sure that America's schoolchildren can master the basics and achieve higher academic standards. America's parents, teachers, and principals can now be sure that we are going to hold children's educational skills up to the same high standard whether they live in Michigan, Maine, or Montana.

The educational agenda I have established for the Nation—from high standards and testing to making a college education possible for every young American—is designed to give our children the tools they need to succeed in a changing global economy. Today's agreement fulfills a critical part of that agenda, and I appreciate

that politics indeed stopped at the schoolhouse door.

The Labor-HHS-Education Appropriations bill, which includes the agreement on national standards and tests, also helps meet our national commitment to expand educational opportunities for all students. It provides a \$1.5 billion increase in Pell grants to help an additional 210,000 young people attend college, and increases the maximum Pell grant to \$3,000, the highest level in history. Special education funding is increased by \$800 million, funding for technology for our schools is almost doubled, and there is \$7.4 billion to help our most disadvantaged students master the basic skills. Goals 2000 is funded at \$491 million, to continue to support school reform in every State, and funding for after-school programs is increased from \$1 million to \$40 million.

I am also pleased to see the House pass bipartisan charter school legislation to promote choice and accountability in the public schools and help achieve my goal of 3,000 charter schools.

The President's Radio Address *November 8, 1997*

Good morning. This weekend the United States House of Representatives will decide whether America will continue to move forward

with confidence on the road to continued prosperity or give in to fear and fail to seize all

the opportunities of the 21st century. There's a lot at stake.

Over the past 5 years, our economic strategy has worked to make the new economy work for all Americans. We're balancing the budget, investing in our people through education and health care, and expanding exports through tough trade deals.

Yesterday, we learned again that this strategy is succeeding: Unemployment is at 4.7 percent—that's the lowest in 24 years—a quarter million new jobs in October alone, and 13½ million since I took office; inflation in check; exports booming. And after dragging for decades, incomes for American workers are rising strongly, up \$2,200 after inflation since 1993.

Now, wages are rising in part because more American jobs are high-paying, export-related jobs. And if exports keep expanding, that will help to keep wages rising. We must press forward with this economic strategy. That's why I'm asking Congress to renew the so-called fast-track authority that enables America to negotiate new trade agreements. A strong bipartisan majority in the Senate backs this bill, which simply gives me the same authority to lower barriers to American products that Presidents of both parties have had for more than 20 years. That's why Presidents Bush, Carter, and Ford support this measure. Now it's up to the Members of the House of Representatives to decide.

A yes vote means America stays in the lead in fighting for new markets. That's now at risk. Just this week, Canada gained an advantage on us by signing a comprehensive agreement with Argentina, Brazil, and others. That means their products will sell in those countries at lower prices than ours because we'll still have to pay tariffs they don't. Now, that's a strategy of America last, not America first.

A yes vote means that America helps to write the rules for the new global economy. That's the only way to make sure that it works for the American people. We already have lower barriers in our country on foreign products than most countries. Other countries have higher barriers on the sale of our products and services.

A yes vote means that we can also address labor protections and environmental concerns around the world as part of our trade negotiations. This is the very first time this has been a part of the President's negotiating authority. Walking away from this will not create a single

job or clean up a single toxic waste site, here or in any other country around the world.

Finally, and perhaps most important, a yes vote means that American leadership in this hemisphere and elsewhere, not only on trade but in fighting drugs and terrorism and dealing with our other security problems, will be strengthened.

In the post-cold-war world, national security requires economic strength and economic leadership. If America, with the world's strongest economy, withdraws from nations who want to be our economic partners, they're much less likely to be our partners in fighting crime and drugs and terrorism and the proliferation of dangerous weapons.

A yes vote is a vote for confidence in the world's strongest economy. But a no vote says, "We don't want our country to negotiate lower trade barriers. We're pulling back. We're afraid we can't compete, and we're willing to walk away from our unique world leadership at this moment."

Other countries look at us and ask, "With 4.7 percent unemployment and 13½ million new jobs, what could America be afraid of?" No other country has an economy so strong with so much promise.

Now, will some people be hurt if we lower our already low trade barriers more? Yes. Though most of our job losses have come because of technological changes and changes in consumer buying habits, trade does cause some. But overall, we're way ahead in the last 5 years.

The answer is to help the people who lose their jobs, for whatever reason, get good new ones and to do it more quickly. We've got a plan to do that. And we're already spending more than twice as much as we were when I took office helping dislocated workers.

By expanding trade, we expand opportunity for working families and give more and more of them a shot at the American dream. It's working. Why in the world would we turn back now?

I ask every Member of Congress, Republican and Democrat alike, to look to the future. Cast the vote you know is right. If we move to seize the opportunities of this new time and to help the people in the communities who need an extra push to get ahead, then our country will enter the 21st century stronger than ever before.

Thanks for listening.

NOTE: The address was recorded at 6:48 p.m. on November 7 in the Roosevelt Room at the White House for broadcast at 10:06 a.m. on November 8.

Statement on the Special Report of the Presidential Advisory Committee on Gulf War Veterans' Illnesses

November 8, 1997

Our administration has made it a priority to care for and compensate Gulf war veterans who have fallen ill. The First Lady and I were both troubled by the pain and frustration these veterans felt. We have been determined to find out why they are sick, to make public the facts as we learned them, and to apply the lessons of the Gulf war for the future. In May 1995, I asked some of America's best doctors and scientists, as well as Gulf war veterans, to undertake an independent and open review of the Government's response to our veterans' health care concerns. Now, the Presidential Advisory Committee I established has delivered its special report. I thank its Chairman, Dr. Joyce Lashof, and the other members for their outstanding work and for extending their efforts 10 months beyond their original mandate. Based on their recommendations, I am taking the following actions:

First, to better care for and compensate our veterans, we will work to establish a new benefits system that will ensure that Gulf war veterans receive treatment and compensation for all illnesses linked to service in the Gulf even if we cannot identify the direct cause. We will ask the National Academy of Sciences to review the ongoing scientific research regarding the connections between all reported illnesses and Gulf war service so we have the fullest understanding of the health consequences of that service. In addition, we will work with Congress on legislation to guarantee that this system of benefits is maintained in all administrations to come.

Second, to deepen our understanding of why Gulf war veterans might have gotten sick, we will dedicate \$13.2 million for new research on low-level exposure to chemical agents and other possible causes of illness.

Third, to make sure our veterans and the public know all the facts and have full confidence in DOD's fact finders, former Senator Warren Rudman has agreed to lead an oversight board to ensure that the Defense Department's ongoing investigations into events in the Gulf meet the highest standards.

Fourth, to apply the lessons we have learned for the future, I am directing the Departments of Defense and Veterans Affairs to create a new force health protection program. Every soldier, sailor, airman, and marine will have a comprehensive, lifelong medical record of all illnesses and injuries they suffer, the care and inoculations they receive, and their exposure to different hazards. These records will help us prevent illness and identify and cure those that occur.

From the beginning, I vowed that we would not rest until we uncovered all the facts about Gulf war illnesses and used that knowledge to improve the health of our veterans, their families, and all who serve our Nation, now and in the future. As Veterans Day approaches, we are continuing work to fulfill that pledge. The men and women of our Armed Forces put everything on the line for us. I am determined that we show the same resolve for them.