

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.