

Remarks on Signing the Help America Vote Act of 2002 October 29, 2002

The President. Thanks for coming. Good morning.

Before we begin today, I would like to pause and remember a devoted public servant who was taken from us last Friday, along with his wife and his daughter and several other members—several other Americans. Paul Wellstone was a deeply principled and a good-hearted man. He will be missed by all who knew him and by all who had the privilege of serving with him. So before we begin, would you join me in a moment of silence in honor of his memory.

[*At this point, a moment of silence was observed.*]

The President. Today I'm proud to sign into law an important reform for our Nation. Americans are a self-governing people, and the central commitment of self-government is free and fair elections. The Help America Vote Act of 2002 is a bipartisan measure to help States and localities update their systems of voting and ensure the integrity of elections in America.

The commission that helped inspire this legislation was led by two exceptional Americans, with broad experience in public service, our 38th and 39th President—Presidents. [*Laughter*] Although Gerald Ford and Jimmy Carter could not be here today, our Nation is grateful for their work on election reform and for all they have given to America. We're pleased, however to be joined by the co-chairmen of the commission, former Congressman Bob Michel of Illinois, former Presidential Counselor Lloyd Cutler. Thank you both for coming. Thank you for your good work.

I also appreciate—I also want to thank the Members of Congress who are here with us today. I particularly want to thank Senator Christopher Dodd and Congressman Bob Ney for their hard work on this

legislation. I appreciate Senators Mitch McConnell and Kit Bond for joining us. I appreciate Jim Langevin from Rhode Island for coming. And I'm honored that Connie Morella from Maryland is with us as well. And Steny Hoyer, from Maryland, has joined us as well. These Members worked hard, along with the chairman, John Conyers, of the State of Michigan. The Members didn't let—didn't get discouraged. They worked through the issues, and they produced a really good piece of legislation. I'm proud to be able to sign this bill.

I also want to thank the four secretaries of state from around the country who have joined us. I appreciate you taking time to witness this important—the signing of this important piece of legislation.

The vitality of America's democracy depends on the fairness and accuracy of America's elections. Over two centuries our country has broadened the right to vote and sealed that right in law, making our Government more accountable to the people and more representative of the people. When problems arise in the administration of elections, we have a responsibility to fix them. Every registered voter deserves to have confidence that the system is fair and elections are honest, that every vote is recorded and that the rules are consistently applied.

The legislation I sign today will add to the Nation's confidence. Each State will be required to maintain a clean and current and accurate State—statewide list of registered voters, making it easier to register and easier to detect fraud. Under this law, people registering to vote are required to prove that they are who they say they are with appropriate identification. First-time voters who register by mail will be asked to provide identification when they cast their ballots. This law also creates new

criminal penalties for providing false information and punishes anyone guilty of conspiracy to deprive voters of a fair election.

Each polling place must have at least one voting machine accessible to persons with disabilities. When people show up at the polls and their voting registration is in doubt, they should not be turned away but allowed to cast a provisional ballot so their vote can be counted if it is later verified that they are properly registered. And every State must have a fair procedure for hearing and resolving voter complaints. Under these reforms, training and education will be provided to pollworkers and voters, reducing the possibility of confusion and error at the polls.

Along with the resources come high standards for the integrity of elections. States must ensure that voting systems have minimal rates of error and allow voters a reasonable opportunity to review their ballots and correct any mistakes before a vote is cast.

The administration of elections is primarily a State and local responsibility. The fairness of all elections, however, is a national priority. And through these reforms, the Federal Government will help State and local officials to conduct elections that have the confidence of all Americans. We're counting on these officials to meet their responsibilities to protect the sanctity

of the vote and to encourage Americans to exercise the right to vote.

All of us in America have a duty to vote. I urge all Americans to show up for this election cycle on November 5th, to do their duty as Americans, to recognize in a free society we have a responsibility to participate in the process.

Citizens of every political viewpoint can be proud of this important law. This legislation reflects the judgments of a distinguished bipartisan commission. These measures were carefully considered and overwhelmingly adopted by the House and the Senate. Congress has made a vital contribution to the democratic process.

Now it's my honor to sign into law the Help America Vote Act of 2002.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:10 a.m. in Room 450 of the Dwight D. Eisenhower Executive Office Building. In his remarks, he referred to the following persons who died in the October 25 plane crash in Eveleth, MN: Senator Paul Wellstone, his wife, Sheila, and his daughter, Marcia Wellstone Markuson; campaign aides Will McLaughlin, Tom Lopic, and Mary McEvoy; pilot Richard Conroy; and copilot Michael Guess. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of these remarks. H.R. 3295, approved October 29, was assigned Public Law No. 107-252.

Statement on Signing the Help America Vote Act of 2002 *October 29, 2002*

Today I have signed into law H.R. 3295, the "Help America Vote Act of 2002." This Act comports with the basic principles set forth in the final report of the bipartisan National Commission on Federal Election Reform, which I endorsed in July of 2001. Consequently, the Act appropriately respects the primacy of State and local gov-

ernments in the administration of elections, while helping to ensure the integrity and efficiency of voting processes in Federal elections by providing Federal governmental support for that vital endeavor.