

Week Ending Friday, September 14, 2001

**Proclamation 7460—National
Birmingham Pledge Week, 2001**

September 8, 2001

*By the President of the United States
of America*

A Proclamation

The United States has grown strong and vibrant because of its diversity and common values. Representing different religions, cultures, ethnic groups, and backgrounds, our citizens have laid the foundation for our country's remarkable achievements.

As a Nation, we celebrate those achievements and look forward to new challenges. At the same time, we also recognize that racism still exists in America.

One of the darkest days for the cause of civil rights was September 15, 1963, when a bomb exploded in the basement of the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama. The blast ended the lives of four young African-American girls, and ultimately demonstrated the tragic human costs of bigotry and intolerance.

Through the efforts of heroes like Martin Luther King, Jr., and other brave men and women of the civil rights movement, our Nation has made progress in battling racism and building a society that more fully lives up to its democratic ideals. However, regardless of the decades that have passed, despicable acts such as the Birmingham bombing remain an unforgettable reminder of the need for continued vigilance against those who would infect our society with hate.

The Birmingham Pledge, started in 1998, forges a positive legacy from the lessons of the Birmingham tragedy. The Pledge encourages people to take personal responsibility for conducting themselves in ways that will achieve greater racial harmony in our communities. It calls for a commitment to "treat all people with dignity and respect." This is our solemn duty as citizens.

As part of National Birmingham Pledge Week, I encourage all Americans to join me in renewing our commitment to fight racism and uphold equal justice and opportunity. We also must strive to treat each other with civility, to love our neighbors, and to extend the American dream to every willing heart. By doing so, we can fulfill our Nation's promise and build brighter futures for all our citizens as we look forward to the challenges of tomorrow.

Now, Therefore, I, George W. Bush, President of the United States of America, by virtue of the authority vested in me by the Constitution and laws of the United States, do hereby proclaim September 9–15, 2001, as National Birmingham Pledge Week. I call upon the people of the United States to mark this observance with appropriate programs and ceremonies.

In Witness Whereof, I have hereunto set my hand this eighth day of September, in the year of our Lord two thousand one, and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and twenty-sixth.

George W. Bush

[Filed with the Office of the Federal Register, 9:02 a.m., September 11, 2001]

NOTE: This proclamation was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on September 8, and it was published in the *Federal Register* on September 12.

The President's Radio Address

September 8, 2001

Good morning. This weekend in Washington my wife, Laura, is hosting the first National Book Festival, continuing a tradition she began as First Lady of Texas. With visiting authors and special events, the Book Festival will highlight the importance of reading and libraries in our national life. A few days later, she and I will host the White

House Assembly on Reading at the Library of Congress. We will bring together scholars and educators committed to the cause of teaching every child to read.

As a former teacher, herself, the First Lady is a passionate advocate for reading. She and I and my entire administration believe that teaching every child to read is critical to making sure every child has the opportunity to realize the American Dream.

Reading is, after all, the most basic educational skill, and the most basic obligation of any school is to teach reading. Yet earlier this year, tests showed the almost two-thirds of African-American children in the fourth grade cannot read at a basic level and reading performance overall is basically unimproved over the past 10 years.

The ability to read is what turns a child into a student. When this skill is not taught, a child has not failed the system; the system has failed the child. And that child is often put on a path to frustration and broken confidence.

The methods we use to teach reading are critically important. First, we will have diagnostic tests to identify early reading problems in grades K-through-three. Second, we will correct those problems with intervention to give children the best possible help. Third, we will support reading instruction based on sound research, with a central role for phonics. And we'll make sure that every teacher is well-trained in these proven methods.

All of this can serve an important goal I have set for our country: to ensure that every child is able to read by the end of third grade. Meeting this goal requires not only encouragement to our schools but resources, and my budget provides them. Altogether I have asked Congress to triple the amount of Federal money available for reading programs across America.

We must also bring accountability and high standards to every public school. At the heart of my education reforms is a confident belief that every child can learn if given the chance. When our expectations are high, America's children will rise to meet them.

I have agreed with the Congress that we must increase education spending. But some, for whom the increases this year may not be

enough, are threatening to stall these much needed reforms. That is a tactic of the past in Washington that has neither worked for our country, nor, more sadly, for our children. After many years of debate, the American people are counting on us to deliver on our promise of reform for the public schools.

Both the House and the Senate have passed good bills that hold schools accountable and expect results. The hardest work is behind us. We have a chance now to pass education reform based on good principles. When the Congress sends me that bill I will sign it, and I urge the Congress to send it quickly.

Thanks for listening.

NOTE: The address was recorded at 3:19 p.m. on September 7 in the Cabinet Room at the White House for broadcast at 10:06 a.m. on September 8. The transcript was made available by the Office of the Press Secretary on September 7 but was embargoed for release until the broadcast. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of this address.

Remarks on the National Football League's Opening Day Coin Toss

September 9, 2001

We're here in the Rose Garden to help kick-off the NFL's 82d season. This is a great day for fans. And I want to salute the NFL for its long history, lasting influence, and the quality of its athletes.

I'm glad to be joined by members of Washington's Metropolitan Police Boys and Girls Club—all future NFL greats.

And now, to officially begin the NFL's 82d season, the coin toss. This is heads. This is tails. Here we go.

[At this point, the President tossed the coin.]

It's tails.

I wish the players of the NFL good health, and have a great season.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:01 p.m. in the Rose Garden at the White House. A tape was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.