

**NLWJC - Kagan**

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**POTUS Press Conference -  
Meet the Press November 6,  
1997**

**Tentative Agreement with Rep. Goodling on National Tests**  
**November 6, 1997**

- Q: Earlier your Administration had indicated that you would veto the Labor-HHS-Education appropriations bill if it required further authorization from Congress to move forward with testing. But some suggest that your compromise with Mr. Goodling basically kills the national test to clear the way for Fast Track. Have you given up on a national test?**
- A: Absolutely not. The agreement allows us to proceed with development of the 4th and 8th grade national tests that I have proposed. It also allows us to pilot test the items for these tests next fall. This is a delay, but it's one we can live with. At the same time, we will go forward with Mr. Goodling's excellent idea to have the National Academy of Sciences study ways to link state tests to each other and to NAEP, an existing national sample test, that reflects high national standards. Both aspects of the agreement make progress toward a single goal: ensuring that all students, across the country, are measured by the same high standards.
- Q: Is further development of the national tests dependent on the findings of the National Academy of Sciences study? What is the timeline for this study?**
- A: The Academy will be asked to make an interim report by June 15, with a final report submitted by Sept. 1. Further development of the national tests is not contingent on the findings of the NAS study. NAGB can go forward with test development activities leading up to pilot testing right now. Pilot testing is postponed until Sept. 1, but does not depend on the completion or findings of the National Academy study. We do expect, of course, that the NAS study will inform test planning and development.
- Q: Does the compromise require further authorization to move beyond the pilot testing stage?**
- A: The compromise provides for test development in FY 98, and pilot testing after September 1. It is silent on the subject of further congressional action.

**Questions and Answers on School Vouchers**  
**November 6, 1997**

**Q: Democrats are filibustering the DC voucher bill in the Senate, as well the Coverdell K-12 education savings accounts. This week House Democrats also joined with 35 Republicans to defeat a proposed voucher provision strongly supported by Speaker Gingrich. And this week you met with a bipartisan group of congressional leaders and a family who support vouchers. Why do you and most other Democrats continue to oppose private school vouchers?**

**A:** I strongly oppose any legislation allowing the use of federal taxpayer funds for vouchers. We need to focus on strengthening the public schools that serve nearly 90% of students and expanding choice within the public education system, such as through charter schools.

Vouchers would siphon critical dollars from neighborhood public schools that are already short on resources in order to send a few selected students to private schools, and would distract attention from the hard work of reform needed to change failing schools into good schools and good schools into outstanding schools.

As I made clear in Chicago recently, no child deserves to get a second class education. Where schools are failing, local and state education officials must step in and redesign them, or close them down and reopen them with new, more effective leadership and staff who will raise standards, put into place effective reforms, and create safe, disciplined learning environments where students can succeed.

**Q: Some argue that vouchers are vital to help children escape ineffective, dangerous schools. What is your response to that?**

**A:** My opposition to vouchers is based more on what happens to students who do not participate in a voucher program than on what may happen to the few who do. The fact is that 90% of our students attend public schools, and our primary responsibility, especially with limited federal resources, is to make sure that the public schools they attend are among the best in the world. This means concentrating our time and money on raising academic standards, improving teaching, providing schools with technology and other up-to-date learning tools, and creating charter schools and other forms of choice within the public school system. Vouchers only drain financial resources and energy away from our most important task -- improving our public schools.

## **Questions and Answers on Bilingual Education** **November 6, 1997**

### **Background**

The Administration has strongly supported the federal bilingual education program, which permits a variety of different approaches to helping students master English, including both bilingual and English immersion instruction. We proposed a 27% increase in bilingual education for FY 98, protected it in the balanced budget agreement, and secured it in the House and Senate-passed appropriations bills.

In June 1998, Californians may face a new ballot initiative to abolish bilingual instruction for public school children in the state, requiring that most instruction be conducted only in English. The idea has support from many conservatives and, recent polls indicate, many in the Latino community and other minority groups, who are frustrated with what they see as an ineffective approach to learning English. The California GOP endorsed the initiative at the end of September. However, the ballot initiative is vehemently opposed by many Latino leaders, who strongly support bilingual instruction and see the initiative as an attack cut from the same cloth as Propositions 187 and 209. The state's largest teacher organization recently announced its opposition, as well. The measure has until December 1 to gain sufficient signatures, although proponents claim that they already have exceeded the necessary threshold.

### **Q. What is your Administration's view of bilingual education?**

**A.** My Administration strongly supports the federal bilingual education program, which funds programs in local school districts that are designed to help kids become proficient in English. The program permits a variety of different approaches to helping students master English, including both bilingual and English immersion instruction. To help ensure that resources are available to assist children to learn English well, we proposed a 27% increase in the program and successfully protected bilingual education in the budget and spending bill before the U.S. Congress.

### **Q. Will the national tests be made available in bilingual versions?**

**A.** The voluntary national tests consist of a 4th grade test of reading in English and an 8th grade test of mathematics. There will be a bilingual (Spanish and English) version of the 8th grade math test -- because that test is destined to measure mathematics, not language skills. However, the purpose of the 4th grade test is to test student proficiency in reading *in English*, not general reading comprehension. Therefore, the national reading test will not be developed in other languages, although we will be making appropriate accommodations for students whose native language is not English.

By 4th grade, U.S. students need to have mastered basic English reading skills in order to begin to learn other subjects. I realize that there are students who have developed strong

reading skills in their native language -- and that's great because those strong reading skills will transfer over to another language. However, the purpose of the voluntary national tests is to encourage all students to meet the same high standards of reading in English -- so that is the skill that these tests will be designed to measure.

**Q. Does the Administration plan to intervene in California or campaign on behalf of bilingual education?**

The initiative measure has not yet qualified for the ballot so this question is premature. We are gathering more information on the initiative as events develop. However, the Administration supports the approach of the federal program, which permits a variety of different strategies for English language instruction.

**Questions and Answers on Crime/Drugs  
November 6, 1997**

Directive on "Sporterized" Assault Weapons

**Q. What are you directing the Treasury Department to do with respect to the modified assault-type weapons that have been reported in the press? How many and what kinds of firearms are at issue?**

A. Over the past few years, firearms manufacturers have modified, or "sporterized," certain dangerous assault weapons to circumvent the ban on their importation required by the 1968 Gun Control Act and the 1994 Crime Bill. There are about 30 models of these firearms that are being manufactured in about 12 different countries, including modified Uzis and AK-47s. While only a limited numbers of these weapons have been imported to date -- about 20,000 so far this year -- applications are now pending to import more than a million of these firearms.

My directive orders the Treasury Department to reexamine and, if necessary, modify the criteria used to ensure that only legitimate sporting weapons enter into the country. In the meantime, my directive orders the Treasury Department not to grant any applications to import these "sporterized" semi-automatic assault weapons -- [and also to suspend current permits that allow the importation of these weapons].

My Administration has done as much as possible -- and used every tool available -- to keep millions of non-sporting, military surplus and other firearms posing a threat to public safety from entering the country and flooding our streets. In 1993, I banned the importation of assault pistols and toughened requirements for federal gun dealers. In 1994, I banned the importation of millions of assault-type weapons and ammunition clips from China. And I fought for and signed the Assault Weapons Ban into law as part of our historic 1994 omnibus crime bill. I've taken these actions to help ensure that criminals are not better armed than our police. Thankfully, last year fewer police officers were slain in the line of duty than in any year since 1960.

**If you do not suspend existing permits to import sporterized weapons:**

**Q. We understand that there are already-approved permits to import tens of thousands of these weapons-- including Galils from Israel. Why didn't you suspend these already-approved permits? Didn't President Bush do this in 1989 when he banned the importation of certain assault rifles?**

A. First of all, by refusing to grant pending applications, we are preventing the importation of more than a million of these firearms while Treasury conducts its review. That's a pretty significant step. Second, the directive also requires Treasury to monitor how many of these firearms are being imported under current permits during the review period and if

they are being recovered at crime scenes. Should circumstances warrant, Treasury can take the additional step of temporarily suspending existing permits too.

The most important point of this directive, however, is not the scope of its temporary suspension, but of its potential final impact. This directive ensures that only legitimate sporting weapons enter the country. That's the point of Treasury's review. We are not going to allow gun manufacturers to evade the 1968 Gun Control Act and the 1994 Crime Bill by making minor changes to what are really assault weapons

**Q. Does this mean that you are planning to permanently ban these firearms from importation?**

A. Not necessarily. The directive does not tell the Treasury Department what guns should or should not be allowed into the country. However, pursuant to the 1968 Gun Act, the Treasury Department has an obligation to ensure that only legitimate sporting weapons are imported. Thus, the proposed review will determine what changes, if any, are needed to continue enforcing this provision of law. And ultimately, those firearms that fail to meet the sporting purposes test will be permanently banned.

#### COPS Program

**Q. Is it true that many cities are not planning to keep the police officers funded through your COPS program because they can't afford them without federal funding?**

A. I don't think so. Each police department that received a COPS grant signed an agreement to make a good faith effort to retain the additional officers when their federal funding expires. Every indication is that the vast majority of the more than 10,000 police departments receiving COPS funding will keep their commitments and retain these officers. Most cities have indicated that these new officers are making a difference, and that they intend to keep them on board. Equally important, most cities today are in better fiscal shape now than they were five years ago, so they are in a better position to continue funding these officers.

Some cities may have difficulties in retaining their officers, and I know that the Attorney General has committed to work with them -- particularly if there is economic hardship involved. Overall, I think the COPS initiative has been a huge success. We have already funded over 65,000 officers and deputies in just three years, and communities across the country are telling us its helping them drive down the crime rates.

#### Southwest Border/Drugs

**Q. What are you doing about the flow of drugs coming across our Southwest Border?**

### **Hasn't the problem been exacerbated by the NAFTA?**

- A. I think it is important to point out that NAFTA has actually helped increase cooperation between the U.S. and Mexico on the drug front. The Zedillo administration has increased law enforcement, criminalized money laundering, and is rooting out corruption. Mexican drug seizures and eradication rates have led the world. And for the first time ever, we have signed an alliance with Mexico and are working together to develop a joint strategy to fight drugs.

I also want to point out that we have substantially expanded our inspection and enforcement efforts along the Southwest border to respond to the increased border traffic. We've increased the number of commercial vehicle narcotics searches by one-third; doubled the number of Border Patrol agents; and significantly increased the number of DEA, Customs, FBI and INS enforcement officers and agents on the border.

Still, there's more we can do in the form of improved cooperation and using new technologies to help police our borders. General McCaffrey has been working very hard on these issues, and I also look forward to discussing them with President Zedillo when he visits next week.



**Questions and Answers on Welfare Reform**  
**November 6, 1997**

**Question:** You've made reforming welfare a top priority of your Administration. How do you think it's going? Is all the success due to the good economy?

**Answer:** As I announced last month, the welfare rolls have fallen more than 3.6 million since I became President, a drop of 26 percent -- the largest caseload decline in history. The welfare rolls dropped 1.7 million in the 10 months after I signed welfare reform into law (from August 1996 to June 1997, the most recent data available). For the first time since 1969, less than 4 percent of the U.S. population is on welfare.

: According to a May report by the Council of Economic Advisors over 40 percent of the reduction in the welfare rolls during my Administration can be attributed to the strong economic growth, nearly one-third can be attributed to waivers we granted to states to test innovative strategies to move people from welfare to work, and the rest is from other factors -- such as our decisions to increase the Earned Income Tax Credit, strengthen child support enforcement, and increase funding for child care.

And welfare caseloads are the best measure we have right now of the success of welfare reform. Not enough time has passed for full scale research studies to be completed to tell us what recipients are doing once they leave the rolls, but we do know that almost all have left the rolls voluntarily, since very few time limits of any kind have gone into effect yet. The natural inference is that the people leaving welfare have found better opportunities and more self-sufficient lives, and the preliminary studies we have support that conclusion.

**Question:** How can you say welfare reform is a success if so many states are failing the work participation rates?

**Answer:** We do not yet have official reports from states about their performance under the new welfare reform rules, but early indications are that nearly all are meeting the work rates for one parent families, which make up a full 93 percent of the caseload. The only work rates states are having trouble meeting are the much higher ones that apply to two parent families, which are a very small portion of the caseload. [The law requires 25 percent of the total welfare caseload to work and 75 percent of the two parent families to work.]

**Question:** Newt Gingrich says your Administration is undermining welfare reform by insisting that participants in workfare programs get the protections of the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) and other employment laws. Why are you doing this?

**Answer:** We believe that worker protection laws, such as the Fair Labor Standards Act, should apply to workfare participants in the same way they apply to other workers. If a workfare participant counts as an "employee" under these laws, then she should get protection. No one doing real work should be paid a subminimum wage.

And we believe that paying working welfare recipients the minimum wage and giving them other worker protections will promote, not undermine, the goals of welfare reform, because it will give them the ability to support their families and break the cycle of dependency.

We will work with states to ensure that they can comply with this policy, without undue financial burden, while still meeting the welfare law's work requirements. Of course, if states place welfare recipients in private jobs, then the minimum wage already applies. And we are working to minimize costs associated with the application of employment laws to workfare participants in other ways.

**Questions & Answers On Campaign Finance Reform**  
**November 6, 1997**

**Q: It looks like both the House and Senate will consider campaign finance reform legislation next spring. What will you do to help pass the McCain-Feingold and Shays-Meehan bills?**

**A:** I remain committed to the enactment of comprehensive, bipartisan campaign finance reform. I have been a long-time supporter of the McCain-Feingold and Shays-Meehan reform bills and I believe their legislation is our best hope for real reform this Congress. As I have since my State of the Union, I will continue to speak out on the need to enact bipartisan legislation swiftly. I will also continue my own efforts to implement real campaign finance reform. Since the beginning of the year, I have petitioned the Federal Elections Commission (FEC) to ban "soft money," I have set up a commission to make recommendations on free and discounted broadcast time, and I have asked the Justice Department to seek a case to overturn Buckley v. Valeo. Over the next few months my Administration will continue to aggressively push forward with these endeavors.

**Q: Are you only willing to support the bills sponsored by Senators McCain and Feingold and Representatives Shays and Meehan or are you willing to consider other types of reform legislation?**

**A:** Earlier this year I outlined five principles that form the foundation of acceptable campaign finance reform legislation:

- 1) It must be bipartisan;
- 2) It must be comprehensive;
- 3) It must reduce the amount of money that is raised and spent on federal elections;
- 4) It must help level the playing field between challengers and incumbents;
- 5) It cannot favor one party over the other.

I am willing to consider signing any reform legislation that meets these five criteria.

**Q: Senator McCain has suggested that in lieu of comprehensive campaign finance reform legislation, that the Congress should pass a ban on "soft money." Do you support Senator McCain's position?**

**A:** I believe a ban on "soft money" is an essential component of comprehensive campaign finance reform. That is why I petitioned the Federal Elections Commission (FEC) to ban "soft money" earlier this year. While I believe we should continue to pursue comprehensive, bipartisan reform, I believe passage of legislation to ban "soft money" would be an important step towards restoring faith in the political system.

**Q: Why not stop taking soft money?**

**A:** As I have said before, both parties raise huge sums of money --the Republicans more than the Democrats. I will not ask the DNC to unilaterally disarm. The answer is for both parties to stop raising soft money --voluntarily, as the DNC has challenged, or by law (either through the FEC or preferably by legislation).

**Questions and Answers on Tobacco**  
**November 6, 1997**

**Q: Do you see any signs that Congress will pass your comprehensive tobacco legislation?**

A: Yes. There are promising signs that Congress will come together in a bipartisan fashion and pass tobacco legislation in the upcoming year. Shortly after I announced my plan for the reduction of youth smoking we had a meeting with the leaders of both the House and the Senate on this issue -- Republicans and Democrats -- and the response was very positive. Protecting our children is a goal we can all agree on. Several Senators have said they intend to introduce legislation -- a few have already done so -- and there is a consensus that we have a unique opportunity if we act right now to control teen smoking. We have great hopes that the Administration and Congress can work together to enact bipartisan legislation in the near future.

**Q: As the tobacco legislation moves through Congress, what are the elements you will not compromise on?**

A: When I announced my plan in September, I made clear that this was not about money, it was about children, and keeping teenagers from smoking. I will not compromise on that. To get the level of smoking reduced, I proposed a plan with five key elements:

- A comprehensive plan to reduce teen smoking, including tough penalties if targets are not met, a public education and counter advertising campaign, and expanded efforts to restrict the access of youth to tobacco products;
- Full authority for the FDA to regulate tobacco products;
- Changes in the way industry does business, including broad document disclosure;
- Progress toward other public health goals, including reduction of second-hand smoke, expansion of smoking cessation programs, strengthening of international efforts, and funding for health research and other health objectives; and
- Protection for tobacco farmers and their communities.

I think we need these elements to have an effective plan.

**Q: Will you accept limitations on the liability of the tobacco industry for the harm their products cause?**

A: I have always said that liability protections are not a deal-breaker if the rest of the legislation meets my objectives. I want to protect the public -- and especially our children -- from the ravages of cigarette smoke. It's much less important to assure big punitive damage awards -- exceeding compensation for actual injuries -- for smokers and their lawyers.

**Questions and Answer on Health Care**  
**November 6, 1997**

**Q: What is your reaction to reports that Senate Republicans are encouraging insurers and businesses to lobby against consumer protection legislation? Do you believe that their views -- which is that this legislation is just a way for the Government to take over the health care system -- will be effective in stopping returns in this area?**

A: No inflammatory and inaccurate rhetoric can hide the fact that there is broad, bipartisan support for national consumer protections in health care. In fact, the legislation that has received the most attention and support in the Congress (and has almost 200 cosponsors, including 85 Republicans) was introduced by a Republican --Congressman Norwood (R-GA). Moreover, the Quality and Consumer Protection Commission's preliminary recommendations for a "Consumer Bill of Rights" comes from a broadly representative group of insurers, businesses, health care providers, and consumer advocates.

There is certainly plenty of room to debate the specifics of how best to assure that the health care our citizens receive is of the highest quality possible. However, attempts to demonize efforts that are designed to protect consumers in a rapidly changing health care system should fool no one.

**Q: Do you support the Norwood bill or any Federal legislation designed to enforce consumer protections?**

A: Federal legislation certainly is one way to enforce these protections. I have not taken any final position on the Norwood bill, but my staff is currently conducting a detailed review of the legislation. I have not received the Quality Commission's report and have made no final determination about how consumer protections should be assured. As you know, the Quality Commission will be submitting their final recommendations on the "Consumer Bill of Rights" on November 19th. I look forward to reviewing it and do not plan to make any announcement on my position on this issue before that time.

**Q: Who are you considering for your appointments to the Medicare Commission?**

As you know, the Balanced Budget Act requires that these appointments be made by December 1. I am still in the process of considering a range of highly qualified candidates with a wide variety of backgrounds and expertise in health care and the Medicare program. I have yet to make any final decisions.

**Q: Will you be appointing any Members of Congress to the Commission? Also, what is your response to Senator Daschle's appointments -- Senator Kerrey and Senator Rockefeller -- to the Commission?**

**A:** There are obviously lots of members who could add a tremendous amount to this Commission. However, I have not made any final decisions.

With regard to Senator Daschle's appointments, both Senator Kerrey and Senator Rockefeller have a good deal of experience in this issue and are extremely knowledgeable and committed to the Medicare program. As Members of the Finance Committee, which has jurisdiction over Medicare, they are logical and welcome additions to the Commission.

**Q: What is your position on the AMA-backed Kyl Medicare amendment and Senator Kyl's hold on Nancy-Ann Min DeParle's nomination to be the Administrator of the Health Care Financing Administration?**

**A:** First, I am deeply concerned about the so called hold. Nancy-Ann Min DeParle is well qualified and the delay in her confirmation undermines the multi-billion dollar Medicare and Medicaid programs and the tens of millions of Americans they serve.

With regard to Senator Kyl's proposal, I do have concerns. It is premature to open up the three month old Balanced Budget Act and all of its carefully constructed Medicare policies that we agreed on to modernize the program and extend the life of the trust fund to 2010.

Moreover, none of us can or should ignore the opposition to this amendment by almost every credible aging advocacy organization in this nation. They have raised serious concerns about the Kyl amendment, citing the potential for fraud as well as reduced access to much needed physicians in rural communities. These and other concerns about Kyl's proposal deserve careful consideration before any modification to current law is made.

**Q: HHS recently sent letters to all states reminding them that any recapture of Medicaid expenditures from tobacco settlements must be apportioned between the federal and state governments. Why does the Federal government have any right to this money?**

**A:** It is my understanding that the letter simply states current law, which explicitly requires that the Federal share of any recapture of Medicaid expenditures be returned to the Federal government.



While we must enforce the law, we also well recognize that a national legislative agreement on tobacco will inevitably address the question of how the federal and state governments should allocate tobacco money. We look forward to working with the states on this important issue.

**Questions and Answers on Service Summer**  
**November 6, 1997**

**Q: Six months ago, you and General Colin Powell convened a summit on children and volunteers in Philadelphia. Some recent press accounts suggest that volunteers have not responded to your call to action. Was the summit just a big photo op?**

**A:** I am deeply committed to the goals of the service summit held in Philadelphia last April, and we are moving forward to attain these goals for children -- a caring adult, a safe place, a healthy start, a marketable skill, and a chance to serve. Service and the well-being of our nation's children have been at the center of my agenda since I took office. Since the summit, my AmeriCorps program has continued working with communities at the grass-roots level and with General Powell's office. Over 150 cities and states are holding local summits around the country, and corporations are continuing to make new commitments to the summit's goals. I have continued to emphasize the importance of service before many audiences.

We have awarded thousands more AmeriCorps scholarships; launched a new high school scholarship program in recognition of community service by young people; signed into law the new child health program, which is the single largest investment in health care for children since 1965; begun to implement my America Reads initiative, where thousands of college students and volunteers will be reading tutors for young children; held the first White House conference on how we can improve the quality of child care in this country; expanded our efforts to get businesses to hire welfare recipients and to get civic organizations to mentor families leaving welfare for work. Finally, federal agencies are moving ahead on the volunteer and partnership efforts they announced at the summit.

**Questions and Answers on White House Conference on Hate Crimes  
November 6, 1997**

**Q: Why are you holding a White House Conference on hate crimes and what policies, if any, do you intend to announce?**

**A:** I am holding the conference to call attention to this very serious problem and to discuss ways of responding to it. Hate crimes are the worst possible manifestation of prejudice and intolerance. Communities all over the countries are finding ways to work together to address this problem, and this conference will allow them to share what they have learned. I do expect to announce several policy proposals, but I will save them for the day of the conference.

**Questions and Answers on Adoption**  
**November 6, 1997**

**Q. Do you think the Congress will pass an adoption bill this year?**

A. I hope so. About a year ago, I called on my Administration to develop a plan to increase the number of adoptions and improve our nation's child welfare system. Many of the changes we proposed -- changes designed to shorten the amount of time children spend in foster care -- require legislative action. The House passed a bill last spring that I strongly supported and that included most of the changes we called for, and the Senate is considering a bill now. I certainly hope we can get a bill done this year for the thousands of children who, through no fault of their own, are waiting in our nation's foster care system.

**Questions and Answers on White House Conference on Hate Crimes  
November 6, 1997**

**Q: What is a hate crime?**

A: ~~As a general matter, a~~ <sup>A/</sup> hate crime, also known as a bias crime, is a crime that is committed against a person or property that is motivated, in whole or part, by the offender's bias against the victim's race, color, religion, gender, national origin, sexual orientation, disability, or familial status. However, it is important to understand that hate crimes are defined by various federal and state criminal statutes, and these statutory definitions differ in their particulars from jurisdiction to jurisdiction. The principal federal hate crimes statute, for example, is limited to crimes committed because of the victim's race, color, religion or national origin; it does not include crimes committed because of the victim's gender, sexual orientation, or disability.

~~What will you be doing on Monday's hate crimes conference?~~  
**Q: Is the President supporting an expansion of the definition of a hate crime? Is he supporting changes to current federal law?**

A: I have called a conference on hate crimes for November 10, 1997. One of the issues that will be considered at the conference is whether the statutory definition of the principal federal hate crimes statute should be expanded.

**Q: What policy announcements will you make at the Hate Crimes Conference?**

A: I will make significant policy announcements regarding law enforcement and prevention, including initiatives regarding FBI resources, training for law enforcement officials, and statistical reporting.

**Q: Is the Hate Crimes Conference part of the Race Initiative?**

A: The Hate Crimes Conference addresses the same basic ideas behind the Race Initiative. In both cases, I would like to create a dialogue so that people can discuss the issue and learn about their differences. While the Hate Crimes Conference coincides with the Race Initiative in many ways, the Hate Crimes Conference encompasses more than racial differences but also differences in religious beliefs, sexual orientation, gender, and disability. Members of the President's Initiative on Race are actively participating in the Hate Crimes Conference as well as at some of the 45 or so satellite sites across the country.

**Q: Is the Oklahoma City bombing case a hate crime? Is the President speaking out on hate crimes now because of the McVeigh and Nichols trials?**

A: It would be inappropriate for me to comment about the Oklahoma City bombing case, since Mr. McVeigh's case is on appeal and the Nichols trial is currently pending.

However, this is an issue I have always felt strongly about. I believe that hate crimes are a scourge on our society as a whole, and that we need to get tough on hate.

**Q: Is the bombing of an abortion clinic a hate crime?**

A: It depends on the circumstances. If the bombing is motivated by the perpetrator's gender-based bias, then the crime could violate a hate crimes statute if the statute defines hate crimes to include this type of conduct when it is motivated by gender bias. The principal federal hate crimes statute currently does not prohibit conduct motivated by gender-based bias.

**Q: Why are there disparities in the hate crimes statistics reported? Why don't we know whether the number of hate crimes committed is going up or down?**

A: Hate crimes statistics vary widely because hate crimes are under reported. There are several reasons why this happens. First, hate crimes reporting by state and local law enforcement agencies is voluntary under current law. Second, many of the most likely targets of hate crimes also are the least likely to report incidents to the police. For example, 60% of the victims of anti-gay incidents who reported their incidents to private tracking groups did not report the incidents to the police, in many cases because of a fear of mistreatment or unwanted exposure. Third, state and local jurisdictions often have disincentives to classify and compile statistics relating to hate crimes. Tracking hate crimes may require law enforcement agencies to do additional investigative work to determine the motivation behind crimes. Nonetheless, the number of hate crimes actually reported to the FBI has increased over the past several years, from 2,771 in 1991 to 7,947 in 1995.

Why are you holding a white House conference on hate crimes and what policies, if any, do you intend to announce?

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**Q&A for Presidential Initiative to Improve the Safety of Imported Fruits and Vegetables  
November 6, 1997**

**Q: What did the Administration propose with regard to food safety?**

**A:** I proposed legislative and executive actions that will further improve the safety of fresh fruits and vegetables, especially those imported into the U.S. The legislation will require the FDA to halt imports of fruits, vegetables, or other food from any foreign country whose food safety systems and standards are not on par with those of the U.S. I will back up this legislation by providing the necessary funds in my FY99 budget to enable FDA to expand dramatically its international food inspection force so that it can make good use of this new authority.

In addition, I directed the Secretaries of Health and Human Services and Agriculture to take additional steps to improve the safety of both imported and domestic fruits and vegetables. Specifically, I asked the Secretaries to issue within one year guidance on good agricultural practices and good manufacturing practices for fruits and vegetables. By providing the first-ever specific safety standards for fruits and vegetables, the guidance will improve the agricultural and manufacturing practices of all those, foreign and domestic, seeking to sell produce in the U.S. market.

**Q: Why is your Administration proposing these actions?**

**A:** There have been dramatic changes in the produce department of the grocery store. Thirty years ago, most produce sections only had around a dozen items year round, increasing to as many as 50 in the summer. Today, the chances are that there are 400 or more items in the produce section and they are there all year round. Last year, 38 percent of the fruit and 12 percent of the vegetables Americans ate were imported.

We have changed as well. Americans are eating more fresh fruits and vegetables than ever before, and our nation's health experts tell us we will live longer, better quality lives as a result. Our environment is also changing. We are finding "new" exotic bugs such as cyclospora and *E. coli O157:H7* on our food that once were not there.

We must ensure that these changes do not increase the risk to American consumers of foodborne illnesses. Although raw produce -- including that imported from foreign countries -- is now safe, experts have suggested ways to make further improvements, and my actions accord with their recommendations.



**Q: Are you saying that imported produce is unsafe?**

**A:** There is no data indicating that imported fruits and vegetables are more unsafe than domestic products. But some recent outbreaks of foodborne illness have been traced back to imports and it is important that foreign fruits and vegetables be held to the same safety standards as American products. The steps we are taking today are adding additional layers of protection. I am making sure that there are no gaps in our food safety system -- that high safety standards apply to imported as well as domestic food, and to fruits and vegetables as well as to meat, poultry, and seafood.

**Q: Will foreign countries have to comply with Good Agricultural and Manufacturing Practices if they want to export fruits and vegetables to the U.S.?**

**A:** We expect that exporting countries will develop similar practices that address potential food safety problems in their countries for one simple reason: they want to be able to sell food in our market, and they want that food to be safe.

We do not know whether a country that does not comply with the new guidance will be able to import fruits and vegetables into the United States. The answer to this question depends on the exact content of the guidance, as well as on intricate legal determinations regarding equivalency between different countries' food safety systems. What is clear is that the FDA will have to cut off imports from countries that do not comply with existing legal standards applicable to domestic produce.

**Q: Doesn't this legislation impose trade barriers to food imports at a time when you are saying you want to lower them? Is this legislation consistent with free trade?**

**A:** This legislation is consistent with free trade and all our treaty obligations. We have no obligation to open our borders to imports that pose a greater risk than domestic products to American consumers. As long as we are not imposing any greater requirements on foreign countries -- as long as we are only holding them to our standards -- we are acting consistently with our trade policy.

**Q: Are these actions meant to provide political cover with respect to the food safety issue because it has become a part of the Fast Track trade debate?**

**A:** No. This is a part of my broad food safety agenda -- my longstanding commitment to ensuring that Americans' food supply is the safest in the world. It does not relate to Fast Track.

**Q: ~~What makes you think this new legislation can be effective? Do you seriously think you are going to be able to put FDA inspectors in every country abroad?~~**

**A: ~~My proposed legislation would give the FDA the same kind of responsibility that the USDA already has for meat and poultry. The USDA system has worked well to ensure that countries with inferior safety standards can't import their meat and poultry. The FDA should be able to run a similarly effective system that inspects food safety systems and standards abroad and prevents imports from countries that do not provide the protections that the U.S. does.~~**

Questions and Answer on Health Care  
November 6, 1997

Q: What is your reaction to reports that <sup>and</sup> the Senate Republican Leadership (Lott <sup>that</sup> and Nickles) are encouraging insurers/businesses to actively lobby against consumer protection legislation? Do you believe their <sup>views --</sup> critique of reforms in this <sup>is</sup> area, which suggests that this is just a veiled attempt for the Government to take over the health care system, <sup>legislation</sup> will be effective in stopping <sup>way</sup> any legislation in this <sup>returns in this area?</sup> area?

A: No inflammatory and inaccurate rhetoric can hide the fact that there is broad <sup>in the health care.</sup> bipartisan support for national consumer protections. In fact, the legislation that has received the most attention and support in the Congress (and has almost 200 cosponsors, including 85 Republicans) was introduced by a Republican -- Congressman Norwood (R-GA). Moreover, the Quality and Consumer Protection Commission's preliminary recommendations for a "Consumer Bill of Rights" comes from a broadly representative group of insurers, businesses, health care providers, and consumer advocates.

There is certainly plenty of room <sup>that are</sup> to debate the specifics of how best to assure that the health care our citizens receive is of the highest quality <sup>nature</sup> possible. However, attempts to demonize efforts <sup>should</sup> designed to protect consumers in a rapidly changing health care system fool no one, and ~~certainly do not represent a constructive and~~ <sup>certainly are not constructive.</sup>

Q: Do you support the Norwood bill or any Federal legislation designed to enforce consumer protections?

A: Federal legislation certainly is one way to enforce these protections. I have not taken any final position on the Norwood bill, but my staff is currently conducting a detailed review of the legislation. I have not received the Quality Commission's report and have made no final determination about how consumer protections should be assured. As you know, the Quality Commission will be submitting their final recommendations on the "Consumer Bill of Rights" on November 19th. I look forward to reviewing it and do not plan to make any announcement on my position on this issue before that time.

Q: Who are you considering for your appointments to the Medicare Commission?

As you know, the Balanced Budget Act requires that these appointments be made by December 1. I am still in the process of considering a range of highly qualified candidates with a wide variety of backgrounds and expertise in health care and the Medicare program. I have yet to make any final decisions.

Q: Will you be appointing any Members of Congress to the Commission? Also, what is your response to Senator Daschle's appointments -- Senator Kerrey and Senator Rockefeller to the Commission?

A: There are obviously lots of members who could add a tremendous amount to this Commission. However, I have not made any final decisions.

With regard to Senator Daschle's appointments, both Senator Kerrey and Senator Rockefeller have a good deal of experience in this issue and are extremely knowledgeable and committed to the Medicare program. As Members of the Finance Committee, which has jurisdiction over Medicare, they are logical and welcomed additions to the Commission.

Q: What is your position on the AMA-backed Kyl Medicare amendment and Senator Kyl's hold on the vote for Nancy-Ann Min DeParle's nomination to be the Administrator of the Health Care Financing Administration?

A: First, I am deeply concerned about the so called hold. Nancy-Ann Min DeParle is well qualified and the delay in her confirmation undermines the multi-billion dollar Medicare and Medicaid programs and the tens of millions of Americans they serve.

With regard to Senator Kyl's proposal, I do have concerns. It is premature to open up the three month old Balanced Budget Act and all of its carefully constructed Medicare policies we agreed on to modernize the program and extend the life of the trust fund to 2010.

Moreover, none of us can or should ignore the opposition to this amendment by almost every credible aging advocacy organization in this nation. They have raised serious concerns about the Kyl amendment, citing the potential for fraud as well as reduced access to much needed physicians in rural communities. These and other concerns about Kyl's proposal deserve careful consideration before any modification to current law is made.

Q: HHS recently sent letters to all states reminding them that any recapture of Medicaid expenditures attributed to a tobacco settlement must be apportioned in between the normal allocation of Federal/state Medicaid spending. Why should the Federal government have access to settlements that were negotiated by states with the Federal government?

A: It is my understanding that the letter simply states current law, which explicitly requires that the Federal share of any recapture of Medicaid expenditures, whether it be for fraud, provider overpayments, or any other recoupment, be returned to the Federal government.

have any right to this money?

While we must enforce the law, we also well recognize that a national legislative agreement on tobacco will inevitably raise ~~Federal/state allocation issues that must be addressed through the legislative process.~~ We look forward to working with the states on this important issue.

address the question of how the federal and state governments should allocate tobacco money.

Questions and Answers on ~~the~~ Tobacco  
November 6, 1997

**Q: Do you see any signs that Congress will pass your comprehensive tobacco legislation?**

A: Yes. There are promising signs that Congress will come together in a bipartisan fashion and pass tobacco legislation in the upcoming year. Shortly after I announced my plan for the reduction of youth smoking we had a meeting with the leaders of both the House and the Senate on this issue -- Republicans and Democrats -- and the response was very positive. Protecting our children is a goal we can all agree on. Several Senators have said they intend to introduce legislation, and there is a consensus that we have a unique opportunity if we act right now to control teen smoking.

*-- a few have already done so --*  
→ ~~Of course, this is a complicated issue. It needs to be studied carefully. But we have great~~ hopes that the Administration and Congress can work together to enact bipartisan legislation in the near future.  
*We*

**Q: As the tobacco legislation moves through Congress, what are the elements you will not compromise on?**

A: When I announced my plan in September, I made clear that this was not about money, it was about children, and keeping teenagers from smoking. I will not compromise on that. To get the level of smoking reduced, I proposed a plan with five key elements:

- A comprehensive plan to reduce teen smoking, including tough penalties if targets are not met, a public education and counter advertising campaign, and expanded efforts to restrict the access of youth to tobacco products;
- Full authority for the FDA to regulate tobacco products;
- Changes in the way industry does business, including broad document disclosure;
- Progress toward other public health goals, including reduction of second-hand smoke, expansion of smoking cessation programs, strengthening of international efforts, and funding for health research and other health objectives; and
- Protection for tobacco farmers and their communities.

I think we need these elements to have an effective plan.

**Q: What will happen if we fail to seize this opportunity?**

A: If current trends continue and nothing is done to curtail tobacco use in America, we can expect an additional 25 million painful and premature deaths among currently living Americans, including five million of our children. On average, smokers who die from smoking-related diseases will lose an average 12 years of life, resulting in medical expenditures of \$50 billion per year.

**Q: Why has tobacco become such an important issue to this Administration?**

A: We've been working on this for two years now. Each day 3000 young people become regular smokers, replacing many of the adult smokers who have quit or died. As the 20th century comes to a close, we need to "right our past wrongs" and bring to a close a century of neglect in dealing with the greatest preventable cause of death in our society. We need to protect our children from being seduced, and then addicted, and finally afflicted. We need to enter the 21st century with policies and programs in place which treat tobacco commensurate with the harm that it causes.

Q: Will you accept limitations on the ~~future~~ liability of the tobacco industry for the harm their products cause?

A: ~~We~~ I have always said that liability protections are not a dealbreaker if the rest of the legislation meets my objectives. ~~That's~~ I want to protect the public -- and especially our children -- from the ravages of cigarette smoke. It's much less important to assure big ~~pen~~ punitive <sup>damages</sup> awards -- exceeding compensation for actual injuries -- for smokers and their lawyers.

**Questions & Answers On Campaign Finance Reform**  
**November 6, 1997**

**Q: It looks like both the House and Senate will consider campaign finance reform legislation next spring. What will you do to help pass the McCain-Feingold and Shays-Meehan bills?**

**A:** I remain committed to the enactment of comprehensive, bipartisan campaign finance reform. I have been a long-time supporter of the McCain-Feingold and Shays-Meehan reform bills and I believe their legislation is our best hope for real reform this Congress. As I have since my State of the Union, I will continue to speak out on the need to enact bipartisan legislation swiftly. I will also continue my own efforts to implement real campaign finance reform. Since the beginning of the year, I have petitioned the Federal Elections Commission (FEC) to ban "soft money." I have set up a commission to make recommendations on free and discounted broadcast time, and I have asked the Justice Department to seek a case to overturn Buckley v. Valeo. Over the next few months my Administration will continue to aggressively push forward with these endeavors.

**Q: Are you only willing to support the bills sponsored by Senators McCain and Feingold and Representatives Shays and Meehan or are you willing to consider other types of reform legislation?**

**A:** Earlier this year I outlined five principles that form the foundation of acceptable campaign finance reform legislation:

- 1) It must be bipartisan;
- 2) It must be comprehensive;
- 3) It must reduce the amount of money that is raised and spent on federal elections;
- 4) It must help level the playing field between challengers and incumbents;
- 5) It cannot favor one party over the other.

I am willing to consider signing any reform legislation that meets these five criteria.

**Q: Senator McCain has suggested that in lieu of comprehensive campaign finance reform legislation, that the Congress should pass a ban on "soft money." Do you support Senator McCain's position?**

**A:** I believe a ban on "soft money" is an essential component of comprehensive campaign finance reform. That is why I petitioned the Federal Elections Commission (FEC) to ban "soft money" earlier this year. While I believe we should continue to pursue comprehensive, bipartisan reform, I believe passage of legislation to ban "soft money" would be an important step towards restoring faith in the political system.



**Q: Why not stop taking soft money?**

**A:** As I have said before, both parties raise huge sums of money --the Republicans more than the Democrats. I will not ask the DNC to unilaterally disarm. The answer is for both parties to stop raising soft money --voluntarily, as the DNC has challenged, or by law (either through the FEC or preferably by legislation).

**Questions and Answers on Welfare Reform**  
**November 6, 1997**

**Question:** You've made reforming welfare a top priority of your Administration. How do you think it's going? Is all the success due to the good economy?

**Answer:** As I announced last month, the welfare rolls have fallen more than 3.6 million since I became President, a drop of 26 percent -- the largest caseload decline in history. The welfare rolls dropped 1.7 million in the 10 months after I signed welfare reform into law (from August 1996 to June 1997, the most recent data available). For the first time since 1969, less than 4 percent of the U.S. population is on welfare.

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<sup>And</sup> [Welfare caseloads are the best measure we have right now of the success of welfare reform.] According to a May report by the Council of Economic Advisors over 40 percent of the reduction in the welfare rolls during my Administration can be attributed to the strong economic growth, nearly one-third can be attributed to waivers we granted to states to test innovative strategies to move people from welfare to work, and the rest is from other factors -- such as the our decisions to increase the Earned Income Tax Credit, strengthen child support enforcement, and increase funding for child care.

Not enough time has passed for full scale research studies to be completed to tell us what recipients are doing once they leave the rolls, but we do know that almost all have left the rolls voluntarily, since very few time limits of any kind have gone into effect yet. The natural inference is that the people leaving welfare have found better opportunities and more self-sufficient lives, and the preliminary studies we have support that conclusion.

**Question:** How can you say welfare reform is a success if so many states are failing the work participation rates?

**Answer:** We do not yet have official reports from states about their performance under the new welfare reform rules, but early indications are that nearly all are meeting the work rates for one parent families, which make up a full 93 percent of the caseload. The only work rates states are having trouble meeting are the much higher ones that apply to two parent families, which are a very small portion of the caseload. [The law requires 25 percent of the total welfare caseload to work and 75 percent of the two parent families to work.]

**Question:** Newt Gingrich says your Administration is undermining welfare reform by insisting that participants in workfare programs get the protections of the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) and other employment laws. Why are you doing this?

**Answer:** We believe that worker protection laws, such as the Fair Labor Standards Act, should apply to workfare participants in the same way they apply to other workers. If a workfare participant counts as an "employee" under these laws, then she should get protection. No one doing real work should be paid a subminimum wage.

And we believe that paying working welfare recipients the minimum wage and giving them other worker protections will promote, not undermine, the goals of welfare reform, because it will give them the ability to support their families and break the cycle of dependency.

We will work with states to ensure that they can comply with this policy, without undue financial burden, while still meeting the welfare law's work requirements. Of course, if states place welfare recipients in private jobs, then the minimum wage already applies. And we are working to minimize costs associated with the application of employment laws to workfare participants in other ways.

In the meantime, my directive orders  
The Treasury Department not to  
grant any applications  
to import

Questions and Answers on Crime/Drugs  
November 6, 1997

Directive on "Sporterized" Assault Weapons

**Q. What are you directing the Treasury Department to do with respect to the modified assault-type weapons that have been reported in the press? How many and what kinds of firearms are at issue?**

A. Over the past few years, firearms manufacturers have modified, or "sporterized", certain dangerous assault weapons to circumvent the ban on their importation required by the 1968 Gun Control Act and the 1994 Crime Bill. There are about 30 models of these firearms that are being manufactured in about 12 different countries, including modified Uzis and AK-47s. While only a limited numbers of these weapons have been imported to date -- ~~and~~ about 20,000 so far this year -- applications are now pending to import more than a million of these firearms.

My directive orders the Treasury Department to reexamine and, if necessary, modify the criteria used to ensure that only legitimate sporting weapons enter into the country. ~~The directive temporarily suspends the importation of all [existing permits and] pending and future applications to grant permits for these "sporterized" semi-automatic assault weapons until the Treasury has completed its review.~~ -- [and also to suspend <sup>current</sup> ~~existing~~ permits that allow the importation of these weapons].

done as much

My Administration has ~~as much~~ as possible -- and used every tool available -- to keep millions of non-sporting, military surplus and other firearms posing a threat to public safety from entering the country and flooding our streets. In 1993, I banned the importation of assault pistols and toughened requirements for federal gun dealers. In 1994, I banned the importation of millions of assault-type weapons and ammunition clips from China. And I fought for and signed the Assault Weapons Ban into law as part of our historic 1994 omnibus crime bill. I've taken these actions to help ensure that criminals are not better armed than our police. ~~And I believe that due in part to our~~ <sup>Thankfully,</sup> ~~efforts~~ last year fewer police officers were slain in the line of duty than in any year since 1960.

If you do not suspend existing permits to import sporterized weapons:

**Q. We understand that there are already-approved permits to import tens of thousands of these weapons-- including Galils from Israel. Why didn't you ~~act on these~~ <sup>suspend</sup> already-approved permits? Didn't President Bush do this in 1989 when he banned the importation of certain assault rifles?**

A. First of all, by ~~not acting on~~ <sup>refusing to grant</sup> pending and future applications, we are ~~putting a stop to~~ <sup>preventing</sup> requests to import more than a million of these firearms while Treasury conducts its review. That's a pretty significant step. Second, the directive also requires Treasury to monitor how many of these firearms are being imported under current permits during the

the importation of

by making minor changes to what are really assault weapons.

Should circumstances warrant,

review period and if they are being recovered at crime scenes. ~~Based on this scrutiny,~~ Treasury can take the additional step of temporarily suspending existing permits, too.

The most important point of this directive, however, is not the scope of its temporary suspension, but of its potential final impact. This directive ensures that ~~in light of the new assault-type weapons that are coming into the country -- we are making every effort to guarantee~~ that only legitimate sporting weapons ~~that comply with the law~~ <sup>will</sup> enter into the country. That's the point of Treasury's review.

Q. ~~gun manufacturers to evade the 1968 Gun Control Act and the 1994 Crime Bill~~ Does this mean that you are planning to permanently ban these firearms from importation?

A. Not necessarily. The directive does not tell the Treasury Department what guns should or should not be allowed into the country. However, pursuant to the 1968 Gun Act, the Treasury Department has an obligation to ensure that only legitimate sporting weapons are imported. Thus, the proposed review will determine what changes, if any, are needed to continue enforcing this provision of law. And ultimately, those firearms that fail to meet the sporting purposes test will be permanently banned.

### COPS Program

Q. **Is it true that many cities are not planning to keep the police officers funded through your COPS program because they can't afford them without federal funding?**

A. I don't think so. Each police department that received a COPS grant signed an agreement to make a good faith effort to retain the additional officers when their federal funding expires. Every indication is that the vast majority of the more than 10,000 police departments receiving COPS funding will keep their commitments and retain these officers. Most cities have indicated that these new officers are making a difference, and that they intend to keep them on board. Equally important, most cities today are in better fiscal shape now than they were five years ago, so they are in a better position to continue funding these officers.

Some cities may have difficulties in retaining their officers, and I know that the Attorney General has committed to work with them -- particularly if there is economic hardship involved. Overall, I think the COPS initiative has been a huge success. We have already funded over 65,000 officers and deputies in just three years, and communities across the country are telling us its helping them drive down the crime rates.

### Southwest Border/Drugs

Q. **What are you doing about the flow of drugs coming across our Southwest Border?**

### **Hasn't the problem been exacerbated by the NAFTA?**

- A. I think it is important to point out that NAFTA has actually helped increase cooperation between the U.S. and Mexico on the drug front. The Zedillo administration has increased ~~their~~ law enforcement, criminalized money laundering and is rooting out corruption. Mexican drug seizures and eradication rates have led the world. And for the first time ever, we have signed an alliance with Mexico and are working together to develop a joint strategy to fight drugs.

I also want to point out that we have substantially expanded our inspection and enforcement efforts along the Southwest border to respond to the increased border traffic. We've increased the number of commercial vehicle narcotics searches by one-third; doubled the number of Border Patrol agents; and significantly increased the number of DEA, Customs, FBI and INS enforcement officers and agents on the border.

Still, there's more we can do in the form of improved cooperation and using new technologies to help police our borders. General McCaffrey has been working very hard on these issues, and ~~also~~ I look forward to discussing them with President Zedillo when he visits next week.

**Questions and Answers on Bilingual Education**  
**November 6, 1997**

**Background**

The Administration has strongly supported the federal bilingual education program, which permits a variety of different approaches to helping students master English, including both bilingual and English immersion instruction. We proposed a 27% increase in bilingual education for FY 98, protected it in the balanced budget agreement, and secured it in the House and Senate-passed appropriations bills.

In June 1998, Californians may face a new ballot initiative to abolish bilingual instruction for public school children in the state, requiring that most instruction be conducted only in English. The idea has support from many conservatives and, recent polls indicate, many in the Latino community and other minority groups, who are frustrated with what they see as an ineffective approach to learning English. The California GOP endorsed the initiative at the end of September. However, the ballot initiative is vehemently opposed by many Latino leaders, who strongly support bilingual instruction and see the initiative as an attack cut from the same cloth as Propositions 187 and 209. The state's largest teacher organization recently announced its opposition, as well. The measure has until December 1 to gain sufficient signatures, although proponents claim that they already have exceeded the necessary threshold.

**Q. What is your Administration's view of bilingual education?**

**A.** My Administration strongly supports the federal bilingual education program, which funds programs in local school districts that are designed to help kids become proficient in English. The program permits a variety of different approaches to helping students master English, including both bilingual and English immersion instruction. To help ensure that resources are available to assist children to learn English well, we proposed a 27% increase in the program and successfully protected bilingual education in the budget and spending bill before the U.S. Congress.

**Q. Will the national tests be made available in bilingual versions?**

**A.** The voluntary national tests consists of a 4th grade test of reading in English and an 8th grade test of mathematics. There will be a bilingual (Spanish and English) version of the 8th grade math test -- because that test is destined to measure mathematics, not language skills. However, the purpose of the 4th grade test is to test student proficiency in reading *in English*, not general reading comprehension. Therefore, the national reading test will not be developed in other languages, although we will be making appropriate accommodations for students whose native language is not English.

By 4th grade, U.S. students need to have mastered basic English reading skills in order to begin to learn other subjects. I realize that there are students who have developed strong

reading skills in their native language -- and that's great because those strong reading skills will transfer over to another language. However, the purpose of the voluntary national tests is to encourage all students to meet the same high standards of reading in English -- so that is the skill that these tests will be designed to measure.

**Q. Does the Administration plan to intervene in California or campaign on behalf of bilingual education?**

The initiative measure has not yet qualified for the ballot so this question is premature. We are gathering more information on the initiative as events develop. However, the Administration supports the approach of the federal program, which permits a variety of different strategies for English language instruction.



**Questions and Answers on School Vouchers**  
**November 6, 1997**

**Q: Democrats are filibustering the DC voucher bill in the Senate, as well the Coverdell K-12 education savings accounts. This week House Democrats also joined with 35 Republicans to defeat a proposed voucher provision strongly supported by Speaker Gingrich. And this week you met with a bipartisan group of congressional leaders and a family who support vouchers. Why do you and most other Democrats continue to oppose private school vouchers?**

**A: I strongly oppose any legislation allowing the use of federal taxpayer funds for vouchers.**

~~We need to focus on strengthening the public schools that serve nearly 90% of students and expanding choice within the public education system, such as through charter schools. [To that end, I am proud of this week's bipartisan House vote in support of the Riggs-Roemer charter schools legislation that I have endorsed.] [Consideration of bill to resume Wednesday].~~

Vouchers would siphon critical dollars from neighborhood public schools that are already short on resources in order to send a few selected students to private schools, and would distract attention from the hard work of reform needed to change failing schools into good schools and good schools into outstanding schools.

As I made clear in Chicago recently, no child deserves to get a second class education. Where schools are failing, local and state education officials must step in and redesign them, or close them down and reopen them ~~it~~ with new, more effective leadership and staff who will raise standards, put into place effective reforms, and create safe, disciplined learning environments where students can succeed.

**Q: Some argue that vouchers are vital to help children escape ineffective, dangerous schools. What is your response to that?**

**A: My opposition to vouchers is based more on what happens to students who do not participate in a voucher program than on what may happen to the few who do. The fact is that 90% of our students attend public schools, and our primary responsibility, especially with limited federal resources, is to make sure that the public schools they attend are among the best in the world. This means concentrating our time and money on raising academic standards, improving teaching, providing schools with technology and other up-to-date learning tools, and creating charter schools and other forms of choice within the public school system. Vouchers only drain financial resources and energy away from our most important task -- improving our public schools.**