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**STATEMENT ON RESULTS FROM
THE NATION'S REPORT CARD: U.S. HISTORY 2006 AND CIVICS 2006**

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Good morning. It is an honor and a pleasure to speak with you all today. And, it is certainly an honor to sit beside my colleagues as we discuss these important issues.

The Heart of the Matter

The current NAEP Civics results are both encouraging and discouraging. At grade 4, scores are up, especially among lower-performing students. But at grades 8 and 12 scores are flat at best. And, what is most discouraging is that as students grow older and progress through the grades towards adulthood and eligibility to vote, their civic knowledge and dispositions seem to grow weaker.

But schools alone are not to blame. Our nation's schools have mounted tremendous efforts to promote civic education and participation. For example, a robust menu of extracurricular programs and projects are available to middle and high school students. Mock Trial, Moot Court, We the People, History Day, and Project Citizen are just a few of the highly-effective civics-related programs supported by joint public-private partnerships. In fact, my daughter is a proud graduate of a mock trial program which inspired her to graduate from law school.

The Congress, states, and local communities have tried to do their part as well. Taking their cue from the National Campaign to Restore the Civic Mission of Schools, states have formed coalitions to promote civic involvement and literacy among young people. I am pleased to serve as Co-chair of California's Civic Mission Project. These efforts have launched from the recommendations of the 2003 Carnegie and Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE) committee which highlighted six promising approaches to civic education:

(more)

1. Instruction in government, history, law and democracy
2. Classroom discussions of current events
3. Service learning
4. Extracurricular activities
5. Student voice in school governance
6. Simulations of democratic processes

Research from my home state of California paints a picture of students eager to help those in need but reluctant to become engaged in civic and political life. The California Survey of Civic Education conducted in 2005 by Joseph Kahne of St. Mary's College, found that nearly 65 percent of high school seniors had volunteered multiple times to help those in need during their high school years. At the same time, less than half (47 percent) of seniors agreed that "being actively involved in state and local issues is my responsibility."

There is ample evidence that there is a large and growing civic literacy gap between advantaged and disadvantaged high school students. The NAEP Civics 2006 report found a strong association between parental education level and student performance at grades 8 and 12. In addition, the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) study of Civic Education found a striking difference in students' expectations about whether or not they would vote. Among students with college aspirations and from advantaged homes nearly 57 percent expected to vote, while among those with neither college aspirations nor advantaged homes only 18.7 percent expected to vote.

There is no "quick fix" for promoting the civic engagement of our youth. The Civic Mission work in the states is encouraging. Efforts to bolster professional development for teachers and models of effective classroom lessons are impressive in some places but absent in others. The real problem seems to be that civic education seems most often to be incidental, and not central, to the schooling of American youth. And, the fact is it ought to be the heart of the matter. The menu of extracurricular programs mentioned earlier touch far too few students. It's important that we create more systemic and comprehensive efforts that are provided during the school day. An excellent example of these efforts is the Civitas Academies offered throughout California. These academies provide a four-year civics-based education for students.

To place civic engagement and participation at the heart of the matter, perhaps we need to act more boldly. Perhaps we should consider making preparation for voting – the heart of participation in our democracy – a requirement for high school completion. And perhaps we should also expect high school seniors to complete their schooling and be registered to vote – not required to vote – but able to vote and prepared throughout their school years to do so.

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