
Presidential Documents

Title 3—

Proclamation 7022 of September 16, 1997

The President

Citizenship Day and Constitution Week, 1997

By the President of the United States of America

A Proclamation

Of all the dates in American history, one of the most important is perhaps the least well-known—September 17, 1787. On that day, our Nation's Founders signed the Constitution of the United States, a document that has steadily grown in stature throughout the world as a model for democratic government under the rule of law.

As with most human enterprises, the Constitution was the product of compromise. The delegates to the Constitutional Convention brought with them to Philadelphia conflicting local and regional concerns, differing viewpoints, fears of creating a government that was either too powerful or too weak. When the convention seemed close to dissolving with nothing accomplished, Benjamin Franklin reminded his fellow delegates that history would judge them harshly if they failed in this great experiment of self-government: “. . . [M]ankind may hereafter, from this unfortunate instance, despair of establishing governments by human wisdom, and leave it to chance, war and conquest.”

But human wisdom did prevail. The delegates devised a framework for democracy with an ingenious design of checks and balances, broad protection of individual rights, and a mechanism for amendment to ensure that it would be able to respond to the ever-changing needs of our people. This remarkable document has rightly earned the world's admiration for its success in combining structural solidity with practical adaptability—a combination that has served our Nation through times of rapid change as well as times of stability.

We can measure that success by the thousands of men, women, and children who travel to our shores each year, seeking a chance to live out their dreams. Many of them know what life can be like without the blessings of our Constitution, and their experience is a powerful reminder to us of the importance of protecting the Constitution if we are to preserve freedom for ourselves and for the generations of Americans to follow. We can also learn much from their deep desire for American citizenship and their enthusiasm to embrace not only its privileges, but also its responsibilities—knowledge of and respect for our laws, a willingness to exercise their vote, and reverence for the fundamental American values of freedom, tolerance, and equality.

But today American citizenship requires more. At the Presidents' Summit for America's Future in Philadelphia this past April, I joined with Vice President Gore; former Presidents Ford, Carter, and Bush; General Colin Powell; and other national and community leaders in calling for a redefinition of American citizenship—a definition that includes a profound commitment to community service. Each of us must look into our own neighborhoods and communities and reach out to help our fellow Americans succeed. We can only fulfill America's bright promise of freedom and opportunity by ensuring that every citizen shares in that promise.

In commemorating the signing of the Constitution and in recognition of the importance of active, responsible citizenship to preserve its blessings for our Nation, the Congress, by joint resolution of February 29, 1952 (36

U.S.C. 153), designated September 17 as "Citizenship Day," and by joint resolution of August 2, 1956 (36 U.S.C. 159), requested the President to proclaim the week beginning September 17 and ending September 23 of each year as "Constitution Week."

NOW, THEREFORE, I, WILLIAM J. CLINTON, President of the United States of America, do hereby proclaim September 17, 1997, as Citizenship Day and September 17 through September 23, 1997, as Constitution Week. I call upon Federal, State, and local officials, as well as leaders of civic, educational, and religious organizations, to conduct meaningful ceremonies and programs in our schools, churches, and other community centers to foster a greater understanding and appreciation of the Constitution and the rights and duties of citizenship.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand this sixteenth day of September, in the year of our Lord nineteen hundred and ninety-seven, and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and twenty-second.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "William J. Clinton". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized "W" and "C".

[FR Doc. 97-25116

Filed 9-18-97; 8:45 am]

Billing code 3195-01-P