

# Locke Proposals Would Shrink Classes, Ease Crowding

By Andrew Trotter

In his fourth State of the State Address, Gov. Gary Locke of Washington weighed improving children's education against the competing priorities of state highway projects and tax cuts—and pronounced education to be most vital to the state's future.

"Education is the sword of democracy, the Excalibur of opportunity, and yes, the great equalizer. Our children deserve the best," the Democratic governor told state legislators in his Jan. 11 speech.

But the state's children need smaller classes and more individ-

## State of the States

ual attention to reach high standards, he said. Although the state has been prosperous in recent years, it also has classrooms that are among the most crowded in the nation, he said.

Mr. Locke proposed that the state make a "down payment" toward eliminating crowded classrooms by "using savings in the state education budget to hire 1,000 teachers" in the 2000-01 school year. Overcrowding also could be addressed by school and weekend programs for children who need extra time or attention, he said. He called for local school boards to be allowed to retain more of the taxes that are generated in their communities, suggesting that localities would use the money to address the overcrowding problem.

State spending on new school construction would continue, he said, noting that since he took office in 1997, efforts by the state bureaucracy to streamline its operations have yielded \$143 million in savings, which have been spent on building new schools.

## Teacher Testing Urged

Mr. Locke suggested that the need to hire more teachers should not slow efforts to improve their quality. To that end, he renewed his call for requiring new teachers to pass a test of their knowledge of the subject areas they would teach, prior to their initial certification. Washington is one of only seven states that don't require new teachers to take tests to prove their mastery, his aides said.

"This is simply unacceptable, and it must end now," he said. Testing new teachers would complement existing efforts to upgrade training and professional standards for current teachers, he added.

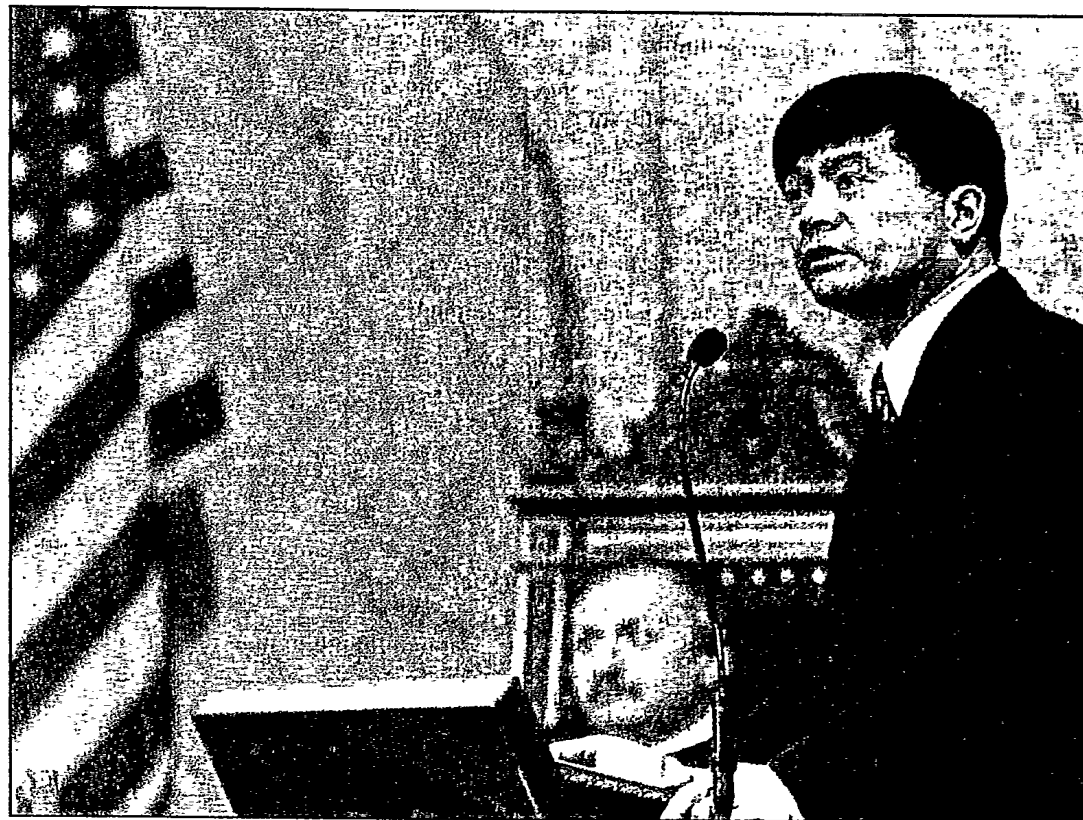
Mr. Locke also supports establishment of a professional-educator-standards board, which would govern certification rules and other professional benchmarks for teachers and principals, an idea opposed by the state board of education, which holds that job now.

He plans to ask legislators to budget \$5.2 million to support

professional-development activities that will take place during three new learning improvement days for teachers that the legislature enacted last year, aides said.

The governor told legislators that he has heard "loud and clear" the anti-tax message of voters who in November wiped out the state's vehicle tax by passing Initiative 695, stripping about \$1 billion from the state transportation budget. That comes on top of a 1993 referendum that tightly limited increases in the state budget.

Responding to Initiative 695 will require "sacrifices and tough decisions," he said, but not at the expense of education. "On my watch I will not see education sacrificed," he said.



Gov. Gary Locke of Washington urged state legislators to give priority to schools over competing budgetary interests, calling education "the sword of democracy, the Excalibur of opportunity."

Instead, Mr. Locke called on legislators to sacrifice for education, a theme he underscored by recognizing several "heroes" who had made sacrifices in the military or other public service. "The choices these heroes made carved out our destiny," he said. "What kind of a destiny do we want to carve out for our children? That will depend on the choices we make—in the next 60 days."