

The President's Radio Address *January 27, 2001*

A week ago today I received a great honor and all the great responsibilities that come with it. The first order of business is education reform, and we have started strong.

On Tuesday I sent to Congress a package of reforms to turn last year's pledges into this year's laws. I want to make all of our public schools places of learning and high standards and achievement. Our country must offer every child, no matter what his or her background or accent, a fair start in life with a quality education.

I also met this week with congressional leaders in both parties, and we found a lot of agreement on the basic goals of reform. No one is content with the status quo. Most are open to new ideas. Everyone agrees, at least, that the problems are serious and action is urgently needed.

This city has heard so much talk over the years about education reform. So many different approaches have been tried. So many new programs have been created. But we need more than a few new programs; we need a new way of thinking. We must go back to the fundamentals of early reading and regular testing, local control and accountability for results, clear incentives for excellence and clear consequences for failure. These are the elements of the plan I am proposing.

Real reform starts by giving schools and school districts more authority and flexibility. We cannot expect schools to change unless they have the freedom to change. My plan respects the principle of local control. It does not try to run the schools from a central office in Washington. I view principals, teachers, and parents as allies in reform. They are ready to raise the standards, ready to take responsibility and answer for results.

Those results must be measured by testing every child every year, in tests devel-

oped and administered by States and local districts, not the Federal Government. Without yearly testing, we do not know who is falling behind and who needs our help. Without yearly testing, too often we don't find failure until it is too late. Testing allows us to help children early, before frustration turns into apathy.

We need to aim high, but we also need to be realistic. Many schools, particularly those in poor neighborhoods, will need help to meet high standards. And they will have it, including a new \$5 billion initiative over 5 years for reading instruction. The goal is to improve our public schools. We want them to succeed, and when they're willing to change, we'll give them the tools to do so.

At the same time, we will not continue to pour taxpayers' money into schools that do not teach and will not change. My plan will give every failing school a fair chance to improve, but there will be a deadline, a moment of truth when parents are given better options and their children are given a way out.

There are some honest differences of opinion in Congress about what form these options should take. I have my own plan which would help children in persistently failing schools to go to another public, private, or charter school. Others suggest different approaches, and I am willing to listen. But all reform must be based on a principle: Children and parents who have had only bad choices need better choices. And it is my duty as President to help them.

In sending my plan to Congress, I ask that we act before this summer, when schools begin planning for the next school year. I hope to have the support of Republicans and Democrats alike, and I hope to have your support, as well.

Jan. 27 / Administration of George W. Bush, 2001

Thank you for listening.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:06 a.m. from the Oval Office at the White House.

Remarks on Signing Executive Orders With Respect to Faith-Based and Community Initiatives

January 29, 2001

Good morning. Thank you all for coming. I take great joy in making this announcement. It's going to be one of the most important initiatives that my administration not only discusses but implements.

First, it's good to have so many groups represented here: religious and nonreligious; Catholic, Jewish, Protestant, and Muslim; foundations and other nonprofits. I want to thank you all for coming. This is a collection of some of the finest America has got to offer, people who lead with their hearts and, in turn, have changed the communities in which they live for the better. This meeting is a picture of the strength and diversity and compassion of our country.

This is a diverse group, but we share things in common. They provide more than practical help to people in need; they touch and change hearts. And for this, America is deeply appreciative.

Everyone in this room knows firsthand that there are still deep needs and real suffering in the shadow of America's affluence, problems like addiction and abandonment and gang violence, domestic violence, mental illness, and homelessness. We are called by conscience to respond.

As I said in my Inaugural Address, compassion is the work of a nation, not just a government. It is more than the calling of politicians; it is the calling of citizens. It is citizens who turn mean streets into good neighborhoods. It is citizens who turn cold cities into real communities.

It is one of the great goals of my administration to invigorate the spirit of involvement and citizenship. We will encourage

faith-based and community programs without changing their mission. We will help all in their work to change hearts while keeping a commitment to pluralism.

I approach this goal with some basic principles. Government has important responsibilities for public health or public order and civil rights, and Government will never be replaced by charities and community groups. Yet when we see social needs in America, my administration will look first to faith-based programs and community groups, which have proven their power to save and change lives. We will not fund the religious activities of any group, but when people of faith provide social services, we will not discriminate against them.

As long as there are secular alternatives, faith-based charities should be able to compete for funding on an equal basis and in a manner that does not cause them to sacrifice their mission. And we will make sure that help goes to large organizations and to small ones, as well. We value large organizations with generations of experience. We also value neighborhood healers, who have only the scars and testimony of their own experience.

Tomorrow I will begin turning these principles into a legislative agenda. I will send to Congress a series of ideas and proposals. Today I want to raise the priority and profile of these issues within my own administration. I want to ensure that faith-based and community groups will always have a place at the table in our deliberations.

In a few moments, I will sign two Executive orders. The first Executive order will