

Remarks in a Discussion on Character-Building Programs in Education  
*April 10, 2001*

*The President.* Thank you all. Mr. Secretary, thank you very much. Mr. Mayor, thank you very much for being here. I'm glad to see you. And I'm glad to see the superintendent. I appreciate you all being here. This is not the first time I've been with the Mayor, nor with the superintendent, both of whom are doing a fine job for Washington, DC. I'm proud to call this place home, and I'm proud to have you all leading the city and the school district.

I want to thank the members of the Young Gentlemen's Club for being here, and I'm looking forward to shaking your hand after the discussion. And thank you all for making the right choices in life. I want to thank our panelists. I look forward to hearing from our panelists.

I want to start the discussion by quoting Martin Luther King, Jr., who said this: "Intelligence is not enough. Intelligence plus character, that is the goal of true education." So we're here today to herald character-building programs. We're here today to recommend that throughout America we teach values to our children, that we not only teach our children how to read and write but that we be bold enough to teach them the difference between right and wrong, as well. And we've picked a pretty darn good school as an example.

By the way, I found this, that one of the keys to success in our public education is to have good, strong principals. So Annie, thank you for being here. I'm looking forward to hearing from you.

One of the keys to success is to have role models not only live a quality life but be willing to take time out of their lives to share their experiences. So I'm pleased to have a star basketball player with us here.

One of the keys to success is to find people who are willing to use their intel-

ligence to rally people of compassion to serve as mentors and role models for children—young ladies, in this case. And so I'm so pleased that Elayne Bennett is here.

One of the keys to success is being a good mom. And so I'm so thankful you're here, Nicole.

One of the keys to success is to be willing to listen to what the adults say. And so Isaiah, thank you for being here, as well.

And finally, it is an honor that Mr. Bob Howard is with us, a person who has taken time out of his life to make sure that the Young Gentlemen's Club flourishes.

Parents have a tough battle in America today. Their children sometimes receive conflicting messages, and what public education ought to do is stand on the side of parents and be willing to reinforce the values that parents teach their children. And the Young Gentlemen's Club does just that. And so I'm looking forward to hearing the stories. I'm looking forward to hearing how best I can help.

One way we can help, by the way, is to have our budgets reflect our priorities. And the budget I submitted to the Congress triples the amount of character-education money available for public education. The budget I submitted to the Congress increases the amount of money available for abstinence education programs. And the money and program I've submitted to the Congress encourages after-school programs to be run by faith-based and community-based programs that exist because they've heard the universal call to love a neighbor just like they'd like to be loved themselves.

We can make a huge difference in the lives of America's children. It starts recognizing that society's changed one child at a time; one heart, one soul, one conscience at a time. And this program, the Young Gentlemen's Club, does precisely that.

So thank you, Mr. Secretary. It's an honor. And thank you all for coming.

[*The discussion proceeded.*]

*The President.* Let me say one thing, Mr. Secretary. To prove the principal's point, they use a Stanford 9 here in the District of Columbia. Many of you know that I'm a strong advocate for accountability. If you don't measure, you don't know. And so under the leadership of the superintendent, there's a lot of measuring that goes on. It's really important to measure, by the way, and I hope the Congress gets the message how important it is that in return for more money, we need to have strong accountability systems developed at the local level.

Cleveland Elementary School, on the Stanford 9, is on par with affluent local suburban districts. In other words, it's not just talking the talk; the results have improved significantly as a result of character programs and focus on each child.

And I want to thank you for your hard work, Madam Principal, and the results bear out what you just said. There is a connection between good character and good education. And we've got to remember that in this country. That's why it's important to spread character-education programs throughout America.

[*The discussion continued.*]

*The President.* I think we've got a perfect gentleman here. Tell us about your program, Isaiah, can you?

*Third Grade Student Isaiah Greene.* Yes. The program teaches us how to be—how to respect women and how to control our attitude.

*The President.* And when do you meet? How often do you meet?

*Isaiah Greene.* When I was there, we used to meet in the afternoons.

*The President.* Oh, good. And so who is—teaches you how to respect women? Is that what you just said? And is it working?

*Isaiah Greene.* Yes. [*Laughter*]

*The President.* How about Mom?

*Isaiah Greene.* Yes.

*The President.* You listen to your mom?

*Isaiah Greene.* Yes.

*The President.* I listen to mine. [*Laughter*] How about you, Mom?

[*The discussion continued.*]

*The President.* Is he studying?

*Nicole Keller.* He's studying hard. He's very—

*The President.* That's great.

*Ms. Keller.* —excited about his school-work and all that he does.

*The President.* He's going to college, isn't he?

*Ms. Keller.* That's right. Yes, he is.

*The President.* Have you got anything to add to that, Isaiah? [*Laughter*]

[*The discussion continued.*]

*The President.* Well, I want to thank our panelists. I believe America can conquer any problem we're faced with. I truly believe that, because this is a loving country. There's a lot of people who really care about members of the Young Gentlemen's Club, whether it be at Cleveland Elementary or any other elementary. There are a lot of people who really care about their neighbor in this country.

All of us have got to do our part. The Federal Government can put money up, but we can't make people love one another. And that's something we've just got to understand in our country, that we can fund programs—and we will. There will be a lot of discussions about what gets funded and what doesn't get funded, and this, that, and the other. But the truth of the matter is, the issue is bigger than budgets. The issue is about whether or not loving people in America want to help somebody in need.

And I think so. And to the extent that you all are helping, I want to thank you from the bottom of my heart. One of my missions is to encourage mentoring programs all across the country. One of our missions is to make sure that boys and girls

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whose mother or dad may be in prison finds a mentor, somebody to love them. One of our missions is to teach—is to help teach children right from wrong so that they can enjoy the great fruits of the greatest country on the face of the Earth. And to the extent you're helping, I thank you from the bottom of my heart.

Thank you all for coming. I look forward to getting to shake hands with the members of the Young Gentlemen's Club, if that's okay with you.

God bless.

NOTE: The President spoke at 3:12 p.m. in the State Dining Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Mayor Anthony A. Williams of Washington, DC; Paul L. Vance, superintendent, District of Columbia Public Schools; Annie R. Mair, principal, Cleveland Elementary School; NBA Washington Wizards player Jahidi White; Elayne Bennett, founder, Best Friends Program; Nicole Keller, mother of Isaiah Greene; and Robert Howard, founder, Young Gentlemen's Club.

## Remarks on Plans for Release of United States Navy Aircraft Crewmembers in China

*April 11, 2001*

Good morning. I'm pleased to be able to tell the American people that plans are underway to bring home our 24 American service men and women from Hainan Island.

This morning the Chinese Government assured our American Ambassador that the crew would leave promptly. We're working on arrangements to pick them up and to bring them home.

This has been a difficult situation for both our countries. I know the American people join me in expressing sorrow for the loss of life of a Chinese pilot. Our prayers are with his wife and his child.

I appreciate the hard work of our Ambassador to China, Joseph Prueher, and his entire Embassy team, who worked tirelessly to solve this situation. The American people, their families, and I are proud of our crew, and we look forward to welcoming them home.

Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 8:25 a.m. in the James S. Brady Briefing Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Ruan Guoqin, widow of Chinese pilot Wang Wei, and their son, Wang Ding.

## Remarks at Concord Middle School in Concord, North Carolina

*April 11, 2001*

Thank you all very much. Okay. "Dr. O," thank you for your hospitality. It's an honor to be here. I want to thank you all for coming.

Before I talk about a subject dear to my heart, which is education, and before

I recognize all the distinguished guests, I do want to say that right after my visit here, I am going to meet with the family of Petty Officer Third Class Steven Blocher. As you know, Steven is one of our 24 service men and women in China.