

board, Hillsborough County Habitat for Humanity; and Johana Rodriguez, whose home the President helped build.

Remarks Prior to a Meeting With the Senate Education Working Group
and an Exchange With Reporters
June 5, 2001

The President. Listen, thank you all for coming. It is good to see Members of the Senate coming back from the Memorial Day break. We're here to discuss the education bill that has been passed by the House of Representatives that will be debated soon, I believe. We hope soon—this afternoon on the floor of the United States Senate. And I, of course, am anxious to talk to the chairman of the Education Committee, Senator Kennedy, about getting the bill done.

There's been a lot of discussion about the bill, a lot of agreements that have been made. There's been a lot of hard work from a lot of people around this table, and my hope is, is that we don't try to add to or subtract from the bill after our agreements have been made.

I look forward to hearing from the Members about how best to get this bill complete. I think we have an opportunity—I know we have an opportunity to show the American people that although the structure of the Senate may have been altered somewhat, we still can get things done in a way that's positive for America. So, welcome the Members here.

Secondly, I am deeply concerned, as are Members of the Senate around this table, about the situation in the U.S. steel industry. And we're concerned about unfair trade practices that may be affecting the economics of the steel industry and, therefore, call upon the International Trade Commission under Section 201 to have a full investigation of the industry, the imports coming into the United States, and make sure that

our industry is not being affected by unfair trade practices.

I'll be glad to answer a few questions, and then we look forward to a discussion.

Bipartisanship

Q. Mr. President, Senator Kennedy is the chairman of this committee because Senator Jeffords is leaving the party, saying that he could no longer—because of the conservative bent of the party, he could no longer work as well with you and other leaders of—

The President. Why do you have to make the guy feel bad in front of the TV cameras?

Q. Because I get paid good money for it, sir. [*Laughter*] Let's not get into your tax cut proposal now.

What does that say about your ability to oversee a party that's supposedly supposed to have a broad tent and, specifically, your ability to govern as you promised, as a bipartisan leader?

The President. Well, that's what this meeting is all about. And there's going to be an opportunity for us to work on a variety of issues. We did so on the tax relief package. That package got a pretty good Democratic vote out of the Senate and a good Democratic vote out of the House. We'll do so on the education plan.

There's a Patients' Bill of Rights that's working its way through the Senate. I'm confident we'll have a series of discussions on that. As a matter of fact, there's an author of one of the bills here, and there's two authors of a secondary bill—a second

bill here. And as you know, we've been working with Senator Frist and Senator Jeffords on that alternative to try to make it conform to some principles that I discussed. There's going to be a lot of give and take on key issues.

And I think when people see the fine print of the education bill, they'll find there's been a lot of give and take in order to get a good bill out that improves public education. So I'm confident we'll be able to work together.

Multilateral Initiative on Steel

Q. And the steel ruling, is this going to anger European allies going into the summit?

The President. Ron [Ron Fournier, Associated Press], I certainly hope it doesn't anger European allies. As you know, I've told the world that we are going to have an active international—internationalist foreign policy, with U.S. interests at its heart. And it's in our Nation's interests to make sure that if there are unfair trade practices in the steel industry, that we address them in an aggressive way, which this administration will do.

Yes, Jim [Jim Angle, Fox News]. Nice seeing your brother the other day.

Q. Yes, sir. He was happy to see you.

The President. He speaks highly of you. [Laughter]

Education Legislation

Q. Sir, do you have any fears that the changeover in the Senate will threaten the education reform? Is that the reason for calling this meeting?

The President. The reason for calling this meeting is because I wanted to touch base with the people that are making the bill move, to let them know how much I appreciate the hard work that has gone into the bill, ask what we can do to help make it move as quickly as possible so that we can sign a bill in time for public districts around the United States to plan for next fall.

And one reason why the Secretary of Education is here is, he is going to be in charge of implementing the new bill. And that's why they're here.

Q. You have more than 100 amendments still to be dealt with, sir. Is that something you would like to ask the Members here to streamline? Is there some way to make the process move a little faster?

The President. That's going to be up to the chairman, and I am sure he will have a few good ideas. He has been around here a lot longer than I have, and he'll have good ideas to move the bill as quickly as possible.

My only request is that we adhere to the spirit of our negotiations as best as possible. I know the Senator is a man of his word. Our administration is, as well. I am confident we can get something done in a positive way.

Situation in the Middle East

Q. Mr. President, what are you expecting to accomplish by sending CIA Director Tenet to the Middle East, and what do you feel about the recent events out there?

The President. Well, we believe strongly we need to stop the cycle of violence before anything can happen. And I have been on the phone, and the Secretary of State has been on the phone, urging all parties involved to adhere to the cease-fire. We believe enough progress has been made on the cease-fire that it is time to send George Tenet to the Middle East to start serious discussions at the security level about how to make sure the cease-fire continues.

And we are very hopeful that this will—this step will continue to—will be a part of building confidence in the region, confidence between skeptical leaders. And George is going to be on a very important mission, and we are all hopeful in the United States that the mission begins to achieve the objective.

Once the violence has ceased, once there is a cease-fire in place, once there are strong security arrangements back in place,

then we can start having political discussions.

Q. Former——

The President. The Mitchell report was a very good report, and I called former Senator Mitchell to thank him for his contributions. Our Government and our Nation supports the Mitchell report. The Mitchell report clearly says: Step one is to stop the violence. And that is where our efforts are from our Government. We are doing everything we can to make it clear to all parties

that we will work as hard as we can to stop the violence.

Thank you all very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:08 p.m. in the Cabinet Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to former Senator George J. Mitchell, chairman, Sharm el-Sheikh Fact-Finding Committee. The committee's report was issued April 30. A tape was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

Statement on a Multilateral Initiative on Steel *June 5, 2001*

This administration is committed to free trade as an engine of growth. As part of our free trade agenda, we are committed to ensuring that American industry and American workers can compete on a level playing field. That is why today I am announcing my intent to launch an initiative to respond to the challenges facing the U.S. steel industry. This initiative will be designed to restore market forces to world steel markets and eliminate the practices that harm our steel industry and its workers.

The U.S. steel industry has been affected by a 50-year legacy of foreign government intervention in the market and direct financial support of their steel industries. The result has been significant excess capacity, inefficient production, and a glut of steel on world markets.

My decision to pursue this initiative comes after extensive consultations by members of the Cabinet with our industry, our steelworkers, and interested Members of Congress. We have discussed the challenges facing U.S. steel manufacturers, and we understand that we have a critical stake in a healthy U.S. steel industry.

Thus, I intend to take the following steps. First, I am directing the United

States Trade Representative, in cooperation with the Secretary of Commerce and Secretary of the Treasury, to initiate negotiations with our trading partners seeking the near-term elimination of inefficient excess capacity in the steel industry worldwide, in a manner consistent with applicable U.S. laws.

Second, I am directing the U.S. Trade Representative, together with the Secretaries of Commerce and the Treasury, to initiate negotiations on the rules that will govern steel trade in the future and eliminate the underlying market-distorting subsidies that led to the current conditions in the first place. Absent strict disciplines barring government support, direct or indirect, for inefficient steelmaking capacity, the problems confronting the U.S. steel industry—and the steel industry worldwide—will only recur.

We see these negotiations—and the goal of restoring market forces—as being in our interest and in the interest of our trading partners and their steel industries. That is why we would like to work cooperatively with our trading partners in pursuing this initiative.

Third, I am directing the U.S. Trade Representative to request the initiation of