

June 21 / Administration of George W. Bush, 2001

just as you are now making a difference in the lives of so many Americans.

Thank you very much, and God bless.

NOTE: The President's remarks were videotaped at approximately 4:30 p.m. on June 19 in the Library at the White House

for a tribute to Tommy Thompson at the Metropolitan Milwaukee Chamber of Commerce in Milwaukee, WI, on June 21. The transcript was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on June 21. A tape was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

Remarks at a Dinner for Senator Jeff Sessions in Birmingham *June 21, 2001*

Thank you all very much. Thank you all. Be seated. Jeff said, "Why don't you come over to Birmingham and have dinner with a couple of my buddies." [*Laughter*] I said, "Okay." I'm glad I came. Thank you for that warm welcome, and thank you for giving me the chance to be the President of the greatest Nation on the face of the Earth.

First, I'm here to urge the people of Alabama to send this good man, Jeff Sessions, back to the United States Senate. He's doing a great job. He's a solid citizen who brings integrity to the office. Plus, he's got a friend in the White House. [*Laughter*] He married well, too. [*Laughter*] It's good to be here with Mary.

I'm so sorry that my wife isn't here. I can't tell you how proud I am of Laura. She's made a big difference already in the White House. She has trained one small puppy. [*Laughter*] She keeps her husband in line. And she brings a lot of class to the Office of the First Lady, and I'm proud of her.

After I speak, I'm heading to our ranch in central Texas, where I will spend some quality time with Laura. And frankly, I'm honored to be here. I'm looking forward to sharing some wisdom—but I can't wait to get back home. [*Laughter*] Washington, DC, is a great place to work, but Texas is a great place to relax.

I'm honored to be here, as well, with the Lieutenant Governor of the State of

Alabama, Steve Windom; the attorney general, Bill Pryor. I'm so pleased that my friend Bill Cabaniss is here. I want to thank the Members of the United States Congress who have traveled here with me today: the Congressman from this district, Spencer Bachus; Robert Aderholt; Terry Everett; Congressman Bob Riley; and Sonny Calhoun. This is a fine delegation from Alabama who are conservative and compassionate, and I'm proud to call them friends, and you ought to be proud to call them Members of the United States Congress.

I want to thank—I don't know if Red Blount is here or not, but I spent a little time in Alabama in 1972 working for Red Blount's senatorial campaign. It's a pretty good lesson of Alabama politics. But I've made a lot of friends in this State from those days, friends that I'll never forget. And I thank you for your friendship, and I thank you for giving me a pretty good lesson on Southern politics. It paid off in the year 2000. [*Laughter*]

I want to thank Mary Connors—Marty Connors, the chairman of the party; Edgar Welden and Bettye Fine Collins for their leadership for the Republican effort. Thank you all very much.

One reason I'm so nice to the Alabama delegation is because they've been steady in their votes for reform. We're making some pretty good progress in Washington, DC, about defusing the old way of doing business. The old way was, you didn't worry

about results; you just worried about how loud you yelled at somebody or how you pointed your finger. I came up to the Nation's Capital intent upon changing the tone in Washington, DC, of setting an agenda that's positive and hopeful for every American, and to working with Congress to get things done. And I'm proud to report, we are getting things done on behalf of the American people.

I was honored the other day to sign the first broad tax relief in a generation. And I want to thank the members of the Alabama congressional delegation and the two United States Senators for voting with us, to say that the American people ought to be trusted with their own money.

This was an important issue for America, because it set the stage for a new way of thinking about the budget. It said that we can meet our obligations by growing the budget at a reasonable rate. But it also recognized that the surplus is not the Government's money. The surplus is the people's money, and we ought to trust the people with their own money. So we cut rates on everybody who pays taxes.

The old way in Washington was to have what they call targeted tax cuts. That meant that folks in Washington, DC, got to say, this side of the room got tax relief, and this side didn't. But we didn't think that was fair, and we didn't think that was right. We felt that if you're going to give tax relief, everybody who paid taxes ought to get tax relief. So we reduced the rates on every taxpayer in the United States of America, and we're going to start sending out checks this July to the taxpayers of America.

We also recognize that the marriage penalty sent the wrong signals, and we mitigated the marriage penalty. And we also understood that the death tax was onerous on small businesses and ranchers and farmers in Alabama and all across the State—all across the country—so we eliminated the death tax.

And this tax relief came at the right time. Our economy is kind of sputtering a little bit, and it's important to send money back to the people so they can spend it and they can invest it to make sure our economy gets second wind. No, I was proud to do something that President John Kennedy was able to do and President Ronald Reagan was able to do, and that's to listen to the American people and to sign broad, meaningful, real tax relief. And I want to thank you, Jeff, for your support.

We're also making progress on an incredibly important issue, and that's education. I believe in short order I'm going to have the opportunity to sign one of the most far-reaching education reform bills in our Nation's history. The bill passed the House; it passed the Senate 91 to 8; it's now going to conference. And I urge the conferees not to play politics with public education in America. Get that bill out and get it to my desk so I can sign it, so that the public schools all across America can plan for next fall when they open their doors for America's children.

The education bill is important because it embodies certain principles. One principle is that it's important to set high standards, to believe that every child, regardless of background, birth, or accent can learn in America.

Secondly, it says that we must trust local people to run the schools all across America. One size does not fit all when it comes to the education of the children in America.

And thirdly, it says that if you receive Federal help—you, the State of Alabama or the State of Texas or any other State or jurisdiction must measure in return for Federal dollars—you must measure so that we as a society know whether children are being left behind.

The old, tired way of public education used to ask the question, "How old are you? And if you're 10, we'll put you in this grade, and if you're 12, we'll put you here, and if you're 14, you go there." And

guess what happened? Children would simply get shuffled through the system. Children would get moved on, regardless if they knew what they were supposed to know. And that's fundamentally wrong in America. And that's not right, and when I sign that bill, we're going to start asking this question, "What do you know? And if you do not know what you're supposed to know, we'll make sure you do early, before it's too late." There are no second-rate children in America, and there are no second-rate dreams.

Dick Cheney and I—and, by the way, the Vice President is doing a fabulous job. We said we would boost the morale of the United States military. It started with treating people better who wear the uniform. That means better pay and better housing, and the budget I submitted does just that. But it also means having a Commander in Chief who sets a clear mission for the military. The mission of the military is to be prepared to fight and win war and, therefore, prevent war from happening in the first place. Our military must be properly trained and ready to go so that the Commander in Chief, if he needs to call upon them, can do to keep the peace. Things are getting better in the military, and throughout my tenure in Washington, we will rebuild the military so that we are more likely to keep the peace.

But it also requires thinking differently as we head into the 21st century. The old way of thinking about military strategy must be addressed. Our troops need to be lighter, harder to find, more lethal when they act. And we must be prepared to deal with the true threats of the 21st century.

I had the honor of meeting with the President of Russia in Slovenia last weekend. I told him, I said, "It's time for new leadership to cast aside the old way of thinking about Russia and America." I told him, I said, "Russia is no longer our Nation's enemy. And therefore, we should not allow a treaty, signed when Russia and America were the enemy, to determine

how our two nations can best come together to keep the peace."

The ABM Treaty codified a day when we were hostile to each other. It's time to come together and to think about a new security arrangement that addresses the threats of the 21st century. And the threats of the 21st century will be terrorist in nature, terror when it comes to weaponry. What we must do—freedom-loving people must be willing to think differently and develop antiballistic missile systems that will say to rogue nations and leaders who cannot stand America, or what we stand for: You will not blackmail us, nor will you blackmail our allies. It's time for new leadership when it comes to how the military thinks about keeping the peace.

Earlier this year, I put together a Commission to think differently about how our retirement systems must work. I'm deeply concerned about Social Security. I'm not concerned about those who receive Social Security today or those who are near retirement, because the Congress and the White House has taken the sacred pledge that we will not touch the Social Security, that Social Security will be spent on only one thing, Social Security.

But I'm concerned about younger workers. I worry that the Social Security System will not fulfill the promise of people who are coming up in our society. This issue requires new thinking, a new way of looking at the problem. I put together a Commission of both Republicans and Democrats charged with making sure there's a Social Security system in the future.

And a key component of that thinking says that we, as a nation, must trust younger workers to manage their own money, if they so choose, in the private markets, to take advantage of the compounding rate of return, to make sure that not only is there a Social Security system available, that workers from all walks of life have got an asset that they can call their own to pass from one generation to the next. Ownership of assets is an incredible part

of holding out hope and promise for the American Dream for every citizen. It's time to think differently in Washington, DC, about the crucial issues.

Just before we came, I had the honor of meeting many religious leaders from around the State of Alabama. I did so because I wanted to share my vision of how best to make sure the welfare system fulfills its promise. At Notre Dame a while ago, I gave a speech that talked about how our Nation can be a more compassionate country. I talked about the fact that Lyndon Johnson, at the University of Texas, gave a speech that declared a War on Poverty. I mentioned the fact that that war, noble in effort, created some consequences that our society has had to deal with. On the one hand, the welfare system that he envisioned created dependency upon Government, and on the other hand, the welfare system that he envisioned created a Government that crowded out people's aspirations to help a neighbor. People across America said, "Why should I be a compassionate neighbor? The Federal Government will solve the problem. Why should I care? The Government will take care." And what we ended up with is dependency upon Government on the one hand and complacency on the other.

In that speech, I said in 1996 the United States Congress in a bipartisan fashion passed a bill signed by my predecessor that addressed one-half of the equation. The bill and the law reduced dependency upon Government. It said that you must work, and as a result, thousands of people are now gainfully employed in America, are less dependent upon our Government. But it did not address the second half of the equation, how best to capture the great compassion of America.

I believe our Government ought to be a partner with faith-based and community-based programs. I believe it is essential we pass laws in the United States Congress that expand charitable choice, that we clearly say in America the great strength

of our country lies in the hearts and souls of loving citizens. The great strength of America is in our churches and synagogues and mosques. And we must welcome faith-based programs that have got the capacity to change lives by changing hearts into the very fabric of our society.

I know I can count on Senator Sessions when the bill comes before the United States Senate. And I feel strongly I can count on the members of the congressional delegation, who have traveled with me from Washington, DC. This is an important initiative; it is an initiative that addresses our Nation's culture. It is an issue that helps us realize the full potential of America. It is an issue that recognizes that Government can hand out money, but what it cannot do is put hope in people's hearts or a sense of purpose in people's lives. It is an incredibly important issue, because our great Nation must make this dedicated promise: No person will be left behind in America, that every American counts regardless of their status, but we recognize that some hurt, some lack hope.

So what I hope to do in the Faith-Based Initiative is to call upon mentors all across the country. There is nothing more meaningful and important than, say, for a child whose parent may be in prison, to have an arm of an adult or a loving soul say, "I love you, brother." America means as much for you as it does for me and my children.

A Faith-Based Initiative understands that in order to solve the problems of those hooked on alcohol and drugs, that sometimes the only way is to call upon a higher being. The Faith-Based Initiative recognizes the power of faith and hope in America. And I urge Congress not to get stuck on the process but to focus on results so that we can change America in an incredibly positive, hopeful, and optimistic way.

That's really the job of the President. The job of the President is to lift the Nation's spirit.

On my wall in the Oval Office is a picture of Abraham Lincoln. I hang that portrait because it reminds me my job is to unify our Nation. I recognize we will have differences when it comes to tax policy and education policy, but the job of the President is obviously to stand on principle and to fight for legislative matters that I think are important. But it's also to unite America, to unite the country around the fantastic values that make us unique, the values of freedom: freedom to speak your mind, freedom to worship where you want, freedom of the press to occasionally say something that I don't agree with—[laughter]—freedom—freedom to express yourself at the ballot box, freedom to be anything you dream to be in America, regardless of your birth or where you're from. Those values set us aside as a nation. They are incredibly important values.

But uniting the Nation understands and—begins with the understanding of responsibility of the offices we hold. I admire Jeff Sessions because he understands. He has the responsibility not only to represent the great State of Alabama, but he has the responsibility to uphold the honor and dignity of the office to which he has been elected. And he will not let the people of Alabama down.

I love traveling outside of Washington. Listen, I like my job, and the public housing is pretty darn good there. [Laughter] But I love to come out to the countryside. I can't thank the people of Alabama enough for lining the roads. We went to an initiative today in one of the parks outside of Birmingham, where I was able to say that this administration, for the first time, is going to fully fund the Land and Water Conservation Fund, so that the people of

Alabama will be able to make the conservation decisions necessary for the great State of Alabama. But as we traveled the road, hundreds of people lined the road to wave and to hold up signs encouraging the President.

It reminds me of what I said earlier and I truly believe: I am blessed to be the President of a nation full of decent and loving and caring and compassionate people, people who respect their country, respect the office of the Presidency—sometimes like the President, sometimes not—but respect the office of the President, who care deeply about the future, who love their families, who worship in houses of worship, and are proud to call themselves American.

I can't tell you what an honor it is to have recently traveled overseas and to stand proudly for a country that represents the best of mankind, that holds up the best for every single citizen. I'm so honored to be here to represent and to urge you to support my friend. And I am honored to tell you, I love being your President, and thank you for the opportunity.

God bless.

NOTE: The President spoke at 6:40 p.m. at the Jefferson Convention Complex. In his remarks, he referred to Mary Sessions, wife of Senator Sessions; William Cabaniss, finance chair, Alabama Bush 2000 campaign; Winton M. "Red" Blount, founder, Blount International, Inc.; Marty Connors, chairman, Alabama Republican Party; Edgar Welden and Bettye Fine Collins, national committee persons, Alabama Republican Executive Committee; and President Vladimir Putin of Russia.