

Remarks at the White House Conference on Character and Community June 19, 2002

Thank you all. Well, thanks for that warm welcome. Welcome to your house. [Laughter] We're glad you're here, and I really appreciate the theme of this conference and the importance of the conference.

I know you've heard from some really impressive people, and I want to thank all the speakers and students who are here. You even heard from a member of my family, and I want to thank the First Lady for doing such a great job and being so patient with the President.

The thing I appreciate is that you understand education should prepare children for jobs, and it also should prepare our children for life. I join you in wanting our children to be not only rich in skills but rich in ideals. Teaching character and citizenship to our children is a high calling. It's a really high calling. And I'm grateful for your work.

I appreciate Secretary of Education Rod Paige. Mr. Secretary, thanks—thanks for joining on this important cause. You know, here in Washington there's a lot of people who are good on theory and not so good on action, so when I picked a man to be the head of the—Secretary of Education, I wanted somebody who had been on the frontlines. Rod had been the superintendent of the Houston Independent School District, and I figured that's a pretty good definition of frontlines. [Laughter] And he had done a great job—Mr. Secretary, and I appreciate your concern and care.

I understand Colin Powell spoke here earlier. I'm—right after this brief speech, he and I have a meeting. He is doing a fabulous job for our country too. I'm proud to call him a member of our team.

I appreciate Michelle Engler and Hope Taft for being here. Thank you both for coming. I know you all are very much in-

involved in your State of Michigan and Ohio for not only making sure every child can read but teaching children the difference between right and wrong.

I appreciate the Members of Congress who are here, Wamp, Lucas, Edwards, McIntyre, and Moore. Thank you all for coming. My Congressman—as you know, I'm a voting resident of Crawford, Texas. My Congressman, Chet Edwards, is here. I appreciate you answering my mail, Mr. Congressman. [Laughter] I won't write you if you don't write me. [Laughter]

I believe that public schools are the most important institutions in democracy, and a good education is the birthright of every American child. Every public school must be the pathway to a better life. And because public schools are America's great hope, making them work for every child is our Nation's greatest duty.

We passed good education reform here in Washington, DC. This wasn't a Republican bill. It wasn't a Democrat bill. It was an American bill. It really was. We worked together to get a good piece of legislation out. Here are the principles. It says, every child can learn. In other words, we believe in high standards. I'm one of these fellows that believes if you lower the bar, you get lousy results. If you believe in the best and raise the bar, you can get high standards.

It also says that if you receive money from the Federal Government, you must show us whether or not children are learning to read and write and add and subtract. For the first time, the Federal Government is asking the question, is every child learning? I don't mean a few children. I don't mean a group of children. I mean, is every child learning to read and write and add and subtract? And if we aren't, we must correct problems early, before it's too late.

In other words, we've had high standards. We demand excellence. We're willing to challenge failure to make sure that not one single child is left behind. And I firmly believe the reforms we put in place, when fully enacted, will make sure that no child is left behind in America.

It is more than—we've got to do more than just teach our children skills and knowledge. That's one part of education, and it's an important part—no question about it. We also want to make sure they're kind and decent, compassionate and responsible, honest and self-disciplined. Our children must learn to make a living, but even more, they must learn how to live. And that's a big responsibility. But I love what Martin Luther King, Jr., said about this. He said, "Intelligence is not enough. Intelligence plus character, that is the goal of true education." And I want to thank you for joining that true goal of education.

Americans believe in character education because we want more for our children than apathy or cynicism. We've got higher aspirations for every child in America. We want them to understand the difference between right and wrong. We want them to live lives of integrity and idealism. Family is the first place where these values are learned. Our parents expect schools to be allies in the moral education of our children. That's what they expect, and that's what we must give them.

The lessons of the home must be reinforced by high standards in our schools. Schools should be safe and orderly. They should be decent and drug-free, and they should teach character by expecting character. They should be places where rules are set and, as importantly, where rules are enforced. And schools should also teach the basics of character to children. This is why we tripled the funding for character education in the budget I submitted to Congress.

Now, I know there's a debate about values and character. I've heard it before. As you might remember, I was the Governor

of a great State at one time. I've heard every excuse why we shouldn't teach character. It always starts with religion, as to why we shouldn't teach character. Well look, we should never promote a particular religion—I agree. That's not the—that's not the reason to have character education. But we've got to recognize in our society that strong values are shared by good people of different faiths and good people who have no faith at all. These are universal values, values we share in all our diversity: Respect, tolerance, responsibility, honesty, self-restraint, family commitment, civic duty, fairness, and compassion. These are the moral landmarks that guide a successful life. And we should teach them with confidence, and we should teach them with conviction.

There are many good programs around the country that show how values can be taught in a diverse nation. I want to thank you for sharing your wisdom on those programs. As a matter of fact, one of the useful functions of the Department of Education is to serve as a clearinghouse for good ideas, as a place where people can come and ask the question, "What works? What can I do to make a difference in somebody's lives?"

There are schools in our country where children take pledges each morning to be respectful, responsible, and ready to learn—it's an interesting idea—where virtues are taught by studying the great historical figures and characters in literature and where consideration is encouraged and good manners are expected.

I think it's safe to say we're making progress in America. We're not ashamed to teach values. We recognize the importance of character. And I want to thank you all for joining here to figure out how we can do more and how we can make a continued difference in the lives of our children.

One goal of character education should be to prepare our children for community service. This conference, I understand, is

focusing on community service for a good reason, helping somebody else gives purpose and meaning in life. I think it's particularly important in a day and age where some question the value system of America that we teach people to serve a neighbor—people to love a neighbor like they'd like to be loved themselves.

There's a question in our society as to whether or not we're so self-absorbed and materialistic that we won't fulfill our obligations as a nation. That's not the America I know, and the America I believe exists. I've seen an amazing America since September the 11th, people who recognize that serving something greater than yourself in life is an incredibly important part of life; that while, you know, focus on the stock market is, I guess, okay, but there's something more in life than just profit and loss; that somebody can profit in life by caring for a neighbor. I like to tell people, if you're interested in helping to define America, to show a side of America the world may not see, do some good, help somebody in need. And that needs to be taught to our children early in life.

I gave a speech at the Ohio State University—thank you for inviting me, Hope. And

I was pleased to see that 70 percent of the graduating class of Ohio State University had at one time or another volunteered, one time or another served something greater than themselves. Perhaps the culture is changing from one that has said, "If it feels good, just go ahead and do it," and "If you've got a problem, blame somebody else," to a culture in which each of us are responsible for the decisions we make in life—responsible for loving our children, responsible for loving our neighbors, responsible for serving a nation by helping somebody in need.

The poet William Wordsworth wrote this. He said, "What we have loved, others will love, and we'll teach them how." And that's what you all are here to discuss today. On behalf of a grateful nation, thank you for teaching them how.

May God bless you all, and may God bless America.

NOTE: The President spoke at 3:30 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Michelle Engler, wife of Gov. John Engler of Michigan; and Hope Taft, wife of Gov. Bob Taft of Ohio.

Statement on the Death of Jack Buck *June 19, 2002*

I am deeply saddened by the death of Jack Buck. Jack endeared himself to sports fans throughout the country with his colorful commentary and love of America's pastime. An honoree of the National Baseball Hall of Fame, Pro Football Hall of Fame,

and Radio Hall of Fame, Jack covered sports in St. Louis, Missouri, and across the Nation for the last 50 years. I extend my deepest sympathies to his family. He will be missed.