

Remarks on Faith-Based Initiative Legislation February 7, 2002

President Bush. I want to welcome Senator Lieberman and Senator Santorum and the delegation of U.S. Senators from both parties here at the Oval Office, to herald a great accomplishment, which is an agreement to move a Faith-Based Initiative out of the United States Senate.

All of us in this room share a priority and insist that people who don't have hope can find hope; people who wonder about the American Dream will realize the American experience is meant for them. One way to ensure that is to unleash these fantastic armies of compassion which exist all across the country.

And Government ought to stand on their side. We're in complete agreement that Government should not discriminate against faith-based programs, but it should encourage them to flourish. And so I welcome so very much the Senators here to get this really important piece of legislation through.

This legislation will not only provide a way for Government to encourage faith-based programs to exist without breaching the separation of church and state; it will also encourage charitable giving, as well. And we have an opportunity to capture the compassion of the country, focus it in the right direction. And because of the Senators here, we're taking a big step in that direction.

So Senator Lieberman, the lead sponsor, thank you for being here, appreciate you coming.

Senator Joseph I. Lieberman. Thank you, Mr. President. Thanks for your leadership on this, and thanks to Senator Santorum and all our colleagues and our staffs that worked very hard on this. I have always believed that faith, right from the beginning of this country, was one of the great unifiers of the American people. And faith has been strong enough to unify all of us as

we went forward to find a constitutionally appropriate way to have a Faith-Based Initiative, to help people who want to do good works and whose desire to do good works is motivated by their faith.

This proposal really will matter to people. It creates some very important tax incentives for greater charitable giving, including saying to nonitemizers—and Mr. Secretary, you correct me, but I think something like 75 percent of taxpayers do not itemize.

Secretary Paul H. O'Neill. That's right.

Senator Lieberman. And it will give individuals an additional \$400 deduction for charitable giving and couples an additional \$800. That's a lot stronger, with all respect, than the comparable House bill. And I think it really will motivate more charitable giving. There are other tax incentives, as well.

We also have an agreement to increase funding for a group of social service programs, including, particularly, the Social Service Block Grant Program, which is very important to our States and very important to a lot of nonprofit organizations, including faith-based organizations that now use it to do good works. We have also here—and I mention that this is constitutionally appropriate—but we have responded here in this proposal to the evidence presented by your Faith-Based Office, John DiIulio, last summer, I believe, and the study that showed that there was some sense of not fairplay totally toward faith-based groups as they applied for Government funding.

And this says that if you qualify otherwise, you can't be discriminated against in applying for a grant to do social service work if you have a cross on the wall or a mezuzah on the door or if you praise God in your mission statement. And that's the way it ought to be. So this is a real step forward.

I remember when we stood together last year over in Anacostia on the day you announced your desire to have this Faith-Based Initiative, I was proud to support you. And I said then, because we were talking in general terms, that the devil—if I may use that term advisedly—[laughter]—would be in the details. The details along the way, Congress being what it is, turned out to be quite devilish. But in the end here today, I think we've put the good Lord right into the details.

President Bush. Yes, thank you.

Senator Lieberman. And I'm proud to be part of it. I thank you.

President Bush. Thank you, sir. Thank you all. See you a little later on.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:05 p.m. in the Oval Office during a meeting with congressional leaders. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of this address.

Remarks Following Discussions With Prime Minister Ariel Sharon of Israel and an Exchange With Reporters February 7, 2002

President Bush. I'm going to make a statement; the Prime Minister will make a statement. We both have agreed we'll answer two questions from both sides. I'll call on somebody; the Prime Minister's press aide will call on somebody; and that's the way we're going to do it.

So it's my honor to welcome a good friend, the Prime Minister of Israel, back to the Oval Office. Mr. Prime Minister, I'm so glad you're here. Welcome back.

We just had an extensive discussion, first about our mutual desire to rid the world of terror. I assured him that our Nation is just beginning in a great objective, which is to eliminate those terrorist organizations of global reach. And by doing so, I firmly believe that the world will be a more peaceful place. My most important objective is to protect our homeland. The best way to do so is to rout terrorist organizations where they try to hide and bring them to justice.

Secondly, I assured the Prime Minister that we will continue to keep pressure on Mr. Arafat to convince him that he must take serious, concrete, real steps to reduce terrorist activity in the Middle East.

We had an interesting discussion about how we can help the Palestinian—those who aren't involved with terror. I'm deeply concerned about the plight of the average Palestinian, the moms and dads who are trying to raise their children, to educate their children. My Government is—I've got \$300 million in the budget to go through NGOs to help Palestinians be able to realize a better life.

And finally, we had a good discussion about how best to work together to get the Mitchell process started, to get into Tenet and then in Mitchell. In other words, that we had wide-ranging discussions not only about international terror but security, about economic development for the Palestinians, as well as for the desire to achieve—to get into Mitchell so that there can be some long-lasting peace in the region.

And so, Mr. Prime Minister, I appreciate the candid discussion. I appreciate your friendship, and I want to welcome you back.

Prime Minister Sharon. Thank you, Mr. President. I was very glad to be again at the White House. We had discussions about strategic issues in the region. We