

Maxwell Gregory

*The President.* That's a fine-looking child, fine-looking child. [Laughter] Little Gregory. Little Stretch. [Laughter]

Thank you all.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:42 a.m. in the Cabinet Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Prime Minister Tony Blair of the United Kingdom; and Prime Minister Jean Chretien of Canada.

## Remarks on Implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 September 4, 2002

*The President.* Thank you all. Thank you for coming. I want to thank you all for coming. I'm particularly grateful that some of the folks on the frontline of education reform are with us, not only here on the stage, but as I look out in the audience I see some familiar faces with people who are—refuse to accept the status quo when the status quo means mediocrity for our children.

So I want to welcome you here. I also want to assure you that one of the big challenges that I see for our country, besides keeping the peace and making the homeland secure, is to insist that every child be educated. Notice I said “every child.” It starts with the mindset that every child can learn. And I don't need to tell that to the people in this room, but there is—some in our country believe in the—what I call the soft bigotry of low expectations. They don't believe in the bigotry, but because there's low expectations, there is a soft bigotry.

And that's unacceptable. What that means is, there's certain kids just get shuffled through the system. Certain kids, they just get quit on. And we know who they are. They're generally inner-city kids, kids whose parents may not speak English as a first language. It's so much easier to walk into a classroom full of the hard-to-educate and say, “See you later. We're just going to move you through.” And those days have got to end, and the people up here on the stage and the people here in the White House understand—standing here, sitting

here in the White House—understand those days are going to end, for the good of the country.

One of the challenges is to make sure America is secure, is safe, is strong. But another one of our challenges is to make sure America is a better place for all of us, and that starts with insisting that every child get educated.

This is a passion that is shared by Republicans and Democrats. I don't view this as a partisan issue; I view this as an American issue. And that's why I was pleased earlier in my administration to travel the country with some of the bill sponsors, two of whom are here, both Republicans and Democrats, to sign this bill. That's a good signal to America that we're coming together to work on what's right for the country.

And I want to welcome Judd Gregg from the State of New Hampshire, who is one of those with whom I had the honor of traveling, and John Boehner, who's the chairman of the Education Committee of the House of Representatives, for being with us. And of course, an advocate for teachers and for education, Ralph Regula, is with us as well. So I want to thank the three Members of Congress for coming. I appreciate you boys coming over here after a long, long vacation. [Laughter]

*Representative.* [Inaudible]—back. [Laughter]

*The President.* Yes, back—[laughter]. Glad you're in town. [Laughter] But I do

really appreciate your work on education. You've been great.

I also want to thank Rod Paige for agreeing to leave Texas—that's a hard thing for Texans to do—and come up here and serve his Nation. I didn't need any theorists in the Department of Education. I wanted somebody who had been on the frontlines, somebody that had actually been, in this case, a superintendent, somebody who had raised the bar, and somebody that had achieved results on behalf of all the students in that incredibly complex and difficult school district. And Rod did a fabulous job in Houston, and he's doing a darn good job here in Washington, DC. And Rod, I want to thank you for your leadership.

I also want to thank the MATHCOUNTS champs who are with us. I told them—[*applause*]. Thank you all for coming. I told them, in my State, sometimes too often we think of the champ only on the football field. I'm glad they're here to show that there's champs in the math arena and in the science arena. These champs are just as important as any athletic champ we have in the country, and I want to thank them for setting high standards and working hard and showing your fellow classmates what is possible.

And I also want to thank your teachers who are here. I know you represent teachers all across the country, and a great teacher can make a huge difference in a child's life, and these teachers with us today have shown exactly what I'm talking about. So congratulations to the student and teacher—[*applause*].

So I understand the difficulty of changing a system that doesn't like to change. After all, I was a Governor at one time. And there is a certain—there's a certain unwillingness of people in the school system, certain school systems, to change. It's hard. I know that. And yet, the bill we passed says you've got to change. And so the meeting today is a way to tell people that change is possible; change can be or-

derly; and change can be, most important, productive for student and family alike.

And that's what we're talking about here today. The bill said that one—one of the cornerstones of that bill that we passed said we're going to trust the local people. That's one way to put it, is it's not all the smart people in the world live in Washington. There's plenty of smart people outside of Washington. And there is certainly an attachment to the school system, the public school systems, for those who live in the public school system's taxing district, for example.

Nobody cares more about the schools in their neighborhood than the parents and the teachers and the local citizens. And therefore, it made a lot of sense to pass power out of Washington, to create a certain amount of flexibility at the local level so people can chart their own path to excellence. This is one of the keys to success. And that's what this bill does.

And so what we have done today is, we have asked people who have taken advantage of the flexibility, that have actually done some creative, positive, significant things, so others can see what works. It's important for those in the public school systems around America to understand that it is possible to change and have positive results without disrupting the school systems.

And that's what we're here to talk about. And one of the cornerstones of any good school system is accountability. Now look, I have battled—I have fought the accountability fight for a long time. I've heard people say, "You test too much"—particularly the students. [*Laughter*] My answer is, if testing determines whether you can read, too bad that we test. As a matter of fact, it's to your advantage that we test.

How do you know, if you don't give people a chance to show us? How do you know? It's the systems that don't test are those that quit on the kids. It's the systems where people say, "All kids can't learn. Therefore, let's don't try to determine

whether they are learning.” Those are the systems where we’ve really got a challenge. And one of the things we did say is, if you receive Federal money, we want to know whether or not you’re succeeding. If you want to—all the Title I money we’re sending out, we expect there to be results because, you see, we believe every child can learn.

And there are creative things you can do with the accountability system, such as what they’re doing in Indiana. And Suellen is here. For a while I thought she was from central Texas, with the name of Suellen—[laughter]—but it turns out—it turns out she’s from Indiana. But they have got a—they decided, and wisely so, in the State of Indiana, that they’re going to post results so people know, so parents know, so teachers know.

You see, with information, people can make constructive change. You can determine whether or not the curriculum you are using works. Accountability is incredibly important for the school systems. People shouldn’t fear accountability. They ought to welcome an accountability system as a useful tool to make sure no child is left behind, a useful tool to make sure they make constructive improvements in their school districts and in their schools.

And Indiana has made a creative decision to put on the Internet, amongst other things, how the schools are performing, a comparative analysis of school performance, how the school’s teachers—how many school teachers are certified under Indiana law. They can compare schools within a district. It is a useful way to use accountability as a management tool. It is also a useful way to encourage citizen involvement. You see, the more information a parent or a citizen knows, the more likely it is that parent or citizen is going to be involved in a school district.

Too often people say, “My schools are doing just fine.” You all have heard that more than I have. Too often people—“Everything is just fine in my school. How

do I know? My child told me,” until you see a comparison, and then you realize that perhaps we need to ratchet up the bar a little higher. We need the make sure that the standards are raised, because every child counts here in this country.

We’ve also got to make sure that the schools—the accountability system insists that the—that each child is recognized. There’s a fancy word for it called “disaggregation of data.” I don’t want to disturb the press corps by using a long word. [Laughter] I know what it means. [Laughter] You see, we’ve got to make sure that we focus on an individual basis. This idea of lumping people into large groups of people will diminish the capacity of an accountability system to make sure no child is left behind. The State of Florida has been on the leading edge of making sure the accountability system is—challenges the soft bigotry of low expectations. And I want to thank Jim for coming—and tell the Governor hello. [Laughter]

I also believe there ought to be a consequence. If there’s failure or mediocrity, something else has to happen. Otherwise, you’ve set up a nice system, but nothing changes. Without a consequence, without something to challenge the status quo, the status quo will remain.

And so therefore, one of the things—one of the interesting innovations that we put in the bill that I think is—probably can be used in a very creative way for school districts all around the country, is the capacity to have after-school tutoring—the money follows the child—and that there can be a lot of creative ways to set up after-school tutoring. People can go outside the system to do—to have these after-schools—after-tutoring classes.

There can be a whole kind of entrepreneurial effort made. There can be a charter schools—after-school charter schools, with funding available, because the money follows the child. It’s a very wise thing that the State of Colorado and Colorado Springs School District is taking advantage of.

You see, if every child matters and your accountability system points out some are falling behind, this bill provides the resources necessary to make sure people catch up early, before it's too late. That's one of the keys to success, is that when you identify somebody who is failing, you get on it right away, and you help that person early, before it's too late. And a good way to do it is to take advantage of the after-school tutoring program we have in the bill. It's really creative.

Once people see what's available and understand the options, there's going to be some—I predict there will be some creative responses, just like Colorado Springs' response, around the country.

It's also important that their public school choice be fully implemented. You see, when the parents start to move, it gets people's attention. And one of the things in this bill says that we expect and will facilitate the capacity of parents to make different choices for their students if they're dissatisfied with the quality of education that their student, that their child is receiving.

And St. Paul, Dr. Harvey, has done a very good job of making sure that those options are not only well-known—you see, sometimes what happens is, the school districts don't really make it clear what can happen or what should happen. The lack of knowledge for citizens means that lack of opportunity is—that people don't have the opportunities that they can achieve what is necessary to start insisting that every child be educated. And so Dr. Harvey not only has worked hard to educate parents about what is available but has also worked in the school district to make sure people understand within the school district that this is an important part of educational excellence for every child.

The—as I said, I—options and consequences are all a part of making sure that the accountability system works. And here are two examples of school districts

in our country seizing the moment to make sure that excellence prevails.

I also want to congratulate Arkansas and Alabama for their work on reading, because the truth of the matter is, no matter how fancy we get with systems, if kids can't read, it doesn't matter. It's hard to be a math scholar if you can't read. It's hard to be a scientist if you can't read. And so we have decided here at the Federal level to make a national initiative being one that every child's going to read. And the reason Arkansas and Alabama are here is, they also understand that it requires a curriculum that works, if you want every child to read. They don't need fancy theories or what may sound good. Science is not an art—I mean, reading is not an art; it's a science. We know what works.

And these schools, and these States, have adopted what works. And as you heard about from Alabama, Dr. Mitchell, they have retrained 2,500 teachers. Retraining is the right word; they've been trained once. Now they're being trained in a curriculum which will work, and it's essential we focus on reading first.

If you have an accountability system, it is unfair to have a society in which not every child kind of starts at the accountability system at the same place. It's not going to work the way we want it to work. And so the best way to make sure that the accountability system has merit and we can accurately measure is to start teaching our children how to read early in life—I mean early—with a curriculum which works, and the willingness for States to recognize that sometimes teachers haven't been trained properly, and they need to be retrained. And that's what they did in Alabama. It's what we did in Texas, by the way. We spent time, money, and efforts to retrain our teachers, to give them the tools necessary so that they can do what they want to do, and which their desire is to do, which is to be as good a teacher as they can possibly be.

And so here are examples of—two examples of Reading First initiatives, which are on the leading edge of reform. They challenge the status quo when it doesn't work. They understand what I know, that reading is the new civil right. It's a part of making sure our students are free citizens. And we're going to do it. You watch here in America. This program is going to have a huge impact as we continue to insist that no child be left behind.

And finally, New York City deserves a lot of credit. You hear about teacher shortages here and there in other places. But sometimes they're so bound in rules and regulations, and challenged because they're unable to be entrepreneurial in their willingness to hire, the shortages persist. But Joyce Coppin has figured out a way to have alternative certification, an intense recruiting campaign with New Teacher Project. I mean, this district has hired more than 2,000 teachers this year, through a city's alternative certification program.

They saw a problem, and instead of being hidebound by the old way of doing things, they said, "Let's solve the problem first." Let's make sure we solve the problem. You can't—if—children will be left behind, unless there's teachers in the classrooms. And Joyce, I want to thank you and thank your folks there in New York City for showing America what is possible, that it's possible to be creative and to use your imagination and to solve a teacher shortage that might exist.

It is essential that Americans understand, from the examples we've seen here, that change is positive, change is incredibly im-

portant to achieve the goal which we all want, and that is to have the best public school systems in the world and make sure no child is left behind. There's no doubt in my mind that these goals are achievable, because we're America, and there's nothing we can't overcome.

The first step is to overcome timidity, and the first step is to overcome an unwillingness to confront mediocrity. And I think school districts and leaders around the country, when they realize what is possible from examples here, will be more than willing to challenge the status quo if the status quo is failing, to insist every child can learn, to raise the bar, and by raising the bar, raise the hopes of everybody who's lucky enough to be called an American.

So I want to thank you all for your leadership. I appreciate very much your commitment to your States, to the children in your States, and to the greatest nation on the face of the Earth.

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

NOTE: The President spoke at 3 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Suellen K. Reed, Indiana superintendent of public instruction; Jim Horne, Florida secretary of education; Gov. Jeb Bush of Florida; Patricia A. Harvey, superintendent, St. Paul Public Schools, St. Paul, MN; Katherine Mitchell, director, Alabama Reading Initiative; and Joyce Coppin, chief executive of the division of human resources, New York City Department of Education.