

Lakeisha Begley is a fourth-grader here. She was way below grade level. The system kicked in. Barbara, her mama, said that, one, she was appreciative of the fact that she had a choice. See, she was notified—said, “Your daughter’s not doing well”—and then was given an option, a range of options. The school and the district trust the parents to make the right choice. It’s not one of these paternalistic things that, “This is what’s going to happen.” They say, “We’ve got a problem with your child. We’re going to give you some options from which to choose.” So she signed up for a private tutor.

Barbara said she’s already seen the difference. The child is excited. The child can’t wait to read. “From day one, Lakeisha learned better study skills,” she said. She was thrilled about doing it and thrilled about learning. The program motivated her to learn more. And that’s what we’re here to talk about, how to make sure we can put programs in place that motivate our children who need help to learn more.

I’m excited to be here. I’m excited to be here because I believe that this country

can solve any problem that we face. We face a problem, to make sure every child can read. The statistics are loud and clear, too many of our fourth-graders cannot read at grade level. The Federal Government decided to do its part by not only providing the resources but by insisting upon results.

We are challenging the soft bigotry of low expectations. We believe every child can learn. And I’m convinced when these programs are fully implemented, children will learn, and America will be better off.

Thank you for having me here today. May God bless you all.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:40 p.m. in the auditorium. In his remarks, he referred to Kim Fowler, principal, Kirkpatrick Elementary School; Pedro E. Garcia, director of schools, Metropolitan Nashville Davidson County Board of Public Education; and Kirkpatrick student Lakeisha Begley, and her grandmother, Barbara Stegall. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of these remarks.

Remarks at a Bush-Cheney Reception in Nashville *September 8, 2003*

Thank you all very much. Thanks for coming. Lamar puts it a little less delicately: “Without Tennessee, there would be no Texas.” [*Laughter*] Without Tennessee, there would be no President George W. Bush.

I want to thank you all for coming tonight. I really appreciate your support and your friendship and your prayers. Tonight is the beginning of what is going to be a successful campaign here. We’re laying the groundwork not only for a victory here in Tennessee, but we’re laying the groundwork for what is going to be a victory in November of 2004.

I appreciate your contributions, but I will remind you there are other contributions to make. Going to need you to put your signs in the yard, need you to put out the mailers. When you go to the coffee shop, make sure you talk it up. [*Laughter*] And remind them that this administration has a vision which is positive and hopeful and optimistic for every single American.

The political season will come in its own time. I’m loosening up. [*Laughter*] And I’m getting ready. But I’ve got a job to do, and right now I’m focused on the people’s business. We will continue to work hard to earn the confidence of every American

by keeping this Nation secure and strong and prosperous and free.

I have only one regret tonight, and that is that the First Lady didn't come with me. I am one lucky man that Laura Bush said yes. We're there on bended knee, I said, "Would you marry me?" She is a fabulous First Lady, a great wife.

I'm proud to have been introduced by a fabulous United States Senator, Senator Bill Frist. He is doing a great job, not only for Tennessee but for our Nation. He's a steady hand. He's a good man to deal with. He's got our country's interests at heart, and I'm proud, like you are, to call him friend.

I'm also proud to call Lamar Alexander friend. He too is doing a fabulous job in the United States Senate. We've got two Members from the House of Representatives with us tonight. One of the event's vice chairmen, Congresswoman Marsha Blackburn—I'm honored that Marsha is with us. I want to thank you for coming, Marsha. And Congressman Zach Wamp is with us as well.

I appreciate all those who put this event together. My great friend from Cincinnati, Ohio, who is our national finance chairman, Mercer Reynolds. I want to thank Mercer for being here. I want to thank Jim Haslam, our State finance chair, for his hard work. I want to thank all who put this event together. I particularly want to thank Beth Harwell, the State party chairman.

I want to thank Gracie Rosenberger for performing the anthem. You know, when you come to Nashville, you hope to see some of your favorite entertainers. Fortunately, some of them showed up tonight, starting with Michael W. Smith, my good friend, and Debbie. I'm also so pleased that Ricky Skaggs came tonight. He's a—that boy can sing. Steve Wariner is with us tonight. Brad Paisley flew in from California to be with us tonight. I want to thank them all for coming.

There's less road rage at NASCAR now because Darrell Waltrip is retired, but I'm

still glad to call him—I'm glad he's here. But most of all, I really want to thank you all for being here. It means an awful lot.

In the last 2½ years, our Nation has acted decisively to confront great challenges. I came to this office to solve problems instead of passing them on to future Presidents and future generations. I came to seize opportunities instead of letting them slip away. This administration is meeting the tests of our time.

Terrorists declared war on the United States of America, and war is what they got. We have captured or killed many key leaders of Al Qaida, and the rest of them know we're on their trail. In Afghanistan and in Iraq, we gave ultimatums to terror regimes. Those regimes chose defiance, and those regimes are no more. Fifty million people—50 million people in those two countries once lived under tyranny, and now they live in freedom.

Two-and-a-half years ago, our military was not receiving the resources it needed, and morale was beginning to suffer. So we increased the defense budget to prepare for the threats of a new era. And today, no one in the world can question the strength, the skill, and the spirit of the United States military.

Two-and-a-half years ago, we inherited an economy in recession. And then our country was attacked, and we began a march to war. And there were some corporate scandals, all of which affected the confidence of the American people. But we acted. We passed tough new laws to hold corporate criminals to account. And to get the economy going again, I have twice led the United States Congress to pass historic tax relief for the American people. Here is what I know, that when Americans have more take-home pay to spend, to save, or invest, the whole economy will grow, and people are more likely to find a job.

We also understand whose money we spend in Washington. We don't spend the Government's money; we spend the people's money. We are returning more money

to the people to help them raise their families. We're reducing taxes on dividends and capital gains to encourage investment. We're giving small businesses incentives to expand and to hire new people. With all these actions, this administration is laying the foundation for greater prosperity and more jobs across America so every one of our citizens can realize the great promise of our country.

Two-and-a-half years ago, there was a lot of talk about education reform, but there wasn't much action. So I acted. I called for and the Congress passed the No Child Left Behind Act. With a solid bipartisan majority, we delivered the most dramatic education reforms in a generation. We're bringing high standards and strong accountability measures to every public school in America. You see, we believe that every child can learn the basics of reading and math, and we expect every school in America to teach the basics of reading and math. In return for Federal money, we now expect results.

I went to Kirkpatrick Elementary School today, and they're achieving results. They're using the accountability system to focus efforts on children who need help. I saw private tutoring lessons being—taking place because of the No Child Left Behind Act. The days of excuse-making are over. We expect every child to learn. We want to make sure in this country that not one single child is left behind.

The last 2½ years, we reorganized the Government and created the Department of Homeland Security to better guard our borders and our ports and to better protect the American people. We passed trade promotion authority to open up new markets for Tennessee's farmers and ranchers and entrepreneurs and manufacturers. We passed budget agreements to bring much needed spending discipline to Washington, DC. On issue after issue, this administration has acted on principle. We have kept our word, and we have made good progress on behalf of the American people.

And the United States Congress shares in these great achievements. I appreciate working with Bill Frist and Speaker Denny Hastert. We've got a great relationship. We will continue to work to change the tone of Washington, DC, to elevate the discourse, to focus on the people's business by focusing on results.

And those are the kind of people I have attracted to my administration. I have put together a fantastic team to serve the American people, good, honorable, decent Americans from all walks of life who are in Washington, DC, for one reason, to serve the country they love. Our Nation has had no finer Vice President than Vice President Dick Cheney. Mother may have a different opinion. [*Laughter*]

In 2½ years, we have come far, but our work is only beginning. I've set great goals worthy of a great nation. First, America is committed to expanding the realm of freedom and peace for our own security and for the benefit of the world. And second, in our own country, we must work for a society of prosperity and compassion so that every single citizen has a chance to work, to succeed and realize the American Dream. It is clear that the future of freedom and peace depend on the actions of America. This Nation is freedom's home and freedom's defender. We welcome this charge of history, and we are keeping it.

Our war on terror continues. The enemies of freedom are not idle, and neither is America. This country will not rest; we will not tire; we will not stop until this danger to civilization is removed.

Yet, our national interest involves more than eliminating aggressive threats to our security. Our greatest security comes from the advance of human liberty, because free nations do not support terror. Free nations do not attack their neighbors. Free nations do not threaten the world with weapons of mass destruction. Americans believe that freedom is the deepest need and hope of

every human heart. And I believe that freedom is the right of every person and that freedom is the future of every nation.

This country also understands that unprecedented influence brings tremendous responsibilities. We have duties in the world. And when we see disease and starvation and hopeless poverty, we will not turn away. On the continent of Africa, America is now committed to bringing the healing power of medicine to millions of men and women and children now suffering with AIDS. This great land, this compassionate Nation, is leading the world in this incredibly important work of human rescue.

We also face challenges at home, and our actions will prove worthy of those challenges. So long as anybody is looking for a job and can't find work, I will continue to try and foster an environment that encourages the entrepreneurial spirit, that encourages job creation in the private sector so people can find work.

We have a duty to keep our commitment to America's seniors by strengthening and modernizing Medicare. Congress took historic action; both the House and the Senate took historic action to improve the lives of older Americans. For the first time since the creation of Medicare, the House and Senate has passed reforms to increase choices for seniors and to provide coverage for prescription drugs. It is now time for both bodies to iron out their differences, to keep our commitment to America's seniors today and seniors-to-be tomorrow and modernize the Medicare system.

For the sake of our health care system, we need to cut down on the frivolous lawsuits which increase the cost of medicine. People who have been harmed by a bad doctor deserve their day in court. Yet, the system should not reward lawyers who are fishing for rich settlements. Because frivolous lawsuits drive up the cost of health care, they affect the Federal budget. Therefore, medical liability reform is a national issue which requires a national solution. I have proposed medical liability reform. It

has passed the House. It is stuck in the Senate. Senator Frist is working hard to get that bill off the floor. Nobody has been healed by a frivolous lawsuit in America.

I have a responsibility as President to make sure the judicial system runs well, and I have met that duty. I have nominated superb men and women for the Federal courts, people who will interpret the law, not legislate from the bench. Some Members of the Senate are trying to keep my nominees off the bench by blocking up-or-down votes. Every judicial nominee deserves a fair hearing and an up-or-down vote on the floor of the Senate. It is time for some Members of the United States Senate to stop playing politics with American justice.

The Congress needs to complete work on a comprehensive energy plan. We need to modernize our electricity grid. We need to encourage more investment and to make sure reliability standards are mandatory, not voluntary. We need to explore for new sources of energy in environmentally friendly ways. We need to use technology to come up with alternative sources of energy. We need to encourage conservation. What we really need to do, for the sake of national security and economic security, is to become less dependent on foreign sources of energy.

Our strong and prosperous Nation must also be a compassionate nation. I will continue to advance our agenda of compassionate conservatism. We will apply the best and most innovative ideas to the task of helping our fellow citizens who hurt. There are still millions of men and women who want to end their dependence on Government and become independent through hard work. We must build on the success of welfare reform to bring work and dignity into the lives of more of our fellow citizens.

Congress should complete the "Citizen Service Act" so that more Americans can serve their communities and their country. And both Houses should reach agreement on my Faith-Based Initiative to encourage

the armies of compassion to love those who hurt, to mentor our children, to care for the homeless, to offer hope to the addicted. This great Nation should not fear the works of faith. We should welcome faith into the community of help.

A compassionate society must promote opportunity for all, including the independence that come from ownership. This administration will constantly strive to promote an ownership society all throughout America. We want more people owning their home. I have put forth policies to decrease the minority homeownership gap in America. We want people owning and managing their own health care accounts. We want people owning and controlling their own retirement accounts. We want more people owning their own small business, because when a person owns something in America, he or she has a vital stake in the future of this country.

In a compassionate society, people respect one another and take responsibility for the decisions they make. We're changing the culture of this country from one that has said, "If it feels good, do it," and "If you've got a problem, blame somebody else," to a culture in which each of us understands we are responsible for the decisions we make in life.

If you are fortunate enough to be a mother or father, you're responsible for loving your child with all your heart and all your soul. If you're concerned about the quality of education in your community, you're responsible for doing something about it. If you're a CEO in corporate America, you're responsible for telling the truth to your shareholders and your employees. And in the new responsibility society, each of us is responsible for loving

our neighbor just like we'd like to be loved ourselves.

We can see the culture of service and responsibility growing around us. I started the USA Freedom Corps to encourage Americans to extend a compassionate hand to a neighbor in need, and the response has been fantastic. Faith-based programs and charitable programs are strong and vibrant all across America. Policemen and firefighters and people who wear the Nation's uniform are reminding us what it means to sacrifice for something greater than yourself. Once again, the children of America believe in heroes, because they see them every day. In these challenging times, the world has seen the resolve and the courage of America. And I have been privileged to see the compassion and the character of the American people.

All the tests of the last 2½ years have come to the right Nation. We're a strong country, and we use our strength to defend the peace. We're an optimistic country, confident in ourselves and in ideals bigger than ourselves. Abroad, we seek to lift up whole nations by spreading freedom. At home, we seek to lift up lives by spreading opportunity to every corner of America. This is the work that history has set before us. We welcome it. And we know that for our country and for our cause, the best days lie ahead.

May God bless you all. Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 6 p.m. at the Loews Vanderbilt Plaza Hotel. In his remarks, he referred to Debbie Smith, wife of entertainer Michael W. Smith; and Darrell Waltrip, retired NASCAR driver.