

Remarks in a Discussion on Education and the Jobs for the 21st Century Initiative in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania
February 12, 2004

The President. Thank you all very much. It is nice to be back in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. Thank you for such a warm welcome. Behave yourself. [Laughter] I—we're going to have an interesting dialog today about how our economy works, how we can make sure people are prepared to take advantage of a growing economy. I hope that the students here at this very fine high school are able to have a better understanding about their future and how to seize opportunities.

Before we begin the discussion, I do want to thank the high school for welcoming me and quite a large entourage. [Laughter] Rich, thank you and your staff. I appreciate the teachers of this fine high school. I want to thank you all for teaching. Teaching is such a noble profession.

I've come to this high school—it's a high school that's willing to raise the bar, challenge what I've been calling the soft bigotry of low expectations, that is willing to measure, willing to change if you need to change, willing to use curriculum that actually works, in order to make sure every child is educated, every child has a chance to succeed. This is a fabulous high school. I'm proud of the administrators and teachers and students who make it such.

I also want to thank the parents who are here for paying attention to your sons and daughters, for caring about the quality of the education they receive. I often talk about the need for us to usher in a period of personal responsibility. Nothing is more responsible than a parent understanding that he or she is the first teacher of a child and he or she must pay attention to the education of their children.

I also want to thank our panelists, who we'll talk to in a minute here. But I also want to thank members of the mighty

Pennsylvania congressional delegation for traveling with me today.

The senior Senator—I try to downplay the senior part—[laughter]—today is actually his birthday. That would be Arlen Specter, who is traveling with us. I look forward to working with him. Where is the Senator? He's somewhere around here anyway. Either that, or he knew this was going to be a long speech. [Laughter] We're working well together. We've got some challenges in Washington. I appreciate him working with my administration on issues such as judges.

Speaking about friends and people who I think is doing a great job for the State of Pennsylvania, Senator Rick Santorum is with us as well. [Applause] Don't go overboard. [Laughter] I've got to fly back with him to Washington. [Laughter]

I appreciate the Congressman from this district, Tim Holden. Congressman, thank you for accompanying us today. The Congressman kindly allowed others from the Pennsylvania congressional district to come into his district today, Members such as John Peterson, Joe Pitts, Don Sherwood, Todd Platts, Bill Shuster, and Jim Gerlach. Thank you all for coming.

We've got senators here; we've got State representatives here; we've got mayors here. Thank you all for being here—city councilmen, a lot of citizens.

I'm proud to be here to share with you some thoughts about how to make sure the American Dream shines brightly in every corner of the country. Before we have a little discussion about economics and of what we can do to make sure people are prepared for the new jobs of the 21st century, I do want to herald a Lauren Simkulak. Lauren is a senior at this high school. She came out to meet me at Air

Force One. She was invited to do so because, you see, she is volunteering her time. She's taking time out of her busy life. If you're a senior in high school, your life can be very busy, sometimes with studying, sometimes with other things, but nevertheless—[laughter]. She's involved with the Four Diamonds Fund, a fund to create awareness for cancer. She is a volunteer in the army of compassion.

The reason I bring that up is that oftentimes, you hear our country's strength is defined as our military might. We're going to stay strong. You hear people talk about the might of America being the size of our wallets. We want more citizens having bigger wallets. But the truth of the matter is, the strength of this country is the heart and souls of the American people, people who are willing to love a neighbor just like they'd like to be loved themselves.

Here's my message to the high school students who are listening, and to anybody else: Find somebody who hurts and surround them with love. Governments—you can do so in all kinds of ways. You can do so in the Boys or Girl Scouts. You can do so in the Boys or Girls Club. You can do so through your church or your synagogue or mosque. The strength of America is the fact that we're a loving, compassionate, decent people who are willing to help save America, one soul at a time. I appreciate the service of people in this—[applause].

I want the students here to understand we've been through historic times in this country. You hear me often say I'm optimistic about the future. Well, one reason I'm optimistic is because I've seen what we have just been through as a nation. Remember, this country has been through a recession, an attack by an enemy which clearly hates what we stand for. We had some corporate scandals, and by the way, we expect our citizens in positions of responsibility to tell the truth. We passed tough laws, by the way, to send those corporate criminals to justice, which is exactly

where they belong because they betrayed the trust to employees and shareholders. And then I made the tough decision about dealing with threats by committing some incredibly brave citizens into harm's way to remove a danger, to remember the lessons of September the 11th and remove a danger before it became imminent and before it could conceivably strike America again. All that affected our economy.

Think about what this economy has been through, recession, an attack, a national emergency, corporate scandals, and war. And yet, the economy is growing. The numbers are good, see. The numbers are good, but I don't worry about numbers. I worry about people. There are still some people looking for work because of the recession. There are people looking for work because jobs have gone overseas, and we need to act in this country. We need to act to make sure there are more jobs at home and people are more likely to retain a job.

I've got some ideas that I'd like to share with you, before we get to making sure we educate people for the jobs that are being generated in the 21st century. The first idea is to make sure there's certainty in the Tax Code. As you know, we acted by cutting taxes. We saw all the challenges to our economy. We cut taxes, which basically meant people had more money in their pocket.

It's kind of a simple Crawford, Texas, economic lesson. When you have more money in your pocket, you're likely to demand a good or a service—an additional good or a service. And when you make a demand for an additional good or a service, in our economy, somebody will produce the good or a service. And when somebody produces the good or a service, somebody is more likely to retain a job or find a job. In other words, the tax cuts stimulated growth.

The tax cuts also made it more likely that the small-business sector of our country would be strong and vibrant. Seventy

percent of the new jobs in America are created by small businesses. And that's why much of the tax cuts, the individual tax cuts as well as the encouraging of investment—those tax cuts which encourage investment—were aimed at small businesses.

The tax cuts are making a difference, but unfortunately, they are set to expire, which means if Congress doesn't renew the tax cuts, the child credit will go down. So, in other words, if you're now getting a bigger child credit because you're a mom or a dad, you're going to pay more taxes. It's a tax increase. The marriage penalty will go up if Congress doesn't act. In other words, they'll be raising your taxes. In order to make sure people can find work or retain a job, we need to make the tax cuts permanent. There needs to be certainty in the Tax Code. People need to be able to plan. Small businesses need to be able to plan. Individuals need to be able to plan. We do not need a tax increase right now in our country.

Health care costs are too high. It's going to be hard to increase jobs with health care costs going up. I put out a plan to address health care costs, associated health plans, health savings accounts. But one of the interesting components of making sure we control the rising costs of health care is to make sure our judicial system doesn't run docs out of business and run the cost of medicine up for patients. We need medical liability reform in the United States.

We've got too many lawsuits in America. It's one thing to be taking a lawsuit based upon a real claim. There's too many junk lawsuits which are running up the cost of doing business. It makes it hard to increase the job base. It makes it hard for people to retain a job when people are getting sued right and left. We need tort reform at the Federal level. We need class-action reform. We need asbestos reform. We need to get less regulations on people who are trying to create jobs. Washington often-times poses too many mandates, which makes it hard to retain a job.

The other day I met with an entrepreneur from Philadelphia. She runs a small foundry. She said, "I've got some issues. I'm worried about jobs." She said, "I'm worried about the taxes jumping up and down." She said, "A lot of my customers are getting sued, which makes it hard for them to buy products from me."

She also said something very interesting; she said she's worried about reliable energy supplies. You see, when you have blackouts or brownouts and you're trying to employ people, it's awful hard to have—to do so. In order to get jobs back, in order for people to retain jobs, we need an energy plan in this country. We need to modernize the electricity grid. We need to become less reliant on foreign sources of energy.

Listen, Pennsylvanians are great entrepreneurs and farmers. We ought to be opening up markets for Pennsylvania products. In other words, there's a lot of things we can do. But I'm confident about the future of this economy because I've seen what we've been through. I know the spirit of America. I know the entrepreneurial spirit. I know the fact we've got the best workers in the world. Productivity increases are high. This is a fabulous country. There's nothing we can't overcome, and we are overcoming it. And as we overcome the recession and war and emergency, we better make sure we've got a workforce that is prepared for the higher paying jobs of the 21st century. And that's what we're here to talk about today.

A good education system begins at the early grades. We passed what's called the No Child Left Behind Act. It basically says we trust local people to chart the path to excellence. We're going to spend more Federal money, but we want to know whether or not the children are learning to read, write, and add and subtract. This business about just shuffling kids through the system has got to end. It's got to end.

We've got to make sure that as we focus on primary and secondary education, we never forget the fact that we can strive

for higher standards at the high school level. One of the things you hear people talking about is reading programs to make sure that those kids who have been shuffled through now have a chance to learn to read before it's too late and, by the way, using curriculum that actually works, not curriculum that sounds good, not curriculum that may be based upon some interesting theory, but curriculum that actually makes a difference, so that when we measure, we can see clearly that children are learning to read.

We need to expand AP courses. We're going to talk a little bit about AP. One of the interesting things about AP courses, it says clearly that we expect the best from our children. AP courses challenge our kids. It also means that they're more likely to go to college and strive for higher goals. Too many of our minority students aren't getting AP classes. I've got a plan to make sure AP is spread throughout all segments of our society.

We've got to make sure that math and sciences are—we've got to focus on math and science. We've got to encourage people who have got expertise in math and science to come into classrooms. Oftentimes you'll hear school districts say, "We're pinched for teachers. We need extra help with math and science." We've got a program to encourage people to come in and teach part-time to help out. In other words, we're focused on making sure that secondary and elementary education works well and that high schools work well.

And another interesting part of our society which oftentimes gets overlooked is the fabulous community college system in America. You've got a great community college here in—[*applause*]. Community colleges are available and affordable. They're particularly affordable because the Federal Government wants to help people go to community college with all kinds of different scholarship programs, including Pell grants, which we intend to expand, particularly for those students who are willing to

take rigorous academic programs, are willing to set their sights.

The community college system is flexible, and you're going to hear an interesting and innovative program that deals with your health care system here in Harrisburg and central Pennsylvania and the community college and the high school, to prepare folks for the jobs which actually exist.

Listen, it used to be in job training that they never asked the question whether jobs—do the jobs exist for the training programs. The way I used to put it is, you used to train 500 hairdressers for 10 jobs. And yet we satisfied our requirement at the State level because they didn't ask whether or not the jobs actually existed. They just asked, were you training somebody. Now we're beginning to ask the question, when you train somebody, is there a job, and does the curriculum make sense for the job.

So what you're about to hear is, educational excellence here in Harrisburg exists; innovative programs exist. People who are listening in different communities around Pennsylvania and the country might want to pay attention to what is happening in this community.

Rich—I appreciate your hospitality—is the principal of the mighty Rams.

Richard Mazzatesta. You're more than welcome here, Mr. President.

The President. I guess I should have said you're the head Ram. [*Laughter*]

Mr. Mazzatesta. Well, Dr. Hasson might think that I'm the second head Ram. [*Laughter*]

The President. You can call her a Ram. I'm not. [*Laughter*] I'm going to call her, "Ma'am." [*Laughter*]

Barbara Hasson. Barbara.

The President. Barbara, that's right.

[*Richard Mazzatesta, principal, Central Dauphin High School, made brief remarks.*]

The President. Well, I'm here to help. [*Laughter*] However, educational excellence will only be found at the local level. And

by that I mean, is that it's important to have local control of schools so that good superintendents and good principals are able to be—adjust according to the circumstances. The Federal Government can write checks, and we are. Federal funding is up. What's changed is we're finally asking the question, are we getting any results for our money? Good schools don't mind answering that question.

Rich said something interesting about the No Child Left Behind Act. What's interesting in this piece of legislation is that because of measuring, you're able to determine whether or not a child can read or write and add and subtract early. And what the measurement system allows you to do is, one, analyze curriculum. You know, is it working? Is the reading program we've got working? But also, it enables you to focus attention on a particular child that might slip behind, which will make it easier, by the way, when this law is fully implemented, for high schools because you'll have a more literate population coming your way at some point in time.

We've got kind of a gap in the pipeline. There's been a—because we haven't focused that intensely on measurement, there's some kids who are just being shuffled through, and you're having to remediate. But we're going to correct that by having high standards early, enough money to help—provide remedial help so that no child is left behind. That's why we called it that law. We don't want anybody left behind in America.

Barbara—listen, I've been listening to Barbaras all my life. *[Laughter]*

Dr. Hasson. And as I told the President backstage here, he's going to listen to one more Barbara. *[Laughter]*

[Dr. Hasson, superintendent, Central Dauphin School District, made brief remarks.]

The President. Let me see here—*[laughter]*—I think we're doing our responsibility here at the Federal level. Most funding should be at the State and local level, in

order to make sure you've got local control of the schools. We've increased the Federal funding at the—for elementary and secondary school programs up by 49 percent over the last 4 years.

I think—let me say a couple of things Barbara said. First, because you measure, you know whether or not children are learning. I hear people say, "Well, I can't believe you're making people measure." Look, I didn't like to take tests either, but that's too bad. You see, we've got to know. If you don't know whether a child can read and write and add and subtract, it's likely that child will be just shuffled through. And guess who gets hurt? Guess who gets hurt? A lot of inner-city kids get hurt. We want the American Dream to be everywhere.

A lot of kids whose parents may not speak English as a first language, they're easy to quit on. Let's just move them through, see. But we're through with those days in America. Every child has worth. I believe every child can learn, and our systems must challenge mediocrity when we find it, must be willing to raise the bar.

Barbara, that's why I'm here. You're willing to raise the bar. She said, "We accept the challenge." It's not my challenge. It's a national challenge to make sure every single child can learn. If you can't read, there is no way you're going to be able to take advantage of the fantastic opportunities being created in America. If you can't read, you're going to be left behind when it comes to these unbelievable job opportunities that are going to exist.

And so what we're talking about really here is the basics of job training, aren't we? And that's to give the people the skills necessary to take advantage of a changing, dynamic, exciting economy.

Schools can't survive without good teachers, and we've got one with us right here. Rebecca is a—shall I tell them 31-year teacher? No, I won't say that. *[Laughter]* It might give away our age. *[Laughter]* She's been in the classroom for 31 years.

She is an incredibly dedicated professional who told me that after 31 years, she still loves walking into the classroom. Rebecca is in charge of the English AP. Would you share with us your story?

[*Rebecca Deitman, teacher, Central Dauphin High School, made brief remarks.*]

The President. I appreciate your dedication. You're leading with your heart, and you've got to be. See, the issue with AP is whether or not teachers know how to teach AP. That's one of the bottlenecks, to make sure more advanced placement—AP means raising the bar, is what it means. It means challenging students to the max, which is what we want to do in society, don't we? And part of the money that we're going to spend out of Washington is to make sure that there is teacher training money.

Another bottleneck is—you know, a kid goes home and says, "Mom, I want to take the AP exam. How much does it cost?" And it's quite costly. And so therefore, a lot of students say, "Well, I'm not going to take the course, because it's too much money to take the exam." We've got to help, particularly, low-income students pay for the exam. We cannot allow the cost of a test to prevent students from reaching high. And so part of the AP program—[*applause*].

[*Ms. Deitman made further remarks.*]

The President. What Barbara mentioned, for example, is not only training AP teachers how to teach AP, which is essential, but if you remember, Barbara said, "We're making sure our teachers have been re-trained in the curriculum we're now going to use for reading at the primary level." Teacher training is an essential aspect of making sure our children get the best education possible.

And one of the reasons you measure, by the way, is to test whether or not the curriculum is working. And if the curriculum is not working, you need super-

intendents and principals and teachers bold enough to say it's not working. And so then you pick what you think will work, and then you've got to train teachers to teach that curriculum. That's what the No Child Left Behind Act also does.

And you've got a vibrant school district here. You see, if you listen carefully, what people are saying is, "We're going to challenge every child." And that's the beginnings of educational excellence. And we need to challenge every child because the jobs of the 21st century are going to require a lot of smarts. People have to have the capacity to think. It used to be, you know, crank somebody out of high school, and if they could run a backhoe, that's going to be fine. And there's nothing wrong with backhoe drivers. We're going to need them. But we're also going to need computer programmers or people working in the health sciences.

There's some exciting new fields coming, and therefore, the education system must start early, make sure the high schools continue to raise the bar, and our community colleges must be flexible enough to have a curriculum that actually meets the needs of the local communities. In other words, you don't need to be training people for jobs that don't exist.

And somebody who understands that is Edna. She runs the Harrisburg Area Community College, which as I understand it, is the oldest community college—

Edna Baehre. That's correct.

The President. The youngest leader with the oldest college.

Dr. Baehre. Don't I wish. [*Laughter*]

The President. Tell us about your school. Tell us how you've made the curriculum relevant. Tell us what you're doing.

[*Dr. Baehre, president, Harrisburg Area Community College, made brief remarks.*]

The President. Now, what—let's see if I can say—kind of summarize what you just said. There's a lot of interesting job opportunities, whether it be forklift drivers

or health care providers, and there are people who need to get extra training to be able to do those jobs. And you're helping them. And that's good. That's what we want our community colleges to do.

[*Dr. Baehre made further remarks.*]

The President. All right, Roger. Roger is the CEO of PinnacleHealth System. He's here because you're looking for people to work. One of the most exciting fields is the health care field—one of the exciting fields to find work. But you've got to be able to have some—got a skill set that makes you employable.

And tell us what you've done with the community college. Tell us what kind of people you're looking for.

[*Roger Longenderfer, president and CEO, PinnacleHealth System, made brief remarks.*]

The President. Thank you, Roger. Thanks for being innovative.

The message I heard from Roger is if you're looking for work in central Pennsylvania and you're willing to retrain, willing to go back to school, you can find work, see. There's jobs in this part of the world that may require a different skill set than you have, but there is ample opportunity to retrain, particularly at the community college level. And I'm sure there's some people listening out there saying, "I want to work. I'm worried about my job security, but I may be too old to go back to the community college." That's not the way it works. The community college accepts all comers. What Roger is looking for is smart, capable, hard-working people who need just a little extra training so that he can put them to work.

Speaking about young workers, Athan's mother is here. Athan is 4?

Cari Aftosmes. Four-and-a-half.

The President. Four-and-a-half, yes. I want to make sure she's 4½. Cari is a student at HACC. She's got an interesting story that I would like for her to share

with you. By the way, for the Congress to understand, she got a \$1,000 child credit for Athan, and if they don't make the tax cuts permanent, she's going to be paying taxes next year.

[*Ms. Aftosmes made brief remarks.*]

The President. It's a fabulous story. Cari, first of all, understands her most important responsibility is to love her child with all her heart and, therefore, to be able to provide for her child. She's also willing to say, "I can do better. I want to do better. I want to serve my community, and I understand it's going to take a little extra time to get the skills necessary." So she actually became entrepreneurial. She said, "How best to improve?" And she researched and she found a good company willing to pay for her tuition, a community college system that was able to develop a curriculum that matched her desires. And here she is on the cusp of a new career, one that pays better, with better benefits.

See, education enables our workers to be more productive. When you hear about productivity increases, what you're really hearing about is better paying jobs. But it requires a certain spirit, doesn't it? It requires somebody to seize the moment, some citizen to say, "I want to do better." Government can't make you do better. We can provide the opportunities, and we all work hard to do so. But it requires the spirit of a person like Cari to rise up and say, "I want to do my duty as a mom. I'm going to do my duty as a wife. I'm going to do my duty as a citizen to provide care and comfort for people in hospitals." She took advantage of the opportunity. For those of you looking for work out there, take advantage of the opportunities available to embetter yourself.

Listen, I'm going to tell you something. We've been through a lot in this country. We're going to win the war on terror. We're going to promote freedom and peace. The world is going to be more free and therefore more peaceful. At home,

we're going to be a society which understands the issues facing our fellow citizens, helps our fellow citizens realize great expectations of our society, encourages the entrepreneurial spirit of Americans, enables people to realize their dreams by having an education system which works and functions well.

And as well this is a society where people who hurt and are lonely and hopeless can find solace, because there's a loving citizen

with arms open, willing to do their duty as an American by loving their neighbor.

I am so honored to be back here in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. I thank you for the warm welcome. I thank our panelists for this discussion. And may God bless you all.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:06 a.m. at Central Dauphin High School.

Remarks in a Discussion on Parental Options and School Choice *February 13, 2004*

The President. Thank you, John. Listen, I'm thrilled to be here. I love to come to centers of excellence. This high school is a center of excellence. It is a school that—I was so pleased to hear that 98 percent of the senior class will be going on to higher education. That is a—I would say that's what's called dashing false expectations, is the best way to put it.

See, I would suspect that prior to coming to a place that demanded high standards and high excellence, people would say, "Well, these certain kids can't learn." See, there's an attitude in our society that maybe certain children can't learn, so therefore let's have a system that just shuffles them through. But not at this school. This school believes in the worth and value of every child, that every child can learn. And therefore, this school is not afraid to raise expectations and set glorious heights and demand excellence. And as a result, you've achieved a startling achievement: 98 percent of the high school seniors are going to higher education.

I want to congratulate you and congratulate Jim, congratulate the teachers, congratulate the parents but, most importantly, congratulate the students. I appreciate you setting goals and making the right choices to achieve those goals.

This is a fabulous high school. It's a great place to come and talk about the expectations of our society. It's a great place to come and talk about how we can encourage people to achieve new heights. It's a good way to—it's a good place to come and talk about how you challenge the status quo when the status quo is promoting mediocrity. So thank you for letting me come.

I appreciate so very much the Secretary of Education being here. He's going to say some words in a minute. You know, when I was looking for a Secretary of Education, I wasn't interested in finding a theorist, somebody who talked about the philosophy of the education or talking about somebody—trying to find somebody who has actually done it. And he was the superintendent of schools in Harris County, which is Houston, Texas. He understands the philosophy behind the law that we just passed a year ago, a law I'm going to talk a little bit about. He's doing a great job. He's a good, sound man. I've known him for a long time. I'm proud that he's serving us. Thank you for coming, Rod. I'm glad you're here.

I noticed Tom Davis and Rodney Frelinghuysen, who are with us today, Members of the United States Congress, who pushed for the initiative I'm going to