

Statement on Afghanistan's Adoption of a New Constitution January 4, 2004

I congratulate the people of Afghanistan on the adoption of their new constitution. This document lays the foundation for democratic institutions and provides a framework for national elections in 2004. A democratic Afghanistan will serve the interests and just aspirations of all of the

Afghan people and help ensure that terror finds no further refuge in that proud land. This new constitution marks a historic step forward, and we will continue to assist the Afghan people as they build a free and prosperous future.

Remarks in a Discussion at Pierre Laclede Elementary School in St. Louis, Missouri January 5, 2004

The President. Well, I'm glad to be here, Madam Principal. [Laughter] One of the things you find in a successful school is a strong-willed, smart, capable principal. And that's obviously the case here, and I appreciate your hospitality.

I'm here at Laclede because this is a school that has defied expectations. It's defied expectations by raising the bar and believing that every child can learn. That's not the case in some parts of our country, unfortunately. In some parts of the country, schools just shuffle kids through, and that's not right. That's not the American way.

This school is a school that has performed, you have to say, brilliantly. Since 1999, 7 percent of the kids could read, and now 80 percent can read at grade level in the third grade. That speaks to strong principals. It speaks to really good teachers. It says this school has got teachers that believe in the capability of every child. It says the school has raised standards and is not afraid to measure.

And see, one of the things I'm here to talk about is the No Child Left Behind Act. Laclede has been named a No Child Left—Blue Ribbon No Child Left Behind School. And the—inherent in this No Child Left Behind Act is the desire to spend Fed-

eral money and spend it wisely. We've increased budgets. The Title I money is up 43 percent since 2001—41 percent. The teacher training money is up. The reading program money is up by 4 times. But finally, the Federal Government has said, "Why don't you show us whether or not that money is being well-spent. Show us whether or not you believe every child can learn. Show us whether or not objectives are being met."

And this is exactly what's happening here at Laclede. As I was reminded, Laclede was doing this before No Child Left Behind Act was passed. Joyce was quick to point it out. [Laughter] She may point it out again. [Laughter]

But the important thing is, inherent in the No Child Left Behind Act was not only the desire to measure, the need to measure, the need to show, the need to track each child, but it's also the trust of local people to make the right decisions. See, you can't have a system that is—meets objectives if you're hamstrung by Federal rules and regulations. And so, inherent in the No Child Left Behind Act is trust, trust of the principals, trust of the teachers, trust of the parents, trust of the local officials, like Speaker Hanaway and Peter Kinder

from the State house and State senate who are with us. I want to thank you for coming, by the way.

I appreciate all the State officials who are here. I know we've got some school board officials. You've got the ball in our—in terms of how to achieve excellence. It's up to you. The Federal Government is a source of money. It's now a source of inspiration. It's a source of measurement. But it's up to the local people to really make it work.

I also appreciate so very much that Senator Jim Talent is with us. Senator, thank you for coming. Congresswoman Jo Ann Emerson and Kenny Hulshof, and of course, Congressman Lacy Clay, whose district we are in. Congressman, thank you very much for joining us today.

I went into a classroom of fourth graders. I asked this question, I said, "How many of you are going to go to college?" You'll be happy to hear that every hand went up. That's a good sign. They were also doing something that was fundamentally important. They were practicing their reading. I also asked the question, "How many of you read more than you watch TV?" About 50 percent of the hands went up. [Laughter]

But what's important is for schools like—around the country to understand what's happening here, and that is that the people here use reading programs based upon what works—not what sounds good—reading programs based upon the science of reading. And it's working.

And so I'm here to congratulate this school and to really hold you up for the Nation to see what is possible when you raise the bar, when you're not afraid to hold people to account, when you empower your teachers and your principals to achieve the objective we all want. And that's to make sure no child, not one single child in America, is left behind.

I'm honored to be here at this Blue Ribbon School. And I appreciate your time, and I look forward to hearing from you.

[At this point, the discussion continued.]

The President. Yes, you are. Listen, one of the things you hear, of course, is that you can't test kids, see. You can't test. We test too much. How do you know if a child isn't reading if you don't test? How do you know who needs help? I mean, if the idea is to make sure not one child is left behind, you better test.

The test isn't a punishment, you know. It's not to punish anybody. The test is to determine who needs extra help. And that's exactly why Laclede is doing well, I'm convinced, or one of the main reasons why. They've got a book here that says, "Every child matters. Every child can learn, and therefore we're going to measure as to whether or not we're meeting expectations for every child, not a few of the children but every child."

And so when you hear this talk about testing, testing is bad, testing is—you know, teach the test, what testing is—what testing does and what measuring does is determines whether or not every child is learning and, if not, whether that child is getting the help he or she needs early, before it is too late.

We've got to stop this business about just shuffling kids through the schools in America. We've got to stop social promotion and focus on whether or not each child is getting the instruction he or she needs, and that's exactly what this book says, and that's why I'm here at Laclede to tout this program, because you're making great sense.

[The discussion continued.]

The President. Yes, I think it's important. The Federal Government can help, and we have. I think we've increased the teacher training and recruitment budget significantly, like by about 40 percent since 2001. And that's important to make sure teachers have the skills necessary to be able to teach. I mean, it's one thing to have a good heart; it's another thing to be able to have the skills necessary to put—to

match the good heart with the capacity to pass on knowledge.

And so the Federal Government is helping on teacher recruitment, teacher training, and that's an important aspect of the No Child Left Behind Act. It's essential that we continue to monitor what works, whether the curriculum you're using makes sense—that's what measurement helps a school to understand—and whether or not a teacher needs a little extra help in order to be able to impart the knowledge that he or she is desirous of doing.

I know we've got a parent here. By the way, the first teacher of any child is a mom and a dad. And it's—this parent right here is a good teacher. Thank you for being here.

[The discussion continued.]

The President. Speaking about volunteers, one of the really true strengths of our country is the heart and soul of the American people. Today with us—I met a fellow at the airport who is now with us here today. His name is Jeff Tank. Probably never heard of Jeff. He is a volunteer with Big Brothers and Big Sisters. January happens to be National Mentoring Month.

Where are you, Jeff? There he is. Jeff, by the way, when I went to the airport, he said, "This isn't about recognition, recognizing me." I said, "Yes, it is, because you represent a lot of other good people who are taking time out of your lives to make a difference in a child's life."

Schools need volunteers. Schools need mentors. Big Brothers and Big Sisters is a fabulous program that provides that kind of—that provides that kind of mentoring and help. Whether you're the superintendent of schools or the chairman of the school board or the President, we all need to be out encouraging people to volunteer.

I always say that part of ushering in a era of personal responsibility means that people have to be responsible for the communities—for the schools in the community

in which they live. You just can't trust that some faraway Government is going to make the correct decisions for the local communities. And if you're interested in the quality of education and you're paying attention to what you hear at Laclede, why don't you volunteer? Why don't you help and mentor a child how to read? Why don't you join us all in changing America one child at a time?

And so, Jeff, I want to thank you for coming. I want to thank you for the example you have set for others in the community of St. Louis and hope that others will follow your example. And a great place to start to volunteer is to show up at a local public school and ask the principal what you can do to help change a child's life.

So thank you for reminding me about the importance of being a good mom and a great volunteer as well.

Listen, making sure every child learns to read and making sure every child is educated is a—the number one domestic priority of this country. It is essential we get it right.

Laclede Elementary School shatters stereotypes. It shows that we can have excellence in every single classroom across this country, that it's not just suburban America where we find excellence. You can find excellence in inner-city America. You find excellence in rural America. You find excellence where you've got great principals and teachers and leadership willing to raise the standards, willing to challenge every child, because you believe in every child. You find excellence where you're willing to measure and then correct when things aren't going the way they should. You find excellence when you've got skilled teachers carrying around a book that measures the ability of each child, not a collection of children but every child, and so that you can then qualify the curriculum to meet the needs of that child.

And I am here for the simple reason to show what is possible all across America. And what is possible is to take reading

scores from 7 percent to 80 percent in places like St. Louis, Missouri, and elsewhere. I want to congratulate you for setting the standard. And keep raising the bar. Make sure that other 20 percent gets up to grade level at third grade—I know you will—and you will have done your duty as educators and Americans to make sure that our children, the very future of the country, have got the capacity to succeed in the greatest land on the face of the Earth.

Thank you all for coming. God bless.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:33 p.m. In his remarks, he referred to Yolanda Moss,

principal, and Regina Davis, parent and volunteer, Pierre Laclede Elementary School; Joyce Roberts, executive director, Middle School and Priority School Education, St. Louis Public Schools, and former principal, Pierre Laclede Elementary School; Catherine Hanaway, speaker, Missouri State House of Representatives; and Peter Kinder, president pro tempore, Missouri State Senate. He also referred to Title I of the Improving America's Schools Act of 1994 (Public Law No. 103-382), which amended Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (Public Law No. 89-10).

Remarks at a Bush-Cheney Reception in St. Louis *January 5, 2004*

Thank you all very much. Thanks for coming. Thank you all. Thanks for your warm welcome. I appreciate such a warm response. I appreciate such a huge crowd. It's great to be back here in St. Louis. I don't know if you know this or not, but my grandmother was raised right here in St. Louis. And I've got a lot of relatives here. By the way, if you're looking for a great uncle, model somebody after Bucky Bush.

This record-setting event really means we're laying the foundation for what is going to be a victory in the State of Missouri in November of 2004 and a nationwide victory in 2004. I want to thank all the event organizers. I want to thank those of you who are in the grassroots. I want to thank you for working hard. I want to thank you for what you're going to do.

The political season is going to come in its own time. I admit I'm loosening up—[laughter]—and I'm getting ready. But right now, I'm focused on the people's business. See, I have a lot on the agenda. I want you to remind your fellow citizens that I will continue to work hard to earn the con-

fidence of all Americans by keeping this Nation secure and strong and prosperous and free.

My one regret tonight is that Laura isn't here. She is a fabulous lady. She's a great First Lady for our country. She is a wonderful wife, a great mother, and she's doing a heck of a job on behalf of the American people.

I appreciate so very much Senator Kit Bond's leadership in the United States Senate. I also appreciate a short introduction. [Laughter] I also want to thank my friend Senator Jim Talent as well for doing a great job for the people of Missouri. I'm pleased that Congresswoman Jo Ann Emerson is with us tonight as well as Kenny Hulshof, two fine Members of the United States Congress from Missouri.

I know the secretary of state is with us, Matt Blunt. Thank you for coming, Matt. I'm proud you're here. I appreciate the speaker coming, Catherine Hanaway, as well as Senate Majority Leader Peter Kinder. Thank you all for coming. I want to thank all the members of the statehouse