

Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of these remarks.

Remarks on the Helping America's Youth Initiative *April 1, 2005*

The President. Thank you all. Please be seated. Thanks. I thought you were going to say you couldn't give the speech because you were suffering from jetlag. *[Laughter]* Laura just got back from Afghanistan and reported that freedom is a beautiful thing, that society is changing because the people are free there.

And it's quite a job I have when you get to be introduced by your wife. I want to thank you all for coming. I'm a lucky man that Laura said yes when I asked her to marry me. She is a great mom, fabulous wife. She's doing a wonderful job as our First Lady. She is a tireless advocate for children in our country. She is a teacher. And you learn a thing or two when you marry a teacher. *[Laughter]* You learn to behave yourself—*[laughter]*—most of the time. *[Laughter]*

And you learn that a single soul can make a difference in a young person's life. That's what you learn. As a matter of fact, that's what we're here to talk about today, how to help Americans realize the great promise of a single person's compassion and its ability to help save a soul. America can change one heart, one soul at a time.

And our job, frankly, all our jobs, is to find those who are willing to be a part of the solution and encourage them to help surround somebody who hurts with love. That's what we're here to talk about today.

First, I want to thank Mike Leavitt for serving as the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services. One of the reasons he is here is this Department distributes a lot of Federal money, and I—you'll hear me talk about public policy that hopefully will encourage faith- and commu-

nity-based programs to do a more—a better job of helping to save lives in our country.

Frank Wolf is with us. Frank, I'm honored you're here. Congressman Frank Wolf has been a leading advocate in the Congress for the faith-based and community-based initiatives. I appreciate you coming, Congressman. Glad to see you brought your daughter, Rebecca, with you. Frank, by the way, has been very instrumental in working in the Sudan to help bring peace to that troubled part of the world. I want to thank you for your efforts.

While I'm mentioning it, we met with youngsters who are being mentored, their mentors, and the directors of programs that have encouraged the mentoring to take place. Dan Johnson, the executive director of Kinship of Greater Minneapolis, is with us. Thanks for coming, Dan. Denise Williams, the vice president for programs, Big Brothers Big Sisters for the Capital Area, is with us. Mark Earley, the president of Prison Fellowship, is with us today. Appreciate you coming, Mark. Maureen Holla, the executive director of the Higher Achievement Program—Maureen, thank you very much.

Barbara—Barbara's been introduced once; I'll introduce her again. Barbara is a big name in my family. *[Laughter]* Thank you for being the head of this great school. We're honored to be here. I want to thank all the teachers who are here. I want to thank all the mentors who are here. I want to thank all the people who care about the future of this country who are here.

Laura and I are thrilled to be here. I'm impressed by the results of the Higher

Achievement Program. I think it's important if you're in my line of work, for example, to ask people, "What's happening? What are the results? Show me some progress." I don't have much time in this job, and so one of the things I try to do is to say, "Here's the goal, and how are we progressing toward this goal?"

And one of the interesting things about the Higher Achievement Program, they have got a good track record, good results. It shows what is possible when you focus on a goal-oriented, results-oriented approach to helping save lives. For 30 years—they've got a long history, by the way; this program has been in existence for 30 years—they've mentored middle school students. And that's an important group, by the way. If you're interested in trying to figure out something to do in America, find some middle school students who need some help. It is a very important age for loving adults to enter into a child's life. And this initiative—let me just say this, of the more than 300 youngsters who take place in this program per year, 95 percent go to college.

If you're interested in finding out what works, look at this program, because the results are clear. And I want to congratulate the visionaries involved with the program and those who are on the frontlines of making it work.

I also—we have the honor of meeting folks who mentor. I call them soldiers in the armies of compassion, people who are willing to take time out of their too-busy lives to help save a life. Such a person is Stacey French. For 2½ years, she has volunteered to tutor a seventh grader named Lexus Henderson, both of whom are here today. Stacey watched as Lexus turned from an inattentive student to one who is focused, to one who sets goals. I asked Lexus, I said, "You going to college?" Thirteen-year-old guy, by the way. He said, "Absolutely." He's even picked one out. He has set a goal. And Stacey is there to help him realize that goal. He wasn't very good

in math. She helped focus on math. Math is now his favorite subject. Here's a guy going to college as a result of the love of Stacey. Thank you all for coming. Please stand up.

Laura and I also met with some extraordinary young men and women who have faced some incredibly significant and great challenges in their life. Each of them has had a mother or father in prison. Each has had a volunteer mentor as well. And the caring presence of this adult, the soul who said, "I love you," has made a big difference in these children's lives. They have made a—the kids have made a tough decision to kind of resist peer pressure and focus on achieving results in schools and staying off drugs and making tough choices. And we're really proud of the accomplishments that you all have made and the example you have set.

One of those is Michaela Huberty, is with us today from Benjamin Mays Magnet School, St. Paul, Minnesota. She is the youngest of three children, and she's being raised by her mom. Her dad has been in and out of prison for her entire life. Fortunately, there's the Lutheran mentoring program—I just introduced the head of it—in Minneapolis that matched Michaela with Jennifer Kalenborn. She is a special needs teacher in St. Paul. Think about that. She's already helping children, and she wanted to do more.

She is—and they do crafts together, and they go to museums together, and they read together, and they talk on the phone together. She sets an example. Guess what Michaela wants to be when she grows up: a teacher. [Laughter] It's pretty interesting—not coincidental, of course. She's being loved by a teacher. She's being helped by a teacher. She herself wants to teach. One of the most important programs that we need to focus on is to—helping a child whose parent is or has been in prison. And I want to thank the Minneapolis program, and I want to thank Jennifer for being such a good soul. Welcome

to you both. Thanks for coming. Let them stand up.

Jillian Antonucci is with us. She joined the Prison Fellowship Angel Tree Program. That's a program all—that exists in order to help a child whose parent may be or has been in prison. It's a great program, by the way.

She takes time out from attending Grove City College in Pennsylvania to mentor Brianna Morris, whose father and mother have both been in prison. I asked her, I said, "Well, how did you get involved with the program?" She said, "The first thing is I prayed and asked for guidance from the Almighty." It's kind of an interesting way to become inspired, isn't it? Matter of fact, it is the basis of many faith-based programs; matter of fact, it's the basis of all faith-based programs.

Brianna was suffering from depression. But Jillian, as a result of her love and desire to help, has watched this young lady become someone who is laughing and more open, somebody who has set goals. Interestingly enough, the goal—she either wants to be a basketball player or a computer technician. If your jump shot doesn't work, go computers. [Laughter] But we want to thank you both for being here. Thank you for coming. Please stand up and be recognized for your good work. [Applause]

Finally, we met Vinnie Thomas. Some people become mentors because of what mentors have done for them in their lives. In other words, one of the interesting things about mentoring is it can create a chain of compassion over the course of people's lives. And Vinnie Thomas left home when he was 16, ended up in California struggling with drugs. And guess where he ended up? In prison. He was there for 3½ years. And while he was there, a mentor—I think he said two mentors, but one sticks out in my mind in particular is a mentor that was a businessperson, came and mentored Vinnie and gave him an airplane ticket to fly back

home, said "If you need a problem [help], * here's a house; here's a bed." In other words, it's probably more effective than a probation officer could be. Somebody said, "I care for you, Vinnie." Vinnie said he didn't have a family; he was lonely. He said this mentor helped him make sure that he didn't land back in jail. Guess what? Vinnie today is a Big Brother to Parry Elliott, who is with us as well.

Parry Elliott is a seventh grader, lives in a section of Washington known for gang violence. His dad is in prison right now. I asked Parry, I said, "How about college?" He said, "Absolutely. You don't have to worry about me." He said, "I've made my decision." He's accepted to the SEED School in Washington, DC, where 100 percent of the graduating students were accepted into college last year. Thanks to Big Brothers Big Sisters of the National Capital Area, their lives have been transformed.

Let me tell you something about Vinnie. This week, he was ordained a deacon at the Galilee Baptist Church. I guess I shouldn't call him Vinnie; I should call him Deacon Thomas. [Laughter] As a matter of fact, I asked the deacon to offer a prayer after our gathering. I was hoping I would be the recipient of the first prayer that the newly ordained deacon would offer. I think I might have been.

Vincent Thomas. You were.

The President. Well, that's good. [Laughter] Let me just say you responded to the pressure quite well. [Laughter] It's an honor to welcome Deacon Thomas and Parry with us today. Thank you all for coming.

I'm proud of these mentors; we're proud of you all who mentor as well. Anybody listening out there is interested in how to serve the country, one good way is to become a mentor. We talked to the program directors. I said, "What are your bottlenecks? Where do you need help?" They

* White House correction.

need help in matching lost souls with somebody who loves. And so spread the word. I'm trying to spread it right now through that camera. *[Laughter]* But if you want to serve America, become a mentor.

And there are ways to do so. Plenty of access to the Internet—usafreedomcorps.gov is one way to figure out a mentoring program close to you that is looking for help. The amazing thing is, is that all this happens without Government. There's success stories like the four we just heard all across America, because there are a lot of people who are saying, "What can I do? How can I help? What do I need to do to make sure opportunity is available to all people?"

Now, Government has got a role to play, in my judgment. I think there's a vital role for Government to play. But first we've got to understand the limitations of Government. Government can do a lot of things, but one of the things Government is not really good at is love. It can hand out money, but it can't put hope in a person's heart. It can't serve to inspire a person to set goals like going to college. But what Government can do is to empower people who have heard the call to love a neighbor, and that's what Government should do, in my judgment. Government should be an advocate of faith-based and community-based programs, not an impediment [impediment]* to faith-based programs. Government ought to be not a roadblock.

So we're committed to making Government an effective partner for those bringing hope to harsh places. In the State of the Union this year, I announced the Helping America's Youth Initiative that's going to be led by Laura. She talked about it. She'll be focusing on three key areas vital to helping young people succeed, family, school, and community.

This fall, she's—as she mentioned, she's going to be convening a White House conference that will bring researchers and pol-

icy experts and educators and parents and community leaders together. They will discuss ways and strategies to help children avoid drugs, alcohol, violence, early sexual activity, ways to help people build successful lives.

As part of Helping America's Youth Initiative, we've proposed a new \$150 million effort to discourage gangs, to encourage faith-based and community-based organizations to provide alternatives to gangs. I can't think of a better group of people to rally and inspire, to offset the lure of a gang, than somebody who has heard a universal call to love a neighbor just like they'd like to be loved themselves.

I'm really excited about Laura's initiative. I urge Congress to support programs that will make this initiative viable, initiatives such as programs to help strengthen marriages, a responsible fatherhood initiative that would support community- and faith-based organizations to help fathers stay involved in their children's lives, a healthy marriage initiative to support research on the best ways to keep marriages strong. Those seem like reasonable programs if we're all aiming to try to make this society as strong a society as possible.

There are over 2 million children in America with at least one parent in prison. That is a problem that we must address, and the problem is, is that if your dad or mother is in prison, you're likely to end up there yourself without love and compassion in your life. That's a fact.

And so one of the initiatives that I called upon Congress to fund was the initiative to help faith-based and community organizations to recruit enough mentors to save the lives of 100,000 children whose parent may be in prison. It's a vital initiative; it's an important initiative. Last year we gave out \$55 million in grants that had been awarded to 221 organizations. There is still work to be done. We're just starting.

I urge those of you involved in the Faith- and Community-Based Initiative to set up programs to mentor a child whose parent

* White House correction.

may be in prison. It is a vital contribution to our country that you can make. It's an important part of keeping this country a hopeful place for all. We'll have more money available in the budgets coming out, but what we can't do is we can't buy compassion and love. It's up to those at the community level to take advantage of the funding available. It's up to you to go out and help recruit. I can call people to service and will continue to do so. A patriotic way to serve America is to mentor a child whose parent may be in prison. But I encourage the social entrepreneurs in America to funnel resources and efforts and energy toward this vital program.

The faith-based program is one that is going to be—remain a constant part of my administration. Obviously, there's some limitations on the faith program. You can't take Federal money to proselytize. You can't take Federal money and discriminate against somebody based upon religion. In other words, if you're an alcohol and drug rehabilitation program and you happen to be associated with the Methodist church, you can't say only Methodists who are drunk can come here. You got to say, "All drunks are able to come here." [Laughter] In other words, there is some limitations. There are limitations to how this Federal money can be used.

But one of the limitations should not be based upon the fact that you're a faith-based program. In other words, we strongly believe at the Federal level that Federal money ought to be accessible on an equal playing field, level playing field to faith-based programs.

Jim Towey runs an office in my—runs an office there at the White House. See, I ask Towey all the time, I say, "How much money are we getting out the door?" It's one thing to talk the Faith-Based and Community-Based Initiative; another thing is actually to make sure money is available. And he reported to me last year, \$2 billion was accessed by the faith community. And that's

good. That's a good start. We spend a lot more than 2 billion a year.

The whole goal, see, is to focus on results, not on process. Those of us in Washington, we ought to say, "Are we saving lives? Are we getting enough mentors in people's lives? Are we helping enough drunks get off alcohol? Are we helping enough addicts get off drugs?" That's what we ought to be asking. And we ought to recognize that in programs that exist because they've heard a call to love a neighbor, you can find great results. And so this Faith-Based and Community-Based Initiative is a results-oriented approach that'll protect the church and—the separation of church and state but, at the same time, wisely uses taxpayers' money so that we can achieve important social objectives.

For those of you involved in the faith and community programs, I want to say thank you for your efforts. You've got a friend and ally in the Federal Government now.

Part of making sure you can do your job is to make sure regulations don't stand in the way of doing your job. Congress needs to make sure that faith-based groups are not forced to give up their right to hire people of their own faith as a price for competing for Federal money. I'm pleased that the House voted a month ago to protect the civil rights of faith-based groups. I urge the Senate to do the same when it considers welfare reform and job training legislation this year.

We're beginning to change the culture here in Washington. There's a more accepting attitude toward the role that faith-based and community-based programs can play in helping cure social ills and helping to shine a light into some of the dark places in our country.

In order to make sure that we continue to stay focused on this initiative and to be—and to succeed, I've set up 10 faith-based offices in 10 agencies, Federal agencies. In other words, there's got to be some

accountability. I want there to be a presence in these Federal bureaucracies. I want somebody in there agitating for fairness, understanding the great hope of this initiative.

In 2003, grants to faith-based programs had gone up by 20 percent, and what's important for you to understand is that all the grant money hasn't just gone to the established faith providers, like the Salvation Army, which has done a fantastic job, or Catholic Charities, which has done a fantastic job in America. But I want to make sure that social entrepreneurs, large and small, had access to Federal money. In other words, we want to make sure that the program reaches some of the most lonely corners in America, that we touch both large and small providers. And we're making progress. And I'm asking Towey all the time, "Are we reaching new programs? Are we making a difference in other neighborhoods? Are we making sure that this has a broad reach throughout America?" And I'm proud to report that thousands of small groups, tiny grassroots organizations, are being touched by this initiative, and that's important.

Let me tell you why I feel so strongly about this initiative, because I understand the true strength of America lies in the hearts and souls of our citizens. Interestingly enough, I wasn't the first person to recognize this, nor will I be the last. De Tocqueville, fine fellow from France, came to the United States in the 1830s. And he studied what made America unique. And

what he found was, the uniqueness of America then was their eagerness to come together to form associations to enable people to serve a cause greater than themselves. Many of those associations existed because of religion; a lot of them didn't. But there was this great desire for Americans to voluntarily associate in order to help realize an ambition deep within our soul, and that is to make our country a better place and, at the same time, make ourselves a better person by working to help somebody who hurts. He recognized, de Tocqueville recognized that a strength—that that was our strength then. It's very important for those of us in public policy to recognize that it is our strength today.

And so I want to thank you all for being a soldier in the army of compassion, some of you privates, some of you sergeants, some of you generals, all soldiers, bound together by the great desire to love a neighbor just like you'd like to be loved yourself.

Over the next 4 years, I'll continue to work with our faith- and community-based programs to save America one heart, one soul, one conscience at a time.

Thanks for coming today. God bless.

NOTE: The President spoke at approximately 10:55 a.m. at Paul Public Charter School. In his remarks, he referred to Barbara Nophlin, head of school, Paul Public Charter School. The transcript released by the Office of the Press Secretary also included the remarks of the First Lady.

The President's Radio Address *April 2, 2005*

Good morning. Before I begin today, I would like to say a word about Pope John Paul II. His Holiness is a faithful servant of God and a champion of human dignity and freedom. He is an inspiration to us

all. Laura and I join millions of Americans and so many around the world who are praying for the Holy Father.

This week, the members of the independent Commission looking into America's