

Remarks in a Leadership Forum in Jacksonville, Florida

September 10, 2001

The President. It's about time he got it right, isn't it? [*Laughter*] Governor. [*Laughter*] Obviously, we were raised right, because Jeb's priority and my priority are the same; that is to make sure every child gets a good education in America.

We understand—we understand—that an educated child is one that is much more likely to realize the great American experience. And it is so important that we get it right in America. And I'm proud of my brother. He's doing a really good job here in Florida, and I appreciate Jeb.

And Jeb is right. I don't think education ought to be a partisan issue. I know reading is not a partisan issue. I mean, getting every child to read in America is an American issue, and it ought to be an American goal. And it is going to be for this administration.

Jeb had the honor of introducing members of the State House and the State level that are going to make this happen. I traveled today with three members of the Florida delegation: the United States Senator, Senator Nelson, thank you for coming, sir. A Member of the House—Stearns and Crenshaw are with us, as well. Thank you all for being here. That is Ander Crenshaw.

And we had a good discussion coming down. I said, "We're going to go to a school that's showing what can happen when people get their minds together and focus on a goal." And the goal of teaching every child to read is an incredibly important goal, and I want to congratulate the teachers and the parents who are insisting that no child—[*applause*].

And I want to thank Diane for having us. Diane told me she just moved down from Virginia. It's a wonderful—to me, a wonderful sign of her dedication, that she would leave Virginia Tech and to come down and put to work her skills, right here on the frontlines of education, a principal. So thank you for being here.

I picked a good man to be the Secretary of Education. I know the superintendent of schools here, for Duval County, is here. There he is; thank you, Super, for being here. Well, I picked a man who had been the su-

perintendent in Houston, Texas. I didn't want somebody who knew the theories of education. I wanted somebody who knew the practical aspects of education, somebody who had been on the frontlines, somebody who shares with me the belief that every child can learn, who is willing to challenge what I call the soft bigotry of low expectations—the feeling that if you lower the bar, you're going to get lousy results, and that we all ought to raise the bar—and that's my friend from Houston, who is now the Secretary of Education, Rod Paige. Thanks for coming, Rod.

Secretary Paige. Thank you, Mr. President. Thank you.

The President. I want to thank the boys and girls who are here. I like to—sometimes when I see elementary school students or, for that matter, middle school students and sometimes high school, so I ask the question, do you read more than you watch TV?

Audience member. Yes.

The President. That's good, the one that said, yes. Make sure you tell the truth. [*Laughter*] And that's an important question to ask, because it's so much easier to watch TV and not read. And yet, you learn so much more when you read. So all of us as parents have got to work hard to teach our children the importance of practicing reading and the importance of not watching TV—in all due respect to the camera folks back there—[*laughter*]—because reading is essential. And we've got to get it right as a nation. Now, lest I make the Governor feel uncomfortable, I'm absolutely against the federalization of public education. I believe that the best way to achieve excellence for every child is to pass power out of Washington and to trust the local folks.

And I presume—I presume the good Governor is still doing what he said, which is to pass power out of Tallahassee to Jacksonville, because one size doesn't fit all, and it's important to empower people at the local level to have the—to give them the flexibility necessary to meet common goals.

But the Federal Government can help, and it will help. In the bills that I've submitted that passed the House and the Senate, we've got a fantastic reading initiative started. First, there's the call for more money. And

we need to put some more resources behind education, and we have in the budget—about \$900 million a year for reading programs which will help local districts develop diagnostic tools necessary to determine whether or not children need help.

You see, one of the fundamental aspects of making sure a child learns to read is, first and foremost, to diagnose the issue. How do you know if you don't diagnose? How do you know if you don't have the tools necessary to say that this young first-grader needs a little extra help when it comes to phonics or when it comes to fluency or when it comes to comprehension?

And so the monies will be available for that—the monies that need to be available, as well, for teacher training. One of the unfortunate aspects that we find in many States is that there are great teachers who have got wonderful hearts who don't know how to teach reading, that don't know the science of reading. And we've got some of the scientists here who understand reading and how it works, and we're going to hear from them here in a minute, if we can ever get the President to stop talking. [*Laughter*]

One of my dreams is to make sure that schools understand and have the resources available for schools within schools. My attitude is, if it takes teaching reading all day long, do it and get it right before we move children through the system. We can't continue to shuffle them through.

The other thing we've done is, we want to provide help for local districts. And I've got two things I want to talk about. First, we've got a parent guide that Rod's Department is going to put out. It's called "Put Reading First," which is a way for parents to take a look, to determine whether or not the school districts around your city are doing what the scientists tell us need to be done. It's kind of a go-by, to make sure that what works is being instituted at the local level. There is nothing better, it seems like to me, than to arm parents and concerned citizens with the facts so they can ask the relevant questions to the school officials.

And secondly, we're going to have what we call reading leadership academies around the country. And there is a lot of new data when it comes to what works. There is a lot

of data on curriculum development, for example. There are a lot of fads, too, that seem to be working their way through the system.

And it seems like, to me, a useful function of the Federal Government is to take the good folks out at the NIH, for example, that have studied the science of reading and send them around the country to meet with local citizens and school board members and superintendents to share the data, so that people know precisely what is working and what's not working, so that the good folks at the local level can cut through all the hot air and the finger pointing and the politics of reading and find out what works and then help implement it at the local level. Because what we find is, a good curriculum based upon the science of reading is necessary to make sure no child gets left behind. And that is, after all, the goal and the agenda.

Now, I believe, and I know Rod believes and brother Jeb believe, and I bet you Diane believes, every child can learn. You start with the premise that every child can learn to read, not just a handful, not just some, not just a few from a demographic group, but everybody. And that ought to be the goal of this country. And it starts with having a President set an ambitious goal, empowering local people to follow that goal, providing the resources necessary and also the sound science and the reform to make it work.

I'm proud of the accountability system Florida has developed. You see, this country of ours needs to start asking the question, "What do you know?" A lot of times when there is no accountability, we guess. We wonder out loud, "Oh, gosh, I wonder if he or she is learning to read," which means that the question ultimately asked in our system like that is, "How old are you? Because if you're 10, we're supposed to put you here, and if you're 12, we're going to move you here."

And that has got to change. We need to start asking early, before it is too late, "What do you know?" And that means accountability systems. And not only do we need to know whether or not children can read, but if not, we need to correct early. And that's the goal, and that's the drive. And I will promise you, America will be a much better place when we teach—not if but when we

teach every child in this great country to read.

Thank you for having me, Diane. Brother Jeb, thanks very much. Thank you all.

[*At this point, the program continued.*]

The President. Let me say something about him before he starts—go Seminoles! [*Laughter*] That's overt pandering.

Gov. Jeb Bush of Florida. Be careful, George.

The President. Just trying to make him feel better.

He got very much involved—we got involved with the Reading Initiative in Texas when I was the Governor, and you know, there's just so much debate about curriculum, and it gets pretty—people begin to get pretty prejudiced about the case. And so we decided to bring in some people that really knew what they were doing. Dr. Torgesen is one of them that came down to help a friend named Reid Lyons.

Reid is out of the National Institutes of Health. These are folks—when you heard me talking about the science of reading, the scientists that are trying to figure out how it works as opposed to what might sound good. This is the kind of guy I'm talking about.

Thank you for coming.

[*At this point, the program continued.*]

The President. One point on that—the Bush boys, we can dominate; we've got the mikes—[*laughter*—is that we've also taken the work that has been done to the NIH and have developed a simple go-by for Head Start Programs. And the purpose is to help the Head Start Program become much better at providing the essential skills for early reading to our kids. It's a perfect opportunity to take young kids and to give them just the essentials, so that when they finally get here, that as many people are at the same place as possible before the accountability systems kick in. And that's another one of the initiatives that makes a lot of sense, it seems like to me.

[*At this point, the program continued.*]

The President. I'm glad you brought that up, because that's another place we could use a little help with the Congress. We had a good bill out of the House; I hope we can

get it up on the Senate floor, to discuss on the Senate floor how to empower the folks of compassion in America. I mean, we've got some unbelievably generous groups of people in America. And a lot of them are found in faith-based programs. And this Nation ought not to fear faith. We ought to welcome it, and we ought to allow faith-based programs to access taxpayers' money, so long as they meet a need. And the need they're going to meet is to help every person realize the promise of America. And the two go hand in hand.

We had a great friend of Rod's and mine out of Houston, one time stood up at a conference such as this, and she said—this is when I was the Governor—she said, "Governor, reading is the new civil right." It's a pretty profound statement when you think about it, because if you can't read, imagine what society is going to be like for you. And if we're interested in having a society in which everybody gets to access the greatness of this country, then the goal has got to be and a goal we must meet is for every person to be able to read.

And it's so important. And I want to thank you all for giving us a chance to come and highlight this initiative. It's an opportunity for me to say that, at the Federal level, both Republicans and Democrats are discussing this important issue. It's a priority of both parties. And I'm confident that with the right attitude in Washington—and we did need a little attitude adjustment in terms of trying to focus on good public policy instead of trying to tear each other down—that we can get a good bill out.

Now, one has passed the House, and one has passed the Senate. Both bills have got really good features to them, and it's now time for people to act in the Nation's Capital and get the bill to my desk, so that people at the local level can start to plan and start to strategize and to make things happen in a positive way.

There's too many of our kids in America who can't read today, maybe not in this school, but around the Nation there's just too many. And now it's time to wage war on illiteracy for the young and to whip this problem early.

Thanks for having me.

NOTE: The President spoke at 3:45 p.m. in the cafeteria at Justina Road Elementary School. In his remarks, he referred to Diane Gillespie, principal, Justina Road Elementary School; John C. Fryer, Jr., superintendent of schools, Duval County Public School District; Joseph K. Torgesen, distinguished research professor of psychology and education, Florida State University; and G. Reid Lyons, chief, Child Development and Behavior Branch, National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, National Institutes of Health.

Remarks on the Terrorist Attack on New York City's World Trade Center in Sarasota, Florida

September 11, 2001

Ladies and gentlemen, this is a difficult moment for America. I, unfortunately, will be going back to Washington after my remarks. Secretary Rod Paige and the Lieutenant Governor will take the podium and discuss education. I do want to thank the folks here at Booker Elementary School for their hospitality.

Today we've had a national tragedy. Two airplanes have crashed into the World Trade Center in an apparent terrorist attack on our country. I have spoken to the Vice President, to the Governor of New York, to the Director of the FBI, and have ordered that the full resources of the Federal Government go to help the victims and their families and to conduct a full-scale investigation to hunt down and to find those folks who committed this act.

Terrorism against our Nation will not stand.

And now if you would join me in a moment of silence. May God bless the victims, their families, and America.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:30 a.m. in the Media Center at Emma Booker Elementary School. In his remarks, the President referred to Lt. Gov. Frank T. Brogan of Florida and Gov. George E. Pataki of New York. At 8:45 a.m. American Airlines Flight 11 crashed into the World

Trade Center North, and at 9:05 a.m. United Airlines Flight 175 crashed into the World Trade Center South. Both flights were scheduled from Boston Logan International Airport to Los Angeles International Airport.

Remarks on the Terrorist Attacks at Barksdale Air Force Base, Louisiana

September 11, 2001

Freedom, itself, was attacked this morning by a faceless coward, and freedom will be defended. I want to reassure the American people that the full resources of the Federal Government are working to assist local authorities to save lives and to help the victims of these attacks. Make no mistake: The United States will hunt down and punish those responsible for these cowardly acts.

I've been in regular contact with the Vice President, the Secretary of Defense, the national security team, and my Cabinet. We have taken all appropriate security precautions to protect the American people. Our military at home and around the world is on high alert status, and we have taken the necessary security precautions to continue the functions of your Government.

We have been in touch with the leaders of Congress and with world leaders to assure them that we will do whatever is necessary to protect America and Americans.

I ask the American people to join me in saying a thanks for all the folks who have been fighting hard to rescue our fellow citizens and to join me in saying a prayer for the victims and their families.

The resolve of our great Nation is being tested. But make no mistake: We will show the world that we will pass this test.

God bless.

NOTE: The President spoke at approximately 2:30 p.m. in the Dougherty Center. At 9:40 a.m., subsequent to the President's remarks in Sarasota, FL, American Airlines Flight 77, scheduled from Dulles International Airport to Los Angeles International Airport, crashed into the Pentagon.