

achievement gap by talking about and spreading curriculum that works. Thanks for coming.

[*The discussion continued.*]

The President. Well, I appreciate it. Thanks, good job. Thank you.

Nonprofits, corporate Tennessee, people who care about the future of your State need to follow the example of Project GRAD and become involved in your school districts. I appreciate the superintendent and the school board members for reaching out and understanding that educational excellence is a local responsibility. I mean, people really shouldn't hope that the Federal Government develops the blueprint for success. That's not our role. And you don't want a one-size-fits-all education approach. You want a—the best education reform comes when the local people decide to reform, when your principals reform, when the people running at the State level reform, when businesses and local community leaders say, “Wait a minute. We're not happy with the way things are. Let's change for the good of everybody.”

And that's what's taking place here in Knox County schools. I want to thank you for that. Listen, I want to thank you all for coming. I'm honored our panel came from around the country to share with us the stories of success. And by the way, we're just beginning in America. See, one of these days, we won't have enough room on the stages as we bring people from all around the country to talk about what is happening, the tremendous success as a result of the No Child Left Behind Act. I'm honored you all came. I want to thank you again for believing in every child and raising that bar and believing in the worth of every individual.

May God bless your work, and may God continue to bless our country. Thank you for coming.

NOTE: The discussion began at 11:14 a.m. In his remarks, the President referred to Melvenia Smith, principal, West View Elementary School; and Mayor Bill Haslam of Knoxville, TN. The President 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 Luncheon in Knoxville

January 8, 2004

Thank you all. Thanks for coming. Thank you all very much. Thanks for the warm welcome. It's glad—I'm glad to be in the land of the orange and white. UT—kind of sounds like home. [*Laughter*] Really appreciate coming back to Knoxville. I'm so thrilled that so many came out to support the Bush-Cheney ticket. As you might recall, we had pretty good success here in the year 2000. Because of today, we're laying the foundation for what is going to be even better success in Tennessee in 2004. We're on our way to a national victory in November of 2004.

I'm loosening up—[*laughter*—and I'm getting ready. But there will be plenty of time for politics, because I've got a job to do on behalf of every citizen of this country. I'm focused on the people's business in Washington, DC. My administration will continue to work hard to earn the confidence of all Americans, by keeping this Nation secure and strong and prosperous and free.

I'm honored you invited me here today. I know I wasn't your first choice. [*Laughter*] Laura was tied up. [*Laughter*] She's a fabulous First Lady. I'm a lucky man that she said yes when I said, “Will you marry me?” She really sends her best and her love. She's—I'm really proud of her.

I also want to thank my friend Lamar Alexander for doing such a fine job in the United States Senate on behalf of the great people of Tennessee. He brings such class and dignity to public office. You've known that when he was your Governor. He's now doing it again as the Senator, as is the other Senator from the great State of Tennessee, Senator Bill Frist, the majority leader of the United States Senate. You've done a great job of sending two fine people to the Senate.

I'm honored that members of the congressional delegation from Tennessee have joined us today, starting with your own homegrown Jimmy Duncan. I appreciate you, Jimmy. I got off Air Force One and the first thing he said was, “This is my district.” [*Laughter*]

I want to thank Congressman Zach Wamp for joining us today. Thank you for being

here, Zach. Congressman Bill Jenkins is with us today. Congressman, thank you for coming. I see you got a seat in the back. [*Laughter*] And Congresswoman Marsha Blackburn is with us today. Marsha, thank you for being here.

I'm honored that members of the statehouse have come. It's always a good sign when the State senators and State legislators are coming. After all, all good politics is local politics. I want to thank Ben Atchley, he's the Republican leader in the State senate, for joining us today. Beth Harwell, who is the chairman of the Tennessee Republican Party, is with us. I want to thank you for coming too, Beth.

I'm so honored that many of you all took time to make this event a successful event. Jim Haslam is event cochairman. Big Jim, I thank you for your friendship, and I appreciate—I also appreciate Jimmy for being the event cochairman. And I appreciate the fact that the mayor is with us today as well.

I want to thank my friend Mercer Reynolds. He's from Cincinnati, Ohio. He's the national finance chairman of Bush-Cheney. He's working hard to make sure that this campaign is well-funded. When the campaign starts, we want to be ready to go. And thanks to the people in this room, and thanks to people around the country, when the campaign gets started we are going to be ready to go.

I appreciate David Kustoff, who is the State chairman. His job is to rally the grassroots. And so, for those of you who are involved in grassroots politics here in Tennessee, I want to thank you for what you're going to do. I want to thank you for the signs you're going to put up. I want to thank you for the phone calls you're going to make. I'm want to thank you for joining us as we turn out the vote to make sure this good State turns out in significant numbers.

And as you're turning out that vote, I want you to remind them, in the last 3 years our Nation has acted decisively to confront great challenges. I came to this office to solve problems, not to pass them on to future Presidents and future generations. I came to seize opportunities instead of letting them slip away. My administration is meeting the tests of our time.

Terrorists declared war on the United States of America, and war is what they got. We've captured or killed many of the key leaders of the Al Qaida network, 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 in those two countries once lived under tyranny, and now they live in freedom.

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

Three years ago, the economy was in trouble and a recession was beginning. And then we had attacks on our country and corporate scandals and war, which all affected the people's confidence. But this administration 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.

We understand that when Americans have more take-home pay to spend, to save, or invest, the whole economy grows, and people are more likely to find a job. So we're returning more money—money to people to help them raise their families. We're reducing taxes on dividends and capital gains to encourage investment. We've given small businesses incentives to expand and to hire new people. With all these actions, we are laying the foundation for greater prosperity and more jobs across America so that every single person in this country has a chance to realize the American Dream.

Today, the American economy is strong, and it is getting stronger. The figures for the third quarter of 2003 show that the economy grew at an annual rate of 8.2 percent, the fastest pace in nearly 20 years. Productivity is high. Business investment is rising. Housing construction is increasing. We've added over 300,000 new jobs in the last 4 months. The tax relief we passed is working.

Three 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 spending more money at the Federal level, but we're finally asking the question, "Are you teaching the children how to read and write and add and subtract?" This administration is challenging the soft bigotry of low expectations because we believe that every child can learn, and we expect every school to teach. The days of excuse-making are over. No child should be left behind in America.

We reorganized the Government and created the Department of Homeland Security to better safeguard the borders and ports of our country 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 that is helping to maintain much-needed spending discipline in Washington, DC.

And last month, we completed the greatest advance in health care coverage for America's seniors since the founding of Medicare. The new Medicare law, that I pushed for and signed, will give older Americans the option of a prescription drug benefit and more control over their health care, so that they can receive the modern health care that they deserve.

On issue after issue, this administration has acted on principle, has kept its word, and has made great progress for the American people. A lot of credit belongs to the Members of the United States Senate and the United States Congress. I enjoy working with Majority Leader Bill Frist. You know as well as I do he's plenty capable, plenty competent, and a very decent man. I enjoy working with Speaker Denny Hastert, who shares the same characteristics as Bill Frist, an honorable, decent man.

We're working hard to change the tone in Washington, DC. There's too much back-biting, endless politics, name-calling. The best way to change the tone is to focus on the people's business and to focus on results. And that's what we're doing with the Congress. Our record has been a good record. And those are the kind of people I've asked

to join my administration. I put together a fantastic team of people, people from all walks of life to serve our country, people who have come to the Nation's Capital not to represent their own special interests but to represent the greatest country on the face of the Earth. There's been no finer Vice President than Dick Cheney. Mother may have a second opinion. *[Laughter]*

In 3 years, we've done a lot. We have come far, but our work is only beginning. I've set great goals worthy of this 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 will work for a society that is prosperous and compassionate so every citizen has a chance to work and to succeed and to realize the great promise of our country. 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.

The war on terror continues. The enemies of freedom are not idle, and neither are we. This country will not rest; we will not tire; we will not stop until this danger to civilization is removed. We are confronting that danger in Iraq, where all people can be certain that they will never again have to fear the rule of Saddam Hussein. He started last year in a palace. He ended this year in a prison. The Ba'athist holdouts largely responsible for the current violence now know there will be no return to the corrupt power and privilege they once held. All Iraqis who have taken the side of freedom have taken the winning side.

We still face terrorists who would rather go on killing the innocent than accept the rise of liberty in the Middle East. And there is a reason why. They know that the advance of freedom in Iraq will be a major defeat for the cause of terror. This collection of killers is trying to shake the will of America. America will never be intimidated by a bunch of thugs and assassins.

We're aggressively after them in Iraq, defeating them there so we will never have to face them in our own country. Other nations are helping, because they understand a free Iraq will make the world more secure. We're

standing with the Iraqi people as they assume more of their own defense and move toward self-government. These are not easy tasks, but they are essential tasks. We will finish what we have begun. We will win this essential victory in the war on terror.

We're working to oppose proliferation of weapons around the world. Last month, after talks with the United States and Great Britain, Libya voluntarily committed to disclose and dismantle all its weapons of mass destruction programs. Leaders around the world now know weapons of mass destruction do not bring influence or prestige; they bring isolation and unwelcomed consequences. And nations who abandon the pursuit of these weapons will find an open path to better relations with the United States of America.

Yet our greatest security comes from the advance of freedom, 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 terror. Americans believe that freedom is the deepest need and hope of every human heart. I believe that freedom is the future of every nation, and we understand that freedom is not America's gift to the world. Freedom is the Almighty God's gift to every man and woman in this world.

America also understands that unprecedented influence brings tremendous responsibilities. We have duties in the world. 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 powerful, strong, and compassionate land is leading the entire world on this incredibly important work of human rescue.

We face challenges here at home as well. We'll be equal to those challenges. This administration will continue to push a progrowth, pro-entrepreneur economic agenda so that people who want to work and can't find a job today will be able to find that job.

And 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 doc deserve their day in court. Yet the system should not reward lawyers who are simply fishing for a rich settlement. Frivolous lawsuits drive up the cost of health care and they, therefore, affect the Federal budget.

Medical liability reform is a national issue that requires a national solution. I sent a bill over to the House, and the House of Representatives passed a good bill to reform the system. The bill is stuck in the Senate. I look forward to working with Senator Frist and Senator Alexander to convince reluctant Senators to act on behalf of all the people in America and get a good medical liability bill to my desk. Some Members of the Senate must understand that no one in America has ever been healed by a frivolous lawsuit.

I have a responsibility as your President to make sure the judicial system runs well, and I have met that duty. I have nominated superb men and women to the Federal courts, people who will interpret the law, not legislate from the bench. Some of the 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 Senate floor. It is time for some Members of the United States Senate to stop playing politics with American justice.

The Congress needs to get an energy bill to my desk. This Nation must be more energy-efficient. We must conserve our resources. We must do a better job of protecting the quality of the air in places like Knoxville, Tennessee. But for the sake of economic security and for the sake of national security, we must become less dependent on foreign sources of energy.

A strong and prosperous nation must also be a compassionate nation. I will continue to advance our agenda of compassionate conservatism, which means we'll apply the best and most innovative ideas to the task of helping our fellow citizens in need. There's still millions of men and women who want to end their dependence on the Government and become independent through hard work. We must build on the success of welfare reform to bring more work and, therefore, dignity

into the lives of our fellow citizens who are still dependent upon the Government.

With the help of Congress, we're working to ensure that more Americans can serve their communities and their country through citizen service programs. I urge both Houses of the United States Congress to pass my Faith-Based Initiative, which will help empower the armies of compassion that are mentoring our children and caring for the homeless and offering hope to the addicted.

One of the great strengths of our country is that we're a nation of many faiths, Christian, Jewish, and Muslim faiths. Out of that faith comes the deep desire for many of our citizens to heed the universal call to help a neighbor who hurts. The Federal Government should never fear the influence of faith-based programs. We ought to welcome faith-based programs into helping solve some of the intractable problems of our society.

A compassionate society is one, also, that must promote opportunity for all, including the independence and dignity that come from ownership. This administration understands the power of owning something in our society. We'll constantly strive to promote an ownership society. Listen, we have a minority homeownership gap in America. I proposed plans to the Congress to help close that gap. We want more people owning their own home. We want people owning and managing their own health care accounts and their own retirement accounts. We want more people owning their own small businesses. And that's why developing the entrepreneurial spirit and keeping it strong is so important. You see, we understand that when a person owns something, he or she has a vital stake in the future of our country.

In a compassionate society, people respect one another. They respect each other's religious beliefs, political opinions. People take responsibility for the decisions they make in life. See, the culture of America is changing 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 that we're responsible for the decisions we make in life. If you're fortunate enough to be a mother or a father,

you're responsible for loving your child with all your heart. If you're worried about the quality of the education in Knoxville, Tennessee, you're responsible for doing something about it. If you're a CEO in corporate America, you are 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 ourself. We can see that culture—the culture of service is strong in America. You know, I started the USA Freedom Corps right after September the 11th to encourage our fellow citizens to extend a compassionate hand to a neighbor in need. And the response has been fantastic. People from all walks of life are serving our Nation by helping people who hurt. Our neighborhood healers are vibrant and strong. Faith-based and charitable organizations thrive in our country. Policemen and firefighters and people who wear our Nation's uniform remind us what it means to sacrifice for something greater than ourself. 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 3 years have come to the right nation. We're a strong country, and we use that strength to defend the peace. We're an optimistic country, confident in ourselves and in ideals bigger than ourselves. Abroad, we seek to lift 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 know that for our country, the best days lie ahead.

May God bless you all.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:55 p.m. at the Knoxville Convention Center. In his remarks, he referred to Mayor Bill Haslam of Knoxville, TN; and former President Saddam Hussein of Iraq.

**Remarks at a Bush-Cheney
Reception in Palm Beach Gardens,
Florida**

January 8, 2004

Thank you all. Thanks for coming. It's great to be back in the great State of Florida. We carried it once, and we're going to carry it again.

And I want to thank you all for your help. I appreciate you showing up today. I appreciate your contributions. I appreciate your friendship, appreciate your prayers. I appreciate you laying the foundation for what is going to be a great national victory in November of '04.

And I'm getting ready. *[Laughter]* I'm loosening up. *[Laughter]* But there's plenty of time for politics. See, I've got a job to do. I'm focused on the people's business in Washington, DC. I want you to remind your friends and neighbors that I will continue to work hard to earn the confidence of every American by keeping this Nation secure and strong and prosperous and free.

I love my brother Jeb. He is a great Governor. He is a great Governor, first and foremost, because he has a large heart. He cares deeply about the people. He and I share some things in common. We share the same last name. *[Laughter]* We share the same political consultant—*[laughter]*—Mother. *[Laughter]* And we both married extremely well.

I'm honored to be onstage with a fabulous first lady for the State of Florida, Ms. Columba. And a great First Lady for America sends her love. I'm sorry Laura is not here. I know she was Jeb's first choice to be the speaker today. *[Laughter]* She's in Washington. But I'm a lucky man to have married Laura Bush. She is a great wife, a fabulous mother, and a wonderful First Lady for America.

I know my friend and former colleague in the Cabinet Mel Martinez is with us. Mel, thank you for being here today. I know Congressman Mark Foley is with us. Mr. Congressman, I'm glad you're here. I'm sorry Congressman Clay Shaw is not here. This is his district, I understand, but he is traveling with Speaker Denny Hastert. He made a good choice. When the Speaker calls, it's

probably a pretty good thing to travel with him. I know the Lieutenant Governor, Toni Jennings, is here. The attorney general, Charlie Crist, is here. Tom Gallagher is here. Where's Gallagher? I appreciate you coming.

A lot of members of the statehouse are here. It's a good sign when State senators and State reps show up. After all, you win campaigns by energizing the grassroots. I appreciate the members of the statehouse being here. I'm looking forward to working with you to carry Florida. I want to thank all the grassroots activists who are here. I want to thank you for what you're going to do, which is to put up the signs, to man the phone booths, to put out the mailers, and to turn out the vote.

I want to thank the mayors and local officials who are here. I want to thank all those who worked hard to make this event such a successful event. We've had three event co-chairmen, the Guzzettas, the Gaineses, and Elizabeth Fago. I want to thank you for your hard work. I appreciate your good work.

My friend Mercer Reynolds is here. He's the national finance chairman. He's from Cincinnati, Ohio. He's taken a lot of time out of his private life to help make sure we get well funded in what's going to be a tough campaign. I want to thank my friend Al Hoffman from the great State of Florida, who is doing such a fantastic job as the—raising money. And of course, there's Tom Petway and Zach Zachariah, two good buddies as well, who have been working hard to make this campaign go well.

In the last 3 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. My administration is meeting the tests of our time.

Terrorists declared war on the United States of America, and war is what they got. We've captured or killed many of the key leaders of the Al Qaida network, 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. The world is better off, and so are the 50 million people