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By Executive order, I have opened billions of dollars in grant money to competition that includes faith-based charities. Tonight I ask you to codify this into law, so people of faith can know that the law will never discriminate against them again.

In the past, we've worked together to bring mentors to children of prisoners and provide treatment for the addicted and help for the homeless. Tonight I ask you to consider another group of Americans in need of help. This year, some 600,000 inmates will be released from prison back into society. We know from long experience that if they can't find work or a home or help, they are much more likely to commit crime and return to prison. So tonight I propose a 4-year, $300 million prisoner reentry initiative to expand job training and placement services, to provide transitional housing, and to help newly released prisoners get mentoring, including from faith-based groups. America is the land of second chance, and when the gates of the prison open, the path ahead should lead to a better life.

For all Americans, the last 3 years have brought tests we did not ask for and achievements shared by all. By our actions, we have shown what kind of nation we are. In grief, we have found the grace to go on. In challenge, we rediscovered the courage and daring of a free people. In victory, we have shown the noble aims and good heart of America. And having come this far, we sense that we live in a time set apart.

I've been witness to the character of the people of America, who have shown calm in times of danger, compassion for one another, and toughness for the long haul. All of us have been partners in a great enterprise. And even some of the youngest understand that we are living in historic times. Last month a girl in Lincoln, Rhode Island, sent me a letter. It began, "Dear George W. Bush. If there's anything you know I, Ashley Pearson, age 10, can do to help anyone, please send me a letter and tell me what I can do to save our country." She added this P.S.: "If you can send a letter to the troops, please put, 'Ashley Pearson believes in you.' "

Tonight, Ashley, your message to our troops has just been conveyed. And yes, you have some duties yourself: Study hard in school; listen to your mom or dad; help someone in need; and when you and your friends see a man or woman in uniform, say, "Thank you." And Ashley, while you do your part, all of us here in this great Chamber will do our best to keep you and the rest of America safe and free.

My fellow citizens, we now move forward with confidence and faith. Our Nation is strong and steadfast. The cause we serve is right, because it is the cause of all mankind. The momentum of freedom in our world is unmistakable, and it is not carried forward by our power alone. We can trust in that greater power who guides the unfolding of the years. And in all that is to come, we can know that His purposes are just and true.

May God continue to bless America.

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:12 p.m. in the House Chamber of the Capitol. In his remarks, he referred to Khalid Sheik Mohammed, senior Al Qaida leader responsible for planning the September 11 attack, who was captured in Pakistan on March 1, 2003; Nurjaman Riduan Isamuddin (known as Hambali), Al Qaida's chief operational planner in Southeast Asia; former President Saddam Hussein of Iraq; and Col. Muammar Abu Minyar al-Qadhafi, leader of Libya. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of this address.

Remarks in a Discussion at Owens Community College in Perrysburg Township, Ohio

January 21, 2004

The President. Thank you, Dr. Adams. Well done. [*Laughter*] You read it just like I wrote it. [*Laughter*] I appreciate your invitation. Thank you for your leadership. I want to thank you all for coming. I particularly want to thank the panelists who are here. We're about to have a discussion about how a community college can change people's lives in a positive way, how we can use our community college system to help people who want to work gain the skills necessary to find jobs in what is a changing economy.

Before we get there, I do want to say a few comments, now that you're stuck here. [*Laughter*] First, it's great to be in Toledo, the home of the Mud Hens. I've always been

intrigued by the nickname, the "Mud Hens." [*Laughter*]

I'm glad to be in the presence of two Members of the United States Senate who actually hitched a ride on Air Force One. They endured a rather long speech last night, then got on the airplane and endured another speech. [*Laughter*] And that would be Senator George Voinovich and Senator Mike DeWine. I want to thank you for coming. There they are, yes.

I was telling—talking to George about what we were going to do here today. He said, "You know, when I was a Governor, I recognized the role of community colleges in job training." And I want to give George credit where credit is due. He was a pioneer in making sure that the curriculum of the community college system in Ohio was relevant to the needs of employers and potential employees. What we're really here to talk about is something that George Voinovich started, and I'm grateful.

That tradition is being carried on by your current Governor, Governor Bob Taft. I'm honored you're here, Governor. Thank you for coming. I appreciate Paul Gillmor; Congressman Gillmor is with us today. Congressman, thank you for coming. He was quick to point out that Owens is in his district. [*Laughter*] I'm quick to point out, you better take care of Owens. It's doing a fine job, Congressman. I appreciate you. And you are—and you are.

We've got a lot of local officials here, mayors, and—I appreciate you coming. We've got members of the school board who are here, trustees of this important college, and I want to thank you all for being here.

Last night I had the opportunity to address the Nation. I talked about a lot of subjects that were on my mind. One of them, of course, is that we still fight the war on terror. I just want to assure you that I understand, my most important obligation as your President is to keep this country secure and strong. And there are a lot of really good people working on your behalf, whether it be people in the Homeland Security Department—and thank you for training people for the Homeland Security Department—local police, local firefighters, or the brave men and women who wear our uniform, all of whom understand the solemn obligation to protect the people. We will never forget the lessons of September the 11th. We will stay on the offensive. We will win the war on terror and make sure that America is secure and free.

I see local officers here. It is very important that we provide law enforcement with the tools necessary to fight and win this war. I called for the renewal of the Patriot Act. I want to tell you why. It is important that we be able to share information at the Federal level. It's important we have the authority to be able to seize assets. These tools in the Patriot Act, most of the tools, we have been using for years against embezzlers or criminals. We're at war. It seems like to me it is logical that we apply tools that we've used to catch embezzlers to be able to catch terrorists. The Congress needs to renew the Patriot Act so we can win the war on terror and secure the homeland.

I also reminded the people that we've been through a lot in this country, particularly when it comes to the economy. Just a brief recap: We've been through a recession. That means three quarters of negative growth, which means people get laid off their jobs. We had a terrorist attack which affected the psychology of the country. It really did. It changed foreign policy, by the way. When you see a gathering threat, we can no longer ignore it and hope it goes away. It also said to America that we are—we can be hurt by an enemy that hates us. And it affected us. It really did.

We had corporate scandals. I oftentimes talk about the need to usher in a period of personal responsibility. If you're a CEO in corporate America, you're responsible for telling the truth to your shareholders and your employees. And we passed laws to make that abundantly clear.

And then, we marched to war. We took gathering threats seriously, and we dealt with them. The world is better off without Saddam Hussein and the Taliban. But all that—the march to war affected our psychology and confidence. It is hard to be optimistic about the future when you turn on your TV screens and say, "America is marching to war." War is not positive. War is—it sends the signal that there will be uncertainty. We're not

marching to peace. But we overcome a lot, and it's important for our citizens to remember that.

We overcame it, in my judgment, because we properly stimulated the economy by letting people keep their money. And now we're growing. Nationwide, this economy is strong: Housing up; inflation's low; interest rates are low. We had good exports the last quarter. New jobs are being created—I mean, last month on the exports. Things are happening.

I fully recognize, in Ohio there are still troubled times. The manufacturing here is sluggish at best, and therefore, people are looking for work. People who could rely upon a steady job in the manufacturing sector are hoping to be able to realize their hopes by finding work elsewhere.

There are some things we can do to make sure the Ohio manufacturing sector is strong. One is to make sure our trading partners understand, we expect there to be free, but level—the playing field needs to be level, that we expect countries like China to understand that trade imbalances doesn't mean—that says that the trade is not balanced and fair, that they've got to deal with their currency.

We also need an energy policy, by the way. If you rely upon manufacturing to have a vibrant job base, you've got to have an energy policy. Manufacturers need to have a reliable source of energy. We're too dependent on foreign sources of energy. We got public policy that is—that makes it difficult for Ohio's manufacturers to say, "We got a reliable source of energy." We've run up the demand for natural gas. We haven't had a corresponding increase in natural gas. It's hard to keep people working when your energy bills are going out of sight. We need an energy policy. I called on Congress to pass one, and they need to get one to my desk.

One other issue that makes it hard for people to stay working in certain industries is that we got a problem with medical liability. There are junk and frivolous lawsuits which are running good docs out of business. Now, look, any doctor who is a bad doc deserves to be held to task. But you can't have a system where people just file lawsuit after lawsuit after lawsuit, fishing for a rich settlement, because what that's going to do is, it's going to run up the cost of health care and drive good docs out of business. And that affects the ability for employers to keep people working. Congress needs to pass medical liability reform now.

These are some of the ways to make sure the manufacturing activity of this State remains strong. But the truth of the matter is, there is job growth in other sectors, and therefore, we'd better have a system which is able to be flexible enough to help people who want to work find a job, to match willing worker with willing employer. And that's what we're here to talk about.

Very quickly, the first stage to make sure workers are trained is to make sure our public education system does its job. The No Child Left Behind Act is challenging what I call the soft bigotry of low expectations. We're raising standards. We're trusting local people to make the right decisions. But we expect every child—every child—not just a few but every child to learn the basics of reading and math. Like I said last night, I'm going to repeat here, the days of just quitting on kids early and shuffling them through our public schools is over.

The ability for these community colleges to do their job means we better have people coming out of high school who can read and write and add and subtract. The best place to start is early. And we're starting early now in America. We're testing to make sure we figure out who needs extra help. And the Federal Government is increasing Federal spending, particularly on Title I students, in dramatic fashion. I also think we need to spend additional money for kids in high school. See, there's a learning gap where the accountability systems are late in arriving in certain places, and therefore, some kids have been shuffled through.

Last night I didn't specify what I meant, but I'll tell you right now what I meant. I think we need to spend an additional $100 million for high school and intermediate reading programs. We want these kids at least reading when they're coming out of high school, and you've got to be honest about it. And these presidents of these community colleges will tell you, sometimes they're getting kids out of high school that can't read. And that's a shame. And that's

not right, and we can focus extra resources there.

We need people who are more steeped in math and sciences. And therefore, it's important for us to encourage scientists and mathematicians to teach part-time and to make sure our teachers are properly trained in the math and sciences so they can impart knowledge that is necessary for kids to have a bright future. We got extra teacher training money, about $120 million a year.

I think we need to have more advanced placement programs in low-income schools to encourage rigorous curriculum for all students. See, if you're challenging the soft bigotry of low expectations, you believe every child can learn. And therefore, we ought to be raising that bar for all students. And so we've got money in the budget, $28 million to encourage advanced placement programs to go into neighborhoods that have not had the benefit of an advanced placement program. And then, to coincide that, I think we ought to have increased Pell Grants for students who qualify and take rigorous curriculum, and that would be Pell Grants of up to $1,000 additional money.

I'm telling you—what I'm telling you is we're focusing on people who can achieve the great promise of our country. We're not going to quit on anybody, and we're going to make sure the community college system does its job. As you know full well, particularly if you're a trustee of the community college, that most of the money is local money, but the Federal Government can help, particularly when it comes to job training.

The president talked about the job training initiative I talked about last night. It's $250 million of direct money to help on these programs which match workers with employers. There's no better place to do that than the community college system. The community college system is flexible. The community college system is local. The community college system accepts input.

And that's what we're here to talk about. It's very important for people who are listening to this conversation that if you're running a community college, I want you to pay attention to what Owens has done. And as importantly, if you're somebody out there who doesn't see a bright tomorrow, listen to the two students. They may look old to be students—[*laughter*]—but nobody's too old to be a student.

Let me—why don't we—you heard from Dr. Adams. I don't know if you want to elaborate beyond this, Dr. Adams. I thought your explanation about what your community college is doing was great. It should be clear to people when you hear the number of students being trained for work—18,000, I think you said—is the reason I'm here. You've got 18,000 people coming through here who are better skilled to meet the jobs being generated in this part of the world. And if you want to elaborate on that, you can. She also told me a lot about nursing, by the way. We've got a nursing—[*applause*]—yes, there you are. It's a nursing shortage?

Participant. Yes.

The President. Forty thousand students? Well, anyway.

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

The President. Yes, I appreciate the guy who is responsible for making sure the curriculum actually adjusts and doesn't stay stuck. What you've got to worry about, if you're in the local community, you've got to ask this question to a provost, "Are you flexible?" [*Laughter*] In other words, if somebody shows up and says, "We've got a demand for jobs," will the community college adjust?

It used to be, in the old days when they held Governors to account as to whether or not we were meeting workforce requirements, it didn't matter what job you trained somebody for. All that mattered is, you train them. So—I'm sure this didn't happen with Voinovich; it might have happened with me—you go out and train 1,000 hairdressers for 50 jobs. But everybody said, "You're doing a fine job. You're training a lot of people."

The key is to train people for the work which actually exists. No better place to do that than in a community college; that's why we're spending $250 million to encourage that.

Paul Unger is with us. He's the provost—fancy word for the guy responsible for making sure it works. [*Laughter*] And he is.

[*Paul Unger, provost, Owens Community College, made brief remarks.*]

The President. Yes, see, I hope everybody listened to what he just said. He said, "We take input." Sometimes institutions of higher education don't take input and miss opportunity. Owens takes input because they're willing to listen to the people on the frontlines of hiring, making the hiring decisions, for which I'm grateful.

Jim Gilmore is the coordinator here of the Skilled Trades Technology and Integrated Systems Technology Programs. Why don't you tell us what that means, what a coordinator does, and—just tell me what you do.

Mr. Gilmore. Coordinator is a fancy word for the guy who does a lot and——

The President. And gets no credit.

Mr. Gilmore. And gets no credit. [*Laughter*]

[*The discussion continued.*]

Mr. Gilmore. The other part of my position is to work with local area business and industry and find out what those needs are, what are they looking for, and if they have an opening, to put those students with those companies and match them up.

The President. How do you do that? In other words, if some person out there says, "I need to hire five new people," how does that person get in touch with you? How does——

Mr. Gilmore. What are you looking for, Mr. President? [*Laughter*]

The President. I'm trying to think of a cute answer. [*Laughter*]

Mr. Gilmore. The quiet ones are dangerous. [*Laughter*]

The President. That's right. I don't need a new wife, fortunately. [*Laughter*] I married really well. [*Laughter*]

Mr. Gilmore. In my position, companies will usually seek us out and ask us specifically, "We are looking for people with these skills." For example, a company might say, "We're looking for maintenance people, and we need our maintenance people to have skills in hydraulics, pneumatics, electronics, PLCs." And they might come to me and say, "Do you have somebody in mind or can you put me in touch with a placement service, with anybody that would have an idea of what Owens and Owens students have to offer?" And most typically, we'll put them in touch with our placement service, the Wood County's placement service, or Lucas County or whatever county that that company happens to reside in. And we match those people up to find them the right job. So it's a two-way street.

The President. Good job. Here's the thing, that—he talks about one-stop; let me tell you what that means. That means there's one place at the local level where a—somebody who is looking for work can go to try to find a job. That's what that means. And there's a lot of opportunities around the country at one-stops. It's one of the interesting innovations which Government put in place in the past decade to make sure that people are able to find a job. They can find help there. They can find counseling services.

Better to explain the one-stop than me is Ruth Larabee. She is the director of the Wood County Department of Jobs and Family Services. Would you please tell everybody what a one-stop does, what your day is like, what—here in the community, are people looking for workers? What do you see and what do you hear?

[*Ruth Larabee, director, Wood County Department of Jobs and Family Services, made brief remarks.*]

The President. Thanks, I appreciate you sharing that with us. You heard me talk about statistics, and they're good. There's no doubt things are getting better, and that's positive. There's no doubt the economy is changing because of technology, and that's interesting. It makes for great, interesting opportunities.

But one of the things we've got to recognize in our society, as technology races through the economy, some people could conceivably be—are being left behind because of the skill sets, and that we welcome innovation, productivity increases. These are all positive for labor stability, higher wages, better opportunity. But this country of ours must also recognize that the workforce needs to be constantly trained to stay up with the technological advances.

And two people to best talk about that are with us today—students, people who are not satisfied with falling behind, people who have

found that there's opportunity and are willing to seize it.

I was teasing Becky, publicly, of course, here. [*Laughter*] But I did so with pride in my voice, I want you to know, because she is—has struggled. And here she sits with a bright future. And so I want you to share your story with us, Becky. She's a good soul who has got—and I told Becky coming in here today, I said, "There's people just like you, Becky, who are probably watching, or may be watching, who just got to know that because of what you have done here at Owens, they've got a shot, too. They've got an opportunity to improve themselves." So let her go.

[*Rebecca Albritton, student, Owens Community College, made brief remarks.*]

The President. This good soul says, "I've got a skill set; I need to upgrade it," that "The world is changing; I need to change with it." Community colleges need to change, but people also have got to make the conscious decision to seize opportunity, to see a brighter future. That's what I love about Becky's story. She could have just said, "Well, I quit." But she didn't. She found opportunity.

Some of the people may be out there wondering whether or not this is affordable, whether or not there is any help. And why don't you tell us, Becky, what you found.

Ms. Albritton. I found, when I went out to the one-stop, that tuition was available, and they pay for your tuition; they pay for your books. The only thing they don't pay for is your time. That's honest.

The President. That's good. [*Laughter*] Let me ask you this question. Is it worth it?

Ms. Albritton. Very much so, very much so.

The President. There you go.

The other living example of what is possible when people make up their mind to improve themselves and seek opportunity, and the local community provides those opportunities, is Mike. Mike Potter is with us. He's the pretty one down there on the end. [*Laughter*] I asked Mike to share his story with you because I think you'll find it interesting. I think anybody who wonders whether or not they can learn a new skill should listen to what Mike has to say. Mike, why don't you let her go.

[*Mike Potter, maintenance technician, Oracle Packaging, made brief remarks.*]

The President. How long did it take? I mean, you're laid off; you come here. How long did it take you to get prepared, to get—to be ready for the new kind of job, the higher paying job? Because, frankly, he was more productive as a worker. He had the skills necessary to fit into the changing economy. How long were you here for?

Mr. Potter. The program—actually it's a self-based program. It's an excellent program for anybody that doesn't have much trouble with—well, that has trouble with bookwork, I'm sorry. It's hands-on, self paced, and that's what was a great part. It actually took me about, probably about maybe 3 or 4 months to finish the program.

The President. So it's not a lifetime?

Mr. Potter. No, no, not at all.

The President. You're able to come in, move quickly, get some skills, and all of a sudden, somebody says, "I love his attitude. He's a hard worker, and he's got the skill sets necessary to fit into this new workforce." That's what people need to know.

Mr. Potter. Everything is changing. People don't just want to see a person with just one skill anymore. They want several skills, and that's what the IST program offers.

The President. That's good. Thanks for sharing. You did a great job.

Our two students here are serving as mentors, in a way, aren't they? They're saying what is possible. And I want to thank you all for sharing your story. I'm sure it was a nerve-wracking experience—[*laughter*]—thinking about coming here. [*Laughter*] Look at all those cameras.

We've got another mentor with us today. Bruce Vanisacker is with us. He came out to the airport to meet me. It's an interesting idea he's doing. He has started what's called First Robotics, that teaches and inspires young people to be interested in the sciences, and that's important. Science and engineering and mathematics are all essential as we head into the 21st century.

I appreciate Bruce coming because it gives me a chance to remind people here and in

Toledo and around the State of Ohio and the country that the true strength of the country lies in the hearts and souls of our fellow citizens, that we're a mighty military country—we'll stay that way, in order to keep the peace—that we've got wealth, compared to other countries, and that's good. But the true strength can be found in neighborhoods where people have decided to mentor a child, to teach a person to read or write, to love the homeless, to help feed the hungry.

Bruce is with us. Bruce, thank you for coming. You might stand up right quick. He happens to be interested in science and robotics, but really what he's doing, when you think about it, is mentoring a child.

This country is prosperous. We're going to be more prosperous, but we don't want anybody left behind. No child should be left behind in the education system, no worker left behind because we haven't created a flexible system in order to get skills, nobody who needs love left behind. Government can't make people love one another, but we darn sure can encourage people who love to reach out to a neighbor in need. America can change for the better one heart, one soul, one conscience at a time, and I call upon you to be a part of the army of compassion, to help make this community and this State and our country one of hope for every single citizen who lives here.

It's such an honor to be here today. I thank our panelists for what I have found to be an interesting discussion. I hope you have as well, and thank you all for coming.

May God bless you all.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:24 a.m. In his remarks, he referred to former President Saddam Hussein of Iraq. 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 in a Discussion at Mesa Community College in Phoenix, Arizona

January 21, 2004

The President. Well, I appreciate you having me here. You've got an interesting accent—[*laughter*]—thought for a minute you were from Texas. [*Laughter*] Then he told me he was from Australia. And we really appreciate our friends from Australia.

First, I want to thank you for letting me come by. This is going to be an interesting dialog to talk about how to make sure our community college systems—not only here in Arizona but around the country—meet the needs of the modern workforce. Let me put it another way—make sure that people get the skills necessary to find work. And that's what we're really here to talk about.

The reason why we're here at Mesa is because you're doing a great job. I'm sure we'll hear some of that soon. Before we do, though, I want to recognize Members of the United States Congress who are here. I appreciate so very much them coming. That would be J.D. Hayworth and Trent Franks and Jeff Flake. I don't know if you guys were there last night—this is the ultimate loyalty, when they hear a long speech last night, then they come and get to hear another speech, back to back. But thank you all for being here. I appreciate your service to our country and your State.

I know there's elected officials here. I know there are members of the community college board of trustees. I met the chairman, by the way, who did a fine job of lobbying on behalf of the funding for the community college system—[*laughter*]—in this vital part of our country.

Let me—just a couple of comments, and then we'll start the dialog. First, we're still at war. And we're going to win the war, because there's a lot of really brave, capable, courageous Americans who are willing to sacrifice for liberty and freedom.

I was so touched, when I went to Baghdad or when I met our troops around our country, to realize there are people in our country who are serving something greater than themself. I think that's such a wonderful part of our Nation and our culture. And you just got to know, our Government will do everything we can to keep us safe—keep us safe by staying on the offensive, by changing parts of the world that had embraced tyranny. We believe strongly in America that freedom is the Almighty God's gift to every person who lives in the world, every man and woman.