

The President. It's a fabulous story. Cari, first of all, understands her most important responsibility is to love her child with all her heart and, therefore, to be able to provide for her child. She's also willing to say, "I can do better. I want to do better. I want to serve my community, and I understand it's going to take a little extra time to get the skills necessary." So she actually became entrepreneurial. She said, "How best to improve?" And she researched and she found a good company willing to pay for her tuition, a community college system that was able to develop a curriculum that matched her desires. And here she is on the cusp of a new career, one that pays better, with better benefits.

See, education enables our workers to be more productive. When you hear about productivity increases, what you're really hearing about is better-paying jobs. But it requires a certain spirit, doesn't it? It requires somebody to seize the moment, some citizen to say, "I want to do better." Government can't make you do better. We can provide the opportunities, and we all work hard to do so. But it requires the spirit of a person like Cari to rise up and say, "I want to do my duty as a mom. I'm going to do my duty as a wife. I'm going to do my duty as a citizen to provide care and comfort for people in hospitals." She took advantage of the opportunity. For those of you looking for work out there, take advantage of the opportunities available to embetter yourself.

Listen, I'm going to tell you something. We've been through a lot in this country. We're going to win the war on terror. We're going to promote freedom and peace. The world is going to be more free and, therefore, more peaceful. At home, we're going to be a society which understands the issues facing our fellow citizens, helps our fellow citizens realize great expectations of our society, encourages the entrepreneurial spirit of Americans, enables people to realize their dreams by having an education system which works and functions well.

And as well this is a society where people who hurt and are lonely and hopeless can find solace, because there's a loving citizen with arms open, willing to do their duty as an American by loving their neighbor.

I am so honored to be back here in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. I thank you for the warm welcome. I thank our panelists for this discussion. And may God bless you all.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:06 a.m. at Central Dauphin High School.

Remarks in a Discussion on Parental Options and School Choice

February 13, 2004

The President. Thank you, John. Listen, I'm thrilled to be here. I love to come to centers of excellence. This high school is a center of excellence. It is a school that—I was so pleased to hear that 98 percent of the senior class will be going on to higher education. That is a—I would say that's what's called dashing false expectations, is the best way to put it.

See, I would suspect that prior to coming to a place that demanded high standards and high excellence, people would say, "Well, these certain kids can't learn." See, there's an attitude in our society that maybe certain children can't learn, so therefore let's have a system that just shuffles them through. But not at this school. This school believes in the worth and value of every child, that every child can learn. And therefore, this school is not afraid to raise expectations and set glorious heights and demand excellence. And as a result, you've achieved a startling achievement: 98 percent of the high school seniors are going to higher education.

I want to congratulate you and congratulate Jim, congratulate the teachers, congratulate the parents but, most importantly, congratulate the students. I appreciate you setting goals and making the right choices to achieve those goals.

This is a fabulous high school. It's a great place to come and talk about the expectations of our society. It's a great place to come and talk about how we can encourage people to achieve new heights. It's a good way to—it's a good place to come and talk about how you challenge the status quo when the status quo is promoting mediocrity. So thank you for letting me come.

I appreciate so very much the Secretary of Education being here. He's going to say

some words in a minute. You know, when I was looking for a Secretary of Education, I wasn't interested in finding a theorist, somebody who talked about the philosophy of the education or talking about somebody—trying to find somebody who has actually done it. And he was the superintendent of schools in Harris County, which is Houston, Texas. He understands the philosophy behind the law that we just passed a year ago, a law I'm going to talk a little bit about. He's doing a great job. He's a good, sound man. I've known him for a long time. I'm proud that he's serving us. Thank you for coming, Rod. I'm glad you're here.

I noticed Tom Davis and Rodney Frelinghuysen, who are with us today, Members of the United States Congress, who pushed for the initiative I'm going to describe. They're educational entrepreneurs. This is good legislation. I'm really proud of the work that you two gentleman have done on behalf of citizens and parents of this—of Washington, DC. It's really good legislation, and I want to thank you for your efforts.

The Lieutenant Governor from Maryland, Michael Steele, is with us. He's a graduate of this fine high school. I appreciate you coming, Michael.

I appreciate his Excellency Kevin Farrell for coming, and please give Cardinal McCarrick my very best. There's no finer person in our country than Cardinal McCarrick, and I'm proud to call him friend. He's a decent, decent man. The bishop said that he was in Kosovo, and—spreading love and American good will. No better person to do so than Cardinal McCarrick, by the way.

Patty Weitzel-O'Neill is the superintendent. Thank you, Patty, for your hospitality. Elfreda Massie is the interim superintendent of DC public schools. Elfreda, thank you for being here. I want to assure you that the message you're going to hear today is one that says that all systems can achieve excellence. I believe that. I think it's very important for us to work not only in DC but around the country for a public school system that promotes excellence for every single child. And I want to thank you for your leadership and your willingness to

take on a tough assignment. I appreciate you coming.

And I want to thank the chairman of the board of the school. One of the toughest jobs in America is to be on the school board. You get all the complaints and none of the glory. But thank you and the board members for being here.

I, again, want to thank the students so very much. We passed an interesting piece of legislation a couple of years ago called the No Child Left Behind Act. I love the sound of that because that's what I believe society must strive for. No child should be left behind. That kind of says some child or children may be being left behind, doesn't it? If the admonition is "no child left behind," maybe some are, and I think they have been. And one of the reasons I think they have is because I don't think we've set the bar high enough.

This society of ours must challenge what I've called the low—the soft bigotry of low expectations. That means when you lower the bar, when you don't believe in the human potential of a person, you're likely to get lousy results. So I think we need to raise the bar everywhere, just like you've done here at Archbishop High, to challenge every child.

Then I think you've got to measure. See, I don't know how you know whether or not you're achieving excellence if you're not willing to measure. I hear people say around the country, "I don't like tests." Well, I didn't like them either—[laughter]—you know? But that's just the way it is. If you're going to try to figure out whether a child can learn to read and write and add and subtract early in life, you better measure. You better find out early, before it's too late.

A society that doesn't want to leave any child behind is a society which says, "Show me whether or not the curriculum is working. Show me whether or not the school is doing what it's supposed to be doing." I suspect Archbishop High is good because it not only sets the bar, but you're willing to measure. And when you find a child that needs help, you provide that child help.

That ought to be the—that ought to be the paradigm, to use a fancy word, for every school district in America. We need to raise

the bar. And so what we said here in Washington, DC, is we're willing to spend more money, particularly on Title I students. But for the first time, the Federal Government is asking the question, "Can you show us whether or not we're achieving objectives?"

You see, we're tired of children being just shuffled through. It's time now to determine whether or not we're meeting the goal of, for example, every child reading at grade level by the third grade. That's not too much to ask, is it, for a society, to be able to read at grade level by third grade?

So we set the goal. Now it's up to the school district to show us whether or not we're meeting the goal, and if not, there's extra money available to make sure that no child is left behind. But at some point in time, in order to challenge mediocrity where we find mediocrity, parents have to be given other options.

And so the No Child Left Behind Act has got an interesting way of providing that for parents. We say, "We measure. We post the scores. We look at results, and if the results don't measure up, a parent has got the ability to take extra money for tutorial work at a private institution or a public institution, or a parent can send a child to another public school." It's the beginnings of what's called school choice.

But I didn't feel like, and Congress didn't feel like, and I know a lot of parents here in Washington didn't feel like that was enough. So we worked on a new initiative. It's an initiative that says, "Here in Washington we want all aspects of schools to work, so there's money available for the public school system." And I want to thank the Mayor, by the way, for his involvement in this project. And he said, "As you're talking about school choice, make sure you don't forget the other schools as well, see." And so we've got money available to make sure public education can do the best it can possibly do. There's money available for the charter school movement, which provides parents interesting options.

But there's also a new approach here in Washington that I want to talk about today. It's an approach that says there are school systems that are capable of meeting expectations, and when a parent has a child trapped

in a school that won't teach and won't change, we've got to liberate that family, got to give them options. So the Congress wisely—and I might say with administration nudging or insistence—said, "Why don't we provide a \$7,500 scholarship for parents whose children go to—low-income parents whose children go to schools that aren't working, so that that scholarship can follow the child to a place like Archbishop Carroll High School." And there's \$14 million, some of it for administrative purposes, but 90 percent of it is going to go to the families.

This is an historic moment for education. It's the first time ever where the Federal Government has recognized that school choice is a viable alternative for parents. It's an opportunity for us to say to a mother or a dad, "Here's your chance to achieve your expectation for your child." You see, a society that is responsible is one in which a mother and dad love their children with all their heart and all their soul. And a parent who does that wants the very best—the very best—for their children.

And so this initiative is one that's the beginning of what I hope is change all across the country. It's the beginning of a go-by for other school districts and other communities. It says, "Look, we want our public schools to succeed. We want them to do well, but we're going to raise the bar and raise expectations. And when we find children trapped in schools that will not change, parents must be given another viable option." And so here in DC, for the first time, hopefully starting this fall, parents will be given an option. When parents are dissatisfied, they will now have a chance to take scholarship money to send their child to a school of their choice.

We've got some people here who understand what I'm talking about. We've got some grandmothers and moms and school-choice agitators. Well, I don't know, that's a little harsh, isn't it? Okay, advocates, advocates. Before we begin, I might ask the leader here about expectations. When a child comes to this school, tell me how you achieve 98 percent graduates going to college.

[John T. Butler III, president, Archbishop Carroll High School, made brief remarks.]

The President. I appreciate the attitude. He's challenged the soft bigotry of low expectations by setting the bar high. You mentioned AP. You know, one of the things we need to do in America is to spread AP programs—that's called advanced placement programs. Those are high-quality, high-expectation, high-achievement programs. Too often, though, in our communities, a parent will take a look and say, "I don't—I'm not so sure I want to pay for the AP exam. My budget can't afford it." I think Government ought to help people pay for the AP exam. Low-income people ought not to fear their child taking an advanced placement exam because they can't afford the fee. That doesn't make any sense. Plus I think we need to have money available to help teachers teach the advanced placement program. It's one thing to aspire to advanced placement, but if you don't have a teacher who knows how to teach advanced placement, it's not going to become a reality.

But I appreciate the AP program. AP programs work. The AP program is part of a challenging curriculum. And once you pass the AP, you're—there's very little you can't accomplish, by the way. It means that you've excelled. I know you've got a lot of AP students here.

Mr. Butler. We do. The faculty are really important in that regard as well. We are fortunate to have dedicated faculty who sacrifice a lot, and they give long hours to ensure that students are getting what they need. And they go beyond the call of duty, frankly, on a daily basis to ensure that they're providing support—even to today, we have students who are at Harvard, as a matter of fact. Our debate team is at Harvard.

The President. Oh, I don't know what's so good about that. *[Laughter]* But—

Mr. Butler. Well, I understand that you've spent some time there as well.

The President. Well, I mean, I thought he was going to say Yale. But you know, that's all right. No, that's good, they're at Harvard. Yes. *[Laughter]*

Mr. Butler. It is.

The President. Yes, I went there, okay—much to the shock of some of the press corps. *[Laughter]*

Mr. Butler. But I think giving our young people opportunities to get out of the building and get to universities in this community but outside of this community as well really helps to reinforce that. It also helps, too, to have alums such as Michael Steele—I'm glad he's with us today—to hold up as an example of what happens when you work hard.

The President. Michael, good. Listen, Rod, why don't you share some thoughts. Rod—Rod took—I told you, he took on a tough assignment. And I will tell you the children in Houston, Texas, benefited from his leadership. And he's a good, solid citizen.

[Education Secretary Roderick R. Paige made brief remarks.]

The President. I appreciate you—thank you, Mr. Secretary.

Local control of schools is important because innovation oftentimes takes place in spite of government. Archbishop Carroll, obviously, has been able to survive without government telling them what to do, and you're doing what's right.

But the other thing about local control of schools is the more power there is at the local level, the more parents have an opportunity to change things. And so one of the key components of the No Child Left Behind Act is that it's up to you to chart the path to excellence. We just want to know, see? That's all we're asking.

The Federal Government is finally saying, "Show us whether or not you're achieving the objectives, but you figure it out." And it's amazing what happens when parents decide to get involved. A lot of parents think everything is fine with their school until the test scores show up, until there's comparison, until they take a look at—across boundaries. Say, in DC, I bet there's a lot of folks wondering why my school doesn't have a 98 percent college attendance with the seniors. So information is important, but empowering parents is important.

Virginia Walden Ford is with us today. She is—she is a great citizen in that she's willing to seize the moment to try to effect change. She's a tireless worker on behalf of children and parents. She's somebody who has made a difference. I want to welcome you here, Virginia. Tell us about your family. Tell us

about what you're doing. Tell us about how you got involved with the Parents for Choice. She's the executive director, by the way, for Parents for Choice in DC movement.

[Virginia Walden Ford, executive director, D.C. Parents for School Choice, made brief remarks.]

The President. One person can make a difference. Now Virginia has got to make sure that the parents who want to learn how the program works can find a resource. I know you will. There's—this—for example, this might stimulate a few phone calls. I suspect there's going to be some mothers and dads wanting to contact you to find out how the program works. How do you apply for the \$7,500 scholarship? What does it take to be eligible? And how do we get the scholarship money out? We'll help. I know you got an advertising campaign getting ready to go.

Mrs. Walden Ford. We do. We have a bus campaign that begins on Monday. This past week, we spent time sending out forms, just asking parents to call for information, thousands of them. So we are in the field. We are activists. And I'm not embarrassed about being called——

The President. I said "agitators," don't change it. [Laughter]

Mrs. Walden Ford. Oh, okay—I'm not embarrassed. Well, I was——

The President. That's not a bad word.

Mrs. Walden Ford. Look, look, Congressman Davis, I think I was a little bit of an agitator too. [Laughter] But when you believe in something, you fight for it, or you raise your voice and get on—and I know we got on Congressman's nerves. I know we did. But that was okay because we got it done.

The President. I do too, occasionally, myself, you know? [Laughter]

[Mrs. Walden Ford made further remarks.]

The President. Good job, thank you. Catherine Hill is with us today. Catherine is raising a niece, a nephew, and two grandsons. She is a—thank you for being here, Catherine. Would you mind sharing with us some of your thoughts?

[Catherine L. Hill, aunt and grandparent of DC students, made brief remarks.]

The President. Catherine made a decision early on that one of your nephews—was it your nephew or grandson?—went to school in Maryland. So that's what we call school choice. [Laughter] In other words, she said, "I'm not satisfied. I've got high expectations for my loved one." And evidently, the expectations weren't being met, so you made a decision.

Now, what we need to do is make sure the decision is closer to home. She's a resident in Washington, DC. She lives here. It's important that decisions be made more readily available for parents.

I want to say something that Rod said, and it's very important. As you make those decisions, somebody might get the message and say, "Wait, we're not doing something right. We must earn Catherine's support by raising expectations." Why—somebody ought to be asking the question, why is Catherine making a unbelievably tough call to drive hours to another State or out of this District to a State? And hopefully that causes somebody to say, "Maybe we're not doing something right. Maybe we ought to work harder to win the confidence of Catherine Hill or the Catherine Hills of the world." That's what Rod was talking about. You see, when a parent makes the decision, votes to move a child, hopefully that will cause the response to be, we've got to do something better or something different. The customer is Catherine Hill and her children.

And so I want to thank you for your story. More importantly, I want to thank you for setting such an unbelievable example. Imagine Catherine raising a niece, nephew, and two grandsons. That in itself is an overpowering job. And yet at the same time, you keep that clear vision about what is best, and I'm going to appreciate your example.

Ms. Hill. And I also want to say that he graduated in June of 2003. So that's a blessing.

The President. That is.

Elizabeth Stallans is with us. I oftentimes tell people, the toughest job in America is being a single mom. That's the hardest work in our country. And it's important for our school systems to make that job easier, not

harder. And I appreciate you coming, Elizabeth. Thank you for being here. We look forward to hearing your story.

[Elizabeth Stallans, parent of a DC student, made brief remarks.]

The President. Thank you, Elizabeth. Very good. Thank you, Elizabeth. There's strong testimony. Thank you both.

Listen, John, thanks for having us. I've got to say something about the Catholic schools in America. The Catholic school system provides an incredibly important service in our country. They serve as a model. They also take on a lot of students that are the so-called hard-to-educate but always do a good job. They're willing to help with the financially disadvantaged parent. Catholic schools are an incredibly important part of the fabric of our country, and I want to thank the educators who are here. I want to thank you for the service you provide.

I know you share with me a deep desire that all schools do well, all school systems achieve the national objective, which is excellence for every child, regardless of their background. There's no doubt in my mind we can achieve it. In order to achieve it, you've got to have the right mindset, and you must be willing to challenge the status quo when it's failing. This society must be willing to never accept mediocrity when it comes to the education of our children.

You know, the President has got a pretty big microphone. I've got a chance to spotlight success. And by coming here today, I am spotlighting success, this success that we want to be a success all over the District of Columbia. We want people to be able to compete with you, John.

Mr. Butler. I look forward to that.

The President. Yes, sir. I know you do, because you love children—

Mr. Butler. I do.

The President. —from the bottom of your heart. So do I. Thank you all for coming. I want to wish the seniors all the very best. I want to congratulate you. Would the seniors stand up, please?

Thank you—thank you for letting us come. Thank you for letting me come. Remember, your senior year isn't over until you graduate.

[Laughter] Good luck in college. Good luck whatever you decide to do.

May God bless you. May God bless this high school. And may God continue to bless our great country.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:49 p.m. at Archbishop Carroll High School. In his remarks, he referred to James Mumford, principal, Archbishop Carroll High School; Bishop Kevin J. Farrell, Auxiliary Bishop of Washington; Theodore E. Cardinal McCarrick, Archbishop of Washington; Patricia Weitzel-O'Neill, superintendent of schools, Archdiocese of Washington; and Mayor Anthony A. Williams of the District of Columbia.

Digest of Other White House Announcements

The following list includes the President's public schedule and other items of general interest announced by the Office of the Press Secretary and not included elsewhere in this issue.

February 7

In the morning, the President had an intelligence briefing.

During the day, in the Oval Office, the President participated in an interview with Tim Russert of NBC television's "Meet the Press" for broadcast on February 8. He also had a telephone conversation with Prime Minister John Howard of Australia to conclude an Australia-U.S. free trade agreement.

February 9

In the morning, the President had an intelligence briefing. Later, he traveled to Springfield, MO, where, upon arrival, he greeted USA Freedom Corps volunteer Travis Morrison.

In the afternoon, the President returned to Washington, DC. Later, in the Residence, he met with Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist and Speaker of the House of Representatives J. Dennis Hastert to discuss legislative priorities.

The President announced his intention to nominate John J. Danilovich to be Ambassador to Brazil.