

NOTE: The President spoke at 3:50 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Shawn C. Boyer, president and chief executive officer, David Bosher, senior vice president and chief financial officer, and Tennille Boyer, national account executive, SnagAJob.com, Inc.; J. Hardin Boyer, father of Mr. Boyer; and Angela Timm, founder and chief executive officer, Cottage Garden Collections.

Statement on National Donate Life Month

April 23, 2008

During National Donate Life Month, we show our appreciation for our fellow Americans who have saved lives by becoming organ, tissue, marrow, and blood donors, and we honor the health care professionals, researchers, and others involved in this life-saving work. I was pleased today to meet with organ donors, medical professionals, and organ recipients, all of whom participated in a historic six-recipient kidney transplant in which six patients received new organs from six unrelated living donors. This history-making medical event took place 3 weeks ago at Johns Hopkins Comprehensive Transplant Center. These people are all firsthand witnesses to the gift of life, or, in this case, lives.

We are blessed to have a health care system that is the best in the world and includes skilled medical professionals like those I met with today. We are also blessed to be a nation filled with generous and compassionate people. The selflessness of those who are donors is an inspiration.

Unfortunately, thousands of Americans are on waiting lists for an organ or tissue transplant. I urge all Americans to make the decision to donate. For information about becoming an organ and tissue donor, go to organdonor.gov. Talk to your family, talk to your friends, and register. You can give a transforming gift of life.

Remarks at the White House Summit on Inner-City Children and Faith-Based Schools

April 24, 2008

Thank you all. Aysia, thanks for the introduction. You did a fabulous job. I'm told that you're a very hard worker who loves school, and it's clear you always wear a smile. She's a member of her school's student advisory group, has performed in plays ranging from Shakespeare to "The Lion King," writes short stories, and as you just heard her explain, she loves all language arts. Well, that's good. Some people say I'm pretty artful with language as well. [*Laughter*]

It is clear she has a promising future because of the education she is receiving at Saint Ann's. Unfortunately, thousands of other children like her are missing out on these opportunities because America's inner-city faith-based schools are closing at an alarming rate. And so that's why we've convened this summit, to discuss how we can extend lifelines of learning to all America's children. And I want to thank you for coming.

I take this summit seriously. Obviously, you do as well. My administration looks forward to working with you. This is a national objective, to make sure every child gets a good education. And I really appreciate you coming.

I want to thank my friend and the Secretary of Education, Margaret Spellings, for joining with us today. I thank the Acting Secretary of HUD, Roy Bernardi.

Archbishop Wuerl, thank you very much, sir, for being here. We were just talking about what a glorious week it was to welcome His Holiness to America. It was an extraordinary moment for all who were directly involved and, I think, an extraordinary moment for all of America.

I got to know Archbishop Wuerl in Pittsburgh. I hope I conveyed to him my sense that providing a sound education for every child is one of the really important challenges for America. I happen to believe it is one of the greatest civil rights challenges. I am fully aware that in inner-city America, some children are getting a good education, but a lot are consigned to inadequate schools.

And I believe helping these children should be a priority of a nation. It's certainly a priority to me. I married a teacher who has worked in inner-city schools; I helped raise one as well. And helping inner-city children receive the education they deserve is so important as we head into the 21st century to make sure every child has got the skills necessary to succeed. That's what a hopeful country is all about.

Over the past 7 years, we have worked to strengthen the public school system. In other words, we haven't given up on public schools. Quite the contrary, we've tried to help them succeed by passing the No Child Left Behind Act. In some circles, it's controversial. I don't think it should be controversial, however, to demand high standards for every child. I don't think it should be controversial to insist upon accountability to see if those children are meeting those standards. And I don't think it should be viewed as controversial to say to a public school, if children are falling behind, here's supplemental services to help that individual child catch up.

As a result of accountability measures, I can now say that eighth graders set a record high for math scores. In other words, in order to be able to say that, you have to measure in the first place. When I was Governor of Texas, I didn't like a system where we just simply guessed—you know, "Do you think the child is learning?" "I don't know. Maybe, maybe not." [Laughter] That's unacceptable, particularly when a child's life is at stake.

We've learned that scores for minority and poor students are reaching alltime highs in a number of areas, and that's great. As a matter of fact, there's an achievement gap in America that is unacceptable. The good news is, it's beginning to narrow. The problem is, is that while the No Child Left Behind Act is helping to turn around many struggling schools, there are still children trapped in schools that will not teach and will not change.

Today, nearly one-half of children in America's major urban school districts do not graduate on time—one-half of our children in major urban school districts do not get out of school on time. In Detroit, one student in four makes it out of the public school system with a diploma. When schools like these

fail our inner-city children, it is unfair, it's unacceptable, and it is unsustainable for our country.

And so there are a variety of solutions. One is to work hard to improve the public school system. But also another solution is to recognize that there is a bright future for a lot of children found in faith-based schools.

The faith-based school tradition is not a 21st century phenomenon. A Quaker school opened in Philadelphia in 1689. A Jewish day school opened in New York more than 40 years before the American Revolution. And during the 19th century, Catholic schools in our biggest cities welcomed children of poor European immigrants. Can you imagine what it would—what it's like to be an immigrant coming to America, can't hardly speak the language, and find great solace in two institutions: one, church; and two, schools? And generations of Americans have been lifted up. Generations of the newly arrived have been able to have hopeful futures because of our faith-based schools. It's been a—it's a fact. It's a part of our history. Frankly, it's a glorious part of our history.

Today, our Nation's poorest—in our poorest communities, religious schools continue to provide important services. And as they carry out their historic mission of training children in faith, these schools increasingly serve children, you know, that don't share their religious tradition. That's important for people to know, that there's a lot of students who, for example, may not be Catholic who go to the schools and get a great education. That's what we ought to be focused on, how to get people a great education.

In neighborhoods where some people say, children simply can't learn, the faith-based schools are proving the naysayers wrong. These schools are—provide a good, solid academic foundation for children. They also help children understand the importance of discipline and character.

Yet for all their successes, America's inner-city faith-based schools are facing a crisis. And I use the word crisis for this reason: Between 2000 and 2006, nearly 1,200 faith-based schools closed in America's inner cities. It's affected nearly 400,000 students. They're places of learning where people are

getting a good education, and they're beginning to close, to the extent that 1,200 of them have closed. The impact of school closings extends far beyond the children that are having to leave these classrooms. The closings place an added burden on inner-city public schools that are struggling. And these school closings impoverish our country by really denying a future of children a critical source of learning not only about how to read and write but about social justice.

We have an interest in the health of these institutions. One of the reasons I've come is to highlight this problem and say to our country, we have an interest in the health of these centers of excellence. It's in the country's interest to get beyond the debate of public/private, to recognize this is a critical national asset that provides a critical part of our Nation's fabric in making sure we're a hopeful place.

And so I want to spend a little time talking about what can be done to help preserve these schools and provide, more importantly, a hopeful future. And that's what you're going to do after I leave as well.

First, ensuring that faith-based schools can continue to serve inner-city children requires a commitment from the Federal Government. Federal funds support faith-based organizations that serve Americans in need. So we got beyond the social service debate by saying, you know, it's okay to use taxpayers' money to provide help for those who hurt. My whole theory of life was, we ought to be asking about results, not necessarily process. When you focus on process, you can find all sorts of reasons not to move forward. If you say, focus on results, it then provides an outlet for other options than state-sponsored programs, which is okay.

I mean, what I'm telling you is, is that we're using taxpayers' money to empower faith-based organizations to help meet critical needs throughout the country, critical needs such as helping a child whose parents may be in prison understand there's hope; a critical need is helping a prisoner recently released realize there's a hopeful tomorrow; a critical need is to help somebody whip drugs and alcohol so they can live a hopeful life. And we do that in the social services.

We also provide Federal funds—funding support for institutions of higher learning. We're using taxpayers' money to enable somebody to go to a private university, a religious university. It's a long tradition of the United States of America.

So my attitude is, if we're doing this, if this is a precedent, why don't we use the same philosophy to provide Federal funds to help inner-city families find greater choices in educating their children.

There is a precedent for this called the DC choice initiative act. And we've got some advocates here for the DC Choice Incentive Act—I know; I've worked with them—and I'm surprised they're not yelling again. [Laughter] The law created Washington's opportunity scholarship program, which has helped more than 2,600 of the poorest children in our Nation's Capital find new hope at a faith-based or other nonpublic school. In other words, one way to address the closings of schools is to empower parents to be able to send their children to those schools before they close.

And this is a successful program, I think it's safe to say. One way to judge whether it's successful is to look at the demand for the scholarship relative to the supplies of the scholarship. And there's a lot of people who want their children to be able to take advantage of this program. As a matter of fact, demand clearly outstrips supply, which says to me we ought to expand the program and not kill the program. I mean, when you have a—[applause].

So we'll continue to work with Congress to not only reauthorize the program as it exists but hopefully expand it so that parents will be able to—[applause].

I also proposed an idea that I really hope Congress takes seriously, and that is Pell Grants for Kids. We—this would be a \$300 million initiative that would help as many as 75,000 low-income children that are now enrolled in troubled public schools to be able to go to a school of the parents' choice. See, one of the—what's very important to make sure that an accountability system works is there's actual consequences and outlets.

And one of the outlets would be, if you're in a public school that won't teach and won't

change, and you're—qualify—here's a scholarship for you to be able to have an additional opportunity. And, to me, this is a good way to help strengthen the schools that I was talking about that are losing. I mean, one way to make sure you don't lose schools is you have people that are able to afford the education—sustain the cashflow of these valuable American assets.

Pell grants—I want to remind our citizens, Pell grants have helped low-income young adults pursue the dream of a college education. And it is time to apply the same spirit to liberate poor children trapped in public schools that aren't meeting expectations.

State and local governments can help. Today, more than 30 state constitutions include so-called Blaine amendments, which prohibit public support of religious schools. These amendments have their roots in 19th century anti-Catholic bigotry, and today, the legacy of discrimination continues to harm low-income students of many faiths and many backgrounds. And so State lawmakers, if they're concerned about quality education for children and if they're concerned about these schools closing, they ought to remove the Blaine amendments; they ought to move this part of history.

There are other things State and local governments can do. I would call people's attention to the Pennsylvania Educational Improvement Tax Credit—P-E-I-T-C—PEITC—[laughter]—which allows businesses to meet State tax obligations by supporting pre-K through 12 scholarships for low-income students. It's an innovative way to use the tax code to meet a national—in this case, State—objective. The scholarships then allow children to attend the school of their choice, including religious schools. Since 2001, these tax credits have yielded more than \$300 million to help Pennsylvania families. It's an innovative use of the tax code to meet social objectives. All 12 high schools in the diocese—in Pittsburgh, bishop, have seen increased enrollment each year the program has been in place. That's positive.

And so I would call upon State leaders to listen to what comes out of this conference and to think of innovative ways to advance education for all children. Faith-based schools can continue to serve inner-city chil-

dren requires a—to see that that happens requires a commitment from the business community. It's in corporate America's interest that our children get a good education, starting in pre-K through 12th grade.

In Chicago, a group of Jesuit priests found an innovative way to finance children's education called Cristo Rey, and they convinced Chicago's businesses to become involved. It's interesting that the Jesuits took the initiative. I would hope that corporate America would also take initiative. [Laughter] But 4 days of the week, the children go to class, and then on the fifth, they report for work at some of Chicago's most prestigious firms.

The businesses get energetic, reliable workers for high turnover jobs. The students get a topnotch education plus real work experience. They feel a sense of pride when they leave some of the city's most dangerous neighborhoods for the city's tallest skyscrapers. It's a program that is working, and many of the students take that same sense of pride and accomplishment to higher education.

It's interesting to note that Cristo Rey is now involved in 19 cities. In other words, the good ideas can take hold. The job of this conference is to provide a kind of go-by for people who share a sense of concern about our Nation's future. And hopefully, from this summit, good ideas will be spawning other good ideas—at the Federal level, the State and local level, at the corporate level, and then, of course, at the citizen level.

Citizens are—you know, we are a compassionate nation. What I see is America at its very best, which is these millions of acts of kindness and generosity that take place, and it doesn't require a government law. Sometimes it takes a little higher authority than government to inspire people to acts of kindness and mercy. But it happens all the time in America. It truly does. About one-third of Americans who volunteer do so through religious organizations. Many of them happen to be faith-based schools, by the way. When you hear about an America that volunteers, many of the volunteers are at faith-based schools.

I was struck by a interesting story that came out of Memphis, Tennessee. Ten years ago, private donors gave approximately \$15

million to the church in Memphis to help revive Catholic schools in the city's poorest neighborhoods. Assets exists; they're worried about them going away. So rather than just watch schools close, somebody—individuals did something about it by putting up \$15 million. With the seed money, the diocese launched the Jubilee Schools initiative and reopened Catholic schools that had been shuttered, actually in some cases, for decades. Today, 10 Jubilee schools serve more than 1,400 students. Eighty-one percent of these children are not Catholic; nearly 96 percent live at or below poverty level.

With the help from Jubilee scholarship donors, tuition becomes whatever the family can afford. And the schools happen to be working as well, which is really important. The program—and the reason I can tell you is because test scores are up; like, they're not afraid to measure. You've got to be a little worried in our society when somebody says, "I don't think I want to measure." That's like saying, "I don't want to be held to account." The problem with that line of reasoning when it—is that when you're dealing with our children, it's unacceptable. Of course you should be held to account. We ought to praise those who achieve excellence and call upon those who don't to change so they can achieve excellence.

And so this school system is willing to measure, and it has been a great joy for the people of Memphis to watch excellence spread. And I want to thank those who have put forth the money and call on all citizens to find ways they can contribute with their hearts to help educational entrepreneurs succeed—is really what we're talking about, isn't it? Kind of innovation—the willing to challenge the status quo if it's not working. I call it educational entrepreneurship, so I'd consider yourself entrepreneurs—social entrepreneurs.

Faith-based schools can continue to serve inner-city children, and sometimes they can get a good boost from higher education. It seems like to me it's—when I was Governor of Texas, I tried to get our higher education institutions to understand that rather than becoming a source of remediation, they ought to be a source of added value. And one way to do so is to help these schools

early on to make sure that children don't slip behind in the basics.

I was impressed by Notre Dame's Alliance for Catholic Education, known as ACE, which prepares college graduates to work as teachers in underserved Catholic schools. It's an interesting way to participate in making sure the Catholic schools and the faith-based schools stay strong, and that is to educate teachers, actually go in the classrooms and make sure that there's adequate instruction available. The people at Notre Dame commit to teach for 2 years as they earn their master's degree in education. And turns out that when you get a taste for being a teacher, that you tend to stay. And so today, there are about 650 ACE teachers and graduates who work at Catholic schools across the country.

And there's a—I like the idea of these higher education institutions saying, okay, here's what I can contribute to making sure that elementary school and junior high school and high school education has high standards and excellence. And one way to do it is to support our faith-based schools all across the country.

And so that's what I've come to talk to you about. Here are some ways—I mean, these are levels of society that ought to all be involved, and hopefully, out of this meeting, that there's concrete action. We didn't ask you to come to Washington just to opine; we came and asked you to Washington to set good ideas out there for others to go by, because there's a lot of people in our country who share the same concern you share. People understand what we're talking about here. This is pretty practical stuff. This isn't—these are just down-to-earth ideas on how to solve some of our Nation's critical problems.

And so I'm—let me end with a story here about Yadira Vieyra. Yadira's here. She goes to Georgetown University, and she said—I heard—I was asking if Yadira was going to be here so I could ask her to stand here in a minute, and a fellow told me she's a little worried about missing class. So whoever Yadira's teacher is, please blame it on me, not her. *[Laughter]*

She is a—she was born in Mexico—*Mexicana*. And they moved to Chicago, probably to try to realize a better life—I'm confident, to try to realize a better life. Mom and dad had a dream to give their family hope. There's no more hopeful place in the world, by the way, than the United States of America. We shouldn't be surprised when people come to America for a hopeful life. And that's what America has been and should be.

And then we shouldn't be surprised when the parents hope that their children get a great education, because there's nothing more hopeful for a parent than to know their child is receiving a good education. Well, that's what Yadira's folks wanted for her. And so when the time came—time for her to go to high school came, they wanted something better than a low-performing high school. You know, one of the interesting things about the accountability system—a lot of people think that their child goes to the finest school ever, until the results get posted. [*Laughter*]

And it's—the whole purpose, by the way, is not to embarrass anybody; it's not to scold anybody. The whole purpose is to achieve excellence for every person. And so Yadira's parents, I'm sure, took a look at the school system and said, there's a better way. And so guess what? She went to Cristo Rey, the program I just described to you. And she was challenged by the school's rigorous academics.

If you set low standards, guess what you're going to get—low results. If you believe in every child's worth and every child can learn, it's important to set high standards and challenge the children. And that's what happened in the school she went to. She was inspired by great teachers. She said she was motivated by the school's amazing job program. And she is now at Georgetown University, one of the great schools—universities in America. And guess what she wants to do when she leaves Georgetown? She wants to enroll in Notre Dame's ACE program. Yadira, thanks for coming.

You either just got an A—[*laughter*—or an F. [*Laughter*] Either case, we're glad you're here—[*laughter*—and I love your example. And the reason why it's important to have examples—so that we get beyond the

rhetoric and realize that we're dealing with the human potential. Someday, no telling what Yadira's going to be in life, but one thing is for certain: It's going to be a productive citizen, and America will be better for it. And so we're glad you're here. Thank you for your spirit. Tell your parents thank you.

And so let me close with what happened at Nationals stadium with His Holy Father. He—when he celebrated mass there, one of the objects he blessed at the end of the mass was the new cornerstone of the Pope John Paul the Great High School in Arlington, Virginia. Isn't that interesting? I mean, I'm sure there was a lot of demands on His Holy Father, but he took time to bless the cornerstone of a school.

And my hope is, is that we're laying cornerstones for new schools here or revived schools; that we take the spirit of the Holy Father and extend it throughout the country and work for excellence for every child; to set high standards, and when we find centers of excellence, not let them go away, but to think of policy that will enable them to not only exist, not only survive but to thrive. It's in our Nation's interests. It's an important summit for America.

I thank you for bringing your talents, your energies, and your efforts. I thank you for caring deeply about our young. And I thank you for being a part of what I believe is a necessary strategy to make sure America continues to be a hopeful place for all.

God bless you. Thank you all.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:23 a.m. at the Ronald Reagan Building and International Trade Center. In his remarks, he referred to Aysia Mayo-Gray, student, St. Ann's Academy, Washington, DC; Donald W. Wuerl, Archbishop of Washington; and Pope Benedict XVI.

Remarks Following a Discussion With President Mahmoud Abbas of the Palestinian Authority

April 24, 2008

President Bush. Thanks for coming, Mr. President. I appreciate your chance to talk about peace. I assured the President that a Palestinian state's a high priority for me and my administration—a viable state, a state that