

through.” Those days are unacceptable. That frame of mind is not right for America, and we can do a better job. It starts with putting trust where it belongs.

Madam Superintendent, I promise you, I know where the great educational entrepreneurship of America lay, and it lay right here, in districts such as this one, and schools such as this one. It’s trust in local people—it starts with trusting local people to make the right decisions. It’s a system that is—in its framework, encourages reform when reform is needed, and rewards excellence when excellence is found.

And so I’m here, frankly, to call upon the citizens of this important State to help pass legislation that will not only focus on teaching every child to read but legislation that will have at its cornerstone, at its very core, a reform agenda based upon accountability, based upon measuring each child, based upon making sure that no child is left behind.

America is a great land. It will be a greater land when every child is educated. The strength of our country is the public school system. That strength will be even stronger—even stronger—when we insist that every child be measured, every problem corrected, and every child challenged to be the best he or she can be. That can happen, and it is going to happen.

It’s an honor to be here. God bless you for what you do, and thank you for your hospitality. Thank you all.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:11 p.m. in Room 2. In his remarks, he referred to Principal Sarah Riss, Moline Elementary School; Superintendent Chris Wright, Riverview Gardens School District; and Gov. Bob Holden of Missouri.

Remarks at a Tax Family Reunion in St. Louis

February 20, 2001

Thank you very much. Before I have a chance to say hello to you all and watch the Mighty Mighty skate, I want to talk a little bit—some public policy.

Today I was in St. Louis talking about education. There is no more important subject as far as I’m concerned, to make sure every child gets educated. I know the Yahngs feel

the same way. But I also want to talk about the budget, the budget of the United States Government, and the budget of the people of the United States.

I’m going to submit a budget next week to the United States Congress. It is a budget that will set priorities, just like each family does in America—set priorities. My priorities will make sure that we preserve and protect and strengthen Social Security, so that there’s a Social Security system available for the Yahngs and their children, and for you, as well. A priority in my budget will be to make sure that the health care system in America is strong for the elderly, for the uninsured, and for all of us concerned about health. A priority will be public education.

Today I talked about a reading initiative which goal is to make sure that children can read by the third grade. I can’t think of a better priority. By the way, I also understand that local control of schools is the best way to achieve that priority.

Last week I spent time touring military bases. The defense of our Nation is a priority. And in my budget I will submit, amongst other things, a pay raise for the men and women who wear the uniform. Restoring morale in the military not only means better pay, better housing, better health care; it also means having a Commander in Chief who will clarify the mission, the mission of the United States military to have fighting forces trained and prepared to fight war, and therefore, prevent war from happening in the first place.

A priority of mine, in my budget, will be paying down national debt. And yet after setting priorities, there’s still money left over. And so while we’re concerned about the Federal budget, I’m also concerned about the budget of people such as the Yahngs, who are here standing next to me.

I think it makes sense to understand who pays the bills. I think it makes sense to understand who fills the coffers of the United States, and it’s the working people. And so I’m going to ask Congress to pass a tax relief package, recognizing that we can meet priorities, but also help families meet their own priorities.

I’m deeply concerned about the high cost of energy. American families are paying more

and more for energy these days. I'm concerned about consumer debt. There's a lot of discussion about national debt, and that's a concern. But I'm also concerned that a lot of working folks have got their own debt, and it seems wise to set priorities at the national level and get people their own money so they can meet their own obligations, to meet their own debts.

I'm asking Congress to pass \$1.6 trillion in tax relief, after we've met priorities. That's over a 10-year period of time. It's a fair plan. It's a plan that says, as opposed to trying to pick and choose who the winners are, that everybody who pays taxes ought to get tax relief. It is a plan that significantly reduces taxes for people at the bottom end of the economic ladder. If you're a family of four making \$35,000, you'll receive a 100 percent tax cut. It's an average tax relief, for families, of \$1,600. The Yahng family, under the plan I submit, will receive actually more than that. They now pay \$2,000 in taxes to the Federal Government. If this plan is enacted by the United States Congress, they'll end up paying \$150 of taxes. That's \$1,850 more that they can decide what to do with.

It's your money. It will give you a chance to set your priorities for your family. It says that we in the Federal Government have a fundamental trust in the people of America, and that's where our faith should be—in the people. The best Government is that which trusts America, and there's no better way to make that trust explicit than to share your money with you.

I want to drop all rates and simplify the code. The reason this family will receive the tax relief they're going to get is because we've dropped the bottom rate from 15 percent to 10 percent, and doubled the child credit from \$500 to \$1,000 per child.

As well, I'm going to ask Congress to provide relief from the marriage tax. Our tax code ought to encourage family, ought to recognize marriage as a sacred institution. And I think we ought to listen to the voices of the farmers and small-business people and eliminate the death tax, so that those who struggle—[*applause*].

This is a plan that's going to require the people to speak up. It's the beginning of a series of trips around our great Nation where

I'm going to make my case, not to the folks in Congress or in Washington, DC, but to the American people. I have an awesome responsibility to be the President of everyone. I assume that responsibility, and I'm going to be the President of everyone, and I believe this tax relief plan is fair for everyone who pays taxes in America. It is the right thing to do at this point in our history.

It also makes economic sense. I am concerned about our economy. I'm concerned about it—that we've lost some wind in our sails. I believe good monetary policy combined with good fiscal policy, will provide a needed second wind to economic growth. We must keep the pie growing so that people who want to work can find a job, people who want to dream are able to realize their dreams in the entrepreneurial—as a small-business person or as an entrepreneur.

One of the great strengths of America is the entrepreneurial spirit of our country. Any President and the Congress must do everything in our power to create an environment where the entrepreneur can flourish, where people can realize their dreams. America is a land based upon dreams, a land where people should aim high, and our tax code ought to encourage capital formation and economic growth. But most of all, America is made up of fine, decent, honorable citizens, citizens who work hard every day to provide for their families—just like my friends here—citizens who, once the Nation meets our priorities, ought to keep their own money, so you can spend, and you can save, and you can dream.

I'm so thankful that you all came. I really appreciate you all standing up here today with me. I'm pinching myself every day. [*Laughter*] It is an unimaginable honor to represent the great people of this country, the greatest country on the face of the Earth, and all my public policy will be designed to keep it great and to invigorate our people.

Thank you for coming, and God bless.

NOTE: The President spoke at 5:50 p.m. at the Kirkwood Community Center. In his remarks, he referred to Chuck Yahng, assistant sports information director, St. Louis University, his wife, Amanda, and their children, Evan and Claudia.

Remarks at Townsend Elementary School in Townsend, Tennessee

February 21, 2001

The President. Thank you all very much. Fred, thank you very much. I appreciate your invitation.

Principal Fred Goins. We appreciate your coming.

The President. And I'm glad I accepted. It's a beautiful part of the world. I was touched by the number of your citizenry who came and lined the roads as we came in to wave and say hello. And I thank them for that, as well. I wish I could thank them in person. I hope they realize my wave was a sincere wave of gratitude.

I want to thank Gary Pack, the superintendent of schools. Let me say a couple things about what I've learned. I've learned this as a parent; I've learned it as a Governor; I know it as the President, that a school is really only as good as its principal, and when you have a fine principal, you've got a fine school. And I appreciate your service. And the same with the superintendents.

But with—the heart and soul of any education system, of course, are the teachers. And I want to thank those who are teaching. I'm sorry that my wife is not here with us today. If she were giving the speech—and most of you, if you had heard both of us, would rather hear her—[*laughter*—she would say that one of her missions will be to convince Americans who are coming up to be a teacher. There's nothing more noble than to teach. And so, to the teachers of this school and the teachers throughout all of Tennessee, we thank you from the bottom of our hearts.

I also want to thank my friend, the Governor of your State, Don Sundquist. He is a good man, and he married—like me—he married above himself. [*Laughter*] But Laura and I love Don and Martha. They have been our friends for a long time, and I appreciate your hospitality.

I want to thank your Senator, Bill Frist. I'm particularly nice to Senator Frist these days, since much of what I'm proposing is going to need to be passed out of the United States Senate. But I've got a strong ally in Senator Frist, and a good friend.

I want to thank members of the Tennessee congressional delegation, Congressmen Duncan and Jenkins and Van Hilleary, for being here, as well. I got to know these folks during the course of the campaign, and they were stalwarts.

I also want to thank my friend, the chairman of the Education Committee, from the State of Ohio, Congressman John Boehner. I am so thankful the chairman is here. I'm going to be discussing education policy today, the framework for good policy, and it's going to require the leadership of John and—on the House side, and Frist and others on the Senate side to get this bill through.

So, Mr. Chairman, thank you very much for not only being here—I'm surprised they didn't check you at the border coming in. [*Laughter*] But I'll let you on the plane so we can fly back together and talk policy.

I'm also most appreciative of the mayor of Knoxville, Tennessee, for being here. I've known Mayor Ashe for years and years and years, and he has done a fabulous job of being a fine public servant in Knoxville. So Victor, thank you for coming.

And finally, a former public servant, a distinguished Tennessee citizen, a man whose son is—sees my daughter at the University of Texas, hopefully in the library—[*laughter*—and that's Lamar Alexander.

I want to thank these distinguished officials. I want to thank the local officials. Senator, thank you, as well. Thank you for coming.

There's no more important subject than public education. We must get it right to make sure no child is left behind. My philosophy is this: First, all of us in positions of responsibility must set the highest of high standards for every child. I believe every child can learn, and that ought to be indelibly etched into our national conscience, that every single child in America has got the capacity to learn and we should accept nothing less. And we must set high expectations for every child. We must raise the bar.

I also strongly believe in local control of schools. I believe the best way to chart the path to excellence for every child in America is to insist that authority and responsibility be aligned at the local level.