

**Remarks on Plans for Release of
United States Navy Aircraft
Crewmembers in China**

April 11, 2001

Good morning. I'm pleased to be able to tell the American people that plans are underway to bring home our 24 American service men and women from Hainan Island.

This morning the Chinese Government assured our American Ambassador that the crew would leave promptly. We're working on arrangements to pick them up and to bring them home.

This has been a difficult situation for both our countries. I know the American people join me in expressing sorrow for the loss of life of a Chinese pilot. Our prayers are with his wife and his child.

I appreciate the hard work of our Ambassador to China, Joseph Prueher, and his entire Embassy team, who worked tirelessly to solve this situation. The American people, their families, and I are proud of our crew, and we look forward to welcoming them home.

Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 8:25 a.m. in the James S. Brady Briefing Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Ruan Guoqin, widow of Chinese pilot Wang Wei.

**Remarks at Concord Middle School
in Concord, North Carolina**

April 11, 2001

Thank you all very much. Okay. "Dr. O," thank you for your hospitality. It's an honor to be here. I want to thank you all for coming. Before I talk about a subject dear to my heart, which is education, and before I recognize all the distinguished guests, I do want to say that right after my visit here, I am going to meet with the family of Petty Officer Third Class Steven Blocher.

As you know, Steven is one of our 24 service men and women in China. I'm really looking forward to letting Steven's family know that we're in the process of bringing their son home. Steven grew up in Charlotte, and I know this entire Charlotte area and I know

this entire community joins in looking forward to welcoming him home.

I'm grateful for the opportunity to tell the Blochers how much America appreciates their son's patriotism and service to his country and how much we appreciate the service of our men and women in uniform throughout the world.

Situations such as this remind us how much our military personnel and their families sacrifice for our freedom. It also reminds me, it's such an honor to be the Commander in Chief of such wonderful people.

It's also an honor to be here in the great State of North Carolina. I've got a lot of friends here, and I'm grateful. It's also good to get out of Washington, DC, on a regular basis. It kind of reminds us that there is—it helps us stay in touch with reality. It's important to listen to people who are on the frontlines of making their communities a much better place. And there's no better place to listen and to say thanks than our schools all across America, where people are working their heart out to make a difference in the lives of our children. So first, I want to thank all the teachers who are here.

I don't know if you know this—and I'm sorry the First Lady is not with us; she's heading down to Texas for the Easter break; I'm following shortly thereafter, I want you to know. [*Laughter*] One of her missions, besides making sure every child can read, is to remind folks about how important it is and what an important profession teaching is, that teaching is a noble profession, and that for the youngsters who are looking for something to do after college: Become a teacher. Or, for those who have just gotten out of the military: Become a teacher.

We need good teachers in America. We need people to understand what an important job it is. So for those of you who are thinking about something to do when you get out of junior high, then high school, then college, give teaching a shot. It will not only change some child's life; it will change your life for the better, as well.

It's good to see Phil Kirk. Phil, thank you very much. I was honored to be escorted around the school by a man I proudly called "Mr. President," Graham Boone. I appreciate Senator Edwards being here. Senator,

it's good to see you, sir. I appreciate Congressman Hayes. I can assure you, on the ride in from the airport, he gave me a full briefing—[*laughter*—about every single aspect of this community. He pointed out every NASCAR garage, and every four-lane highway that needed to be expanded. [*Laughter*]

Congressmen Coble, Ballenger, and Taylor are also here. I want to thank you all for coming, and I appreciate your loyal support. I guess when the President shows up, all kinds of elected officials come, and I appreciate your coming. The mayors, the mayor of Charlotte and the mayor of Concord, I want to thank you both for being here, as well.

It's good to see Mike Ward again. I saw Mike just the other day. Thank you, Mike. And it's good to have members of the statehouse, the speaker and the leader of the Senate, on both sides of the aisle. It reminds me, seeing both Republicans and Democrats from the statehouse here, that when it comes to education, there really isn't—there isn't a need for partisan bickering. When it comes to the education of the children, it is right for people of both parties to come together and figure out how to get the job done. And that's what's happened here.

I know that's what's happened here in North Carolina. It also happened in the State of Texas when I was the Governor—that we said we'll have our time for political bickering, but when it comes to important issues like education, we'll set aside political bickering and focus on the children. And as a result of people from both parties being able to work together in our respective States, North Carolina and Texas have made great progress.

I know that some other States don't like to hear this, but at one point in time, the National Education Goals Panel analyzed which of the States in the United States were making the greatest gains on student achievement. And it turned out our States were, North Carolina and Texas. And I attribute that to the fact that people from both political parties were willing to work together—something Washington, DC, needs more of, by the way. We need less name-calling and finger-pointing and more focus on what's right for America. And a good place to start

is when it comes to the education of our children.

Now, there's another reason why our States did well. It's because we adopted a philosophy that makes sense. It starts with setting high expectations for every child. Ours are States that have said every child can learn. We're not one of these States that said, some of the children can learn; or, maybe a handful of the children can learn. We started with the philosophy that every child can learn, and that's the right attitude to take. And also a philosophy that said we're going to set high standards for every child—not high standards for suburbia, or high standards for inner city—high standards for every child is part of our political philosophy.

Oh, I know there are difficult circumstances. But that is not an excuse to lower standards. You see, if you lower standards, you get lower results. If you set the bar low, you're going to get results that are not satisfactory for having a tomorrow that we want for every child. So the first part of our common philosophy says, we're going to set high standards and high expectations and believe that every child can learn.

Secondly, our States believe in local control of schools. That's something the Federal Government needs to learn. It needs to learn to trust the people of North Carolina when it comes to running the schools of North Carolina. This idea of Washington making decisions on behalf of the people of North Carolina has got to end, in order to make sure that every child gets educated in America.

One of the things I look forward to working with the Congress on is to explain to those who don't quite understand that all knowledge doesn't exist in Washington; that in order to have excellence in our schools, we've got to trust local people. And I mean we need to pass power out of Washington, DC, to empower the Governors and local school boards to make the right decisions for the children in their respective States, because one size does not fit all when it comes to the education of the American children.

And finally, the cornerstone of reform for North Carolina and for Texas and for other States is the willingness of our States to

measure—is to say, accountability is an incredibly important part of educational excellence. Now, in your State of North Carolina, you measure three through eight. In my State of Texas, we do the same thing. And that’s exactly the cornerstone of reform necessary. Do you know why? Because if you do not measure, you do not know whether or not children are learning. And if you don’t know, it’s likely certain children will be moved just right through the system.

It’s so easy to quit on certain children. It’s so easy to quit on children whose parents may not speak English as a first language. It’s so easy to quit on a child; you take a look and say, “This child is too hard to educate, so we’ll just move him or her through.” That is unacceptable to me. I know it’s unacceptable to you, and it needs to be unacceptable to all Americans. Every child matters; every child can be educated; and we must quit this business of just simply giving up on children early, before it’s too late.

And the structural reform necessary to make sure that doesn’t happen is to measure, is to say—ask ourselves: Can a child read at grade level, say, by the third grade? And if we find out the answer is no, then do something about it early, before it’s too late. I strongly believe in accountability.

In the budget I submitted to the Congress—one which one body of the House listened to pretty carefully, and one body of the Congress listened to carefully, and the other decided, well, they’re going to listen to some of it, but they decided to increase the size and scope of the Federal Government—we put a lot of money in for public education.

The biggest increase of any Department was for public education. We increased the size of the reading initiative by threefold. Because I understand that reading is the gateway to knowledge—and that’s nothing new; all Members of Congress understand that—I did want there to be a priority in the budget for reading. They said, “If the States wants to access Federal money, you should be able to do so, but make sure you have K-through-2 diagnostic tools available so that we can have meaningful early childhood reading initiatives; make sure you understand that if the curriculum doesn’t work, that you’re bold

enough to change it, and therefore, access some of the money to train teachers on curriculum that do work; make sure that you have intensive reading academies so that no child gets left behind when it comes to reading.”

We’ve tripled the amount of money for States, if they so choose to use that, because—I know this is obvious, unfortunately sometimes—but it reflects reality, and it reflects some of the problems we have that if you can’t read, you can’t learn other subjects. And unfortunately, too many of our children can’t read. I’m a first-things-first person. Let’s get the reading right, and I’m confident the math and science will follow thereafter. I do know if they can’t read, it’s going to be hard to master science. So there’s the focus on reading. And I know your State will take advantage of the Federal monies if I can get it passed out of the Congress—I think we’re going to, by the way—to make sure every child learns to read in your great State.

Secondly, it’s one thing to teach a child to read and write, but in order to make sure education is full and complete, we also must teach our children right from wrong. We triple the amount of money in the budget for character education programs. We should not be afraid to teach children what’s right and what’s wrong. And we should not be afraid in our society to teach children the values which have stood the test of time: Don’t lie, cheat, and steal; honor thy parents; show respect; be responsible for the decisions you make in life. And I also believe that, along those lines, we ought not to be afraid to teach abstinence to our children. So I’ve increased abstinence funding in the budget, as well.

Now, we increase spending. Now, there’s some hollering we didn’t increase it enough and some saying too much, and of course, imagine the President thinks it’s just right. But it’s one thing to spend money, but it’s another thing to make sure the systems work, too.

As you know, particularly in your State, there’s more than just spending money to education. It is important to get it right. And that’s why I urge the Congress to hear the message of accountability and local control.

Part of the reform package that is being debated in the Senate and the House is to pass power out of Washington, is the best way to put it; is to make sure the Federal money that is spent, is not so tied up that local folks can't use it to meet their own specific needs; is to trust the local people. It's an inherent principle of good public policy in Washington: Always remember to trust the local people. Why? Because government closer to the people is that which is most responsive. The government which get far away from the people sometimes doesn't hear the real voice, doesn't respond, may get caught up in special interests or the folks that surround the Nation's Capital.

And so we've got to trust people. And so inherent in the plan is to say to the Congress, "Work with us to pass power out of Washington. And let's not be afraid to do so." And I think we're making good progress on that. I think many of the Members of the Congress and the Senate understand that principle.

And I'm asking Congress to say, "If you receive Federal money, you must develop an accountability system like North Carolina has done." In return for taxpayers' money, to me it makes sense to ask the question, what are the results? If you receive Title I money in the State around the country—in one of our States in our country, you've got to measure. You've got to show us. I don't believe there ought to be a national test. I strongly resist a national test. A national test would undermine the development of local curriculum, for example. A national test could really mean the National Government ends up running—begins to dictate policies for our schools, and that's not right.

But I think it's responsible and wise and appropriate to say that if you receive help from the Federal Government, you develop an accountability system. And you measure. And you disaggregate results; you don't lump people into groups so we don't know. Each child matters. You see, it is incredibly important for this country to change our mentality about education. Instead of asking the question, how old are you, we need to start asking the question, what do you know?

Instead of saying, "Oh, you're 10, and you go here; and you're 12, you go here; or you're 16, we'll just put you here"—it's time for this

country, all across the land, to start asking the question, what do you know? And if you don't know what you're supposed to know, we'll make sure you do early, before it's too late. That's what accountability will do for our country. It begins to change the mentality.

It recognizes you can't correct problems unless you know there is a problem. And so I hope the Members of the House and the Members of the Senate do not blink when it comes to insisting that local jurisdictions develop strong accountability systems. It's so important. It's so important if we want to make sure that no child gets left behind.

And by the way, in order for there to be accountability that works, there must be a consequence for success, and a consequence for failure. There is no such thing as an accountability system unless something happens with success and failure. I believe we ought to reward success, and I believe, after a reasonable period of time, if a school will not teach and it will not change, something else must happen. And we're having a big debate on what the something else is in the Nation's Capital. There's a big debate on that.

But one thing is for certain: I will not accept a plan that accepts failure, because our children are too important. One thing is for certain: People must be given different options if their children are in schools that simply won't adjust. It's time for us to have strong accountability measures and local control in our schools.

People talk about parental involvement. All of us are for parental involvement, of course. It will make the teachers' job so much easier when parents get involved. But there's nothing like parental involvement when we start posting scores on the Internet. There's nothing like parental involvement when we break down accountability on a child-per-child basis. There's nothing like getting a mother fired up when she sees the fact that her school may not be performing quite like she thought it was going to be. Accountability is not only good for the children; it's good for parents, as well.

And it turns out it's good for schools. It's good for schools. It's good to know. It's good to know whether a curriculum is working or

not. It's good to know whether the methodology that's being used within the classrooms makes sense. It's good to know.

And when we start to measure, we're going to start saying for certain, every child matters in America. And when we start to correct—when we start to correct, we're going to make certain that every child is educated, and our country is going to be better off for it.

There's a lot of things I want to do in Washington. As you know, I'm committed to making sure that once we meet our priorities, that our Government always remembers who funds the Government; that it's not the Federal Government's money; it's the people's money.

We're making progress. Oh, some folks are kicking and screaming, but we're making some progress toward remembering whose money it is. But we're making good progress on education, as well, and I'm grateful. I'm grateful when a President Bush can sit down with a Senator Kennedy and have a meaningful, real dialog on what's right for the country. I'm grateful for that.

One of my missions was to try to change the tone of Washington. You see, Washington is zero-sum game up there. There are people up there that say, "We can't support this because it means somebody wins and, therefore, somebody loses." It means that we're not focused on the right reason, the reason we're there as people. And we may have a disagreement, but we've got to get rid of the zero-sum politics that dominates the discourse in our Nation's Capital. We're there to serve.

And the best way to convince people to serve is to change the tone from one of suspicion to respect. And as you can imagine, Senator Kennedy and I don't get along on a lot of issues, but we get along—I respect him as a person. I respect his professionalism. And I respect the fact that he's willing to sit down and see if my office and me, we can't work out differences that may exist when it comes to educating children. It's a good step in the right direction.

I think the tone in Washington is beginning to change for the better. I know we're beginning to have a new culture of accomplishment take hold, that instead of everybody focusing on process and who's saying

what about who, that we're beginning to focus on results.

I want this country to be a results-oriented country, starting at the national level. We ought to be focusing on results—particularly when it comes to education of children. And if they're good, let's praise everybody. And if they're bad, let's praise them, but let's fix it. So we're making progress in the Nation's Capital.

And finally, I think I'm making pretty good progress—I hope I am—on convincing people that it's not only important to educate our children; it's important to welcome faith-based and community-based programs and to stay-after-school programs, so that children understand that somebody loves them and somebody cares. That is so important.

I think we're making pretty good progress on the so-called Faith-Based Initiative, that makes it clear that government is limited. I mean, government can't make people love one another. If it could, I'm sure that Senator Edwards would sponsor it, and I would sign it if we could figure out how to do that.

But the role of government is limited. Oh sure, we can fund and we can tax and maybe not tax so much. And of course, we can keep the peace. But what government cannot do is cause people to love one another. What government cannot do is to understand the great power of faith and concern and love. We can rally faith and concern and love; we can encourage programs based upon faith, concern, and love, and we must. But we can't make people love one another. That comes from institutions that rely upon a greater power; that comes from churches and synagogues and mosques. It comes from mentoring programs based upon the idea of some soul, some good, decent American saying, "What can I do to help make my society a better place?"

I love coming outside the Nation's Capital, because it gives me a chance to see Americans line the road, saluting the institution of the Presidency as I drive by. And it reminds me every time, every trip, that the strength of this country lies not in the halls of our Government; the strength of this country lies in the hearts and souls of the citizens of the greatest land on the face of the Earth.

I think we're making progress. We understand where the power of this country lays. It lays in the hearts and souls of Americans. It lays in our pocketbooks. It lays in the willingness for people to work hard. But as importantly, it lays in the fact that we've got citizens from all walks of life, all political parties, that are willing to say, "I want to love my neighbor. I want to make somebody's life just a little bit better." And for those of you who are doing that, I thank you from the bottom of my heart.

And thank you for your warm welcome, and God bless.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:55 a.m. in the gymnasium. In his remarks, he referred to Austin Obasohan, principal, and Graham Boone, student council president, Concord Middle School; Phillip J. Kirk, Jr., chairman North Carolina State Board of Education; Mayor Patrick McCrory of Charlotte, NC; Mayor George W. Liles of Concord; Michael E. Ward, superintendent, North Carolina Public Schools; and Speaker of the House James B. Black and Senate President Pro Tempore Marc Basnight, North Carolina State Assembly. 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 Meeting With the Parents of Petty Officer Third Class Steven Blocher in Concord

April 11, 2001

The President. I'm so honored that the Blocher family came to say hello. Obviously, when we were going to visit, we were just going to visit in a quiet way, a private way. Now that their son, Steven, will be coming home soon, I thought it would be appropriate for us to visit, and then visit some with the press.

These good folks are patriots, as is their son. It's a patriotic family. We had other family members served our country. Steven was one of the 24. I know they're thrilled he's coming home. But I'm so appreciative of how this family and the other families were steadfast in their patriotism and loyalty. They raised a boy who loves his country, and we owe a debt of gratitude to not only the service

men and women but to their parents, as well. So that's why I wanted to see you.

Robert Blocher. This morning worked out even better than we had hoped. It's an honor to meet the President, but to meet the President under such happy circumstances was more than we could ask the Lord for in any way.

The President. It's my honor to have you all. Thanks. We're watching very carefully; progress is being made, and that's very good news for this group of folks.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:40 p.m. at Concord Middle School. Petty Officer Third Class Blocher is one of 24 crewmembers of the U.S. Navy EP-3E Aries II electronic surveillance aircraft being held by the Government of China after the aircraft made an emergency landing on China's Hainan Island due to a mid-air collision with a Chinese F-8 fighter jet over the South China Sea. A tape was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

Remarks to the Community in Greenville, North Carolina

April 11, 2001

The President. Thank you all. Thank you very much. Okay. Richard, thank you very much for your kind hospitality. I'm proud—I am proud to be an honorary member of the East Carolina baseball team. I am proud to be on this campus. I am proud to be in East Carolina, and I'm proud I've got so many friends in this great State.

It is such an honor to be here, and I want to thank you all for coming. I understand that some good folks spent the night last night here to be here. I promise not to speak so long so you will fall asleep. [Laughter] But I'm really thankful that you're here. I'm thankful to be out of Washington, DC, with the good, hard-working people of this part of our country.

Release of U.S. Navy Aircraft Crewmembers in China

I'm pleased to report that a commercial charter airplane is close to landing in Hainan Island.

Audience members. U.S.A! U.S.A! U.S.A!

The President. The plane is expected to leave that island in a couple of hours, bound