

Joe Samaha, father of Virginia Tech victim Reema Samaha said last week that, "If we do not learn the lesson, we will have lost our students for nothing."

Let's honor the memories of those students and work to be proactive and do anything necessary to make sure that we can deliver fewer and fewer statements commemorating tragedies like Virginia Tech.

This body has the duty to pass laws that protect Americans, and we can do just that, by supporting sensible legislation like the VTV Act to make sure that we do everything we can to avoid more gun violence.

So let's mark today's unfortunate anniversary by upholding the memory of those lost at Virginia Tech last year and promise to do better, work harder, learn the lessons and not let them be lost for nothing.

PERSONAL EXPLANATION

HON. FRANK PALLONE, JR.

OF NEW JERSEY

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, April 16, 2008

Mr. PALLONE. Madam Speaker, yesterday I was away from Washington attending to personal matters and missed several votes. I would have voted "yes" on H.R. 5036, the Emergency Assistance for Secure Elections Act of 2008, "no" on the Motion to Recommit H.R. 5719, "yes" on H.R. 5719, the Taxpayer Assistance and Simplification Act of 2008, and "yes" on H.R. 5517, designating a post office in Humble, Texas.

WELCOMING POPE BENEDICT XVI TO THE UNITED STATES

HON. CHRISTOPHER H. SMITH

OF NEW JERSEY

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, April 16, 2008

Mr. SMITH of New Jersey. Madam Speaker, my wife Marie and I were among the thousands who joined President George W. Bush and Laura on the White House lawn today in welcoming Pope Benedict XVI to the United States.

It was among the most inspiring events of my 28 years in Congress.

Both men—extraordinary leaders for extraordinarily difficult times—spoke eloquently of the challenges, opportunities and duties of global citizenship. Both called us to work harder and more effectively for others, especially the disenfranchised, weak and vulnerable.

President Bush—speaking for us—said to the Pope:

"Here in America you'll find a nation of compassion. Americans believe that the measure of a free society is how we treat the weakest and most vulnerable among us. . . . Here in America you'll find a nation that welcomes the role of faith in the public square. . . . Here in America, you'll find a nation that is fully modern, yet guided by ancient and eternal truths. . . . Most of all, Holy Father, you will find in America people whose hearts are open to your message of hope. And America and the world need this message."

Pope Benedict said "I come as a friend. a preacher of the Gospel, and one with great respect for this vast pluralistic society. . . ."

He said he hoped his presence would be "a source of renewal and hope." He reminded us that "Freedom is not only a gift, but also a summons to personal responsibility." And the Pope urged us to greater action:

"the need for global solidarity is as urgent as ever, if all people are to live in a way worthy of their dignity—as brothers and sisters dwelling in the same house and around that table which God's bounty has set for all his children. America has traditionally shown herself generous in meeting immediate human needs, fostering development and offering relief to the victims of natural catastrophes. I am confident that this concern for the greater human family will continue to find expression in support for the patient efforts of international diplomacy to resolve conflicts and promote progress. In this way, coming generations will be able to live in a world where truth, freedom and justice can flourish—a world where the God-given dignity and the rights of every man, woman and child are cherished, protected and effectively advanced.

Madam Speaker, what follows are both the President and Pope's remarks in their entirety.

PRESIDENT BUSH WELCOMES HIS HOLINESS

POPE BENEDICT XVI TO WHITE HOUSE

President Bush: Holy Father, Laura and I are privileged to have you here at the White House. We welcome you with the ancient words commended by Saint Augustine: "Pax Tecum." Peace be with you.

You've chosen to visit America on your birthday. Well, birthdays are traditionally spent with close friends, so our entire nation is moved and honored that you've decided to share this special day with us. We wish you much health and happiness—today and for many years to come.

This is your first trip to the United States since you ascended to the Chair of Saint Peter. You will visit two of our greatest cities and meet countless Americans, including many who have traveled from across the country to see you and to share in the joy of this visit. Here in America you'll find a nation of prayer. Each day millions of our citizens approach our Maker on bended knee, seeking His grace and giving thanks for the many blessings He bestows upon us. Millions of Americans have been praying for your visit, and millions look forward to praying with you this week.

Here in America you'll find a nation of compassion. Americans believe that the measure of a free society is how we treat the weakest and most vulnerable among us. So each day citizens across America answer the universal call to feed the hungry and comfort the sick and care for the infirm. Each day across the world the United States is working to eradicate disease, alleviate poverty, promote peace and bring the light of hope to places still mired in the darkness of tyranny and despair.

Here in America you'll find a nation that welcomes the role of faith in the public square. When our Founders declared our nation's independence, they rested their case on an appeal to the "laws of nature, and of nature's God." We believe in religious liberty. We also believe that a love for freedom and a common moral law are written into every human heart, and that these constitute the firm foundation on which any successful free society must be built.

Here in America, you'll find a nation that is fully modern, yet guided by ancient and eternal truths. The United States is the most innovative, creative and dynamic country on earth—it is also among the most religious. In our nation, faith and reason coexist in harmony. This is one of our country's greatest strengths, and one of the reasons that

our land remains a beacon of hope and opportunity for millions across the world.

Most of all, Holy Father, you will find in America people whose hearts are open to your message of hope. And America and the world need this message. In a world where some invoke the name of God to justify acts of terror and murder and hate, we need your message that "God is love." And embracing this love is the surest way to save men from "falling prey to the teaching of fanaticism and terrorism."

In a world where some treat life as something to be debased and discarded, we need your message that all human life is sacred, and that "each of us is willed, each of us is loved" and your message that "each of us is willed, each of us is loved, and each of us is necessary."

In a world where some no longer believe that we can distinguish between simple right and wrong, we need your message to reject this "dictatorship of relativism," and embrace a culture of justice and truth.

In a world where some see freedom as simply the right to do as they wish, we need your message that true liberty requires us to live our freedom not just for ourselves, but "in a spirit of mutual support."

Holy Father, thank you for making this journey to America. Our nation welcomes you. We appreciate the example you set for the world, and we ask that you always keep us in your prayers.

Pope Benedict XVI: Mr. President, thank you for your gracious words of welcome on behalf of the people of the United States of America. I deeply appreciate your invitation to visit this great country. My visit coincides with an important moment in the life of the Catholic community in America: the celebration of the 200th anniversary of elevation of the country's first Diocese—Baltimore—to a metropolitan Archdiocese and the establishment of the Sees of New York, Boston, Philadelphia and Louisville.

Yet I am happy to be here as a guest of all Americans. I come as a friend, a preacher of the Gospel, and one with great respect for this vast pluralistic society. America's Catholics have made, and continue to make, an excellent contribution to the life of their country. As I begin my visit, I trust that my presence will be a source of renewal and hope for the Church in the United States, and strengthen the resolve of Catholics to contribute ever more responsibly to the life of this nation, of which they are proud to be citizens.

From the dawn of the Republic, America's quest for freedom has been guided by the conviction that the principles governing political and social life are intimately linked to a moral order based on the dominion of God the Creator. The framers of this nation's founding documents drew upon this conviction when they proclaimed the self-evident truth that all men are created equal and endowed with inalienable rights grounded in the laws of nature and of nature's God.

The course of American history demonstrates the difficulties, the struggles, and the great intellectual and moral resolve which were demanded to shape a society which faithfully embodied these noble principles. In that process, which forged the soul of the nation, religious beliefs were a constant inspiration and driving force, as for example in the struggle against slavery and in the civil rights movement. In our time, too, particularly in moments of crisis, Americans continue to find their strength in a commitment to this patrimony of shared ideas and aspirations.

In the next few days, I look forward to meeting not only with America's Catholic community, but with other Christian communities and representatives of the many religious traditions present in this country.