

Remarks and a Question-and-Answer Session With the Mount Paran Christian School Community in Marietta

May 27, 1992

The President. May I simply start off by thanking you, sir, Pastor Rice. And Dr. Walker, of course, Dr. Heyman, Principal Susan King. And I understand there's a little overflow in the sanctuary; we'll greet them wherever they may be. And thank you for this warm welcome to this wonderful, wonderfully warm school environment. I know a little poster action went on over Memorial Day, and I see the tip of the iceberg. But thank you for the welcome.

I would like to say to Pastor Rice, we are trying. We are trying, because we are committed to making American education the best in the world. And it's not there yet. We're not close to that yet, so we've got to keep on trying. I left the two great Bush family experts on education behind, regrettably. Barbara Bush, I think, is doing a superb job encouraging people to read to their kids, and that is fundamental. And we have an author in the family, our dog Millie. *[Laughter]* You may have read my tax returns, and you can tell who the breadwinner is in that family. The dog made 5 times as much as the President of the United States. *[Laughter]* I might point out that all of that money that Millie made in her book goes to Barbara's foundation on literacy, which I hope will benefit children across this country. I'm sure it will.

Our America 2000 education crusade is not built on finding the answers in Washington, DC. It is built on encouraging a revolutionary approach to education, and that is where local communities put forward excellence. We believe that's right. We believe in parental choice. We believe that people should be free to choose public, private, religious schools. And our whole system, our whole approach to education is built on a concept of choice and actually revolution, not tinkering at the edges but revolutionizing American education at the public school level. You see, we've got the best college education in the world. When Yale's president announced his departure from Yale yesterday to go into some concepts similar

to what we're talking about nationally, he pointed out that at the college level, choice makes State schools better and makes private schools better. The same thing will be true if this concept catches on nationally.

Another point that we want to make is that one of the reasons I wanted to come here is to point up for the rest of the country what excellent teachers mean and what parental involvement in kids' education mean. I'm told by Dr. Walker and your able principal that parents are involved and that they care and that they read to the kids and that they see that the homework is done. So I would salute this school for some way inculcating into the parent this concept of what they do is vital to American education.

The teachers, I'm told, here are excellent. I would recognize that your system here encourages that interaction between the kids and the teachers, not just in the classroom but by bringing in the parents for what some would call PTA activities or whatever. So I salute you for that, and I think you're setting a good example for other countries as well.

Some parents are out there checking homework and turning off the TV. Well, that's a good thing because tomorrow there will be a new study announced by our Department of Education. And I might say I have great confidence in our Secretary of Education, Lamar Alexander. But this is the NAEP, the National Assessment of Education Progress. It's coming out with conclusions that will not be a surprise to the teachers, the officials, the administration, and the parents in this school.

But the point explains that American students across the board spend too little time reading for pleasure or as part of their school work, that they rarely visit the library, and that they watch television on average more than 3 hours a day. Now, I think that these conclusions in this report will resonate around the country, and

people are going to begin to say, “Wait a minute, let’s try it a different way. Maybe let’s try it the Mount Paran way where we’re going to have less of that and a little more homework emphasis.”

But in any event, I came here to take a few questions and hopefully to get an answer or two. My dad, who was in politics many years ago, always liked the guy that got up at the forum like this and said, “For your information, I’d like to ask this question.” [Laughter] Well, I could use a little information, so don’t be concerned if your question sounds a little bit like a lecture. So with no further ado, other than to once again say thank you from this grateful heart, I’d like to take your questions.

The last point I will make, and I promise it’s the last: From the minute I walked in here I get the distinct feeling that this place has a real sense of what we call family values. I think that sets a good example for the rest of the country as well.

So, who’s first?

Vouchers for Private Schools

Q. Mr. President, in an effort to improve the quality of education in America, do you support any Government funding of private education?

The President. Yes, I do believe that our system which calls for vouchers for private, public, or religious schools is the way to go. And I think it, incidentally, I think that will improve the school that is not chosen. That comes under what we call a concept of school choice, and I think that it will help those schools that are left behind. I think Minnesota will tell you that that’s what happens when a school is chosen.

I might point out as one who benefited from the GI bill a thousand years ago when I got out of the Navy in nineteen-forty—what the heck was it—[laughter]—1945, they said, “Here’s the GI bill. You can choose where you want to go. You can choose a private school. You can choose a State school.” And no great damage was done to the Constitution. I think that same principle will inure to the benefit of the schools that are chosen and those that aren’t. So yes, I do support that concept. Therein I have a big difference with the Court.

You guys right in the middle, go ahead. You’ve got a question? Scoot right up here. While you’re coming up, let’s see.

Advice to Youth

Q. What can a fifth grader do to help keep our country free and the greatest country in the world?

The President. What kind of what?

Q. What can a fifth grader do to keep—

The President. A fifth grader? A fifth grader can study. I know you’re not going to like the answer too much. [Laughter] A fifth grader can watch less than the national average of kids watching television. You can learn. You can listen to those around you who are helping you with your value structure, and I think you then find that through your studies and through your environment, you have the values that will help keep this country strong.

I am an old-fashioned kind of guy. I think it’s good when the people are patriotic and salute the flag and stand for the Pledge of Allegiance and say we are “one Nation under God.” I think a fifth grader learns those things and shares them with her schoolmates, and then it’s a part of your life as you get older. You’ll be standing for something; you believe in something, something good.

What’s your friend got? Are you a friend of hers?

Q. Yes.

The President. Are you?

Balanced Budget Amendment

Q. Yes. I have a question. If God can run the world on 10 percent, why can’t Government run the country on 30 percent? [Laughter]

The President. That’s a good question. You’re talking about tithing? [Laughter] Well, that’s a good question, and the answer is it’s slightly more complicated than the question. [Laughter] But you know, there are some people—I assume that that’s a pitch for 10 percent in taxes, but there are some that frankly can’t afford it. I think under our system others manage to pitch in to help those who literally can’t afford to pay a dime.

But I take your point. I think there’s a

point behind the question, and that is that we've got to get our spending of our Government under control. Frankly, I think one way to do that is to now pass the balanced budget amendment to the Constitution. The liberals don't like it. The liberals do not like it, and they keep throwing up what I call the Washington Monument syndrome. That means if you have to cut somewhere, they'll point out, well, the first thing you've got to do is take down the Washington Monument or go after programs that everybody likes. That isn't what happens to get a balanced budget.

What we need to do without getting too technical here is to control the growth of the mandatory programs. You don't have to cut them, but you have to control the growth of that part of the budget that's running out of control. I believe we can do it. I think a balanced budget amendment would discipline the Congress, and I think it would discipline the executive branch. It's an idea I've been for for a long, long time. I believe it's going to pass the Congress now. The people are not listening to these sophisticated arguments. They're saying, "Do not saddle these young kids with more and more debt." And so we're going to try it.

The guys in the back of the bus are getting not equal opportunity on these questions. So you might have to just come up to the front, or just if you put your hand up and you've got a loud voice, we'll try some back there. Go ahead.

Vouchers for Private Schools

Q. Mr. President, when if ever can private school and Christian school parents ever expect to see some type of tax credit?

The President. Well, I think what—we're frankly having a little difficulty getting this idea of vouchers, which is essentially a credit, through the Congress. But we're going to keep on because it is part of our America 2000 program. I think there's less resistance to it. But I'll be honest with you; I just don't know the answer as to when it's going to happen. I think our administration with our six education goals and our America 2000 program are on the right track in this regard. I'm going to keep pushing for it because I think it makes good sense.

Anyway, yes, ma'am, way in the back.

School Choice

Q. [*Inaudible*]

The President. Where it's been tried, choice has been tried, I think the record shows that the school that is not chosen improves itself. That's the point that Benno Schmidt—I made this to a group earlier on—who's leaving Yale University—I still think it's a great university, not just because I went there—but nevertheless, he's leaving to go into what I would call a model school program. His point was that choice makes those schools, private schools in higher education better, and the State schools are better as well because of the competition.

So I don't look at it as a program that should diminish the quality of education in our very important public school system. We think the competition will enhance the—especially if we can strive to achieve our six education goals.

So, that's the answer I would give you.

President's Domestic Agenda

Q. What will you do after you win your election?

The President. After I win? Well, you mean the very first thing? [*Laughter*] Take a little time off. [*Laughter*] No, but what I'll do is—and I think I'll win; I really think so. It's funny out there right now. But there is so much we need to do in the country, and this is one of the prime things, better education. I feel strongly about it.

You know—what grade are you in? Fifth grader. Well, it wasn't long ago that every fifth grader in this country went to bed from time to time very much concerned about what? Nuclear war. Now, thank God, because of my predecessor I think gets credit; other Presidents get credit; I hope I'll get a little; we've helped change the world. The changes are dramatic. There no longer is a Communist monolithic enemy. You don't probably worry about it. You don't have drills where you have to hide under your desk, wondering what would happen if there was a nuclear war. We've got a lot of blessings. We can thank our God for the blessings, the changes toward world peace.

So that's been some good that's happened. You don't hear much good these days, but that's something very good. What I'd like to do now is to take that energy and that emphasis that helped bring about that kind of change, after, you say after I'm elected, and then try to move forward in the field of anticrime; move forward in the field of education; move forward in the field of health reform—not to put in a socialized medicine program but to—where everyone has access to insurance through pooling and through various ways of doing it. I'd like to work for a society where we love each other more and sue each other less, and that means putting some caps on these liability claims.

But there is so much to do as President. There are so many things to work on and so much to do. But those are just some of the priorities that I would try to work very hard on if I'm lucky enough to win.

Religion in Public Schools

Q. Can there be Bible in public schools?

The President. The answer to that is, I don't think so. I still favor voluntary prayer in the public schools. I believe in that, and I think there will be. [*Inaudible*]*—*in the Constitution. But prayer in school on a voluntary basis, I simply can't understand why it's not permitted. In the Senate, and heaven knows they need it—[*laughter*]*—*but in the Senate and in the House, they open with prayer every single day, and nobody complains about that.

So my position is well-known, and I say this.

Way up in the balcony. Yes, sir. You. I can hear you.

Abortion

Q. I want to thank President Bush on behalf of the—[*applause*]. I'd like to know if you have any plans to eliminate abortion?

The President. Well, yes, because we're—well, of course, this is a matter that is enshrined in law. My position is, as you say, is publicly stated. And I think the matter now is in the courts. And I do, I worry very much about the mounting numbers of abortions. One of the cases before the Supreme Court now relates to whether a parent should be notified if a child, 13-year-

old kid, for example, is going to have an abortion. I feel, of course, a parent should be involved. But that matter is being adjudicated in the courts right now.

But my position is clear. I think it's correct. And there's room for a lively debate out there; you get plenty of argument on it. But I come down on the—err, if you're going to err, err on the side of life. And that's the way I feel.

Local Control of Education

Q. Mr. President, as an educator for 21 years, what can you do to help us to eliminate the enormous amount of paperwork involved in education so that we who want to be good and positive role models for kids can get on about that business?

The President. Well, you touched a real nerve because we have now just redoubled our efforts to cut down on the regulatory burden, not just paperwork, which is enormous and where we've got to do better, but on a lot of excessive Government regulation that stifles many small businesses, for example.

I know educators feel that they are swamped when you're dealing with Government funds on paperwork. But one of our approaches is to get away from these mandated programs where some subcommittee chairman, some old curmudgeon that might have been there forever, has some idea about the way it used to work 40 years ago and insists on saying, if you want Federal money—happens to be your money—but if you want Federal money, you've got to follow these certain guidelines and fill out 23 reports.

Our whole approach on America 2000 is to let the decisions be made at the local level. And some schools might say, "We want 8 hours a day;" another might say "6 days a week"; another might say "11 months a year"; another might say, "Let's try the other way; back off and have less school time, more required homework." But let the American people decide that in their communities, as close to home as possible. That will take care of the problem you asked.

What's this guy, what have you got?

Family Values

Q. President Bush, where do you stand on the issue of the traditional family unit?

The President. The traditional family? Well, I guess everybody looks at his or her own experience. Barbara Bush and I have been blessed with growing up in what you might call a traditional family, a family where a mother and dad are there, and they give love to a child. So I am, I guess, what you call a family values man.

But where you don't have that, where a kid, a little child comes into the world and doesn't have the father—the father may have run away, not even there to know the name of the child—somehow we then have to help that little kid. I told it earlier, every kid ought to have somebody that knows his name. It should be the parent, should be two parents. If not two parents, it ought to be one parent. If it can't be that, there's got to be a mentor. There's got to be somebody who cares, somebody who loves that child.

And on traditional family values where you can have the welfare system so it does not encourage a husband and wife to live apart. We've got to change it. We've got to make it so these kinds of traditional values have a chance to work in this troubled society of ours.

So I'm not ashamed about talking about family values and traditions of that nature. We'll keep on doing it, and I think it's beginning to resonate. Because as I told Dr. Walker and some others earlier, when the mayors of these cities, a lot of cities, came to see me, including Mayor Bradley of now-troubled Los Angeles, they said, "The thing that concerns us most about trouble in the cities, the most single cause is the decline or defamation of the American family." We've got to find ways to strengthen it.

Haitian Migrants

Q. Good evening, President Bush. My question is a little different from what we have been talking about this evening, about family values and education. It has to do with the fact that, as we educate our daughter here at Mount Paran, one of the things we try to do as parents is to try to also educate our daughter in light of what is

going on in the world in terms of what she's being taught.

My question has to do with the Haitian refugee situation. Earlier this week the Government announced a policy of repatriating Haitians back to Haiti. On the surface, Mr. President, that policy seems to run contrary to what America has stood for over the past couple hundred years, in that Americans opened their arms to all ethnic groups and different classes who sought to free themselves here in America from oppression in their homeland. Could you please explain why a policy was warranted to repatriate those Haitians?

The President. Absolutely. And it's a very good question. The answer is this: Yes, the Statue of Liberty still stands, and we still open our arms to people that are politically oppressed. We cannot and, as long as the laws are on the book, I will not, because I've sworn to uphold the Constitution, open the doors to economic refugees all over the world. We can't do that.

We're having a border crossing coming in from Mexico in unprecedented numbers. We're trying to, not to be mean about it, but we're trying to say, "Listen, we've got to live by the laws of this land."

It is my understanding that the vast majority of the refugees—and they're being screened; they're now going to be screened at the Embassy; they were being screened at Guantanamo—are economic refugees. There was one guy that was thrown out twice and vowed as he left the Coast Guard cutter the second time, "I'll be back in a week." There are merchants in Haiti today advertising almost like bounty, "Pay us \$500 and you can climb into my unsafe boat and set out across the ocean," knowing that out of compassion the United States Coast Guard would save them.

We have to control our own immigration policy. We've got to do it with compassion. We've got to do it under the law, though. So what I'm saying to you is, we are not repatriating willfully people that are fleeing political oppression. Part of our policy on Haiti, and we're taking a leadership role in the OAS, is to return Mr. Aristide, who was democratically elected, to Haiti. We want him back there. And if we don't do that—I would say this, add this peripherally—if we

don't do that, that sends a bad signal to those who might be plotting coups in other parts of our hemisphere, which, thank God, is almost totally democratic today.

So our policy is, I think, the right policy. I think we do have to control—some accuse it, incidentally, of being a racist policy. I would vehemently deny, that is not the case, because these people have every right to be screened. We've accompanied this program now, so we will not be faced with the numbers of leaky boats, with giving additional food aid to Haiti. We will continue with our sanction program, and we will continue to try to get Mr. Aristide returned.

Frankly, the numbers as of yesterday were down of the people fleeing. I still worry about it because some will get by and some will die on the sea because they are being—it's like a magnet to them, these advertisements that "we'll get you to Guantanamo" or "we'll get you to Florida." We're bound by our laws to screen people properly, to protect people's rights. But we are not bound to have an open policy where everybody in economic deprivation around the world can come to the United States. I don't think that should be our policy, and it's not.

So I worry about it. I worry about the appearance of it to some. But I'm glad you raised it because it's the first chance I've had since the new order to fully explain it. I am convinced that the people in Haiti are not being physically oppressed. We've got all kinds of ways to monitor that situation there. A returnee, for example, a guy that's taken from Guantanamo and sent back, I would not want on my conscience that that person having fled oppression, anyone that was fleeing oppression, would be victimized upon return.

So I think I can say to you they're not being oppressed. Political refugees, where they're caught up in this political turmoil, are being screened and have been admitted and will continue to be admitted to the United States under our laws. But under the other part of our laws, economic refugees will have to come in under the quotas designated under the law.

So there it is.

North American Free Trade Agreement

Q. Mr. President, I'm an eighth grader, and my dad is concerned that American jobs will be going to Mexico and South America as a result of the American free trade policy. Will this happen?

The President. Well, I think your dad, with all respect, and don't tell him this, is wrong. I happen to believe that a fair trade agreement will result in more American jobs. I happen to think—we're talking here about compassion and economics—I happen to think that if the free trade agreement helps Mexico, as well as helping the United States, it's a good thing.

I don't believe in protection. I believe in fair trade. I believe the NAFTA, the North American free trade agreement, will result in better jobs and more jobs for the United States of America. If we're successful in this NAFTA agreement that your dad asked about and Canada stays in the deal, which I'm sure they will, we're talking about a \$5 trillion market. And this is enormous. And that means prosperity for lots of families.

So please tell your father that we are not talking about exporting American jobs. We're talking about creating new American jobs. If in the process we create a more prosperous Mexico that can do more about its environment, can do more about its standard of living, so much the better. Mexico has a wonderful new President, Carlos Salinas, and he has done wonders with Mexico. I believe that this fair trade agreement not only is in his interest, but what I've got to look after, is it the interests of the United States of America. I am absolutely convinced that it is, because free trade is far better than turning inward to some kind of protection.

I wish I had it on the tip of my tongue the numbers of jobs in Georgia that depend on American exports. It is enormous. And we ought to keep opening, knocking down barriers, like our GATT agreement and getting a successful conclusion to the Uruguay round, knocking down barriers to American trade that will come with the North American free trade agreement.

So I am a free but fair trader. I think protection shrinks markets, and I think our policy will increase jobs and markets.

Listen, thank you all very, very much.

Note: The President spoke at 5:46 p.m. in the school gymnasium. In his remarks, he referred to Pastor Darrell Rice, chairman,

Mount Paran Christian School Board, who acted as moderator for the session. A tape was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

Statement by Press Secretary Fitzwater on House of Representatives Action on Energy Legislation

May 27, 1992

The President is pleased that the House of Representatives, in passing H.R. 776, today made progress toward adopting a sound national energy strategy.

This legislation implements several key elements of the national energy strategy the President presented to Congress in 1991. It promotes energy efficiency and increases the use of renewable and alternative energy while providing much needed alternative minimum tax relief for independent oil and gas producers. This bill would also foster competition in wholesale electricity markets, reform the regulation of natural gas pipe-

lines, and streamline the nuclear powerplant licensing process.

Although pleased with the progress, the President noted that the House bill needlessly locks up some of America's best prospects for domestic oil and natural gas production and restricts State prorationing authority, thereby interfering with the ability of States to properly regulate production of their own gas resources. While there is much work to be done, the President believes this bill forms a welcome bipartisan basis for moving to conference.

Appointment of Eric D.K. Melby as Special Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs

May 27, 1992

The President today announced the appointment of Eric D.K. Melby as Special Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs and Senior Director for International Economic Affairs on the National Security Council staff.

Mr. Melby has served as Director for International Economic Affairs on the NSC staff since September 1987. Prior to joining the NSC staff, he served as Special Assistant to the Under Secretary of State for Economic Affairs (1985–87) and with the Inter-

national Energy Agency in Paris (1980–85). He has also worked for the Agency for International Development and was a Peace Corps volunteer in the Philippines.

Mr. Melby received his B.A. from Haverford College and his M.A. and Ph.D. from the School of Advanced International Studies of the Johns Hopkins University. He is married to Pamela Tripp Melby and has two daughters, Alexandra and Sarah.