

issues of concern for him. I suspect one of them might be campaign funding reform. But I'll let you know how the conversation goes. I'm confident it's going to be friendly and productive. John and I are friends. I remember we debated this issue several times. I think you might have been there.

Q. Do you think he has a mandate?

The President. And I think there's a need to discuss good campaign funding reform, and we will.

Legislative Agenda on Education

Q. How much of a sticking point for Democrats do you think your school choice or voucher program is? And are you willing to give ground in order to get a broader deal?

The President. I think that there is consensus on a couple of things: One, accountability is the cornerstone for reform; and secondly, in order for there to be an accountability system that's got merit, there has to be a consequence. And that's what we're going to discuss. Representative Miller from the State of California understands that accountability is crucial for success. And so does Boehner, and I hope the Senators do. I haven't had a chance to speak specifically with Senator Kennedy yet. I'm about to.

But we've got to measure, and there needs to be flexibility at the local level to make sure that local folks can chart the

path of excellence. But in order for an accountability system to work, there has to be consequences. And I believe one of the most important consequences will be, after a period of time, giving schools the time to adjust and districts time to try different things if they're failing, that parents ought to be given different options.

If children are trapped in schools that will not teach and will not change, there has to be a different consequence. None of us at the Federal Government should try to impose a school voucher plan on States and local jurisdictions. That's not the prerogative of the Federal Government, as far as I'm concerned. But to the extent that the Federal Government spends money, we ought to expect good results and good consequences.

Q. Thank you.

The President. I can't tell you what a pleasure it is.

California Electricity Shortages

Q. [*Inaudible*]*—*to do about the California crisis?

The President. You'll hear something today.

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:20 a.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Representative George Miller. A tape was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

Remarks on Submitting the Education Reform Plan to the Congress *January 23, 2001*

Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Secretary. I appreciate you being here, and it's good to see a former Secretary of Education here. Lamar, thank you very much for coming, surrounded by two fine Texans, I might add. [*Laughter*] You are in good position. I was going to say a rose between two

thorns, but—[*laughter*]*—*Diana Natalicio is not a thorn. She's a fabulous educator in the great State of Texas. Miller, on the other hand—[*laughter*]. At any rate, I'm glad you all are here. It's good to see so many faces of friends, welcome you to our new temporary abode.

This is an important moment for my administration because I spent such a long amount of time campaigning on education reform. It's been the hallmark of my time as Governor of Texas. My focus will be on making sure every child is educated, as the President of the United States, as well.

Both parties have been talking about education reform for quite a while. It's time to come together to get it done so that we can truthfully say, "In America, no child will be left behind, not one single child."

We share a moment of exceptional promise, a new administration, a newly sworn-in Congress. And we have a chance to think anew and act anew. All of us are impatient with the old lines of division. All of us want a different attitude here in the Nation's Capital. All in this room, as well as across the country, know things must change.

We must confront the scandal of illiteracy in America, seen most clearly in high-poverty schools where nearly 70 percent of fourth graders are unable to read at a basic level. We must address the low standing of America test scores amongst industrialized nations in math and science, the very subjects most likely to affect our future competitiveness. We must focus the spending of Federal tax dollars on things that work. Too often, we have spent without regard for results, without judging success or failure from year to year. We must face up to the plague of school violence. With an average of 3 million crimes committed against students and teachers inside public schools every year, that's unacceptable in our country.

Change will not come by adding a few new Federal programs to the old. If we work only at the edges, our influence will be confined to the margins. We need real reform. Change will not come by disdaining or dismantling the Federal role of education. I believe strongly in local control

of schools. I trust local folks to chart the path to excellence.

But educational excellence for all is a national issue and, at this moment, is a Presidential priority. I have seen how real education reform can lift up scores and schools and effectively change lives. And real education reform reflects four basic commitments.

First, children must be tested every year in reading and math—every single year. Not just in the third grade or the eighth grade, but in the third, fourth, fifth, sixth, and seventh and eighth grade.

I oppose a national test, one designed here in Washington, DC, because I know it would undermine local control of schools and undermine State curricula. But States should test each student each year. Without yearly testing, we don't know who is falling behind and who needs help. Without yearly testing, too often we don't find failure until it is too late to fix.

Consider what some parents face under the current system in some States. A child may pass the third grade reading test; he or she gets in the eighth grade and, lo and behold, fails the eighth grade test. And the parent says, "Who do I hold accountable? What happened? My child was successful in the third, and here he or she is in the eighth. What went wrong? How come? Where did the system let me down?"

Too much precious time has elapsed in this case for us to achieve what we want: every child being able to learn. Testing every child every year is the way to stop the cycle. We must care enough to ask how our children are doing. We must have the data to know how poor and minority children are doing, to see if we're closing the achievement gap in America.

Annual measurement is a special concern of mine. I understand it's crucial—it's a crucial part of a solid reform package. But the good news is, I'm not alone. Take, for example, Congressman George Miller from California. Some might think it odd that

the President—a Republican President be mentioning a Democrat, a Member of the House. But he and I have had discussions already. He understands the importance of strong accountability. And we're going to work together to make sure this is an integral part of a reform package coming through the House and Senate.

Secondly, the agents of reform must be schools and school districts, not bureaucracies. Teachers and principals, local and State leaders must have the responsibility to succeed and the flexibility to innovate. One size does not fit all when it comes to educating the children in America. School districts, school officials, educational entrepreneurs should not be hindered by excessive rules and redtape and regulation.

The principle here is a basic one. If local schools do not have the freedom to change, they cannot be held accountable for failing to change. Authority and accountability must be aligned at the local level, or schools will have a convenient excuse for failure: "I would have done it this way but some central office or Washington, DC, caused me to do it another way."

Flexibility in education spending is a special concern of Members of both parties with whom I've discussed. Today I had a good meeting with the chairman of the Education Committee in the House, John Boehner. I know he shares my passion for flexibility at the local level, as do people like Senator Judd Gregg or Tim Hutchinson.

Third, many of our schools, particularly low-income schools, will need help in the transition to higher standards. When a State sets standards, we must help schools achieve those standards. We must measure. We must know. And if a school or school district falls short, we must understand that help should be applied. Senator Jeff Bingaman of New Mexico brought this up to our attention, about the need to make sure there is a transition period between the moment of consequence and the first indication of failure.

Once failing schools are identified, we will help them improve. We will help them help themselves. Our goal is to improve public education. We want success. And when schools are willing to accept the reality that the accountability system points out and are willing to change, we will help them.

Fourth, American children must not be left in persistently dangerous or failing schools. When schools do not teach and will not change, parents and students must have other meaningful options. And when children and teenagers go to school afraid of being threatened or attacked or worse, our society must make it clear, it's the ultimate betrayal of adult responsibility.

Parents and children who have only bad options must eventually get good options if we're to succeed all across the country. There are differences of opinions about what those options should be. I made my opinion very clear in the course of the campaign and will take my opinion to the Hill and let folks debate it.

Today I was pleased to see that Senator Joe Lieberman brought up his plan that includes different options for parents. It's a great place to begin. He and I understand that an accountability system must have a consequence. Otherwise, it's not much of an accountability system.

These four principles are the guides to our education reform package. Yet today I'm offering more than principles; I'm sending a series of specific proposals to the United States Congress, my own blueprint for reform. I want to begin our discussion in detail with the Members of the House and the Senate because I know we need to act by this summer so that the people at the local level can take our initiatives and plan for the school year beginning next fall.

I'm going to listen to suggestions from folks. If somebody has got a better idea, I hope they bring it forward, because the Secretary and I will listen. We've got one thing in mind: an education system that's

Jan. 23 / Administration of George W. Bush, 2001

responsive to the children; an education system that educates every child; an education system that I'm confident can exist; one that's based upon sound, fundamental curriculum; one that starts teaching children to read early in life; one that focuses on systems that do work; one that heralds our teachers and makes sure they've got the necessary tools to teach; but one that says every child can learn. In this great land called America, no child will be left behind.

It's an honor to be here. I'm so thrilled you all came. God bless.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:08 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Secretary of Education Roderick R. Paige, who introduced the President; former Secretary of Education Lamar Alexander; Diana Natalicio, president, University of Texas at El Paso; and Charles Miller, chairman, Meridian Advisors, Ltd.

Letter to Congressional Leaders Transmitting the Education Reform Plan *January 23, 2001*

Dear Mr. Speaker: (Dear Mr. President:)

Enclosed please find my blueprint for nationwide education reform entitled, "No Child Left Behind." I look forward to working with the Congress to ensure that these principles are turned into acceptable legislation that leaves no child behind.

Sincerely,

GEORGE W. BUSH

NOTE: Identical letters were sent to J. Dennis Hastert, Speaker of the House of Representatives, and Richard B. Cheney, President of the Senate. This letter was released on the White House Web site.

Remarks Prior to a Meeting With Bipartisan Congressional Leaders and an Exchange With Reporters *January 24, 2001*

The President. I'm honored to host the leaders of the Senate and the House. I want to thank you all for coming. I really, really appreciate it. This is the sixth meeting I've had with legislators since I've been sworn in. It is a habit I intend to keep, because I understand the best way to advance an agenda for the country is to work together.

I hope people are now beginning to realize that when I said the executive branch is willing to work with the legislative branch and do what's right for the country, it's

not hollow words; it's what I believe we need to do.

Expectations are that we can't come together to get things done. Our mission is to exceed the expectations. So I want to thank you all so much for coming. We're going to have a frank dialog about a lot of issues, and I'm going to start by reminding that we know the difference between the executive branch and the legislative branch, but I do believe the President and the Vice President can play a part, a strong part, in helping advance an American agenda.