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Statement on the Report of the White House Office on Faith-Based and Community Initiatives
August 16, 2001

On January 29, 2001, I signed an Executive order creating Centers for Faith-Based and Community Initiatives in the Departments of Health and Human Services, Housing and Urban Development, Labor, Justice, and Education. I charged each Center to conduct a Department-wide audit and identify all existing barriers to the participation of faith-based and community organizations in Federal social service programs.

Over the past 6 months, five Cabinet Offices for Faith-Based and Community Initiatives have examined administrative procedures, programs, and policies. Today the White House Office on Faith-Based and Community Initiatives reported their findings.

The report, entitled "Unlevel Playing Field," highlights the funding gap between the Government and the grassroots. It points out significant barriers organizations face in obtaining Federal support for their compassionate work. And it shows clearly how much work needs to be done to mobilize the armies of compassion.

The Cabinet Centers have done vitally important work in examining Federal social service programs. We now see exactly what kind of obstacles stand in the way of a more compassionate America. Our emphasis must always remain on getting compassionate results. We look forward to addressing these inequities through legislation, administrative action, and education. Americans in need are depending upon it.

NOTE: The Executive order was published in the *Federal Register* at 66 FR 8497.

Statement on the Death of Representative Floyd Spence
August 16, 2001

I am deeply saddened by the loss of my friend Floyd Spence. He was a leader of great courage and determination, especially since his double-lung transplant surgery 13 years ago. As a Congressman, he will be remembered as a true friend of the men and women in our armed services and a steadfast servant of his fellow South Carolinians. Laura and I send our prayers to his wife, Debbie, and Floyd's children and grandchildren.

The President's Radio Address
August 18, 2001

Good morning. This month, in my travels around the country, I am talking about values that make communities strong and our Nation unique. One of those essential American values is compassion.

A little more than a week ago, I visited a Habitat for Humanity building site, where volunteers were helping a family find the dignity of owning a home. Every community offers its own examples of service:

shelters for battered women and children; crisis pregnancy centers; treatment for drug addiction; care for the homeless; hope for those in prison and their families. The groups behind these caring efforts have advantages Government social programs often can't match: the idealism of volunteers and intimate knowledge of the communities they serve and values stronger than the problems they face. A compassionate Government should find ways to support their good works.

Unfortunately, Government often treats charities and community groups as rivals instead of partners, and this week came some new evidence. Soon after I took office, I instructed my Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives to examine Federal rules and regulations for discrimination against community and faith-based groups. Five Cabinet agencies now have issued their findings. Their report, entitled "Unlevel Playing Field," documents a Government bias against faith- and community-based organizations, a bias that exists even when constitutional concerns about church and state have been addressed.

Government administrators restrict religious groups from even applying for funding simply because they are religious. They place artificial limits on what programs and how much funding faith-based groups can apply for. In some cases, they restrict civil rights these faith-based and community-based groups enjoy under Federal law. This is wrong.

Next Wednesday will mark the fifth anniversary of a bipartisan charitable choice legislation. This law says faith-based organizations should be able to compete for some contracts to provide social services. But even this limited charitable choice law has been almost entirely ignored by many Federal administrators. They've done little to help or require State and local governments to involve faith-based providers, as the law requires.

I've appointed advocates in five Cabinet agencies to end this bias, and soon. My Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives is also working closely with groups to help them know their civil rights, know how to effectively apply for funds so their good works can be expanded. We must also broaden charitable choice to more social service areas, removing barriers of discrimination against the participation of faith and community groups. By doing so, we will welcome them to more fully confront the poverty and hopelessness that remain in America.

The House of Representatives took a key step in leveling the playing field by passing my Faith-Based and Community Initiative, which broadens charitable choice and encourages charitable giving. I applaud the bipartisan House vote and urge the Senate to pass that legislation, with the leadership from Senators Joe Lieberman and Rick Santorum. The needs are real. The time to act is as soon as Congress returns to work after Labor Day.

If you agree, let your Senator know, if you see him or her during the congressional recess. Faith-based and community groups cannot replace the work of Government, but with Government's help, they can serve many more people. And my administration is committed to providing that help.

Compassion is one of the values that builds communities of character, because every community of character must be a community of service.

Thank you for listening.

NOTE: The address was recorded at 9:45 a.m. on August 16 at the Bush Ranch in Crawford, TX, for broadcast at 10:06 a.m. on August 18. The transcript was made available by the Office of the Press Secretary on August 17 but was embargoed for release until the broadcast. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of this address.