

Remarks on Proposed Charity Aid, Recovery, and Empowerment Legislation

April 11, 2002

Elaine, thank you very much. I appreciate the job you're doing. And thanks for that kind introduction. I want to welcome you all here to the White House, the people's house.

It's an honor to welcome those who have heeded a great call, to love your neighbor just like you'd like to be loved yourself. It's a universal call, and it's a call that has been applicable throughout history. It's really needed right now. And so I want to thank you for coming to help discuss a very important issue, an important piece of legislation, a part of making sure the future of our country is hopeful for everybody who lives here.

Part of the reason you're here is so we can unleash your talents and energy on the Hill. [Laughter] And I appreciate your willingness to be practical in Washington, because there is a piece of legislation that I hope you work on. It's an urgent time for you to act, and I think it's going to help America. This really isn't about any political party, I want to assure you. It's a way to make sure America is as hopeful as we possibly can be.

I want to thank all those who are here on stage with me, besides the Secretary of Labor. Thank you for coming. I appreciate you being soldiers in the armies of compassion.

I want to thank Senator Santorum, who is the author of the legislation I'm going to talk about, and Senator Brownback from the State of Kansas for coming. As the author of the bill, I thought you might have gotten a better seat. [Laughter] Sam got your seat because he was on time. [Laughter] I'm still for your bill. [Laughter] Both Senators are fine people and good Members. And I want to thank you all for coming.

I appreciate Cardinal McCarrick for being here as well, my longtime friend. And I want to thank you all.

I don't know if you've met my confidant, Jim Towey, who is here. He works in our Faith-Based Office. There he is. Hi, Jim. How are you? Jim is a remarkable soul who I was able to convince to leave the private sector to come and work. And if you've got any complaints about how charitable choice is working or suggestions about how to make it work better, he's available. His job is to work with the faith community to make America a better place. He was Mother Teresa's lawyer, worked for Democrats and Republicans. This is not a political guy, you'll be pleased to hear. And he'll do his job in a way that will make you proud.

The events of September the 11th were an incredibly dark moment. But the thing I'm most proud about is, through the darkness, our character shined. This is really an unbelievable country we live in. It was heroes who risked their lives, and Americans responded with incredible generosity. I mean, our heart was united with those who lost their—those whose families grieved. It was a remarkable moment, it really was. It was a test of our character. People prayed. All faiths were praying for our country. People grieved together. All the racial issues went away because we all realized we were Americans, with everything at stake—everything at stake.

The organizations directly related to the relief efforts received \$2 billion during that quick period of time. The goodness of the country is overcoming the evil done to us.

We're overcoming the evil done to us, as well, through military action. And we will take action. I want to assure you, we don't seek revenge; we seek justice. And I believe that if we're patient and resolved

and united, that out of this evil will come lasting peace, peace in regions of the world that might appear now that cannot be peaceful. I believe we can achieve peace by being strong and to lead the world toward peace. Peace is the cornerstone of this Nation's foreign policy; it's what we aim for.

It's going to be—there are going to be some tough moments achieving that peace. But you need to know that we're going to be plenty tough when we need to be tough. And we're going to stay focused on keeping our homeland safe, hunting down barbaric killers one by one. That's our call. History has called us into action, and we must and we will respond.

But we need to do more than just make the world more secure. We need to make the world and our country a better place. In order to really battle evil, we must be more than just a military might. We must be a—we must show our might through our compassion for our fellow citizens.

I gave a speech in Monterrey, Mexico, the other day, talking about how this Nation will help in the development of nations who are poor and who suffer. I was proud to give that speech.

At home, though, we also have got to recognize even though we're a rich and powerful nation, there are pockets of despair and hopelessness. There are too many people in America who wonder whether or not America is meant for them. And so part of our fight to make our country more secure must be one also to make the country a better place for all of us. And the place to start is understanding that the country can be changed one heart, one soul, one conscience at a time.

One person can't do everything, but a person can do something to help somebody. And your jobs as social entrepreneurs and people deeply committed to our future is to gather that love and compassion which exists. And you're doing a great job of doing that, and I want to thank you.

My job is to continue to address the spirit of the country, is to call upon the best, and I will do so. I will remind people, if they want to fight evil, they must do some good. And it's also to recognize problems when they exist and work to solve those problems, to eliminate the hurdles and barriers that prevent the neighborhood healers and helpers from doing their jobs.

The past 7 months have shown how much our country depends on charities. Yet today, America's charities face very difficult times. It's ironic to me that in the immediate aftermath of September the 11th, we responded, and yet, there are too many charities hurting. Part of it is because of a recession; I recognize that. Part of it is that a lot of money has gone into those charities directly involved with the relief efforts. And that's good, but it's not good enough for the future of our country that many charities suffer today, and we're going to do something about it.

If there is any doubt, let me just quote a few statistics to you to make my point. America's Second Harvest, the country's largest hunger relief charity, reports that more than 80 percent of its affiliates face increased demands for food, while 40 percent have seen a significant drop in food donations and funding. That's a problem.

In Northern California, the United Way is facing an unprecedented fundraising shortfall for 2001. Giving was 14 percent below the year before. That's a problem. The group's leader said this: "I don't think we've ever had a dropoff of this magnitude. It affects our ability to serve our community." And I agree.

The United Way in Orlando was forced to lay off 17 percent of its staff in February because it fell significantly short of its fundraising goal. Many people in this room, many people whose sole purpose is to help an American in need, are confronting greater needs with fewer resources. And our Government must recognize the problem and deal with it in a constructive way.

First, as I mentioned, my job is to call upon Americans to love a neighbor like they'd like to be loved themselves, to understand that being a citizen is more than just a spectator; it's a participant in your community. And I will continue to—I will continue to call upon Americans to serve. And I will continue to talk about the pockets of despair and hopelessness, so that it is clear to those who may be comfortable that they have a—there are some who aren't and we need their help.

And I'm going to make sure that our Government passes legislation that does a couple of things: one, that encourages more private sector giving, that makes giving to the armies of compassion a more profitable venture for the individual by allowing the people to deduct from their income taxes all charitable gifts.

The issue is for those who do not itemize. They don't get to deduct their gifts, and we ought to allow that. We ought to encourage giving by allowing the non-itemizers—listen, charitable giving is important for all of the people in our country, not just the wealthy. Everybody ought to be encouraged to give.

What's called the "CARE Act," the "Charity Aid, Recovery, and Empowerment Act," sponsored by Rick Santorum and Joe Lieberman, have this as a part—as a core part of the bill. It is an important part of the legislation, and I urge you all to take your message to the Finance Committee in the United States Senate that has something to do with this type of legislation. [Laughter] I'm sure they'll respond.

You probably know that the House is passing a good piece of legislation already. J.C. Watts and Tony Hall were the sponsors. It passed. And now, so the focus—that's why the focus is on the United States Senate.

The "CARE Act" as well recognizes—oh, by the way, just so the people understand the extent of what we're talking about, 84 million Americans don't itemize and therefore don't have the opportunity

to deduct. And we really believe—and I know you agree with me—that changing the tax laws to provide an incentive for the 84 million could and probably will substantially raise the amount of giving in America, which will be really helpful and hopeful and positive.

The other thing the Federal Government must not do is worry about the role of faith-based programs in providing help to people in need. Let me put it a little more bluntly: The Federal Government should not discriminate against faith. There must be a level playing field available. When we have Federal monies, people should be allowed to access that money without having to lose their mission or change their mission.

We need to know that in our society, faith can move people in ways that Government can't. I mean, Government can write checks, but it can't put hope in people's hearts or a sense of purpose in people's lives. That is done by people who have heard a call and who act on faith and are willing to share that faith. And I'm not talking about a particular religion. I'm talking about all religions under the Almighty God.

And we should not fear those kind of programs: programs where someone's addiction may be more likely cured because of faith; programs that are willing to go into the prison systems—you know, programs that say, "Well, stamping license plates is okay, but it may not change somebody's life for the better"; programs in which they surround a child with love because of faith and provide a blueprint based upon—a future based upon love for a child. That's what we ought to recognize happens.

Listen, some of the greatest welfare programs in America are on the street corners of inner-city America in a house of worship. Some of the best places where lost souls find hope are in our synagogues. Mosques provide great hope for people who wonder whether America is meant for them. And our Government must recognize the power

of these programs. These programs don't have giant bureaucracies and endless rules in which they become entangled. They keep their focus on their mission. They don't keep hours. [Laughter] They're open when needed.

There's been some anticrime programs based upon faith, like Brother Rivers, out of Boston, Massachusetts, who has done a fantastic job.

And so this act recognizes that part of the mosaic of aid and comfort in America comes from the faith community and that we shouldn't fear faith, we ought to welcome it in our society. I urge that the "CARE Act" get passed out of the Senate by Memorial Day.

I want to thank the neighborhood healers who are here. One of the things I brag about is the entrepreneurial spirit in America. But people have got to understand, the entrepreneurial spirit just doesn't pertain to starting a business. Our entrepreneurial spirit also pertains to helping people. And one of the great joys of being a candidate and eventually President is the opportunity to see these little programs that start up because somebody has heard a call. I mean, it's an unbelievable part of the fabric of our Nation. Somebody has heard the—said, "I think I'm going to take my energy and my talent into a neighborhood where nobody else has dared walk," and have changed people's lives.

And it is amazing what happens, amazing what happens when you start off—Brother Lusk here started off with—I don't even think—well, it might have been a building; it looked like a building. [Laughter] But

now he's got this magnificent place in inner-city Philadelphia, because he had a vision and a dream to make something happen.

But it is the effect—and why I feel so strongly about this mission that we're all on is because when that one soul who decides to do something changes a heart, it is likely that heart that's been changed is willing to change another heart. And it's that effect that will have an incredibly profound effect on all of us.

In order to fight evil, we must do good. It is the gathering momentum of millions of acts of kindness and compassion which define the true face of America, that shows what this country is truly made out of. On the one hand, we are strong and tough militarily, but on the other hand, that is—we are a nation that is compassionate and decent and caring. And no evil, no terrorist can extinguish that light.

God bless.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:33 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Secretary of Labor Elaine Chao, who introduced the President; Theodore Cardinal McCarrick, Archbishop of Washington; Rev. Eugene Rivers, pastor, Azusa Christian Community, and cofounder, Boston Ten Point Coalition; and Rev. Herbert Lusk II, pastor, Greater Exodus Baptist Church, and founder/president, People for People, Inc. The President also referred to S. 1924, entitled "Charity Aid, Recovery, and Empowerment Act of 2002," and H.R. 7, entitled "Community Solutions Act of 2001."

Statement on Senate Action on Election Reform Legislation

April 11, 2002

I commend the Senate for passing an election reform bill and bringing us a step closer to enacting legislation this year. I

look forward to working with conferees to make sure the reforms reflect the principles outlined by the bipartisan Ford/Carter