

Remarks at the White House Conference on Faith-Based and Community Initiatives in Los Angeles, California
March 3, 2004

Thank you all for coming. Thanks for coming. Let's see, you've been here since 8:30—[laughter]—all you need is another speech. [Laughter]

I'm honored that here in the City of Angels, Mr. Mayor, in the City of Angels there are so many people doing God's work. And let me put your mind at ease. We're talking about healing our Nation; we're not talking politics. We're all here to do everything in our power to save lives. And by saving a life, we improve our community. And as we improve communities, we improve our Nation.

I'm here to thank you for hearing that call. Actually, I shouldn't be thanking you; I should be thanking a higher power for giving you the call. You're what we call social entrepreneurs. An entrepreneur is somebody who is willing to take risk, take a risk for a reward. And I just met with some social entrepreneurs. I'll be sharing some of the stories in a minute.

These stories really always lift my soul because it reminds me of the true strength of America, the fact that there are people from all walks of life, all faiths willing to take time out of their lives to make somebody else's life better. That's the true strength of the country. We talk about our military might or we talk about our wallets, but the true strength of the country is the fact that there are decent, honorable citizens who would like to love their neighbor just like they'd like to be loved themselves.

And so here we are at the Conference on Faith-Based and Community Initiatives. That's a pretty fancy word for our Government trying to tell you that we're trying to change the culture in Washington, DC, to welcome people of faith in helping meet social objectives. That's what this means. That's a long title for, the hope and healing of faith-based services are an integral part

of working together to make America a more hopeful place for all. And it is essential for those of us in Government to recognize the vital work that faith-based programs are able to do.

I always—"always"—sometimes say Government can hand out money—and I'm going to talk about some of the money we're trying to hand out—but Government can't put hope in a person's heart or a sense of purpose in a person's life. That is done by loving individuals who spread their love. That's what happens. And it seems like to me it makes sense for those of us who are honored to hold office to gather that strength, rally that strength, call upon that strength, and, most importantly, support that strength from the halls of Government.

And so there's a practical aspect to this conference, and that is for members of my administration and others to come and explain how you can access the Federal monies. There is a—hopefully, you walk away from here hearing a commitment from the Government. And that is, if you decide to interface with taxpayers' money, you won't have to change your mission. See, I believe this: It's hard to be a faith-based program if you can't practice your faith.

And I fully recognize there are a lot of social entrepreneurs who are nervous about interfacing with Government. What we're working on is to change the culture, to recognize that there are results, fantastic results being achieved, and that those of us who are policymakers must welcome those who are achieving the good results of the work of faith.

And so thanks for coming. I'm honored that Alphonso is with me. He is the Acting Secretary of HUD. It means he hasn't—I knew him in Dallas; he was running the housing authority there in Dallas. He's a

very capable citizen. He's "Acting" because the Senate hasn't approved him yet. I'm sure they will. But he's going to do a fine job. I'll talk about some of the record of HUD here in a minute, about making sure that Federal money coming out of HUD is—that faith-based programs can access that money.

John Walters is here with me. He's the Director of the National Drug Control Policy. Where are you, John? Somewhere. There he is. Thanks for coming, John. His job is to work on the demand side of the equation, to work with people to encourage kids not to use drugs. No better place to do that, by the way, than faith-based programs. His job is to work as well on interdicting drugs, to disrupt the supply. His job as well—and we're going to talk a little bit about it later on—is to work with those whose bodies and souls are consumed by drug and alcohol, to save those lives as well.

I appreciate Charlie Curie here. He's the administration of the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services of the Department of Health and Human Services. The Department of Health and Human Services spends a lot of Federal money, and a lot of that Federal money needs to be accessed by the faith community as you work to achieve social objectives.

I want to thank the mayor. Mr. Mayor—the fact that he has taken time out of his day to come and see little old me—[*laughter*]*—*more importantly, to see you is a testimony to his understanding that the faith community in Los Angeles can help him do his job better; that people of all walks of life—thank you, Mayor, for coming. And he brought his son, Jackson. Jackson is known as "Mr. President." He just won the class election. It's a pretty good title, Jackson. [*Laughter*]

I know there's a lot of mayors here and county supervisors. I want to thank the mayors for coming. I want to thank the county supervisors for coming. It is really essential that local officials tap into the

great strength of the faith community, doesn't matter what faith, by the way—all faiths. All faiths have heard a universal call, and the idea of capturing this strength to help your communities become better places for all citizens is good public policy. It makes a lot of sense. I see the mayors shaking their heads. Thanks for coming.

I'm proud of my friend Bishop Charles Blake, is with us. Thank you for coming. Reverend Chip Murray as well, Reverend Murray. You know, thinking of these two great pastors reminds me of the story about the guy who's giving the sermon, about halfway through, and a person pops up in the first pew and he screams, "Use me, Lord, use me." And the reverend keeps on preaching. The next Sunday he gets up there again, another stemwinder. The guy screams, "Use me, Lord, use me." So finally, he comes to him and he says, "Fine, we'll be glad to use you. Why don't you scrape and paint all the pews?" The next Sunday he's preaching, the guy pops up and says, "Use me, Lord, use me—but only in an advisory capacity." [*Laughter*] These two guys—these two men are not advisers; they're doers. They're running vibrant churches that are changing lives.

I'm proud that John Bryant, the CEO of Operation Hope, is with us. Cecelia, thanks for being here as well. Thank you, John.

Bishop Zavala is with us—Bishop, thank you for coming—from the Archdiocese of Los Angeles. There's a lot of great faiths in our country. Faith-based programs were initiated by a lot of faiths, but the Catholic Church has always been on the forefront of faith-based programs. The Catholic Church is—when you think about whether Government shouldn't interface with faith, I mean, the Catholic Church has been providing hospitals and schools, and they've been making a big difference in neighborhoods. I'm honored you're here.

I appreciate Robert Schuller coming—I'm honored you're here—from the Crystal Cathedral. They even beamed his program

into Midland, Texas. [*Laughter*] Thanks for coming, sir. You made a huge difference.

I appreciate the Hillel Hebrew Academy Choir. Thank you all for coming.

When I landed at Air Force One, one of the things I try to do is to pick out a local hero and to herald, in this case, her achievement toward making this country a better place. Charlotte Van Fleet is with us. Charlotte is probably humiliated I introduced her in front of so many people. She's a mentor. She mentors young children. She heard a call. Oh, it probably doesn't sound like much, except it does to the child she mentors. And she is—her spirit is strong. She's saving a life. You teach a child to read, you've saved a life. The new civil right, by the way, in the 21st century, is teaching somebody to read. You can't accomplish much in America unless you can read. And here's a soul who is willing to take time out of her life to mentor a child.

The reason I introduced Charlotte is not only to hold her up as an example but to call upon others in this community of Los Angeles and across the State of California to listen to your heart and to realize you can make a significant difference in our society by teaching one child to read. She teaches a lot of child to—she mentors a lot of children. But all you've got to do is, if you want to be a part of this world, an active part of the world, is to do what Charlotte Van Fleet has done and to make a difference in people's lives in a positive way. I'm honored you came out to the airport. Thanks for coming, appreciate you being here.

The reason the Faith-Based Initiative is so important is because, in spite of our plenty, there are a lot of people in our society with shattered lives. In spite of the fact that we've got large bankrolls and wealth, beyond imagination for many people in the world, in our own society there's darkness and loneliness and addiction and wonder—wonder whether their life is worth

anything. And that's the reality of the society in which we live today.

And all of us who have got a responsibility in our society must work to do something about it, must work to address those seemingly intractable problems. But those problems can be solved. They can be helped. But sometimes we have to try a different route. Sometimes the old way hasn't worked. Sometimes the prison system needs a little different look to it. Sometimes the drug and alcohol programs need a different curriculum. Sometimes the probation offices, which do fine work in our communities, need a little boost, need a little help in their mission. And that's what we're here to talk about.

We're really here to talk about miracles. And they happen in all kinds of ways in our society, if you really step back and take a look. I talked to—I heard some people who I think would say, "My life has changed because of a miracle. God loves you, and I love you. And you can count on both of us." This is a powerful message that people who wonder about their future can hear—powerful message. And it's a message that a lot of people can spread.

The sample of folks I talked to today is—I'm confident represented the crowd here, and there's some really powerful stories. Ralph Plumb—he is the president of the Union Rescue Mission. He described what it's like to provide a place of love in the midst of such despair. And he said it's dark in the neighborhood in which the Rescue Mission exists. On the other hand, I could tell from how he talked, inside the building, there is a radiance that was changing people's lives. I appreciate Ralph. Ralph talked about wandering the world as a missionary, I guess is the right way to describe, and here he is in inner-city Los Angeles providing shelter for the homeless and hope for the addicted and love for the lonely.

And then there's Pastor John Baker, the founder of Celebrate Recovery. Big John

is with us. He is a—he and I shared something in common along with somebody else I'm going to introduce. We used to drink too much. And our hearts changed, and then we quit. That is a tried and true formula. [Laughter] The problem is, Government is not good at changing hearts. But people like John Baker is—been good about it and successful doing that.

Reverend Carmen Warner-Robbins is with us, who formed Welcome Home Ministries. She formed it. It's a ministry. She's a social entrepreneur. When I said she formed it, that's what an entrepreneur does; they found things. She's a founder. She decided she wanted to make a difference in somebody's life, so she started a program to welcome women from the prison systems and then convinced women to go back into the prison systems to change hearts. And it's a powerful lesson of what one person can do.

I'm sure I'm looking at hundreds of social entrepreneurs here as well, people who have started ministries because they heard a calling. I met with Mark Borovitz and Harold Rothstein and Harriet Rossetto. Harriet is married to Mark. Mark is now a rabbi. He was in prison. He was addicted. He told me the story about how the rabbi in the prison got a hold of Mark and said, "I'm never going to forget you. I love you. I want to help you." And so Mark runs into Harriet, his wife, who has started a—she, too, is a social entrepreneur, by the way, at Beit T'Shuvah, program for addicts. She sees him in the prison. He's kind of a—probably feeling his oats pretty good about that time. [Laughter] She says, "Fine, why don't you—if you want to do something constructive, why don't you just show up at our program?" So he did, 3 years later. And now he's the rabbi of the program. She's the CEO.

And they helped save Harold's life. I can't properly put into words what he said. I'm just telling you, the guy was lost, and now he is found, thanks to these two good souls. Harold said, "I cannot say enough

about the program and what I continue to learn here." That's what he said. And he said, "How can I repay someone for saving my life?" You know what he's done? He saved somebody else's life, is how you repay someone for saving your life. He's a part of the program too. I want to thank you all for coming.

Finally, I met Leticia Chavez-Paulette. Leticia was a drug addict in prison. She was a single mom. She lost custody of her child because of her addiction. And she got involved with Celebrate Recovery, and it changed her life. And she has rebuilt her life. She said, "to see how God forgives me, and therefore I could forgive myself." That's what she said, powerful experience for her, "knowing that it was His grace that kept me alive for such a time as this." That's Leticia's words. This is a person who was lost in prison, a drug addict who lost her family, and now she's here with the ability to say those words with clarity. And where's little Isaac? There he is. And Isaac, her son, is back with his mama.

These stories are being written every day in America. Every single day this is happening. We never hear half of them or any—I never, but—I barely hear any of them, but I just know they're happening. You know they're happening because you're on the frontline of making them happen.

When you hear these kind of stories and you're in a position like I'm in or the mayor's in or somebody else is in, in elected office, you say, "Well, gosh, how can we spread—how can we help make this happen more?" It's really a practical application, it seems to me, of taxpayers' money to try to encourage this to happen more.

And there's been a big debate about this, of course, because we never want—we want to make sure there's a separation of church and state. The state should never be the church, and the church should never be the state. That's clear—that's clear. But if we have a social objective and you've

got people of faith helping achieve that objective, doesn't it make sense for the Government to not fear faith but to welcome faith in meeting common goals?

And there's a resource issue. We talked to the good folks that I just introduced, and I think if you ask them their biggest problem they'd say, "Well, we need to expand. There's more souls to be saved. We need a little extra space for our rescue mission." And the Government has got resources. We spend a lot of money on social welfare programs. And so what I'm here to talk to you today is to—how to make sure that you have a chance to access that money. You can access that money without losing your mission.

Now, there are some rules. You can't use Federal money to proselytize. We want to make sure the church and the state stay separate. But you can use Federal money to help a person quit drinking. You can use Federal money to help a person find housing. You can't, if you're a faith-based organization, say, "only Methodists allowed." You know, you can say, "All drunks are welcome." [Laughter] But you can't pick and choose a person's religion. In other words, there are some certain guidelines necessary to make sure that we don't violate the rules of church and state.

But it is essential that when it comes to grantmaking, we asked a simple question: Can you achieve the objective? What are the results? Too often in Government it is, you know, what is the religion you practice, and if you practice, you can't access the money. That's not the right question. The right question is, can you save lives? And if you can, in my judgment, you ought to be able to access Federal money through the grantmaking process.

And so I got a little frustrated in Washington because I couldn't get the bill passed out of the Congress. They were arguing process. I kept saying, "Wait a minute, there are entrepreneurs all over our country who are making a huge difference in somebody's life; they're helping

us meet a social objective." Congress wouldn't act, so I signed an Executive order—that means I did it on my own. It says we're going to open up billions of dollars in grant money competition to faith-based charities. And that's what's happening, and that's what we're here to talk about today. That's why we're having these conferences. We've had 11 conferences so far. I spoke to the second one and now the 11th one. And this is a way for those of us in the administration that are focused on this to come and explain to people how best to access this money, how best to reach out for it.

I'm a person who believes in results; I think you can hear that in my voice. So the other day I called together Cabinet Ministers—Alphonso was one—I said, "Well, show me what you've done thus far. Have you been able to get Federal grant money out the door? If there's an issue, I need to know about it."

You see, I set up a faith-based office in the White House. You're about to hear from Jim Towey who's the—runs the faith-based office. He's an incredible guy. By the way, Towey was Mother Teresa's lawyer. [Laughter] And that's a pretty litigious society when Mother Teresa needs a lawyer, isn't it? [Laughter] But his job is to make sure these conferences get set up and to have an office to answer people's questions about how to get involved in the grantmaking process. My job is to get the initiative going, is to stay on it, not yield, and then to ask the questions to the people responsible for getting the money out the door, how are we doing.

And so I'm going to give you some of the results. In a year, there was \$144-million increase in the amount that HUD and HHS grant dollars were granted to faith-based organizations. So from last year to this year, there's a \$144-million increase; the two agencies granted \$1.1 billion to faith-based groups in 2003. That's a measurable number. It's not bad. It's a pretty good start. There's just a lot of—there's

just a lot more money there. And so I keep talking to these—to Alphonso and Tommy and others in my administration—that would be Tommy Thompson. I said, “We’re going to watch you carefully. Make sure your faith-based offices that you have set up in your cabinet move the money out in a way that is—that honors the Executive order I signed.”

There are some issues with the money moving out, by the way. Some of the grant money is what they call formula-based money, and so it immediately goes to the State. And it’s essential that all States have faith-based offices so that money that comes from the State to the city. For example, Mayor Hahn will have the flexibility to use it to empower faith-based programs to help him and the city of Los Angeles meet objectives. The State of California, in my judgment, should have a very viable, strong faith-based office so that all Federal money becomes more available to the faith programs.

Last year at HUD, more than half of the Section 202 funding for elderly housing went to faith-based programs. That’s a great idea, if you think about it, that if a church or a synagogue or a mosque is able to take elderly housing money and help meet the needs of parishioners or people in their congregations.

We’ve seen an increase in the number of first-time recipients. That’s one of the things I wanted to make sure that was happening at the Federal level. It’s important to measure and to make sure that objectives are being met. And what—really what we don’t want is all the money going to two or three organizations. That doesn’t make any sense. If part of the objective is to—part of the objective is to encourage startups, to use an economic term, is to encourage people who have got an idea and they think they can make a difference in somebody’s life to feel confident and bold about their vision.

And again, for Alphonso—I guess he’s the reason she introduced me; she seems

to be doing quite well—that over \$113 million in grants out of HUD went to first-time recipients, small amounts of money to small programs to help them get started.

Once this program—to give you a sense of the new grant money, to hopefully inspire those of you there who are wondering whether this makes sense for you or not—it’s called the Fishing School in DC. I went there as the President when I was first elected. It’s a little school in the heart of a tough neighborhood. It’s really an old house. And a fellow got inspired and said, “I want to provide a safe haven, a place of love for children who don’t have anywhere to go after school.” And it is a faith-based program. It is based upon God’s love. As one of the teachers told me, kids need prayer. Faith teaches them that God can do anything. That’s kind of the motto for the program, in a way. It’s their operating credo. And they’re now recipients of Federal money.

In other words, it’s a—what I’m telling you is you don’t have to be a mega church or a monster synagogue or a massive—you just don’t have to be—big helps, but what we really want to make sure as well—and I hope this seminar helps you understand that, and if it’s not, I need to know—is whether or not the money is actually going to help startups as well and smaller organizations that really do feel like they’re lost out there in trying to access grant money.

Again, I want to reiterate one point. I’m sure there’s some reticence, and I would be reticent too, if I were you, at first. Why do I want to be involved with the Federal Government, is the question you’re asking. [Laughter] No, really, really, when you think about it, sometimes with that sort of money comes all kinds of restrictions, some of it having to do with whether you can practice your faith or not, some of it having to do with the size of your building or whatever, the temperature of the room in which you’re supposed to be doing your work. [Laughter]

And as I told you, we're changing the culture. It's hard in Washington. This is a fairly heavy lift for a lot of people who are used to bureaucracies, as you can imagine. But one of the things that I can assure you, our intention is to make sure that you're able to practice your faith as you fulfill your mission. I told you earlier, you can't be faith-based if you can't practice your faith. That's pretty practical.

But we are going to work. The offices we've set up in these different Departments, Labor, Agriculture, HHS, and HUD—as a matter of fact, agriculture secretaries from California came in the other day. I said, "What do you need a faith-based office for?" If you happen to live in rural California, there's a lot of housing money coming out of the Agriculture Department, by the way. It started off probably from migrant worker programs. There's nothing better, by the way, than to have a faith-based organization be involved with housing. It's a natural extension of a ministry from any faith, it seems like to me.

But we're working hard to change the culture. We're working hard to make sure the regulations are not onerous. We're working hard to encourage the entrepreneurial spirit as opposed to discourage it.

I do want to talk about a couple of special initiatives, and then I'm sure you're spoken out. [Laughter] I guess that means you listen to too many speeches. But one of the special initiatives I'm working with Congress on, I think we're making pretty good—I know we're making good progress, is addiction. A few people use a lot of drugs in our society, and therefore, it seems to make sense to focus resources on the few.

And this is a program that the Congress has responded to, with about \$100 million in the appropriations process, starting today, as a matter of fact. Money is now available to fund patients who then can take their funding to the program that meets their needs. It's a little different ap-

proach, when you think about it. A lot of times in the past, we've funded the program. Now we've decided to fund the addict and let the addict choose his or her best place to find what works. And so for those of you who are in the drug counseling, alcohol treatment programs, there's some new opportunities to go help find people to help you save lives.

Mentoring programs—I've always felt that the toughest, toughest pull for a citizen of our country is to have your mom and dad in prison. And we need mentoring programs that will mentor young children whose mom or dad is in prison. No better place to mentor a child than in a faith-based program, by the way; no better place where the word "love" actually rings true. And there's mentoring program available there.

In my State of the Union, I talked about 600,000 inmates that will be released from prison. I really think we need to think differently about how we help save lives of people in prison and coming out of prison. It seems like to me that—listen, the probation officers of your community work hard, and many of them are really good at what they do. But it seems to me that a wise approach to prisoner reentry is through a faith-based program, where the prisoner is able to be welcomed by a person of faith as a—as part of the probation experience or parole experience, and that the faith-based program have the ability, for example, to access worker trainer money. And so you can have a person come, be loved, be welcomed, be nourished, and then they—practical application of Federal dollars to help that person gain a skill to work. It's what the faith initiative is meant to do. It's meant to take the true strength of this country and help save lives.

And I want to thank you. I'm really here to thank you for what you're doing for setting such a good example. You're soldiers in the armies of compassion. You're people who have put on the mighty, mighty armor

of the Almighty in order to save lives, one person at a time—one person at a time.

See, the society we live in can be changed. I've seen it change. I've heard the stories of those who have been changed and are changing it. And it's that—it is that massive effort by people of concern and people of love to save lives which will change our Nation for the better. In the midst of our plenty, there's darkness, but there's always hope. In the midst of plenty, there is sadness and loneliness, but there's always a soul to put your arm around you and say, "I love you."

I'm here to call—to thank you for what you do. I'm here to spell out a practical strategy by those of us who are involved with the dispensing of taxpayers' money to help nourish the armies of compassion and to make sure this great country of ours, the greatest on the face of the Earth, holds

out hope for every single citizen who is a citizen of our land.

Thank you for what you do. May God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:06 p.m. at the Los Angeles Convention Center. In his remarks, he referred to Mayor James K. Hahn of Los Angeles, CA; Alphonso R. Jackson, Acting Secretary, Department of Housing and Urban Development; Bishop Charles E. Blake, West Angeles Church of God in Christ; Rev. Cecil L. "Chip" Murray, senior minister, First A.M.E. Church, Los Angeles; Rev. Dr. Cecelia Williams Bryant, wife of Rev. John Richard Bryant; Bishop Gabino Zavala, Auxiliary Bishop, Archdiocese of Los Angeles; Dr. Robert H. Schuller, pastor, Crystal Cathedral; and Tom Lewis, founder, the Fishing School.

Remarks at a Bush-Cheney Reception in Los Angeles March 3, 2004

Thank you all very much. Thanks for coming. Thank you all for coming. Appreciate you coming. Please be seated. Thanks for the warm welcome. It is great to be back in Los Angeles. I'm thankful you all are here.

I'm aware that they handed out the Oscars last Sunday night. "Terminator 3" didn't win any. [Laughter] But the star of the movie had a pretty good year. I know he's new to politics, but he is getting used to all the lights and the cameras. I used to think my brother Jeb was the coolest Governor. By electing Arnold Schwarzenegger, the voters of California have shown that no party can take this State for granted.

The Vice President and I are going to be spending some quality time in the State of California. With your help, we're going to make California part of a nationwide vic-

tory in November of '04. Speaking of the Vice President, he's doing a fine job. The country has had no finer Vice President than Dick Cheney. Mother may have a second opinion. [Laughter]

It's good to see the Desert Moms here. Those are the ones who didn't go through the background check. [Laughter] But recently, Laura was in the desert with the Moms. And she sends her best to not only the Moms but all the folks here. I'm really proud of Laura. She is a fabulous First Lady and a great wife.

I want to thank my friend Brad Freeman, who has been a loyal friend. He's the State finance chairman here in California. I want to thank my friend Gerry Parsky, who's the State campaign general chairman. I want to thank my friend Mercer Reynolds from Cincinnati, Ohio, who is the chairman of the Bush-Cheney reelect