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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 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.

Remarks Prior to a Meeting With Bipartisan Congressional Leaders and an Exchange With Reporters

January 24, 2001

Legislative Agenda

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.

So thanks for coming. I'd be glad to answer a few questions.

Attorney-General-Designate John Ashcroft

Q. Sir, I'm wondering about the Ashcroft confirmations. There seems to be little question that he's going to be confirmed, and yet there's this one week delay. I'm wondering, what do you think Democrats are doing?

The President. I think they're making sure that when they confirm him all questions have been answered.

Efforts at Bipartisanship

Q. Sir, where is the common ground on the issues that really divide the two sides, specifically the size of your tax cut and on school vouchers? How can you possibly reach agreement on those two issues?

The President. We'll just have to see. That's part of what a dialog is all about. I think that it's important for me to explain my position. It's important for me to hear other's positions. It's important for me to understand where there's resistance and why. But it all happens with good, honest discussion, a frank discussion about positions.

I look forward to explain to any Member that's concerned about tax relief and why, why I proposed it. And I think the evidence is going to become more and more clear that the economy is—it's not as hopeful as we'd like, which I hope will strengthen my case.

Q. Mr. President, you talked about frank and honest discussions. Are you willing to give on either one of those issues, or is there a——

The President. Well I'm certainly not willing to negotiate with myself. [*Laughter*] Particularly in your column. [*Laughter*]

Legislative Agenda on Education

Q. You talked about bipartisanship, sir, but you've also issued legislation or legislative proposals prior to meeting with the Democrats to work on negotiations. Does that imply that you want them to just take your positions and pass them?

The President. It is in recognition of what a Presidential campaign is all about. I don't believe Dick and I would be sitting here had we not taken strong positions on key issues. And I told the American people if I had the honor of being the President, I would submit those positions I was campaigning on to the legislative branch, and that's exactly what I've done.

So if you look at the education proposals we submitted to the Congress, those are based on what I campaigned on. That's exactly what I told the people I would do, and that's what I'm here to remind the Members of the Congress. That's what I am going to do. And I can't wait to have an honest discussion about education, for example, the cornerstone of which is strong accountability.

And I'm going to make the case here, and I'll continue to make the case to anybody who will listen that in order to make sure every child is educated—I mean every child—we must measure—we must understand whether or not children are learning, because the likelihood of poor children being shuffled through the system is increased if we don't measure.

And I hope we can find people—I hope people will listen, because I feel passionately on the subject.

Q. Sir, would you be—a proposal that didn't include——

The President. John [John Roberts, CBS News], it's a pleasure. One question per session.

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:25 a.m. in the Cabinet Room at the White House. A tape was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

Remarks at the Swearing-In Ceremony for Roderick R. Paige as Secretary of Education

January 24, 2001

Thank you very much. Mr. Vice President, thank you very much; Dr. Paige, family members. I look out and see so many Members from the United States Senate. Mr. Chairman, thank you for coming. Senator Kennedy, I appreciate you being here, as well. I don't want to skip anybody, but the reason I mention those two, they happen to be the chairman and ranking minority of the Education Committee. I see Members from the House who are here. Thank you all for coming, as well, of course, Senator Hutchison, from the home State of Dr. Paige and the President—[*laughter*]—John Culberson from the district which represents Houston. So, thank you for coming. I am honored you are here.

Ladies and gentlemen, it is an honor to witness the swearing-in of a man who will help us see important reforms for education become reality.

The Vice President and I were so pleased to be invited and are pleased to be here in this important building. It is an important moment, and we certainly were not going to miss it. I wanted to see the beginning of a new era in public education.

Dr. Paige and I share a basic commitment: We will work to bring excellence to all public schools all across America. I picked a really good man to run this Department, a man of integrity, a man of common sense, a down-to-earth man who knows how to get the job done.

My administration has no greater priority than education, and Dr. Paige and I share that urgency. And there's no greater champion of reform than the man I am about to witness be sworn in as the Secretary of Education.

Every problem now facing our Nation's public schools Dr. Paige faced as superintendent of the Houston Independent School District: children unable to read at basic levels; falling scores in science and math; problems with discipline and order. Dr. Paige answered those challenges with the spirit we must now bring to all our schools and all our districts in every State.

He did not tolerate indifference or mediocrity. He demanded the highest standards of students in schools, and people rose to the challenge. He proved that poverty does not need to be a barrier to achievement. He stressed reading as the key to all learning, and he measured progress, holding schools accountable for results. As Dr. Paige takes his new assignment, Houston is now a city proud of its schools and a city more hopeful for its children.

Rod Paige gained his passion for education from his own background. His mother was a librarian, and his dad was a school principal. His three sisters have dedicated their careers to teaching and education. And we welcome them to this ceremony today.

In his distinguished career, Rod Paige has seen firsthand what works. He has not just talked about education reform; he's practiced it. And that's why I picked him. He has shown an ability to reach across party lines, to cross old divisions for the sake of our children. I value all these qualities, and our country needs them.

We have great and urgent work to do. I'm honored to have this good man to be our partner in reform.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:24 p.m. in the Barnard Auditorium at the Department of Education. In his remarks, he referred to Senator James M. Jeffords, chairman, Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pension; and Representative John Culberson, newly elected to Texas' Seventh Congressional District. The transcript released by the Office of the Press Secretary also included the remarks of Secretary Paige.

Remarks at Merritt Extended Elementary School

January 25, 2001

It's always a good sign when the principal gets a standing ovation—[*laughter*]—from teachers and parents. Having spent some quality time with you, I now understand why.

First, Mr. Superintendent, thank you very much. Your reputation is a strong one because you believe every child can learn and are willing to work hard and make the tough