AUTHENTICATED
U.S. GOVERNMENT
INFORMATION
GPO

ought to be free from bitterness and anger and rancor and ill will. We have an obligation to make our case, not to demonize our opponents. As the Book of James reminds us, fresh water and salt water cannot flow from the same spring.

I am under no illusion that civility will triumph in this city all at once. [*Laughter*] Old habits die hard, and sometimes they never die at all. I can only pledge to you this, that I will do my very best to promote civility and ask for the same in return.

These are some of the crucial contributions of faith to our Nation: justice and compassion and a civil and generous society. I thank you all here for displaying these values and defending them here in America and across the world. You strengthen the ties of friendship and the ties of nations. And I deeply appreciate your work.

I believe in the power of prayer. It's been said, "I would rather stand against the cannons of the wicked than against the prayers of the righteous." The prayers of a friend are one of life's most gracious gifts. My family and I are blessed by the prayers of countless Americans. Over the last several months, Laura and I have been touched by the number of people who come up and say, "We pray for you"—such comforting words. I hope Americans will continue to pray that everyone in my administration finds wisdom and always remembers the common good.

When President Harry Truman took office in 1945, he said this: "At this moment, I have in my heart a prayer. I ask only to be a good and faithful servant of my Lord and my people." This has been the prayer of many Presidents, and it is mine today.

God bless.

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:10 a.m. in the International Ballroom at the Washington Hilton Hotel. In his remarks, he referred to Representative Zach Wamp.

Remarks Announcing the New Freedom Initiative

February 1, 2001

Steven, you were brilliant in your introduction. Little did we know—we kind of thought we'd be sitting here during the California race, didn't we? But here we are, and thank you so much for being here.

I'm so honored that you all are here. I appreciate the folks who served on my coalition for people with disabilities. There's one hero here that I got to know during the campaign. His name is Jim Mullen. Jim is from Chicago. He's a police officer, wounded in the course of duty, who is a courageous, fine American. And Jim, thank you so very much for coming today.

I'm glad the First Lady is here. It's an unusual job where all you've got to do is walk down from your living room to come to work. [*Laughter*] I'm really proud of Laura.

It's good to see Members of the Congress who are here. Thank you all for coming as well. I'm especially pleased that people from all around the country have taken time to help kick off this important initiative.

One of the things I enjoy most about my new job is the walk I get to take every single morning, up the Colonnade from the Residence to the Oval Office. I say "up," because the path rises just slightly. It's been that way since they took out the steps so that Franklin Roosevelt could make it to his place of work.

This house is among the first places in America to accommodate people with disabilities. And we have come a long way since the days when only a President could hope for that consideration. We are more mindful now of the hardships that come with disability, more generous in responding to the needs of our citizens, more grateful for the contributions you make to our society.

Old misconceptions about physical and mental disability are being discredited. Old barriers are falling away. Our task is now clear: We must speed up the day when the last barrier has been removed to full and independent lives for every American with or without disability.

I am proud that the last great reform in this cause, the Americans with Disability Act, bears the signature of my dad. I see many in this audience who helped him get this important legislation through Congress, and I want to thank you for coming. Because of that law, millions of Americans can now compete for jobs once denied them, enter buildings once closed to them, travel in buses and trains once unequipped for them.

For those who have hearing or visual impairments, for those who use walkers and wheelchairs or have mental retardation and mental illnesses, your own country now seems a more welcoming place as a result of that law. Eleven years after the ADA we are a better country for it.

But there is more to do, and today I propose we move forward. This morning I sent to Congress a set of proposals called the New Freedom Initiative. It is an important step in ensuring that all Americans with disabilities, whether young or old, can participate more fully in the life of their communities and of our country.

Wherever a door is closed to anyone because of a disability, we must work to open it. Wherever any job or home or means of transportation is unfairly denied because of a disability, we must work to change it. Wherever any barrier stands between you and the full rights and dignity of citizenship, we must work to remove it—in the name of simple decency and simple justice.

Often, as you know, such barriers are unintentional. One is the high cost of assistive technologies. For many people with disabilities, new technologies are helping to defeat dependence and frustration and isolation: text telephones for those with hearing impairments; computer monitors with Braille displays for those with visual impairments; infrared pointers for people who cannot use their hands, allowing them to operate computers by pointing at functions on the monitor or the keyboard; lighter wheelchairs; lighter artificial limbs.

These modern wonders make the world more accessible; yet, they are often inaccessible to people who need but cannot afford them. These technologies were once beyond the dreams of Americans with disabilities. Today, they're only beyond their means, and we can help.

In our New Freedom Initiative, we're asking Congress to significantly increase Federal funding for low-interest loans so that more Americans with disabilities can purchase assistive technology. And to ensure that even better technologies are available in the future, we're asking Congress to increase Federal investment in assistive technology research and development.

My administration will also work with businesses to bring more assistive technologies to the marketplace. Once available, these technologies will allow Americans with disabilities to use more of their own gifts, make more of their own choices, and lead lives of greater independence.

Many Americans with disabilities work or would like to have more freedom to do so. And you know that the greatest challenges are often not in the job itself but in the distance between your job and your home. For some people with disabilities, this challenge means no job at all, no opportunity to work and to contribute and to use their talents.

This is changing as more Americans work at home. Yet here, too, the cost of computers and telecommuting are sometimes beyond the means of those with disabilities. And we can help. In our New Freedom Initiative, we are asking Congress to create a fund to help people with disabilities to buy the equipment they need to telecommute. We will provide tax incentives to encourage employers to provide such equipment. And we will protect home offices from needless OSHA regulations.

Some 40 million Americans today work out of their homes. For most, it is a convenience. For workers with disabilities, it is a revolution. And we want as many Americans as possible to share in this revolution of independence.

Our plans also include transportation solutions for people with disabilities. Specifically, we're asking Congress to fund pilot programs for innovative transportation plans that serve people with disabilities. And we'll provide Federal matching grants to community groups to provide alternative methods of transportation.

There are several additional proposals in this package, but let me just mention one more. We will provide additional funding each year to help churches, synagogues, mosques, and other civic groups become more fully accessible to all Americans. In many houses of worship and civic centers, intentions are good, but resources are scarce. We can help make these community places open to all.

I've often talked about the goal of a welcoming society, a nation where no one is dismissed or forgotten. Our progress toward that goal is really the great American story. It is a story of inclusion and protection extending across our history to more and more Americans.

And that story's not over. There is still work to do. We must all do our duty and play our part. And I hope today we have made a good beginning.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:10 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Steven J. Tingus, director, Resource Development for the California Foundation for Independent Living Centers, who introduced the President.

Letter to Congressional Leaders Transmitting the Blueprint for the "New Freedom Initiative"

February 1, 2001

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

Enclosed please find the blueprint for my "New Freedom Initiative" to increase investment in and access to assistive technologies and a quality education, and help integrate Americans with disabilities into the workforce and into community life. I look forward to working with the Congress to ensure that these proposals are enacted into law and to working together to ensure that every American with a disability has access to the American dream.

Sincerely,

George W. Bush

NOTE: Letters were sent to J. Dennis Hastert, Speaker of the House of Representatives, and Richard B. Cheney, President of the Senate. An original was not available for verification of the content of this letter.

Proclamation 7404—National African American History Month

February 1, 2001

By the President of the United States of America

A Proclamation

In 1915, Carter Godwin Woodson, the father of Black history, founded the Association for the Study of African-American Life and History. Each February, the Association proposes a theme to guide the celebration of National African American History Month. For this year, the Association has chosen "Creating and Defining the African-American Community: Family, Church, Politics, and Culture."

This month in particular, we remember the stories of those who have helped to build our Nation and advance the cause of freedom and civil rights. We remember the bravery of the soldiers of the 54th Massachusetts Infantry Regiment and the sailors of the USS MASON in service to our country. We remember those who marched on Washington, sat at whites-only lunch counters, and walked rather than use segregated buses. And we remember those, known only to each of us, who helped to build our families, places of worship, and communities.

When we examine our Nation's history, we discover these and countless other stories that inspire us. They are stories of the triumph of the human spirit, tragic stories of cruelty rooted in ignorance and bigotry, yet stories of everyday people rising above their circumstances and the prejudice of others to build lives of dignity.

This month, and throughout the year, let us celebrate and remember these stories, which reflect the history of African Americans and all Americans. We can all enjoy the works of writers like Paul Laurence Dunbar, James Weldon Johnson, Zora Neale Hurston, and Langston Hughes. In our Nation's schools, our children can learn to admire Booker T. Washington, Sojourner Truth, Frederick Douglass, and others. And Americans from all backgrounds can be ennobled by the examples of Thurgood Marshall, Roy Wilkins, Whitney Young, Mary Church Terrell, and other civil rights leaders.