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There's a lot of people who have heard the call to love their neighbor just like they'd like to be loved themselves.

We're a nation, the fabric of which is created by little communities of conscience all over America. I was at one today, at the YMCA camp in Estes Park, a place where they teach children right from wrong by teaching values. There are drug treatment programs all across our country who rely upon faith. They change a person's heart, and that person changes their lives.

We've got prison ministries that are helping prisoners find the walk. We've got all kinds of faith-based initiatives that are literally changing our country one heart, one soul, one conscious at a time. And the Federal Government must not fear faith-based programs in America. We must empower them. We must welcome them into all neighborhoods, to make sure the American Dream reaches across every neighborhood.

My dream for America is to usher in a period of personal responsibility, a culture that rejects the old times that said, if it feels good, do it, and if you've got a problem, blame somebody else. I believe there's a better culture for the country. It's one that says each of us must be responsible for the decisions we make in life.

If you're a mom or a dad, you're responsible for your child. The most important job you'll ever have is to love your child with all your heart and all your soul. If you're a neighbor—got a neighbor in need, it's up to you, not your Government, to help the neighbor in need. Be responsible with our environment, responsible by supporting teachers in the school system. Be a responsible citizen.

But it starts with having responsible leadership. And that's why I'm so proud to stand and represent and urge for the reelection of Wayne Allard and Bill Owens, who are responsible citizens, who bring dignity and honor to the offices to which they have been elected.

It's an honor to be here. May God bless you all, and may God bless America.

NOTE: The President spoke at 6:41 p.m. in the Plaza Ballroom at the Adam's Mark Hotel. In his remarks, he referred to Bob Beauprez, State chairman, Republican State Central Committee of Colorado; Gov. Jeb Bush of Florida; and President Vladimir Putin of Russia.

Exchange With Reporters at Griegos Elementary School in Albuquerque, New Mexico

August 15, 2001

Situation in the Middle East

Q. One question about the Middle East, sir. Do you believe that they are on the brink of war there? And have you come to believe that it's no longer realistic——

The President. [*Inaudible*]—the violence in the Middle East, but I'm confident that the leadership there will understand that war is avoidable and will work to bring peace. The parties must—must—make up their mind that peace is preferable to war. The suicide bombings have increased; there's too many of them. And Mr. Arafat must do everything in his power to discourage the suicide bombers. And the Israelis must be restrained in their response.

There's too much violence in the Middle East, but I'm confident that we can avoid war so long as the leadership makes the concerted effort to do so. My administration is constantly in touch with the parties. I spoke to Secretary Powell this morning. We're working with the appropriate folks. The Egyptians are in town. Not only are we talking to the Palestinians and the Israelis, we're talking to other nations in the neighborhood to encourage them to convince Mr. Arafat to do everything he can to prevent and stop suicide bombings and needless violence.

Congratulations, Gregory [David Gregory, NBC News]. You actually got me to say something. [*Laughter*]

NOTE: The exchange began at 11:40 a.m. in room 117. In his remarks, the President referred to Chairman Yasser Arafat of the Palestinian Authority. A tape was not available for verification of the content of this exchange.

Remarks and a Question-and-Answer Session at Griegos Elementary School in Albuquerque

August 15, 2001

The President. Thank you for the warm greeting. It's an honor to be here on the first day of school. I can remember—I think I can still remember the excitement I felt when I was—the first day of school as a first-grader at Sam Houston Elementary School in Midland, Texas. At least I felt—I felt the energy of the kids, and I kind of could relate to it. And I want to thank you for giving me a chance to come.

I want you to know that the idea of coming here was Heather Wilson's. We were sitting around the Cabinet Room at the—right outside the Oval Office, and she said, "I understand you're thinking about coming to New Mexico." I said, "You bet. I used to spend a lot of time there when I was living in Midland, Texas. I think that's exactly where I intend to go during my stay out of Washington." She said, "Well, if you come to Albuquerque, you better make sure you go to a school, and I've got a good one in mind." And I said, "Yes, ma'am." [*Laughter*] Here I am. It shows what kind of influence she has as a Congressperson representing the great folks of Albuquerque, New Mexico. And I want to thank Heather for her service and for her recommendation.

I'm also really thrilled to be here with the two United States Senators from the State of New Mexico, Pete Domenici and Jeff Bingaman, both of them fine Americans. I want to thank the Lieutenant Governor, who is here. Lieutenant Governor Walter Bradley is representing the State officials, and I want to thank you for being here, Walter, as well.

I want to thank—I made a pretty darn good pick when I asked Rod Paige to come to Washington, DC, from Houston, Texas, to become the Secretary of Education. I picked Rod for a reason, and I think Brad Allison, the superintendent of schools here, will understand why. I wanted somebody who had been in the trenches of public schools, somebody who had been on the front line of insisting upon excellence for every single child, not somebody who had read it in a textbook or somebody who was a theorist but a hands-on Secretary of Education who had cut his teeth in making sure that all children, not just a handful of children but every child in the school district, received a good education. And Rod Paige did just that as the superintendent of the Houston Independent School District. He's going to make a great Secretary of Education.

I was very impressed by Brad Allison's comments to me when I walked in. Sometimes people, when they meet the President, get a little tongue-tied. Not Brad. [*Laughter*] He said, "I want you to know, Mr. President, our school district is committed to two things, excellence in academics for every child and strong character education for every child." He understands that the two go hand in hand; that a complete child is one that not only learns how to read and write and add and subtract but a child who also learns the difference between right and wrong. And I applaud that holistic approach to education, Brad, and thank you for your leadership.

And I want to thank Eddie Lucero, too, the principal of the school. One of the things you learn when you spend a lot of time on public education, like I have done as the Governor of Texas and now doing as the President, that the quality of education in a particular school really depends upon the entrepreneurial spirit of the principal.

You've got a fine principal here. You know how I know? You've got an accountability system that tells us that's the case. We're not guessing in New Mexico whether or not children are learning to read. We know, because your State is bold enough to adapt a policy that says, show us whether or not the children are learning before any child gets left behind.

I just came from a second grade class. I want to thank Gloria—is she here, the second grade teacher? She is there. Gloria, thank you for your hospitality. Obviously, she has inherited on the first day of school a group of former first graders who were well-trained in reading. These kids are way beyond "The Hungry Caterpillar," let me put it to you that way. [*Laughter*] They read it better than the President could read it. [*Laughter*]

But I was very impressed. And I want to thank Gloria, but I also want to thank all the teachers, the teachers here in Albuquerque,