

## Remarks at So Others Might Eat

November 20, 2001

Thank you. Mel, thank you very much. I appreciate your leadership; I appreciate your vision; and I appreciate your heart. Father Adams referred to Mel—Mel's rescue from Cuba. He came over in a program called Pedro Pan, Peter Pan. And it's when his mother and dad decided that life in Cuba would be rough on young people, and they had great faith in America and great faith in a program that encouraged them to put their little boy on an airplane, and he flew to America.

When we swore in Mel, I'll never forget meeting his adoptive parents that provided a loving home. Mel's a perfect choice to understand what a loving home means. He saw one in a foreign land that enabled him to go from scared little boy to now Secretary of HUD. It's a marvelous story about America. It also helps me to be able to assure people that the Secretary who runs HUD has got a heart of gold and a deep compassion about all Americans, those newly arrived as well as those who have been here for a long period of time. I'm honored that Mel has agreed to serve our Government. And I'm absolutely confident America and the needs of America will be more easily met as a result of his leadership.

Oftentimes, when I speak around the Nation, I talk about the great strength of the Nation lies in the hearts and souls of our citizens. I was using military terms at times even before the war began. I talked about armies of compassion. I truly believe that's one of the wonderful strengths of America, that we've got armies of compassion all across our country.

And Father Adams is a general in the army of compassion. He won't admit it. He'll say he's a lowly foot soldier. *[Laughter]* But I saw the way he got people snapping to when it came time to introduce people in the kitchen. *[Laughter]* I see everybody with green aprons on. I suspect the general ordered that to be the case. But anyway—*[laughter]*—but I want to thank Father Adams and everybody else who works here for really bringing out the best in our country by helping people in need.

The other thing that I'm most impressed about the vision of Father Adams, besides being a social entrepreneur, somebody willing to think as aggressively as possible to help people in need, is that this is a program that attracts people from all faiths. That's important for the world to see, that our country is a country of a variety of faiths, that we respect other faiths, and that we're bound by some common principles: Love a neighbor just like you would like to be loved yourself. That's common to faith.

Last night we had an Iftaar dinner at the White House. That's a part of breaking the fast of Ramadan. I wanted to assure people that there are common values, even though we may have different ways to worship God. This program shows those common values. A neighbor in need needs to be helped. We need to constantly figure out ways to reach out and help somebody who may not be as fortunate as we are.

And as we come into the holiday season, the Thanksgiving season, the traditional holiday seasons of our country, we must always remember there are people who hurt in our society. And we will always remember, with blessings come the responsibility to help those in need. And so that's why I've come to So Others Might Eat, to highlight the successful programs that do make a difference in people's lives and to thank people for their concern and care for our fellow Americans who are in need.

There's no question that our country has been deeply wounded. We were attacked. After all, we're never used to being attacked. Never did we dream—I certainly never dreamt that I'd be the President where there is a war on our homefront.

But the evildoers never really—they must have not known who they were attacking. *[Laughter]* They must have thought we were soft and hateful. In fact, the attacks have united our country, have rallied a nation. And out of evil will come good, and part of my purpose as the President is to remind people of the good that can come out of these attacks.

No question that the outpouring of support for—in the direct aftermath of the September 11th attack was astounding. People gave: They gave blood; they gave money; they

gave time to help. And that's great, and I want to thank those Americans who have helped.

But in order to make sure the homefront is secure, in order to make sure that we don't allow the terrorists to achieve any objective, Americans must give generously to programs like SOME, community-based programs that help make their neighborhoods a better place for all.

I have been disturbed by reports that charitable giving has dropped off. I hope Americans will not substitute the gifts they've given in the aftermath of September 11th for neighborhood groups such as SOME or mentoring programs or programs that understand that when you change a person's heart, you can change their life for the better, that faith is such an integral part of our society and faith is such an integral part of helping people help themselves, and that as we think about ways to recognize the true blessings we have in America, that we must never forget the food banks and the hungry and the poor, and that the most effective programs are those that have sprung from the hearts and souls of social entrepreneurs such as Father Adams.

And so, I hope America—I encourage America—that as we head into Thanksgiving, to find a program that needs help. Or, if you have been helping a program in the past, continue your help. The generosity of this country will say to the world that we're a nation that will not be affected by terror and evil; that, in fact, we encourage good to overcome evil through our actions and deeds, not just our bravado, not just our waving of flag but true actions and true compassionate acts of giving, in order to make sure this Nation remains whole and strong and complete.

Government's got a responsibility, as well. There is a role for the Federal Government in making sure that charitable organizations thrive and flourish. Today I am pleased to announce that the Department of Housing and Urban Development is distributing more than \$1 billion this year in grants to community charities which serve the homeless. It is the largest such grant in the history of the country. It is a grant program that will help provide food and shelter, drug treatment, job training, and other vital services. It is a part

of our Government's desire to support the armies of compassion. We don't want Government to take the good Father's place. We want the Government to stand side by side with the good people of SOME and programs like it all around the country.

We must also promote more private-sector giving, besides just words of encouragement. And so I want to make sure that the Tax Code is changed, and we've got time to do so with the Congress. I've been working closely with Joe Lieberman and Rick Santorum to say that you can deduct—non-itemizers can deduct charitable giving, or that out of your IRA you should be allowed to give gifts to charitable organizations. It is a wise use of the Tax Code to encourage more charitable giving to programs that are positively affecting people's lives, and I think we can get a bill out of Congress to do just that.

I know that the House has responded; J.C. Watts and Tony Hall, Republican and Democrat, work closely together. Lieberman and Santorum are doing the same thing. And so why doesn't Congress, in order to help fight poverty and fight hopelessness, do something smart with legislation and bring it to my desk so I can sign it before Christmas? [*Laughter*] It makes a lot of sense.

I think, as well, we ought to have a tax incentive for food donation. I know that we ought to create what's called a Compassion Capital Fund that will give community-based organizations needed resources and training. I suspect that if we have kind of a capital fund that will encourage people to duplicate that which works, there will be a lot of people coming here to SOME to see why this program is so successful. And I suspect the good Father will be willing to share with others from different communities as to how to make a program like this work.

And the Federal Government ought to be in the process of encouraging the formation of community-based programs, and to that end, we need to simplify the process by which community-based organizations gain tax-exempt status.

The mindset of the Federal Government has been that only Government-sponsored programs should receive Federal money.

That's not my attitude. My attitude is, Government should be nondiscriminatory about how we use taxpayers' money. We ought to ask the question, does the program work? And if faith is the integral part of a program being successful, the Government ought to say, "Hallelujah." We ought to say, "We welcome the good work of faith in our society." We ought not to fear it. We ought to welcome it and encourage it.

And so the faith-based initiative that has passed the House and, hopefully, will pass the Senate recognizes the great power of faith in our society and says that Government ought to encourage the social entrepreneurship that we find here at SOME, and Government ought to encourage the armies of compassion to flourish all around our neighborhoods, that Government ought to welcome faith and not shy away from it.

And as well as in this piece of legislation, we recognize there are some specific tasks that the social entrepreneurial system can deal with, such as a son or daughter of a person in prison. I can't think of anything more profound than to have a national mentoring program, where somebody whose dad or mother is in prison will have somebody put their arm around them and say, "I love you; somebody loves you in our society." There's nothing more profound for a child than to be surrounded by love and care and compassion. So part of this initiative is to encourage the funding of a national mentoring program aimed at some of the most vulnerable in our society—those whose mom or dad may be sitting in prison right now.

The fundamental question is, can America address these problems? And certainly, we can't address them with money alone. But as I'm sure Father Adams will testify, money can help. *[Laughter]* It's part of how a program succeeds. *[Laughter]*

And so, therefore, I ask Americans to dig a little deeper in their pocket. In the aftermath of the tragedy that so deeply affected our Nation, I ask the American people to understand that in order to make America whole, that programs such as SOME make an enormous difference in people's lives; that we are a blessed nation, and as we go into Thanksgiving we ought to thank God for our blessings—for our families, for our fantastic

country, for the greatest country on the face of the Earth—we ought to thank Him for the protection that we've received since the attack, thank Him for our blessings, but at the same time seek ways to help, seek ways to help our fellow human, seek ways to save a heart, seek ways to save a soul.

I am so honored to be able to come to this program and highlight the great successes that can take place in neighborhoods when loving Americans come together with the singular purpose of helping a neighbor in need.

May God bless SOME. May God bless America.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:23 a.m. in the dining room at SOME's 71 O St. NW location. In his remarks, he referred to Father John Adams, executive director, So Others Might Eat.

### **Remarks Following Discussions With President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo of the Philippines and an Exchange With Reporters**

*November 20, 2001*

**President Bush.** It's my honor to welcome the President of the Philippines here to the Oval Office. I had the honor of not only meeting the President but having a great discussion with her in Shanghai, China. She is a highly intelligent, dedicated public servant, to not only better the Philippines but to work with us to make the world more peaceful.

I could tell the first time I talked to her that we had a great ally and friend in our cause. And I look forward to having a good, long discussion today about how we can work together—how to work together more. We've been working together a lot. We've been sharing intelligence; we've been talking strategies.

The United States has got a very close relationship with the Philippines, and I intend to keep it that way. The Philippines have been great allies and friends for a long period of time, and it's in our national interests that we maintain a very close and strong relationship. And so I've really been looking forward to this visit.