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Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and twenty-sixth.

George W. Bush

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NOTE: This proclamation was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on May 6, and it was published in the *Federal Register* on May 9.

Exchange With Reporters in Southfield, Michigan

May 6, 2002

Upcoming Meeting With Prime Minister Ariel Sharon of Israel

Q. [*Inaudible*]—that he absolutely has to talk to Yasser Arafat in order to get to peace negotiations?

The President. You know, I'm going to have a private conversation with Ariel Sharon and would rather that my conversation—what I'm going to tell him and discuss with him be done, and he be the first to know about it——

Q. Has he talked with you about the documents he has?

The President. I talk to him all the time. But if you're asking about Chairman Arafat, I have been asked—if I have been asked once, I've been asked 20 times about him. He has disappointed me. He must lead. He must show the world that he believes in peace. And we have laid out conditions for all parties in order to achieve peace. All parties—Arab nations, Israel, Chairman Arafat, and the Palestinian party—must assume their responsibilities and lead.

This is a series of discussions we're having with—not only with Prime Minister Sharon; as you know, King Abdullah is coming as well. It follows up on meetings I've had with the Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia as well as the King of Morocco. I will continue to have further meetings as we begin to bring—coalesce the world around a vision for peace.

Q. But are the Israelis making it any more difficult by seeming to say that Arafat is not someone they can deal with at all?

The President. Oh, I think they express disappointment in his ability to lead. I mean, after all, right before we had our security agreement done, a shipload of ammunition shows up and could probably be aimed at the Israeli citizens. So there's a high level of disappointment.

But I haven't had a chance to talk with Prime Minister Sharon in recent days. I look forward to hearing what he has to say. Part of the goal of the United States is to lay out a vision for peace, which I have done, and then encourage people to assume their responsibility necessary to achieve the peace. And that's why it's so important, for example, that the Arab world be very much involved in a peace process, in discussions for—toward peace. And we are—I think we're making some progress, and I appreciate that.

Burma's Release of Aung San Suu Kyi

Q. Mr. President, what's your reaction to Myanmar's release of Aung San Suu Kyi?

The President. Oh, I thought that was very positive, a good development.

Education

Q. Mr. President, this week you're talking about domestic issues. Are you afraid that people are losing their attention to those during the war?

The President. No, Mike [Mike Allen, Washington Post], I think that people around America know how important public education is, particularly moms and dads and principals and teachers. Public education is on the minds of our citizens every day, because our citizens see public schools in their neighborhoods, and our citizens know how important public education is for the future.

So I will spend as much time as necessary to herald success in our public schools and to remind people of the implementation plan that the Secretary of Education is selling, promoting around the country. We've got to get public schools right. We've got to make sure every child is educated. A lot of schools are making really good progress; some aren't. Those schools that aren't making good progress need to change.

Yes, Martha [Martha Brant, Newsweek], last question.

First Lady's Contributions to Education

Q. Secretary Paige, as well as your wife, has been traveling around talking about education. I'm wondering if you could mention what you think her greatest contribution has been to your education policy?

The President. You know, Laura's a former teacher—I guess you're never a former teacher; you're always a teacher. [*Laughter*] She's not in the classroom—and she understands the importance of teaching, teacher training, teacher recruitment. And one of the most significant contributions she has made and will continue to make is to remind young Americans—and old Americans, for that matter—that their talents and passion are needed in our classrooms. You know, she pushed the Troops for Teacher Initiative, and she's got a way about her that's pretty convincing. And I know she's going to convince a lot of Americans about the importance of being a teacher.

Some school districts are short of teachers, and you've got to remind people—you know, one of my hopes is that as a result of the Nation taking an assessment of that which is important, that the idea of serving your community by being a teacher becomes more paramount in students' minds, and Laura certainly is going to herald that.

The other thing, of course, is reading. There's nothing more fundamental to a good education system than making sure every child learns to read and that our schools use a curriculum that works. She's pretty good about that too. She's a great leader and a great advocate for literacy.

Listen, thank you all. You're watching democracy—one of the core values of democracy is a free press. [*Laughter*]

Q. Yes, and don't forget it.

Q. How free are we?

The President. You're very free—for how much we have to pay on a daily basis to buy your newspapers. [*Laughter*]

NOTE: The exchange began at 11:23 a.m. during a tour of Vandenberg Elementary School. In his remarks, the President referred to Chairman Yasser Arafat of the Palestinian Authority; King Abdullah II of Jordan; Crown Prince Abdullah of Saudi Arabia; King Mohamed VI of Morocco; and Aung San Suu Kyi, 1991 Nobel Peace Prize recipient who was released from house arrest on May 6. A tape was not available for verification of the content of this exchange.

Remarks at Vandenberg Elementary School in Southfield

May 6, 2002

Thank you all very much for that warm welcome. I'm delighted to be here. Secretary Paige said that he's moving around the country to 25 different cities and school districts to make sure that the No Child Left Behind Initiative is put in place and implemented, and I just wanted to check up on him a little bit. [*Laughter*] And I'm glad I'm doing so here in Michigan.

I picked Rod to be the Secretary of Education. One, I was comfortable with him as a person. We're both Texans. I saw him in action in Texas. I know how deeply he cares for the children all across our country. But I also wanted somebody that actually knew how to get things done. In Washington, we find all kinds of great theorists, people who talk about theory and philosophy. I was interested in somebody who actually had run a school district, who knows what it means to meet a budget, who knows how to deal with teachers, who insists upon high standards for every child. And Rod did that, and he's a great Secretary of Education. I'm so glad that he's here.

I want to thank Sharalene as well. You know, one of the things you find out when you pay close attention to public education and you try to figure out what works, the good schools are those who have got good principals. Good schools are—[*applause*]. So I want to thank Sharalene for her hospitality. I know it's not easy to welcome the President. [*Laughter*] He's got kind of a small entourage—[*laughter*]—of 25 vehicles. [*Laughter*] But you all and your staff have done a great job. And I want to thank all who are responsible for helping put this event on for your hospitality.

I want to thank your teachers as well. I'm real proud to be in the midst of teachers who are doing a great job.

I made a wise choice when I asked a public school teacher to marry me. [*Laughter*] A lot of people are wondering how wise a choice