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Week Ending Friday, January 9, 2004

Statement on Representative Ralph M. Hall's Joining the Republican Party

January 2, 2004

I welcome Congressman Ralph Hall to the Republican Party. Ralph is a close friend of the Bush family. He is a well-respected leader of the highest integrity and a tireless advocate for the people of Texas. We have worked closely together on the important challenges facing our Nation. I strongly support his reelection.

NOTE: This item was not received in time for publication in the appropriate issue.

The President's Radio Address

January 3, 2004

Good morning. Two years ago this month, I signed into law the No Child Left Behind Act, the most important reform of public education in a generation.

In that landmark law, we made our expectations clear: Every child in America will learn to read, write, add, and subtract at grade level. Schools are now required to test children regularly to make sure students are learning and that schools are teaching well.

And when schools do not show progress toward high standards, we're giving parents better options, including tutoring for their children or a transfer to a better public school. Above all, the No Child Left Behind Act required a change in attitude from the educators and public officials responsible for our schools.

We will no longer write off some children as hopeless. We will no longer accept or excuse schools that do not effectively teach the basics. We will insist on high standards and accountability because we believe that every school should teach and every child can learn.

For the past 24 months, schools and State Governments have been putting the new reforms into action. All 50 States, plus the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico, have drawn up plans to hold every public school accountable for student achievement. We're measuring results. We're giving teachers the information they need to improve instruction and giving parents new options to help their children when schools do not measure up.

We have recently received test results that show America's children are making progress. In 2003, math scores for fourth graders nationwide were nine points higher than in 2000. Math scores for eighth graders improved by five points. And a higher percentage of fourth graders tested at or above their grade level in reading.

To mark the anniversary of the No Child Left Behind Act, I will travel this coming week to schools in St. Louis, Missouri, and Knoxville, Tennessee. Children at these schools once struggled, but in recent years, they have risen to meet our new standards. Their example shows that high expectations, a commitment to measuring achievement, and a belief in every child can change lives and turn schools around.

Some critics have objected to these reforms because they believe our expectations are too high or that it is unfair to hold all students to the same standards regardless of background or that we're punishing schools that are not making progress. But the time for excuses has passed. Our reforms insist on high standards because we know every child can learn. Our reforms call for testing because the worst discrimination is to ignore a school's failure to teach every child. And our reforms identify underperforming schools because we need to direct our help to the schools that need it most.

In 2003, we provided $234 million to assist the lowest performing schools that need the most improvement. In 2004, we plan to more than double that amount. We have increased

Federal funding for elementary and high school education from about $25 billion in 2001 to more than $33 billion in 2003, an increase of about 36 percent and the highest level ever.

We've committed $1.8 billion in grants to help train tens of thousands of teachers to use effective reading instruction methods and materials. We expect schools to do their job, and we're helping them to do their job. So there's no excuse for failure. When we set a high standard, we are showing our belief in the capacities of every child. And when we prepare them to meet a high standard, we're giving them a better chance in life. High expectations set children on a path to success. I'm pleased to report that the No Child Left Behind Act is helping put more of America's children on that path, so they succeed in school and in life.

Thank you for listening.

NOTE: The address was recorded at 9:55 a.m. on January 2 at the Bush Ranch in Crawford, TX, for broadcast at 10:06 a.m. on January 3. The transcript was made available by the Office of the Press Secretary on January 2 but was embargoed for release until the broadcast. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of this address.

Statement on Afghanistan's Adoption of a New Constitution

January 4, 2004

I congratulate the people of Afghanistan on the adoption of their new constitution. This document lays the foundation for democratic institutions and provides a framework for national elections in 2004. A democratic Afghanistan will serve the interests and just aspirations of all of the Afghan people and help ensure that terror finds no further refuge in that proud land. This new constitution marks a historic step forward, and we will continue to assist the Afghan people as they build a free and prosperous future.

Remarks in a Discussion at Pierre Laclede Elementary School in St. Louis, Missouri

January 5, 2004

The President. Well, I'm glad to be here, Madam Principal. [*Laughter*] One of the things you find in a successful school is a strong-willed, smart, capable principal. And that's obviously the case here, and I appreciate your hospitality.

I'm here at Laclede because this is a school that has defied expectations. It's defied expectations by raising the bar and believing that every child can learn. That's not the case in some parts of our country, unfortunately. In some parts of the country, schools just shuffle kids through, and that's not right. That's not the American way.

This school is a school that has performed, you have to say, brilliantly. Since 1999, 7 percent of the kids could read, and now 80 percent can read at grade level in the third grade. That speaks to strong principals; it speaks to really good teachers. It says this school has got teachers that believe in the capability of every child. It says the school has raised standards and is not afraid to measure.

And see, one of the things I'm here to talk about is the No Child Left Behind Act. Laclede has been named a No Child Left—Blue Ribbon No Child Left Behind School. And the—inherent in this No Child Left Behind Act is the desire to spend Federal money and spend it wisely. We've increased budgets. The Title I money is up 43 percent since 2001—41 percent. The teacher training money is up. The reading program money is up by 4 times. But finally, the Federal Government has said, "Why don't you show us whether or not that money is being well-spent. Show us whether or not you believe every child can learn. Show us whether or not objectives are being met."

And this is exactly what's happening here at Laclede. As I was reminded, Laclede was doing this before No Child Left Behind Act was passed. Joyce was quick to point it out.