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President Highlights Compassionate Conservative Agenda for Inner Cities

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Policy In Focus: Compassionate Conservative Agenda

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THE PRESIDENT: Thank you very much for that warm welcome. I'm feeling great, by the way. (Laughter.) And I'm glad I'm here. And thank you all for coming.

We've just come from a discussion of community leaders all involved with trying to make Cleveland a compassionate, decent place for every citizen. Some were democrats, some were republicans -- all of them Americans. (Applause.)

All of them Americans who understand that out of the evil done to America can come some incredible good; that by loving a neighbor just like you'd like to be loved yourself, you can do some good in our country. You can fight evil by being a decent, honorable, compassionate citizen. And that's what I want to talk about today. I want to talk about the soul of America. (Applause.)

First, I appreciate my traveling party and the folks who showed up here today. I want to thank Rod Paige, for being the Secretary of Education. I like to remind people that when I was -- came time to pick a Secretary of Education, that I wanted somebody who had actually been on the front lines of education.

I didn't need a theorist, I needed somebody who was a practical person, somebody -- and I knew Rod when I was the Governor of Texas and he was the Superintendent of our state's largest school district, Houston Independent School District. And our test scores soared when he was leading that district.

And so I -- fortunately, he came to Washington, D.C. He's made a huge sacrifice to be there, and he's doing a fine job. And I want to appreciate Rod and I appreciate his leadership, I appreciate his being a straightforward fellow. It's easy to understand where he's coming from. He's coming from this perspective: every child must be educated in America. Every child. (Applause.)

I also brought another man along with me, Alphonso Jackson, who is the Deputy Secretary of HUD. Alphonso's job is to make sure we work tirelessly to promote homeownership in America. And I appreciate Alphonso coming. I'm going to talk a little bit about that later on. (Applause.)

Of course, I appreciate so very much the elected officials who have joined. My friend, the Governor of the great state of Ohio, Bob Taft, is with us. (Applause.) Senior Senator, a fine friend and a good man, George Voinovich, is with us. (Applause.) Are you the senior Senator? He's the junior -- he's the oldest junior Senator. (Laughter.) He's a junior Senator who happens to be a senior citizen, he said. (Laughter.) But a young -- he thinks young. He's a great man.

I appreciate members of the congressional delegation, both Republicans and Democrats alike -- Ralph Regula, Steve La Tourette, Stephanie Tubbs Jones, and Dennis Kucinich. I appreciate you all coming. (Applause.) Thanks for being here. I appreciate you're here.

I appreciate the Attorney General, Betty Montgomery, from the great state of Ohio. (Applause.) I'm honored that the Mayor of the great city of Cleveland would come, Mayor Campbell, thank you for being

here. I'm honored you're here. Appreciate you. (Applause.)

I had the honor of listening to a elected -- a local elected official, Ms. Fannie Lewis, who had some things to say. (Applause.) Thank you, Fannie, for coming.

Today, as I landed at the airport, I had the honor of meeting a gentleman named Eugene Brudno. And Eugene is a Cleveland resident who has spent a lot of time of volunteering in the community. The reason I mention Eugene is, one of the true strengths of this country is the fact that we've got so many citizens who have heard the call to help somebody in need, and they don't need a government telling them to do it. They just do it because they love their community.

And Gene has been loving his community for a long time. Gene, would you stand up and please wave? Thank you for coming. (Applause.)

I want to thank Alex Machaskee for having sponsored the discussion we had today. I want to thank the United Way leadership for being here. I want to thank you all for coming. I am honored that you're here. I've got some things to say -- it's really how great America -- I mean, what a fabulous country we have. We are lucky to be Americans. (Applause.)

And as Americans, we have responsibilities. We have responsibilities. If you live in this country and you want to be a patriotic soul, you have a responsibility. And I think one of those most important responsibilities is to help a neighbor in need. I do.

And I've got a responsibility, too. Perhaps my biggest responsibility is to keep our homeland secure. I want to give you a brief update about our attempts to keep the homeland secure. At home we're doing everything we can do. I want to thank all those on the front line, the first time -- the first responders, the police and fire and EMS teams for being prepared and ready and working long hours.

In Washington, D.C., we've got a lot of good folks who are spending a lot of time chasing down any hint or any lead, any idea that somebody might have to hurt us. We're on it. And you just need to know we are actively focusing our attention and efforts to keep the homeland secure.

We're fighting an enemy that hates what we stand for. They don't value human life. The death of innocent people doesn't bother them in the least. They hijacked a great religion. They kill in the name of the religion when, in fact, they're nothing but a bunch of cold-blooded fanatics and killers. (Applause.)

I've asked the Congress to take all the agencies involved with the homeland defense -- there's about a hundred of them scattered all over Washington, D.C. -- you can imagine what that is like, trying to hold somebody accountable.

I said, we should put it all under one umbrella, called the Cabinet officer, and give us a chance to align authority and responsibility; give us a chance to change the culture of these agencies; give us a chance to say, protecting the homeland is now the single most important priority of the federal government. And I appreciate the response from both Republicans and Democrats alike to the initiative I laid out. It's tough for some, I recognize that. I mean, there's some turf in Washington. (Laughter.) And people like to protect the turf.

But by far most members understand that it's more important to protect the American people than the turf. (Applause.) So we're making progress at home. But the surest way to protect the homeland is to hunt the killers down one by one and bring them to justice. And that's what we're going to do. (Applause.)

And we're making progress. This isn't a -- the type of war we're all used to. It's not the kind of war where there's tanks moving across, you know, some plain, everybody gets to see the progress of the tanks. This isn't the kind of war where planes are in formation.

This is a war that we fight against these shadowy terrorists that hide in caves or hide in big cities and send young souls to their death through suicide. That's the kind of people we're after. But we've hauled

in over 2,400 people so far. I say "we," I'm talking about not only the United States, but a vast coalition of freedom-loving countries. And so we're after them one by one. I guess the best way to describe the strategy is to treat them for what they are, international criminals; get them on the run, and when we find them, bring them in, and get them.

And that's what this mighty country is going to do, because, you see, we love our freedom. We stand for freedom. We love freedom of religion. We love freedom of the press. We love to speak freely. We love politics. We love what we're doing in this country. And anybody who threatens our freedoms will face the ire of the mighty United States of America. (Applause.)

And we're in this deal for the long haul. There is not a calendar on my desk that says, by such and such a date we quit. That's not how I think. And I don't believe that's how the American people think either. The American people understand that we need to be patient and resolved and determined to do what is right. History has called us into action. And for the sake of our young, for the sake of our children and our grandchildren, we must be strong enough and resolved enough to defend freedom to the core; to not waver or tire in the face of an enemy that hopes that we relinquish our love for freedom and the values we hold dear in America.

You know, I can't imagine what was going through their mind when they attacked us. They must have thought America was so materialistic and so selfish and so self-absorbed that we might just file a lawsuit or two. (Laughter.) They learned differently. They learned that we love our country and love our freedoms. (Applause.)

But I want the youngsters here to understand this great country doesn't seek revenge. We seek justice. And this great country, when we go somewhere, we don't go as conquerors -- we go as liberators. I want our country to keep in mind what happened in Afghanistan. Afghanistan was a country that had been hijacked by these al Qaeda killers, with a complacent government.

We said if you harbor a terrorist, you're just like the terrorist, we're going to treat you just like the terrorist. And we upheld that doctrine by removing the Taliban. But, more importantly, we liberated people. For the first time, young girls go to school in Afghanistan, thanks to the United States and our coalition. (Applause.)

And that's -- and that's going to be our posture for a long time coming, too. We believe in freedom for all. We believe in the value of individual life. We're a compassionate, strong nation; a nation that through our determination will bring peace.

Oh, I know that in the midst of this war there is a lot of warlike talk, and I'm as guilty as -- I'm guilty. (Laughter.) I talk that way. But I want you to know, I love peace. I want the world to be at peace. I believe out of the evil done to America can come some good. And one of the goods is going to be a peaceful world. Peace in places where we haven't seen peace in a long time. And peace at home for our children and our grandchildren. I long -- I long for a peaceful world for every citizen on the face of the globe. And I believe that the United States can lead to peace if we're strong and resolved and unified. (Applause.)

And I also believe that as we make the world more peaceful and America more secure, we can make America a better place. A better place for all of us. Not a better place for some; not a better place for a few; but a better place for all.

I think that means that our government, federal government must be active to promote self-government and self-reliance and independence. It means that we must encourage individuals and communities and families to take more responsibility for themselves and their neighbors and our nation.

Our aim isn't to make government bigger by spending more money; our aim isn't to focus on finance, large or small. Our aim must be to mean that when we spend money, we spend it on what works to create a better society. I call this compassionate conservatism. It is conservative to trust the local folks to chart the path to excellence in education. It's conservative to liberate parents. It's conservative to pass power out of Washington, D.C. when it comes to public schools. It is compassionate to make sure not one

child gets left behind in America. (Applause.)

It is conservative to promote private property, and ownership of homes. It is compassionate to understand there is an ownership gap in America, and we must use our resources to close that ownership gap by encouraging minority ownership of homes in America. (Applause.)

It's conservative to reform welfare and reduce dependence on government. It is compassionate to encourage work and family and values of personal responsibility. It is conservative to understand government can hand out money, but it cannot put hope in people's hearts and, therefore, we should promote the good works of faith-based and community-based programs. (Applause.)

It is compassionate to understand in the land of plenty there are pockets of despair and hopelessness. There are people who, when you say the American Dream, say, I don't know what that means. And it's compassionate to understand all of us, no matter what your political party is, must do something about it. We must work to make the American Dream reach into every single neighborhood all across America. (Applause.)

I believe that starts with making sure everybody gets a good education. (Applause.) Rod talked about the "no child left behind" legislation. Let me tell you what I think the bill says. I believe it says that our society must believe every child can learn, and that means we've set high standards. If you set low standards, guess what's going to happen? If you have low expectations, you know what's going to happen? We'll just give up on kids -- see?

It's so much harder to, by the way, educate inner-city -- some inner-city children. It's easy to walk into a classroom full of inner-city African Americans, for example, and say, you can't learn, we'll move you through. Or how about classrooms full of children whose parents don't speak English as a first language - it's easy to quit on those kids. Heck, it's hard to educate a child whose parents don't speak English; why don't we just shuffle them through the system. That means you have low hopes, low standards, low expectations. We start with a different premise: Every child can learn, regardless of their circumstances. And we expect every single child to learn in America. (Applause.)

We said, yes, there's a role for funding, and we increased funding for Title I programs here in Cleveland by 23 percent. And that's good and that's important. We want to help the disadvantaged through funding. But Washington shouldn't be telling Cleveland how to run its school system. See, that's up to you all to figure out how to run your school system. (Applause.)

But we've instituted a new reform, and it's an important reform. It says, if you do receive the money, if you decide to take federal money, show us whether or not the children are learning, see. Show us whether or not expectations are being met. (Applause.)

I've heard it all -- we can't test, we test too much. We test too much. We shouldn't test children whether they can read. See, all you do is teach to test. Listen, if you can teach a child to read, they can pass a test. You teach them to read, don't worry about the tests. (Applause.)

We need to know in America whether or not our children can read and write and add and subtract. That's what an accountability system is for. Not only do we need to know, but more importantly, the parents need to know whether or not the children can read and write and add and subtract. (Applause.) And if we find they can't, something else has to happen. We cannot allow our children to be trapped in schools that won't teach and won't change. (Applause.)

Starting this September, as many as 3.5 million students across America who attend failing schools will have different options, of transferring to another public school. It's part of being an accountable society. It's part of strengthening public education.

Listen, I think public education is one of the most important parts of democracy. In order to make sure the American Dream reaches every neighborhood, we've got to have good public schools all across America. We must. (Applause.) So we've got to strengthen the public education system, by encouraging different opportunities if there's failure.

Low income students, as a result of the new bill, in chronically failing schools will now have access to after-school tutoring. The money follows the child and the parent can decide who provides the after-school tutoring. (Applause.)

There is not a single avenue to success. In order to achieve educational excellence for every child there's got to be a multiplicity of approaches. That's why I believe so strongly in local control of schools. The people of Cleveland and the state of Ohio decided that one of the approaches they wanted to take was to encourage a voucher system to be implemented. That was a local decision. And the Supreme Court of the United States gave a great victory to parents and students throughout the nation by upholding the decisions made by local folks here in the city of Cleveland, Ohio. (Applause.)

It is a constructive approach to improving public education. We're interested in aiming toward excellence for every child. And the voucher system is a part of the strategy to achieve that here in Cleveland. One of my jobs is to make sure that we continue to insist upon reform, to take this court decision and encourage others to make the same decision at the local level. One way to do so is through tax credits, which is now in my budget. I urge Congress, when we debate how to improve public education, to pass the tax credit so parents will have more flexibility and more choices when it comes to the education of their children, particularly K through 12. (Applause.)

I also -- the Supreme Court in 1954 declared that our nation cannot have two education systems. And that was the right decision. Can't have two systems, one for African Americans and one for whites. Last week, what's notable and important is that the Court declared that our nation will not accept one education system for those who can afford to send their children to a school of their choice and for those who can't. And that's just as historic. (Applause.)

I think by continuing to focus on high standards and results and local control of schools, we can all work together to make sure no child is left behind.

And by the way, I had the honor of meeting Roberta Kitchen today. She should be giving the speech, not me. Where's Roberta? Hi, Roberta. Roberta is a mom of five children, and her passion is a passion which is shared by moms all across America. Her passion is pretty simple: I want my children to go to a safe school where he or she can realize their full potential. Roberta, thank you for your love for your children. (Applause.) I appreciate you.

We also have got to do a better job of bringing the American Dream to all Americans by encouraging home ownership. There is a -- we've got a home ownership gap in America, let's face it. Over 75 percent of white Americans own their home, and less than 50 percent of Hispanos and African Americans don't own their home. And that's a gap, that's a homeownership gap. And we've got to do something about it.

One of the barriers to homeownership is the cost of down payment. And I'm working with Congress right now to have a down payment assistance program to help the homeowner be able to afford the down payment.

I also believe that a barrier to entry is education. There's a lot of folks who when they look at the fine print in the contract, don't quite understand what it means. Not only do we need to simplify the contracts, we've got to make sure that there's an outreach program to educate first time home buyers on what it means to own a home and how you do it. Not to get nervous about the fine print, but to realize what's in the fine print so that the people can make good decisions. We've got money in the budget to do that. We want to work with the faith-based community to encourage the education of people to understand what it means to own a home.

I'm also working with the private sector to make sure they do their part. It's in the national realtors interests, or the National homebuilders interests that we encourage minority ownership of homes. We're trying to increase the demand for homes. One way to do that is to work with Freddie Mac and Fannie Mae to encourage capital, so that there's more money in the private sector for first time home buyers. We need billions of more dollars available for those who want to realize the dream. They have made the commitment to do so.

And, finally, we need legislation, tax credit legislation that will increase the supply of homes, affordable homes all across the country, affordable homes in inner-city Cleveland, where people are able to find a home and realize their dreams. (Applause.)

The goal for this country is that by 2010 we have 5.5 million new minority homeowners. And when that happens -- you watch what happens when these neighborhoods will become revitalized, it'll help the public school systems, it'll create such a sense of hope. This is a noble goal and one that I fervently believe we can achieve and must achieve to make America a better place. (Applause.)

We've got work to do. The Senate has got work to do, in passing a reauthorization of the welfare reform bill. One of the great success stories in recent past has been to reform welfare so as we reduce dependency upon government. And that's important. See, we believe in the worth of each individual and believe if we help people they can realize their full potential.

And it starts with finding work. It starts with a job. If somebody works, they're more likely to be able to realize dreams, to realize their God-given potential. And so we've got to continue to employ the resources and the vision to helping people find work. I believe work ought to be an incredibly important part, ought to be the standard by which welfare reform has been judged. And our society must work with local folks to implement strategies that will help people find work.

Listen, the government is willing to pay for re-education. The government is willing to pay for job training. But we need people at the local people, just right like you do out here in Cleveland, to take the hand of somebody in need and say, how can we help you? How can we help you realize the independence of finding -- and the dignity, by the way -- of finding work?

I want to thank the employers in Cleveland for showing responsibility by helping on the welfare to work initiative. And I want to thank the faith-based programs for taking the resources available and to help people find work. We've got to continue -- we've got to continue -- to promote work as part of a independent -- independent -- to encourage independence. And at the same we do so, we've got to teach people the values of marriage and family. (Applause.)

And speaking about responsible society, one of the key things we've got to do here in America is make sure that all of us are responsible for the decisions we make -- especially in this day and age, the CEOs of corporate America. (Applause.) We need to make sure that when the people put out their balance sheets, when people put out the facts and figures, there's no question about their veracity. There's no question that there true numbers.

You see, in order to keep the job base increasing in America, there must be trust. And some have violated the trust. They haven't assumed their responsibility. I expect there to be responsibility at all levels in our society. And I intend to fully enforce the law when people cheat on the balance sheets of corporate America. (Applause.)

We laid out an initiative in March to provide better information to investors, to make corporate officers accountable and responsible; to make sure that there's an independent auditing system -- make sure this business about conflict of interest is eradicated. We need to rebuild the confidence in our job-creating system.

Now, you need to know that by far the vast majority -- by far -- of corporate America are above-board and doing their jobs just the way you'd expect them to do, that they treat their investors, their shareholders and employees the way you'd want them to. And that's important for America to know. It's also important to know we're going after those who aren't and hold them accountable. (Applause.)

Our economy, the foundation of our economy is strong. We've got good fiscal policy, good monetary policy. We just now got to get this -- get trust built back in the country's leadership -- which we will; we will. And one way to do it is to bring some of these folks to justice who have violated their trust. And we'll do that, too.

I also want you to know that my philosophy really does trust the American people. I trust people when it comes to -- the parents when it comes to educating their children. I trust people when it comes to making right decisions about whether to own a home. I trust people when it comes to helping find work. The strength of this country is really not in our halls of government, it's in the hearts and souls of the American people. That's really why America is so strong a nation as we are today.

I also believe that -- in the power of faith in people's lives. And that when we find people who have lost hope, maybe as a result of addiction or despair, that one way to help change America is to encourage those who have heard the call to love a neighbor to go love their fellow citizen.

See, I've got great faith in America because I know our society can change one heart, one person at a time. And I know there are millions of soldiers in the armies of compassion who are willing to do just that. The faith-based initiative that you've probably read about means this. Our government should not fear programs which exist because of a church or a synagogue or a mosque has decided to start one. (Applause.) We should not discriminate against programs based upon faith in America. We should enable them to access federal money, because faith-based programs can change peoples lives, and America will be better off for it. (Applause.)

I urge the Congress to get the bill on by desk that does two things -- one, allows for faith-based programs to compete for taxpayers' money to help change people's lives; and secondly, allows non-itemizers to receive a deduction on their income taxes when they give money to a charity. We need to do everything we can to encourage the strength of America to help change America for the better. (Applause.)

Now, out of the evil done to America is going to come some incredible good here. I believe it. I believe that our citizens, many citizens are now hearing the call that a true patriot is somebody who serves something greater than themselves. A true patriot is somebody who asks a neighbor in need, what can I do to help. A patriot is somebody who understands that life is more -- that life is complete when you make a sacrifice for somebody else.

That certainly came home to a lot of Americans when Flight 93 was driven into the ground by citizens -- normal, everyday citizens -- who realized the plane they were on would be a weapon. And I want to remind you of what happened on that flight. They told their loved ones good-bye, they said a prayer, and they made the ultimate sacrifice for somebody else. That's the American spirit, as far as I'm concerned -- the notion that in order -- (applause.) And it is that spirit which is exhibited every day in our country when people say, I think I want to mentor a child, and do so. And people helping an elderly shut-in. When people deliver food.

It's the millions of acts of kindness and decency which define America, which show the true face of this great country. And I mean a great country.

It's a great honor to be the President of the greatest nation on the face of the Earth. Thank you for coming today, and God bless. (Applause.)

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