

Leave No Child Behind

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I am delighted to be here at Murray State and I am honored to have the opportunity to deliver the Harry Lee Waterfield Distinguished Lecture tonight. From my briefing materials I have learned that he was a distinguished man who distinguished himself in three different careers—journalism, insurance and public service. So I thank him not only for being the founder of the Harry Lee Scholarship program but for the quality of his life and for the willingness to serve as a model for what effective public service should be like and for his character and for teaching us how we should behave as people who are leaders of the public sector. It is a distinguished honor to be here and I thank you for that; and I commend the students who are the recipients of these scholarships. You have a charge to keep. You now are being benefited by this man's career and his life and his model and you, in turn, are being asked to become like him. So I commend you and I challenge you and I thank you for your decision to pursue public service. Your interest in public service is noble and I encourage you to put it to good use. I also thank the congressman, Congressman Whitfield. Congressman, thank you so much for your assistance in providing this opportunity for me tonight. Let me say to you that this man is a leader in the Congress of the United States of America. Although he has special interest in the House Energy and Commerce Committee, he has also taken on education and he has been of great service to the President of the United States and he asked me to say to you publicly, "thank you so much for your leadership," and let me applaud you for what you have done. Also, thank you for that great introduction. But, I have learned now how to put introductions into context. They are somewhat like perfume; you get a sniff of their fragrance, but if you swallow it, it will give you a headache. In addition to that, you mentioned in your introductory remarks that I served as an athletic director for some time; but I also served as head football coach at both Jackson State and at Texas Southern

University and as an assistant at the University of Cincinnati. That also gave me some humbling experience. I remember one time in particular at Texas Southern University when we had just played a football game in the Astrodome and we had sold the Astrodome out, there were 56,000 people in attendance and at the end of the game we came up on the wrong side of the scoreboard; we were playing Grambling or some school of a similar kind and as I walked out of the stadium, kind of dejected, I did not see this little old lady. Consequently I bumped into her and knocked her purse on the ground and as I bent down to help her pick up her things off the ground I said to her, "Excuse me ma'am, no offence" and she said, "That's right son and I did not care much for your defense either." So, I have learned through experience how to put the good sounds into context because it can go both ways.

Allow me to talk a little bit tonight about the President's plan to reform public education in America. The plan is called "No Child Left Behind." At first glance it sounds like a lot of Pollyanna comments, pious sentimentality, easy talk. But having had a chance to work with this man seven years while I headed the largest school district in Texas while he was governor, I can say to you forthright this man seriously means we want to organize ourselves so that our public school system leaves no child behind. All children, notwithstanding the deficit that they bring, should be able to maximize their educational potential through the public school system, which I believe, is the greatest social idea of mankind. And this concept of leaving no child behind is grandiose and big and ambitious. It's big even like President Kennedy's goal of sending a man to the moon and bringing him back safely. It is big even like President Johnson's goal of the great society. No society has ever done this; no society has ever tried to educate all of its children. Yet this courageous man, President George W. Bush, has set this as a goal and not only is he talking the talk, he

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is walking the walk. That is because this education plan was the very first plan rolled out in front of Congress. Its number now is in the Senate as Senate Bill 1 and in the House as HR1 and that is an honorable posture. Not only is this the number one priority but it also calls for funding the Department of Education with an higher than the increase of any other domestic federal agency. And I could go on and on but my point here is that this is a serious undertaking that requires all of us. At any place I find a crowd of two or more I want to solicit the nation's consciousness toward this grand idea of educating all of its children because it is in all of our best interests. So it is not just a wish, the President also has a plan and this plan is called "Leave No Child Behind" and I would like to spend just a few minutes talking about the details of that.

Now I want to first put this in context to make clear we need to do this. Let me say first that there are a lot of wonderful teachers and principals, and school administrators and PTO people across the United States. I know this firsthand because many of them live in Houston and I know how much I had benefited by their excellence as I served as the head of the Houston Independent School District system. So there are islands of excellence all across the United States. There are great schools in spots all across the United States, but islands of excellence will not achieve the goal of leaving no child behind. We need to create a total system that provides this opportunity for everybody and that is what his plan, "No Child Left Behind," attempts to do. And if you think that we don't need to do that, just listen to this. It was 20 years ago that my predecessor, the Department of Education Secretary at that time, set out a goal and asked a study group to determine what we need to do in our public school system and they published a report called "A Nation at Risk." Notice, they didn't say a city at risk or part of a city at risk but they said a nation at risk indicating that all of us are at risk for failing public schools. But notwithstanding the fact that he called that to our attention 20 years ago, today fewer than a third of our fourth graders can read proficiently. Notwithstanding the fact that we began this reform 20 years ago, the average reading scores as measured by NATE for our fourth graders is flat ever since 1992. Notwithstanding calling this to our attention, NATE tells us that 70 percent of our inner city and rural fourth graders cannot read at basic levels. American eighth graders perform below on math and science tests every industrial nation. Nearly a third of the students

going to college arrive on their college and university campuses unable to take rigorous college courses and consequently have to take remedial courses. And I have not even bothered to mention the big gap that exists between our advantaged students and the less advantaged students. Though we have islands of excellence, though we have great people across our nation working on this case, we must say now that our nation's public school system has failed to produce the kind and quality of education that we need to keep this great country a leader of the world. That's why President Bush's plan, "Leave No Child Behind," is important because after spending 125 billion dollars over the last quarter of a century we have very little to show for it. So the answer obviously is not to continue the status quo. After all it was Einstein who advised us the definition of insanity is the feeling that you can get different results doing the same thing. Clearly, we have to do something different. So the answer is not to continue to do the same thing. It also is not for the federal government to develop a solution for every problem. That is not the answer either. The answer also is not just simply more money. It's more complicated than that. The answer is to change the culture in our education system and to convert this system from a system of compliance to a system of performance. Convert this system from a system that is evaluated on inputs to a system that is evaluated on outputs. And that is why we are trying to convince our colleagues that simply more money is not the solution; it needs more than that. And you cannot measure success simply by the amount of dollars you put in it. Dollars are important, but in and of themselves, we have 25 years of history that teaches us we can't get there from here in that way.

Now the good news is that we believe the great start for this revolution is encroached in the President's plan, "Leave No Child Behind." His proposal will fundamentally change the way our nation apportions primary and secondary education. And the President's proposal budgets to back that up. The Department of Education budget will increase by 11.5 percent compared to last year's budget if this budget is approved, adding another 4.6 billion dollars to the Department of Education in FY 2002. At the program level, the increase will be 5.9 percent at a minimum or 2.5 billion dollars. The President gives the Department of Education the biggest increase of any domestic department, and Kentucky's share of the President's education budget is 603 million dollars. The average

Kentucky couple will save \$2,599 in federal income taxes or a 32.9 tax cut if the President's plan is approved. If Congress approves the President's plan and budget, federal funding for K-12 education in America will increase by 1.9 billion dollars. And this will provide resources for our reading first initiative. So this would result in tripling the funds to teach reading in the early grades in America. And reading is very fundamental to anything we do. Over five years, spending about a billion dollars a year in K-2 teaching young people to read will solve many of the problems ahead of that. Let me tell you a story to illustrate that. This little story goes that one time there was a businessman who had had a successful day and decided to take a day of leisure and go down on the creek and fish in the river. So he went down to the river and threw his hook out in the water and as he looked in the water there was a kid trying to swim down the river but was drowning, so he dived out into the river to save this drowning kid and bring him back to shore, but just as he got him back to shore he looked over his shoulder and there was a second kid floating down the river drowning. So he jumped back into the water and went back out and got the second kid. And before he could get the second kid to the shore he saw a third, a fourth and a fifth kid drowning. He got on his cell phone, called his friends and before long he got a lot of people jumping into the water, swimming out, saving drowning kids, bringing them back when they notice the original guy was crawling out of the water, brushing himself off and walking away. And when someone asked him where his was going, he turned back and said, "I'm going upstream to see who's throwing these kids in the river in the first place because we clearly cannot pull them all out from this position. But if we go upstream and see what is causing these kids to be drowning in the river, we'll have a better chance of fixing it." And when we get upstream what we are going to find is the inability to read as one of the biggest things that is causing this drowning as we go up, and downstream is going to be much too late. And so the President's early reading plan is designed to make it unnecessary to try to pull them out of the river later if we could head this off upstream.

Now what are the other elements of his plan? The first step is high standards, to set high standards for all, to believe that all students can reach their potential and to provide the resources and the technical assistance and also see that it is being accomplished. To set high standards for

all students and secondly how do we know whether these students are meeting these standards or not. We can only answer that question by testing. Now there are those who disagree with that and talk about the high stakes of testing. We're not talking about that test; we are talking about tests that are designed to determine whether or not students are meeting the standards that are set for them by their state and by the school district. And you can do this in no other way. And we can't wait three years later to find out if they are drowning. We have to find that out early which means annual testing. This does not mean waiting three years to determine whether or not they are making progress. If we read the studies coming out of the University of Tennessee by standards or by teacher effectiveness, it tells us that it is cumulative. A student who is exposed to a bad teacher in grade two cannot have that deficit made up by a very effective teacher in grade three. So sometimes this damage is permanent so we have to know at the earliest possible moment what the deficits are. So we can begin to correct this. That's what the testing is for—it is to inform instruction. And it can also be used for accountability which is the third leg of the President's plan. The schools must accept the responsibility; the teachers must accept the responsibility; the principals, the superintendents, the Secretary of Education; we must accept the responsibility of student learning. Now, is that easy? Of course not; we know there are other factors; we know that poverty is a factor. We know that all the social ills that they live with are factors. We know that the family structure and the family's values are factors. Notwithstanding that, that is simply our challenge—the challenge that we must overcome. And we know it can be overcome because we know there are examples of schools with populations of students who have all the characteristics of at risk students but still these students are achieving. If they can do it there, we can do it in the rest of the world. So then when we say "Leave No Child Behind," we know this is a very aggressive challenge, which is possible to do.

We believe it is the height of arrogance to believe that we can manage the school districts from Washington D.C., that we can write regulations and policies and things that say if you do this, then things will be OK. It's analogous to saying that if we write the recipe then we hold you responsible for how the pie comes out. That does not work. So we want to have local control and write the federal laws so they are flexible enough that the profes-

sionals on the scene can make the decision about the activities and how the funds should be used and applied. We simply want to come one day and ask: "Where are the results?" We want to measure the results and be able to see the results, and that's what the federal government has not done well. The federal government has done a good job in spending money but less than a good job in determining whether or not there have been positive results as a result of the spending of those dollars. We want to fix that. We want to have flexibility so the local people can make the decisions, but we want them to be accountable for the results.

Now here is where we get the most hiccups and there are a lot of people who disagree with this. That's fine because these are good and well meaning people. And we think that if these people have a better idea and they can convince us of a better idea, then we're fine with that idea. But our plan, the President's plan, calls for parental choice if a child is not succeeding in a school. If a school is failing a child for three consecutive years, we believe that child should then have the opportunity to find relief at some place where he/she can get a good education. Now a lot of my colleagues and friends disagree with that and I know they are good and well meaning people, but I ask them why continue funding a failure; why continue to fund something that isn't working? If something isn't working we need to change; so if a school is failing the first year we need to provide more funds and more technical assistance. If a school is failing the second year we need to provide more funds and more technical assistance. If a school has failed at the end of the third year, then we would like to change now. Now we want to start talking about not the school but the individual children who populate the school. We also want to say now "you tell me what is your idea to provide a quality education for these children?" We want to fix the school but we want to concurrently find some relief for the children who are in the schools. That's our idea and we are open to other ideas, but so far nobody has been able to give us a good solution to that. So then we believe that parental choice is a fundamental requirement for effective school reform.

Reading is such a fundamental part of education that the President's plan calls for funding for reading at an unusual level. But not just funding any kind of reading instruction. Funding reading instruction that is consistent with research based practices that are proven that results will be obtained if these are applied appropriately. We know that reading now

is a much more complex undertaking than we at first thought. As educators, we also know that young children can begin to learn to read at a much earlier age. And so we want to begin these opportunities for reading earlier and that is why the President plans to take a look at Head Start because we have a lot of young children there and this is what gives us a good opportunity to begin free literacy programs in Head Start. So we are going to remodel Head Start and make Head Start work better than before. We are going to consolidate the multiple existence of programs and streamline funding and reduce bureaucracy and provide funds more timely and look to results for control rather than control through regulations and increased bureaucracy. Now we know that this is a big challenge. That is why we ask so much for your assistance. We want you to raise your voice in this regard because we are talking about public education. And when we talk about public education we are talking about the benefit of the public. The public benefits from public education. It is a public benefit, not just a private benefit of the individual people who have children in the school; they receive a private benefit because their children are there. But the fundamental purpose of the system exceeds the aggregate of their private benefits. It extends to the public benefit, to all of us. That's why all of us have to pay taxes to support the system. And whether people have children in the system or not, the point is they have something to gain or lose based on the quality of it. And that's why it is important to each of you, and that's why we need each of you to assist us in bringing the President's plan into reality by having it enacted into law.

We thank you so much for your attention and for allowing me to come and speak to you about this. We hope you will go forward and be of assistance, and I would just like to thank the Congressman one more time for giving me this opportunity. Let's give him another round of applause. And I'll end these little remarks by saying one more time to the scholarship recipients, "You are very fortunate to be at this great university. You are blessed to have a scholarship with the attached name of a great individual and you have a charge to keep. Good luck to you." Thank you very much.