



THE WHITE HOUSE

PRESIDENT GEORGE W. BUSH

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Press Gaggle by Scott McClellan and Jim Towey, Director of WH Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives

Aboard Air Force One

En route Los Angeles, California

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12:00 P.M. PST

MR. McCLELLAN: Good afternoon. I don't know if it's afternoon where we are, but it's afternoon for all of us. I've got a guest gaggler with me with morning, Jim Towey, the head of our Faith-based office, to talk to you here in a minute.

Just to kind of give you a quick update on the President's day -- he had his usual briefings before we departed. He met with the Secretary of Defense. And when we land in L.A., the Freedom Corps greeter is Charlotte Van Fleet, and she has been an active volunteer with Harambee Christian Family Center, which is a youth mentoring program located in Pasadena, California. And she has been active with them since 1993.

Following that, the President will meet with some of the faith-based program participants. And then he will make remarks at the 11th Regional White House Conference on Faith-Based and Community Initiatives. This is the second one the President has participated in -- previously one in Philadelphia.

Q The second?

MR. McCLELLAN: That he's participated in, himself, yes. Obviously, various members of our Cabinet have been participating in it.

Q Annual conference, right?

MR. McCLELLAN: Regional, regional -- 11th regional conference. And then the President, this evening, will make remarks at a Bush-Cheney 2004 reception. And then, from there he will go to a Republican National Committee Victory 2004 dinner, where he will also make remarks.

Q Which private residence is he going to?

MR. McCLELLAN: The private residence?

MR. DECKARD: The last name is Perenchio, Jerry and Margie.

Q Who are they?

MR. McCLELLAN: We'll see what we can get you. You already have the faith-based fact sheet we've handed out. And with that, I'll just turn it over to Jim, and then I'll be here for your questions.

DIRECTOR TOWEY: The President will meet with a number of success stories -- by that, I mean individuals whose lives were redirected by the intervention of a faith-based program. The President has repeatedly said that the faith-based initiative is about results, not religion. So he's going to be meeting with individuals whose lives were changed by way of a faith-based program.

One individual, through the Beit T'Shuvah program -- this is a drug -- residential drug treatment program. It's built around the Torah and Judaism, and that has been instrumental in redirecting the lives of many addicts in the Jewish community in Los Angeles. He'll also be meeting with an individual from the Union Rescue Mission and other faith-based organizations. You'll get more information on who the attendees are, the success stories.

The President does this because he feels the Faith-Based Initiative, its most profound implication is how we focus social services on results and on changing lives. And so in his speech that will follow this meeting, he's going to announce first -- for the first time ever, results of a survey that show that there is progress being made in leveling the playing field so that faith-based groups can compete on a level playing field with other groups.

The results will show that there's been a dramatic increase in funds going to faith-based organizations. Two agencies where there is comparison data available, HHS and HUD, you will see over \$144 million -- new dollars going to faith-based groups from 2002 -- fiscal year 2002 to fiscal year 2003. You'll see an increase of 41 percent in one year in HHS grants to faith-based groups. You'll see at HUD now that over half of the money that goes to Section 202, elderly housing, which is a program of about \$750 million, with about half of that money is going to faith-based organizations.

This is because when you have a level playing field, the focus is on who is the most effective provider, faith-based or not. Many community groups do compete successfully, but I think this data shows that what the President announced his first week of his administration he's now delivering on, which is a level playing field that will give the poor access to the most effective programs in their community.

He will also be announcing today that governors can now apply for funds for drug treatment. There will be 15 grants for a total of \$100 million that will go out and, for the first time, will allow individuals choice in the program that they access. So this program, we think, is going to give a lot of ownership in the recovery for addicts who often are just pushed to one program, without any choice whatsoever. So programs that have faith content could now receive federal funds through the choice of these individuals accessing them.

And thirdly, the President will be also talking about additional regulatory reform steps before federal agencies -- HUD, Labor, HHS and Agriculture. These regulations follow previous waves of regulation by agencies for the simple purpose of removing barriers that have discriminated against faith-based

organizations. President Bush, in his State of the Union in 2004, announced his desire to have these equal treatment regulations codified. He's also going to make an appeal for the Congress to take final action on the CARE Act, which will help America's charities and provide billions of dollars of relief for our poor.

So this address, of course, is a clear indication of how important the faith-based and community initiative is to President Bush, and how he believes that this will unleash armies of compassion and, ultimately, redirect the lives of addicts and those who are homeless, and others in need of services.

Q Can I ask a couple of questions about the numbers? In the fact sheet, it talks about the increase at HHS and the increase at HUD. Do you have -- it gives the dollar amount at HHS, but not HUD. Do you have those numbers?

DIRECTOR TOWEY: The increase at HUD was \$53 million, I believe.

Q That's an increase, to what?

DIRECTOR TOWEY: To what total? In HUD, it was \$532 million. In HHS, it's \$568 million. Just those two agencies together, over a billion dollars.

Q Do you have a total overall of faith-based grants in 2003?

DIRECTOR TOWEY: You can't get an answer to that question because of two reasons. First, the majority of social service dollars are delivered through formula grants and administered by state and local governments. About \$41 billion goes out of Washington to state and local governments to administer. And so we do not have the mechanism to collect that data about how do the states grant it. We're going to try to get it, because we think the public has a right to know who the providers of public funds are.

Second is, the data that we have looked at a category called non-formula competitive grants. That's kind of discretionary grants -- OMB tells me technically that's not true, that there are some formula grants that are discretionary, but basically we're looking at figures, dollars that the Washington headquarters have control over how they're awarded, and that they're competitive. And that pot is about \$14.5 billion.

Q Can I just ask one more, if you don't mind. On the new regs, I thought that, for instance, like, Labor and HHS and HUD already had essentially leveled the playing field in terms of their regulation. So what's this today?

DIRECTOR TOWEY: The regulations today are general regulations that will apply across all the programs in the agency. These require a very thorough legal review, looking at the rights of Indians, looking at the -- when you look at Agriculture regs, for example, you've got to look at the school lunch program. So you're going to spend a lot of time -- so that the regs being announced today are equal treatment principle regs that apply.

What took place before identified regulations in certain programs at HUD, for example, that had language that discriminated against faith-based groups. For example, a regulation at HUD that said, if you are a religious organization you cannot provide even secular activities, nor can your program have any religious influence. So those were the first barriers that were removed, because they had actual hostile language.

Today's action is an affirmative statement of equal treatment principles across all programs in these four agencies. The Department of Justice already did this and has finalized their regulations. And those were the first five agencies the President touched. We expect further regulatory action this year, because the President wants all the barriers removed. But as we do legal review, we want to do this very carefully and make sure it's done in a constitutional manner.

Q You say that the President has moved to level the playing field. What, specifically, can you tell us he's done in those executive orders that he issued? What does it basically say?

DIRECTOR TOWEY: By removing language in regulations that are faith-based organizations from being able to maintain their identity while they provided a federally funded service, you've opened up to competition federal programs that previously did not have the best -- all of the best programs applying. So, for example, today the data the President releases will show a large increase in first-time grantees. You'll see, for example, at HUD a doubling in funds, to \$113 million, just in one year, to first-time grantees. At HHS there's a 50-percent increase in first-time grantees just from 2002 to 2003.

This shows that faith-based organizations, and even small ones, can compete effectively on a level playing field. The Department of Education has seen a fourfold increase in applicants that are now supplemental providers. We've just seen -- you'll see at the conference today with your own eyes -- I've been to all 11 of these, or 10 of the 11 -- one I got snowed out -- you'll see these people who have come -- these aren't people coming here as Republicans or Democrats, these are people that have hearts for the poor and that want to find out how they can expand what they do. So this morning they've gotten a primer on how to partner with the federal government.

And what they're learning is, oh, I guess I can apply. And now we're seeing groups for the first time getting money. For example, the President is going to meet with a group that, before President Bush took office, had never sought federal funds. Now they've received some federal funds, they've been able to expand what they do to help more people who are addicts and in prison.

So tangible results -- I can't say this is a direct cause/effect, but the data speaks for itself. We've seen large increases in grants to faith-based groups. And there's no -- we also recognize the many good community organizations and other governmental providers of services. This isn't about favoring faith-based groups; it's simply about making the grants process faith-friendly, so that they're welcome to apply, and let the best program win.

And I think seeing hundreds of millions of dollars in faith-based grants at HHS, over a half-billion both at HUD and HHS, is evidence that faith-based groups can compete. And we think more and more groups now are starting to say, wait, let me see if we can expand our job training program.

Q Is the government going out and recruiting people to apply?

DIRECTOR TOWEY: Our faith-based conferences are open to anyone; it's free. We take the first 1,500 that register, then we take a waiting list. We've had overflows at every one. These groups have been shut out from the federal grants process -- now they're being welcomed back. Some leave our conferences and they never apply for a grant. They say it's too complicated, or we might lose our religious freedom, or something, that we want to talk about our faith regardless whether we're in the middle of a federally-funded job training program, or not. But other groups do go out and apply and they're getting funds.

Q The new rules -- just to be clear, the new rules you're talking about, are these the ones that were announced at the White House a couple months ago, that allow religious -- that would allow, say, a

Christian organization to hire only Christians, and a Jewish organization to hire only Jews, and then -- I mean, now they're allowed to apply for federal funds, where organizations that had those hiring practices before were not?

DIRECTOR TOWEY: No. The equal treatment principles the President has talked about pertain to the religious identity of an organization, such as their name, their board of directors, their governing articles, their mission statement, and for them to be able to provide -- for example, in a HUD building they could have a homeless program, even if another room had a prayer service that was voluntary and not a condition to be in the homeless shelter. Previously, that wasn't permitted at HUD. So those are equal treatment principles.

The religious hiring issue is a little different. This was an issue, of course, where President Clinton signed the first legislation permitting faith-based groups to maintain their rights to hire while they take federal funds. That's, of course, now an issue of contention in Congress. What the President has done through regulation has applied to federal contracts. That's what he did in December of 2002. We cannot, by executive order, do anything with statutes, such as the Work Force Investment Act on job training, that had language that says you cannot hire according to religious beliefs. Congress has to do something about it. The House has passed a bill that would permit faith-based groups to maintain their civil rights and religious liberty as they take federal funds, which President Clinton proposed. The Senate hasn't acted on it.

Q Do you know, roughly, how many people are going to be there, and since it's a regional thing, what states are involved?

DIRECTOR TOWEY: Well, we don't know -- we know that there were 1,504 registered and that we had a waiting list of 150. We had to cut it off some time ago. All of them have been to overflow crowds. There's so much interest in the country about this.

Phoenix, we had one February 12th; I think the gate was 1,300. A lot of times it's determined by the size of the facility. When the President went to Philadelphia, a packed house. Even when the President doesn't go -- obviously, when the President comes, there's a lot greater security measures. When we do it, we have an honor system -- they have to declare if they have any, you know, weapons.

Q And the states -- are the states involved?

DIRECTOR TOWEY: The states involved?

Q Or region?

DIRECTOR TOWEY: Well, we think primarily this will draw upon California. We had one in San Diego a year ago. We had one in Phoenix. We've had one in Atlanta, Minneapolis. We will have one in Pittsburgh in April. We'll have other ones until people stop wanting to come. What we're seeing is enormous interest. And what the President had said was, let's get the word out to groups that the federal government welcomes them, because we have a joint mission: to help the addicts get treatment, the homeless get housing, and people have access to the most effective programs.

Q Is this meeting private that he's having before the speech? Is he meeting before the speech private?

MR. McCLELLAN: Yes, it's closed.

DIRECTOR TOWEY: He met in New Orleans January 15th with success stories. The President loves it. To him, the whole measure of the faith-based initiative is in how lives are redirected. I was telling him yesterday about the story of a woman that had a child, was in drug -- enslaved in drug addiction. Now she's got -- she went to a program in Jacksonville, got her life turned around. She's got her child back. Similar story today he's going to be seeing. This, to him, is a measure of what these groups can do and I think he admires it. And Beit T'Shuvah is a great example in Los Angeles; humble place, if you go to this facility -- it's not far from the airport, very small, residential. They've got an army of volunteers. And they've had an enormous impact on addicts' lives.

Q Jim, spell your last name.

DIRECTOR TOWEY: It's T-o-w-e-y.

MR. McCLELLAN: All right, thanks Jim.

DIRECTOR TOWEY: Thank you.

MR. McCLELLAN: I think Jim used up all the gaggle time, so thanks. (Laughter.)

Q Popular demand here.

MR. McCLELLAN: Hey, that's a great tie. My wife got me --

Q Is he going to see Arnold?

MR. McCLELLAN: Something about a five-hour flight. You don't have to wear the tie on the flight.

Q Hey, Josh, could the President win -- Josh, I'm thinking about Josh.

MR. McCLELLAN: Josh? Okay, you want Josh. (Laughter.)

Q Scott, could the President win California?

MR. McCLELLAN: I'm sorry?

Q Can the President win California in the general election?

MR. McCLELLAN: Well, look, I'll let the campaign talk about that, but I think you can expect the President is going to compete across the country. But I'll let the campaign talk to you more about that.

Q **What was the deal** with the presidential call to Senator Kerry last night?

MR. McCLELLAN: The President's -- it was the President's decision.

Q Why did he want to do it?

MR. McCLELLAN: Well, the President has been through a tough primary -- a tough primary before. He knows what it's like, and he thought it was a nice gesture. So the President called to congratulate Senator Kerry on his impressive win in a -- against a tough field. And the President said he looked forward to a spirited campaign. Senator Kerry thanked him for the call and indicated that he looked forward to the

race, hoped that it would -- hoped that the campaign would keep to the issues.

Q What was the headline out of the little deep background discussion with a certain very senior official?

MR. McCLELLAN: I appreciate the question, but I'm not going to get into discussion of background briefings in the gaggle. I think one thing to always remember is that I -- one of my responsibilities is to work closely with the White House press corps and listen to your concerns and be as helpful as I can. And that's the spirit in which I work. And we're all here to serve the American people and, hopefully, give them an accurate picture of what is going on in Washington and the decisions the President makes.

Q It sounds like an invitation.

Q What's the reason to have this sort of session?

MR. McCLELLAN: Like I said, I'm just not going to get into discussion in the gaggle on background briefings.

Q **Is Governor Schwarzenegger** and the President going to meet -- are they going to meet today?

MR. McCLELLAN: I think he's supposed to attend the victory reception -- or victory dinner this evening.

Q Tonight?

MR. McCLELLAN: Yes.

Q The one at the private house or the one at --

MR. McCLELLAN: At the private residence, yes, the RNC dinner.

Q That's not a fundraiser, is it? The dinner -- the victory dinner?

MR. McCLELLAN: You would have to check with RNC on the specifics.

Q So you think he's at the closed event, but not the public, you said? I didn't hear you.

MR. McCLELLAN: I'm sorry?

Q Schwarzenegger is going -- the Governor is going?

MR. McCLELLAN: At this point, I know that he's scheduled to go to the dinner tonight.

Q Are you able to talk at all about the amount raised --

MR. McCLELLAN: About what?

Q About the amount being raised today and tomorrow?

MR. McCLELLAN: Well, you'll have a campaign official talk to you on the ground.

Q How about the advertising --

MR. McCLELLAN: I think the campaign is talking about some of that today and tomorrow.

Q **What's the progress** on the international peacekeeping force moving into Haiti?

MR. McCLELLAN: Well, we continue to work with our international partners and the interim government in Haiti and the -- and members of civil society to advance democracy and stability. We are working with our international partners to move forward on the CARICOM framework that was outlined prior to Mr. Aristide's resignation. We believe that's a good framework for moving forward. And you have a -- we're working along with our international partners to get the tripartite commission underway that will include representatives from the international community and the interim government and members of civil society.

Q You mentioned that there are French and Canadian troops there.

MR. McCLELLAN: Yes.

Q Anything -- any more countries?

MR. McCLELLAN: I don't have the latest updates. I mean, we've obviously been in discussions with others about contributing to the multinational force. And, eventually, as it's spelled out in the Security Council resolution, the United Nations will assume responsibility for those -- for the multinational forces.

Q So you can't say when more additional troops will --

MR. McCLELLAN: No, I leave those discussions to the Pentagon to address.

Q What do you say to Guy Phillippe, the rebel leader who says that he's basically in charge? Should a guy -- are you going to confront him, or are you just going to let him say these things?

MR. McCLELLAN: I think -- our message to the rebels, or the so-called rebels has been very clear: the rebels need to put their arms down and return home. There is no place for thugs, criminals, and the so-called rebels in Haiti's political system. And so our message has been very clear that we are working with our international partners and the Haitian people to move forward on strengthening democracy and democratic institutions in Haiti, and bringing about order and stability. The level of violence has been reduced. And we continue to call on all Haitians to end the violence.

Q What happens if the rebels don't follow this -- don't put down their arms? Are there any consequences?

MR. McCLELLAN: Well, I'm not going to speculate. I think that -- we're focused on bringing order and stability to Haiti with our international partners, and moving forward on the democratic constitutional process that's in place.

Q -- have any updates today about who might be behind the bombings at the mosques in Karbala and Baghdad yesterday?

MR. McCLELLAN: Obviously, I think if there's any more to report on that, that will come out of

military leaders in the region. But I don't -- I do not have any update on that at this point. As we said yesterday, these kind of attacks have all the hallmarks of al-Zarqawi. And we saw the letter that he was sending to al Qaeda members, and it outlines his intentions to start civil war within Iraq. But this is another indication of how high the stakes are in Iraq. The terrorists recognize that Iraq is the central front in the war on terrorism. And they will not prevail. Democracy is taking root. And the Iraqi people have a better and brighter future on the way.

Q Do you make a distinction between Zarqawi and al Qaeda, or is he part of al Qaeda? Or how do you --

MR. McCLELLAN: Well, Zarqawi is a dangerous terrorist, and he is a senior al Qaeda associate. He is someone that we continue to pursue. We will find him and we will bring him to justice.

Q Has the President seen the ad his campaign is releasing today, and what does he think of it?

MR. McCLELLAN: Yes.

Q He's what?

MR. McCLELLAN: He's seen it.

Q So he really has seen it?

MR. McCLELLAN: He participated in it, too.

Q Scott, when you said you can expect the President to campaign, he's going to compete across the country, does that raise the commitment in California a little bit more from where it was, or keep it --

MR. McCLELLAN: I expect -- he will compete in California, as well.

Q I mean, there wasn't any doubt, was there?

MR. McCLELLAN: -- I say that -- but, look, those are questions that are best directed to the campaign.

All right, thanks.

Q Thank you.

END 12:26 P.M. PST