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PRESIDENT
GEORGE W. BUSH

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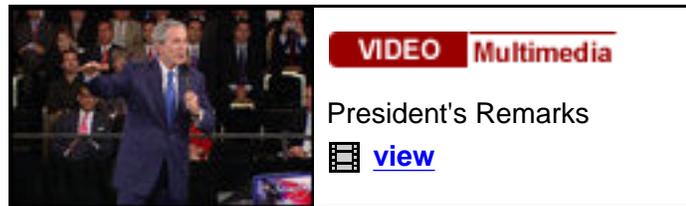
President Discusses Comprehensive Immigration Reform

Hyatt Regency Irvine
Irvine, California

 [Fact Sheet: Comprehensive Immigration Reform:
Securing Our Border](#)

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9:14 A.M. PDT

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you all. Please be seated. (Applause.) Thanks for letting me come by. Tom, thanks for the invitation. What I thought I would do is share some thoughts with you on some issues that kind of like may be on the TV screen these days. (Laughter.) And then answer some of your questions. I'm interested to know what's on your mind.

First, I've had a fabulous trip to your unbelievably beautiful state. It started off in northern California, Cisco; then I went to Stanford; then I went to Napa Valley; then I rode my bicycle on Earth Day in Napa Valley. Then I found out the mountains are a little steep in Napa Valley. (Laughter.) I then went down and spent fantastic time in Palm Springs. What an unbelievably diverse state and it's a fantastic place to end my journey, here in Orange County. I want to thank you for giving me a chance to come by and visit with you.



Laura sends her very best. I, of course, checked in with her this morning before I headed over here to see if she had any additional instructions for me for the day. (Laughter.) She said, keep it short. (Laughter.) I'm a lucky man to have Laura as a wife. You can imagine what it's like to be President -- there's some pressure on your family, as you can imagine. The good news is I've got a 45-second commute. (Laughter.) And the better news is I've got a wife who is a fantastic First Lady who shares a passion with me to do the best we can for our country. (Applause.)

I want to thank Lucy Dunn, as well as thanking Tom for putting this event together. I appreciate the members of the Orange County Business Council. I want to thank Congressman John Campbell for his service. Appreciate you. He's the Congressman from this district, by the way. And Catherine is with us.

I thank -- Congresswoman Mary Bono is with us today. Mary, thank you for being here. (Applause.) I just spent some quality time in her district, and I forgot to tell you that I had the privilege of riding my mountain bike in the desert, as well. The national monument that she helped put together to preserve open spaces -- she's got a lot of humility, she didn't name the national monument after herself. If I were to name it I would say, Really Hard Bike Ride Monument. (Laughter.)

I want to thank Congressman Ken Calvert for joining us today. Ken, it's good to see you, proud of you. (Applause.) Congressman Gary Miller is with us today. Congressman, thank you. (Applause.) Mayor Beth Krom of the city of Irvine -- Madam Mayor, thank you for being here. Thanks for serving. (Applause.) There you are, Mayor. Thank you. (Applause.) Appreciate you coming. Thanks for serving. I had -- last night, by the way, I had dinner with the Mayor of Los Angeles and Mayor of Long Beach and Mayor of Anaheim, and some other mayors that came.

It's real important for the President to pay attention to people, what's on their mind, and that's what I'm here to do today. I want to share some things that's on my -- first of all, Rick Warren, by the way, is here. Where are you, Rick? There you go. I appreciate you. (Applause.) Still got the calendar in the desk. (Laughter.) Ambassador Argyros, good to see you, George. George served our country as the ambassador to Spain. Thank you. (Applause.)

I got a lot on my mind these days; I want to share two thoughts with you. First, I want to talk about the war on terror. I wish I could report to you that the war on terror was over. It's not. There is still an enemy that wants to do us harm. And the most important job of the President of the United States is to protect the American people from that harm. That's -- and I think about it all the time.



As you know, well, I make a lot of decisions, and at the core of my decision-making when it comes to protecting America is the lessons learned from September the 11th, 2001. My job is to use the resources of the United States to prevent such an attack from happening again. And the first lesson of September the 11th, 2001 is that we face an enemy that had no regard for innocent life, an enemy which has hijacked a great religion to suit their political needs.

And therefore, the only way to deal with them is to stay on the offense to pressure them, and to bring them to justice which is precisely what the United States of America is doing and will continue to do for the safety of the American people. (Applause.)

The second lesson is we must deny these folks safe haven. They need to find safe haven from which to plot and plan. We denied safe haven in Afghanistan, and we're denying them safe haven in Iraq.

One of the important things that a President must do is to take the words of the enemy very seriously. And when the enemy speaks, and they speak quite often, we listen carefully. We listen to their aims and their objectives. These are not a kind of isolated, angry people. These are folks bound together by

an ideology that is totalitarian in nature. They believe that capitalism produces weak societies. They want to spread their idea of life throughout the Middle East. They have stated so in word after word. And they believe that with time, they can establish a safe haven in Iraq.

And here's the danger of having an enemy with a safe haven in Iraq, Iraq has got wealth. Iraq has -- had weapons of mass destruction and has the knowledge as to how to produce weapons of mass destruction. And the confluence of a terrorist network with weapons of mass destruction is the biggest threat the United States of America faces. They have said it's just a matter of time.

And they've got a powerful weapon, by the way -- the enemy does. And that is the willingness and capacity to kill innocent people. And they understand the United States of America is a compassionate nation. They view -- I'm sure they view it as a weakness of our country, I happen to view it as a strength that we value every life, that every person is precious. But they know, and it doesn't take much to realize that when you put carnage on our TV screens, it causes us to weep. It causes people rightly to say whether or not the cause is worth it. It's a legitimate question for the American people.

But it's very important for the American people to understand that they're trying to run us out of Iraq for a purpose. And the purpose is to be able to have safe haven from which to launch further attacks. And I understand it. And we've got a strategy in place to achieve victory.

Yesterday I went over to Twentynine Palms -- I want to tell you something about the United States military. These young men and women are incredibly dedicated. They are motivated. They understand that we must defeat the enemy over there so we do not have to face them here at home. Most of them raised their hand to volunteer after September the 11th. Many of them have said, I want to continue to serve our country. We're lucky to have people like them willing to o serve. And the United States government, whether you agree with my policy or not, must stand by our troops. When they're in harm's way, they deserve the best pay, the best equipment, and the best possible support. (Applause.)

And I told them, I told them they didn't have to worry about me. I believe we're going to win in Iraq. And a victory in Iraq will be a major blow to the totalitarian vision of bin Laden and his lieutenants -- a major blow. One, it will be a tactical blow. We'll deny them that which they want. But secondly, it will be a major blow because, in the long-term, the best way to defeat an ideology of hatred is with an ideology of hope.

I based a lot of my foreign policy decisions on some things that I think are true. One, I believe there's an Almighty, and secondly, I believe one of the great gifts of the Almighty is the desire in everybody's soul, regardless of what you look like or where you live, to be free. I believe liberty is universal. I believe people want to be free. And I know that democracies do not war with each other. And I know that the best way to defeat the enemy, the best way to defeat their ability to exploit hopelessness and despair is to give people a chance to live in a free society.

You know, the Iraqis went to the polls last December for the third time in one year. It seems like a decade ago, doesn't it? It seems like it was just an eternity ago that 12 million people defied terrorists, threats, and said, we want to be free. We're sick and tired of a society that had been suppressed by a brutal tyrant. We want to go to the polls. We want to be self-governing. I wasn't surprised; I was

pleased, but not surprised. If you believe that liberty exists in the soul of each person on the face of the Earth, it shouldn't surprise you that, given the chance, people will say, we want to be free. And now the role of the United States is to stand by the courageous Iraqis as their democracy develops.

It's not easy work, by the way, to go from tyranny to democracy. We had kind of a round go ourself, if you look back at our history. My Secretary of State's relatives were enslaved in the United States even though we had a Constitution that said all were -- that believed in the dignity, or at least proclaimed to believe in the dignity of all. The Articles of Confederation wasn't exactly a real smooth start for our government to begin. And what you're watching on your TV screens is a new democracy emerging. And I had the privilege of calling the President of Iraq, the new Speaker of Iraq, and the Prime Minister-designee of Iraq, there in the comfort of my hotel room in Palm Desert -- Palm Springs. And I can't tell you how heartened I was to hear their words.

First of all, they expressed great appreciation for the American people, and our troops, and the families of our troops. Secondly, to a person -- this is a Kurd, a Shia, and a Sunni I'm talking to -- each one of them said, we want to have a national unity government. We're sick of the sectarian violence. We believe if you stand with us, we can achieve our objective of becoming a democracy that listens to the people. And I believe them. And I believe them. And I told them -- I said, look, it's going to be up to you to make it work, but you can count on the United States of America because we believe in liberty and the capacity of liberty to change lives and to change the neighborhood for a more peaceful tomorrow.

This is a new chapter in our relationship. We had an important milestone when the unity government was formed, and now there's a new chapter in the relationship and we're moving forward.

You know, it's really important for people to be able to connect the concept of freedom to our security. And it's hard. It's hard, particularly in a day and age when every act of violence is put in your living room. And I know that. I fully understand the challenge I face as the Commander-in-Chief to describe to the American people why the sacrifice is worth it.

And perhaps the best way to do so is to share one of my favorite lessons of history with you, and that is that my relationship with Prime Minister Koizumi of Japan is a special relationship. He's an interesting guy. And he's a friend, and we work to keep the peace. We sit down -- when we sit down, we talk about the importance of democracy developing in Iraq. The Japanese had troops, by the way, in Iraq to help this young country. We talked about North Korea. We talk about issues of peace. I find it so interesting and so ironic that those are the conversations I have with him, especially since 60 years ago, my dad -- and I suspect many of your relatives -- fought the Japanese as an enemy.

And so what happens between 18-year-old G.H.W. Bush, Navy fighter pilot, signing up to fight the sworn enemy of Japanese, and his son sitting down to talk about the peace? And what happened was Japan adopted a Japanese-style democracy. Democracy can help change the world and lay the foundation for peace. And that's what's happening today. These are historic times. My job is to lead this to protect you. And my job is to lay the foundation of peace for generations to come. And that is why I told those Marines yesterday that we're going to complete the mission. (Applause.)

I got a lot of others things to talk about. I want to talk about immigration. So I saw my friend Brulte, he's

an ex-politician, you know? Always a friend. He said, people are wondering why you would come to Orange County to talk about immigration. (Laughter.) And the answer is because that's what a leader does.

I want to talk to you, tell you my thoughts about the subject. First of all, I understand it is an emotional subject. And it's really important that those of us who have microphones and can express ourselves do so in a respectful way that recognizes we are a nation of immigrants, that we have had a grand tradition in this country of welcoming people into our society. And ours is a society that is able to take the newly arrived, and they become equally American. I believe that immigration has helped reinvigorate the soul of America. I know that when somebody comes to our country because he or she has a dream and is willing to work hard for that dream, it makes America a better place.

Now, first and foremost, the federal government has the role to enforce our border. The American people are right in saying to the government, enforce the border. Listen, I was an old border governor. I understand it's important to enforce our border. And we are. We got a lot of good people down there working hard on the border to keep people from -- and contraband, or whatever -- from coming into this country illegally. We've increased the number of Border Patrol. And I want to thank to Congresswoman and Congressmen here for being wise about providing resources to increase the number of patrol on the border. But that's not enough.

We've got to have modern equipment to be able to help people find people that are coming across a very long and difficult border to protect. We got infrared. Unmanned vehicles are being -- aerial vehicles -- UAVs are being deployed. We're now beginning to modernize our border so that the people we've asked to enforce the border have got the tools necessary to do so. In parts of the rural border there needs to be berms to prevent people from flying across in their SUVs, smuggling people into America. And we're strengthening this border. I'll tell you something that's interesting. Since 2001, 6 million people have been caught illegally trying to get in this country, and turned back -- 6 million people. So people are working down there, and they're working hard.

And I'm going to continue to work with Congress. I know these people from Congress are interested in providing the Border Patrol and those responsible for enforcing the border the tools necessary to do their job, and I thank you for that.

Secondly, we have got a problem with -- we have a problem we're going to solve this year, by the way, of catching people from -- non-Mexican illegal immigrants, and just sending them back into society. There weren't enough detention beds. So you got the people down there working hard -- 6 million people crossing since 2001 and sent home. But most of the Mexican citizens who were caught trying to illegally come in the country were sent back to their country. But if you catch somebody from Central America coming back, you just can't send them back for a while, so there needs to be a place to detain them. We didn't have enough bed space. And so we had catch-and-release. We're asking people to go down there and do their job, and they find somebody from Central America sneaking in and they say, check back in with us in 45 days, come and see your immigration guy down there. (Laughter.) And they weren't checking back in after 45 days. (Laughter.) They were coming to work, see. They wanted to put food on the table for their families, and they weren't interested in checking back in.

And so it meant there was a lot of wasted effort by the Border Patrol. We're going to change that. One of the things that Congress has done, it's done a good job of providing additional money for bed space and money to make sure that we can send people back home. You got people coming up who want to work, see. They're going broke at home; they want to put food on the table; they go to unbelievable lengths to come and feed their families. We're catching them, we're putting them back in -- we're stopping that. Our job is to enforce this border -- 6 million people have been turned back. And we got a strategy in place to make sure that this border is as tight as it possibly can be.

Secondly, in order to make sure immigration laws work, you got to enforce the laws on the books, see. If it's illegal to hire somebody, then the federal government has got to enforce those laws. We're a nation of law. And by the way, you can be a nation of law and a compassionate nation at the same time. You don't have to be -- (applause.)

Now, the problem we have is you got some person out there in central Texas needing a worker, and he can't find a worker, an American. So he says, look, anybody help me find somebody, I got something to do. This economy is growing, see -- 4.7 unemployment rate nationwide. Pretty good numbers. And people are having trouble finding work that Americans won't do. And that's a fact of life. And so he says, why don't you send somebody over to help me? And they show up and they put a Social Security card out there and it looks real. You know, our small business owners are not document checkers. These are people trying to get ahead, and it's impossible to -- (applause.) It's impossible to really effect the enforcement of our laws if people are able to use forged documents.

Now, we've increased the amount of manpower there to hold people to account for hiring illegals, but it is difficult to hold somebody, an employer to account if they're putting false papers on -- the truth of the matter is, what's happened is people are trying to come in this country and we got smugglers smuggling them in. And they're putting them in the back of 18-wheelers, stuffing human beings in the back of trucks, because people are coming to do jobs Americans won't do. They're putting people out in deserts. We've lost a lot of people, a lot of decent, hardworking people, trying to come in this country in the desert, losing their lives. These smugglers are coyotes, they're kind of preying on innocent life, and they've got a whole document forgery industry going on.

See, we made it such that an underground industry thrives on human beings, people coming to do work that the Americans will not do. And so I think that the best way to enforce our border and the best way, besides making sure it's modern and we've got manpower and equipment down there, which we do, and it's increasing every week, is to come up with a rational plan that recognizes people coming here to work and let them do so on a temporary basis. That's why I'm for a temporary worker program that will -- (applause) -- that says to a person, here is a tamper-proof card that says, you can come and do a job an American won't do, fill a need. A tamper-proof card all of a sudden makes interior enforcement work. In other words, we now know who's getting the cards and we know they can't be tampered with. So the guy says, show me your tamper-proof card before I hire you. And if they do, fine. But if they don't, say, I'm not hiring you. You got to have the card to get work.

Secondly, we got a lot of people across the border to do jobs. It is really hard to enforce the border with people sneaking across to do a job. Doesn't it make sense to have a rational, temporary worker plan that says you don't need to sneak across the border. You can come on a temporary basis to do a job Americans won't do. So you don't have to sneak across -- so you don't have to pay money to a coyote

that stuffs you in the back of a truck, so you don't have to burden our borders.

Look, we want our Border Patrol hunting gun smugglers and dope runners. And it just seems rational to me and logical to me that says, okay, fine, you can come and do a job Americans won't do for a temporary period of time with a tamper-proof card.

All of a sudden, we've kind of taken this smuggling industry and dismantled it through rational policy. All of a sudden, we recognized that we want to treat people with respect. I know this an emotional debate. And I can understand it's emotional. But one thing we cannot lose sight of is that we're talking about human beings, decent human beings that need to be treated with respect. (Applause.)

Massive deportation of the people here is unrealistic. It's just not going to work. You can hear people out there hollering it's going to work. It's not going to work. It just -- and so therefore, what do we do with people who are here? And this is one of the really important questions Congress is going to have to deal with.

I thought the Senate had an interesting approach by saying that if you've been here for five years or less, you're treated one way, and five years or more, you're treated another. It's just an interesting concept that people need to think through about what to do with people that have been here for quite a period of time.

Now, my attitude is this: I think that people ought to be, obviously, here to work on a temporary basis. The definition of temporary will be decided in the halls of Congress.

Secondly, I believe that a person should never be granted automatic citizenship. And let me tell you why I believe that, that if you've been here -- broken the law and have been here working, that it doesn't seem fair to me to say you're automatically a citizen when somebody who has been here legally working is standing in line trying to become a citizen, as well. In other words, there's the line for people. (Applause.)

But what I do think makes sense is that a person ought to be allowed to get in line. In other words, pay a penalty for being here illegally, commit him or herself to learn English, which is part of the American system -- (applause) -- and get in the back of the line. In other words, there is a -- there is a line of people waiting to become legal through the green card process. And it's by nationality. And if you're a citizen here who has been here illegally, you pay a penalty, you learn English, and you get in line, but at the back -- not the front. And if Congress wants a shorter line for a particular nationality, they increase the number of green cards. If they want a longer line, they shrink the number of green cards per nationality.

This is an important debate for the American citizens to conduct. It's a debate that requires clear rational thought, and it's really important for those of us in positions of responsibility to remember that we're a nation of law, a welcoming nation, a nation that honors people's traditions no matter where they're from because we've got confidence in the capacity of our nation to make us all Americans, one nation under God.

And so that's what's on my mind today -- got a lot of other things, if you're interested. But I -- (applause) -- I got some time for some -- I'd like to answer some questions if you got any, or hear from you.

Yes, sir.

Q Morning, sir. (Inaudible.)

THE PRESIDENT: Pretty good. I think I'm doing all right, yes. (Laughter.)

Q I understand you get a lot of tough questions and you're very candid person, so assuming that you agree with the fact that no one is perfect --

THE PRESIDENT: I agree with that.

Q Good.

THE PRESIDENT: Especially me. (Laughter.)

Q I'd like to get your candid response to your perspective from the outside looking in, and now the inside looking out. Before you became President, obviously, you had some perceptions based on your family history, being governor, what it would be like to be President of the U.S. Now that you are President, and you've had a chance to go through the experience and you're in your second term, candidly, if you had it to do over, would there be anything that you'd do differently?

THE PRESIDENT: I appreciate it. The fundamental question

-- the threshold question is would I run, the first place. That's really the first question that one would ask. Now that I'm here, seeing what it's like, would I do it again, and the answer is, absolutely.

I have enjoyed this experience in a way that's hard for me to describe to you. Listen, there have been some rough moments. But it is an incredible honor to serve our country.

The second threshold question is, would I commit troops to protect the American people. It's really a fundamental question. Knowing what I know today, would I have done anything differently with our troops.

First, you got to know that the hardest decision for a President is to put anybody in harm's way -- because I fully understand the consequences of making such a decision. I was at church yesterday in Twentynine Palms. In the pew that I was sitting in was a mother and step-father grieving for a guy who lost his life. And I knew that I would have to deal with this as best as I possibly can.

I also wanted to let you know that it's before you commit troops that you must do everything you can to solve the problem diplomatically. And I can look you in the eye and tell you I feel I've tried to solve the

problem diplomatically to the max, and would have committed troops both in Afghanistan and Iraq knowing what I know today. (Applause.)

Obviously, as we look back -- and every war plan is perfect until it meets the enemy. It's fine on paper until you actually start putting it into practice. And there is a -- decisions like preparing an Iraqi army for a -- external threat. Well, it turns out, there may have been an external threat, but it's nothing compared to the internal threat. We got in and started trying to build some big reconstruction projects right off the bat. And it didn't make any sense because it was easy -- they became convenient targets for the enemy. And so we started to decentralize -- this kind of -- I'm getting down to the minutia. But there are some tactics that -- when I look back -- that we could have done differently.

The fundamental question on the Iraq theater, though, is did we put enough troops in there in the first place. That's the debate in Washington. I'm sure you've heard about it. Let me just tell you what happened. I called Tommy Franks in with Don Rumsfeld and said, Tommy, if we're going in, you design the plan and you got what you need. I said -- I remember the era when politicians were trying to run wars, people trying to fine-tune this or fine-tune that. One the lessons of Vietnam, it seemed like to me -- still does -- is that people tried to make decisions on behalf of the military, which I think is a terrible precedent to make if you're the Commander-in-Chief. By the way, you can't run a war, you can't make decisions based upon polls and focus groups, either.

And so I told Tommy, I said, you know you got what you need. And then it's my -- then the fundamental question is, do I think he's comfortable telling the Commander-in-Chief what's real and isn't real. So I spent a lot of time with Tommy, and the first time I'm with him I'm trying to figure out whether or not he has got the ability to walk in the Oval Office -- which can be kind of an intimidating place -- and say, here's what I think, Mr. President.

I was comforted by the fact that Tommy and I were raised in the same part of the world. He went to Midland Lee High School with Laura, by the way. I felt like -- I felt like that there was kind of a kinship to begin with, and I'm confident, sir, that Tommy told me exactly what was on his mind. I believe that. And so, therefore, the troop level that he suggested was the troop level necessary to do the job. And I support it strongly.

And I fully understand people are going to think back and, could you have done something different, or not different. And that's fair. And it's worthwhile. And we still have members of Congress who are coming in -- and they should -- are coming in and say, Mr. President, have you thought about this, or are you going to do that. And we're constantly adjusting on the ground to meet an enemy which changes. But on the big decisions of sending the troops in, I'd have done it again.

Thank you. Great question. (Applause.)

Yes, sir.

Q Good morning. My name is Jamie Law (sp) and I'm 14 years old, and I was wondering what America is going to be like in 10 years. (Laughter.)

THE PRESIDENT: Here's what America needs to be like -- maybe 20 -- (laughter) -- 10 to 20. You need to be driving an automobile with hydrogen as the main source of power. (Applause.) And at the very least, with a hybrid -- a plug-in battery of a hybrid vehicle that will let you get the first 40 miles without using gasoline. In other words, between 10 to 20 years from now we got to get off Middle Eastern oil. It's a problem. (Applause.)

You'll be able to see a technology, a technology that will be -- enable you to converse with somebody on long distance and it seems like the person is right there in the room with you. I saw that at Cisco. It's an amazing technology that will mean that education changes to the better. You can hire -- if you got yourself a state like we got in Texas, that's rural, you can get a chemistry professor from one of the urban centers and put them on the screen and it's like the professor is right in the room, teaching. There's a way to husband resources.

You'll have the capacity to interface with people around the world in a real-time basis. You'll be able to talk more clearly. Information will become even more powerful than it is today. And the fundamental question is, what do we do with that information. You'll be confronted with very difficult choices when it comes to science. The first choice we all have to deal with right off the bat is whether or not it's okay to destroy life to save life. In other words, as technology progresses, as this country of ours is more technologically advanced, you're going to be confronted with serious ethical choices. There will be a clash between morality and science that will present some really difficult decisions for people.

You'll be able to have a leader that can go and sit down with a duly-elected leader of a major Middle Eastern country, saying, how can we keep the peace together. I believe you'll see there's a democracy movement moving across the Middle East over the next 10 years. Much of it is going to be led by women who don't want to be a second-class citizen in any society. I think you'll see a relationship between the United States and other great powers that will enable us to work together to be able to provide a stable platform.

What I hope you don't see is a nation that loses its nerve and becomes isolationist and protectionist. That's one of my concerns, so I put it in the State of the Union. It was such a concern that, instead of going with, here are the 29 things we're going to do either for you or to you, it was -- (laughter) -- I talked about isolation and protectionism. It's very important for this nation to be a confident nation and to remain a leader of the world. You cannot win the war on terror if you kind of pull back and say, let somebody else deal with it.

You can't do your duty as a nation that should subscribe to the theory that to whom much is given, much is required -- and that duty is to help deal with HIV/AIDS, for example, on the continent of Africa. We have a duty to help feed the hungry, in my judgment. (Applause.)

What I hope you don't see is a nation that loses its confidence in the capacity to trade with countries like China. Hu Jintao was -- came to visit, and we had a wonderful visit with him. But I know there are some Americans who wonder whether or not it's worth the effort to try to out-compete with China. They look at the statistics and they worry about whether or not it is possible to compete with China. I say, you bet it's possible to compete with China. And not only can we compete with China, if we have a level playing field we'll do just fine.

And so what I'm telling you is I hope you have a nation that, at home is one that is able to balance technology and ethical concerns, a nation, by the way -- I hope those taxes remain low, see. One of the things you got to make sure -- (applause) -- you got to have that proper balance between what government really needs and money in your pocket.

Anyway -- great question, by the way, for a 14-year-old guy. I'm not so sure if I were 14 I'd have been able to get that question out. I might have been a little nervous. (Laughter.)

Let's see -- yes, ma'am.

Q First of all, I want to thank you for coming to Orange County. I don't know who said it wasn't a good idea, but I think it's a great idea. And we love you, so thank for being here. (Applause.) I very much support your immigration plan. I think it's a good framework. But the one question I have -- last year my daughter fell and broke her hip -- she's 12. And it was five hours in the emergency room at the hospital before she could see a doctor. And a lot of people in the ER were there because it was their primary medical facility --

THE PRESIDENT: Correct.

Q So in your plan, how do you plan to address health care and schools and so forth that are really impacted?

THE PRESIDENT: Community health centers. We -- this administration, working with the Congress, has funded the expansion of what's called community health centers. Community health centers are places for the poor and the indigent to get primary care so to do exactly what -- to address the problem that you described, which is primary care in emergency rooms are costly, they are -- it's not a cost-effective treatment -- I guess it is once you get the treatment, but it's not cost-effective overall and, therefore, the advent of community health centers.

And I don't know if you've got them here in Orange County; I hope you do. I bet you do. You don't have any? Well, get to working, Congressman. (Laughter and applause.) But that's the best way, really, to be able to address the issue, whether it be for an immigrant who is here, or anybody else that cannot afford health care. The best place to get primary care is not the emergency rooms. And so we've got a comprehensive strategy. And we're expanding them all across the country. And I'm surprised you don't have one here. I bet you do, and you just don't know it. And, therefore, what needs to happen is there needs to be a campaign to explain what's available for people so that they don't go to the emergency rooms.

Yes, sir.

Q Mr. President, I emigrated from Cuba when I was about nine years old -- legally, I might add.

THE PRESIDENT: Pedro Pan? Were you Pedro Pan?

Q No.

THE PRESIDENT: No? Okay.

Q But anyway, besides marrying a wonderful woman and having two great sons, coming to this great land is the best thing that has ever happened to me. And I appreciate your comments on immigration. And my question to you, Mr. President, is that I would like to go to Cuba, to travel, to see -- I want to go see my front door that was bullet-riddled when they were fighting Batista's guys. And I can't go there legally. And I don't understand, how can we trade with Vietnam -- we lost over 50,000 Americans there -- how can we trade with Communist China, we can't even go to Cuba? And I think if the borders were opened up with Cuba and American enterprise got to go down there, I think Castro would fall like a rock off a cliff. And my question to you, sir, is why can't we open --

THE PRESIDENT: Okay, here's why --

Q Yes. (Applause.)

THE PRESIDENT: Here's why: Fidel Castro has got the capacity to arbitrage your dollars to the advantage of his administration. You pay in dollars, he pays in Cuban money and collects the difference. So you go to a hotel in Havana, the money goes to the hotel, which has kind of got a deal with the government in order to be there in the first place, and the workers get paid in a currency that's worthless compared to the U.S. dollar. And he makes the balance. And so, in all due respect, I have taken the position that trade with the country enables a tyrant to stay in power, as opposed to the opposite. Honest disagreement of opinion -- I fully recognize -- but that's why I made the decision I made. And anyway, my preacher, by the way, at St. John the Divine Church, is a guy who came from Cuba at about the same age you did. You look a little younger than he is -- but, nevertheless, that's why. That's why.

Yes, sir.

Q As you said, you make a lot of important decisions on a day-by-day basis. I'm interested in the personal, as well as political aspects of your counsel. Do you know any illegal status individuals coming from Midland, Texas? What do they feel? And how do they counsel you on this? And also, politically, it's an intensely state-specific issue. Are the states most affected by illegal immigration, speaking in a collective voice?

THE PRESIDENT: Really good question. No, I don't believe I know anybody who is in Texas illegally. Had I hired somebody who had been here illegally, I guarantee you'd have read about it. (Laughter and applause.)

Isn't that right, Elisabeth?

The interesting thing about this issue -- I want to be respectful in correcting you about the nature of the immigration debate -- it is more widespread than you think. It really is. There's a lot of states who have

been affected, and maybe impacted in a much more different way than California and Texas has been. Texas and California are -- have had a history of Latino presence. It's been a part of our heritage. But there are many communities in the United States that for the first time are getting to become acquainted with the Latino heritage. And that probably impacts people even more significantly than parts of California and Texas. It really does. And so there is a universal concern about the issue. And what's really important about this issue is to try to set aside all the emotion and think about how to solve the problem in a rational, calm way.

But, no, it's -- people -- obviously, if you're from -- I was talking to a congressman from -- I don't want to -- they'll start trying to find the guy, so I'm not going to give him any hints, but -- (laughter.) It's a guy. Anyway, but he said, my town was like a small number of minorities, and now it's 50 percent Latino, and we don't know what to do. And this is a new phenomenon. This isn't something that's been around for decades. This is a brand-new phenomenon. And so there is a national concern about this issue. It really is. And, obviously, it takes -- it reflects the nature of the local community, flares up one way or another around the country. But there's a lot of people talking about it. And it's -- we've got to get something done. I want a comprehensive bill. I don't want -- (applause.)

Yes, sir, back there in the end zone.

Q Mr. President, Bill Habermehl, County Superintendent of Schools. For us to compete globally, we need to get better in math and science. What do you see as the role of the federal government in that regard?

THE PRESIDENT: Yes, thanks. First, the role of the federal government is to make sure that we get it right at the early grades. And that's why I worked hard for and was extremely proud to sign the No Child Left Behind Act. And the No Child Left Behind Act starts with these basic premises: One, children can learn, and we ought to expect them to learn. I know that sounds simple. But that's not the way it was in certain school districts. You look like a vet, and you know full well that in certain school districts, just move them through, man. What mattered was the age, not what -- the level of knowledge.

Secondly, that accountability can be used effectively, particularly if it's designed at the local level. In other words, you can use an accountability system to determine whether or not curriculum is working, or you can use an accountability system to determine how your school district is doing relative to the school district next-door to you. You can use an accountability system to determine whether or not we're closing an achievement gap that needs to be closed if America is going to be a promising place for all people, not just some, but all people.

And so I worked with both Republicans and Democrats -- it actually can happen sometimes in Washington that we're able to work together -- and passed the No Child Left Behind Act, which said, in return for federal money -- in increasing amounts, by the way -- on particularly Title I money, we expect you just to show us. We expect you to measure. You notice I didn't say, we expect you to administer the test we designed. I'm a local-control-of-schools person, and I knew that if a federal test were designed, it could force people to behave according to the tests. In other words, you could cause people to lose their independence if you're the test designer. And so I said, California, design your own test, and measure 3 through 8 and post the results for everybody to see so that concerned citizens,

when they saw a failure, would have something to say to the -- to you to change. Or, thank you for doing what you're doing.

And as a result of measuring, I can report to you that math scores and science scores for 4th graders and reading scores

-- math and reading scores for 4th graders and 8th graders -- on the rise, particularly amongst African American and Latino students.

Things are changing. It's amazing what happens when you say, there's accountability in the system. The problem is, as you know full well, but others may not, is that when a child gets to high school, our math and science skills, relative to other countries in the world, is abysmal. And it's not right. And we're not going to be able to compete successfully for the jobs of the 21st century. So here's the strategy: Apply the same rigor in math that we've applied in reading.

And here's what happens: In early grades in reading, if you don't pass the test, there is supplemental service money to enable a child to get up to speed. In other words, we diagnose the problem and we're actually providing money to solve the problem, and it's paying off. They ought to apply the same rigor to 8th grade math and 9th grade math -- measure to find deficiencies and provide extra money for school districts to make sure children get back up to speed.

Secondly, it is very important for there to be role models in classrooms that basically says science and math are cool. They weren't too cool when I was going to school, you know. And therefore, one of the things we can do is have adjunct professors in classrooms. I went to a school with Margaret Spellings, who is the Secretary of Education, in Maryland the other day, and there were two NASA scientists there. And part of their job was not only to work at the NASA facility close-by, but to go into classrooms, to say to children, math and science are really important for you.

Thirdly, AP works -- advanced placement. I bet you've got some good AP teachers. The advanced placement program is the way to set high standards for our children. And so, therefore, the federal government ought to help train 70,000 AP teachers in classrooms. That says, we believe in setting high standards; we ought not to accept a system that doesn't continue to raise the bar and measure and hold people to account.

Finally, we've got an additional 1 million students on Pell grants. These are grants to help people who can't afford college go to college. And they're very important -- it's a very important tool to help people realize dreams. But I think we ought to enhance the Pell grants for those who take rigorous academics in high school for years one and two. And if you maintain a 3.0 grade point average and take science, math, or critical languages in third and fourth year of college, you ought to get an additional \$4,000 on top of your Pell grant.

There is a strategy; the strategy of the federal government is a part of the strategy. The local school district is an integral part of the strategy. Thanks for being a superintendent, appreciate it. (Applause.)

Yes, sir.

Q I'm a civil engineer, and we recently put out a report card for the nation's infrastructure and -- by the American Society of Civil Engineers. It was abysmal, is the word that you've used. And we're really concerned that our nation is coming to a crisis on its infrastructure. And yet, we seem to have problems with the federal government coming up with the funds that we need for the various parts of our transportation and our water resources.

THE PRESIDENT: Well, I appreciate that very much. We passed a pretty good sized highway bill -- like really big. And it's a six-year bill, and so it's -- we've got five more years to run on it. But it was a pretty interesting struggle about how much to spend and how much not to spend. And I think if you look at the history of that highway bill, pretty much the bill I signed was more than some thought was necessary.

I did talk to your Governor about an important subject, and that's the levees. And I appreciated his time the other day when I was in -- up there in Cisco Systems. And we talked about the levees, and I said, we want to help. He's committed, by the way, to rebuilding the infrastructure of California. It's a good, strong commitment. And it's what governors do, they lead. But he said, look, we need to work together on this, and what he wanted -- what his office suggested is that we allow the state of California to use the Corps of Engineers to pay the federal share of levee rebuilding when the water goes down, and then through the budget process, reimburse the state of California. I agreed to that.

In other words, the Governor is concerned about being able to get started enough on -- quick enough on levee repairs so we don't waste time. And part of the concern is there's a sharing arrangement between the federal government and the state government. And so I said, advance the state share -- advance the federal share through state money and we'll reimburse you. That's an important beginning. In other words, the funding match is not an excuse. And secondly, he needs regulatory relief from federal law and state law, in order to be able to take advantage of the dry season to get the levees done. And so we're working with him on that.

And -- but, no, I appreciate your concern. It's -- infrastructure is always a difficult issue. It's a federal responsibility and a state and local responsibility. And I, frankly, feel like we've upheld our responsibility at the federal level with the highway bill. There are other infrastructures we got to get built. We need a broadband highway all across America if we're going to end up being a competitive nation. I talked about the ability to be able to converse in real-time, speedy and very fast ways. But that requires us to make sure that broadband is effectively distributed all across the country -- not just in big cities, but out in rural America, as well. And we're working hard on right-of-way issues and other issues to get broadband extensively spread throughout the country.

Yes, sir.

Q Mr. President, I want to thank you for being here in Orange County. In your first term you came to Santa Ana, if you'll recall --

THE PRESIDENT: Yes.

Q -- you met with the museum -- it was a wonderful chat we had with several of the leadership. Your honor, I -- don't call you "your honor" already -- (laughter.) We believe, as you know, the Latino community is America.

THE PRESIDENT: Por cierto.

Q Por cierto. And we believe that the effort that you're putting forth as a comprehensive legislation is what we need in this country. We believe that the economy is going to be great. We believe that the issue that has been raised about the possible changes and possible funding for many infrastructures, as well as emergency services will be there, because we're going to make these people to pay taxes, just like you and I. So we thank you for that.

We just want to ask you a question. What is it that we need to do, and you need to do to make sure Congress will pass this comprehensive immigration bill?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, that's starting right here. You know, you've been on vacation and now start to work the issue. And one way to work it, stand right here in front of these cameras in California, talking about it in a candid way. And I'm going to do my part to continue to call this nation to responsible dialogue and remind the United States Congress we need to get a comprehensive bill passed.

The state of play right now is the Senate reached an important compromise, and it was -- they had a chance to get a bill, it just got caught up in, in my judgment, needless politics. One of the problems we face in Washington is we've got too much needless politics. We got people who aren't willing to -- they want to play -- they want to make the other person look bad, as opposed to make the country look good. And I'm going to continue to call people, whether it be on Social Security reform, or immigration reform, to think about the country first, and put our political parties aside. And I'm confident, if we can do that, we'll come up with a rational plan that will make the country proud.

I'd like to stay here all day, but I got to go to Vegas. (Laughter.) Something about what goes on there, stays there -- or something like that. (Applause.) God bless you. Thanks for letting me come. (Applause.)

END 10:14 A.M. PDT

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