

So thanks for coming. I'd be glad to answer a few questions.

*Attorney-General-Designate John Ashcroft*

Q. Sir, I'm wondering about the Ashcroft confirmations. There seems to be little question that he's going to be confirmed, and yet there's this one week delay. I'm wondering, what do you think Democrats are doing?

*The President.* I think they're making sure that when they confirm him, all questions have been answered.

*Efforts at Bipartisanship*

Q. Sir, where is the common ground on the issues that really divide the two sides, specifically the size of your tax cut and on school vouchers? How can you possibly reach agreement on those two issues?

*The President.* We'll just have to see. That's part of what a dialog is all about. I think that it's important for me to explain my position. It's important for me to hear other's positions. It's important for me to understand where there's resistance and why. But it all happens with good, honest discussion, a frank discussion about positions.

I look forward to explain to any Member that's concerned about tax relief and why, why I proposed it. And I think the evidence is going to become more and more clear that the economy is—it's not as hopeful as we'd like, which I hope will strengthen my case.

Q. Mr. President, you talked about frank and honest discussions. Are you willing to give on either one of those issues, or is there a—

*The President.* Well I'm certainly not willing to negotiate with myself. [Laughter] Particularly in your column. [Laughter]

*Legislative Agenda on Education*

Q. You talked about bipartisanship, sir, but you've also issued legislation or legisla-

tive proposals prior to meeting with the Democrats to work on negotiations. Does that imply that you want them to just take your positions and pass them?

*The President.* It is in recognition of what a Presidential campaign is all about. I don't believe Dick and I would be sitting here had we not taken strong positions on key issues. And I told the American people if I had the honor of being the President, I would submit those positions I was campaigning on to the legislative branch, and that's exactly what I've done.

So if you look at the education proposals we submitted to the Congress, those are based on what I campaigned on. That's exactly what I told the people I would do, and that's what I'm here to remind the Members of the Congress. That's what I am going to do. And I can't wait to have an honest discussion about education, for example, the cornerstone of which is strong accountability.

And I'm going to make the case here, and I'll continue to make the case to anybody who will listen that in order to make sure every child is educated—I mean every child—we must measure—we must understand whether or not children are learning, because the likelihood of poor children being shuffled through the system is increased if we don't measure.

And I hope we can find people—I hope people will listen, because I feel passionately on the subject.

Q. Sir, would you be—a proposal that didn't include—

*The President.* John [John Roberts, CBS News], it's a pleasure. One question per session.

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:25 a.m. in the Cabinet Room at the White House. A tape was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.