

Jan. 27 / Administration of George W. Bush, 2001

Thank you for listening.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:06 a.m. from the Oval Office at the White House.

Remarks on Signing Executive Orders With Respect to Faith-Based and Community Initiatives

January 29, 2001

Good morning. Thank you all for coming. I take great joy in making this announcement. It's going to be one of the most important initiatives that my administration not only discusses but implements.

First, it's good to have so many groups represented here: religious and nonreligious; Catholic, Jewish, Protestant, and Muslim; foundations and other nonprofits. I want to thank you all for coming. This is a collection of some of the finest America has got to offer, people who lead with their hearts and, in turn, have changed the communities in which they live for the better. This meeting is a picture of the strength and diversity and compassion of our country.

This is a diverse group, but we share things in common. They provide more than practical help to people in need; they touch and change hearts. And for this, America is deeply appreciative.

Everyone in this room knows firsthand that there are still deep needs and real suffering in the shadow of America's affluence, problems like addiction and abandonment and gang violence, domestic violence, mental illness, and homelessness. We are called by conscience to respond.

As I said in my Inaugural Address, compassion is the work of a nation, not just a government. It is more than the calling of politicians; it is the calling of citizens. It is citizens who turn mean streets into good neighborhoods. It is citizens who turn cold cities into real communities.

It is one of the great goals of my administration to invigorate the spirit of involvement and citizenship. We will encourage

faith-based and community programs without changing their mission. We will help all in their work to change hearts while keeping a commitment to pluralism.

I approach this goal with some basic principles. Government has important responsibilities for public health or public order and civil rights, and Government will never be replaced by charities and community groups. Yet when we see social needs in America, my administration will look first to faith-based programs and community groups, which have proven their power to save and change lives. We will not fund the religious activities of any group, but when people of faith provide social services, we will not discriminate against them.

As long as there are secular alternatives, faith-based charities should be able to compete for funding on an equal basis and in a manner that does not cause them to sacrifice their mission. And we will make sure that help goes to large organizations and to small ones, as well. We value large organizations with generations of experience. We also value neighborhood healers, who have only the scars and testimony of their own experience.

Tomorrow I will begin turning these principles into a legislative agenda. I will send to Congress a series of ideas and proposals. Today I want to raise the priority and profile of these issues within my own administration. I want to ensure that faith-based and community groups will always have a place at the table in our deliberations.

In a few moments, I will sign two Executive orders. The first Executive order will