

of “no child is left behind” is a part of the regulations. But this bill says there—one size doesn’t fit all when it comes to public schools. It fosters change by pushing power to the lowest level, and that is at the local school districts, which should make the teachers in this audience feel good.

First of all, I want to thank all the teachers who are here. Yours is a noble profession, and thank you for taking on this tough job. But a system that devolves power says we’ve got to trust the teachers and principals to make the right decisions in the classrooms. And that’s what this bill says.

This bill also wages a battle against illiteracy. It recognizes that spending money is important, but you need to spend money effectively in order to make a difference. We’ve spent a lot of money in education—a lot. And a lot of it hasn’t made a difference. Well, one area where we’re going to make a difference from this point forward in America is in reading—teaching every child to read.

The numbers for inner-city kids or impoverished—kids from impoverished families—their ability to read, or the illiteracy rate—let me put it to you that way—is astounding. It is pitiful. It is not right for America that over 60 percent of the children in the fourth grade from impoverished families cannot read. If you can’t read in the fourth grade, you’re not going to read in the eighth grade. And if you can’t read in the eighth, you’re not going to read in high school. And if you can’t read, you’ve got a tough life ahead of you.

And we need to do something about it, America, and this bill does. It triples the amount of money for early reading programs, programs based upon the science of reading, not something that sounds good or feels good but something that works. There’s money for teacher training. There’s money for enhanced methodology. There’s money that says we’re going to stay focused until we teach every child to read by the third grade in America.

So those are the principles of a good bill. The bill is not only good for education, but it’s a good go-by to show what can happen in Washington. And that’s why the five of us—or the six of us, including Rod Paige—have been traveling around the Nation today, heralding the success—the joint success—the success of people from both political parties in both Houses of Congress. It shows what is possible when people say, “I want to get something done.”

I know what’s possible when it comes to educating children. You’ve seen it here in your own State, how the numbers have improved dramatically. It starts with an attitude that says public education is crucial; every child can learn; and we must set high standards. And that’s what we’ve got to do in America, it seems like, all over the country.

After 9/11, a lot of people have asked, “What can I do to help? How can I make a difference in America?” Well, my advice is, first, love your children like you’ve never loved them before. Show them that they’re the most important people in the world. But a way you can help America is to mentor a child, to teach a child to read. You can make sure your kids turn off your TV and read. You can make sure that you support the public school in your neighborhood. You can make sure you thank a teacher. You can help by going into classrooms, to make a difference.

If you’re really interested in how to help fight terrorists, if you want to make sure that the terrorists aren’t able to affect the heart and soul of America, support your public schools. Insist upon the best; demand accountability, because every child in America can learn. And when they do, this country is going to be a heck of a lot better off.

Thank you for letting me come. May God bless.

NOTE: The President spoke at 5:17 p.m. in the Roache Gymnasium. In his remarks, he referred to Cornelia A. Kelley, head master,