

United States of America  
White House Faith-Based and Community Initiative  
Innovations in Effective Compassion Conference

MR. HEIN: Good morning. It's a delight to have you back today. What a special day we had together yesterday. We heard from the President of the United States. We heard from Cabinet officials. We heard from so many other leaders across the country that describe how the Federal Government has been fundamentally changed to be more aware of what you do in your communities, to be bent in our policies and our apparatus to serve you and equip you and lift up your arms. And that was on display. It was a great encouragement to us all. We were inspired, of course by the clients who shared their stories, whose three to four minute story was the equivalent of a 45-minute speech because it just spoke volumes of the work that you do on their behalf. And I'm not sure I've ever been at a conference before where videos got applauded. But it happened yesterday because of the inspiration in those stories as well. So we had a remarkable day. It was a high-level day.

And today we're going to unpack those big concepts and we're going to talk about not the Federal Government as much. But instead, social entrepreneurship, what it takes to revitalize communities through your efforts from the bottom up, which is indeed how we're governing with that appreciation. But this is an initiative that isn't born in Washington, or driven by Washington. It's driven by each of your actions in your communities. And that will be on display today. And we're going to talk about the research that's showing us the new chapters of this story, a greater understanding of what works, what doesn't and why, and how we can continue to improve our collaboration together. So, it's a very rich day.

I talked yesterday about the 200 speakers that we have for you at the plenary sessions and in the workshops. So, we talked about the number. I didn't talk about the quality. The speakers in those workshops are head liners at conferences all throughout the year. And so you've got to work hard to find them in workshops because we have such a plentiful set of talent that I just commend to you. And so you're going to leave today emboldened, encouraged and equipped. And so today could have been a conference in itself. So, you got the inspiration yesterday, day hallelujah today. You're really going to go to work. And when we used words yesterday about this is all about the future, this isn't just looking to the past, it's looking toward working better together. That work's going to get done in large measure today. And we have the ideal first person to speak to us about this initiative and to begin today's conversation. Because I'm now honored to invite to the stage, Senator Joseph Lieberman, United States Senator from Connecticut. You can applaud too, but I'm going to say a couple more things about him. (Applause)

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Senator Lieberman, we are so deeply honored that you're here because your voice has been so profound in this movement. You have been a terrific champion on Capitol Hill as United States Senator. You've brokered and lead the negotiations in the Senate that lead to Senate passage of the CARE Act, the legislation early on in this initiative. And that was a vital and important work. But your voice has been so meaningful beyond even legislation. You've spoken to religious tolerance issues. You've spoken to the public value of private faith and how that transforms communities and culture into so many of us. You're an impressive public official, a United States Senator, but you're beyond partisanship and you're just a great Statesman. For the cause that we're here -- (Applause) With all those reasons, I welcome you. Thank you.

SENATOR LIEBERMAN: Well, thank you very much. I thank you ladies and gentlemen for that warm welcome. I normally don't get that kind of welcome at this hour of the day. (Laughter) I will tell you a story from when I was in college. I brought one weekend, a friend of mine home with me. And as we were heading back to New Haven, to Yale, he said to me, "I really liked your parents. And just, they seem so supportive of you." He says, "I have this vision, Joe, that when you were a child, and you got up in the morning and came downstairs for breakfast, your parents gave you a standing ovation." (Laughter): Well, it wasn't quite that way, but anyway, thank you for making me feel at home this morning.

I want to thank Jay, and I want to thank everyone that works with the White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives. I want to thank all of you for what you do across American and what you believe and what you do from your belief. And I want to thank you for giving me the opportunity to come and speak with you for a few moments this morning. I'm going to come to the end of my remarks at the beginning. And then, I'm going to go back and fill in. Because what I really want to leave you with is what I think you know, and I want to share with you, a hope. Which is, that what you know of course is, is that our country, our government, is at a time of transition now.

We're having a presidential election. You knew that, right? Yes. (Laughter) And it is -- and perhaps you don't know this. The first time in 56 years that neither the incumbent president or vice president has sought the presidency if you will, not running for re- election, the vice president running. So, it's a real time of transition. And we make a choice which is large, but it includes many parts under it when we decide who to vote. And I want to say that I come this morning to thank you and our friends at the White House in the

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FBCI office for all you have done to give these programs credibility, to prove that they're effective, and to say that my greatest hope at this time of transition as we head to a new administration, is that the controversy that has occasionally surrounded these programs, is over. And that whoever is elected president and carries us forward, will not only respect but embrace the Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives, and sustain these programs on into the future. (Applause)

Now, that's my conclusion. Now, I want to come back, and if you will, in the spirit of this group, I want to just be a little bit personally reflective. And tell you how I -- but I think not unusually for people growing up in this country, came to the belief that I had about these programs and the faith-based initiatives particularly when I first began to deal with them and discover them and try to support them in my public life. Look, I always say that, talking about my parents again for the second time, I was blessed from the first second of my life. First of course, because I was alive. But second, because I was given wonderful parents. And one of the blessings that they gave me is the blessing of faith and the example of their own lives, the way they lives based on that faith. And my own models, my mom and dad, of what it meant and throughout the earliest years of my childhood on into my teenage years, and beyond of course, of what faith meant, was that faith meant that you are of service.

The tradition that I grew up in, like all religious traditions, taught me that faith was critical, and the rituals of my religion, which is quite ritualistic, were very important. But ultimately, we were going to be judged by our deeds. The prophets speak so loudly and passionately to the Children of Israel saying, you know, Don't come to the temple and bring your sacrifices and celebrate my new moons and think -- and this being the voice of God speaking through the prophet --that I'll be satisfied, if you are not treating each other with mercy, if you are not caring for the orphans and the widows and those who are in need. And I watched my mom and dad in different, you know, the millions of small community-based, faith-based programs that nobody really much ever hears about or didn't hear about for a long time here in Washington, helping people.

My mother passed away three years ago, just about, actually this past week. And until the end, almost the very end of her life, she led a group in Stamford, Connecticut that her mother had led before her, with a name that is so quaint it is antiquated: The Hebrew Ladies Educational League. And what did they do? They raised money with little fund raisers. And they had basically, I don't know what the term of art would be, but a generalized, available fund for those who needed it. This was long before governmental welfare programs or support programs. And my mother, who wonderfully never revealed names or

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anything, would tell me stories until the end about the children who came and said as their mother was dying of cancer, or didn't have money to give her a proper burial. And so, my mom would write out a check from the Hebrew Ladies Educational League, or another family whose daughter was getting married, and they couldn't afford to buy a decent wedding dress. And so they'd do that, and on, and on, and on, and on. A woman who has had cancer, and she couldn't get compensated for exactly the kind of wig she wanted to wear because she had lost her hair, et cetera, et cetera.

These were small, and yet very large and powerful examples to me. As I grew, and began to study and learn American history, particularly, I put that personal experience into the larger context of our National experience, indeed, I would say, our National purpose and carrying it a bit further, even our National destiny. I believe that America is a faith-based initiative. I believe that American is a faith-based initiative, and why do I say that? (Applause)

After the first sort of preface sentence of the Declaration of Independence, which is the original American document, at the moment of our Nation's official birth, remember what is said there, "The self-evident truth that all of us are created and endowed by our Creator," not by the wise men who wrote the Declaration, not by the philosophers of the enlightenment who were quite influential at the time, but the endowment was from our Creator to give us those rights, to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. (Applause) And remember what it says in the next -- this is why I say America is a faith-based initiative. In the very next sentence, it says, "In order to secure those rights, to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, which are the endowment of our Creator," the founders were declaring that there is a United States of America.

Go to the first President of the United States, George Washington. You could quote so many of our founders, but Washington in his farewell address, which seems to stay relevant as long as any politician speech I've ever read. It may be right up there with Lincoln's Second Inaugural. He said, and I paraphrase, I don't have it in front of me, that he said to the American people as he left office, Do not indulge the supposition that American can be a good country, the country we want it to be, without the force of religion. And I have always believed that what George Washington meant was, that we were that they, were creating a government of limited powers. They were creating a government that was defining itself against the monarchy from which they had come in England. This was going to be the government of the people, by the people and for the people. So, freedom of individuals would be protected and held high.

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But, that also meant that the government couldn't do everything for everybody all the time, and certainly, couldn't control everybody's behavior all the time with a law that governed every moment. It would be ultimately up to the individual personal, moral choices of every American. And I think Washington meant that in two ways. One was, the law can tell you not to assault each other, not to cheat each other, but ultimately, there will be moments when the law won't be present and you will have to be guided by some inner moral compass that will tell you, no, I shouldn't do this. But the second part I have always believed, was that Washington, who was a great visionary, was saying -- was seeing forward and saying, over time there are many things this government will try to do for its citizens. But never expect, citizens in need, but never expect that this government will be able to do it all. And therefore, we will rely on the moral imperatives of your faith to create programs that will assist those in need.

I'll skip forward to when I was privileged to be elected to the Senate in 1988. I came in 1989, and I both first watched and then participated vigorously in this central question of the extent to which government should be supportive of faith-based organizations when they were attempting to help people. I state that in the broadest possible terms. And I will say that, as these debates took shape in the '90s, first, there was a recognition that you know, some of this had already been happening. That there were a lot of churches around America that had had preschool programs, and childcare programs forever. That there were Catholic Charities and Jewish Federations and the Lutheran Charities, et cetera, et cetera, and some many more that had been doing these works and in different ways had benefitted without real formal governmental action from governmental benefit programs to the benefit of their -- of the people they were serving.

But as there were attempts during the Clinton Administration, and you know, as we go to this time of transition, without knowing who our next president is, acknowledging the extraordinary role, and I'll get to this in a moment, that President Bush has played in bringing these programs forward, it is important to remember that President Clinton was generally supportive of the idea of faith-based initiatives. But it was very controversial in Congress. And that surprised me. Because I know that my colleagues had, most of whom had grown up in religious homes, and had had their own faith examples of religious service. And what I saw was, a concern that perhaps these programs supporting faith-based groups would violate the First Amendment guarantee that there would be no establishment of religion and the Government would never abridge the Freedom of Religion. I remember, actually, it was on Meet the Press with our dear friend, Tim Russert, a real blessed memory. And I was in a debate with Mario Cuomo about this. And I remember

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saying, Do I, my family, society, have -- I said, I'm going to pose this choice. Do we have more to fear from a drug-addict, who broke his addiction in a faith-based drug treatment program, that led to his commitment to Christianity, or Judaism, or Islam; do we have more to fear from that process and person, or from a drug-addict who was not helped and continued to be involved in robbery, mugging, to support his habit?

(Applause)

To me the answer was clear. And I must say, in the spirit of -- I don't want to be too judgmental, but I want to -- I was about to be a little too theological, I want to say, about three or four years later, I said to Tim Russert, we were talking about that who. And he said, you know, I just saw Mario Cuomo, and he said, he now concludes that you were right. (Laughter) SENATOR LIEBERMAN: And so, I know I heard Governor Cuomo say that since then. The whole idea that these faith-based groups would have to be barred from getting Federal funds they needed to do good works, because, for the sole reason, for instance, that on the wall of the room where these needed services were being delivered, there was a Christian cross, a Jewish Star of David, a Muslim crescent moon, or because they had a religious name in their title, or a praise God in their mission statement. None of this made any sense when you compare to what was actually being done.

So, then comes President Bush and elected in 2000. And as you may remember I had some involvement in that particular election. (Laughter) So it was truly in the spirit of reconciliation that all of our faiths urge on us, and really the initiative I must say, came from the President himself. That in January of 2001, I was surprised and delighted to be invited by the White House, along with my colleague and co-worker, former Pennsylvania Senator Rick Santorum, to go with the President in that first week or two of his administration, to the Fishing School here in Washington. They don't teach fishing. That's the name. This is an award-winning, faith-based program, right here in the District that provides after school tutoring programs and hot meals to students who might otherwise have neither of those. The founder of the school, Tom Lewis, an ex-policeman, motivated by his faith, saw a real need here, stepped in to fill it when government and traditional charities either were not or could not. And he was -- so the question that that story raised as the President said that day, Should the Federal Government refuse to partner and support Tom Lewis and others like him in this successful program because he was inspired by his faith in God, and because part of the program for these children was inspirational readings, faith-based readings to build their self-esteem? The answer was, of course not. That's no threat to the First Amendment, no establishment of religion, no abridgment of freedom of religion, surely as the founders of our country

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intended it. I remember that standing there at that school that day, President Bush said, and I quote, "There are so many people in need. The good news about America is that there are so many willing to serve. It's the great strength of our Country. Government of course, cannot fund and will not fund religious activities, but when people of faith provide social services, we must not discriminate against them." And he was so absolutely right. (Applause)

And that's the point, where you and the phrase that I know you're familiar with, we're leveling the playing field. He said, Let's open the Federal grant process to any organization, faith-based or otherwise, that knows its community, has a drive to do something to raise up the community, help those in need and can get results. And then let's evaluate those programs to see whether they're successful as we do every other program. Seven years later, as you gather here at the end of the Administration of President George W. Bush, thanks to the President, his vision, his steadfastness. Some of us in Congress who have followed his lead, the work of the Office in the White House, and most of all, to the way all of you and your programs have proved the merit, the affect of what you are doing. We can now say that this works. This has helped countless of our fellow Americans in need. Local groups working through the Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives have mentored thousands of children with parents in prison, helped move thousands of homeless from the streets to shelters or a residence, allowed hundreds of thousands of drug-addicts to choose recovery, the recovery program they with the choice we have now put into so many of these programs, believe will work best for them, created new prisoner re-entry programs that cut the recidivism rate in half. In 2006, members I'm sure you know, \$14.7 billion in competitive grants, competitive grants, that went to nonprofit organizations working on behalf of the most vulnerable Americans, \$2.2 billion went to faith-based groups without causing an abridgment of the First Amendment or anything but good results throughout the United States of America. (Applause)

So, this is the record. These are the results. These are the facts that will be there for whoever is honored and privileged to enter the oval office on January 20th of next year. And I express the hope, and may I say here, the prayer, that whoever that is, will embrace, sustain and expand the work done by the Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives, and reach out to Congress to pass bipartisan legislation that can make permanent and even more robust all that you have done for America. (Applause)

You will not be surprised to hear that I stand ready to help in that regard in any way I can, with the belief, the faith and the conclusion based on fact, that as you serve God with gladness, you also serve America with great results. Thank you very much. God Bless and good luck to you all. (Applause)