

amount of money. It's the right thing to do for America.

Now, we've submitted the people's budget to Congress. It's a budget that sets priorities, a budget that pays down debt, a budget that worries about the future, but a budget that keeps in mind the fact that our people are overtaxed. And I am here asking Congress to give you a refund.

Audience members. Refund! Refund!

The President. I want to thank you all for coming out. It is so refreshing to travel the—to travel your streets and to see people come out. I know there is an overflow room here of a thousand people, and I want to thank you all for coming.

I want to tell you there is something bigger, though, than just a legislative agenda at hand. It is truly the greatness of the country. My job is to remind all of us that responsibility begins at home, that the biggest job, if you happen to be fortunate enough to be a mom or a dad, your biggest job is not your day job; your biggest job is your 24-hour job of loving your children with all your heart and all your soul. That's the best thing all of us can do.

The best thing all of us can do in this Nation, whether our job is President or Boy Scout leader or Sunday school teacher or teacher, is to teach our youngsters the difference between right and wrong, is to encourage them to be responsible for the decisions they make in life, is to make sure that every child, regardless of how he or she are born, knows somebody cares for them, somebody loves them.

No, the great strength of this country, the great strength of this country can be found in the heartland of America, where neighbor turns to neighbor and says, "What can I do to help you, neighbor," if you've got a problem, where there are thousands of people saying, "I want to help somebody in need," coming out of our churches and synagogues and mosques.

My job—my job is not only to argue and work to get a legislative agenda passed that will help Americans help themselves. My job is also to remind America how great we are, that we're a blessed nation, a nation indivisible under God, the greatest nation on the face of the Earth.

Together—together we can help this Nation fulfill its greatest promise, where every child realizes the American experience is meant for them, where every child can learn to read, where moms and dads understand the top priority is to love their children.

No, the greatness of this country is ahead of us. We've been great in the past, but the future has never been brighter. And the future has never been brighter—the future has never been brighter because the people of this country have never been greater. It is my honor to be your President.

Thank you for coming, and God bless.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:46 p.m. in Mancuso Hall at the Omaha Civic Center. In his remarks, he referred to Mayor Hal J. Daub of Omaha; Gov. Mike Johanns and Lt. Gov. Dave Maurstad of Nebraska; and Governor Johanns' wife, Stephanie.

Exchange With Reporters in Council Bluffs, Iowa

February 28, 2001

Seattle Earthquake

Q. Mr. President, any reaction to the earthquake news?

The President. I talked to the FEMA Director. He is on top of it. He is gathering all the information. He is in touch with the officials in the State of Washington. I think the Governor is on an airplane now, but as soon as he lands, we'll be in touch. Then we will assess whatever damage, and we will provide whatever resources are necessary to help the people.

Q. When were you told?

The President. I was told in Omaha.

Q. Do you have a message for the people of Washington?

The President. Well, God bless, obviously. Anything we can do to help, we will do so.

Q. Can you talk about your contingency plan as part of your budget outline and how this—

The President. Well, we've got money set aside for emergencies such as these.

NOTE: The exchange began at approximately 2:35 p.m. at the Old Carnegie Library. In his remarks,

the President referred to Gov. Gary Locke of Washington. A tape was not available for verification of the content of this exchange.

Remarks at a Leadership Forum in Council Bluffs

February 28, 2001

The President. Well, thank you, Bill, very much. I want to thank our panelists. It's kind of family day here. [*Laughter*] Speaker, it's good to see you, sir. I've enjoyed campaigning with you here. I've spent a lot of quality time here in the great State of Iowa, and I'm glad to be back.

I will say one thing as an aside, that I never met a more kind group of people than the good people of Iowa. Even if they weren't for you, they were kind. But I really—I have fond memories of traveling to your great State, and I want to thank the good citizens of Council Bluffs for welcoming me back here again.

Let me talk a little bit about the budget. Because in order to get a budget passed, the President must count on the people. My speech last night was really not to Members of the House and the Senate; my speech last night was to the people of America. It was a great opportunity for me to go around, or through the process, however you want to look at it, and go directly to people who had an interest in their Government.

Before I begin, though, I'm also mindful that I'll get nothing done unless I get something through the House and the Senate. And we've got three House Members traveling with us today, people who I respect a lot: one, your current Congressman Greg Ganske, Tom Latham, and Jim Leach. They all flew down.

They flew down and reminded me the entire way down how important the issues are to Iowa, issues like ethanol—[*laughter*]—I said it—when I told them on the way down, when I said I support ethanol, I meant it. I supported it in the caucuses; I supported it in the general election; and I support the use of ethanol as the President of the United States. Now that we've gotten the ethanol issue straight, let me talk about the budget.

There's a lot of myths about the budget. One myth is, you can't have tax relief because

somebody's not going to get their Social Security check, or you can't have tax relief because we'll never pay down debt. The facts are that if we have a fiscally sound approach to spending your money, we can meet priorities; we can pay down debt; we can set aside contingency funds for the unknown; and we can have tax relief. Those are the facts.

It starts with slowing down the rate of discretionary spending. In our budget, there are entitlement programs that are going to trigger spending, whether or not we—the Congress has no say, because people are entitled to money, they'll get the money.

Social Security, for example, it set aside all the payroll tax for Social Security. Medicare is taken care of in the budget. We double the Medicare budget over the next 10 years. Discretionary spending like education, it will go up under my plans. And it's right, it does go up. I'm glad to know there's a groundswell for support. [*Laughter*]

I want to tell you, though, even though I have a Washington address, I strongly believe in local control of schools. Of all States that understands local control of schools, Iowa is such a State. I believe we ought to pay our folks who wear the uniform in the military more money, and my budget does that. We've set aside priorities.

But instead of increasing the rate of growth in the budget, discretionary part of the budget, like they did in the last Congress, we slow it down to 4 percent, a rate greater than the rate of inflation, however. And as a result of being fiscally sound with money, it is amazing what we can do beyond just spending.

We can pay down \$2 trillion of debt over the next 10 years. My budget does so; I'm confident the Congress will support me to do so. People say, "Why don't you pay down more?" Because that's all the debt that's available to pay down in a 10-year period of time unless you want to prepay debt, which will cost taxpayers money. That's the debt that becomes due in a 10-year period of time. And so we set aside money for discretionary spending and priorities. We save and strengthen Social Security. We've got money for Medicare. We pay down debt, and we set aside \$1 trillion over 10 years for contingencies.