

January 30, 2001

President Bush's Faith-Based Initiative

Rallying the Armies of Compassion

Yesterday President Bush unveiled a new initiative designed to allow successful faith-based charities to compete for federal funds and to encourage greater private charitable giving. The underpinnings of President Bush's proposal follow.

- Private charities – including churches and other faith-based groups – are the backbone of America's efforts to reach out to those at society's margins, including the poor, the incarcerated, and at-risk youth. Such private initiatives often post greater success than government.
- Government has too long ignored or been hostile to the efforts of faith-based charities, due to well-meaning but unnecessarily restrictive First Amendment interpretations. In fact, the First Amendment is now construed to require neither hostility nor favoritism toward religion, but *neutrality*.
- Therefore, President Bush's Faith-Based Initiative will seek to honor and assist charities that achieve results, whether spiritually motivated or not.

The White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives (OFBCI) – and parallel offices at Justice, Education, Labor, HHS, and HUD – will identify areas where executive action, legislation, and regulatory relief will enable successful faith-based and community organizations to better serve America's needy. For example, the OFBCI will:

- Encourage charitable giving by advocating (1) expanding the charitable deduction to the 80 million taxpayers who do not itemize, (2) limiting the liability of corporations who donate equipment to charity, and (3) allowing penalty-free IRA withdrawals for charitable contributions.
- Expand application of Charitable Choice, which allows faith-based groups to compete on an equal footing for federal welfare funds while forbidding religious discrimination against recipients of services.

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