

young people face, even when they are difficult to talk about. Each year, about 3 million teenagers contract sexually transmitted diseases that can harm them or kill them or prevent them from ever becoming parents. In my budget, I propose a grassroots campaign to help inform families about these medical risks. We will double Federal funding for abstinence programs so schools can teach this fact of life: abstinence for young people is the only certain way to avoid sexually transmitted diseases. Decisions children now make can affect their health and character for the rest of their lives. All of us, parents, schools and government, must work together to counter the negative influence of the culture and to send the right messages to our children.

A strong America must also value the institution of marriage. I believe we should respect individuals as we take a principled stand for one of the most fundamental, enduring institutions of our civilization. Congress has already taken a stand on this issue by passing the Defense of Marriage Act, signed in 1996 by President Clinton. That statute protects marriage under Federal law as the union of a man and a woman, and declares that one State may not redefine marriage for other States. Activist judges, however, have begun redefining marriage by court order, without regard for the will of the people and their elected representatives. On an issue of such great consequence, the people's voice must be heard. If judges insist on forcing their arbitrary will upon the people, the only alternative left to the people would be the constitutional process. Our Nation must defend the sanctity of marriage.

The outcome of this debate is important, and so is the way we conduct it. The same moral tradition that defines marriage also teaches that each individual has dignity and value in God's sight.

It is also important to strengthen our communities by unleashing the compassion of America's religious institutions. Religious charities of every creed are doing some of the most vital work in our country: mentoring children, feeding the hungry, taking the hand of the lonely. Yet government has often denied social service grants and contracts to these groups, just because they have a cross or a star of David or a crescent on the wall. By executive order, I have opened billions of dollars in grant money to competition that includes faith-based charities. Tonight I ask you to codify this into law, so people of faith can know that the law will never discriminate against them again.

In the past, we have worked together to bring mentors to children of prisoners and provide treatment for the addicted and help for the homeless. Tonight I ask you to consider another group of Americans in need of help. This year, some 600,000 inmates will be released from prison back into society. We know from long experience that if

they cannot find work or a home or help, they are much more likely to commit more crimes and return to prison. So tonight, I propose a 4-year, \$300 million Prisoner Re-Entry Initiative to expand job training and placement services, to provide transitional housing, and to help newly released prisoners get mentoring, including from faith-based groups. America is the land of second chance; and when the gates of the prison open, the path ahead should lead to a better life.

For all Americans, the last 3 years have brought tests we did not ask for and achievements shared by all. By our actions, we have shown what kind of Nation we are. In grief, we have found the grace to go on. In challenge, we rediscovered the courage and daring of a free people. In victory, we have shown the noble aims and good heart of America. And having come this far, we sense that we live in a time set apart.

I have been a witness to the character of the people of America, who have shown calm in times of danger, compassion for one another, and toughness for the long haul. All of us have been partners in a great enterprise. And even some of the youngest understand that we are living in historic times. Last month a girl in Lincoln, Rhode Island, sent me a letter. It began, "Dear George W. Bush. If there is anything you know I, Ashley Pearson, age 10 can do to help anyone, please send me a letter and tell me what I can do to save our country." She added this P.S.: "If you can send a letter to the troops, please put, 'Ashley Pearson believes in you.'"

Tonight, Ashley, your message to our troops has just been conveyed. And, yes, you have some duties yourself. Study hard in school, listen to your mom and dad, help someone in need, and when you and your friends see a man or woman in uniform, say "thank you." And, Ashley, while you do your part, all of us here in this great Chamber will do our best to keep you and the rest of America safe and free.

My fellow citizens, we now move forward with courage and faith. Our Nation is strong and steadfast. The cause we serve is right because it is the cause of all mankind. The momentum of freedom in our world is unmistakable, and it is not carried forward by our power alone. We can trust in that greater power Who guides the unfolding of the years. And in all that is to come, we can know that His purposes are just and true.

May God continue to bless America. (Applause, the Members rising.)

At 10 o'clock and 6 minutes p.m., the President of the United States, accompanied by the committee of escort, retired from the Hall of the House of Representatives.

The Assistant to the Sergeant at Arms escorted the invited guests from the Chamber in the following order:

The members of the President's Cabinet.

The Associate Justice of the Supreme Court.

The Acting Dean of the Diplomatic Corps.

JOINT SESSION DISSOLVED

The SPEAKER. The Chair declares the joint meeting of the two Houses now dissolved.

Accordingly, at 10 o'clock and 12 minutes p.m., the joint meeting of the two Houses was dissolved.

The Members of the Senate retired to their Chamber.

MESSAGE OF THE PRESIDENT REFERRED TO THE COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE HOUSE ON THE STATE OF THE UNION

Mr. WILSON of South Carolina. Mr. Speaker, I move that the message of the President be referred to the Committee of the Whole House on the State of the Union and ordered printed.

The motion was agreed to.

LEAVE OF ABSENCE

By unanimous consent, leave of absence was granted to:

Mr. ABERCROMBIE (at the request of Ms. PELOSI) for today and the balance of the week on account of business in the district.

Ms. BALDWIN (at the request of Ms. PELOSI) for today on account of travel problems.

Mr. CRAMER (at the request of Ms. PELOSI) for today on account of official business in the district.

Mr. REYES (at the request of Ms. PELOSI) for today and the balance of the week on account of family illness.

Mr. NADLER (at the request of Ms. PELOSI) for today on account of personal reasons.

Ms. CARSON of Indiana (at the request of Ms. PELOSI) for today and January 21 on account of official business.

Mrs. JONES of Ohio (at the request of Ms. PELOSI) for today on account of a death in the family.

Ms. DUNN (at the request of Mr. DELAY) for today on account of illness.

Mr. BURTON of Indiana (at the request of Mr. DELAY) for today on account of being detained in his district.

Mr. EVERETT (at the request of Mr. DELAY) for today and January 21 on account of having the flu.

SPECIAL ORDERS GRANTED

By unanimous consent, permission to address the House, following the legislative program and any special orders heretofore entered, was granted to:

(The following Members (at the request of Mr. MCNULTY) to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material:)

Mr. EMANUEL, for 5 minutes, today.

Mr. BROWN of Ohio, for 5 minutes, today.

Mr. MEEK of Florida, for 5 minutes, today.

Ms. SOLIS, for 5 minutes, today.