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President Bush Speaks at Tsinghua University

Tsinghua University
Beijing, People's Republic of China

10:35 A.M. (Local)

PRESIDENT BUSH: Vice President Hu, thank you very much for your kind and generous remarks. Thank you for welcoming me and my wife, Laura, here. (Applause.) I see she's keeping pretty good company, with the Secretary of State, Colin Powell. It's good to see you, Mr. Secretary. (Applause.) And I see my National Security Advisor, Ms. Condoleezza Rice, who at one time was the provost at Stanford University. So she's comfortable on university campuses such as this. Thank you for being here, Condi. (Applause.)

I'm so grateful for the hospitality, and honored for the reception at one of China's, and the world's, great universities.

This university was founded, interestingly enough, with the support of my country, to further ties between our two nations. I know how important this place is to your Vice President. He not only received his degree here, but more importantly, he met his gracious wife here. (Laughter.)

I want to thank the students for giving me the chance to meet with you, the chance to talk a little bit about my country and answer some of your questions. The standards and reputation of this university are known around the world, and I know what an achievement it is to be here. So, congratulations. (Applause.) I don't know if you know this or not, but my wife and I have two daughters who are in college, just like you. One goes to the University of Texas. One goes to Yale. They're twins. And we are proud of our daughters, just like I'm sure your parents are proud of you.

My visit to China comes on an important anniversary, as the Vice President mentioned. Thirty years ago this week, an American President arrived in China on a trip designed to end decades of estrangement and confront centuries of suspicion. President Richard Nixon showed the world that two vastly different governments could meet on the grounds of common interest, in the spirit of mutual respect. As they left the airport that day, Premier Zhou Enlai said this to President Nixon: "Your handshake came over the vastest ocean in the world -- 25 years of no communication."

During the 30 years since, America and China have exchanged many handshakes of friendship and commerce. And as we have had more contact with each other, the citizens of both countries have gradually learned more about each other. And that's important. Once America knew China only by its history as a great and enduring civilization. Today, we see a China that is still defined by noble traditions of family, scholarship, and honor. And we see a China that is becoming one of the most dynamic and creative societies in the world -- as demonstrated by the knowledge and potential right here in this room. China is on a rising path, and America welcomes the emergence of a strong and peaceful and prosperous China. (Applause.)

As America learns more about China, I am concerned that the Chinese people do not always see a clear picture of my country. This happens for many reasons, and some of them of our own making. Our movies and television shows often do not portray the values of the real America I know. Our successful businesses show a strength of American commerce, but our spirit, community spirit, and contributions to each other are not always visible as monetary success.

Some of the erroneous pictures of America are painted by others. My friend, the Ambassador to China, tells me some Chinese textbooks talk of Americans of "bullying the weak and repressing the poor." Another Chinese textbook, published just last year, teaches that special agents of the FBI are used to "repress the working people." Now, neither of these is true -- and while the words may be leftovers from a previous era, they are misleading and they're harmful.

In fact, Americans feel a special responsibility for the weak and the poor. Our government spends billions of dollars to provide health care and food and housing for those who cannot help themselves -- and even more important, many of our citizens contribute their own money and time to help those in need. American compassion also stretches way beyond our borders. We're the number one provider of humanitarian aid to people in need throughout the world. And as for the men and women of the FBI and law enforcement, they're working people; they, themselves, are working people who devote their lives to fighting crime and corruption.

My country certainly has its share of problems, no question about that. And we have our faults. Like most nations we're on a long journey toward achieving our own ideals of equality and justice. Yet there's a reason our nation shines as a beacon of hope and opportunity, a reason many throughout the world dream of coming to America. It's because we're a free nation, where men and women have the opportunity to achieve their dreams. No matter your background or your circumstance of birth, in America you can get a good education, you can start your own business, you can raise a family, you can worship freely, and help elect the leaders of your community and your country. You can support the policies of our government, or you're free to openly disagree with them. Those who fear freedom sometimes argue it could lead to chaos, but it does not, because freedom means more than every man for himself.

Liberty gives our citizens many rights, yet expects them to exercise important responsibilities. Our liberty is given direction and purpose by moral character, shaped in strong families, strong communities, and strong religious institutions, and overseen by a strong and fair legal system.

My country's greatest symbol to the world is the Statue of Liberty, and it was designed by special care. I don't know if you've ever seen the Statue of Liberty, but if you look closely, she's holding not one object, but two. In one hand is the familiar torch we call the "light of liberty." And in the other hand is a book of law.

We're a nation of laws. Our courts are honest and they are independent. The President -- me -- I can't tell the courts how to rule, and neither can any other member of the executive or legislative branch of government. Under our law, everyone stands equal. No one is above the law, and no one is beneath it.

All political power in America is limited and it is temporary, and only given by the free vote of the people. We have a Constitution, now two centuries old, which limits and balances the power of the three branches of our government, the judicial branch, the legislative branch, and the executive branch, of which I'm a part.

Many of the values that guide our life in America are first shaped in our families, just as they are in your country. American moms and dads love their children and work hard and sacrifice for them, because we believe life can always be better for the next generation. In our families, we find love and learn responsibility and character.

And many Americans voluntarily devote part of their lives to serving other people. An amazing number -- nearly half of all adults in America -- volunteer time every week to make their communities better by mentoring children, or by visiting the sick, or caring for the elderly, or helping with thousands of other needs and causes. This is one of the great strengths of my country. People take responsibility for helping others, without being told, motivated by their good hearts and often by their faith.

America is a nation guided by faith. Someone once called us "a nation with the soul of a church." This may interest you -- 95 percent of Americans say they believe in God, and I'm one of them.

When I met President Jiang Zemin in Shanghai a few months ago, I had the honor of sharing with him how faith changed my life and how faith contributes to the life of my country. Faith points to a moral law beyond man's law, and calls us to duties higher than material gain. Freedom of religion is not something to be feared, it's to be welcomed, because faith gives us a moral core and teaches us to hold ourselves to high standards, to love and to serve others, and to live responsible lives.

If you travel across America -- and I hope you do some day if you haven't been there -- you will find people of many different ethnic backgrounds and many different faiths. We're a varied nation. We're home to 2.3 million Americans of Chinese ancestry, who can be found working in the offices of our corporations, or in the Cabinet of the President of the United States, or skating for the America Olympic team. Every immigrant, by taking an oath of allegiance to our country, becomes just as just as American as the President. America shows that a society can be vast and it can be varied, yet still one country, commanding the allegiance and love of its people.

And all these qualities of America were widely on display on a single day, September the 11th, the day when terrorists, murderers, attacked my nation. American policemen and firefighters, by the hundreds, ran into burning towers in desperation to save their fellow citizens. Volunteers came from everywhere to help with rescue efforts. Americans donated blood and gave money to help the families of victims. America had prayer services all over our country, and people raised flags to show their pride and unity. And you need to know, none of this was ordered by the government; it happened spontaneously, by the initiative of free people.

Life in America shows that liberty, paired with law is not to be feared. In a free society, diversity is not disorder. Debate is not strife. And dissent is not revolution. A free society trusts its citizens to seek greatness in themselves and their country.

It was my honor to visit China in 1975 -- some of you weren't even born then. It shows how old I am. (Laughter.) And a lot has changed in your country since then. China has made amazing progress -- in openness and enterprise and economic freedom. And this progress previews China's great potential.

China has joined the World Trade Organization, and as you live up to its obligations, they inevitably will bring changes to China's legal system. A modern China will have a consistent rule of law to govern commerce and secure the rights of its people. The new China your generation is building will need the profound wisdom of your traditions. The lure of materialism challenges our society -- challenges society in our country, and in many successful countries. Your ancient ethic of personal and family responsibility will serve you well.

Behind China's economic success today are talented, brilliant and energetic people. In the near future, those same men and women will play a full and active role in your government. This university is not simply turning out specialists, it is preparing citizens. And citizens are not spectators in the affairs of their country. They are participants in its future.

Change is coming. China is already having secret ballot and competitive elections at the local level. Nearly 20 years ago, a great Chinese leader, Deng Xiaoping, said this -- I want you to hear his words. He said that China would eventually expand democratic elections all the way to the national level. I look forward to that day.

Tens of millions of Chinese today are relearning Buddhist, Taoist, and local religious traditions, or practicing Christianity, Islam, and other faiths. Regardless of where or how these believers worship, they're no threat to public order; in fact, they make good citizens. For centuries, this

country has had a tradition of religious tolerance. My prayer is that all persecution will end, so that all in China are free to gather and worship as they wish.

All these changes will lead to a stronger, more confident China -- a China that can astonish and enrich the world, a China that your generation will help create. This is one of the most exciting times in the history of your country, a time when even the grandest hopes seem within your reach.

My nation offers you our respect and our friendship. Six years from now, athletes from America and around the world will come to your country for the Olympic games. And I'm confident they will find a China that is becoming a da guo, a leading nation, at peace with its people and at peace with the world.

Thank you for letting me come. (Applause.)

Q Mr. President, yesterday I watched the press conference made by you and President Jiang Zemin. At the conference, you didn't clearly answer a question, which is a concern by almost everybody. It's why the TMD system will cover Taiwan. And what's more, whenever you talk about the Taiwan issue, you always use a phrase just like, peaceful settlement. You never use the phrase, peaceful reunification. What's the difference and why?

PRESIDENT BUSH: Thank you, very good question. (Applause.) First of all,

I want to compliment you on your English. Very good.

The first thing that is important on the Taiwan issue is that my government hopes there is a peaceful, as I said, dialogue, that there is a settlement to this issue. But it must be done in a peaceful way. That's why I keep emphasizing peaceful. And, by the way, "peaceful" is a word intended for both parties, that neither party should provoke that -- go ahead, I'm sorry.

THE INTERPRETER: First of all -- sorry.

PRESIDENT BUSH: She's correcting my English. (Laughter.)

THE INTERPRETER: I'm sorry, Mr. President. (Continues in Chinese.)

PRESIDENT BUSH: We've had many discussions with your leaders, and I've reiterated support for the one China policy. It's been my government's policy for a long period of time, and I haven't changed it. (Applause.)

I also, in your question about missile defenses, have made it clear that our nation will develop defenses to help our friends, our allies, and others around the world protect ourselves from rogue nations that have the -- that are trying to develop weapons of mass destruction. To me, that is essential for peace in the world. We have yet to develop a system, and therefore, that's exactly what I said yesterday. And it's the truth. But we're in the process of seeing if we can't develop a system. And I think it will bring more stability to the world than less.

And let me just say one general comment that's very important for you to know. And it's also important for the people of my country to know -- that my administration is committed to peacefully resolving issues around the world. We want the issues resolved in a peaceful manner.

And we've got a lot of issues that we deal with. We're dealing in the Middle East. And if you follow the news, it's a very dangerous period of time there. We're working hard to bring peaceful resolution there. We're working hard to bring a peaceful resolution to Kashmir, which is important for China. And I recently went to Korea and I made it very clear that we want to resolve the issues on the Korean Peninsula in a peaceful way.

Another question, please?

Q I'll repeat my question in English.

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you.

Q It's a pity you still haven't given us -- sorry -- give us a clear question about whether you always use the peaceful settlement. You have never said "peaceful reunification." It's a pity.

PRESIDENT BUSH: We're back on Taiwan again -- (laughter) -- go ahead.

Q This is a question our Chinese people are extremely concerned about.

PRESIDENT BUSH: Yes, I know.

Q Three days ago, during your speech in the Japanese Parliament, you said, the United States will still remember its commitment to Taiwan.

PRESIDENT BUSH: Right.

Q But my question is, does the U.S. still remember its commitment to 1.3 billion Chinese people? (Applause.) Abiding by the three Joint Communiques and three notes. Thank you.

PRESIDENT BUSH: Thank you very much. As I said, this seems to be a topic on people's mind, obviously. I can't say it any more clearly, that I am anxious that there be a peaceful resolution that's going to require both parties to come to a solution. And that's what I mean by peaceful dialogue. And I hope it happens in my lifetime and I hope it happens in yours. It will make a -- it will be an important milestone.

And, secondly, when my country makes an agreement, we stick with it. And there is called the Taiwan Relations Act, and I honor that act, which says we will help Taiwan defend herself if provoked. But we've also sent the same message that there should be no provocation by either party for a peaceful dialogue.

Next question. Yes, ma'am. That's not a ma'am; that's a male. Sorry. Actually, I said, yes, ma'am, but --

Q Now, please let me repeat my question in English. Mr. President, I'm a student coming from the School of Economics and Management in Tsinghua University. As we can see, China and the United States have a bright future in scientific and cultural exchanges. Now -- just now, you have made warm remarks about our universities. So my question is, if possible, do you -- will you be happy to encourage your daughters to study in our university? Thank you. (Applause.)

PRESIDENT BUSH: I'm afraid they don't listen to me anymore. (Laughter.) If you know what I mean. Let me -- first of all, I hope they do come here. It is an amazing country. You know, as I said, I was here in 1975. It is hard for me to describe the difference. It is an amazing transformation. I first saw that in Shanghai, earlier this fall -- or last fall.

They would benefit from coming here, as would a lot of other United States students. I think our student exchange program is very important. I think our nation must be welcoming to Chinese students who would like to go study in America. I think that would benefit the students, but, as importantly, it would benefit American students.

It's so important for people to realize in both our countries that we're dealing with human beings that have got desires and loves and frustrations. Even old citizens like me and the Vice President -- (laughter.)

THE INTERPRETER: I'm sorry, sir?

PRESIDENT BUSH: Even old citizens like me and the Vice President -- (laughter) -- can benefit by spending time getting to know each other. Obviously, there are some issues in our relationship that we don't see 100 percent -- don't have a 100 percent agreement on. But it is so much better to discuss these issues after you get to know a person, as a person.

We're human beings, first and foremost. There are just some important characteristics that are real. And, you know, I talked about my families in my speech. Family is just such an important, integral part of any society. And China has got a grand history of honoring family that is an important tradition, an important part of your culture. And I hope my country, as well, has a -- is known for a strong tradition of family. That's a concept that is not owned by a particular country; it is universal. And when students get to know each other, they learn the universality of many values. And that's going to be important for peace in the world.

Another question?

Q Please let me translate my question in English. Mr. President, I'm a student from Center for International Communication Studies. Younger Bush Neil Bush visited our university just before last Christmas, and he mentioned that there are many Americans, especially politicians, have a lot of misunderstandings about China. So just like -- just as our Vice President Hu Jintao and you mentioned, you all want to make efforts to promote the Sino-American relationship to go ahead smoothly. So my question is, being the President of the United States, what will it take -- some action to promote the contacts and exchanges between the two countries, between the peoples at all different levels? Thank you.

PRESIDENT BUSH: Well, thank you, that's a very good question.

Q Thank you.

PRESIDENT BUSH: Well, first of all, my trip here and my discussion here helps promote -- (applause) -- people in my country are paying attention to my visit here. And it should interest you that I was here in the fall and I'm back here again in the winter -- twice, in a very brief period of time. That should say something about the importance of our relationships.

It's important for our political leaders to come to China. And I know many have, and more ought to come. It's important for the rhetoric, when we describe what we've seen to be accurate and real. And when I go back home, I describe a great nation, a nation that has not only got a great history, but an unbelievably exciting future.

Many people in my country are very interested in China, and many come, as you know. They come to not only see the beautiful countryside, but they come to learn more about the culture and the people. And we've got to continue to encourage travel between both our countries. (gap in feed --)

In 1975, everybody wore the same clothes. Now, people pick their own clothes. Just look here on the front row, everybody's dressed differently. Because you thought, this is what you wanted. You made the decision to wear a beautiful red sweater. And when you made that decision, somebody made it.

And, in other words, the person, the individual, the demand for a product influences the production, as opposed to the other way around. Recognizing the desires of the individual in the marketplace is part of a free society. It is a part of the definition of freedom. And I see that as the most significant change that I can see, besides the new buildings and all the construction.

But the most important thing is the human dimension of freeing people to decide for themselves. And with that freedom comes other freedoms. So you can understand why the transformation from my memory of 1975 to today is significant. I mean, it is an amazing change -- for the better, I might add.

I'll answer one more question, then I've got to go have lunch with your President. (Laughter.) Yes, sir, in the blue.

Q Thank you, Mr. Bush. Thank you, Mr. President, for giving me the last chance to ask you a question. I have read your autobiography, and in it you wrote about some social problem in the U.S. today, just like the violence in campus and juvenile delinquency, and such as the children in poverty. And we know -- a former schoolmate of our university, Tsinghua, and he studied in USA and was killed last year. And I feel so sad. And I know this kind of crime has become more and more serious in today U.S. As the President, do you have any good plan to improve the human rights today in the U.S.? Thank you.

PRESIDENT BUSH: Sure. Well, first of all, I'm proud to report that violent crime actually is going down. But any crime is too much crime. I mean, anytime somebody is violent toward their neighbor, it's too much violence. And there's no question, we've got people living in poverty. But, as I mentioned, our government is very generous in the amounts of money we spend trying to help people help themselves. When we all campaigned for office, one of the big debates is how best to help people help themselves.

Foreign policy is an important part of our campaigns, of course -- at least for President. But the American voter really is more focused on domestic politics, what's happening at home, as you can imagine. If the economy is soft, like ours is now, they want to know what's going to happen -- what are you doing about the economy? If the economy's good, then they don't talk much about the economy.

But always we talk about two key issues to address your problem. One is welfare; how do we structure a welfare system that helps people in need, and in my judgment, should not make them dependent upon their government. And the other big issue is education. It's always not only an important part of campaigns, but it's an important part of being -- once you're in office.

When I was the governor of Texas, I used to always say, an educated child is one less likely to commit a crime. As a governor, and now as President, I have spent a lot of time working with members of both political parties to develop an education plan that starts making sure children learn before they just get shuffled through the system.

One of the saddest facts about my country is that there are a significant number of fourth grade students who cannot read at grade level. Imagine a child who can't read in the fourth grade is a child that's not going to be able to read in the eighth grade. And if a child can't read in the eighth grade, it's likely that child's not going to be able to read sufficiently when they get out of high school, and therefore won't be able to go to college. It's a shame in America that that's the case.

So as part of an education bill I managed to get through Congress last year, we've got a significant reading initiative, where we'll work with the states and the local jurisdictions to focus on an education program that emphasizes reading. This year I hope to work with my wife and others on an early childhood development program, so the youngsters get the building blocks to learn how to read.

I'm actually working my way to your question, I promise you. (Laughter.) Because education is the best anti-crime program. It's important to enforce law. It's important to hold people accountable for their actions. It is important to have consistent policy that says, if you harm somebody, there will be a punishment for that harm. But in the best interests for my country, the long-term solution is to make sure the education system works for everybody. And when that

happens, there will be a more hopeful future for people, and there will be less poverty, less hopelessness, and less crime.

Listen, thank you for letting me come. God bless you all. (Applause.)

END 10:27 A.M. (Local)