

THE WHITE HOUSE

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**MRS. LAURA BUSH HOSTS THIRD REGIONAL CONFERENCE ON  
HELPING AMERICA'S YOUTH**

**Panels Focus on Challenges Facing At-Risk Boys and Military Youth of Deployed Parents**

Nashville, TN- Mrs. Laura Bush delivered the keynote address today at the third regional conference on *Helping America's Youth* at Tennessee State University. The *Helping America's Youth* initiative is a nationwide effort to raise awareness about the challenges facing our youth, particularly at-risk boys, and to motivate caring adults to connect with youth in three key areas: family, school and community. The two-day Nashville conference featured training on the on-line *Community Guide to Helping America's Youth*, and expert panelist presentations on the current status of youth and successful methods for helping make a difference in the lives of America's youth.

“To make sure every child is surrounded by positive influences, even more adults must dedicate themselves to Helping America's Youth,” said Mrs. Bush. “Adults need to care — to be aware of the challenges facing children, and take an active interest in their lives. Adults, and especially parents, should be reminded that they can teach kids healthy behavior by their own good example.”

Research shows that boys are at greater risk than girls for illiteracy, dropping out of school, substance-abuse problems, violence, juvenile arrest, developing learning disabilities, and early death caused by violent behavior. The National Fatherhood Initiative reports that adolescent boys with non-resident fathers have lower grades than boys with resident fathers, and youth are more at risk of first substance use without a highly involved father. The panel of experts and researchers examined the challenges facing boys and how fathers in particular have an exceptionally powerful impact on the well-being of our nation's boys.

Other panel discussions at the Conference focused on special populations within the Southeast region and examined how caring adults are connecting with regional youth in Appalachia, the Gulf Coast, and military communities:

Appalachia lags behind the rest of the nation in the percentage of high school students who attend college. In Appalachian Tennessee, schools that have participated in a network of Appalachian Higher Education Centers that link community leaders, businesses, schools, and colleges for at least three years have seen the percentage of high school graduates going on to college climb from an average of 35 percent before beginning the program to 62 percent now.

The Reconcile New Orleans' Youth Workforce training program has successfully enrolled youth between the ages of 16 and 25 to learn basic life skills, interpersonal skills and work skills to enable and empower them to successfully enter the second-largest non-governmental workforce in New Orleans – the entertainment and hospitality industry.

According to the Department of Defense, approximately 275,000 service members are currently deployed and approximately 220,000 children have a parent deployed. The panel of experts discussed how creating a community network of support for military

youth, children can be fully supported before, during and after their parents are deployed. One such program highlighted was the National Military Family Association's Operation Purple; a summer camp program provided free of charge to children of deployed parents. Since its launch in 2004, Operation Purple and its sponsors have sent 6,000 children of deployed parents to camp. There are 34 Operation Purple camp locations in 26 states.

The first day of the Helping America's Youth conference provided training on the *Community Guide to Helping America's Youth*, a web-based guide to assist communities in coordinating resources and track effective programs, to more than 200 community partners from Tennessee, Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, North Carolina, South Carolina and Virginia.

On the second day of the conference, Mrs. Bush delivered the keynote address and joined local, regional, state leaders for a speaker series on the challenges facing youth and the successful methods for positive development.

Mrs. Bush traveled to Indianapolis, Indiana in June 2006 and to Denver, Colorado in August 2006 for previous regional conferences on Helping America's Youth.

The April 12, 2007 regional conference will be webcast live at [www.helpingamericasyouth.gov](http://www.helpingamericasyouth.gov). In addition, community leaders, parents, youth program practitioners and others gathered in their own communities across the region on April 12th to discuss issues impacting youth in their areas and view the Helping America's Youth regional conference via webcast.

For more information on the initiative, please visit [www.helpingamericasyouth.gov](http://www.helpingamericasyouth.gov).

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