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## Bush: 'Education President'

He says school bell signals alarm about American system

LEWISTON, Maine (AP) — President Bush, delivering a troubling back-to-school message, said Tuesday that America's education system is failing and "we must blame ourselves for betraying our children."

"The ringing school bell sounds an alarm, a warning to all of us who care about the state of American education," Bush said. "Every day brings new evidence of crisis."

Bush pressed his crusade to improve schools during a brief stop before returning to Washington at the end of his 29-day Maine vacation.

Bush's speech marked the beginning of a new emphasis on education, the environment and other domestic issues likely to be major themes of the coming election year.

Democrats hope to exploit what they believe is the president's weakness on problems at home, such as the faltering economy and the lack of health insurance for many Americans.

Democratic Party Chairman Ronald Brown said the president's speech was intended to open Bush's 1992 re-election campaign and "redeem George Bush's embarrassing failure to live up to his lofty promise to be our education president."

"George Bush and his White House must match rhetoric with real action and substitute direct presidential responsibility for the same old photo opportunity," Brown said in a statement. "Campaign pledges don't cut the mustard when our economic future depends on smart kids and a skilled work force."

Rep. Tom Andrews, D-Maine, said it was good that the president was drawing attention to the problem, but that his proposals don't go far enough. Bush, he said, should shift millions of dollars from the defense budget into education.

Maine Gov. John McKernan Jr., a Republican, introduced Bush to an audience of parents, students and educators who filled Lewiston

High School gym.

"Much of what the president has tried to do on the domestic agenda has been overlooked" because of dramatic events around the world, McKernan said.

Bush told the audience that parents and students must get involved in the campaign to improve education.

He noted that the verbal scores of high school seniors declined to an all-time low on the Scholastic Aptitude Test. "These numbers tell us: Our schools are in trouble."

"But before we point fingers, assign blame, how many of us demand more of children, ourselves, our schools? Survey after survey suggests too many parents and students remain unconcerned, unconvinced that the state of their own schools should worry them."

Bush said: "The truth is, all our children are at risk. ... If our schools fail, we can't blame Washington. We can't blame Augusta," the capital of Maine.

"We must blame ourselves for betraying our children."

Bush and the nation's governors have adopted a package of lofty education goals to be achieved by 2000. The strategy calls for American students to be first in the world in science and math, two subjects where they rank last among industrialized nations.

To accomplish the goals, Bush has proposed creation of national standards in English, math, science, history and geography, and a system of national examinations to measure performance.

Bush told parents they are expecting too much of teachers.

"We expect them to act as social workers and psychologists and family counselors," he said. "At the same time, we ask too little of our students. We shy away from demanding excellence and accountability."

"We haven't taken the time to read to our kids, to talk with them, to teach them the art of communication, how to think, how to write, how to speak clearly. What happens at home really matters."

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## They were screaming 'Let me out!' Fire kills 24 at chicken processing plant

HAMLET, N.C. (AP) — Fire broke out Tuesday at a chicken processing plant, killing 24 people and injuring more than 40, authorities said. Employees and witnesses said one exit was locked and one was temporarily blocked by a truck.

"They were screaming 'Let me out!'" said passer-by Sam Breeden. "They were beating on the door."

Witnesses said a fryer at the Imperial Food Products plant caught fire about 8:30 a.m. The company makes chicken nuggets and marinated chicken breasts sold at fast-food restaurants and grocery stores.

Renee Hoffman, a spokeswoman for the

state Department of Crime Control and Public Safety, said 24 were confirmed dead by mid-afternoon. Hospitals reported more than 40 were injured.

The interior of the building was gutted.

A woman who was in the canteen said people rushed in yelling, "Fire! Fire!" The door from the canteen to the outside was locked and a man had to break the door open so those inside could escape.

Carolyn Rainwater, a plant worker, said she heard people screaming and "I saw a big puff of black smoke and I started running for the back door." The door was blocked by a delivery truck and the workers had to wait for it

to be moved, she said.

"When I arrived, I didn't have hope for anybody coming out of here," said a police officer who would not give his name. "They're beating all the odds."

The officer was trying to control a growing crowd of worried relatives, friends and curiosity-seekers.

Several witnesses said employees couldn't escape because of locked doors.

O'Neil Patrick said he was walking near the plant and saw another man trying to help workers. He said only one door was open and that was in the front of the building.

## Director Frank Capra dies at 94

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Oscar-winning director Frank Capra, whose romantic idealism defined the American dream through such movie classics as "It's a Wonderful Life" and "Mr. Smith Goes to Washington," died Tuesday. He was 94.

Capra died in his sleep at 9:30 a.m. at his home in the desert city

of La Quinta, said his son, Tom Capra, executive producer of NBC's "Today Show" in New York.

Capra "died of natural causes. He just didn't wake up," his son said. He said his father suffered a series of minor strokes several years ago and had been under 24-hour nursing care.

A Sicilian immigrant, Capra lived and celebrated his new country's spirit of opportunity. He came of age as a filmmaker during the Depression, and his populist work triumphed the little man over the system, hope over despair and an optimistic vision of country and place.

"The art of Frank Capra is very

simple: It is the love of the people," he remarked when he accepted a Life Achievement Award from the American Film Institute in 1982.

Capra won Academy Awards for "It Happened One Night," "Mr. Deeds Goes to Town" and

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 D. Developed rotary dial telephone and automatic switchboard.

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