

Remarks at a Reception for Gubernatorial Candidate Ernie Fletcher in
Lexington, Kentucky
October 9, 2003

Thanks for coming. It's great to be back in this beautiful State. It's good to see a lot of friends. I know something about the culture of Kentucky. I know the priorities of this State. I promise you I'll keep my speech short so you can get to the football game. *[Laughter]* All I can say is, thank goodness it wasn't basketball season, because nobody would be here. *[Laughter]*

I appreciate the warm welcome to this former Governor, and I'm proud to be here with the next Governor, Ernie Fletcher. For me, politics will come in time. I've got a job to do, and it's my honor to lead this country. But politics is upon the people of Kentucky, and I'm here because I want to make it as clear as I possibly can: In the interests of every person who lives in this State, whether they're Republican, Democrat, or independent, the best man to be the Governor of Kentucky is Ernie Fletcher.

I know him well. I've worked with him as a United States Congressman. The first thing I found out about Ernie is he loves his family, and he loves this State. I finally had to tell him to quit saying the word "Kentucky" every time he lobbied me on an issue. *[Laughter]* He cares a lot about people. He believes in personal responsibility, the dignity that comes from hard work, and the importance of a good education for every child. There's no question in my mind this man has the right values to lead this great State.

And I appreciate the fact that Ernie picked a good man named Steve Pence to be the Lieutenant Governor of this State. I picked him first. *[Laughter]* He was the U.S. Attorney for Western District of Kentucky, appointed by President George W. Bush. I looked at a lot of candidates. This man was the best candidate for the job. I'm proud that he served as U.S. Attorney.

I'm proud that he served as a lieutenant colonel in the Army Reserves. And I'm proud to be standing on this stage with the next Lieutenant Governor of the State of Kentucky.

Ernie and I both married above ourselves. *[Laughter]* I'm proud to be with Glenna and the Fletcher family. I want to thank you for your sacrifice and service. Glenna, you'll make a great first lady for this State, just like Laura has made a great First Lady for our country. I'm really proud of Laura. She recently went on a high-level diplomatic mission. She went to Russia to help promote a book festival with Lyudmila Putin—by the way, came back right after that in Russia and hosted a national book festival. She loves books. She loves reading. She wants every child to read in America.

And then she—before she went to Russia, she stopped off in France. *[Laughter]* Now, you may have seen the picture. I went to France. *[Laughter]* I had a nice reception, but I wasn't treated like that. *[Laughter]* No, she's great. I'm proud of her. I can't tell you how thankful I am that when I got on bended knee and said, "Will you marry me," she said yes. *[Laughter]* She sends her love and her best to all her friends here in the great Commonwealth of Kentucky.

I also thank Ruth Ann Pence and the Pence family for working hard to get the next Lieutenant Governor in office. It's a sacrifice for families when somebody makes the decision to run. It's a team effort, and I thank the families for what you're doing.

In our midst is a man who you must send back as the United States Senator from this great State, and that is Mr. Jim Bunning. He's strong. He's capable. He's the absolute right man for the job.

Speaking about Senators, Mitch's wife is in my Cabinet. That would be Mitch McConnell, and I'm speaking about Elaine Chao. She's done a fabulous job as the Secretary of Labor. Hi, Elaine. Need a ride back? *[Laughter]* Not much air rage on Air Force One, by the way. *[Laughter]*

Two Members of the United States Congress are with us today. A great Member, a fellow I remember campaigning with for my dad at his house, a person who has done a really good job for Kentucky—he is a person who is a leader in the House of Representatives, and that's Congressman Hal Rogers. As well we've got another fine Member from the House of Representatives with us, a good stalwart, a good ally, and that's Congressman Ron Lewis. I know the current Congressman, soon to be Governor, is really appreciative of the Members of the Congress for coming tonight. You know him as well as anybody.

I appreciate the members of the statehouse who are here. It's in your interest you're here, because you're going to be working with a fine man as Governor. We've got the senator, Dan Kelly, who's the majority leader. You're fixing to have a great Governor to work with, Senator. You've got State Representative Jeff Hoover, minority leader of the statehouse. And I want to thank the other members of the senate and the house who are here tonight as well. Help is on the way.

I know there's a lot of other candidates running for statewide office, too numerous to name, but I wish you all the best. I thank your families for making the sacrifice. I also want to thank all the grassroots activists who are here, people who are putting up the signs and dialing the phones and licking the envelopes. You can't win a race unless you energize the grassroots.

And we've got some fantastic leaders of the Republican Party who are with us tonight. Ellen Williams, my good friend, is the chairwoman of the Republican Party of the State of Kentucky. My friend Cathy Bailey, the national committeewoman and

the State finance chair, by the way, for the Bush-Cheney 2004 campaign, is with us tonight.

But my message to the grassroots folks is it's one thing to come to a fundraiser—and that's important, don't get me wrong—but you need to go to your coffee shops. You need to go to community centers and your houses of worship, and you need to say to people who haven't made up their mind, "You've got a good man in Ernie Fletcher." You need to spread the word. You need to energize those folks. Find those folks that say, "My vote doesn't matter," and look them in the eye and says, "It does matter to have the right kind of Governor in the statehouse."

I appreciate Ernie's priorities. The number one priority of any Governor ought to be the education of the children of the State in which he's the Governor. That ought to be the priority. It's Ernie's priority. See, if you can't get education right, there's a dismal future for the State. It's essential that you have a Governor who stands tall for every child. And that starts with having a Governor who understands the dire need to challenge the soft bigotry of low expectations. You've got to have a Governor that believes that every child can learn and is willing to raise the standards, a Governor who believes in the worth and potential of every single child in his State. And that's Ernie Fletcher.

You see, if you do not believe that every child can learn, then you're willing to accept a system which simply shuffles children through the schools. And that's unsatisfactory. It should be unsatisfactory to everybody who lives in the State of Kentucky. It's important to know whether or not the children are learning to read and write and add and subtract. It's important to hold public schools accountable. That way, Governor Fletcher can praise the teachers and principals and parents in succeeding schools. And that way, Governor Fletcher can take the accountability measures and say, "We're not doing it right here." For

the sake of Kentucky, put a Governor in who's willing to work hard to make sure not one single child is left behind.

Ernie talked about health care. Health care is an issue. It makes sense to have somebody who knows something about health care as the Governor. He does. I've worked with him closely on key issues. We worked on the Medicare bill together. See, we want to make sure the Medicare system is modern, so seniors have got choices. I'm not only talking about the seniors today; I'm talking about those of us who are fixing to be seniors. You've got to have a system that works. Let's make sure we have prescription drugs available for our seniors. Ernie has been a leader on this issue. He knows what he's talking about.

And he and I know this, that for the sake of affordable and available health care, we need to have medical liability reform. For the sake of the working people of this State, you better have you a Governor who is strong enough to stand up to the trial lawyers, somebody who is going to remind the people of this State that nobody has ever been healed by a frivolous or junk lawsuit.

And that's soon-to-be Governor Ernie Fletcher. We spent a lot of time in Washington talking about jobs. See, he and I understand this, that things might look okay, but so long as anybody is looking for work and can't find a job, it means we still have a problem. We've got to work to create the conditions for job growth. The role of our governments is not to create wealth—Ernie knows that—the role is to create the environment in which small businesses can flourish to be big businesses, in which the entrepreneurial spirit is strong.

We had a problem at the national level. When we came in—Vice President Cheney and I came in—the country was headed into a recession in the first quarter of 2001. We were in recession. The economy started coming around, and then the enemy hit us, and that hurt. And then we found out some of our citizens forgot to tell the truth.

We had some corporate scandals. And by the way, there's no excuse for that. They will be held to account. We expect corporate CEOs to be responsible citizens in America.

We vigorously waged the war on terror, and the battles of Afghanistan and Iraq affected the confidence of the American people. We had an issue with our economy. I went to the Congress. I said, "The best way to get the economy growing again, the best way to make sure people can find a job is to return the people's money." I proposed historic tax relief. We increased the child credit from \$600 to \$1,000. We reduced the marriage penalty. The code ought to encourage marriage, not discourage marriage.

We cut the taxes on everybody who pays taxes. We thought the fairest way to deal with tax relief was not to play favorites but to say, "If you pay tax, you get tax relief." We provided incentives for small businesses to expand, because Ernie and I understand that most new jobs in America are created by small businesses. No, we acted. I called upon Congress; this good man supported me. The tax relief came at the right time for American history.

Now, I've watched him carefully. He understands what I know: When we're spending money at the Government level, we're not spending the Government's money; we're spending the people's money. And you'd better have a Governor who understands that in your statehouse.

There's another thing we're working on in Washington to make sure our businesses flourish, and that's a reliable source of energy. I look forward to working with Ernie on clean coal technology. I want to use the resources at hand. You've got some great resources here in Kentucky. We've got to use them. We've got to make sure we use our technology so that the air is cleaner. But we need an energy policy for the sake of economic vitality. And for the sake of national security, we need to be

less dependent on foreign sources of energy.

We've been working on a jobs plan at the national level, Ernie's working on a jobs plan here in Kentucky. He knows what he's doing. He's got the right philosophy. If anybody out there is listening and is worried about their job, I'd strongly suggest that you make Ernie Fletcher your Governor. He knows what he's talking about when it comes to job creation for the people of the Commonwealth of Kentucky.

Another thing I'm looking forward to working with Ernie on is homeland security. There's a lot responsibility at the State level when it comes to protecting the homeland. Make sure you've got a Governor who is well organized, who can make sure that there's a response mechanism in case the worst might happen, somebody who supports the first-responders, the fire and the policemen and the emergency service squads all over your State. I'm confident Ernie can do the job. I've worked with him on matters of homeland security.

The truth of the matter is, the best way to secure the homeland is never to forget the lessons of September the 11th, 2001, and chase the enemy down, one by one, and bring them to justice.

One of the big problems we had when we got to Washington was morale in the United States military was beginning to suffer. When we showed up, there was an issue in the military. So I proposed strong defense budgets to meet the threats of a new era. Congressman Fletcher was a strong supporter of those defense budgets. And today, thanks to his support and the good work of others here in this audience, no one—no one in the world—can doubt the strength and the spirit and the sacrifice and the class and the technological ability of the United States military.

Thank goodness we did strengthen our military, because we're still at war. I knew, after September the 11th, one of the hardest things for me to do would be to convince the people that there was a new kind

of war, and they had to be diligent and patient in order to do our duty, in order to answer history and secure our homeland. Ernie Fletcher got that right off the bat.

It's important that our country not forget the lessons of September the 11th. The first lesson is the nature of the enemy. These people are nothing but coldblooded killers. They've hijacked a great religion. They'll kill innocent women and children and men. They care not who they kill. They try to create fear and intimidation. Therapy won't work with these people. Negotiation won't work with these people. The only way to secure America is to stay on the offensive, and this country will stay on the offensive.

We're making good progress against Al Qaida. I vowed that we would bring those killers to justice, and we're making good progress. We're teaming up with other nations and, slowly but surely, bringing them to justice. About two-thirds of the Al Qaida leadership have either been killed or captured. And we're after the rest of them. I know we've got a family here who grieved because of the bombing in Bali. The man who ordered that bombing, masterminded the bombing, is now in custody. He's no longer a threat. May God rest your daughter. We have a duty, no matter whether the citizen lives here in America or elsewhere, to be tough and strong and vigilant, to use our resources and capabilities to bring killers to justice.

I also laid out another initiative that's an important lesson of September the 11th. It's important for those who harbor a terrorist and feed a terrorist and hide a terrorist to understand they're just as guilty as the terrorists. And the Taliban in Afghanistan found out exactly what we meant. Because of the bravery of the United States military and our friends and coalitions, the Taliban is no more. The people of Afghanistan are free. Many young girls go to school for the first time, thanks to the United States of America.

There's another lesson involved with September the 11th, and that is, when we see a gathering threat, we must deal with it. You see, in the past, oceans protected us, or so we thought. We felt—thought we were invulnerable to attack. So if we saw a gathering threat overseas, we might decide to deal with it, or might not. September the 11th changed that calculation. The enemy can strike anytime, anywhere in America with ruthless fashion. They know no rules. They know no bounds of decency. They kill in the name of great religion. And therefore, this Nation must deal with gathering threats when we find them.

And Saddam Hussein was a gathering threat. He possessed and he used weapons of mass destruction. He was a brutal tyrant and dictator to his own people. We discovered mass graves of men, women, and children. He had rape rooms and torture rooms. Words cannot describe the tyranny of this brutal man. I was not about to leave the security of the United States to the desires and hopes of this madman.

But we weren't alone. The world called for Mr. Saddam Hussein to disarm, to prove he had disarmed, not once but time after time. The world clearly saw the threat of Mr. Saddam Hussein. Last year, you might remember, we passed Security Council Resolution 1441. The United Nations said, "Mr. Saddam Hussein, you must declare your weapons. You must disarm for the sake of peace, or there will be serious consequences. Your choice." He made a bad choice. Saddam Hussein is no more.

Recently, there was a report about Mr. Saddam Hussein's weapons programs. If you read the report, it is absolutely clear that he was in defiance of Security Council Resolution 1441, that he was not only a danger but a deceiver. The United Nations was right to demand Saddam Hussein be disarmed, and the United States and our coalition was right to remove him from power.

And we have more work to do in Iraq. See, we're at an historic moment. A free Iraq, a peaceful Iraq in the heart of the land of terror will change the world and make America and our friends more secure. A peaceful Iraq in the heart of the Middle East will change the habits of countries that have spawned terrorists. It's essential we succeed for the long term. It's essential we succeed for our children and our grandchildren in developing a peaceful, democratic country. And make no mistake about it, we will succeed.

We're making great progress. I don't care what you read about. Just ask anybody who's been there. They will tell you that the schools are opening, the children are getting immunized, the electricity is up, water is purified and moving. We're making great progress in helping this nation establish itself. The Iraqis want a secure country. They're moms and dads just like you all are. They want to live in a peaceful, hopeful place. The marketplaces are burgeoning. The entrepreneurial spirit is growing. And they'll start taking over their own security. By the end of next year, we'll have 40,000 militia trained so they can deal with the thugs and the criminals and the Ba'athists who long for Saddam Hussein.

I talked to Bernie Kerik, the police chief of New York City, who was the commissioner there during 9/11. He went over there in the midst of chaos and set up a 37,000-person police force in Baghdad. No, it's different. We're making progress. This country is growing. I readily concede it's still hard work. There's thugs and killers who can't stand the thought of freedom. Freedom makes them nervous. And so, they're going to try to intimidate. See, you've got to understand, their goal is to try to frighten the United States of America. They want us to leave early. They want to inflict damage so that we run. They don't understand our country. We don't run from a challenge. We understand the stakes. We will stay the course, not only for our own security but for the peace of the world.

I've received great support from the United States Congress on this initiative. Ernie Fletcher understands the stakes. He understands the historic nature of what we are doing. He understands this war on terror. It will be good to have him as your Governor. He has got a vision.

I also know what he knows, that the true strength of this country is not our military might, however, or it's not the size of our wallets. That's not the true strength of America. The true strength of this country is the heart of the American people. We're a compassionate, decent nation. It's very important that you have a Governor who knows that Government can hand out money, but it cannot put hope in a person's heart or a sense of purpose in a person's life. That comes when loving citizens put their arm around somebody who hurts and says, "I love you. What can I do to help you? How can I make a difference in your life?" You need to have a Governor who knows that amidst the plenty of this great State, there are people who hurt. There are people who cry for help. There's homeless people. There's battered women. There's addicted people. And the best way to solve that is to rally the armies of compassion. Whether it be at the Federal level or at the State level, elected officials should never fear rallying faith, no matter what the religion, to help people in need.

No, the greatest strength of this country is the fact that there are thousands and thousands of people who have heard the universal call, whether they be Christian or Jewish or Muslim, to love a neighbor just like you'd like to be loved yourself. Problems will be solved one person at a time, one person—one conscience at a time, when our country gathers up the true strength, those who have heard the call, and help them provide the services that will save lives.

Ernie Fletcher understands that the people are the strength of this State. There's no doubt in my mind he'll make a great Governor. And it's my high honor to come and stand by his side and urge the good people of this State to vote him into office.

May God bless you all, and may God bless America.

NOTE: The President spoke at 6:11 p.m. in Heritage Hall at the Lexington Convention Center. In his remarks, he referred to Glena A. Fletcher, wife of candidate Ernie Fletcher; Lyudmila Putina, wife of President Vladimir Putina of Russia; Ruth Ann Pence, wife of candidate Steve Pence; former President Saddam Hussein of Iraq; and Bernard B. Kerik, former commissioner, New York City Police Department.

Remarks on Cuba

October 10, 2003

Hola. Sientese. Thank you for coming. Welcome to the Rose Garden. It's my honor to host you for an important policy announcement.

I'm proud to be joined by our great Secretary of State Colin Powell and a son of Cuba, a graduate of the Pedro Pan program, Mel Martinez. I'm also pleased to be joined with other members who will

be—of my administration who will be charged with implementing policy. From the Department of Homeland Security, Under Secretary Asa Hutchinson is with us today. From the Treasury Department, Rick Newcomb, Director of the Office of Foreign Asset Control, is with us today. Rick, thank you for coming. Assistant Secretary for the Western Hemisphere Roger