

Remarks at a Bush-Cheney Reception in East Meadow, New York March 11, 2004

The President. Thanks for coming. Thanks for the warm welcome. It's great—

Audience member. New York loves you!

The President. Thank you, sir.

Audience member. We need you!

The President. Let me get started. [Laughter] Thanks for coming. Thanks for your friendship. Thanks for your support. It is great to be back in New York. We have had a fantastic day here today. And it's topped off by what is a successful effort to make sure that my campaign is properly fueled—[laughter]—for the charge ahead.

We're going to compete here in New York, and we're going to compete here hard. I'm counting on you. I'm counting on you to help us. The Vice President and I look forward to bringing our message to this great State. New York is going to be a part of what is going to be a great national victory in November of this year. Speaking about our Vice President, I made a really good pick when I asked Dick Cheney to join me. He's the finest Vice President our country has ever had.

Audience member. Your dad was! [Laughter]

The President. You know something, you sounded exactly like my mother. [Laughter]

Speaking about marrying well—[laughter]—that is precisely what I did. Laura is a fabulous First Lady. She's really a comforting soul who loves our family and loves our country. I'm really proud of the job she's done.

I'm also proud of the job that Governor George Pataki has done for the State of New York. He is a great Governor. I'm proud to call Pataki friend. I really am. It's comforting to know that he's out there on the stump defending his buddy George W. And he does a good job of it. He really does. I'm proud—thank you, George, for being here. I also want to thank my friend

Rudy Giuliani for being here as well. He too is out there defending his buddy. And both these men have got a lot of credibility because they've done such a great job in their—one as Governor and one as mayor during difficult times. And I'm proud to call them friends.

I'm also pleased that Peter King traveled with me today from Washington, DC, to his district here in New York. I want to thank Peter for his service. He's a fine United States Congressman, as is Vito Fossella. Vito is a New York Congressman as well.

I want to thank all the grassroots activists who are here. I want to thank Sandy Treadwell and Mike Long. I want to thank Joe Mondello. Pat Acampora is with us today. These are all people who are willing to spend time energizing the grassroots. Those are the people who are willing to put up the signs and make the phone calls and turn out the vote. I'm counting on you. You can't run a campaign alone. You need people from all neighborhoods around this country willing to work. And for those of you who are going to work on our behalf, I want to thank you from the bottom of my heart. We're counting on you. We're not going to let you down. And I'm looking forward to the contest.

I finally got an opponent. [Laughter] It was my honor to call Senator Kerry and to welcome him to the race and to congratulate him on running a good campaign. I look forward to the debate, a debate on the issues. And it's going to be an interesting debate because he's built up quite a record. [Laughter] Senator Kerry—he's been in Washington long enough to take both sides of every issue. [Laughter] Senator Kerry voted for the PATRIOT Act, voted for NAFTA, voted for the No Child Left Behind Act, and for the use of force in Iraq. Now he opposes the PATRIOT

Act, NAFTA, the No Child Left Behind Act, and the liberation of Iraq. He clearly has strong beliefs. *[Laughter]* They just don't last very long. *[Laughter]*

There will be a very clear choice in this election, the choice between keeping the tax relief that is moving the economy forward or putting the burden of higher taxes back on the American people, a choice between an America that leads the world with strength and confidence or an America that is uncertain in the face of danger. I look forward to laying these alternatives squarely before the people.

I'm glad the campaign has begun. I have something I want to tell the people. The first thing I'm going to tell them is we've achieved great things during the last 3 years. We've accomplished a lot. But most importantly, we have a positive vision, an optimistic vision for the years ahead, a plan to win the war on terror, a plan to extend freedom and peace throughout the world, a plan to make sure prosperity continues, and a plan to encourage compassion at home. There's no doubt where we stand. I will speak clearly and confidently about our positions, and there's no doubt we'll win 4 more years on the 2d of November.

The last 3 years have brought serious challenges, and we've given serious answers. We came to office with the stock market in decline and the economy headed into recession, delivered historic tax relief, and now our economy is the fastest growing of any major industrialized nation.

We had to confront corporate crimes that cost people their jobs and their savings, so we passed strong corporate reforms and made it very clear that we will not tolerate dishonesty in the boardrooms of America.

We saw war and grief on a quiet September morning. But we pursued the terrorist enemy across the world. We've captured or killed many of the key leaders of the Al Qaida network, and the rest of them will learn there is no cave or hole deep enough to hide from the justice of the United States.

We confronted the dangers of state-sponsored terror and the spread of weapons of mass destruction, so we ended two of the most violent and dangerous regimes on Earth. We freed over 50 million people, and once again, America is proud to lead the armies of liberation.

When we came to Washington, we found a military that was underfunded and underappreciated, so we gave our military the resources and respect they deserve. And today, no one in the world can question the skill and the strength and the spirit of the United States military.

When we came to office, people had gotten used to what they call gridlock. Old problems were used to score points. Old problems were just politicized and debated and then just passed on from year to year. But we came to Washington for a different reason. We came to solve problems. That's why we passed major reforms to raise the standards in every public school in America. That's why we passed reforms of Medicare to give patients prescription drugs and give seniors choices. No, we came to lead, and we have delivered results for the American people.

It's a President's job to confront problems, not to pass them on to future Presidents and future generations. A President needs to step up to make tough decisions and keep commitments. And that's how I'm going to continue to lead this country. Great events will turn on this election. The man who sits in the Oval Office will set the course in the war on terror and the direction of our economy. The security and prosperity of America are at stake.

My opponent hasn't offered much in the way of strategies to win the war or policies to expand our economy. So far, all we hear from that side is a lot of bitterness and anger. But he's going to find out what I know: Anger is not an agenda for the future of America.

I'm going to talk about the big issues confronting our country with a sense of optimism because I believe so much in what

our country stands for, a sense of resolve and determination. My administration stands ready to lead this Nation for 4 more years. We have a reason. We can see clearly where we need to go.

The big issue for every family in America is the Federal tax burden. It's the largest tax relief since Ronald Reagan was the President. We have left more money in the hands that earned it. By spending and investing and helping to create new jobs, the American people have used their money far better than the Federal Government would have. Because we acted, our economy is growing stronger. The economy grew in the second half of 2003 at the fastest rate in nearly 20 years. Productivity is high, and business investment is rising. Interest rates and inflation rates are low. Homeownership is at the highest rate ever. Manufacturing is increasing. We've added 355,000 new jobs over the past 6 months. The tax relief we passed is working.

We have a difference of opinion on taxes. My opponent's plan for those tax cuts is to take them away. He would use that money to expand the Federal Government. I have a better idea: To keep this economy growing and to create jobs, the tax cuts must be permanent.

We need to do more to keep our economy growing. To create jobs, we need to maintain fiscal discipline in the Nation's Capital. We need to protect small-business owners and employees from the frivolous and junk lawsuits that make it hard to expand their businesses. We need to stop overregulation at the State and Federal level. We need to control the costs of health care by association health plans or health saving accounts, and this country must have national medical liability reform. We need to open up markets for New York's farmers and entrepreneurs and manufacturers. We need to pass sound energy legislation that will encourage conservation, that will enable us to modernize our electricity system, and that will make us less dependent on foreign sources of energy.

We've got a difference on how to create jobs. My opponent talks about job creation, but he's against every one of those job-creating measures. Empty talk about jobs and economic isolationism won't get anybody hired. The best way to create jobs is through a pro-growth, pro-entrepreneur economic agenda.

Our economy is changing. It's a time of transition. And so we must help people get the skills necessary so they can find good work. All skills start with education. That's why I was so strong on the No Child Left Behind Act. This administration is challenging the soft bigotry of low expectations. In return for Federal money, we now expect every child to learn to read and write and add and subtract. And we want every school district in America to show us whether or not every child is learning to read and write and add and subtract, to make sure that not one single child gets left behind in our country.

We're doing more. We have special programs for high school students to make sure they can catch up in reading and math. We've got to focus on our community college system. Today I heard the great story about Nassau Community College and their nursing program, as they're paying for people to become nurses in our society. Education is the gateway to a hopeful future, and this administration is making sure the gate is open to all Americans.

We're also working toward making sure this society encourages ownership. We want more people owning a home. We want more people owning their own small business. We want people owning and managing their own health care accounts. We want younger workers to own and manage personal savings accounts under Social Security. I believe in private property so much, I want everybody to have some. [Laughter]

On issue after issue, the American people have a very clear choice. My opponent is against personal retirement accounts. He's against putting patients in charge of

Medicare. He's against the tax relief. He seems to be against every idea that gives Americans more authority, more choices, and more control over our own lives. It's the same old Washington mindset: They'll give you the orders, and you'll pay the bills. I've got news for the Washington crowd, the Washington insiders. America has gone beyond that way of thinking, and we are not going back.

Our future also depends on America's leadership in the world. The momentum of freedom in our time is strong, but we still face serious challenges. Al Qaida is wounded but not broken. Terrorists are testing our will in Afghanistan and in Iraq. Regimes in North Korea and Iran are challenging the peace. If America shows weakness and uncertainty in this decade, the world will drift toward tragedy. That is not going to happen on my watch.

This Nation is strong and confident in the cause of freedom, and today, no one doubts the word of the United States. America and our allies gave an ultimatum to the terror regime in Afghanistan. The Taliban chose defiance, and for the good of the world and for the good of the suffering people in Afghanistan, the Taliban are no longer in power. America and our allies gave an ultimatum to the terror regime in Iraq. The dictator chose defiance; the dictator now sits in a prison cell.

September the 11th, 2001, taught a lesson I will never forget: America must confront threats before they fully materialize. In Iraq, my administration looked at the intelligence, and we saw a threat. The Congress looked at the same intelligence, and they saw a threat. The United Nations Security Council looked at the intelligence, and it saw a threat. The previous administration and Congress looked at the intelligence and made regime change in Iraq the policy of our country. In 2002, the United Nations Security Council yet again demanded a full accounting of Saddam Hussein's weapons programs. As he had for over a decade, Saddam Hussein refused to

comply. So I had a choice to make: Either take the word of a madman, or take action to defend America. Given that choice, I will defend America.

My opponent admits that Saddam Hussein was a threat. He just didn't support my decision to remove Saddam from power. Perhaps he was hoping Saddam would lose the next election in Iraq. [Laughter]

We showed the dictator and a watching world that America means what it says. Because our coalition acted, Saddam's torture chambers are closed. Because we acted, Iraq's weapons programs are ended forever. Because we acted, nations like Libya have gotten the message and renounced their own weapons programs. Because we acted, an example of democracy is rising at the heart of the Middle East. Because we acted, the world is more free and America is more secure.

We still face thugs and terrorists in Iraq who would rather go on killing the innocent than accept the advance of liberty. See, they know that a free Iraq would be a major defeat in the cause of terror. This collection of killers is trying to shake our will, to shake the will of America. You know, they really don't understand our country. America will never be intimidated by thugs and assassins.

We are aggressively striking the terrorists in Iraq, defeating them there so we do not have to face them in our own country. We're calling on other nations to help Iraq build a free society. A free Iraq makes America and the world more secure. We're standing with the Iraqi people as they assume more of their own defense and move toward self-government. These are not easy tasks, but they are essential tasks. America will finish what we have begun, and we will win this essential victory in the war on terror.

On national security, Americans have the clearest possible choice. My opponent says he approves of bold action in the world, but only if other countries don't object. I'm

all for united action, and so are our 34 coalition partners in Iraq right now. This country must never outsource America's security decisions to leaders of other nations.

Some are skeptical that the war on terror is really a war at all. Just days ago, my opponent indicated that he's not comfortable using the word "war" to describe the struggle we're in. He said, "I don't want to use that terminology." Senator Kerry has also said the war on terror is far less of a military operation and far more of an intelligence gathering, law enforcement operation. I disagree. Our Nation followed this approach after the World Trade Center was bombed in 1993. The matter was handled in the courts and thought by some to be settled. But the terrorists were still training in Afghanistan. They were still plotting in other nations. They were drawing up more ambitious plans. After the chaos and carnage of September the 11th, it is not enough to serve our enemies with legal papers.

With those attacks, the terrorists and their supporters declared war on the United States of America. And war is what they got. One very important issue of this war is intelligence gathering, as Senator Kerry says. Yet in 1995, 2 years after the first attack on the World Trade Center, my opponent offered legislation to cut the overall intelligence budget by \$1½ billion. When he introduced that bill on the floor of the Senate, Senator Kerry said he was cutting spending that was, in his words, pointless, wasteful, antiquated, and just plain silly. Well, his colleagues must have had their own ideas about what was pointless and silly, because not one of them signed on as a cosponsor to Senator Kerry's idea. Intelligence spending is necessary, not wasteful. It is important. It is a serious duty of our Government and vital to the defense of this country.

Our intelligence professionals are taking great risks, and they're doing great work. And so are the men and women of the United States military. At bases across our

country and the world, I've had the privilege, the high privilege, of meeting with those who defend our country and sacrifice for our security. I've seen their great decency and their unselfish courage. And I assure you, ladies and gentlemen, the cause of freedom is in very good hands.

This Nation is prosperous and strong, yet we need to remember that our greatest strength is in the hearts and souls of our citizens. We're strong because of the values we try to live by, courage and compassion and reverence and integrity. We're strong because of the institutions that give us direction and purpose, families and schools and religious congregations. These values and institutions are fundamental to our lives, and they deserve the respect of the Government.

We stand for the fair treatment of faith-based groups so they can receive Federal support for their works of compassion and help. We will not stand for Government discrimination against people of faith.

We stand for welfare reforms that require work and strengthen marriage, which have helped millions of Americans find independence and dignity. We will not stand for any attempt to weaken those reforms and to send people back into lives of dependence.

We stand for a culture of life in which every person counts and every person matters. We will not stand for the treatment of any life as a commodity to be experimented upon or exploited or cloned.

We stand for the confirmation of judges who strictly and faithfully interpret the law. We will not stand for judges who undermine democracy by legislating from the bench and try to remake the culture of America by court order.

We stand for the culture of responsibility in America. We're changing the culture of America from one that says, "If it feels good, do it," and, "If you've got a problem, blame somebody else," to a culture in which each of us understands we are responsible for the decisions we make in life.

If you're fortunate enough to be a mother or a father, you're responsible for loving your child with all your heart. If you're worried about the quality of the education in the community in which you live, you're responsible for doing something about it. If you're a CEO in corporate America, you're responsible for telling the truth to your shareholders and your employees. And in a new responsibility society, each of us is responsible for loving our neighbor just like we'd like to be loved ourself.

For all Americans, these years in our history will always stand apart. There are quiet times in the life of a nation when little is expected of our leaders. This isn't one of those times. You and I are living in a period when the stakes are high and the challenges are difficult, a period of time when American resolve is needed.

None of us will ever forget that week when one era ended and another began. On September the 14th, 2001, I stood in the ruins of the Twin Towers. I stood with George and Rudy. I'll never forget that day. There were workers in hardhats shouting at the top of their lungs, "Whatever it takes." I remember a fellow pointed at me and said, "Mr. President, never let me down." As we all did that day, the men and women searching through the rubble took it personally. I took it personally. I have a responsibility that goes on. I will never relent in bringing justice to our enemies. I will defend the security of America, whatever it takes.

In these times, I have also been witness to the character of this Nation. Not so long ago, some had their doubts about the American character, whether we could meet a serious challenge or whether we had the capacity to serve a cause greater than self-interest. But Americans have given their answer. I've seen the unselfish courage of our troops. I've seen the heroism of Americans in the face of danger. I've seen the spirit of service and compassion renewed in our country. We've all seen our Nation unite in common purpose when it mattered most.

We will need all of these qualities for the work ahead. We have a war to win, and the world is counting on us to lead in the cause of freedom and peace. We have a duty to spread opportunity to every part of this country. This is the work that history has set before us. We welcome it. And we know that for our country, the best days lie ahead.

God bless you all. Thanks for coming.

NOTE: The President spoke at 6:25 p.m. at the Carltun. In his remarks, he referred to Gov. George E. Pataki of New York; Rudolph W. Giuliani, former mayor of New York City; Alexander F. "Sandy" Treadwell, chairman, New York Republican State Committee; Mike Long, chairman, Conservative Party of New York State; Joseph Mondello, chairman, Nassau County Republican Party; and Patricia L. Acampora, New York State assemblywoman.

Remarks Following a Wreath-Laying Ceremony for Victims of the March 11 Terrorist Attacks in Madrid, Spain *March 12, 2004*

Mr. Ambassador, thank you for having Laura and me here during this solemn occasion. The United States of America sends our prayers and sympathies to the Spanish people, who mourn the loss of life, who

today weep for their loved ones, who wonder about their future now that there's been such tragedy.

The bombings in Spain are a grim reminder that there are evil people in the