

Thanks for coming. May God bless you and your families, and may God continue to bless our great country. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:25 p.m. in the State Dining Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to ESPN broadcasters Joe Morgan, Tim Kurkjian, and Peter Gammons; and columnist George Will.

Remarks at a Bush-Cheney Dinner March 31, 2004

Thank you all very much. Thanks for coming. Thank you all. Alex, thank you very much. I didn't realize you were such a good orator. *[Laughter]*

I wasn't Alex's first choice to speak tonight. His request was that Laura come to be the key speaker. Alex is a man of good judgment. So am I, by asking Laura to marry me. She's a fabulous wife and a great First Lady. She sends her love. I think Laura deserves 4 more years as the First Lady.

Laura will be out campaigning with me, and so will Dick Cheney. Our country has had no finer Vice President than Dick Cheney. Mother heard me say that the other day, and she said, "Now, wait a minute." *[Laughter]* No, I'm proud of the Vice President. He's doing a fabulous job.

And I want to thank you all for supporting this ticket, and thanks for coming tonight. This is a huge turnout. Alex said, "Why don't you come by. I may have a few friends here"—*[laughter]*—"a few Greek Americans might show up."

And Manny, thank you as well. I appreciate you and Alex working so hard to make this a spectacular event. I want to thank my friend Mercer Reynolds, who is the national finance chairman for Bush-Cheney. He's a business guy who has taken time out of his life to help. I thank my friends Jim Langdon and Julie Finley for being the Washington, DC, finance cochairmen. Manny and Alex have helped the DC finance cochairmen meet their goals, for which we are grateful.

I want to thank Congressman Mike Bilirakis from the great State of Florida, for joining us. Congressman Jim Greenwood is with us today, from the great State of Pennsylvania. Thanks for coming, Jim. Jerry Kilgore, the attorney general from Virginia, is with us today. The Lieutenant Governor of the great State of Maryland, Michael Steele, is with us today. I really appreciate you all being here.

I finally got an opponent. The campaign season has arrived. My opponent is an experienced Senator, and he's built up quite a record. In fact, he's been in Washington long enough to take both sides of just about every issue. Senator Kerry voted for the PATRIOT Act. He voted for NAFTA. He voted for No Child Left Behind, and he voted for the use of force in Iraq. Now he opposes the PATRIOT Act, NAFTA, No Child Left Behind, and the liberation of Iraq. He feels strongly about these issues. *[Laughter]* If he could find a third side, I imagine he'd take that one too. *[Laughter]*

It's going to be an interesting campaign. Someone asked Senator Kerry why he had voted against the \$87 billion funding bill to help our troops in Iraq. And here's what he said, "I actually did vote for the \$87 billion before I voted against it." *[Laughter]* Clears things up, doesn't it? *[Laughter]*

The voters this year are going to have a clear, unmistakable choice. It's a choice between the tax relief that is moving this economy forward or putting the burden of higher taxes back on the American people.

It is a choice between an America that leads the world with confidence and strength or an America that is uncertain in the face of danger. I look forward to this campaign. I look forward to the debate. I look forward to reminding the American people that in the last 3 years, we've accomplished great things. And I look forward—and most importantly, I look forward to laying out a positive vision for the years ahead, a positive vision for winning the war against terror and extending peace and freedom throughout the world, a positive vision for creating jobs and promoting opportunity and compassion here at home. I will leave no doubt where we stand, and we are going to win on the 2d of November.

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

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

We saw war and grief arrive on a quiet September morning, so we pursued the terrorist enemy across the world. We've captured or killed many 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 American justice.

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 Dick Cheney and I came to Washington, we found a military that was underfunded and underappreciated, so we gave our military the resources they deserve.

And today, no one can question the skill, the strength, and the spirit of the United States military.

It is the 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 hard decisions, to keep his commitments, to speak clearly, and that is exactly how I will continue to lead our great country.

Great events will turn on this election. The man who sits in the Oval Office will set the course of the war on terror and the direction of our economy. Security and the prosperity of America are at stake. The other side hadn't offered much in the ways of strategy to win the war or policies to expand our economy. So far all we hear is old partisan rhetoric and bitterness. Anger and bitterness are not an agenda for the future of America.

I will take on the big issues, set big goals. With optimism, resolve, and determination, we stand ready to lead this Nation for 4 more years.

A big issue for every family in America is the Federal tax burden. With the largest tax relief since Ronald Reagan was President, we have left more money in the hands that earned it. By spending and investing and helping create new jobs, the American people have used their money far better than the Federal Government would have.

I'm optimistic about our future. I'm optimistic about our economy because I've seen the hard work of the American people. I understand the entrepreneurial spirit of this country. Because of good policies and because of that spirit, our economy is strong, and it is growing stronger. Economic growth in the second half of 2003 was the fastest in nearly 20 years. Manufacturing activity is increasing. Business investment is rising. Disposable income is up. Inflation is low. Interest rates are low. Homeownership is at the highest rate ever in American history. Job creation is gaining strength. We've added over 350,000 new jobs over

the last 6 months. The tax relief we passed is working.

My opponent has a different view of tax relief. When we passed an increase in the child credit to help families, he voted against it. When we reduced the marriage penalty, he voted against it. When we created a lower 10-percent rate for working families, he voted against it. When we reduced tax on dividends that many seniors depend upon, he voted against it. When we gave small businesses tax incentives to expand and hire, he voted against them. When we phased out the death tax, he voted against it. We're beginning to see a pattern here. *[Laughter]*

My opponent is one of the main opponents of tax relief in the United States Congress. But when tax increases are proposed, it's a lot easier to get a "yes" vote out of him. Over the years, he's voted over 350 times for higher taxes on the American people, including the biggest tax increase in American history. He supported higher gas taxes 11 times. He's favored a gas tax increase of 50 cents a gallon. That would cost you another \$5 or more every time you fill up the tank. For that kind of money, at least he ought to offer a free car wash. *[Laughter]*

Senator Kerry is proposing a lot of new Government spending as well—about \$1.7 trillion at last count—and the campaign is just getting started. He says he's going to pay for all this by raising taxes on the rich. To cover all of the spending, Senator Kerry would need to eliminate every single one of the tax reductions we passed as well as more tax increases. The marriage penalty would go back up. The child credit would go down. Taxes on many small businesses would rise. Even low-income people paying the 10-percent rate would see their taxes go up. I guess that's his idea of taxing the rich. It turns out, if you have a job, a child, or a dollar to spare, Senator Kerry thinks you're rich enough to pay more taxes. Fortunately, we're not going to give him that chance.

Higher taxes would undermine growth and destroy jobs, just as our economy is getting stronger. Raising taxes is lousy economic policy. To help grow the American economy and to create more jobs for our workers, I have a better idea. We should make the tax cuts permanent.

We must do more to keep this economy growing and to create jobs. We need to maintain spending discipline in the Nation's Capital. We need to protect small-business owners and employees from frivolous and junk lawsuits. We've laid out a plan to control the cost of health care and get people better access through association health care plans, tax-free health savings accounts. And we need to pass medical liability reform at the Federal level in order to hold down health care costs.

This country must never become isolated from the world. We must reject the pessimistic thoughts of the economic isolationists and knock down trade barriers and open up new markets around the world for our country's farmers and ranchers and entrepreneurs and manufacturers. I proposed a sound energy strategy, one that will modernize our electricity system and one that will make America less dependent on foreign sources of oil. The Congress needs to pass the energy bill.

You hear a lot of talk about job creation up here, but the other side is against every one of these job-creating measures. Empty talk about jobs and economic isolationism won't get anyone hired. The way to make sure this economy continues to grow is to reelect a pro-growth, pro-entrepreneur President, and that is George W. Bush.

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 dangers. Al Qaida is wounded but not broken. Terrorists are testing our will in Afghanistan and 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. This will not happen on my watch.

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

September the 11th, 2001, taught a lesson I will never forget, a lesson this Nation must never forget: America must confront threats before they fully materialize. In Iraq, my administration looked at the intelligence information, and we saw a threat. Members of Congress looked at the 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 this country.

In 2002, the U.N. 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 defend this country. Given that choice, I will defend America every time. [*Applause*] Thank you all.

My opponent admits that Saddam Hussein was a threat. He just didn't support my decision to remove Saddam from power. Maybe he was hoping Saddam would lose the next Iraqi election. [*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

very heart of the Middle East. Because we acted, the world is more free, and because we acted, 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, and there's a reason why. They know that a free Iraq will be a major defeat in the cause of terror. This collection of killers is trying to shake our will. America will never be intimidated by thugs and assassins. We are aggressively striking the terrorists in Iraq. We will defeat them there so we do not have to face them in our own country.

Other nations are helping. They're helping Iraq become a free society, because they understand what we in America know: The world will be a safer place with a free Iraq. We stand with the Iraqi people as they assume more of their own defense and move toward self-government. These are hard tasks, but they're necessary tasks. America will complete 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. Yet, America must never outsource America's national security decisions to the leaders of other countries.

Some are skeptical if the war on terror is really a war at all. My opponent said the war on terror is far less of a military operation and far more of an intelligence-gathering, law enforcement operation. I completely 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 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. Our men and women in the military are taking great risks, and they're doing great work. At bases across our country and the world, I have had the privilege of meeting with those who defend our country, sacrifice for our security. I've seen their great decency and unselfish courage. And I assure you, ladies and gentlemen, the cause of freedom is in 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, reference and integrity. We're strong because of the institutions that give us direction and purpose, our families, our schools, and our religious congregations. These values and institutions are fundamental to our lives, and they deserve the respect of our Government.

We stand for the fair treatment of faith-based groups, so they can receive Federal support for the works of compassion and healing. 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, 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 or judges who try to remake the values of America by court order.

We stand for a culture of responsibility in America. We're changing the culture of this country from one that has said, "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 are 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 this 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 its leaders. This is not one of those times. You and I are living in a period when the stakes are high, the challenges are difficult, and the choices are clear. We live in a time when 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'll never forget that day. Workers in hardhats were shouting, "Whatever it takes." A guy pointed at me and said, "Don't let me down." As we all did that day, these 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've also been a witness to the character of this Nation. Not so long ago, some had their doubts about the American character, our capacity to meet serious challenges, or our willingness 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 these qualities for the work ahead. We have a war to win, and the world is counting on us to lead 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.

May God bless you. Thank you for coming. Thank you all.

NOTE: The President spoke at 6:30 p.m. at the Marriott Wardman Park Hotel. In his remarks, he referred to Alex G. Spanos and Manuel N. Stamatakis, event cochairmen, Bush-Cheney '04, Inc.; and former President Saddam Hussein of Iraq.

Remarks on Signing the Unborn Victims of Violence Act of 2004 *April 1, 2004*

Thank you for coming. Thank you all. Please be seated. Thanks for the warm welcome. [*Laughter*] Welcome to the people's house, the White House. I'm pleased that you all could be here for the first bill signing ceremony of the year 2004.

The Unborn Victims of Violence Act provides that, under Federal law, any person who causes death or injury to a child in the womb shall be charged with a separate offense, in addition to any charges relating to the mother. As of today, the law of our Nation will acknowledge the plain fact that crimes of violence against a pregnant woman often have two victims. And therefore, in those cases, there are two offenses to be punished. Under this law, those who direct violence toward a pregnant woman will answer for the full extent of the harm they have done and for all the crimes they have committed.

I appreciate Members of the United States Congress who have joined us today. Majority Leader Bill Frist is with us from the Senate. Thank you for coming. Majority Leader Tom DeLay of the House of Representatives, Members from both political parties have joined us. I appreciate the Members on stage here. House bill sponsor

Congresswoman Melissa Hart from Pennsylvania is with us. Senate sponsor Senator Mike DeWine from Ohio is with us. And the chairmen of the Judiciary Committees, Senator Orrin Hatch and Congressman Jim Sensenbrenner, are with us as well. Thank you all. I appreciate those in attendance today from across the country who have worked hard to get this bill passed.

I also want to thank Sharon Rocha and her husband, Ron Grantski, for joining us today. This act of Congress addresses tragic losses such as Sharon and Ron have known. They have laid to rest their daughter Laci, a beautiful young woman who was joyfully awaiting the arrival of a new son. They have also laid to rest that child, a boy named Conner, who was waiting to be born when his life too was taken. His little soul never saw light, but he was loved, and he is remembered. And his name is forever joined with that of his mom in this statute, which is also known as Laci and Conner's law. All who knew Laci Peterson have mourned two deaths, and the law cannot look away and pretend there was just one.

Each of these families on this stage has lost a child or a grandchild or both. Carol and Buford Lyons, Tracy Marciniak-