

Remarks in Cincinnati, Ohio May 4, 2004

The President. Thanks for coming. It is exciting to end what has been a great bus trip across Ohio right here in a wonderful city, Cincinnati, Ohio. Thanks for coming out tonight. I appreciate you coming out. I appreciate you giving me a chance to thank you for what you're going to do as we come down the stretch in this campaign in 2004.

I'm here asking for your vote, and I'm here asking for your help.

Audience member. Viva Bush!

The President. *Vamos a ganar.* That means, we're going to win. We set up a web site called georgewbush.com. It will give you a chance to find out how to volunteer, how to register voters, how to turn them out. We need your help. And when you're talking to people, talk to people from all walks of life about this campaign. Talk to people who may never have voted before about this campaign. Talk to people from different parties about this campaign, because, see, we've got a positive vision. We've got a positive vision for everybody who lives in America. We've got a vision to make sure America is safer and stronger and better. We have a mission to make this country as hopeful as it can possibly be. Put out the word, and we will win in November of 2004.

I wish Laura were here to see this crowd. Listen, a good reason to put me back in there is so she will have 4 more years as the First Lady. She's a great First Lady. She's a fantastic wife and a great mom and a wonderful First Lady. I'm really proud of her. She sends her best. She sends all her best—she sends her best to all her friends here in Cincinnati.

By the way, a measure of a good President is whether or not he surrounds himself with excellence. I do. I put together a fantastic team to serve the American people, people from different backgrounds,

people from different walks of life, smart and capable people, all of whom have come to Washington to serve a cause greater than themselves, the United States of America. Our country has got a great Vice President in Dick Cheney.

I want to thank the elected officials who have come here today. Your Governor, Bob Taft, is with us. And Governor, I'm honored you're here. Thank you for coming. Congressman Rob Portman is with us today. I appreciate Congressman Portman. Congressman Steve Chabot is with us today. I'm honored you're here. I mean, we've got statewide officials. We've got elected—local officials. We've got all kinds of people who are here, and I'm proud you've come.

I appreciate the grassroots people who are here. Listen, you've got to work hard to turn out the vote, and that's what we call grassroots. I want to thank you. I'm here to fertilize the grassroots today. I'm here to ask you to grow.

I want to thank our entertainers who are here. I'm proud you've come, Billy. It's good to see you again. I appreciate you coming. My friend Billy Cerveney was with us yesterday, as well as Steven Chapman. I'm honored that Steven was here as well.

The last 3 years have brought serious challenges, and we have given serious answers. We came to office with a stock market in decline, an economy 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 uncovered corporate crimes that cost people their jobs and their savings, so we passed strong corporate reforms. We brought the wrongdoers to account, and we made it clear, 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 have 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 liberated over 50 million people. Once again, America is proud to stand against tyranny and to set nations free.

When Dick Cheney and I 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 can question the skill and 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 and to make the hard decisions and to keep his commitments, and that is how I will continue to lead our great Nation.

I'm so glad you're here, because 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. The security and prosperity of America are at stake. I'm running against an experienced United States Senator. He's been in Washington a long period of time.

Audience members. Boo-o-o!

The President. No, he's been there quite a while. He's been there long enough to take both sides of just about every issue. He spent some time here in Ohio looking for the vote, just like I'm looking for the vote, and he's looking for endorsements, just like I'm looking for endorsements. But you know, he's claimed he's picked up some important endorsements from foreign leaders. He just won't give us their names. [Laughter] He did drop a hint a few days

ago. He insisted, quote, "What I said is true"—what he said on national TV about the foreign leaders—"What I said is true. I mean, you can go to New York City, and you can be in a restaurant, and you can meet a foreign leader." End of quote. [Laughter] I've got a hunch this whole thing might be a case of mistaken identity. Just because somebody has an interesting accent, a nice suit, and a good table at a New York restaurant doesn't make him a foreign leader. Whoever these mystery men are will not be deciding the election. The American people will be deciding this election.

The people of this State and the people of this country have an unmistakable choice in this election. It's a choice between keeping the tax relief that is moving this economy forward or putting the burden of higher taxes back on the American people. It's a choice between an America that leads the world with strength and confidence or an America that is uncertain in the face of danger. The other side hasn't offered much in the way of strategy to win the war or policies to expand our economy. We're into this campaign and all we hear is old bitterness, but they're going to learn something from the American people. Anger is not an agenda for the future of this country.

I will take on the big issues with optimism and resolve and determination, and I will make it clear to the American people I stand ready to lead this Nation for 4 more years.

Audience members. Four more years! Four more years! Four more years!

The President. 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 could have. Our economy is getting better.

I know there are still people in this important State who hurt. There are still people looking for work. That's a reason to be—that's not a reason to fall into pessimistic policy. We've got to be optimistic, and there's reason to be optimistic. The entrepreneurial spirit is strong. Small businesses are vibrant. We're going through a time of transition, but things are getting better. Just look at the facts. The economy grew at a strong rate of 4.2 percent in the first quarter of this year. Economic growth over the past three quarters has been the fastest in nearly two decades. In March, the economy added 308,000 jobs; 7,900 of those were created right here in Ohio.

No, there's been some tough times for people in Ohio. But listen to this: The unemployment rate has dropped from its high of 6.3 percent last summer to 5.7 percent in March. Manufacturing activity is increasing. Business investment is rising. Disposable income is up. Homeownership is at the highest rate ever. 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 no.

Audience members. Boo-o-o!

The President. When we reduced the marriage penalty, he voted against it.

Audience members. Boo-o-o!

The President. When we lowered a 10-percent break for working families—or created the 10-percent rate, he voted no.

Audience members. Boo-o-o!

The President. When we voted to reduce the taxes on dividends that seniors depend on, he voted against it. When we gave small businesses tax incentives to expand and hire, he voted no.

Audience members. Boo-o-o!

The President. Are you getting the picture? But when tax increases are proposed, it's a lot easier to get a "yes" out of him. Over the years, my opponent has voted over 350 times for higher taxes—

Audience members. Boo-o-o!

The President. —including the biggest tax increase in American history. He supported raising the gas tax. He won't even give you a free car wash. [Laughter] There is a trend here. He's got a record. In this campaign thus far, he has proposed a lot of Government spending, over a trillion dollars thus far. And there's 6 more months to go. [Laughter] And yet, he says he's going to pay for it by taxing the rich. You can't tax the rich enough to pay for all the spending promises he's made. So guess who's going to pay? You're going to pay. But the good news is, we're not going to let him raise your taxes. The tax relief we passed must be permanent. We don't need to be raising taxes on the American people.

In order to make sure this economy grows and people can find work, we've got to make sure we protect small-business owners and employers from frivolous and junk lawsuits. We need tort reform. We've got to help control the cost of the increasing medicine by medical liability reform. We've got to make sure the doctor-patient relationship is central to decisionmaking in health care through association health care plans and health savings accounts.

In order for us to grow and make sure we're the leading economy in the world so people can find work, Congress needs to pass an energy plan. We need an energy plan that encourages conservation, an energy plan that helps develop alternative sources of energy. We need an energy plan that has clean coal technology as a part of its supply. We need to make sure that we explore for natural gas in environmentally friendly ways. We need to become less dependent on foreign sources of energy.

We need to have trade policy that is confident and optimistic. We need to reject economic isolationism. See, we're good at things here in America. We're good at growing crops. We're good at raising cows. We're good at high-tech. We're good at manufacturing. We've got the most productive workforce in the world. Rather than

walling ourselves off from the world, we need a President who will open up markets. We can compete with anybody, any time, anywhere if the playing field is level.

This economy is strong, and it's getting stronger. And I've got a plan to keep us on the path to economic vitality and strong growth so people can find work, because I understand the role of Government is not to create wealth; the role of Government is to create an environment in which the entrepreneurial spirit can flourish, in which small businesses can grow to be big businesses. I need 4 more years to make sure a pro-growth, pro-small-business agenda—[*applause*].

Audience members. Four more years! Four more years! Four more years!

The President. 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. America must confront threats before they fully materialize. In Iraq, my administration looked at the intelligence, 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 adminis-

tration and Congress looked at the intelligence and made regime change in Iraq the policy of our Government.

In 2002, the United Nations Security Council yet again demanded a full accounting of Saddam Hussein's weapons program. As he had for over a decade, Saddam Hussein, the man who had used weapons of mass destruction before, the man who had terrorist ties, the man who paid suiciders to go kill innocent Israelis, refused to comply.

So I had a choice to make: Either take the word of a madman, or take action to defend America. Faced with that choice, I will defend America every time.

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 have voluntarily disarmed. 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 America is more secure.

On the ground in Iraq, we still face serious and dangerous challenges. Illegal militias and remnants of the regime, joined by foreign terrorists, are trying to take by force the power they could never gain by the ballot. They know that a free Iraq will be a major defeat in the cause of terror. These groups have found little support among the Iraqi people. They will find no success in their attempts to shake the will of America. They do not understand this country. America will never be intimidated by thugs and assassins.

Our coalition is implementing a clear strategy in Iraq. We will ensure an atmosphere of security as Iraqis move toward self-government. We support the efforts of local Iraqis to disarm the radicals in Fallujah. We made it clear that militias in Najaf and elsewhere must disarm or face serious consequences. American and coalition forces are in place, and we will enforce order in Iraq.

We will return sovereignty to the people of Iraq on the schedule that we agreed to. Like any proud people, Iraqis want to manage their own affairs, and that is a goal we share. On June 30th, a sovereign Iraqi interim government will take office.

These are tough days. We honor the sacrifice of those who have fallen. We appreciate their families. We ask for God's blessing. These are tough times. They're difficult tasks, but they're 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 do not object. I'm all for united action, and so are our more than 30 coalition partners in Iraq. I will never turn over America's national security decisions to leaders of other countries.

We've got fantastic troops. They've got to have the best supplies, best equipment, best body armor. And that's why I proposed an \$87 billion supplemental last fall. Someone recently asked my opponent why he voted against that bill. Here is what he said: "I actually did vote for the 87 billion, before I voted against it." The American President must speak clearly and mean what he says.

We have a difference of opinion. We have a difference of opinion about whether the war on terror is really a war at all. My opponent said, and I quote, "The war on terror is far less of a military operation and far more of an intelligence-gathering,

law enforcement operation." I disagree—I disagree. Our Nation followed that 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, plotting in other nations, and 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've had the privilege of meeting with those who defend our country and sacrifice for our freedom. I've seen their great decency and unselfish courage. And I assure you, ladies and gentlemen, the cause of freedom is in really 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, reverence and integrity. We're strong because of the institutions that help give us direction and purpose, family and schools and 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 their 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 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 values of America by court order.

We stand for a culture of responsibility in America. The culture of this country is changing 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're fortunate enough to be a mother or a father, you are 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 are responsible for telling the truth to your shareholders and your employees. And in the new responsibility society, each of us is responsible for loving our neighbor just like we'd like to be loved ourselves.

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 the leaders. This isn't one of those times. You and I are living in a period where the stakes are high, the challenges are difficult, a time when firm 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. I'll never forget the workers in the hardhats who were shouting, "What-

ever it takes." I'll never forget the firefighter that 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 have 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 to serve a cause greater than self-interest. 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, and we've all seen our Nation unite in common purpose when it mattered most.

We will need all these qualities for the work ahead. You see, I'm running for 4 more years because we have a war to win, and the world is counting on us to lead the cause of freedom and peace. I'm asking for your help because we have a duty to spread opportunity to every part of America. 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 all. May God continue to bless America.

NOTE: The President spoke at 6:48 p.m. at the Cincinnati Gardens Arena. In his remarks, he referred to Gov. Bob Taft of Ohio; entertainers Billy Cerverny and Steven Curtis Chapman; and former President Saddam Hussein of Iraq.

Interview With Alhurra Television May 5, 2004

Abuse of Iraqi Prisoners at Abu Ghraib Prison

Q. Mr. President, thank you for agreeing to do this interview with us.

Evidence of torture of Iraqi prisoners by U.S. personnel has left many Iraqis and people in the Middle East and the Arab world with the impression that the United States is no better than Saddam Hussein regime. Especially when this alleged torture took place in the Abu Ghraib prison, a symbol of torture of—

The President. Yes.

Q. What can the U.S. do, or what can you do to get out of this?

The President. First, people in Iraq must understand that I view those practices as abhorrent. They must also understand that what took place in that prison does not represent America that I know. The America I know is a compassionate country that believes in freedom. The America I know cares about every individual. The America I know has sent troops into Iraq to promote freedom—good, honorable citizens that are helping the Iraqis every day.

It's also important for the people of Iraq to know that in a democracy, everything is not perfect, that mistakes are made. But in a democracy as well those mistakes will be investigated, and people will be brought to justice. We're an open society. We're a society that is willing to investigate, fully investigate in this case, what took place in that prison.

That stands in stark contrast to life under Saddam Hussein. His trained torturers were never brought to justice under his regime. There were no investigations about mistreatment of people. There will be investigations. People will be brought to justice.

Media Coverage/Investigations

Q. When did you learn about the—did you see the pictures on TV? When was the first time you heard about—

The President. Yes, the first time I saw or heard about pictures was on TV. However, as you might remember, in early January, General Kimmitt talked about an investigation that would be taking place about accused—alleged improprieties in the prison. So our Government has been in the process of investigating.

And there are two—more than two investigations, multiple investigations going on, some of them related to any criminal charges that may be filed. And in our system of law, it's essential that those criminal charges go forward without prejudice. In other words, people need to be—are treated innocent until proven guilty. And facts are now being gathered.

And secondly, there is investigations to determine how widespread abuse may be occurring, and we want to know the truth. I talked to the Secretary of Defense this morning, by the way. I said, "Find the truth, and then tell the Iraqi people and the world the truth." We have nothing to hide. We believe in transparency, because we're a free society. That's what free societies do. They—if there's a problem, they address those problems in a forthright, up-front manner. And that's what's taking place.

Accountability

Q. Mr. President, in a democracy and a free society, as you mentioned, people investigate, but at the same time, even those who are not directly responsible for these events take responsibility. With such a problem of this magnitude, do we expect anyone to step down? Do you still have confidence in the Secretary of Defense?