

Four years ago, as I traveled this great country asking for the vote, I made a pledge to my fellow Americans. I said if you honor me with this great responsibility, I would uphold the dignity and the honor of the office to which I had been elected. And with your help, I will do so for 4 more years.

God bless. Thanks for coming. Thank you all.

NOTE: The President spoke at 6:05 p.m. at Wendler Arena. In his remarks, he referred to Michigan Secretary of State Terri Lynn Land; Myrah Kirkwood, candidate for Michigan's Fifth Congressional District; entertainers the Gatlin Brothers; Col. Muammar Abu Minyar al-Qadhafi, leader of Libya; former President Saddam Hussein of Iraq; and the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States (9/11 Commission).

Remarks to the UNITY: Journalists of Color Convention and a Question-and-Answer Session

August 6, 2004

The President. Thank you, Ernest. Thank you for having me. I appreciate the invitation. It's good that—Ernest tells me that there's nearly 10,000 members of your organization. I congratulate you for reaching out and including a lot of people. You represent a very important profession. It's one that I'm quite familiar with. [*Laughter*]

I appreciate the chance to—I deal with my press corps on a regular basis. It's a beneficial—it's a mutual beneficial society, see. I need them to get the message out, and they need me to be a messenger. And we're working hard to make sure that our relationship is cordial and professional. And that's how I feel about coming here too—to establish a cordial and professional relationship with people who help spread the news.

You believe there ought to be diversity in the newsroom. I understand that. You believe there ought to be diversity on the editorial pages of America. I agree. You believe there ought to be diversity behind the managing editor's desk. I agree with that too. I also believe there ought to be diversity in the political parties in America, and that's why I'm going to work hard to tell people my message, to tell people what I believe. And I believe that Government

should stand side by side with people and help them gain the tools necessary to realize the American Dream, not just some people but everybody.

I believe those of us who have been given the high honor of representing the people must work to reform parts of Government that are stagnant and don't stand side by side with people to give them the tools necessary to perform. I believe it's more important to be a doer than a talker. I believe it's important to say to people, "Judge me by my results." And so today I want to talk about some of the results of this administration, and then I look forward to answering some of your questions.

First, I want to thank the board of directors of this august organization. Thank you for having me. Thank you for greeting me behind stage. I want to thank the sponsor for providing the opportunity for people from all around the globe to come here—all around the country—to come here to talk about important issues.

I think one—you know, look, you can't read a newspaper if you can't read. And so one of the most important initiatives of this administration was to challenge the soft bigotry of low expectations. You know what I mean by that. If you lower the bar, guess

what happens? You get lousy results. And that's the way it was in American public schools 3½ years ago. That's why you had kids just shuffled from grade to grade, year to year, without learning the basics of education. That's the way it was, because there was no accountability. See, we weren't measuring.

If you believe that every child can learn to read and write and add and subtract, which I believe, then you must be willing to measure to determine whether or not the children are learning to read and write and add and subtract. No, here in this Capital there's a lot of focus on funding but very little focus on the result. We increased funding for K through 12 by 49 percent since 2001. We increased funding for Title I by 52 percent since 2001. But now, in return for increased funding, we're saying to local districts, show us whether or not a child can read, early, before it's too late. We're measuring.

And when there are schools that aren't teaching, there's extra help to make sure the children learn early, before it's too late. We've raised the bar. We believe in local control of schools, and we're insisting on accountability. And you know what? It's beginning to work.

There is a reading gap in America. We can play like there's not a reading gap in America, but there is. Too many of our African American kids cannot read at grade level by the third and fourth grade, and that's not right for America. Too many Latino youngsters can't read. And one of the reasons why is because it's so easy to quit on a classroom full of inner-city kids and kids whose parents maybe can't speak English as a first language. It's easy to walk in and say, "These kids are too hard to educate; let's just move them through." We've stopped the practice in America, and the schools are better off for it.

I'll tell you one other thing we've done, which I think is important, is we've started the process of giving parents more choice in schools. If your public school fails after

a period of time, you ought to be allowed to move your child to another school. Why should a parent have their child trapped in a school that won't change? That doesn't make any sense to me.

Here in the District of Columbia, we've given \$7,500 scholarships to the parents of low-income children so that they can move their kid from school to school—to another school if the public school is failing. I appreciate working with the Mayor of this city. See, my attitude is, if public—or school choice is good enough for the middle class and the upper class, it ought to be good enough for low-income Americans. And this is going to make a difference in Washington, DC.

No, we're making a difference here in the public schools of America. In a recent study of 61 urban school districts, 73 percent of African American fourth graders narrowed the achievement gap with white students in reading. See, that's how you—you know how you know that? Because you measured, because we say, show us whether or not a child can read, and if not, let's correct problems early, before it's too late.

We're making progress in this country. About 60 percent of Hispanic fourth graders narrowed the achievement gap. So long as there's an achievement gap, we've got more work to do. But we're making substantial progress toward achieving what we want to do, and that is every child reading at grade level by the third grade and remaining at grade level throughout their entire public school career.

There's more to do. We've got to make sure our higher education is available for everybody. We've increased the number of students receiving Pell grants by a million since I've been President. We've got historic levels of funding for our black colleges. I told the Native Americans we will see that their school systems were modernized. We spent \$1.1 billion of Indian school construction repair since 2001, more than double spending in the previous 4 years.

I told people we'd focus on schools, and we are. And we're making progress in America.

You know, when I came into office we had a problem with our economy. It was in a recession. In order to make sure this country is hopeful and people have a better chance to realize their dreams, we need economic growth. That's why I cut the taxes on everybody. I didn't cut them; the Congress cut them. I asked them to cut them. It was to stimulate the economy. It was to help people have more money in their pocket so they would demand additional goods or services.

And the economic growth is strong and it's getting stronger, and that's good for everybody in America. I want you to remember the tax relief and how it worked. We didn't play favorites in the Tax Code. We said if you're paying taxes, you ought to get relief. Seems to make—a fair way to me to make policy. If you're paying taxes, you're going to have tax relief, and the Government ought not to pay favorites.

So everybody who paid taxes got relief. We paid special attention to parents with children. We raised the child credit. We provided relief for the marriage penalty. It's an unusual Tax Code that penalizes marriage. Seems like we ought to be trying to encourage marriage in America, not penalize it.

A lot of our tax relief was aimed at small businesses. Most new jobs in America are created by small businesses. Most small businesses pay tax at the individual income-tax level. That's just a fact. By far, the majority of small businesses in America are what they call sole proprietorships or Subchapter S corporations. Since most new jobs in America are created by small businesses, it makes sense to provide relief for small-business owners. And so when you cut the taxes on individuals, you're cutting taxes on by far the vast majority of small businesses in America. And that's good for the economy.

It's also good to encourage an ownership society. I came to Washington aiming to help people own something. I want there to be more owners in America. The role of Government is not to create wealth but an environment in which the entrepreneur can flourish. At least, that's my philosophy. And as a result of tax relief and a good economic environment, there are more small minority owners—businessowners today than ever before. More and more people are realizing their dreams by owning their own business, and that's healthy for this country. It's important for this country.

And there's more work to do. You've heard me talk about tort reform. Tort reform is necessary to make sure the business environment is such that people have the confidence necessary to start their own business. Good trade policy will help small businesses. We regulate a lot here in Washington, DC. I can't promise you whether or not any regulator has ever read the reports that we ask small-business owners to file in Washington. I suspect they haven't. But reasonable regulatory policy will help small-business owners. Small-business owners must be able to afford health care. That's why I strongly urge the Congress to pass association health plans, which will allow small businesses to pool risk across jurisdictional boundaries so they can get the same purchasing power that big businesses have. I have got a plan that will help all small businesses thrive in America.

When you own something, you have a vital stake in the future of this country. Judge me on homeownership in America. I believe it's—I can't tell you how exciting it is to know more people in America can now say, "Welcome to my home. I'm glad you're here to visit me in my home." To me, those are hopeful words for our country.

I set a goal two summers ago to have 5.5 million new homeowners by the end of the decade—minority homeowners by the end of the decade. We're meeting that

goal—1.6 million new minority homeowners in the last 2 years. You know, they talk a good game up here sometimes in Washington; we're delivering. More minority families own their home today than ever before in the history of the United States of America. And that's a positive development for this country. A lot of it has to do with low interest rates. A lot of it has to do with good tax policy. A lot of it has to do with downpayment assistance, counseling out of Housing and Urban Development. Listen, if you're a first-time homeowner and you take a look at the contract, that fine print looks a little small; people get a little nervous. And so we're providing counseling to help people understand what it means to be a first-time homebuyer. And it's paying off.

Medicare—there's been a lot of talk about Medicare here in Washington, DC. You might remember that issue. At every single political campaign, people said, "I want to help our seniors; I'll help our seniors"—nothing got done. We got it done. We reformed a very important part of our health care system by enabling seniors to have choices of their own and providing prescription drug coverage for seniors for the first time in Medicare. They talk a lot up here. I want the people of this country to remember who actually has got the work done.

Now, let me tell you about the Medicare bill, the reform bill. It started off first by the distribution of drug discount cards, which provide real savings for our seniors. Over 4 million seniors have signed up so far. Low-income seniors get a \$600 credit as well as the discount on their card. Next year, for the first time, there will be preventative screenings provided for in Medicare. Medicare has never done that before. I mean, it makes sense, doesn't it, to say in Medicare, we want to diagnose problems early, before they become acute, in order to save taxpayers money and, more importantly, in order to save lives.

In 2006, there will be a prescription drug coverage available in Medicare for seniors, with low-income seniors getting substantial help in the payment of—help in their prescription drugs. In other words, the system is better. Imagine a system where the Government would pay a \$100,000 hospital stay for heart surgery but wouldn't pay the medicines necessary to prevent the heart surgery from happening in the first place. We're changing that, for the good of our seniors.

We've added community health centers all across the country. These are primary care facilities for low-income Americans to get help. We want people to get help in primary care facilities, not in emergency rooms. It's one way to help hold down costs. We provided health savings accounts, which will be beneficial for people from all walks of life. These are tax-free health savings accounts that make sure the patient and the doctor are the center of the decisionmaking process in health care.

I'm concerned about the fact that doctors all across America are leaving the practice of medicine. And one reason they are is because of the frivolous lawsuits that plague the medical profession. I think everybody ought to have their day in court when they've got a legitimate injury, but these frivolous lawsuits are running up the cost of medicine, and they're making medicine harder for people to access. We need tort reform in Washington, DC, medical liability reform. And I will continue to work so on behalf of the patients and doctors of America.

Look, I understand Washington; you understand Washington. There's a powerful group up here in the trial lawyers. I don't think you can be pro-doctor and pro-patient and pro-trial-lawyer at the same time. I think you've got to make your choice, and I've made my choice.

I believe strongly that the Justice administration ought to enforce the civil rights laws, and we are. I'm the first President to have banned racial profiling in Federal

law enforcement. I believe that the benches ought to reflect as best as possible the diversity of our country. And I believe my administration ought to, too, and I've fulfilled that commitment. I've got people from all walks of life who advise me.

My Cabinet is diverse. The people who walk into the Oval Office and say, "Mr. President, you're not looking so good today," they're diverse. [*Laughter*] And I'm better off for it. I'm better off for listening from people from different walks of life. And our bench will be, too, if we can get people to have a fair hearing on the floor of the United States Senate. They need to stop playing politics with my nominees for the sake of good justice, for the sake of diversity, and for the sake of unclogging some of these Federal courts that have got loaded dockets because the Senate won't approve some of my nominees.

Finally, I believe a compassionate America is one that taps into the strength of the country. Those are the hearts and souls of our people. I like to remind our citizens, Government can hand out money, but it cannot put hope in a person's heart. That happens when a loving soul puts their arm around somebody in need and says, "What can I do to help you?" That's the whole crux of the Faith and Community Initiative—Faith-Based and Community Initiative that I have worked with Congress on and worked with my administration on to spread compassion in America. Oh, I know there's a big debate here in Washington about separation of church and state, and I accept that debate. And I think it's important. The church should never be the state, and the state should never be the church. No question about it.

But when we find effective programs that are helping to save people's lives, the Government ought to open up Federal money to those programs for competitive bidding. We ought not to fear faith-based programs. We ought not to fear those who are willing to love their neighbor just like they'd like to be loved themselves.

Audience member. [*Inaudible*]

The President. Excuse me—excuse me. I think it's very important for the Faith-Based Initiative to continue on, because I know we can save America one heart, one soul, one conscience at a time.

One of the most important initiatives is the drug rehabilitation initiative I've asked Congress to work with me on. Let me tell you how it works. They appropriated \$100 million to help those who are hooked on drugs. A lot of times the Government counseling program can work. But a lot of times it requires a change of heart in order to change habits. And so therefore, a person who is desperately seeking help will be able to take a voucher and have that voucher redeemed at a program of his or her choice, faith-based or not. We need to give people who need help the opportunity to interface with those fantastic healers and helpers that literally are saving our country, one heart and one soul at a time.

I've got a duty as your President to work as hard as I can to secure our country. It's a duty that goes on. September the 11th changed the world. It changed how we must look at our internal security. There is some thinking here in America that says, "If you go on the offense against the terrorists, you're creating more terrorists." That is a woeful misunderstanding of the nature of the terrorist threat.

These were the people who were training for years to bring harm to freedom-loving people. These were the people who took—who gained confidence because there was no response when they wantonly killed around the world. These are people who you cannot negotiate with, you cannot bargain with. And these are people that you must not hope for the best, see. They're coldblooded killers; they will kill you just like that in order to create fear and intimidation. My most solemn duty is to protect our country. I will continue to do so by hunting these killers down around the world and bringing them to justice before they hurt us here at home. And as we

do so, we will continue to spread freedom and peace.

I want to tell you a story about an event that took place in the Oval Office. Seven men came to see me from Iraq. They had had their right hands cut off by Saddam Hussein. You know why? Because his currency had devalued and he needed a scapegoat. In this case, he needed seven scapegoats. I asked one of the fellows who came in to see me, he said—I said, “Why you?” He said, well, because he happened to have sold dinars to buy euros, I think he said, to buy gold so he could manufacture the jewelry that he was making. He made this transaction on—evidently on the wrong date, because the dictator picked him out and said, “You’re one of seven, and I’m cutting off your hand and burning an X in your forehead.” And these were the fellows that came to see me.

They came to see me because their story was documented and Marvin Zindler—I don’t know if there’s any Houstonians here, but you know Marvin Zindler. He’s a—[*applause*]. Yes, you know Big Marv—

Audience member. [*Inaudible*]

The President. Yes, sir, born and raised in Houston; he knows—he was brought up by Marvin Zindler, Big 2 News. He flew them over to Houston, and they got new hands. And they were coming to see me in the Oval Office. And it was a very emotional moment for all of us. A guy took a Sharpie, folded it in his new hand, and wrote “God bless America” in Arabic. You see, he said “God bless America” because he had been liberated from the clutches of a brutal tyrant who whimsically could cut off a hand.

The contrast was sharp to me, about the nature of freedom, a free society and a tyrannical society. Free societies are peaceful societies. Free societies help people realize their dream. Free societies are compassionate societies.

In the Oval, I told them, I said, “You know, I’m glad you’re here. It’s very important for you to know that a successful Presi-

dent is one who realizes he’s not bigger than the office, that the office of President is always bigger than the person, and that as we help you build a free Iraq, the institutions must be bigger than the people so that never happens to you again.”

While we pursue the terrorists to protect ourselves, we must also be confident in the ideals of liberty and how freedom can change societies. You might remember—you cover the news—you might remember a while back where there was some doubt as to whether or not anybody would show up to register to vote in Afghanistan. Expectations were quite low as to how many people would dare take risk to exercise their God-given right. You might remember the incident when the Taliban pulled four women off a bus. They saw that they had voter IDs and killed them. Since that time, millions of people in Afghanistan have registered to vote. I think the total now is over 8 million people are lining up to exercise their right as a citizen to participate in a free society.

The long-term solution to the world is to spread freedom and liberty, and America must continue to lead. We’re the home of liberty. We believe in freedom. Deep in my soul, I know that freedom is not America’s gift to the world; freedom is the Almighty God’s gift to every man and woman in this world. And I believe the United States of America must lead, must lead the world toward a more peaceful tomorrow by spreading hope and liberty in places that are desperate for freedom.

I want to thank you all for giving me a chance to come today. It’s my honor to be here. I look forward to answering some questions. I’m off to shake a few hands in New Hampshire. But what the heck, it’s the season, isn’t it? [*Laughter*] God bless you all.

Q. Thank you very much, Mr. President. We appreciate you being here this morning.

The President. By the way, it’s Big 13 News, not Big 2. [*Laughter*] Thank you—yes, 11 numbers. [*Laughter*] Excuse me.

Civil Liberties and the War on Terror

Q. A little addition. [Laughter] Good morning, Mr. President. I'm Joie Chen with CBS News and the Asian American Journalist Association. [Applause]

The President. You've got quite a following out there.

Q. It is, after all, the season, isn't it? [Laughter]

I wanted to ask you about protecting all Americans as well. There are many Arab Americans and Muslims in this country who find themselves unfairly scrutinized by law enforcement and by society at large. Just yesterday we had arrests in Albany, New York. Immediately afterwards, some neighbors in the community said they feared that the law would come for them unfairly next. We have a new book out today that suggests perhaps we should reconsider internment camps. How do we balance the need to pursue and detain some individuals from not-well-known communities while at the same time keeping innocent people from being painted by the broad brush of suspicion?

The President. Yes, I appreciate that. First, we don't need intern camps. I mean, forget it. Right after 9/11, I knew this was going to be an issue in our country. I knew that there would be people that say, "There goes a Muslim-looking person; therefore, that person might be viewed as a terrorist." I knew that was going to be a problem. That's why I went to a mosque, to send the signal, right after the attacks, that said let's uphold our values. People are innocent until judged guilty. Religious people, people that go to mosques, you know, need to be—Americans need to be viewed as equally American as their neighbor, be tolerant, let law enforcement, to the best of their ability, determine guilt or innocence, but our fellow citizens need to treat people with respect.

By far, most Americans in this country did that, not because I asked them to, just because by far the vast majority of Ameri-

cans are decent people. They care about their neighbors. I don't care where you're from or what your walk of life is, by far the vast majority of our citizens are willing to reach out to somebody who is different. And that needed to be done. As a matter of fact, the anecdotal stories of neighbors helping neighbors across religious lines were heartwarming.

Now, in terms of the balance between running down intelligence and bringing people to justice obviously is—we need to be very sensitive on that. Lackawanna, for example, was a—there was a cell there. And it created a lot of nervousness in the community, because the FBI skillfully ferreted out intelligence that indicated that these people were in communication with terrorist networks. And I thought they handled the case very well, but at the time, there was a lot of nervousness. People said, "I may be next." But they weren't next, because it was just a focused, targeted investigation. And by the way, some were then incarcerated and told their stories, and it turned out that the intelligence was accurate intelligence.

I guess my answer to your question is, is that we've always got to make sure that people are judged innocent before guilty; that's the best insurance policy for law enforcement overstepping its bounds. I will also tell you, however, that the threats we're dealing with are real, and therefore we must do everything we can to ferret out the truth and follow leads.

We cannot—again—it's interesting, these recent threats, you know, they're becoming more and more enriched, as you're finding out. There was more than one thread line—threat line. People are now seeing there was other reasons why we took the action we took. When we find out intelligence that is real that threatens people, I believe we have an obligation as Government to share that with people. And imagine what would happen if we didn't share that information with the people in those buildings and something were to happen;

then what would you write, what would you say?

And so we have a—in terms of law enforcement, we have a duty to uphold innocence and guilt. In terms of a Government, we have the solemn duty to follow every lead we find and share information we have with people that could be harmed. And that's exactly what we've done, and I will continue to do as the President.

This is a dangerous time. I wish it wasn't this way. I wish I wasn't the war President. Who in the heck wants to be a war President? I don't. But this is what came our way. And this is our duty, to protect our people. It's a solemn duty, and I'll continue doing it to the best of my ability.

Native American Tribal Sovereignty/Federal Aid to Tribes

Q. Good morning. My name is Mark Trahan. I'm the editorial page editor of the Seattle Post Intelligencer and a member of the Native American Journalists Association. Most school kids learn about the government in the context of city, county, State, and Federal. And, of course, tribal governments are not part of that at all. Mr. President, you've been a Governor and a President so you have a unique experience, looking at it from two directions. What do you think tribal sovereignty means in the 21st century, and how do we resolve conflicts between tribes and the Federal and the State governments?

The President. Tribal sovereignty means that: It's sovereign. You're a—you've been given sovereignty, and you're viewed as a sovereign entity. And therefore, the relationship between the Federal Government and tribes is one between sovereign entities.

Now, the Federal Government has got a responsibility on matters like education and security to help, and health care. And it's a solemn duty. And from this perspective, we must continue to uphold that duty.

I think that one of the most promising areas of all is to help with economic devel-

opment. And that means helping people understand what it means to start a business. That's why the Small Business Administration has increased loans. It means, obviously, encouraging capital flows. But none of that will happen unless the education systems flourish and are strong, and that's why I told you we've spent \$1.1 billion in the reconstruction of Native American schools.

Diversity in College Administration and Admissions

Q. Good morning, Mr. President. Thanks for coming. I'm Ray Suarez, a member of the National Association of Hispanic Journalists and—[applause]—there's a couple of others here too—and senior correspondent for the NewsHour with Jim Lehrer on PBS.

The President. Yes, I recognize you. [Laughter]

Q. In one of the most closely watched cases of the 2003 term, the Supreme Court split the difference on affirmative action, allowing *Bakke* to stand but rejecting the numerical formulas used by the University of Michigan undergraduate schools. I'd like to hear your own view about when and if race and ethnicity are admissible as factors for consideration both in college admissions and in hiring in the workplace.

The President. Yes. I think—I agreed with the Court in saying that we ought to reject quotas. I think quotas are discriminatory by nature. They discriminate—I think they discriminate on the bottom, and I know they discriminate on the top. And so I agreed with their assessment that a quota system was an unfair system for all.

As you might remember, we also agreed with the finding that, in terms of admissions policy, race-neutral admissions policies ought to be tried. If they don't work to achieve an objective, which is diversification, race ought to be a factor. I agree with that assessment. I think it's very important for all institutions to strive for diversity, and I believe there are ways to do so.

When I was the Governor of Texas, there was concerns that our big institutions were not—big educational institutions were not diversified enough. So I went to the legislature and said, “Why don’t we work together and say that there’s automatic admission to our universities if you finish in the top 10 percent of your high school class, no matter what high school you go to.” And it worked. It worked because the student bodies began to diversify at the University of Texas and at Texas A&M. And—that’s an inside joke up here. [Laughter] You’re about to hear why.

You know, I have a responsibility to work for diversity as well in the administration. I’ve met the obligation. If you look at my administration, it’s diverse. And I’m proud of that. Condi Rice is there because she happens to be a very competent, smart, capable woman. She’s also African American. And she is my closest foreign policy adviser. I see her every day. When I see Condi, I think “brilliant person,” and I’m glad she’s there. Colin Powell—he was here yesterday, evidently. Rod Paige—Rod Paige was the superintendent of schools in Houston. I wanted somebody who knew what it meant to run a school district, not a theorist; somebody who knows what it means to challenge the soft bigotry of low expectations. He had. He’s there. Alphonso Jackson, Elaine Chao, Norm Mineta—Mel Martinez was in my Cabinet—we’ve got a diverse Cabinet. I’ve got a diverse administration. Hopefully, that sets an example for people when it comes to hiring, including news organizations.

College Admissions in Texas

Q. Mr. President, Roland Martin.

The President. Tell them what it’s about, Martin.

Q. Oh, I will—nationally syndicated columnist with Creators Syndicate and also the editorial consultant for the Chicago Defender, the Nation’s only daily Black newspaper.

The President. Give them what—

Q. I will—and representing the National Association of Black Journalists, the world’s largest minority media organization, and—the inside joke—a 1991 graduate of Texas A&M University. And Mr. President, before I ask the question, I hope you’ll give our Governor, Rick Perry, a call. I know you spend a lot of time in DC, Mr. President, but they’re trying to cap the top 10 percent in Texas, so that may have an impact on those students going to college.

The President. Yes, but I appreciate your recognizing that it’s working in the first place.

Q. It is, but they actually—the percentage of white students increased as well.

The President. See, sometimes—

Q. I understand.

The President. —they talk; sometimes they deliver.

Q. I understand. It’s okay. I’m working with the A&M president on that. I also hope that you would take a second round of questions from Texan to Texan, so we can ask a second question. If you would do me that favor.

The President. All right, just ask your two questions.

Fairness in the Voting Process/Voter Participation

Q. Mr. President, you remarked—in your remarks you said that 8 million people in Afghanistan registered to vote and, as you said, exercised their God-given right to vote.

The President. Right.

Q. That may be a right from God, but it’s not guaranteed in the U.S. Constitution. In 2000, an estimated 2 million people—half African American—had their votes discounted, from Florida to Cook County, Illinois, to other cities. [Applause] Come on, that cuts into other questions. Are you going to order Attorney General John Ashcroft to send Federal election monitors to Florida and other southern States? And in this age of new constitutional amendments, will you endorse a constitutional

amendment guaranteeing every American the right to vote in Federal elections?

The President. First of all, look, I can understand why African Americans, in particular, are worried about being able to vote, since the vote had been denied for so long in the South, in particular. I understand that. And this administration wants everybody to vote.

Now, I—the best thing we did was to pass the Helping America Vote Act with over—I think it's \$3 billion of help to States and local governments to make sure the voting process is fair. And it's not just the South, by the way. The voting process needs help all over the country to make sure that everybody's vote counts and everybody's vote matter. I understand that. And that's why I was happy to work with the Congress to achieve this important piece of legislation.

Just don't focus on Florida. Now, I'll talk to the Governor down there to make sure it works. [Laughter] But it's the whole country that needs—voter registration files need to be updated; the machines need to work. And that's why there's \$3 billion in the budget to help, Roland. And obviously, everybody ought to have a vote. And what was your other question?

Q. Should we put it in—

The President. The Constitution amendment?

Q. Should we guarantee it in the Constitution?

The President. I'll consider it—I'll consider it. And what's your second question?

Q. Well, but you said it should be guaranteed in Iraq; why not America?

The President. Well, it's not guaranteed in Iraq. People have got to show up to vote in the first place. This is—the thing about democracy is people need to step up and decide to participate in the first place. There's no guarantees people are going to vote. They should be allowed to vote. But the problem we have in our society is too many people choose not to vote. And we have a duty in the political process

and you have a duty as journalists to encourage people to register to vote, to do their duty. I'm not saying every—I'm saying people are choosing. It's not guaranteed they're going to. That's part of the problem we have in America: Not enough people do vote. And you have a duty on your radio stations, on your TV stations to encourage people to register to vote. I have a duty to call them out to vote. Of course, I'm going to try to call them out to vote for me. [Laughter]

Second round.

Q. All right, come back around, sir.

Immigration Reform/Free Trade Agreements

Q. Early in your administration, you talked a good deal about immigration reforms and possibilities there. I have not heard you talk to that issue so much recently. I wonder what you still think is possible, given the circumstances that we find ourselves in today. What is doable, particularly in the short term?

The President. Actually, I have talked about it lately. I talked about it this winter, because I think it's necessary that we reform our immigration laws. I believe where there's a willing worker and a willing employer, and they can't find work here in America, the people ought to be allowed to be here legally to work; that's what I believe. And I believe there ought to be a process that allows a person to work here legally and go home and come back without fear of being arrested.

I think there needs to be a—first of all, this will help bring people out of the shadows of our society. This will help kind of legalize a system that takes place everyday without employers feeling like they have got to be subjected or employees feeling like they're going to be arrested—subjected to fines or arrested. And so we need to reform our immigration laws.

Now, the issue there is whether or not people automatically get to step in the front of the line when it comes to citizenship.

I don't think they should. I think those who have been waiting in line to be a citizen ought to be allowed to keep that priority in line. I think people ought to—in this process ought to be allowed to apply for citizenship, but I don't think they ought to be treated specially in relation to those who have been in line for quite a while. And in order to solve the logjam for citizenship, Congress has got to raise the quotas on who can become a citizen. And I support raising the quotas on certain population groups, like the Mexican nationals, on who can become a citizen.

The long-run solution, particularly to Mexican immigration, is going to be to help Mexico develop a middle class. That's why free trade is so important between our countries. That's why we better be careful about rhetoric that begins to unwind a free trade agreement that is making an enormous difference in the lifestyles of people in Mexico. See, trade, to me, is the great hope for developing nations. That's why I was a strong supporter of AGOA, the African Growth and Opportunity Act. It gives people a chance to have a job that's a meaningful job, because of the trade between the world's largest market and their countries. NAFTA has made a big difference in lifting lives of people. It has improved the living standard in Mexico.

Listen, people are coming to the United States to work from Mexico because they want to make a living for their families. And if they can't make a living for their families at home, they'll come here to work. And therefore, we must work with Mexico to develop a middle class in the long run, so people can do their duty as a parent at home. That's what they want. And we need to change our immigration laws. Will it get done? Probably not this year. This is an election year; not much gets done, except for a lot of yelling and elbowing. But I would like to see reasonable immigration reform come out of the Congress.

Payroll Tax

Q. A few minutes ago you mentioned the—every American received a tax cut that's working. The most onerous tax for many Americans, particularly on the low end of the scale, is the payroll tax. What can be done about payroll taxes?

The President. Well, obviously, I chose to provide tax relief by income tax cuts, not by payroll taxes, and the reason why is payroll taxes relief will affect the solvency of Social Security. So I chose not to deal with the payroll tax.

U.S. Mission in Iraq

Q. Mr. President, this week, General Tommy Franks, your former CENTCOM commander, has been on tour, talking about his book, talking about his Iraqi experience. And he conservatively estimated 2 to 4 more years of a large-scale American presence in Iraq. This morning there is fresh fighting in Najaf, Nasiriyah, Samara. What is the mission at this point, for 140,000 American forces? And how will we know when they're done?

The President. The mission is for there—the mission is there to be a democratic Iraq where they have elections to elect their government. That's the mission, to help them achieve that. And that's important. And that's necessary work. The tactics to achieve that are, one, we help provide security to the Allawi government as they move toward elections. Obviously, there are people there that are still trying to disrupt the elections process. They can't stand the thought of a free society in the midst of a part of the world that's just desperate for freedom. These people don't like freedom. You know why? Because it clashes with their ideology. We actually misnamed the war on terror. It ought to be the struggle against ideological extremists who do not believe in free societies who happen to use terror as a weapon to try to shake the conscience of the free world. [*Laughter*]

No, that's what they do. They use terror to—and they use it effectively, because we've got good hearts. We're people of conscience. They aren't. They will cut off a person's head like that, and not even care about it. That's why I tell you, you can't talk sense to them. Maybe some think you can; I don't. I don't think you can negotiate with them. Let me——

Q. That 2-to-4-year projections——

The President. No, let me finish. Let me finish, please, sir. Thank you, though.

We will stay there until the job is completed and our commanders on the ground tell us. See, I think it's very important for those of us in the political arena to listen to the commanders on the ground. Tommy was a great commander on the ground. I listened to him. And now I'll listen to General Casey as to—and Ambassador Negroponte as to when they think we've achieved our mission.

The second stage, by the way, Ray—he's trying to get me to put a timetable out there. I'm not going to do it, see. And when the timetable is busted, they'll say, "I told you." [Laughter] Anyway——

Q. We've got to try. [Laughter]

The President. Yes, A for effort.

It's still dangerous there, no question about it. The dynamics have changed, however, because Prime Minister Allawi, who's now in charge of the Interim Government—he's a tough, strong guy who believes that Iraq can be free and democratic. And that's an important step. It was—he's willing to step up and say clearly to the Iraqi people, "Let's reject this violence and terrorism that is threatening a better way of life." He's the fellow who woke up in bed one night in London to confront an axe-wielding thug—thugs from Saddam Hussein that tried to hatchet him to pieces, axe him to pieces. And so he's seen firsthand what tyranny can do, and he's made a decision, obviously, to take risk on behalf of a free society.

The key to success, to answer your question about when, is how quickly the Iraqis

are trained and prepared to take action themselves. The ultimate success of our venture in Iraq, which is a free and democratic country, will depend upon how quickly we can help the Iraqis defend themselves. The will is there, and now they must have the training and equipment to provide them what is necessary to do their duty in a free society.

One of the biggest fears many Iraqi citizens have is that we're not a country of our word. People don't want to take risks. They understand that at this point in time, if a vacuum were created, anarchy would reign and there would be mayhem and bloodshed. And they're fearful that the United States will once again say something and not mean it. I say "once again" because you might remember at different times during Iraqi history they were—they believed they heard something in terms of U.S. support, and it didn't happen. And then there was a lot of death as a result of unfulfilled expectations. We've got to stay with them until they achieve the objective.

Nice try.

Diversity and Legacy in College Admissions

Q. Mr. President, you say, quote, "Quotas are an unfair system for all," with regards to your opposition to affirmative action.

The President. No, no, no, whoa, whoa, whoa—with regard to my opposition to quota systems.

Q. To quotas, okay. But I've never heard you speak against legacy. Now, the president of Texas A&M, Robert Gates, said that he would not use race in admissions, and then he later said he would not use legacy. If you say it's a matter of merit and not race, shouldn't colleges also get rid of legacy? Because that's not based upon merit; that's based upon if my daddy or my granddaddy went to my college.

The President. Yes. I thought you were referring to my legacy. [Laughter]

Q. That's why I allowed you to go ahead and bring it out.

The President. Well, in my case, I had to knock on a lot of doors to follow the old man's footsteps. [Laughter] No, look, if what you're saying is, is there going to be special treatment for people—in other words, we're going to have a special exception for certain people in a system that's supposed to be fair—I agree. I don't think there ought to be.

Q. So the colleges should get rid of legacy.

The President. Well, I think so, yes. I think it ought to be based upon merit. And I think it also ought to be based upon—and I think colleges need to work hard for diversity. Don't get me wrong—don't get me wrong. You said “against affirmative action,” is what you said. You put words in my mouth. What I am for is—

Q. I just read the speech, Mr. President.

The President. What speech?

Q. In terms of when you came out against the Michigan affirmative action policy, and—

The President. No, I said was I against quotas.

Q. So you support affirmative action but not quotas.

The President. I support colleges affirmatively taking action to get more minorities in their school.

Q. That's a long headline, Mr. President. [Laughter]

The President. I support diversity. I don't support quotas. I think quotas are wrong. I think quotas are wrong for people, and so do a lot of people.

Q. Just to be clear, you believe that colleges should not use legacy.

The President. I think colleges ought to use merit in order for people to get in, and I think they ought to use a merit system like the one I put out.

Q. Thank you very much.

The President. Thank you all. Thanks for having me.

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:21 a.m. at the Washington Convention Center. In his remarks, he referred to Ernest R. Sotomayor, president, UNITY, and Long Island editor, Newsday.com; Mayor Anthony A. Williams of Washington, DC; former Secretary of Housing and Urban Development Mel R. Martinez; Gov. Jeb Bush of Florida; Gen. George W. Casey, Jr., commanding general, Multi-National Force—Iraq; and U.S. Ambassador to Iraq John D. Negroponte. Discussion participant Roland Martin referred to Gov. Rick Perry of Texas.

Remarks in Stratham, New Hampshire August 6, 2004

The President. Thanks for coming. Listen, there's no better way to spend a Friday afternoon than at a picnic in New Hampshire. Thanks for coming. Gosh, what a fine gathering. Thanks for coming. I'm thrilled to be here.

I'm here to ask for your vote. I'm back in your important State one more time, saying I've got something to do on behalf of your country. I'd like your vote, and I'd like your help. We won New Hampshire

last time; we're going to win it this time. We're on our way to a great victory in November.

I'm sorry Laura is not here.

Audience members. Aw-w-w!

The President. That's generally the reaction: Why didn't you send her instead of yourself? [Laughter] But what a great First Lady she is. She is a wonderful mother, a wonderful wife. She's doing a wonderful job for the American people. I'm going to