

Remarks in Erie, Pennsylvania
September 4, 2004

The President. Thank you all for coming. Thanks for being here. I appreciate you all coming out. There's nothing better than taking a bus trip on a Saturday with your family. [Laughter] Nothing better than ending the bus trip in Erie, Pennsylvania.

I'm so honored so many came out to say hello. Thank you. I'm here to ask for the vote. I believe it's important to get out amongst the people, tell them what's on your mind. And that's what I'm here to do. But perhaps—I'm going to give you some reasons to put me back in, but perhaps the most important one of all is so that Laura is the First Lady for 4 more years. Laura is a great mom, a great wife, and a great First Lady. I'm proud of the job she's doing. I'm also proud of our daughters, Barbara and Jenna. Thank you for coming.

I'm proud of my runningmate too. I'm running with a good man in Dick Cheney. I admit he's not the prettiest face on the ticket. [Laughter] I didn't pick him for his looks. I picked him because of his sound judgment, his experience. I picked him because he can get the job done.

It's good to be in old Tom Ridge's hometown. He's a good friend. He's a good man, and he's doing a heck of a good job in reorganizing the Department of Homeland Security. Thank you for raising him the right way. [Laughter]

Glad to be here with Senator Arlen Specter. I hope you put him back in the United States Senate. He's a good friend. I'm looking forward to working with him just like I look forward to working with Rick Santorum, the other Senator.

I'm proud to be in the district of another friend, Phil English, Congressman Phil English. Thought he'd have got a better seat. [Laughter] And Congressman John Peterson is with us as well. Thank you for coming, John. I appreciate you being here.

Jean Craige Pepper too—she's running for treasurer of the State of Pennsylvania. My friend Jane Earll is with us today from right here in Erie. John Evans is with us.

I want to thank all the other State and local officials who are here. Thanks for serving your State and your community. I thank my friend John Connolly, the country music singer, for being here today. I appreciate him coming. Most of all, thank you all for taking time out of your Saturday to come by and say hello. I appreciate you being here. It means an awful lot. Somebody said, "Well, maybe a couple hundred will show up to say hi." [Laughter]

I'm here also to ask for your help. I know many of you are involved in grass-roots politics, which means putting up the signs or making the phone calls. I want to thank you for that, and I want to thank you for what you're going to do as we come down the stretch run here. I urge you to encourage your friends and neighbors to vote. We have a duty in this country to participate in the democratic process, to register people, convince people that we have an obligation in a free society to exercise our will at the ballot box. And when you're registering people, make sure you register independents and discerning Democrats, people like Zell Miller. And when you get them headed toward the polls, remind them 4 more years of George Bush and Dick Cheney will make this country safer, stronger, and better.

Over the next 2 months, I'm going to spend a lot of time here in Pennsylvania. Now, I know what the pundits say, but let me tell you something. There's no doubt in my mind, with your help, we're going to carry this great State. I'm going to tell you where I stand. I'm going to tell you what I believe, and I'm going to tell you where I'm going to lead this country for the next 4 years.

I believe every child can learn and every school must teach. We're making progress. We're challenging the soft bigotry of low expectations. We're raising standards. We're testing so we can solve problems early, before they're too late. We're empowering local people to make the right decisions for their schools, and the minority gap is closing in America. We're on our way to excellence for every child, and we're not turning back.

I believe we have a moral responsibility to provide good health care for our seniors. You might remember the old debate on Medicare. They called it "Medi-scare." But I went to Washington to make sure that we provided good health for our seniors. See, the old system, we'd pay \$100,000 for heart surgery but not the medicine necessary to see to it that the heart surgery wasn't necessary. It didn't make any sense for you, the taxpayers. It didn't make any sense for our seniors. Starting in 2006, seniors will get prescription drug coverage in Medicare.

I believe in the energy and the innovative spirit of America's workers, small-business owners, farmers, and ranchers. And that's why we unleashed that energy with the largest tax cut in a generation. Because we acted, our economy is growing. Last—the jobs report yesterday showed that we increased jobs by 144,000 in the month of August. And when you couple that with the upward revisions of the two previous months, we added 200,000 new jobs, which is 1.7 million since August of '03. The national unemployment rate is 5.4 percent, 1 percent lower than last summer. The national unemployment rate is lower than the average of the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s. Our economic recovery plan is working.

I believe I have the duty as your President to lead. A President must confront problems, not pass them on to future generations or future Presidents. I believe the most solemn duty of the President is to protect the American people. If America shows uncertainty or weakness in this dec-

ade, the world will drift toward tragedy. This is not going to happen on my watch.

I have a positive plan to build a safer world and a more hopeful America. I'm running with a philosophy called compassionate conservatism. It says that Government should help people improve their lives, not try to run their lives. I also understand the world we're living in is changing. People are changing jobs and careers. Years ago when our fathers and grandfathers were in the workplace, it was mainly men working. Today, women are occupying a lot of the important jobs in America. This is a changing world we live in. And yet—I want you to hear this—our most fundamental systems, the Tax Code, health coverage, pension plans, and worker training, were created for the world of yesterday, not tomorrow. We will transform these systems so all citizens are equipped, prepared, and thus truly free to make your own choices so you can pursue your own dreams.

Any good plan means we've got to keep growing our economy, and I've got a plan to do that. To keep jobs here in America, Congress needs to get an energy plan to my desk so we can become less dependent on foreign sources of energy.

To keep jobs here in America, we must open up markets overseas. Listen, our markets are open, and it's good for you as a consumer. See, when you have more choices to choose from, you're likely to get a product that you like at a good price. And so I've told countries like China and elsewhere, "You treat us the way we treat you." American workers can compete with anybody, anytime, anywhere so long as the rules are fair.

To keep jobs here, we've got to get rid of these junk lawsuits that are threatening our small-business owners in America. To keep jobs here, I propose what's called opportunity zones to help places like Erie, where you've lost manufacturing jobs, to be able to apply for tax relief and investment incentives and regulatory relief, all

specifically designed to attract new businesses and new jobs. To keep jobs here, we must be wise about how we spend your money and keep your taxes low.

Running up the taxes on American workers and American small businesses is bad economic policy. And we have a difference in this campaign about taxes. I'm running against a fellow who's proposed already \$2 trillion of new programs, see. And so they said to him, they said, "How are you going to pay for it?" And he said, "Oh, that's easy. We'll just tax the rich." The problem is we've heard that before, haven't we? Yes. You know what happens. They hire accountants and lawyers, and you get stuck with the bill. But we're not going to let him get away with it. We're going to carry Pennsylvania and the country in November.

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

The President. Let me tell you what else needs to change. Our Tax Code needs to change; it's a complicated mess. Americans spend 6 billion hours on paperwork and headache when it comes to this Tax Code. It's full of special interest loopholes. In a new term, I will bring Democrats and Republicans together to reform and simplify the Federal Tax Code.

We'll make sure our workers have got the skills for the 21st century jobs. That's why we're going to expand access to our community colleges. We'll make sure we're able to—make sure the kids of this country are able to be able to compete in a competitive world. Listen, most new jobs are filled by people who have been to college for 2 years. That's the reality of the world we live in, yet one in four of our students gets there. That's why in our high schools we'll fund early intervention programs to help students at risk. We'll expand math and science. Over time, we'll require a rigorous exam before graduation. By raising performance in our high schools and by expanding Pell grants for low- and middle-income Americans, we will help more

Americans start their career with a college degree.

In changing times, we've got to make sure health care is available and affordable. Most of the uninsured in America—about 50 percent of the uninsured are small-business employees. These small businesses are having trouble affording health care. In the new term, we must allow small businesses to join together to purchase insurance at the discounts that big companies are able to get.

We'll expand health savings accounts to help our workers and small businesses. We'll expand community and rural health centers to poor counties all across America. We will improve health care, but as we do so, we'll make sure the decisions are made by doctors and patients, not by bureaucrats in Washington, DC.

There's another big issue in this campaign as far as health care. There are too many frivolous lawsuits that are running up the costs of your health care and running good docs out of business. You've got a problem here in Pennsylvania with medical liability, and we've got a problem around the Nation. See, I don't think you can be pro-doctor, pro-patient, pro-hospital and pro-plaintiff-attorney at the same time. I think you have to choose. My opponent made his choice, and he put him on the ticket.

Audience members. Boo-o-o!

The President. I made my choice. I am for medical liability reform—now.

In a changing world, if you own something, you can bring stability to your life. One of the most hopeful statistics of the modern age is the fact that the homeownership rate is at an alltime high in America. More minorities own a home than ever before in our country. More people are opening up their doors saying, "Welcome to my home. Welcome to my piece of property." Over the next 4 years, we'll continue to expand homeownership.

I want to talk about one other aspect of ownership that's important, and that's

Social Security. If you're an older citizen today, nothing's going to change for Social Security. You're in good shape. If you're a baby boomer like me, the Social Security trust will take care of us. But if you're a younger worker, you better listen carefully to the debate on Social Security. I believe to make sure the Social Security system is around for younger workers, they should be able to save some of their own taxes in a personal account that they can call their own, that Government cannot take away.

Now, this is a changing world. We've got plans to stand side by side with the people and the families of America so they can realize their dreams. But in a changing world, some things won't change, the values we try to live by, courage and compassion, reverence and integrity. In a changing world, we must support the institutions that give us purpose, our families, our schools, and our religious congregations.

We stand for a culture of life in which every person matters and every person counts. We support marriage and family, which are the foundations of our society. We support our religious charities that provide a safety net of mercy and compassion. Our Government must never discriminate against faith-based programs. And I will continue to appoint Federal judges who know the difference between personal opinion and the strict interpretation of the law.

This election will also determine how America responds to the continuing danger of terrorism. Since the terrible morning of September the 11th, 2001, we have fought the terrorists across the Earth, not for pride, not for power, but because the lives of our citizens are at stake. Our strategy is clear. We're defending the homeland. We're transforming our military. We're strengthening our intelligence services. We will stay on the offensive. We will strike the terrorists abroad so we do not have to face them here at home. We will advance liberty in the broader Middle East because freedom will bring a future of

hope and the peace we all long for. And we will prevail.

Our strategy is succeeding. Four years ago, Afghanistan was the home base of Al Qaida; Pakistan was a transit point for terrorist groups; Saudi Arabia was fertile ground for terrorist fundraising; Libya was secretly pursuing nuclear weapons; Iraq was a gathering threat; Al Qaida was largely unchallenged as it planned attacks. Because we acted, the Government of a free Afghanistan is fighting terror; Pakistan is capturing terrorists; Saudi Arabia is making raids and arrests; Libya is dismantling its weapons programs; the army of a free Iraq is fighting for freedom; and more than three-quarters of Al Qaida's key members and associates have been brought to justice.

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

The President. We have led. Many have joined, and America and the world are safer.

This progress involved careful diplomacy, clear moral purpose, and some tough decisions, and the toughest came on Iraq. We knew Saddam Hussein's history of aggression and support for terror. We knew his long history of pursuing and using weapons of mass destruction. And we know that after September the 11th, this country must think differently. After that horrible day, we must take threats seriously before they fully materialize.

In Saddam Hussein, we saw a threat. I went to the United States Congress, and members of both political parties looked at the same intelligence I looked at, remembered the same history that I remembered, and came to the same conclusion that my administration had come to: He was a threat. My opponent looked at the same intelligence and came to the same conclusion and voted to authorize the use of force in Iraq.

Before the Commander in Chief commits troops into combat, we must try all means to solve a problem. That's why I went to the United Nations, in the hope

that diplomacy would work. The United Nations Security Council looked at the same intelligence we looked at, remembered the history we remembered, came to the same conclusion that we came to: Saddam was a threat. And they pass a resolution that said, "Disclose, disarm, or face serious consequences." In other words, the free world, after more than a decade of diplomacy, gave Saddam Hussein another chance, a final chance, to meet his responsibilities.

But as he had for over a decade, he wasn't interested in what the free world said. He ignored resolution after resolution after resolution. As a matter of fact, when they sent inspectors into his country, he systematically deceived them.

So I had a choice to make, the only—the kind of choice that comes to the Oval Office, a choice no President wants to make but better be prepared to make. And the choice was this: Do I trust the word of a madman and forget the lessons of September the 11th, or take action to defend this country? Given that choice, I will defend America every time.

Because we acted—because we acted to defend our country, more than 50 million people have been liberated. Because we acted in our own self-interest, democracy is now on the march* in the greater Middle East. Think about this. In Afghanistan, 10 million citizens have registered to vote in a Presidential election which will take place next month. Despite ongoing acts of violence, Iraq now has a strong Prime Minister, a National Council, and national elections are scheduled in January.

We're standing with the people of Afghanistan and Iraq because when America gives its word, it must keep its word. As well we're serving a vital and historic cause that will make us safer. Free societies in the Middle East will be hopeful societies which no longer feed resentments and breed violence for export. Free govern-

ments in the Middle East will fight terrorists instead of harboring them. And that helps us keep the peace.

So our mission in Afghanistan and Iraq is clear. We will help the new leaders train their armies so they can stop the few who are trying to prevent the many from living in a free society. We will move toward elections. We will help those countries get on the path of stability and democracy as quickly as possible. And then our troops will return home with the honor they have earned.

We have a great military. Our military is full of courageous and decent and honorable people. I want to thank the veterans who are here today for setting such a great example for those who serve. We will make sure our troops have all that is necessary to complete their missions. That's why I went to the Congress last September and proposed fundamental—supplemental funding, which is money for armor and spare* parts and ammunition and fuel—necessary, money necessary so they can do their work. And we received great bipartisan support. That means both Democrats and Republicans supported it—except for 12 Members of the United States Senate voted no.

Audience members. Boo-o-o!

The President. Yes, two of whom are my opponent and his runningmate.

Audience members. Boo-o-o!

The President. Only four United States Senators voted to authorize the use of force and then voted against funding our troops.

Audience members. Boo-o-o!

The President. And two of those were my opponent and his runningmate.

Audience members. Boo-o-o!

The President. So they asked him to explain his vote. He said, "I actually did vote for the \$87 billion, before I voted against it."

Audience members. Boo-o-o!

The President. So they said—they kept pressing, and he said he was proud of his

* White House correction.

vote. And finally he just said, "The whole thing was a complicated matter." [*Laughter*] There's nothing complicated about supporting our troops in combat.

Our allies know the historic work we're doing. We've put together a broad coalition; nearly 40 countries in Afghanistan, some 30 in Iraq are working with us to bring peace to the world. Over the next 4 years, I'll continue to work to build our alliances. But I will never turn over America's national security decisions to leaders of other countries.

I believe in the transformational power of liberty. That's what I believe. The wisest use of America's strength is to advance freedom. I like to tell the story about my discussions with Prime Minister Koizumi of Japan. We sit around the table, and we talk about peace. It's an amazing conversation, when you think about it. Wasn't all that long ago in the march of history that my dad and your dads were fighting the Japanese as a sworn enemy. And yet, because my predecessor, citizens of this great country believed that liberty could transform enemies into allies, we worked with the Japanese after World War II to build a democracy, a self-governing nation. Someday, if we're strong and resolute and keep faith in our beliefs, an American President will be sitting down with a duly elected leader of Iraq, talking about the peace, talking about security.

I believe that America is called to lead the cause of freedom in this new century. I believe that millions in the Middle East plead in silence for their liberty. I believe that given the chance, they will embrace the most honorable form of government ever devised by man. I believe all these things because freedom is not America's gift to the world; freedom is the Almighty God's gift to each man and woman in this world.

The 21st century will be liberty's century. By promoting freedom at home and abroad, we'll build a safer world and a more hopeful America. Over the next 4 years, we'll

continue to work hard to reform systems that need to be changed so the American people can realize their dreams. We'll spread ownership and opportunity to every corner of this country. We'll pass the enduring values of our Nation on to a young generation. We'll continue to lead the world to make the world more free and peaceful.

You know, for these years—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 isn't one of those times. This is a time when we need firm resolve, clear vision, and a deep faith in the values that make us a great nation.

Four years ago—well, 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. It's a day I'll never forget. There were workers there in hardhats yelling at me, "Whatever it takes." I remember trying to console people as best I could. A guy grabbed me by the arm and he said, "Do not let me down." I wake up every morning thinking about how to better protect our country. I will never relent in defending America, whatever it takes.

Four years ago, when I traveled your great State asking for the vote, I said if you gave me a chance to serve, I would uphold the dignity and the honor of the office to which I had been elected. With your help and hard work, I will do so for the next 4 years.

God bless. Thank you for coming. Thank you all very much. Thank you all.

NOTE: The President spoke at approximately 2:45 p.m. at Erie Veterans Memorial Stadium. In his remarks, he referred to Pennsylvania State Senator Jane M. Earll; John R. Evans, member, Pennsylvania General Assembly; Senator Zell Miller of Georgia, who

made the keynote address at the 2004 Republican National Convention; Prime Minister Ayad Allawi of the Iraqi Interim Government; and Prime Minister Junichiro

Koizumi of Japan. The transcript released by the Office of the Press Secretary also included the remarks of the First Lady, who introduced the President.

Remarks in Parkersburg, West Virginia September 5, 2004

The President. Thank you all for coming. Thanks for taking time out of your Sunday to say hello. I appreciate you giving me the chance to come and tell you I want your vote. I believe you got to get out amongst the people and ask for the vote, and that's what I'm doing.

It's great to be back in West Virginia. It seems like I'm making a habit coming here. It ought to be clear to the people of this State that I want to carry West Virginia again. And it's clear to me, having been here a lot and seeing the enthusiasm and the size of the crowds, with your help, we will carry West Virginia again.

I like this State. It's the home of really good people, beautiful scenery, and good hunting and fishing.

I wish Laura were traveling with me today. She's at home. She's been on the road a lot and—what a great speech she gave the other night in New York City. I'm really proud of her. She's a great mom, a wonderful wife, a terrific First Lady. I'm going to give you some reasons why I think you ought to put me back in, but perhaps the most important one of all is so that Laura will be First Lady for 4 more years.

I want to thank my friend Dick Cheney for working so hard. He's a great Vice President. I'm proud to be running with him. You know, he doesn't have the waviest hair in the race. *[Laughter]* But I picked him because of his experience and judgment and because he can get the job done.

I want to thank Shelley Moore Capito for joining us, the fine Congresswoman

from West Virginia. I appreciate you coming, Shelley Moore.

I want to thank your Mayor, Mayor Jimmy Colombo. Thanks for coming, Jimmy. I'm proud you're here. I'm honored you're here, sir. Next time I come back, we'll make sure you got a seat. *[Laughter]* But I'm proud you're here. Thank you, sir, for coming.

You know, there's a—like Jimmy, there's a lot of Democrats here in the crowd, and I want to thank you all for coming. See, my message is for everybody. A safer, stronger, better America is for every citizen of this country. I think old Zell Miller set a pretty good tempo for Democrats all across the country. He made it clear it's all right to come and support the Bush ticket. So if you're a Democrat and you're here, welcome. If you're an independent and you're here, welcome. If you're a Republican and you're here, thank you for your help.

I want to thank all those who are running for office who are here, but most importantly, I want to thank you all. I also want to thank the folks at Parkersburg High. I want to thank Ralph Board, the principal, and the students at Parkersburg High. I want to thank the community band that is here. Thank you all for coming.

Looks like you all take high school football pretty seriously, kind of like where I was raised. There's nothing like Friday night football. I want to thank—did you win last night—or last Friday? You did? Good. That's great. Now go do your homework. *[Laughter]*