

Remarks in a Discussion in Sedalia, Missouri
September 7, 2004

The President. Thank you all. Thanks for coming. Thank you all. Please be seated. It's such an honor to be here. Thanks for coming. I don't know if you know it, but we're on a bus tour. I'm out asking for the vote. I believe—I like coming directly to the people, and say, “I want your vote, and here's the reason why I think you ought to vote for me.” And that's what we're going to do today.

I thought we'd do it a little differently. I've got some things I want to share with you about what I'd like to accomplish during the next 4 years. And so we've asked some citizens to come and share some of their stories with you. I think that will help you understand why we have made decisions we have made and why we'll continue making certain types of decisions.

Audience member. [Inaudible]

The President. You betcha. And then I'd like to answer some questions. Some of you may have a question or two on your mind, and I'd like to answer them for you.

Before I begin, I wish Laura were here. She is a wonderful lady. If I don't get too long-winded, I'm going to have dinner with her tonight. [Laughter] She was a—she was raised in Midland, Texas. That's where I was raised. And she was a public school librarian when I married her. And she said, “Fine, I'll marry you, just so long as I don't have to give any speeches.” [Laughter] Fortunately, she didn't—I said, “Fine, you don't ever have to give any speeches.” And so, fortunately, she didn't hold me to that promise that she wouldn't have to give any. She gave a magnificent speech in New York City the other night. I wasn't surprised. I wasn't surprised, because she's such a gentle soul. She's got a great heart. She's a wonderful mom, a terrific wife. I'm going to give you some reasons to put me back in there, but I think probably the most

important one of all so is that Laura is your First Lady for 4 more years.

The other thing—then I'm running with a good man. We've got a great ticket. Dick Cheney has done a heck of a job as the Vice President. I like to tease him by saying, “Well, you know, I admit it, he's not the prettiest face in the race.” [Laughter] But I didn't pick him because of his looks. I picked him because of his judgment, his experience, and the fact that he can get the job done. He's a great Vice President. And I'm proud to be running with him. Proud to be running with him.

I want to thank my uncle Bucky Bush who is with us. He's a Missouri native—or citizen, right here, from St. Louis. I want to thank Charlie Kruse—where is Charlie? Oh, Charlie, God bless you, sir. Our prayers are with you. He's a good man. I've known Charlie for quite a while. He said—when I was campaigning in 2000, he said, “Whatever you do, do not forget the Missouri farmer.” He said, “You keep that river open for our products.” And we did. And I hadn't forgotten the Missouri farmer. The farm economy is strong, and we intend to keep it that way. I'm going to talk a little bit about that as we go on.

I appreciate the mayor being here, Mayor Wasson. Thanks for coming. Where are you, Mayor? I appreciate you. Glad you're here. Thanks for your hospitality. Tell your fire and policemen—firefighters and policemen how thankful we are for their service to your community.

And thank all the people who are involved with politics, the grassroots activists. Those are the people who put up the signs and make the phone calls and register people to vote. I'm here to ask you to—at this stage of the campaign, I'm going around to your State today and around our country asking people to participate in the political process. In a free society, I believe

people have a duty to vote. And that's what we're doing.

We're asking people to vote, you know. And we're—in order to vote, you've got to register to vote. And I'd like you to register your friends and neighbors and explain they have a duty. And when you're out registering them, don't overlook independents and discerning Democrats. You heard Zell Miller the other night. He said loud and clear, "If you want a better America, a safer America, and a stronger America, vote for George Bush and Dick Cheney." We welcome everybody in this campaign.

Today I met Bill Dugan. Where are you, Bill? There he is. Thanks for coming. Bill's a soldier in the army of compassion; that's what he is. He's a fellow who has worked for Habitat for Humanity. He volunteered time out of his life to help people with a home, and that's an important part of our society, when you think about it. The strength of America is the hearts and souls of our citizens. Government is limited in its capacity. We can pass laws, and we will. We can enforce justice, and we will. But Government can't make people love one another. Love comes from something higher than Government. And when people like Bill are moved to help somebody, it makes society a better place.

One of the most important initiatives of the previous 4 years—and it will be an important initiative for the next 4 years—is the Faith-Based and Community-Based Initiative, which will rally the armies of compassion.

People say, "Well, what exactly do you mean by that? What do you mean by that?" I'll tell you what I mean by that. I mean this, that when it comes, for example, to helping the—to heal the addicted, that we've got to recognize that sometimes Government programs work, but sometimes, in order to help a fellow get off drugs, you've got to—or alcohol, you've got to have a change of heart. And therefore, a faith-based program is the kind of program that

could be effective at helping somebody change the heart and, therefore, change the habit. We ought to welcome programs which work. We ought not to discriminate against faith-based programs. We ought to welcome faith-based programs to help Americans realize the full promise of our country.

I want to thank Bill for being here. I want to thank you for the example you set. Thank you for loving a neighbor just like you'd like to be loved yourself.

I tell people I'm for a more hopeful America, and that means our job base has got to grow. We've overcome a lot, when it comes to our economy. When you're out there gathering up the vote, remind people about what this country has been through. We've been through a recession. We've been through corporate scandals. It's now clear, by the way, because of the law we passed, that we'll not tolerate dishonesty in the boardrooms of America. We've been through a terrorist attack, and that hurt us. We're overcoming these obstacles because of the hard work of the American people; we've got great workers; because the small-business sector is strong; the entrepreneurial spirit is alive and well in America. We're overcoming them because we've got great farmers and ranchers.

And we're overcoming it because of tax relief. The tax relief we passed is working. Do you realize the national unemployment rate is 5.4 percent? That's lower than the averages of the—average, national average of the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s. The question is, how do we make sure jobs stay at home and the economy continues to grow?

I'll give you some ways to make sure it continues to grow. First, this has got to be the best place in the world to do business, which means we've got to do something about these junk lawsuits that are threatening these small employers. In order to make sure jobs stay in America, we have to have a national energy plan. Listen, I submitted one to the United

States Congress. They need to get it to my desk. It's a plan that encourages conservation. That makes sense, doesn't it? We want to encourage people to conserve more. It's a plan that encourages the use of renewable sources of energy. I'm talking about corn and soybeans, is what I'm talking about. See, we need to spend research dollars so that someday, somebody is going to walk in and say, "Here's the crop report, Mr. President, and it looks like corn is up." And the President will say, "Gosh, that means we're less dependent on foreign sources of energy."

We need to use clean coal technology. We need to explore in our own lands in sensitive ways. What I'm telling you is, to keep jobs in America, we must be less dependent on energy from overseas.

To keep jobs here, we've got to open up markets to U.S. products. Listen, we open up our markets to goods from other countries, and that's good for the consumer. That's how the market works. If you've got more things to choose from, you're more likely to get a product you want at a better price and higher quality. That's how the economy works.

So what this administration is saying to places like China and elsewhere, "You treat us the way we treat you." And that's why the price of soybeans is doing pretty good, because we're selling soybeans all around the world. My job for the next 4 years is to open up markets. We can compete with anybody, anyplace, anytime if the rules are fair.

In order to make sure that we've got jobs here at home, we need a health care system that functions well. That means health care has got to be available and affordable. Let's talk about health care right quick. First, we started by strengthening—my administration started on health care by strengthening Medicare. I told the people when I was running, "Give me a chance, and I'll go to Washington and try to make sure Medicare worked well." You might remember those old Medicare debates. They

called it "Medi-scare" for—because people were scared to talk about it. I went up there for a reason. See, the Medicare system had done great work for our seniors, but it was beginning to get antiquated. Medicine was changing. Medicare wasn't.

And the system was designed that so that any new procedures has to be approved by bureaucracies. We would pay, for example, for heart surgery, which would cost maybe \$100,000, but we wouldn't pay for the prescription drugs that would prevent the heart surgery from having to occur in the first place. That didn't make much sense to the seniors. It certainly didn't make much sense to the taxpayers, since the cost of prescription drugs is a heck of a lot less than the surgery.

And therefore, I worked with Congress. I said, "Why don't we make the system work better." Right now, seniors can get prescription drug coverage, and if you're a low-income senior, you get your drugs paid for, up to \$600 a year. Next year, seniors, when they enroll in Medicare, are going to get preventative screening for the first time ever, which makes a lot of sense, doesn't it, for seniors to get—and in 2006, prescription drugs will be available in Medicare.

There's more to do in health care. My philosophy is, is that the health care decisions need to be made between doctors and patients, should not be made by bureaucrats in Washington, DC. So a lot of what I'm talking about is to strengthen the ability for people to make decisions. Small-business owners are having trouble with their health care, because the cost is going up. We're going to talk to a small-business owner who just told me that a while ago.

The way to help small businesses deal with rising health care costs is to allow them to pool together, pool the risk together, so that they can be able to buy insurance at the discounts that big companies are able to do. Those are called association health plans. We need to expand health savings accounts, which will allow

workers and/or small businesses to put money aside on a tax-free basis, to earn money tax-free, to use your money tax-free for health care needs. There's all kinds of ways to make sure that health care is vibrant and alive and well without nationalizing health care.

We've got a doc here today with us, and we're going to talk about medical liability reform, which is going to make sure that we—when we get it, it's going to help you on your costs and the availability for medicine.

I want to talk a little bit about pensions. I told the people the other night, we have a changing world, and yet the institutions, fundamental institutions of our Government haven't changed with them. In other words, the pension plans were designed for the 19—in the 1930s. They haven't changed. The health care systems haven't changed. The Tax Code hasn't changed much since—you know, we need to change these systems. Job training programs haven't changed much to reflect the world in which we live in.

The next 4 years, we're going to change these aspects of Government to help people realize their dreams. It's another one of my philosophies. Government ought to help people, not dictate to people, and Government ought to trust people.

One way to trust them is to make sure the Social Security System works well. If you're an older citizen, you just don't have to worry about Social Security. It's not going to change. You're in good shape. There's ample money in the trust fund to take care of you. If you're a baby boomer like me, it's going to be okay, but we need to worry about our children and our grandchildren. That's who we need to worry about when it comes to Social Security. And I believe we ought to allow younger workers to take some of their taxes and set them aside in a personal savings account that they can call their own to help make sure Social Security is available for a younger generation.

I think you have to think differently. Let me talk about education right quick. We have—I went to Washington with the idea of expanding the role of the local folks when it comes to schools but, at the same time, saying, "In return for extra money, why don't you show us whether or not your children can read." It doesn't seem like too tough a request to me. It seemed like a reasonable request.

And the reason why I thought that was necessary is because you know what I know: Too many of our kids were just moving through school, grade after grade, year after year, without learning the basics, and that's not right. That's setting the bar too low. I believe the role of all of us is to challenge the soft bigotry of low expectations. I believe every child can learn to read, and I expect every child to read, and so should you.

And that's the philosophy behind the No Child Left Behind Act. It says, "Let us measure early so we can correct problems early." See, you can't solve a problem until you diagnose the problem. And so we're now diagnosing problems in education, and we're raising the standards. And the achievement gap in America is getting better. You know how we know? We measure. We can show you that more and more children are learning to read and write and add and subtract because we take time to measure. We use the measurement system to support our teachers and principals. We use the measurement system to determine whether or not the curriculum being used at the local level is working. We use our measurement system to heap praise on those who are doing a fantastic job in the public schools, and there are thousands across our country who are. And we use the measurement system to correct early, before it's too late.

There's more to do. There's more to do. We need early intervention—or intervention programs in high schools. We need to make sure that children have got the basics. We need to emphasize math and

science in our high schools. Do you realize that most new jobs now require 2 years of college, yet one in four students in America gets there? That's why we need to expand access to our community college systems. We need to increase Pell grants to help low- and middle-income families. We want more and more of our children starting their careers with a college diploma.

There's more work to be done in education, and I'm looking forward to continuing to lead the country in that direction. Let me talk to some of the folks with us. Perhaps they'll help me make our points that I'm trying to make today. One of the things I love about our society is people own things, an ownership society. You know, we want more people owning their own home. Do you realize the homeownership rate is at an alltime high during my administration? I think it's an incredibly hopeful statistic. I like to put it this way: More and more people are opening up the door in the places in which they live and say, "Welcome to my home. Welcome to my piece of property."

Ownership is a part of a hopeful America. When you hear me say "a more hopeful America," it means I'm going to encourage ownership in our society. And one of the things we also—I like about America and I think one of the things that's really interesting about our country is more and more people own their own small business. Do you realize 70 percent of new jobs are created by small-business owners—70 percent of jobs. Therefore, all policy or good policy is aimed at helping the small-business sector of America remain strong and vibrant. If 70 percent of all new jobs are created by small businesses and we want to continue to expand our job base, policy ought to focus on small-business owners.

Today we've got one with us. Wayne Lamb is with us. [Applause] Sounds like some of them know you.

Wayne Lamb. I guess so.

The President. Okay. The name of your company?

Mr. Lamb. Sedalia Steel Supply.

The President. Sedalia Steel Supply. And what do you do?

Mr. Lamb. We're a steel service center, and we service the Midwest—we service all the mid-part of Missouri with—we buy steel from large mills, break it into smaller quantities, take it to schools, manufacturing companies, maintenance fabricators. We process it. Just pass the savings on that way.

The President. Yes, good. And let me ask you, when did you start—did you start the business?

Mr. Lamb. Started it in 1976, so we're almost 28 years old.

The President. This wasn't one of those deals that started in your garage, was it?

Mr. Lamb. No, it started just about like that. I had a degree—

The President. Kitchen table.

Mr. Lamb. Yes, there you go. I had a degree in accounting—in fact, it was in economics—and didn't know a piece of steel from a two-by-four.

The President. Yes.

Mr. Lamb. That's how it started.

The President. I'm glad you learned. How many employees do you have now?

Mr. Lamb. We presently have 40 employees.

The President. Forty, good.

Mr. Lamb. We have grown—for 27 years, we have grown every year. We've had an increase in sales for 27 years, and we've increased our employees in that kind of direction.

The President. That's great. So did you add employees this year?

Mr. Lamb. We've added three new employers this year.

The President. Great. Here's what's happening in America: Small businesses are adding employees all across the country. He's put on three. I suspect some of you ought there who has got a small business might have added some. This economy—

when you hear me say, "It's strong and getting stronger," it's because the small-business sector is alive and well and it's vibrant.

Let me tell you something interesting about Wayne's business. He is called a Subchapter S corporation. That is an accounting term, or legal term—legal term.

Mr. Lamb. Yes, it's a legal term.

The President. Legal term, yes. You and I aren't lawyers.

Mr. Lamb. No, sir.

The President. A Subchapter S corporation, like a sole proprietorship, pays taxes at the individual income-tax level. So when we reduced all rates, individual income-tax rates, we're helping Subchapter S corporations like Wayne's.

Now, did it help you? The tax relief help at all? I'm sure—that's called leading the witness. *[Laughter]* "Yes, it helped, Mr. President." *[Laughter]*

Mr. Lamb. Yes, it helped. *[Laughter]*

The President. Let me tell you something. Listen to that rhetoric of this campaign. I'm running against a fellow who has promised about \$2 trillion—well, I think maybe a little more than \$2 trillion thus far—of new spending. So they said, "How are you going to pay for it?" He said, "Oh, we're just going to tax the rich. We're going to raise the top two brackets." That's called taxing the rich.

And guess who he taxes? He taxes Wayne. By running up the top two brackets, he's taxing nearly a million, about 900,000, Subchapter S corporations and sole proprietorships. Just as our economy is gaining strength, my opponent wants to run the taxes up on nearly a million small businesses, which is going to make it hard for this guy to add employees. If you're taking money out of his treasury, if he's sending money to Washington, not reinvesting in his company, it's less likely he's going to add people. Raising taxes is the wrong thing to do right now in America.

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

The President. Okay, got a little work to do. Hold on here. We've got work to do. Sorry, thanks. Thanks for the "4 more years." We can do that at the end. *[Laughter]*

One of the things we did in the tax relief act was to encourage investment by small businesses. We allowed for bonus depreciation and extra expensing. Those, again, are accounting terms, which basically say to a fellow like Wayne, "If you invest, there's going to be incentive for you to do so."

Are you investing?

Mr. Lamb. Yes. In the last 3 years, we have taken advantage of that \$200,000 cap that we can take off immediately off the large pieces of equipment. And by doing that, we've actually been able to buy the next piece quicker. Plus, that has also improved our productivity so well, and also, it made our job safer for our employees.

The President. Yes, what did you buy, for example?

Mr. Lamb. Well, 3 years ago, we bought a Behringer saw-handling. It saws materials. It's a complete handling system. It was almost \$300,000. And what we used to do in a week on our other saw, which we thought was the cat's meow, what it would do then, this saw will do in less than a day.

The President. Yes, so he buys a saw. The tax relief says, "Why don't you go think about buying new equipment." He makes the decision to go buy new equipment. Somebody has to make the new equipment. See, when—what we've done is we've increased demand through good tax policy. So Wayne says, "I need a piece of new equipment." He files an order, and the guy who takes the order says, "Okay, I'm going to make it for you." It may mean that he has to add an employee to make that equipment for Wayne. That's how the economy works.

When you hear the word "investment," it means somebody is buying something, which means somebody has to make it. And

so the Tax Code encouraged decision-makers all across the country to increase demand for goods and services. That's what you're hearing in this discussion. That's what this is all about. And as a result, the economy is growing. And the fundamental question, are we going to keep the tax relief in place? I think we should. I think we ought to encourage small-business growth.

You done? You did good, Wayne. Thank you. He hired Steve Platt. Steve, thanks for coming.

Steve Platt. Thank you.

The President. Steve's brother is coming back from Iraq in 2 days. I told him when he saw him, after he gave him the hug, tell him we're all proud of him.

Mr. Platt. I will. I definitely will.

The President. Steve's with us because he's working here for Wayne. And it's an interesting story. He had a job, and then you decided to—

Mr. Platt. I went back to college.

The President. Went back to college. And where did you go first?

Mr. Platt. I went to State Fair—got my associate's degree at State Fair Community College.

The President. You're the guy who's working. You were working for—

Mr. Platt. Duke Manufacturing.

The President. Yes, and decided to go back to college. Why did you make that decision?

Mr. Platt. Well, my children—I'm on them about wanting to send them to college and the understanding of the importance of going back to school, and I didn't feel like—if I didn't finish something I started, I couldn't very well express that, that I wanted them to do it.

The President. He made a tough choice, when you think about it. And there's a lot of people in this society of ours and this changing world who are faced with the same choice, you know. "Do I make a decision to go back to a community college"—and he eventually went to a 4-year college—"and upgrade my skills?" And that's

hard in a changing world. I know it's hard in a changing world. I think the role of Government is to help. It's to help people, encourage people, to go back and get an associate degree, in Steve's case, or—and he went on to a 4-year, right?

Mr. Platt. Four-year at MidAmerica Nazarene University in Olathe.

The President. There you go. See, what he's done is, he's upgraded his skills, which makes him a more productive worker. So when you hear the talk about productivity, it means people have got additional skills, and our job base is changing.

You know, I went down to—I've been to North Carolina a lot and went down there. The textile industry has been hurting down there. They've lost some jobs in the textile industry. But the health care industry is booming. So you've got one kind of job replacing another. And the fundamental role of Government, I think, is to make college—community colleges accessible to programs which will train people for the jobs which exist.

And so what Steve has done is he went back, got a little help from some loans?

Mr. Platt. Yes, definitely.

The President. The Government is loaning money. It should. Government provides Pell grants. It will. But as well—like, you told me you're making a little more money in the new job?

Mr. Platt. Yes, I've earned more money, the benefits are better, the company pays 100 percent of—

The President. See, he upgraded his skills. He's making 10,000 more a year than he did before by going back to college, by going to the community college in his neighborhood. Community colleges work well. They work well because they take people who have got one skill set and help them with a new skill set. And people make more money when you become more productive in our society.

Tax relief helped him too. See, one of the things about the tax relief is that it helps people like Steve.

Mr. Platt. In 2003, we earned \$1,800. In 2004, it will be \$2,200.

The President. See, he saved 1,800. And in '04 he saved 2,200. Now, I know that doesn't sound like a lot to the budgeters in Washington, DC. But here's a fellow whose wife is working, and he's gone back to school, and I expect that \$4,000 came in handy over the last 2 years, didn't it?

Mr. Platt. Yes, definitely.

The President. And the issue is—and the issue in this campaign is and the issue confronting Congress now is, do we make this tax relief permanent, or does it go away? I'm for making it permanent, so people like him can keep their money.

See, I believe Government—as a matter of fact, I know Government—if Government is wise about how we spend your money, we can set priorities and meet those priorities. But I think once we meet those priorities, people like Steve can spend his money a lot better than the Federal Government can spend his money. That's part of my philosophy.

We've got another person who saved money on her taxes, Ellyn Wilson. Thanks for coming, Ellyn. Tell us what you do, Ellyn. Interesting job she's got—interesting jobs she's got.

Ellyn Wilson. Mr. President, I work three jobs. I'm a single mom, which is a full-time job, anyway.

The President. Is that your daughter?

Ms. Wilson. Yes, this is Hannah.

The President. Listen to your mom. I'm still listening to mine—most of the time. [Laughter]

Ms. Wilson. And this is my son, Caleb Wilson. He's eight.

The President. Fantastic. What do you do, Mom?

Ms. Wilson. I am a music teacher. This is my 14th year starting. That's my full-time position.

The President. Thank you for teaching.

Ms. Wilson. And I made a change this year, and I'm presently at Pettis County

R-12 Dresden School District, one of the best schools in the State of Missouri.

The President. That's good. She's a marketer. [Laughter]

Ms. Wilson. And my part-time job is out of my home. I'm a Mary Kay consultant, and I'm working my way up to a star recruiter and working my way up in the business.

The President. Running her own business. She's a sole proprietor. Got her own business—kind of the American way, isn't it? Started her business out of her own home. Keep going.

Ms. Wilson. And I love to serve the Lord at what I do, and I'm church pianist at First Baptist Church, Sedalia, Missouri.

The President. There you go. She saved \$1,000 on tax relief. A single mom—by the way, being a single mom in America is the toughest job in our country. It's incredibly hard work to be a single mom. The tax relief helps single moms—\$1,000.

Ms. Wilson. And I got braces for my kids. It's helped a lot.

The President. Let's see—oh, yes. [Laughter] Did you ever. [Laughter]

Ms. Wilson. With my Mary Kay supplies as well. So it really helped out tremendous, and I'm very thankful.

The President. Helped her small—helped with the kids. She's doing her job as a mom, to take care of her kids. And then she's got a little business going. And that money helps. Someday you'll be driving that pink Cadillac. If they don't make the tax relief permanent, \$300 goes out of her pocket. That's 300 she can use. Remember the tax relief, how it works? Not only did we reduce all rates, which helped everybody in our small businesses; we raised the child credit to \$1,000, and we reduced the marriage penalty. The Code ought to be encouraging marriage, not discouraging marriage.

We created a 10-percent bracket, which helps Ellyn. In other words, we've just got to keep this in mind, our country's got to keep in mind, what tax relief has meant

to working people, to people who are trying to get ahead in life. This is a perfect example of a soul who is working hard to do her duty as a mom and to realize her dreams as a small-business owner. The tax relief has helped. I appreciate you coming.

I hope you get what I'm trying to say here. See, we can get people like me running for office, and we talk about numbers and this, that, and the other. The most effective way to explain the effects of tax relief on our society is to ask people like Ellyn come and tell you why tax relief was effective. I'm honored you're here, Ellyn. Great job. Thank you.

Ms. Wilson. Thank you so much. Thank you, Mr. President.

The President. Before I talk about how to make the world a safer place, I want to ask Dr. Don Allcorn, who is with us today, to stand up. I've asked Don to come today because we have an issue in this country. We've got an issue with these frivolous lawsuits that are making it difficult for people to practice medicine. And this just isn't in the case in Missouri, this is all over the country. I'm telling you, too many good docs are getting sued time and time and time again by frivolous lawsuits which, make no mistake about it, runs your cost up. It also makes it harder for you to find a good doc, and we need to do something about this in this country.

I want to—Don, what kind of medicine do you practice?

Dr. Allcorn. I'm in family practice in Lincoln, which is about 20 miles south of here. It's a town of about 900.

The President. Nine hundred.

Dr. Allcorn. Nine hundred.

The President. Well, that's—about 3 times bigger than Crawford.

Dr. Allcorn. That's right. [Laughter]

The President. Well, thanks for coming. And so, give us—tell people what it's like. I mean—

Dr. Allcorn. I've always—my dream, as I was going through undergraduate and then medical school, was to practice in a

small town, raise a family there. I think it's a good place to be.

The President. Is this your family here?

Dr. Allcorn. I have my family here with me.

The President. Beautiful family.

Dr. Allcorn. Four daughters and my lovely wife.

The President. She sure is.

Dr. Allcorn. My wife has a master's degree in nursing education, and she chose to be a stay-at-home mom and has done that for the last 19 years.

The President. Good. And so, what is it like to practice medicine in the modern era? I mean, you said something—he was telling me that when he first got going, he was able to practice without fear of being sued.

Dr. Allcorn. It's a real issue these days. I could not practice in Lincoln today had I not already started 19 years ago, because the cost of medicine is so high. And part of the reason for that is medical liability.

The President. Yes. So what are you paying—I mean, your premiums are high. Explain to people what it means to practice medicine defensively.

Dr. Allcorn. Defensively means that if—for example, this morning, I had a lady in the hospital that I know her pneumonia's better. I can hear it. It sounds better, but her chest X-ray didn't look that way. It looked like it had not changed. So I kept her an extra day or two just to make sure the chest X-ray is better. The reason is because if someday I ever go to court, then I will be able to prove on paper, from the chest X-ray report, that that lady is better.

The President. Yes. See, what he's saying is, is that if you practice medicine and you're afraid you're going to get sued, you will spend more than necessary to protect yourself in a court of law. That's just the reality of the society we live in.

When I first got to Washington, I said, "Well, maybe medical liability is not a national issue." Then they told me how much

the defensive practice of medicine costs our Treasury. Think about it. When you've got docs all over the country prescribing extra so in case they get sued, they've got a good case in court, it runs up your veterans' bills. It runs up your Medicare bills. It runs up your Medicaid bills. It costs the U.S. Treasury a lot of money, and therefore, I said, "Wait a minute. Medical liability reform is a national issue that requires a national solution."

We have a problem in this country, and it's a major difference in this campaign. The problem is, the trial lawyers are making it hard for people to practice medicine. This town here—this guy provides a great service to the people of his town. You don't want it so that docs feel like they've got to quit medicine because it's too expensive and can't do their practice.

Talk to an ob-gyn these days. Find out what that's like. When these ob-gyns are getting sued right and left, it makes it awfully hard for a person to be able to find a doc to deliver the baby. And that's not right in our society. So I'm for medical liability reform.

I'm running against—I don't think you can choose. Here's the way I put it. You cannot choose between and doctor and a patient and a hospital and a trial lawyer. [Laughter] In other words, you can't be for all of them. You've got to choose. You've got to make a choice. The fellow I'm running against made his choice, and he put him on the ticket.

You've got to make choices. I made mine. I'm for medical liability reform now, so good men, like this good doc, can do his job, can practice that which loves to do, is to heal lives without fear of a frivolous lawsuit running him out of business.

Thanks for coming.

Let me talk about how to keep America safer right quick, then I'll answer questions. I want to tell you some of the lessons I have learned and the country must learn about September the 11th. One, we face an enemy which is coldblooded, an enemy

with which we cannot negotiate and hope for the best. See, you cannot talk sense into these people. These people are full of hatred. They're ideologues that use terror as a weapon, and they're trying to shake our will. They're trying to play upon our conscience. They don't have a conscience. They go into a Russian schoolhouse and mow down young kids. And the only way to deal with them is to find them and bring them to justice around the world so we don't have to face them here at home. [Applause]

And we must be—okay, hold on. All right. Thank you. I've got to keep working. I've got to keep working.

We must be strong and focused and unrelenting. Secondly, this is a different kind of war. It is a—I know there's a lot of vets here, and this is a different kind of war than you all were in. It's a war in which these people will hide in caves and lurk around in the cities and around the world and try to find safe harbor. So the second lesson is, is that we must not only find them—by the way, we're doing a good job. As I said in the speech the other night, three-quarters of known leaders of Al Qaida have been brought to justice, and we're on the hunt. We'll stay on the hunt.

But in order to make sure that they can't find safe haven, I issued a doctrine that said, "If you harbor a terrorist, you're just as guilty as the terrorist." Now, when the President says something, I think it must be easy to understand and he must mean what he says. And I meant what I said.

And when the Taliban refused our demand for them to give up Al Qaida and to stop playing safe haven—providing safe haven, we led a coalition and removed them from power. And America is safer for it. The Al Qaida can no longer train there. They can no longer plan there. The people of Afghanistan are free. Afghanistan is an ally in the war on terror now. They're our friends when it comes to routing out those killers. They helped us find them.

But something else is taking place there too, as well, which will mean our children and grandchildren can grow up in a more peaceful world that we all hope for, and that is, Afghanistan is moving toward democracy. It's an amazing thing for a President to be able to say. It wasn't all that long ago that that country was run by the Taliban. These are the kind of people that would take a woman in the public square and whip her because she didn't toe the line. They were dim-viewed. They're—had a dark vision of the world, and now light has arrived in Afghanistan in the form of a free society.

Many young girls weren't allowed to go to school in Afghanistan. It wasn't all that long ago, in Cleveland, Ohio, I welcomed athletes to the International Children's Games. And right to my right was the Afghan girl's soccer team. They were there because they had been freed. Young girls are going to school there now the first—for the first time. Three years isn't very long, when you think about it. But 3 years after the Taliban were removed from power, 10 million citizens in Afghanistan registered to vote—10 million. It's an amazing thought, isn't it. They're going to have Presidential elections this October. The people are going to be allowed to go to the polls and say, who—"Here's who I want to be President in my country." An amazing thing has happened.

The third lesson is, is that we must deal with threats before they fully materialize. That's one of the serious lessons of September the 11th. You know, prior to September the 11th, we would see a threat somewhere and say, "Oh, we don't need to deal with that, because it's not going to come home to hurt us." That's what we thought. That's what the history had taught us, that we're protected. But that changed on that day, and it's really important for the American President and the American people to understand that when we see a threat, that we must have to take

it seriously. We must deal with it before it comes to hurt us.

And that's what led me to go to the United States Congress about Saddam Hussein. See, I saw a threat. And the reason I saw one, because he had used weapons of mass destruction. He harbored terrorists. And the worst thing that could possibly happen is there be a connection between weapons of mass destruction and terrorist networks that we know want to inflict harm on us. He had paid—when I say harbored terrorists, Abu Nidal, his organization, were there. He's the guy that killed Leon Klinghoffer. He's a terrorist. This guy, Zarqawi, was in Baghdad. He's the guy that chops people's heads off on TV and hopes to cause us to tremble and shirk from our duty. Saddam Hussein subsidized the families of suicide bombers. It's a terrorist act when somebody goes and kills the innocent. And he invaded his neighbors. He was shooting missiles at our pilots. That guy was a threat.

And so I went to the Congress, and the Congress agreed. As a matter of fact, they passed a resolution. They looked at the same intelligence I looked at, the very same intelligence. They passed a resolution that authorized the use of force.

My opponent looked at the same intelligence I looked at and made some pretty strong statements about the threat of Saddam Hussein. He voted yes when it came to the authorization of force.

Now, before a President commits troops, it's necessary to try to solve problems peacefully. I want you to know that. We spent time going to the United Nations, because I was hopeful that we could deal with this threat diplomatically. And I gave a speech there and laid out our case about Saddam Hussein being a threat. They looked at the same intelligence I looked at, and they looked at the history. They remembered the history I remembered and passed by 15-to-nothing a Security Council resolution that Saddam Hussein must disclose, disarm, or face serious consequences.

The free world spoke loud and clear, but as he had for over a decade, he ignored the demands. It's like, "Go ahead and talk, I'm not interested in listening." He wasn't interested in the demands of the free world. As a matter of fact, he deceived the inspectors that the U.N. sent into his country. In other words, they said, "Well, we'll send inspectors in," and he deceived them. And we all knew that.

So at this point in our history, after diplomacy failed, I had a choice to make. Do I forget the lessons of September the 11th and hope for the best when it came to the decisions of a madman, or take action to defend our country? Given that choice, I will defend America every time. [Applause] Thank you all.

We didn't find the stockpiles we thought we would find, but Saddam Hussein had the capability of making weapons. He could have passed that capability on to the enemy, and that's a risk we could not afford to take after September the 11th. Knowing what I know today, I would have made the same decision.

Fourth lesson: We put—when we put our troops in harm's way, they deserve the full support of our Government. That's why I went to the United States Congress September of '03 and asked for supplemental funding to support our troops in combat, \$87 billion worth. We received great support, overwhelming support—as a matter of fact, so strong that only 12 United States Senators voted against the funding for our troops, 2 of whom are my opponent and his runningmate.

Audience members. Boo-o-o!

The President. As a matter of fact, my opponent and his runningmate were two of four Senators who voted for the authorization of force and then voted against funding our troops. We have a difference of opinion on this issue when it comes to supporting troops in combat. So they asked him why. And he said, "Well, I actually did vote for the \$87 billion, before I voted against it," you know. I don't know if they

talk that way in the coffee shops here in Sedalia, Missouri. [Laughter] "Yes, no." And then they kept pressing him, and he said, "Well, it's a complicated matter." There is nothing complicated about supporting our troops in combat.

I believe in the transformational power of liberty. Let me tell you what that means. I think liberty can change societies and promote the peace. Our short-term strategy is to help these countries achieve—get on the road to democracy and stability, is to train Iraqis and Afghans so they can do the work necessary to defend freedom. And we'll get that done as quickly as possible, and then our troops will come home with the honor they've earned.

But the long-term strategy is to spread freedom. Let me tell you some interesting—a story about that that maybe will help illustrate the point I'm trying to make. You know, I've spent a lot of time in the past with Prime Minister Koizumi of Japan. And I like him a lot. He's a good guy. His favorite singer was Elvis. [Laughter]

So, it's interesting, though, just to remember it wasn't all that long ago—what, 60 years ago, I guess—that we were at war with the Japanese. My dad, your husbands, dads, grandfathers fought in the same war against Japan. It was a bloody war. Japan was the sworn enemy of the United States of America, and we were fighting them. And here I am, 60 years later, sitting down with this guy, strategizing about the peace.

What happened was, is that after World War II, Harry Truman and the State of Missouri and other Americans believed in the capacity for liberty to transform societies, believed that a free society would convert the Japanese people from enemies to friends. That's what they believed. And as a result of that belief and as a result of staring down the skeptics and the critics—and you can understand why people were skeptical after World War II about Japan becoming an ally in peace. We just fought them. You know, moms and dads had lost a son in combat, and they're saying

to themselves, "You think liberty is going to transform these people?" But they—but my predecessor did and others did.

As a result of believing in the power of liberty, Prime Minister Koizumi and I sit down and talk about how to keep the peace on the Korean Peninsula. We talk about Iraq and how a free Iraq will make the world a more peaceful place. What's going to happen someday is that when America keeps faith with our belief in liberty, an American President is going to sit down with a duly elected leader of Iraq talking about the peace. And our children and grandchildren will be better off.

It's hard work. I know there's people who are skeptical about whether or not it will happen. Just remember what I told you about Afghanistan. It wasn't all that long ago that four women were pulled off a bus by the Taliban and killed because they're—I think they were registering to vote, themselves, or helping others to register. And people said, "Oh no, there goes the elections." Since that day, millions have shown up to vote.

Freedom is a powerful—freedom is powerful. Iraq will have elections in January. It wasn't all that long ago that Saddam Hussein was torturing and killing the people of Iraq, and now they're headed toward Presidential elections—or prime—or elections for their Prime Minister. It's amazing what happens.

You know why I feel so strongly about the power of liberty? It's because I believe that freedom is the Almighty God's gift to each man and woman in this world. That's what I believe.

These are historic times we're living in. These are historic times we're living in. The free societies in Afghanistan and Iraq are going to affect the neighborhood that's desperate for freedom. Think about the example they're going to set. Women will say, "Look at the free women of Iraq. Why can't we be free?" Young boys are going to say, "Look, there's a free society in our neighborhood, and why do I want to strap

bombs on as a suicider?" Reformers, political prisoners, are going to say, "Wait a minute. The United States is standing true to its belief that all people ought to be free." Free societies there are going to serve as powerful examples. They're going to promote freedom in other countries, and that part of the world needs freedom. The long-term solution, so our children can grow up in a free world, is never forget the power of liberty to transform societies.

That's why I'm running again. That's why I'm out asking for the vote. A couple of more things, then I'll answer questions. In a changing world, things won't change, the values we try to live by, courage, compassion, reverence, and integrity. We stand for some things. We stand for marriage and family, which are the foundation of our societies. We stand for a culture of life in which everybody matters and every being counts. We stand for judges who faithfully interpret the law, not legislate from the bench.

I'm coming today to ask for the vote and tell you there's a reason why, and I hope you got a better feel for why I'd like to serve this country for 4 more years. And if you give me the chance to do so, I'll uphold the honor and dignity of the office to which I've been elected. [*Applause*]

Let me answer some questions. Not yet. I've got some time for some questions, then we've got head on the bus here. Anybody got any questions? Yes, sir.

Q. [*Inaudible*]

The President. All right, well, that's not a question, that's a request. [*Laughter*] I'll sign it, so long as you go out and register somebody to vote.

Yes, sir.

France and Germany/International Cooperation

Q. Do our previous allies remember us, such as France and Germany? Thank you.

The President. Yes, I appreciate that. First of all, we put together coalitions. In Afghanistan, for example, there's French

Special Forces that have been helping our Special Forces find Al Qaida. We've been working together in Haiti. Haiti had a problem, and we provided some stability forces, along with the Canadians and the French. So there are places where we are working together.

As a matter of fact, I put together what's called the Proliferation Security Initiative, which is a 60-nation coalition, all aimed at intercepting the flow of technologies so that weapons of mass destruction don't get in the hands of our enemies. I don't know if you remember when we busted the A.Q. Khan network. This is a guy who was a fellow out of Pakistan that was selling technologies to North Korea and Iran. And we intercepted a ship—we, the coalition, intercepted a ship of materials aimed at Libya, which helped us make the case to Colonel Qadhafi, which caused him to make another decision about whether or not he was going to have weapons of mass destruction.

We work with Germany on a lot of causes as well. They just didn't agree with me on Iraq. They did on a first resolution, but when it came time to define serious consequences, they made a different choice. But our coalition was a strong one going into Iraq, you know. We shouldn't denigrate the contributions of our allies. My opponent called them "the coerced and the bribed." That's denigrating allies.

Tony Blair is a standup guy. The people of England are putting troops in combat. The Australians were there, Prime Minister Howard. The Poles went with us. Now there's nearly 30 nations involved in Iraq. These aren't the coerced and bribed; these are the brave and the dedicated to peace and freedom. We'll put coalitions together, and we'll work with alliances. I'll never turn over our national security decisions to leaders of other countries.

Yes, ma'am. Okay, we—either way. You're next. Be thinking of a good question. You already got it? Okay.

Support for Families of Fallen Soldiers

Q. Mr. President, I know a lot of our boys are not going to come home because they are giving up their lives for what we truly believe in in America. What are we going to do for their families that are left behind?

The President. Yes, I appreciate that. The first thing we'll do is support them with our prayers. And there will be survivor benefits. I've met with a lot of the families to whom you refer, and I've been struck by their incredible courage and strength. My promise to them is that we will complete the mission so that their child or their husband or wife has not died in vain. And that mission is to leave behind a better world.

It's really important that our—that we never send mixed signals to our troops in harm's way or mixed signals to the Iraqi citizens who wonder whether or not we've got what it takes to stay the line, see. What I like to do is, I don't like to put artificial timetables out there because of politics. My—I say to the—I say to our troops and I say to the enemy and I say to the Iraqis, we will be there until the mission is finished, and then we're coming home.

Every life matters. And it is—there's been some incredible bravery and sacrifice made. And I will do my best to assure those loved ones that the personal sacrifice will mean this world is a more peaceful place, because I think that's what's happening.

Yes, ma'am? Fire away.

Flexibility Under the No Child Left Behind Act

Q. I have a daughter that's a fifth grade teacher just north of Columbia, and she's very concerned about your no-child-left-behind policy.

The President. Why?

Q. She says, what about behavior-disordered children and the learning-disabled children?

The President. I appreciate that. What she's asking me is, "Well, you have an accountability system. Shouldn't there be a different standard for certain children?" In other words, should the accountability system be flexible? And the answer is: Yes, it should be and is. You know, you can't expect a child that who can't speak English as a first language to immediately be able to adapt to the education system. And so the system shows flexibility, as it should.

By the way, these systems are designed by the citizens of each State. These aren't Federal tests. All the Federal Government is saying is, "We've increased your funding by 49 percent since 2001 for K through 12, and now you show us, not only Federal people, but everybody, whether or not a child can read." And you bet there's a flexibility in the assessments. So you tell her, there's flexibility in the assessment system.

But I will tell you something, I'm not going to yield when it comes to assessment. A system that doesn't assess is a system that just shuffles kids through, and that's unacceptable. It's not a—and believe me, you know, as a former Governor, I've heard it all. You know, "Oh, they're just teaching the test." I've heard that. But I—you know, when you teach a child to read, they pass the test. Or, "All they're doing is taking tests all the time." Well, that's not true. They're learning how to be able to read; otherwise they can't pass the test.

We should not allow the excuse-making to weaken accountability. Accountability saves lives. Accountability reinforces whether or not a school district is doing the right thing. Accountability will tell us whether or not there needs to be changes. Accountability will let us know that the teacher is doing a fabulous job. Accountability says to parents, "Here's the standing of your school." Accountability allows one district to compare to another. Accountability is healthy and necessary for excellence in every classroom in the United States of America.

Got a question? Yes. Future Farmer of America, there you go.

Military Draft/Reconfiguration of U.S. Forces

Q. Mr. President, if the war on terrorism continues, do you feel that there will be a need for the draft? And do you want to start the draft again?

The President. Yes, first of all, the war on terror will continue. It's going to take awhile. And no, we don't need a draft. What we need to do is—don't worry about it. What we need to do is to make sure our troops are well-paid and well-housed and well-equipped.

And that's why over the last 3½ years we've increased military pay by 21 percent. And that's why our housing is better. We've improved housing. You see, you keep a soldier in the military by appealing to his family or her family. When the housing is good, when the health is good, they stay. When the pay is decent, they stay.

And so therefore, in making a volunteer army work, it's best to treat our soldiers with the best we possibly can. And we made great progress in doing just that. No, I'm—we don't need the draft. We don't need a draft at all.

I'll tell you what else we need to do is we need to transform our military. And let me tell you what that means. A little flap came up the other day when I announced that we're going to reconfigure our troops, in Europe, for example. Now, our troop strength in Europe was set when the Soviet Union was an enemy. Well, the Soviet Union doesn't exist anymore. And so, therefore, our troop strength in Europe needs to reflect the threats of the 21st century.

We can replace people with a lighter, more mobile military. In other words, the heavy—let me rephrase it. We can replace divisions of heavy armament and, therefore, people with fewer people and equipment which can move lighter and more lethal. We've changed our military since the day

in which the Soviet was a threat. It is lighter, more agile, easier to move. And therefore, we can reconfigure, transform how we meet the threats of the 21st century.

That will take pressure off our troops at home, by the way. Cycling deployments is a strain on families. And so hopefully we'll have a more stable military so moms don't have to move their children from school to school to school and that people will be based in—more likely to stay in one base longer.

Our military is different. It is being converted into a force that can move just like that, very quickly, you know, light units but are lethal. And that's necessary to defend against the enemy which exists.

And so that's how you make sure you don't need a draft, is to make the military perform better and take care of the people in the military.

Yes, ma'am. Hold on. We've got to crank that thing up.

English Language Skills

Q. You talk about accountability in reading. Will you please require that our schools teach English? And will you rescind President Clinton's Executive order so that they can read a ballot in English and not have ballots and other driver's license and Social Security all in whatever language they—is their home language?

The President. Yes, well, listen, I think, look—no question—the accountability systems in schools are based on English. In other words, we expect kids to read English. When I was the Governor of Texas, I supported what's called “English Plus.” English is necessary to be able to realize dreams in our society, plus additional language. But I think we are—I think it's pretty clear in America that you've got to speak English in order to be able to succeed here.

And so the schools are based—when he mentioned the accountability system, they are based on English. And it's going to take a while to help transition certain kids.

We've got a society in which people are coming here to work. They're working the farms. They're working the meat plants. And a lot of times their children don't speak English, and so the function of a school is to help them learn to speak English. And ours is a society based on English, but we've got to recognize that a diverse society is one in which other languages are learned and spoke as well, but English is the primary language.

Yes.

Prayers for the President/Religious Freedom

Q. Hi.

The President. Hi. You're not nervous, are you?

Q. No, how can I be? This is an answered prayer for me to get to speak to you.

The President. [Laughter] Well, thanks for coming.

Q. This is a comment to encourage you. We here in the heartland, I think, are responsible for being the anchor, and we know that there is a lot of trends on both coasts, but we try to stay steady, and we try to do what we feel is the right thing. And I want to tell you that I believe I can be a Christian representative and say there's a whole bunch of people praying for you.

The President. Thank you.

Q. There are those here that will know what I mean what I say that. In my prayers over the last 3 years, I am definitely impressed that you've been chosen for this time.

And finally, I don't want you to worry about those weapons of mass destruction. They're going to find them. They're there.

The President. Thank you very much. Thanks. I appreciate your prayers a lot. Let me make a comment about religion. First of all, the prayers help a lot, and I thank you for that. It means a lot to me and Laura that people would pray for us.

Ours is a society that is based upon the ability for people to worship or not worship, if that's what they choose to do. It's really an important part of the American tradition and history and future, and I believe that.

We need to be serving the example in a world that says, "If you worship, you're a patriot. If you don't worship, you're a patriot. And if you do worship, you can worship any way you see fit." It's really one of the most important traditions of our country. It serves as such a wonderful example that—around the world—we value the freedom to choose how we want to worship, and the great thing about our country is that it's that freedom, and we'll guard that. The other thing that's—about our country which is true, there's a lot of people who have chosen to pray for me and Laura, and I can't thank people enough for that. It's the sustaining aspect of our life, and we're very grateful for that. Thank you.

2004 Election

Q. First of all, I have to say, my mom said to tell you she loves you.

The President. Your mom said that?

Q. My mom said that. She couldn't be here today.

The President. Tell her thanks.

Q. I appreciate so much the choice of your runningmate. A lot was made over John Edwards' great head of hair when he decided to accept the nomination, but I would take Dick Cheney's cute little smirk over that great head of hair any day of the year. [Laughter]

The President. He's a steady guy, Dick Cheney. I really like him. We're close, and he's a good guy, really good guy.

Q. Any chance he'll run in '08?

The President. Pardon me?

Q. Any chance that he will run in '08?

The President. Oh, no, listen, we've got to get through '04. [Laughter]

Q. That's a done deal. '04's a done deal.

The President. No, no done deal. Well, I appreciate that. I have no idea about '08. I will tell you, we are—Dick and I are focused on November of '04. We're traveling hard, working hard, and balancing time on the road with time we need to spend in Washington to do our jobs. And tomorrow, I'm going to spend the morning in Washington. I'll be meeting with Members of Congress. I'll be meeting with my national security team. And then I'm going to head on down to Florida and try to comfort as best I can the people whose lives, once again, have been affected by natural disaster.

But no, I'm—thanks for talking about '08, but it's just kind of—don't forget about right now, you know? [Laughter]

Yes, sir. A couple of more questions, and we've got to go. Yes, sir.

Veterans' Health Benefits

Q. [Inaudible]

The President. Good.

Q. [Inaudible]

The President. Thank you, sir.

Q. [Inaudible]

The President. Thank you, sir.

Q. [Inaudible]

The President. Yes, I am. He's asking about veterans' health benefits. Let me just give you the record. We have spent more in 4 years on veterans'—we have increased veterans' benefits in 4 years by more than the predecessor did in 8 years. In other words, in the 4 years I've been President, we've increased spending by more than my predecessor did, one. Two, I told the people, I said, "If I'm in, we'll reduce the waiting time necessary for the veterans." We've done that. Three, we're making sure that the veterans' hospitals and clinics meet the needs. A lot of veterans are moving kind of—the central part of our country down to the South and the West, and those veterans' clinics and hospitals need to be upgraded around the country, where the veterans live. And so you're seeing us now match assets with need.

We've increased the number of people receiving pharmaceuticals on the veterans' list. The answer is, yes, sir, we have a duty to our veterans. We'll keep our commitment to our veterans.

Got one?

Federal Highways Legislation/Partisanship in Washington

Q. Mr. President, I'd like to thank you for your comments on the Faith-Based Initiative. I'm certainly for that.

But my family is involved in trucking here in Missouri, and I was wondering what you, as President, could do with Federal money to upgrade our highways. Our trucks are falling apart because our highways are falling apart.

The President. Yes, I appreciate that. We're in the midst of a discussion on a highway bill. I just want to make sure that the highway bill is a fair bill. We've put out a number we thought was fair, and we're working with the Congress to meet the number. And hopefully, we'll get it done. You know, there's a—either get the highway bill a 6-year extension, or they may just decide to go with a 1-year extension and work it out later on. There will be a highway bill, and just want to make sure that the highway bill honors the Highway Trust Fund. The Highway Trust Fund is set up so that we use the money from the gasoline tax and not general revenues. And I think it's very important that we guard that aspect of the trust, keep the trust of the trust fund.

And that's why we're having the discussions we're having, and you know, we'll see if we can get a bill done. There will be a lot of discussions here in the next 1 month. It's hard to get things done this year coming down the stretch because there's a lot of politics in Washington. *[Laughter]* It's a town that—I've been frankly amazed at the zero-sum attitude in that town. "We can't do this because Bush might look good," or "We can't do this because so-and-so would do this, make him

look bad." I mean, it's not the right way, but that's the way it is.

I've worked hard to try to change the tone there, and I admit it's hard to do. But I'm going to keep trying. The President's job is to lead the whole Nation. I understand not everybody's for me. I believe over 50 percent will be, but not everybody is. And therefore—but I still have the responsibility to be the President of everybody, and I will. And I—you know, I will try to do my best to work with people in the other party to get things done. But I can't guarantee much will get done between now and the election because it's pretty partisan up there right now. They—it's real partisan up there right now. *[Laughter]* That's just reality.

Last question, sir, and then I've got to go. I've got to get on the bus.

International Cooperation

Q. What a pleasure, Mr. President, to actually face and see my Commander in Chief.

The President. Thank you, sir.

Q. My question is, why are the French so ungrateful for what all we have done for that nation, especially in the past?

The President. The who?

Q. The French.

The President. Oh, yes. Yes. Well, I'm getting the picture here today of—*[laughter]*—look, we've got a—we just try to work with everybody as best we can, you know, and if they—if—I'm just not going to let anybody veto our policy, if we do what we think is right and lead the world in the cause of freedom and peace and try to work with everybody, you know, try to bring people along. And by far—a lot of nations are working with us so far. We've got good coalitions, and I'm not going to touch that. *[Laughter]*

All right, one more question, then I've got to go. Got one? Okay. Now, I promise, she's the last one.

Audience members. Aw-w-w!

The President. I know. We've got to go down the road.

President's Autograph

Q. Mr. President, my question was on the draft. Thank you for answering that. But if at all possible, could I have your autograph, please? [*Laughter*]

The President. Tough question. Where's the guy with the hat? Oh, there he is. Okay, get the hat, get the vest.

Who's got one? Okay, go ahead.

Whiteman Air Force Base

Q. Mr. President, 20 years ago, Ronald Reagan spoke in Sedalia, right here in this building.

The President. Really? Right here? You've got to be kidding. Isn't that something. I'm honored to be following in his footsteps again.

Q. My question is——

The President. How old were you then?

Q. Me?

The President. Yes.

Q. Twenty-six. I guess everybody knows how old I am. [*Laughter*] My question is, Whiteman Air Force Base and the stealth bomber are very important to the local economy here. And we've got a pretty good Representative that's done a good job sticking up for Whiteman. Trouble is, he's a Democrat. But that's okay; he's done a good job in that. The problem is, he came to town on an alleged whistlestop tour with his buddy, who's running against you. And we're talking about the Presidential election now, folks. So how is Whiteman Air Force Base and its impact on our economy going to be different under you than under your opponent?

The President. Well, you've seen how it is under me. You know, when I'm talking about a military that's transforming, the stealth was part of that transformation. It was the leading edge of the transformation.

I remember those stories about the pilots loading up here in Missouri, flying over and delivering ordnances and coming home. Now, that's the—that's a military which has been transformed.

And so the stealth was on the leading edge of transformation. It's a new way to approach how to keep the peace, and the fact that we've got the capacity to fly long-range out of our country to deliver ordnance and come back home is—reflects what I'm talking about. In other words, the military has got to be lethal, easier to move, and stealthy, in this case.

And so I'm—people have seen how I've used our military up to now. We're going to make it stronger as time goes on by reconfiguring. It makes these home bases more important. And I appreciate you bringing that up.

Listen, I do have to go, otherwise the people will be waiting. I hate to keep people waiting.

God bless you. Thanks for your time. Get out and vote.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:06 p.m. at the Missouri State Fairgrounds. In his remarks, he referred to William H.T. "Bucky" Bush, Missouri State chairman, Bush-Cheney '04, Inc.; Charles E. Kruse, president, board of directors, Missouri Farm Bureau; Mayor Robert Wasson of Sedalia, MO; Senator Zell Miller of Georgia, who made the keynote address at the 2004 Republican National Convention; senior Al Qaida associate Abu Musab Al Zargawi; Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi of Japan; A.Q. Khan, former head of Pakistan's nuclear weapons program; Prime Minister Ayad Allawi of the Iraqi Interim Government; Col. Muammar Abu Minyar al-Qadhafi, leader of Libya; Prime Minister Tony Blair of the United Kingdom; and Prime Minister John Howard of Australia.

Remarks in Columbia, Missouri September 7, 2004

The President. Thank you all for coming.
Audience members. Four more years!
Four more years! Four more years!

The President. Thanks for coming. I appreciate it. That's what I'm here to tell you: I'm ready to lead this Nation for 4 more years. It is great to be back in Columbia. It is nice to be here at the Boone County Fairgrounds. I was hoping to get a corny dog. *[Laughter]* Thanks for coming.

We're taking a bus tour across your State. It's a great way to spend a Tuesday. I'll tell you why I'm here. I'm here to ask for the vote. I believe we've got to get out—I'm not only here to ask for the vote; I'm here to ask for your help. I think we have a duty in this country to vote, and I'm here to ask you to register your friends and neighbors to vote. And then after you get them registered to vote, head them to the polls. And as you get them going to the polls, remind them, if they want a safer country, a stronger country, a better country, put me and Dick Cheney back in office.

And by the way, when you're registering people, make sure you not only register Republicans and independents, but make sure you include discerning Democrats too. You might remember Zell Miller. He's a discerning Democrat, and there's a lot of folks like him all across this country. I appreciate you coming. It means a lot to me that you're here.

My only regret is that Laura is not here.

Audience members. Aw-w-w!

The President. Yes, I know it. When I asked her to marry me, she said, "Fine, just so long as I never have to give a political speech." *[Laughter]* I said, "Okay." *[Laughter]* Fortunately she didn't hold me to the promise. As you all saw, she is a—has got a lot of class. She is a great First Lady, a wonderful mom. I love her dearly. Perhaps the most important reason to put

me back in there is so that she'll have 4 more years as the First Lady.

I'm proud to be running with Dick Cheney as well. He's a fine Vice President. He doesn't have the waviest hair in the race. I didn't pick him for his hairdo. I picked him because he's a man of enormous experience and sound judgment, and he can get the job done for the American people.

I'm proud to be standing up here with Kenny. Congressman Hulshof is a fine, fine Member of the United States Congress. I appreciate it. I'm proud to call him friend.

I understand that Governor Blunt was here. I know Lieutenant Governor Kinder is here. Good to see you, Peter. Thanks for coming. Pete's a good friend of mine, been a friend for quite a while.

I appreciate the speaker being here, Catherine Hanaway. And I appreciate the fact that Sarah Steelman was here. I want to thank all the other State and local officials. I appreciate your attendance.

I want to thank my uncle Bucky Bush from St. Louis, Missouri. He's here with us today.

I thank Ernie Lee, State veterans co-chairman, is with us today. I appreciate you coming, Ernie. I want to thank Mark Wills, the country and western singer, for entertaining you here.

But most of all, thank you. I'm here to tell you, I'm looking forward to this campaign. I'm looking forward to telling you where I stand and what I believe and where I'll lead this country. I believe every child can learn and every school must teach. I went to Washington to challenge the soft bigotry of low expectations. See, I believe you've got to raise the bar. I believe you must assess early so you can solve problems before they're too late. I believe we've got to end this practice of simply shuffling the kids through the schools year