

Prime Minister Allawi. Okay. Thank you.
President Bush. Proud you're here.

NOTE: The President's news conference began at 12:06 p.m. in the Rose Garden at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Prime Minister Tony Blair of the United Kingdom; Eugene Armstrong and Jack Hensley, American citizens who were killed in Iraq on September 20 and 21, respectively,

by militants led by senior Al Qaida associate Abu Musab Al Zarqawi; Gen. John P. Abizaid, USA, combatant commander, U.S. Central Command; James A. Baker III, former Presidential envoy on the issue of Iraqi debt; and former President Saddam Hussein of Iraq. Prime Minister Allawi referred to Usama bin Laden, leader of the Al Qaida terrorist organization.

Remarks in Bangor, Maine September 23, 2004

The President. Thanks for coming. I'm honored to be back in this beautiful State. I wasn't sure I'd be invited back after the last time I came; I didn't make my bed. [Laughter] What a beautiful day in such a glorious part of the world. I'm so honored you all came. I'm here to ask for the vote. That's what I'm doing.

I believe you got to get out amongst the people and ask for the vote and tell them why you're running. That's what I'm here to do today. I'm also here to ask for your help. I'd like for you to register your friends and neighbors. I'd like for you to remind people in the community in which you live, we have a responsibility in a free society to go to the polls.

When you're out there registering, make sure you register all Republicans. Make sure you register independents. Don't overlook discerning Democrats like Zell Miller. And then once you get them registered, get them headed to the polls. And when you get them headed to the polls, tell them, if they want a safer America, a stronger America, and a better America, to put me and Dick Cheney back in office.

My only regret is that Laura is not here with me. She was a public school librarian in Texas when I asked her to marry me. She said, "Fine, I'll marry you, just so long as I never have to give a political speech."

[Laughter] I said, "Okay." Fortunately, she didn't hold me to the promise. The other night in New York City, the American people got to see Laura at her best, her—decent, strong, compassionate woman. She's a great mom, a great wife. She needs to be the First Lady for 4 more years.

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

The President. I'm proud of my runningmate, Dick Cheney. Now, listen, I admit he doesn't have the waviest hair in the race. [Laughter] Some of you out there don't either. [Laughter] I didn't pick him for his hair. I picked him for his judgment. I picked him because he's a man of a lot of experience. I picked him because he can get the job done on behalf of the American people.

I want to thank Peter Cianchette, my chairman here in the State. I want to thank all of the grassroots activists, people like Pete who are putting up the signs and making the phone calls. It takes a lot of work to get this many people to show up here in Bangor, Maine. I want to thank all of those who helped turn out such a great crowd. I appreciate your effort. It means a lot.

I'm sorry the two United States Senators are—they're working for you. I appreciate their friendship. I'm proud to call Olympia

Snowe and Susan Collins friends. I know you're proud to call them Senator.

I want to thank all the statehouse people who are here. I appreciate you serving your community. I appreciate your serving your State. I also appreciate Brian Hamel. I flew down from Washington, DC, with Brian Hamel. I had a chance to visit with him. There's no doubt in my mind he should be the next Congressman from the Second Congressional District. And I want to thank his wife, Gail, and his daughters, Natalie, Abbie, and Molly, for supporting their dad when he's out running for the Congress.

I want to thank Charlie Summers. He's running the First Congressional District. When he wins, he's going to have old 41 and Barbara as constituents. *[Laughter]*

I want to thank Jim Tobin, my regional chairman.

I want to thank Mark Wills for being here. Mark, thank you. Proud you're here. I want to thank the high school band that's joined us today, John Bapst Band. Thank you for coming. I will try to keep my speech short so you can get home and do your homework. *[Laughter]*

I want to thank Steve Hanington. He's the president of the American's Logger Council. I appreciate you coming. I want to thank all the loggers who are here today. Thank you for helping us put together the Healthy Forests Initiative, good piece of legislation. I appreciate you working on it with us. I want to thank the lobstermen who are here with us today. *[Applause]* Oh, yes.

I want to thank the Bangor Chapter of the Blue Star Mothers of America for being here. Thank you for coming. The Freeport Flag Ladies are with us. WAVES International is with us. Veterans of the Military Order of the Purple Heart are with us.

I'm really looking forward to this campaign. I like to get out and talk about what I believe, where I stand, and where I'm going to lead this Nation for the next 4 years. I believe every child can learn and every school should teach. I went to Wash-

ington, DC, to challenge the soft bigotry of low expectation. We had a practice in this country where, in some public schools, kids were just shuffled through grade after grade, year after year, without learning the basics. And that wasn't right. We need to raise the standards. We need to trust the local people to design a curriculum that works best in the local community. We need to support our teachers and principals. We need to measure early and solve problems, before they're too late.

The reforms we passed are working. And the minority gap is closing. The achievement gap amongst minority students is closing in America. We're making progress, and we're not turning back.

I believe we have a moral responsibility to honor our citizens with good health care. See, I went up to Washington to solve problems, not to pass them on to future Presidents and future generations. I saw a problem in Medicare. Medicine was changing, and Medicare wasn't. Take this fact: Medicare would pay \$100,000 for heart surgery but wouldn't pay for the prescription drugs to prevent the heart surgery from being needed in the first place. That wasn't fair for our seniors. It meant the system needed to be changed for the better. I called the Republicans and Democrats together. I signed a law that strengthened Medicare. Our seniors will be getting prescription drugs in 2006, and we're not turning back.

I believe in the energy, innovation, and spirit of our workers, our loggers, our lobstermen, our small-business owners, our farmers and ranchers. And that's why we unleashed that energy with the largest tax cut in a generation.

We've been through a lot. This economy has been through a lot. When you're out there rounding up the vote, remind people what we have been through. That stock market started to go down about 5 months before we showed up in Washington. Then we had a recession we had to live with. Started to come out of that recession, and

some citizens in this country forgot what it meant to be a responsible citizen. They fudged the books. They didn't tell the truth. It created a crisis of confidence. Those corporate scandals hurt our economy. We've passed tough laws in Washington. It's abundantly clear now that we're not going to tolerate dishonesty in the boardrooms of America. And then the enemy hit us. Some estimate that it cost us a million jobs in the 3 months after September the 11th.

I mean, we've been through some tough times when it comes to this economy. Yet, we're overcoming those obstacles. Our economy is strong, and it is getting stronger. Our economy has been growing at rates as fast as any in nearly 20 years. The national unemployment rate is 5.4 percent. That's lower than the average of the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s. The unemployment rate in the State of Maine is 4.5 percent. This economy is strong. It is getting stronger, and we're not going to turn back.

I believe the most solemn duty of the American President is to protect the American people. If America shows uncertainty and weakness in this decade, the world will drift toward tragedy. This will not happen on my watch.

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

The President. I am running for President with a clear and positive plan to build a safer world and a more hopeful America. I'm running with a compassionate conservative philosophy that Government should help people improve their lives, not try to run their lives. I believe this Nation wants steady, consistent, principled leadership. And that's why, with your help, we'll carry Maine and win a great victory in November.

I understand the world we live in is changing. Think about what happened over the past 30 years. You know, the workplace used to be a place where a man would only show up, and they'd have one job, one career, one pension plan, one health

care plan. Today, the world is different. People change jobs and careers quite often. And today, the workplace is diversified. Women work in the house and, now, out of the house. And yet, when you think about it, the most fundamental institutions, our Tax Code, our health coverage, our pension plans, our worker training programs, our labor laws, were created for the world of yesterday, not tomorrow. I'm running to transform these systems so all our citizens are equipped and prepared and thus truly free to make your own choices and realize the great dreams of our country.

Listen, any hopeful society has got to have a growing economy. And I have a plan to make sure this prosperity lasts. To create more jobs in America, America must be the best place in the world to do business. If you want jobs here, if you want people to be able to find a job, it's got to be the best place in the world. And that means less regulations on our small-business owners. That means we got to do something about these junk lawsuits that are making it hard for employers to expand the job base.

Listen, if you want to keep jobs here, we got to have us an energy plan. I proposed a plan to the United States Congress 2 years ago. They need to get it to my desk. If we want jobs to be created here, we got to do a better job on conservation. We got to do a better job on promoting renewables such as ethanol and biodiesel. We got to modernize our electricity grid. We got to use our clean coal technology to make sure we can use the energy here at home. We got to explore for natural gas in environmentally friendly ways. If we want jobs here in America, this country must become less dependent on foreign sources of energy.

Part of my plan to make sure jobs are here in America so people can find work is to open up markets overseas. See, we open our markets. And that's good for you as a consumer. If you have more products

to choose from, you're likely to get that which you want at a better price and higher quality. That's how the market works. So I'm saying to places like China, "You treat us the way we treat you. You open up your markets just like we have ours." See, we can compete with anybody, anytime, anywhere, so long as the rules are fair.

To make sure this economy grows, we got to be wise about how we spend your money and keep your taxes low. Taxes are an issue in this campaign. The fellow I'm running against has proposed \$2.2 trillion in new Federal spending so far.

Audience members. Boo-o-o!

The President. And we still got October to go. [Laughter] Two trillion dollars is a lot, even for a Senator from Massachusetts. [Laughter] So they asked him, they said, "Well, how are you going to pay for this?" He said, "I'll just tax the rich." Now, you've heard that before, haven't you? First of all, you can't raise enough money to pay for 2.2 trillion by taxing the rich. There's a tax gap. Guess who gets to fill the tax gap in American history. You do. Secondly, when they say "tax the rich," be careful. It's rich—rich hire lawyers and accountants for a reason, to stick you with the bill. We're not going to let him raise your taxes. We're going to carry Maine, and we're going to win in November.

Let me also say something about the Tax Code. The Tax Code is a complicated mess. You realize, it's a million pages long. Americans spend 6 billion hours a year on taxes. I think we need to simplify the Tax Code. I think we need to make the Tax Code more fair. I'm going to call Republicans and Democrats together in a new term to make sure this Tax Code works for the people, not against the people.

Listen, in a changing world, the job base changes, and there's a skills gap in America in some places. You know, I remember going down to North Carolina where the textile industry had been hit hard and yet, the health care industry was growing. And there's a skills gap, because a lot of people

in the textile industry who wanted to work didn't have the skills necessary to be in the health care industry. That's why I'm such a big believer in the community college system here in America. We need to make our community colleges accessible so workers can gain the skills they need to fill the jobs of the 21st century.

And most new jobs are filled by people with at least 2 years of college. That's what the changing world demands. And yet, only about 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 place a new focus on math and science. Over time, we'll require a rigorous exam before graduation from high school. By raising performance in our high schools and by expanding Pell grants for low- and middle-income families, more Americans will start their careers with a college degree.

We've got to do something about our health care system. We have a fundamental difference in this campaign about health care. When it comes to health care, my opponent wants Government to dictate. I want you to decide. Half the uninsured in America work for small businesses. Small businesses are having trouble affording health care. One way to help small businesses, one way to help those who work for small businesses is to allow small businesses to pool together to be able to buy insurance at the same discounts big companies are able to do. My opponent opposes such a plan. See, ours is commonsense plan. Ours is a practical plan. Ours is a plan that doesn't let the Federal Government decide everything for you.

I believe that we ought to expand tax-free health savings accounts. I believe we ought to give small businesses tax credits, to encourage them to put money in small—in health savings accounts, so small-business employees can get coverage. I know we need to expand community health centers all across America, places where the poor

and the indigent can get good primary and preventative care.

I know—I'll tell you what else I know. In order to make sure we do something about the rising cost of health care and the availability of health care, we got to stop these junk lawsuits that are running good docs out of practice. Ask your doctor what it's like to get sued all the time. A lot of them are quitting practice. I met ob-gyns across the country, all across the country who are quitting their practice. That means a lot of women are hurting, all of it because these junk lawsuits are running up the cost of staying in business. It doesn't make any sense. You can't be pro-doctor, pro-patient, and pro-trial-lawyer at the same time. I think you have to make a choice. My opponent has made his choice, and he put a trial lawyer on the ticket.

Audience members. Boo-o-o!

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

Now, there's a lot of—a big difference in this campaign. But anything we do in this administration to make sure health care is available and affordable will mean that the decisions will be made by doctors and patients, not by bureaucrats and insurance companies and the Government.

New term, let me tell you what else we're going to do. In a changing times, ownership helps bring stability to people's life. During my administration, more people own a home than ever before. More and more people are owning their own home. What a hopeful sign that is. What a stabilizing influence that is. Over the next 4 years, we'll continue to expand homeownership. I like the thought of more and more people opening up the door where they live and saying, "Welcome to my piece of property. Welcome to my home. Come on in to my place."

I tell you what else we need to think about, and that is the retirement systems. Let me talk about Social Security here for a minute. If you're on Social Security, you'll

be paid. Don't care what they say in the course of the campaigns. The Government will honor its commitment to you. The Social Security trust has got enough money to take care of you. Baby boomers like me, we're in pretty good shape when it comes to Social Security. But we need to think about the younger kids. We need to think about our children and our grandchildren. I believe younger workers ought to be allowed to take some of their own money and set aside a personal savings account to make sure that Social Security works, a personal savings account they call their own, a personal savings account that Government cannot take away.

In a world of change, some things do not change, the values we try to live by, courage and compassion, reverence and integrity. In times of change, we must support the institutions that give our lives direction and purpose, our families, our schools, our religious congregations.

We stand for a culture of life in which every person counts and every being matters. We stand for marriage and family, which are the foundations of our society. I stand for the appointment of Federal judges who know the difference between personal opinion and the strict interpretation of the law. I stand for supporting faith-based organizations. Men and women of faith are performing works of hope and compassion all across our country. They're renewing communities. They're helping lift up lives, and they deserve fair treatment by our Government.

That's a position I share with Republicans and Democrats from many callings in life, including a fine citizen in Maine named John Kerry. Now, Kerry runs Catholic Charities Maine in Falmouth, which helps people all over this State. A few years ago, the city of Portland denied Federal funding to Catholic Charities because John Kerry refused to compromise his organization's beliefs. Here's what he said: "Just because you're religious doesn't mean you

should be stopped from providing services.” That’s one John Kerry I agree with.

For those of you involved in your communities, for those of you who’ve heard the call to love a neighbor like you’d like to be loved yourself, thank you for your works of compassion. Thank you for making a difference in America.

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 are staying on the offensive. We are striking the terrorists abroad so we do not have to face them here at home. We will work to advance liberty and freedom in the broader Middle East and around the world, and we will prevail.

Our strategy is succeeding. Think about the world some 4 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.

Today, because we acted, Afghanistan is fighting terror; Pakistan is capturing terrorist leaders; Saudi Arabia is making raids and arrests; Libya is dismantling its nuclear weapons programs; the army of a free Iraq is fighting for freedom; and more than three-quarters of Al Qaida’s leaders and associates have been brought to justice. 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.

Audience member. That’s what you have! Thank you!

The President. And the toughest decision came on Iraq. See, we knew Saddam’s record. We knew he harbored terrorists like Abu Nidal. That’s the leader of the terrorist organization that carried out attacks in Europe and Asia. We knew he—Saddam harbored Abu Abbas. He took—found refuge in Baghdad after he killed an American, Leon Klinghoffer. Saddam paid the families of suicide bombers. Saddam was a sworn enemy of America. Saddam not only desired weapons of mass destruction; he used weapons of mass destruction. Saddam was a threat. He was a threat. And after September the 11th, our country must think differently. We must take threats seriously before they fully materialize.

So I went to the Congress. They looked at the same intelligence I looked at. They remembered the same history I remembered, and they concluded Saddam Hussein was a threat and authorized the use of force. My opponent looked at the same intelligence, and he voted yes when it came to the authorization of force.

Listen, before the Commander in Chief ever puts any troops into harm’s way, we must try all options—all options—to solve a problem. That’s why I went to the United Nations. I was hoping diplomacy would work. I was hoping we could solve this problem peacefully. The toughest decision a President ever has to make is to put our kids into harm’s way.

So I gave a speech to the United Nations. They looked at the same intelligence I had looked at. They remembered the same history we remembered. And they voted 15 to nothing to say to Saddam Hussein, “Disclose, disarm, or face serious consequences.” The other day in the United Nations I said, “When an international body say something, they better mean what they say. If you don’t mean it, don’t say it.”

Saddam Hussein ignored the demands of the free world—again. This wasn’t the first resolution he ignored. He had been ignoring resolutions for nearly a decade. He

wasn't about to disarm. He wasn't about to listen to the world. As a matter of fact, when the U.N. sent inspectors into that country, he systematically deceived the inspectors.

So I have a choice at this point. Diplomacy has failed. We had given Saddam Hussein his last chance, his decision to make. Do I take 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 to defend ourself, because we mean—we meant what we said, today, 50 million people in Afghanistan and Iraq live in freedom. I want you to think about Afghanistan here for a minute. It wasn't all that long ago that these poor people were subjected to the brutal ways of the Taliban. These barbarians have a dark vision of the world. As a matter of fact, they think exactly opposite of Americans. They're against—they don't believe in freedom of religion, freedom of speech, freedom of anything. They believe you either toe their line or there will be reprisals.

Think about a society in which many young girls were not allowed to go to school because of the Taliban or a society in which their mothers were pulled out in the public square and whipped and in some cases executed in the sports stadium because they wouldn't toe the line. Today, because America acted, 10 million citizens, 41 percent of whom are women, have registered to vote in the upcoming October Presidential elections. It's an amazing thought, isn't it? It's an amazing statistic, when you think about it.

There were some skeptics who thought, well, maybe people don't want to be free. Everybody longs to be free. People yearn to be free in this world. And those 10 million citizens are showing it as this election comes closer. Of course, there's going to be violence, because these dark-visioned people, these evil folks cannot stand the

thought of a free society emerging in that part of the world.

Today I met with Prime Minister Allawi, a strong man. He does deserve our praise. He's a courageous fellow. In the press conference I had with him today, I reminded the people that were listening that Prime Minister Allawi woke up in an apartment one day in London, England—see, he had been exiled out of Iraq; Saddam Hussein wanted to get him—and he woke up in a bed—this is a true story I'm telling you; he told me personally—he woke up in the middle of the night. Two people were standing by his bed with axes. They had been sent by Saddam Hussein. Fortunately, by the grace of God, he woke up in time, rolled—got hurt pretty bad, recovered, went back to his country because he believes in freedom. He's ready to do the hard work. He is a strong man. There will be elections in January of 2005 in Iraq. And we're going to stand with the people of Afghanistan and Iraq because when America gives its word, America must keep its word.

We're also making our country safer. See, free societies in the Middle East will be hopeful societies which no longer feed resentments and breed violence for export. Free governments in the Middle East will fight the terrorists instead of harboring them and supporting them. Listen, our strategy is clear. We'll help the new leaders train armies so that Iraq citizens and Afghan citizens can do the hard work of defending their country against those who would stop the advance of freedom. There are over 25 million people in that country who desire to be free. There's only a few, relative to the 25 million, who are trying to start—stop the march of freedom. We'll help them get on the path of stability and democracy as quickly as possible, then our troops will come home with the honor they have earned.

I am proud of the United States military. I'm proud of the men and women who serve. I've seen their unselfish courage and

their great decency. I want to thank the veterans who are here for having set such a great example for those who wear the uniform. You know, the airport here is often the first stop in the United States for our troops returning home. No matter what hour they arrive or what the weather is like, citizens of Maine come here to thank our troops for their service. It's got to make them feel great. I thank you for doing that.

I met Bill Knight. He organizes the Maine Troop Greeters to welcome military personnel here. I appreciate Bill, and I appreciate all those who work with Bill.

I want to thank the military families who are here today. I made a commitment to our troops and to their loved ones: They'll have all the resources they need to do their jobs. So I went to the Congress last year and requested \$87 billion of supplemental funding to support our troops in combat in both Afghanistan and Iraq. This was really important money. This was money for fuel, spare parts, body armor, hazard pay, health benefits, that which is necessary to support people in harm's way. And it was important. Fortunately, most Members of the Congress understood how important it was. We got great bipartisan support, so strong that only 12 Members—12 Members—of the United States Senate voted against this important funding, 2 of whom are my opponent and his runningmate.

Audience members. Boo-o-o!

The President. When you're out gathering the vote, when you're out convincing people to go to the polls and vote, remind them of this fact: Only four United States Senators voted to authorize the use of force and then voted against funding our troops, two of whom are my opponent and his runningmate.

Audience members. Boo-o-o!

The President. Of course, they asked him, you know, they said, "Why?" And he said, "Well, I actually did vote for the 87 billion, before I voted against it." I don't think a lot of people speak that way in

Bangor, Maine. They kept pressing him, and he said he was proud of his vote. Finally, he said the whole thing was a complicated matter. There's nothing complicated about supporting our troops in combat.

There's hard work to do in Iraq. The Prime Minister told me they're making progress. Yet, as we're seeing on our TV screens, the terrorists are desperately trying to block that progress, is what they're trying to do. Our military cannot be beat in Iraq. They can't beat us. They do have a weapon, though, and that is, they're coldblooded killers. They'll behead somebody, and our prayers go to the families here in America. Our hearts break when we see that on our TV screens. These killers know that. See, they know we have a conscience, and they don't. They're trying to shake our will.

We're going to help this Government in Iraq. We'll help them—

[*At this point, there was a disturbance in the audience.*]

The President. —help them build their troops. We'll help them build their infrastructure. We have a strategy that says to our commanders, "Adapt to the ways on the ground. You've got the support you need to do what you need to do." The way to prevail, the way toward the successful conclusion we all want, the way to secure Iraq and bring our troops home is not to wilt or waver or send mixed signals to the enemy. We can grieve, but we will not waver.

Incredibly, this week my opponent said he would prefer the dictatorship of Saddam Hussein to the situation in Iraq today.

Audience members. Boo-o-o!

The President. You cannot lead the war on terror if you wilt when times are tough. You cannot expect the Iraqi people to stand up and do the hard work of democracy if you are pessimistic about their abilities. You cannot expect the Iraqi people to do the hard work if you say that they'd be better off with Saddam Hussein in power.

What kind of message does it send our troops, who are risking their lives and who see firsthand the mission is hard but know the mission is critical to our success? Mixed signals are the wrong signals. I will continue to lead with clarity, and when I say something, I'll mean what I say.

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

The President. I appreciate the contributions of our friends and allies. I appreciate what they've been doing, side by side with our troops and the Iraqi troops. Listen, we got a—put together a broad coalition of about 40 nations in Afghanistan and some 30 nations in Iraq. Over the next 4 years, I'll continue to strengthen our alliances. But I will never turn over America's national security decisions to other countries.

I believe in the transformational power of liberty. The wisest use of America's strength is to advance freedom. A couple of days ago in New York, I was having a Diet Coke with my friend Prime Minister Koizumi. He's the Prime Minister of Japan. I said, "You know, I've been talking about you on the campaign trail." He said, "Fine." [Laughter] I said, "Do you mind if I tell people your favorite singer was Elvis?" [Laughter] He said, "Okay."

It's amazing that I am having that discussion with Prime Minister Koizumi, if you really think about it, because it wasn't all that long ago in the march of history, some 60 years ago, Japan was a sworn enemy of the United States of America. My dad fought them. Your dads and granddads probably did as well. And it was a tough war. A lot of people lost their life. But after we won World War II, Harry Truman, one of my predecessors, believed in the power of liberty to transform societies and said, "We'll work with Japan to build a democracy."

There were a lot of skeptics then, and you can imagine why. A lot of families had been turned upside down because of loss of life in that horrible war. A lot of people were still angry that the Japanese had at-

tacked us in Pearl Harbor. A lot of people didn't believe an enemy could become a friend. But there were people like Harry Truman in this country who believed in the power of liberty. And today, as a result of their belief—think about this now—I sit down with Prime Minister Koizumi, and we talk about the peace we all want. We're talking about the peace. Someday, an American President will be sitting down with a duly elected leader of Iraq talking about the peace, and our children and our grandchildren will be better off for it.

These are historic times—historic times—and the work is hard. But we've done hard work before in this country. I believe that millions in the Middle East plead in silence for their liberty. I believe that women in the Middle East long to be free. I know that women in the Middle East want their little girls and boys to be able to grow up and realize their dreams. I believe that the people there, if given a chance, will embrace the most honorable form of government ever devised by man. I believe 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.

This young century will be liberty's century. By promoting freedom at home and abroad, we'll build a safer world and a more hopeful America. By reforming our systems of Government, we'll help more Americans realize their dreams. We'll spread ownership and opportunity to every corner of America. We will pass the enduring values of our country on to a young generation. We will continue to lead the cause of freedom and peace.

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 that requires firm resolve, clear vision, and a deep faith in the values that make this a great nation.

None of us will ever forget that week when one era ended and another began.

I certainly won't. I was there in the ruins of the Twin Towers on September the 14th, 2001. The workers there—I can still hear them—were chanting at me, "Whatever it takes." I was doing my best to console folks who had just come out of the rubble. A guy grabbed me by the arm. He looked me straight in the eye and said, "You do not let me down." Ever since that day, I wake up trying to figure out how best to protect our country. I will defend the security of America, whatever it takes.

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

The President. Four years ago, as I traveled your great State asking for the vote, I made a pledge. I said that if you gave me the chance to serve, I would uphold the honor and the dignity of the office to which I had been elected. With your help,

with your hard work, I will do so for 4 more years.

God bless. Thanks for coming. Thank you all.

NOTE: The President spoke at 4:03 p.m. at the Bangor International Airport. In his remarks, he referred to Senator Zell Miller of Georgia, who made the keynote address at the 2004 Republican National Convention; Peter Cianchette, Maine State chairman, and Jim Tobin, New England regional chairman, Bush-Cheney '04, Inc.; Brian Hamel, candidate for Maine's Second Congressional District; Charlie Summers, candidate for Maine's First Congressional District; entertainer Mark Wills; senior Al Qaida associate Abu Musab Al Zarqawi; Prime Minister Ayad Allawi of the Iraqi Interim Government; and Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi of Japan.

Remarks to Army Reservists and National Guard Troops Departing for Iraq From Bangor September 23, 2004

The President. I want to thank you all very much.

Troops. Hooah!

The President. I appreciate your service to the country. I appreciate being in the presence of such fine men and women. May God bless you all. May God keep you

safe. May God bless America as well. Thank you all.

NOTE: The President spoke at 5:47 p.m. aboard a World Airlines plane at the Air National Guard Base at Bangor International Airport. A tape was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

Statement on Congressional Passage of Legislation To Extend Tax Relief September 23, 2004

The tax relief I worked with Congress to pass is putting more money into the hands of the American people and helping to grow our economy. As the economy strengthens, the last thing hard-working American families need is a tax increase.

I commend the Members of Congress for acting to extend marriage penalty relief, the \$1,000 child tax credit, and the broader 10-percent individual tax rate—which would otherwise expire this year and raise taxes on nearly 94 million Americans. This