

Exchange With Reporters Aboard Air Force One October 14, 2004

The President. How is everybody? Ballsy [Dan Balz, Washington Post].

Q. Mr. President, how are you?

The President. Were you anticipating my arrival? [Laughter] Listen, 19 days to go, and I'm looking forward to it. I enjoyed myself last night. The debate phase of the campaign is over, and now it's a sprint to the finish. And the good news is I'm not going to be sprinting alone. I'll have a lot of support from people like Senator McCain and Governor Lingle. We'll be seeing Governors today in Las Vegas, and they're going to spread out all across the country, and I'm excited about it. It's—my spirits are high. I'm enthusiastic about my chances.

I'll answer a couple of questions, and then we'll let you have your coffee.

Presidential Debate in Tempe

Q. Some of the early polls say Kerry won last night. What do you have to say?

The President. Well, the voters will decide. They'll decide on November the 2d who they want to be the President.

Q. Has Kerry helped himself with these debates, if you have an opinion?

The President. The voters will decide that. You know, that's—the great thing about a campaign, all the speculation ends on election day.

Senator John McCain. Can I just say, on substance, there is no doubt. When you talk about Social Security, they all want to reform it. You don't know how to pay for it. You can't answer the question, and people notice that. On substance, the President won, and that's what the people think about when they go into the ballot booth.

Can I also say at that event afterwards, 40,000 citizens of Arizona showed up at Bank One Ballpark. There has never been an event like that in the history of our

State, not only the numbers but the enthusiasm.

Q. Mr. President, what do you think your best moment was last night?

The President. Telling people what I think. You know, the pundits and the spinners and the—they'll all have their opinion, but there's only one opinion that matters, and that's the opinion of the American people on November the 2d. I feel great about where we are. There's lot of enthusiasm for my candidacy. People have seen me lead, and they also know that I've got plans for the next 4 years. And as you'll hear me today, I'm optimistic about the future of this country.

Governor Linda Lingle. I thought that a great moment was the question about jobs. It's more than statistics. I think the President made a key point when he said the important point is that a solid education for the children in America is the best way to ensure a sound economy over the long term. It's common sense. It's why No Child Left Behind is not just important for education, it's important for the sustained economic progress of this Nation.

And personally, the part I liked is when the President talked about his feelings for Mrs. Bush and his daughters. I thought that was just so touching. I think people across America felt how close they were as a family, and I thought it was a really important part of the debate as well.

The President. All right, I'm going to let you all go back to your breakfast.

Senator McCain. Can I just mention one thing? Again, on Social Security, the President has pledged to reform Social Security and bring America together on that issue. You can't just say that the status quo will prevail on Social Security. Millions and millions of baby boomers are going to be facing retirement. This is an issue that has

got to be the highest priority. The President has pledged to address it and not be satisfied with the status quo.

Q. Mr. President, one question that you were asked last night about the cost, the transition cost of——

The President. Well, that's part of bringing people together, to figure out how to address the costs. The point is, is that I'm the President who understands Social Security needs to be reformed.

Listen, thank you. Good to see you, Dan. Get a smile on your faces, everybody, 18 days left.

Q. Will you come visit us again?

Senator McCain. Every day. [*Laughter*]

The President. I'm a better person for it, of course. [*Laughter*]

NOTE: The exchange began at 9:07 a.m. while en route to Las Vegas, NV. Gov. Linda Lingle of Hawaii participated in the exchange. A tape was not available for verification of the content of this exchange.

Remarks in Las Vegas, Nevada October 14, 2004

The President. I appreciate it. Thank you. Thank you all for coming. I appreciate you all being here. With only 19 days to the election, the finish line is in sight, and Nevada will be a part of a great nationwide victory in November, the 2d.

I'm proud to be on stage with so many of the Governors, the Nation's Governors. I'm a member of the ex-Governors club. They'll be a member of that club one day soon. [*Laughter*] I know these folks really well. They're hard-working. They bring people together to get the job done in their States. They focus on results, and that's what I've done as your President, and that's what I'll do for 4 more years.

I want to thank our host, Governor Kenny Guinn, for his hospitality. It wasn't very hard to get the Governors to come to Vegas—[*laughter*—]—to begin a road trip. The next 2 days, they're going to travel our country to tell people that leadership matters. They're going to tell the people that the best way to make sure America has strong and steady and principled leadership is to put Dick Cheney and me back into office.

It's great to be in the home of the Running Rebels. And that's what I'm doing:

I'm running, and I'm not going to stop until election day. Look, my only regret is that Laura is not here to see this crowd. She's right around the corner at the AARP convention. So the convention said, "Send your best speaker." [*Laughter*] When I married Laura, she said, "Fine, I'll marry you, so long as I never have to give a speech." [*Laughter*] I said, "Okay, you got a deal." Fortunately, she didn't hold me to that deal. When the people see her speak, they see a compassionate, strong, great First Lady.

I'm proud of my runningmate, Dick Cheney. He did a really good job in his debate. I admit it, he doesn't have the—he didn't have the waviest hair there on the set. [*Laughter*] I didn't pick him because of his hairdo. [*Laughter*] I picked him because of his experience, his judgment, his ability to get the job done for the American people.

After this we're going to Reno, and then we're going up to Oregon, and I'm proud to be traveling with a great American in John McCain. I like traveling with John. We have a lot of fun. We laugh. We enjoy each other's company, and we share something in common: We both love our Nation.