

quote, “It didn’t change me much at all,” end quote. And his unchanged world view becomes obvious when he calls the war on terror primarily an intelligence and law enforcement operation. That is very dangerous thinking.

We must fight the war on terror with every asset of our national power. We are waging a global campaign from the mountains of central Asia to the deserts of the Middle East and from the Horn of Africa to the Philippines. These efforts are paying off. Since September the 11th, 2001, more than three-quarters of Al Qaida’s key members and associates have been killed, captured, or detained. The rest of them know we will hunt them down.

America faces a grave threat, and our Government is doing everything in its power to confront and defeat that threat.

We’re making progress in protecting our homeland and progress against the terrorists who seek to harm our Nation. And by staying focused and determined, we will prevail.

Thank you for listening.

NOTE: The address was recorded at 7:46 a.m. on October 22 in the Cabinet Room at the White House for broadcast at 10:06 a.m. on October 23. The transcript was made available by the Office of the Press Secretary on October 22 but was embargoed for release until the broadcast. In his remarks, the President referred to Thomas H. Kean, Chairman, National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States (9/11 Commission). The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of this address.

Remarks in Fort Myers, Florida October 23, 2004

The President. Thank you all. Thank you all for coming.

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

The President. It’s getting close to voting time, and I am here to ask for your help. Get your friends and neighbors to go to the polls. Remind people we have a duty to vote. And when you get them headed to the polls—and by the way, don’t overlook discerning Democrats—[laughter]—people like Senator Zell Miller. When you get them headed to the polls, remind them, if they want a safer America, a stronger America, and a better America, to put me and Dick Cheney back in office.

I want to thank you all for coming. It’s a great way to start a Saturday morning, at the ballpark with a lot of great Americans. I’m so happy that Laura is traveling with me today. Today I’m going to talk about why I think you need to put me

back in office for 4 more years, but perhaps the most important reason of all is so that Laura is the First Lady for 4 more years.

My runningmate, Dick Cheney, is out working hard. Listen, I readily concede, he does not have the waviest hair in the race. [Laughter] You’ll be happy to hear I didn’t pick him because of his hairdo. [Laughter] I picked him because of his judgment and his experience, and he’s getting the job done for the American people.

I’m proud of my brother Jeb. When the hurricanes hit this part of your State, I came by to try to lend my support, to remind people that the Federal Government will do everything we can do to help the people of this part of the world get their feet back on the ground. But your Governor showed great compassion and great leadership.

I want to thank Connie Mack for joining us today. He represented this State and

this district with such class and dignity. I'm proud that his son, Connie Mack IV, is running for the United States Congress. Nothing—there's nothing wrong with a son following in a father's footsteps. When you're in there voting for Connie, make sure you put Mel Martinez in the United States Senate.

I want to thank my friend Congressman Mark Foley for joining us today. I appreciate the mayor of Fort Myers being here. Mayor Humphrey, thanks for coming. I want to thank the attorney general for joining us. I want to thank the house speaker. Listen, I want to thank all the people who are serving for coming here today.

I thank my friend Daron Norwood for singing to help entertain you before the—before we made it here.

Most of all, I want to thank you. I want to thank the people putting up the signs, making the phone calls, doing all the hard work at the grassroots level. With your help, we'll carry Florida again and win a great victory.

We've just got 10 days to go in this campaign. And voters have a clear choice between two very different candidates with different approaches and different records. You know where I stand, and sometimes—and sometimes, you even know where my opponent stands. *[Laughter]* We both have records. I am proudly running on mine. The Senator is running from his—*[laughter]*—and there's a reason why. There's a reason why. There is a mainstream in American politics, and my opponent sits on the far left bank. *[Laughter]* I'm a compassionate conservative and proudly so.

This election comes down to five clear choices for American families, five choices on issues of great consequence: your family's security; your family's budget; your quality of life; your retirement; and the bedrock values that are so critical to our families and to our future.

The first clear choice is very important because it concerns the security of our country and the security of your family.

All our progresses on every issue depends on the safety of our citizens. This will be the first Presidential election since September the 11th, 2001. Americans will go to the poll in a time of war and ongoing threats unlike any we have faced before. The terrorists who killed thousands of innocent people are still dangerous and determined to strike us again. The outcome of this election will set the direction of the war against terror. The most solemn duty of the American President is to protect the American people. If America shows uncertainty or weakness in this decade, the world will drift toward tragedy. This will not happen on my watch.

Since that 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've strengthened protections for our homeland. We're reforming our intelligence capabilities. To meet the changing threats in today's world, we are transforming our All-Volunteer Army—I will keep it an all-volunteer army. We're on the offensive. We will stay on the offensive. And we're succeeding. More than three-quarters of Al Qaida's key members and associates have been brought to justice, and the rest of them know we're on their trail.

My opponent has a very different approach. He says that September the 11th—he says that September the 11th, quote, "didn't change me much at all," end quote.

Audience members. Boo-o-o!

The President. And that's pretty clear. He considers the war on terror primarily a law enforcement and intelligence gathering operation.

Audience members. Boo-o-o!

The President. His top foreign policy adviser questioned it is even a war at all, saying, "It's just like a metaphor, like the war on poverty."

Audience members. Boo-o-o!

The President. Anyone who thinks we are fighting a metaphor does not understand

the enemy we face. You cannot win a war if you are not convinced we're even in one.

Senator Kerry also misunderstands our battle against the insurgents and terrorists in Iraq. After voting to authorize force against Saddam Hussein, after calling it the right decision when I sent troops into Iraq, the Senator now calls it the "wrong war."

Audience members. Boo-o-o!

The President. The Senator used to recognize that Saddam Hussein was a gathering threat who hated America. After all, he said so. He used to recognize that Saddam was a state sponsor of terror with a history of pursuing and even using weapons of mass destruction. After all, he said so. He used to understand that Saddam was a major source of instability in the Middle East. After all, he said so. And when he voted to authorize force, the Senator must have recognized the nightmare scenario that terrorists might somehow access weapons of mass destruction. Senator Kerry seems to have forgotten all of that, as his position has evolved during the course of the campaign. You might call it election amnesia. I know then and I know now that America and the world are safer with Saddam Hussein sitting in a prison cell.

Senator Kerry now calls Iraq a "diversion."

Audience members. Boo-o-o!

The President. But the case of just one terrorist shows how wrong his thinking is. It's a man named Zarqawi. He's responsible for planting car bombs and beheading Americans in Iraq. I want you to remember, he ran a terrorist camp, a terrorist training camp in Afghanistan until our forces arrived to destroy that camp. He then fled to Iraq. He recently publicly announced his allegiance to Usama bin Laden. If Zarqawi and his associates were not busy fighting American forces in Iraq, what does Senator Kerry think, that he'd be a small-business man? *[Laughter]* That he'd be living a peaceful life, making positive contributions to society somewhere? I don't think so. Our troops will defeat them

there so we do not have to face them in our own cities.

The choice in this election cannot be clearer. You cannot lead our Nation to the decisive victory on which the security of every American family depends if you do not see the true dangers of the post-September 11th world. My opponent has a September the 10th point of view. At his convention, he declared that his strategy will be to respond to attacks after America is hit.

Audience members. Boo-o-o!

The President. That would be too late. In our debates, he said with a straight face, we can defend America only if we pass a "global test."

Audience members. Boo-o-o!

The President. I'm not making that up. I heard him. He was standing right there when he said it. I will work with our friends and allies, but I will never turn over our national security decisions to leaders of other countries.

I want to thank the veterans who are here. I want to thank the military families who are here. I want to thank those who wear the uniform who are here. You will have the full support of our Government. That's why I went to Congress and proposed \$87 billion of funding. I want—as you gather up the vote, I want you to remind your fellow citizens of this startling statistic. Four Members of the United States Senate voted to authorize the use of force and then voted against funding for our troops in combat—only four Members—two of whom were my opponent and his runningmate.

Audience members. Boo-o-o!

The President. My opponent is a person who said he actually did vote for the \$87 billion, right before he voted against it. He then said, "The whole thing was a complicated matter." There's nothing complicated about supporting our troops in harm's way.

I believe in the transformational power of liberty. I want you to recognize what's

happened in Afghanistan. That country has gone from darkness to light. Young girls couldn't go to school some 3½ years ago. Their mothers were whipped in the public square if they didn't toe the line of these barbaric Taliban. Today, because we defended ourselves, freedom is on the march. Millions voted in a Presidential election. The first voter was a 19-year-old woman. And the world is better off for it.

Despite ongoing violence, Iraq has an Interim Government. It's building up its own security forces. We're headed toward elections in January. You see, we're safer, America is safer with Afghanistan and Iraq on the road to democracy. We can be proud that 50 million citizens of those countries now live as free men and women. We must understand that free societies help us keep the peace. I believe strongly in freedom. Freedom is not America's gift to the world; freedom is the Almighty God's gift to each man and woman in this world.

The second clear choice in this election concerns your family budget. When I ran for President 4 years ago, I pledged to lower taxes for America's families. I kept my word. We doubled the child credit to \$1,000 per child. We reduced the marriage penalty. Our Tax Code ought to encourage marriage, not penalize marriage. We dropped the lowest bracket to 10 percent to help our families. We reduced income taxes for everybody who pays taxes. As a result of these good policies, real after-tax income, the money in your pocket, the money you get to use, is up about 10 percent since I took office.

Our economy has been through a lot. See, that stock market was in serious decline 6 months prior to my inauguration. That stock market decline foretold a recession. And then we had some corporate scandals. By the way, we made it clear, we're not going to tolerate dishonesty in the boardrooms of this country. And then we got attacked, and those attacks hurt our

economy. We lost about a million jobs in the 3 months after September the 11th.

But our economic policies have led us back to growth, and that's good for American families. Our economy is growing at rates as fast as any in nearly 20 years. We've added 1.9 million new jobs since August of 2003. The national unemployment rate is 5.4 percent, lower than the average of the 1970s, the 1980s, and the 1990s. The unemployment rate in your great State is 4.5 percent. We're moving forward.

My opponent has different plans for your budget. He intends to take a big chunk out of it.

Audience members. Boo-o-o!

The President. When I asked Congress to help grow this economy and help our American families, he voted against the higher child credit; he voted against marriage penalty relief; he voted against lower taxes. If he had had his way, the average middle-class family would be paying 2,000 more a year to the Federal Government.

Audience members. Boo-o-o!

The President. It's kind of part of a pattern. He voted 10 times to raise taxes on gasoline as a United States Senator. And all told, during his 20 years in the Senate, he voted 98 times to raise taxes.

Audience members. Boo-o-o!

The President. Think about it. It's about five times a year he's voted to raise taxes. When a Senator does something that often, he must really enjoy it. [Laughter] And that's a warning. That's a predictable pattern. During the campaign, he's made a lot of big, expensive promises. He's promised about \$2.2 trillion worth of new spending. That's with a "T." [Laughter] That's a lot, even for a Senator from Massachusetts. [Laughter]

So they said, "How are you going to pay for it?" And he said, "Oh, I'm just going to tax the rich." We have heard that before. First of all, when you raise the top two brackets, you know who you're taxing;

you're taxing job creators. Most small businesses pay tax at the individual income-tax rate. Seventy percent of new jobs in America are created by small businesses. Raising taxes on small businesses is lousy economic policy.

When you talk about running up the top two brackets or taxing the rich, you raise about 600 billion or 800 billion dollars, depending on who's counting, but remember, that's far short of the 2.2 trillion he promised. So there's a gap, a gap between what he's promised and how he's going to raise the money. And guess who usually gets to fill the gap?

Audience member. We do!

The President. That's exactly right. And finally, the rich hire lawyers and accountants during tax time for a reason; that's to slip the tab and stick you with the bill. We're not going to let him raise your taxes; we're going to carry Florida and win a great victory in November.

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

The President. The third clear choice in this election involves the quality of life for our Nation's families. I believe a good education and quality health care are important to a successful life. When I ran for President 4 years ago, I promised to end the soft bigotry of low expectations by reforming our public schools. I kept my word. We passed the No Child Left Behind Act, meaningful education reforms to bring high standards to our classrooms and to make schools more accountable to our parents. We're making progress. Math and reading scores are rising. We're closing an achievement gap by helping all students. We will build on these reforms. We will extend them to our high schools so that no child is left behind in America.

We will continue to improve life for our families by making health care more available and more affordable. We'll expand health savings accounts so more small businesses can cover their workers and more families will be able to get health care ac-

counts they can manage and call their own. We will create association health plans so small businesses can join together to buy insurance at the same discounts big companies get.

We will help families in need by expanding community health centers and making sure every eligible child is enrolled in our Government's low-income health programs. We'll help patients and doctors everywhere by doing something about the frivolous lawsuits that run up the cost of your practice and run good doctors out of business. We want our doctors focusing on fighting illnesses, not on fighting frivolous lawsuits. These lawsuits are a national problem that require a national solution. I am for medical liability reform.

Senator Kerry has a different point of view on our schools and health care system. Listen, he voted for the No Child Left Behind Act but now wants to weaken the accountability standards. He's proposed including measures like teacher attendance to judge whether students can read or write or add and subtract.

Audience members. Boo-o-o!

The President. He voted against health savings accounts. He opposes association health plans. He has voted 10 times against medical liability reform.

Audience members. Boo-o-o!

The President. You heard him in the debates the other day, mouth something about helping our docs and patients. Remember, he put a personal injury trial lawyer on the ticket. He can run from his record, but he cannot hide.

Now he's proposing a big Government health care plan that would cause 8 million families to lose private coverage they get at work and have to go onto a Government plan. Eighty percent of the people who get coverage under his idea would be enrolled in a Government program. In one of our debates, he tried to tell America that when it comes to his health care plan, and I quote, "The Government has nothing to do with it." [Laughter] I could barely contain

myself. [Laughter] He can run from his record, but he cannot hide.

My opponent's plan would move America down the road to Federal control of health care, and that is the wrong road for American families. In all we do to improve health care in a new term, we will make sure the decisions are made by doctors and patients, not by officials in Washington, DC.

The fourth clear choice in this election involves your retirement. Our Nation has made a solemn commitment to our seniors on Medicare and Social Security. When I ran for President 4 years ago, I promised to keep that commitment. I promised to improve Medicare by adding prescription drug coverage for our seniors. I kept my word. You remember those endless debates; leaders on both political parties have talked about strengthening Medicare for years. We got the job done. Seniors are now getting discounts on medicine through drug discount cards. Low-income seniors are getting \$600 to help them this year and next year. And beginning in 2006, all seniors will be able to get prescription drug coverage under Medicare.

My opponent voted against the Medicare bill that included prescription drug coverage, even though it was supported by AARP and other senior groups. Later he said, quote, "If I'm the President, we're going to repeal that phony bill." Then a little later, he said, "No, I don't want to repeal it." Sounds familiar.

As your President for the next 4 years, I will defend the reforms we have worked so hard to pass and keep the promise to America's seniors. And we will keep the promise of Social Security for our seniors, and as we do so, we will strengthen Social Security for generations to come. Every election, desperate politicians try to scare our seniors about Social Security. It's just predictable. You remember in the 2000 campaign, they ran the ads telling our seniors, "If George W. gets elected, you won't get your Social Security check." Well, when

you're out gathering up the vote, remind our seniors that George W. did get elected and our seniors did get their checks. And our seniors will continue to get their checks. And baby boomers are in pretty good shape when it comes to the Social Security trust.

But we all must be concerned about our children and our grandchildren. Someday, our youngest workers will retire, and we've got to make sure the Social Security system will be there when they need it. I believe younger workers ought to be able to take some of their own money and put it into a personal savings account, a personal savings account that will earn a better rate of return, a personal savings account they can call their own, an account the Government cannot take away.

Once again, my opponent takes a different point of view. He talks about protecting Social Security, but he's the only candidate in this race who voted eight times for higher taxes on Social Security benefits.

Audience members. Boo-o-o!

The President. And when it comes to the next generation, he has offered nothing. The job of the President is to confront problems, not to pass them on to future generations and future Presidents. In a new term, I will bring Republicans and Democrats together to strengthen Social Security for an upcoming generation of Americans.

The fifth choice in this election is on the values that are so crucial to keeping our families strong. And here, my opponent and I are miles apart. I believe marriage is a sacred commitment, a pillar of our civilization, and I will defend it. This is not a partisan issue. When Congress passed the Defense of Marriage Act, defining marriage as a union of a man and a woman, the vast majority of Democrats supported it. My predecessor, President Clinton, signed it into law. But Senator Kerry was part of an out-of-the-mainstream minority that voted against the Defense of Marriage Act.

Audience members. Boo-o-o!

The President. I believe that reasonable people can find common ground on difficult issues. Republicans and Democrats and many citizens on both sides of the life issue came together and agreed that we should ban the brutal practice of partial-birth abortion. Senator Kerry was part of an out-of-the-mainstream minority that voted against the ban.

Audience members. Boo-o-o!

The President. He voted against parental notification laws—

Audience members. Boo-o-o!

The President. —against the Unborn Victims of Violence Act.

Audience members. Boo-o-o!

The President. I will continue to reach out to Americans of every belief and move this goodhearted Nation toward a culture of life.

My opponent has said that the heart and soul of America can be found in Hollywood.

Audience members. Boo-o-o!

The President. Most American families do not look to Hollywood as a source of values. The heart and soul of America is found right here in Fort Myers, Florida.

All these choices make this one of the most important elections in our history. The security and prosperity of our country, the health and education of our families, the retirement of our seniors, and the direction of our culture are all at stake. The decision is in the best hands, because the decision belongs to the American people.

I see a bright future for America. I see a better day for all of us. One of my favorite quotes was written by a fellow Texan, Tom Lea. He said, “Sarah and I live on the east side of the mountain. It’s the sun-

rise side, not the sunset side. It is the side to see the day that is coming, not to see the day that is gone.” If you listen carefully to this campaign, my opponent has spent much of this campaign talking about the day that is gone. I see the day that is coming.

We’ve been through a lot together in the last 4 years. Because we’ve done the hard work of climbing that mountain, we can see the valley below. We’ll protect our families. We’ll build their prosperity. We will defend the deepest values. We’ll spread freedom in this world, and as we do so, we’ll keep America safe and spread the peace.

Four years ago, when I traveled your great State asking for the vote, I made this pledge. I said if I was elected, I would uphold the honor and the dignity of the office to which I had been elected. With your help, I will do so for 4 more years.

God bless. Thanks for coming.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:10 a.m. at City of Palms Park. In his remarks, he referred to Senator Zell Miller of Georgia, who made the keynote address at the 2004 Republican National Convention; Gov. Jeb Bush of Florida; former Senator Connie Mack III of Florida; Connie Mack IV, candidate in Florida’s 14th Congressional District; Mel R. Martinez, senatorial candidate in Florida; Mayor Jim Humphrey of Fort Myers, FL; State Attorney General Charlie Crist of Florida; Johnnie Byrd, speaker, Florida State House of Representatives; entertainer Daron Norwood; senior Al Qaida associate Abu Musab Al Zarqawi; and Usama bin Laden, leader of the Al Qaida terrorist organization.

Remarks in Lakeland, Florida
October 23, 2004

The President. Thank you all for coming.

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

The President. Thank you all for coming today. Laura and I are so honored that so many came out to say hello. We really appreciate it. It is a beautiful day to be campaigning in the great State of Florida. Of course, according to your Governor, every day is a beautiful day in Florida.

I'm here to ask for your vote, and I'm here to ask for your help. We're close to voting time. As a matter of fact, in your State, voting time is already here. Please go to your friends and neighbors, people from all parties—don't overlook discerning Democrats—[laughter]—people like Zell Miller. They want a better country too. Tell them we have a duty in this country to vote. Tell them we have an obligation in a free society to go to the polls. And when you get them headed to the polls, remind them, if they want a safer America and a stronger America and a better America, to put me and Dick Cheney back in office.

I think it's important to go around this country telling people what you're going to do. I'm here to tell you why I think you need to put me in office for 4 more years. But perhaps the most important reason of all is so that Laura is the First Lady for 4 more years.

Audience members. Laura! Laura! Laura!

The President. I'm sure some of you all will appreciate this, when I tell you that Laura and I knew each other in the seventh grade in San Jacinto Junior High in Midland, Texas. We became reacquainted. She was a public school librarian at the time. I said, "Will you marry me?" She said, "Fine, so long as you make me a promise." I said, "What is it?" She said, "I never want to have to give a political speech." [Laughter] I said, "Okay, you got a deal." Fortunately, she didn't hold me to that

deal. She is giving a lot of speeches, and when she speaks, the American people see a compassionate, warm, strong First Lady.

I'm proud of my runningmate, Dick Cheney. He's doing a great job. I see some others out here who are follically challenged. [Laughter] See, I admit he doesn't have the waviest hair in the race. [Laughter] You'll be pleased to hear I didn't pick him because of his hairdo. [Laughter] I picked him because he can get the job done. I picked him because of his judgment. I picked him because of his experience.

I'm proud to be traveling with my brother. Jeb Bush is a great Governor for Florida. He's led with conviction. You know, one thing about him, you don't have to worry about where he stands. In other words, he's not one of these politicians who is going to take a poll or run a focus group, trying to figure out what to tell you. He stands on principles. That's how we were raised. You stand for what you believe. And Jeb showed great courage and compassion during the times of these storms. I came over to try to lend a hand and show the people of this important State that the Federal Government cared, people around the country cared for you. But I was incredibly impressed by two things, one, Jeb's leadership, and two, the great compassion of the people of Florida.

I'm proud to be up here with Adam Putnam. I call him Red; you call him Congressman. [Laughter] We went over and saw some orange growers the other day, and it was my honor to be in that citrus grove, telling the orange growers of this part of the State, we're going to help them get their feet back on the ground.

I want to thank—listen, while you're out there voting, voting for me and Dick Cheney, make sure you vote for Mel Martinez for the United States Senate. He'll be a