

Remarks at the Associated Builders and Contractors National Legislative Conference

June 8, 2005

Thank you all. Please be seated. Thanks for coming. Thanks for the warm welcome. Thanks for the kind introduction, Gary; it's good to keep it in the old Texas family. [Laughter] All you other Texans who are here, make sure you behave yourself. [Laughter]

But I'm really honored to be here. I appreciate ABC; I appreciate your leadership. I appreciate the entrepreneurial spirit. I appreciate the fact that you're hiring people and making your communities better in which you live. I want to thank Carole Bionda and Kirk Pickerel and the board of directors for having me here.

You made a mistake, you should have invited Laura—[laughter]—to be your speaker, if you were looking for the A-team in our family. She's become quite the comedienne. [Laughter] I'm pleased to report, though, that she's doing great. I'm a lucky man when she said yes when I asked her to marry me. And I think the country is lucky to have her as the First Lady.

You know, I came to Washington to get some things done. This isn't my permanent home. I'm going to give it my all, put my energy into the job, and pour my soul into my work, and when time is up, I'm going to head back home. But I want it to be said that my administration came to Washington, DC, to solve problems. And when we had a problem that we square—that we dealt with it squarely. And we did it based upon principle. And we've been presented with some problems in this administration. One of them was a recession, because of an enemy attack and the down cycle in the economy. We had to deal with the recession.

And at the heart of my decisionmaking was my understanding that most new jobs in America are created by small businesses,

and therefore, any relief, any decisions as to how to deal with the recession had to be good policy for small businesses. And the tax relief we passed made a difference for our small businesses here in America.

And the economic policy is working. I mean, after all, more people work in America today than ever before in our Nation's history. The unemployment rate is down to 5.1 percent. Small businesses are flourishing. The entrepreneurial spirit is strong. But there's more work to be done; there's more work to be done.

One of the main jobs we have here in Washington is to protect our country. You see, not only did the attacks help accelerate a recession; the attacks reminded us that we are at war. It's a different kind of war. It's a war that has taken the country a while to adjust to, because we're not facing nation states; we're facing terrorist organizations that know no border, terrorist organizations that know no conduct the way civilized nations know it when it comes to fighting war. They'll kill innocent people like that in order to justify a hateful ideology, which means that we've got to do a couple of things here out of Washington.

One, we've got to do everything we can to protect the homeland, and we are. We're doing a better job of collecting and analyzing intelligence and sharing intelligence. Tomorrow I'm going to go to Columbus, Ohio, to talk about the renewal of the PATRIOT Act, which is an important piece of legislation that on the one hand guarantees the civil liberties of the American people, but on the other hand, gives our terror fighters the same tools that we use to deal with drug lords or white-collar criminals. We're making progress about making sure Federal agencies do a better job of communicating.

The best way to defend the homeland, though, is to stay on the offense, is to find these people, is to defeat them abroad so we don't have to face them at home. And that's exactly what the United States of America is doing. And for those of you who have got a loved one in the United States military, I want to say two things to you: One, we'll make sure your loved one has whatever is necessary to protect America; and secondly, thank you for their sacrifice.

And the second way to defeat the terrorists is to spread freedom. You see, the best way to defeat a society that is—doesn't have hope, a society where people become so angry they're willing to become suiciders, is to spread freedom, is to spread democracy. You know, during the course of the last campaign, I used to tell people about the power of liberty to transform societies. And what I meant by that was that one of my close associates in world politics is Prime Minister Koizumi of Japan. He's a buddy. He's a friend. He's the kind of guy you can sit down at the table and say, "What are we going to do together to help keep the peace," how best to deal with the—with Kim Chong-il in North Korea, for example. We strategize, all aimed at making the world a more peaceful place.

But it wasn't all that long ago that an 18-year-old Navy pilot named George H.W. Bush—and I'm confident some of your relatives—were at war with Japan. When you really think about it, 60 years isn't all that long ago, is it? And yet today, the enemy has become a friend. And the reason why that enemy is a friend is because of freedom and democracy. Democracy has got the capacity to change the world.

I believe everybody wants to be free. I believe mothers all across the world, regardless of their religion or where they live, want to bring up their children in a free society. I believe that is a universal drive and a universal desire. And it has been proven that democracies are peaceful. The best way to defeat terrorism in the long

run and the best way to leave behind a foundation for peace for a generation of Americans coming up is to spread freedom and democracy around the world. And freedom is on the march.

For the youngsters here today, I want you to pay attention to what's in the news. You're living in a remarkable period. Just think about what has happened in a quick period of time. Millions voted in Afghanistan. Millions defied the suiciders in Iraq to vote. People turned out in the town squares across Lebanon demanding freedom. In the Ukraine there was a freedom revolution. People in the world want to be free, and the United States of America will promote democracy and promote freedom movements for the sake of peace and stability.

So while we'll continue to work to do our duty to secure you, we got to do work here at home to keep this economy growing, and here's some practical ways to do that. First, I understand that health care is an issue for small businesses. See, if most new jobs are created by small businesses, it makes sense to have good economic policies that help small businesses. And so therefore, one of the things we've got to do is to be wise about how we help small businesses deal with insurance, health insurance.

One thing is for certain, to deal with health insurance—is we need to pass medical liability reform. One reason your premiums are high is because of the junk and frivolous lawsuits that are running good doctors out of practice and running up the cost of medicine. When I first came to Washington, I wasn't so sure this was a Federal issue. You know, being the former Governor of a State, I kind of felt like States could take care of medical liability issues. But you see, all these lawsuits cause docs to practice what they call defensive medicine. They practice more medicine than necessary just in case they get sued. And all these lawsuits are running up the cost of medicine because premiums go up,