

March 9, 2006.

Remarks at the Georgia Republican Party's President's Day Dinner in
College Park, Georgia
March 9, 2006

Thank you all. I appreciate you coming. Please be seated. Thanks for being here. I appreciate the warm reception. Thanks for letting me come back to Georgia. I'm proud to be here to help support the Republican Party of Georgia, which is changing this State for the better.

And I'm proud to be introduced by Sonny Perdue, who is doing a heck of a good job as the Governor of this State. So here's the thing I like about Sonny: One, he married well. [*Laughter*] Where's Mary? Oh, there she is. Hi, Mary, good to see you. Thanks for being here. Secondly, he said his favorite title in life is not "Governor" but "Big Buddy." [*Laughter*] You know who calls him "Big Buddy"? His grandkids. Sonny has got his priorities straight. I'm proud to call him friend, and I know you're proud to call him Governor.

By the way, Mary, Laura sends her very best and her love. Laura is a remarkable person. She is patient, especially to be married to me. [*Laughter*] One of the things that I love about being the President is, well, I've got a 45-second commute—[*laughter*—and when I get home, there's a person there who is a wonderful partner in serving our country. She understands what I know: It's a huge honor to be the First Couple of the United States. And she is making an enormous difference in the lives of people in west Texas-type ways. And so she sends her love and sends her best.

I want to thank the—first of all, let me say something about your two United States Senators. They had votes, and that's good that they stayed there to do the job that you send them to do. I was incredibly

proud to watch them help shepherd through two Supreme Court Justices I named. When I campaigned in Georgia, I said, "If you elect me to be President, I will name people to the bench who will strictly interpret the Constitution and not try to write laws from the bench." I did so with Chief Justice Roberts, Judge Alito. And Senator Saxby Chambliss and Johnny Isakson were strong supporters for those nominees.

I want to thank the Members of the United States Congress who have joined us here today: Nathan Deal from north Georgia; John Linder; Phil Gingrey; Lynn Westmoreland; and Tom Price. Thank you all for joining us. We spent some quality time on Air Force One flying down here. These are smart people. They never pass up a free flight when they're offered one. [*Laughter*] But I enjoy them. They're good folks—good, down-to-earth, decent folks serving the State of the Georgia in the United States Congress, and I'm proud to call them friends.

I want to thank Glenn Richardson, who is the speaker of the house. I want to thank Eric Johnson, the president pro tem of the State senate. I want to thank all those who are serving in the statehouse. It's a—it is an important job.

You know things are changing in Georgia when you say welcome to the speaker—[*laughter*—and welcome to the leader of the senate. The Republican Party here has done a good job of establishing a grassroots political base that is not only helping people like me, but it's changing the statehouse for the better in the State of Georgia.

I want to thank Alec Poitevint, the mighty chairman and national committee-man of the great State of Georgia. Alec, good to see you, and Doreen is here. Alec has got his priorities straight. I've known him for a long period of time. We're quite familiar with each other. He said, "How many turkeys you got on your ranch?" I said, "I haven't been counting them lately." He says, "Well, I've been counting them on mine." The man's got his priorities straight. [Laughter]

I want to thank people who are running for office. I appreciate you willing to put your name on the line. I want to thank you for your willingness to get out and shake hands and tell people what you believe and speak from the heart. Two candidates running for the Lieutenant Governor with us, Casey Cagle and Ralph Reed, and I appreciate them both being here tonight.

Finally, I want to say something about two Mac—well, one Mac, one Max. [Laughter] One of the reasons I've come down here is to thank you for supporting two good folks who are running for the United States Congress, Mac Collins and Max Burns. I know them well. I know Mac's wife, Julie, and I know Max's wife, Lora. I've served with them before. I have seen what kind of people they are up close. They're principled gentlemen. They understand the risks to the world in which we live. They're smart with the people's money. I urge the people of Georgia to send Mac Collins and Max Burns back to the United States Congress. [Applause] I knew they were there somewhere.

And finally, I want to say something about Sonny. I think the people of this State need to judge your Governor based upon performance. He is a fellow who has performed. He's delivered results. He said he was going to do some things when he ran for the Governor of your State, and he did. I don't know if you remember, but when he took office, Georgia wasn't doing that well in the economy. Matter of fact,

you were losing jobs. I don't know if people remember in this great State, but when Sonny first came into office, he had a State deficit of \$620 million. Today, Georgia's economy is on the march. You're increasing jobs; people are working; and you've got a surplus in the State treasury.

Now, Sonny knows how to get things done. And one of the main reasons I have come down here is to thank the good people of your State for electing such a good man to be the Governor of an important State. Sonny Perdue deserves to be re-elected as the Governor of the State of Georgia.

We're living in historic times. We are a country still at war. I wish I could report—give you a different report. My job is to see the world the way it really is, not to see the world the way some would hope it would be. My job is—my thinking is, really—was defined on September the 11th—you've just got to know that.

Some of my buddies from Texas come over there to the White House, and they say, "What's it like to be the President?" First of all, I'm a person who is so honored to be sustained by the prayers of millions of people. It is—one of the truly great blessings of the Presidency is to be uplifted in prayer by people I never get to thank personally.

Secondly, I make a lot of decisions. It's a decisionmaking experience. Sonny will tell you, as the Governor of a State, you make decisions. That's what a chief executive officer does. In order to make decisions, you've got to make decisions based upon principle. And if not exactly sure what information you need, you've got to rely upon good people to give you information so you can make good decisions. A lot of my decision-making has come about as a result of the attack on our country. See, after that day, I vowed that I would do everything in my power to protect the United States of America from further attack.

That's why I'm proud to stand with Members of the United States Congress

and candidates for Congress who understand our biggest job, our most important responsibility in Washington, is to protect the American people and never forget the lessons of September the 11th, 2001. I knew one of the challenges for our country would be, the farther we got away from that date, that day, that people would want to forget the trauma of the day and might be willing to forget the lessons learned on that day. I can assure you, these Members of Congress won't forget the lessons of that day, and neither will I.

And today I had the honor in the White House of signing an extension of the PATRIOT Act. We've asked brave souls to be on the frontline of fighting terrorists. They deserve every possible tool, while we safeguard the civil liberties of the United States of America. Thank you all for supporting the PATRIOT Act. We did the right thing in Washington.

After the attacks on the country, I did what you would expect me to do, and asked people who are on the frontlines of defending you whether or not there was—there's more we could be doing. What can we do more to protect the American people? I vowed on September the 11th I would do everything I can to protect the American people. I would rally the assets and resources and brain power of our country to protect you.

And so I called people in, and I said, "Is there anything else we could have done to prevent the attacks from September the 11th?" And a general named Mike Hayden said, "I believe there is, Mr. President. I believe we can design a system that will enable us to listen to a call from outside the country in, from a known Al Qaida affiliate or a suspected Al Qaida affiliate." I said, that makes sense, doesn't it? If the people inside the country that planned the attacks on the United States were making phone calls out, we'd want to know that prior to any attack.

And so I said, "Mike, show me how the system would work." I then called in law-

yers—and we've got a lot of them in Washington. [*Laughter*] By the way, two of my favorite lawyers are here today, Dan Coats and Connie Mack, former United States Senators who have been close to the White House on a variety of matters. So I'm not denigrating you two guys; I like lawyers. [*Laughter*] But we've got a lot of them—[*laughter*—and some smart ones.

And I said, "Is the program that the NSA is recommending legal?" That's what you'd expect the President to do. You'd expect the President to ask, is there more we could do, and if the suggestion—if someone made a suggestion, the first question is, is it legal to do so? And they came back and said, "Mr. President, you have the authority to do this program"—in other words, it's legal.

Before I implemented the program, a program, by the way, which is limited in nature—phone calls coming from inside the country out and outside in, with one of the numbers being known Al Qaida, suspected Al Qaida, and affiliates—I then recognized that the United States Congress would be interested in this subject. So we briefed leaders from both parties, both chambers, on a program to protect the American people. We've kept them abreast more than one time, in a series of briefings, about a program that is necessary to protect the American people. As my buddy in Texas said, "If you're trying to do something illegal, why did you brief the Congress?" [*Laughter*]

What we're doing is the right thing. My thinking process, my decisionmaking, is based upon my understanding of the job of the President and the Federal Government—is to protect our people so we never have to go through what we went again. It is right; it is necessary to listen to Al Qaida. If Al Qaida is making a phone call into the United States of America or vice versa, we want to know why, in order to protect this country.

In order to protect this country, we must remember the lessons of September the

11th. And lesson number one is, we have got to stay on the offense against the terrorist network that would like to do harm to the United States of America, and we are. We are on the hunt. We've got some fantastic men and women who wear our Nation's uniform doing everything they can to find the terrorists before they can hurt us again. It's hard to plan and plot and destroy America if you're on the run. And we're bringing a lot of the killers to justice. And I will continue to insist that we pursue the killers to keep America safe.

The second lesson, since this is a different kind of war, is that if you harbor a terrorist, you're equally as guilty as the terrorist. We're dealing with a shadowy network. We're not fighting nation-states. We're fighting a group of coldblooded killers who adopted an ideology that's the exact opposite of America, that tries to find safe haven. And therefore, part of the strategy is to deny the enemy safe haven. And when the President says something, he better mean what he says, and I meant what I said when I said to the Taliban, "Give up Al Qaida." And when they refused, the United States of America removed a barbaric regime for our own security, and in so doing, however, we liberated 25 million people from the clutches of these barbaric people.

Another lesson of September the 11th is that we must deal with threats before they come to hurt us. You see, prior to September the 11th, 2001, a lot of folks assumed that we were safe in America. In other words, we could see a threat somewhere overseas, but we were fine. Oceans protected us; perhaps our might protected us. But that all changed for me on September the 11th, 2001. Whenever we see a threat, the United States of America must take them seriously. We cannot take threats for granted. I saw a threat; the world saw a threat; people in the United Nations Security Council saw a threat; Republicans on Capitol Hill saw a threat; Democrats

on Capitol Hill saw a threat in Saddam Hussein.

And the reason they saw a threat—this is a man who at least had the capacity to manufacture weapons; he had used weapons of mass destruction; he was on the terrorist list of the United States of America; he killed thousands of his own citizens; he was firing at U.S. jets; and he invaded his neighbor. He was a threat, and getting rid of Saddam Hussein has made America safer and the world a better place.

And I'm proud to be on stage with people who understood the stakes and stand strong, particularly when we put men and women in harm's way. I'm proud to have people up here who understand that any time we put an American volunteer into harm's way, he or she deserves the best pay, the best training, and the best possible equipment.

We've got a strategy for victory in Iraq. Now, you got to understand, we're facing an enemy that can't beat us militarily, and they certainly can't beat us ideologically. And they've got one weapon, and their weapon is the willingness to kill innocent people and to have the horror on the TV screens, understanding full well that the American people are decent and compassionate people. That's the only weapon they have.

Their goal, their stated goal, is to drive the United States of America and allies out of the Middle East so they can spread their totalitarian vision. That's what they've said, and when the enemy says something, we got to take them seriously. They believe we're weak. They believe their tactics will cause us to run. The United States of America will not run in the face of thugs and assassins, and we're going to stand strong in support of people who expressed themselves last year at the ballot box in the face of incredible threats. Eleven million Iraqis said loud and clear to the world, "We reject civil war. We want our freedom, and we want our democracy." And America is proud to stand with them.

We have a political strategy, and that is to encourage the votes which took place last year under—and they ratified a Constitution, which is a modern constitution. A government should be a unified government that recognizes minority rights so that the people—when the people speak, government responds.

And secondly, we have a security strategy that says loud and clear that we want the Iraqis to take the fight to the enemy. As the Iraqis stand up, our troops will stand down. But I want to assure you, what I said in the State of the Union is what I mean. Troop levels in Iraq will be decided not by Washington, DC, politics but by the commanders on the ground. I will be making the military decisions necessary to win this war not based upon focus groups or opinion polls but based upon the solid, sound advice of a group of really fine military commanders.

Our objective is a country that can defend itself and sustain itself, a country that will not be a safe haven for Al Qaida and its terrorist network, a country which will be a ally in the war on terror, and a country will—which will serve as a powerful example for others in a part of the world that is desperate for freedom.

And so the ultimate way to achieve our objectives, which is to lay the foundation of peace for generations to come, is to help people live in liberty and help spread democracy. The people of the Middle East must understand that when I say democracy, I don't mean American-style democracy. I mean a democracy which reflects the values and the history and the tradition of the country in which democracy is spreading.

But I do believe in the universality of liberty. I personally believe there is an Almighty God, and I believe a gift from the Almighty God to every man and woman on the face of the Earth is freedom. Our country was formed based upon the natural rights of men and women, and we believe those natural rights extend to men and

women all across the globe. The United States of America believes people desire to be free. And by freeing people, we are laying the foundation of peace for generations to come.

I've trotted this story out a lot, or my beliefs out a lot, about the effects of freedom. But let me try to explain for—particularly the youngsters here—about what I mean for laying the foundation for peace to come.

One of my best buddies in the international arena is Prime Minister Koizumi of Japan. What's interesting about that is 60 years ago, my dad, as an 18-year-old fighter pilot, Navy fighter pilot—and I'm sure many relatives of folks here fought the Japanese, because they were the sworn enemy. And this is one of the bloodiest of all wars. A lot of people lost their lives on both sides of this conflict. And yet today, the American President can speak to an audience in Atlanta, Georgia, and say, "I sit down at the table with Prime Minister Koizumi to keep the peace, to deal with some of the tough issues around the world. He's a partner in peace."

And so what happened? Something had to have happened between 18-year-old fighter pilot George H.W. Bush and George W. standing here as the President. And what happened was, Japan adopted a Japanese-style democracy. You see, democracies yield the peace, and someday, someday, if we do not lose our nerve and our will, an American President will be talking to a duly elected leader from Iraq, working together to keep the peace, and our children and grandchildren will be better off.

Now that you're stuck here, I'm going to tell you something else. *[Laughter]* Our economy has been through a lot in a relatively quick period of time. We've been through a recession; we've been through corporate scandals; we've been through a devastating attack on our country; we have dealt with war; we have dealt with high energy prices; and we have dealt with natural disasters, large natural disasters. Last

year, our economy grew at 3.5 percent. The national unemployment rate is 4.7 percent. That's lower than the average rate of the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s. We added 4.7 million new jobs over 2½ years. After-tax real income is up 8 percent. Productivity is at an alltime high. More people own a home than ever before in our Nation's history; more minority families own a home than ever before in our Nation's history. We're doing something right in Washington, DC, and you know what it is? We've unleashed the entrepreneurial spirit of the United States because of real, meaningful tax cuts. Republicans believe that the more money you have in the pocket, the more you save, invest, and spend, the better off this economy is.

The tax relief we passed and these Members voted for, these candidates voted for, is set to expire. And if it does, the American people are going to get a tax increase they don't expect and they don't want. In order to make sure this economy continues to grow, in order to make sure the entrepreneurial spirit continues to remain strong, in order to make sure the small-business sector of our economy is as strong as it is today, we need to make the tax relief permanent.

Now, I know what they're going to say. They're going to say, "How can you balance the budget if you cut the taxes?" People will say, "Well, we need to raise your taxes in order to balance the budget." That's not the way Washington works. What will happen is they will raise your taxes and figure out new ways to spend your money. The best way to balance the budget is to keep pro-growth economic policies in place and be wise about how we spend your money. We're on our way to cutting that deficit in half by 2009, and I want to thank the Members up here for making the tough choices when it comes to our budget.

We got a choice to make in this country: Do we become a protectionist, isolated nation, or do we continue to lead? I made my choice. I believe America is better off

when America takes a leadership role in this world. I believe we should not fear our economic future, because we should shape it. Part of shaping the future is to keep taxes low. Part of shaping our future is to get rid of these junk and frivolous lawsuits that are running good capital out of America.

Part of shaping our future is to make sure we're not hooked on oil. I know that sounds odd for a Texan to say. [Laughter] But if you see the world from my perspective, I think you would agree with me. Being addicted to oil is a problem. When demand for hydrocarbons or fossil fuels goes up in developing parts of the world, it causes the price of gasoline to go up here at home. When parts of the world that don't like the United States of America threaten to withhold supplies of oil from the market, it creates a national security problem. And so I'm looking forward to working with Congress to diversify away from oil, to spend money on research and development so we can have plug-in hybrid automobiles that can drive the first 40 miles on electricity, to spend money to make sure that our technologies are able to help us develop ethanol. Look, we want our farmers in Georgia growing crops that can run our automobiles. We need to become less dependent on foreign sources of oil in order to be a competitive nation.

We need nuclear power and solar power and wind power. In order for this country to be competitive in the out years, in order for us to be confident about our national security, we have got to be less addicted to Middle Eastern oil, and I intend to lead that country this direction.

I want to talk to you about a couple of other things, about a competitiveness agenda. How do you stay competitive in a global economy? The key to making sure that America remains the leader in the world is to make sure our children are educated. You see, if our kids don't have the skills for the jobs of the 21st century, they're going to go somewhere else. That's

just a fact of life. And so therefore, I told the United States Congress we need to work together to make sure that we're not only the leader in research and development, in technological development, but to make sure our children have got math and science skills so that we are educating the engineers of the future and the physicists of the future and the chemists of the future.

I want to congratulate Sonny Perdue for implementing the No Child Left Behind Act. I've heard all the debates about it; I'm sure you have as well: "How dare the Government measure?" Look, my attitude is, we're spending money. The taxpayer wants to know whether the money is well-spent. If you're spending money to teach a child to read and write, doesn't it make sense to measure, to determine whether or not the child is reading or writing? Doesn't it make sense to believe every child can read and demand that the school system teach every child to read? And how do you know? You measure. And if you find a child not reading early, I think it makes sense to provide additional help, additional money for each child, like we're doing through No Child Left Behind Act, so no child is left behind. No, Republicans should stand for high standards and the belief that every child can learn, and we ought to demand change where we find children trapped in schools that will not teach and will not change.

And we're getting results. We're getting results nationwide. There's an achievement gap in America that's not right. We've got too many of our African American kids and young Latino kids who can't read at grade level. But that's changing. See, we're measuring, we're correcting problems early, before it's too late. And that achievement gap is narrowing, and America is better off for it.

And we've got a problem when it comes to math. See, our fourth graders are testing fine in math but then falling off in the eighth grade. So what I want to do is apply

the same rigor we've done for reading in the early grades to math in the middle grades to make sure that America is competitive, to make sure that our children have the skills necessary to fill the jobs of the 21st century. This country of ours should not fear the future. We ought to welcome the future and shape the future. And the United States of America must put policies in place to make sure that we're the leading economy in the world, for the sake of our people and the sake of people who want to find work. And that's exactly what I intend to do for this country.

And finally—you'll probably be happy to hear the word, "finally"—I'm going to continue to work with people on this stage to promote a culture of life in the United States of America. We believe every person matters, every person counts. We believe that—we believe in medicine and sound science, but we don't believe in taking life to promote science. We believe in upholding values that are important. We believe in the faith-based initiatives. We understand there are people in this part of the world and people all over our country who hurt.

We also understand the limitation of government. Government can hand out money, but it cannot put hope in a person's heart or a sense of purpose in a person's life. That's done when a loving individual finds a stranger in need or a child who needs to learn to read or a person addicted, says, "I love you, brother," or, "I love you, sister. What can I do to help you?" The greatest strength of the United States of America is not our military, and it's not the size of our wallet. The greatest strength of the United States of America lies in the hearts and souls of millions of our citizens who've heard the universal call to love a neighbor just like you'd like to be loved themselves and are doing that on a daily basis.

We've got millions of our citizens who are helping change America one heart, one soul, and one conscience at a time. And

it's important for the Federal Government and the State government not to fear the armies of compassion but to support the armies of compassion as they help make this country a hopeful, optimistic place for every citizen who is honored to call themselves an American.

Listen, I love being your President. I love being back in Georgia. Thanks for giving me a chance to come back. Thanks for joining this great festival that celebrates

the Republican Party of the great State of Georgia. And God bless.

NOTE: The President spoke at 6:22 p.m. at the Georgia International Convention Center. In his remarks, he referred to Gov. Sonny Perdue of Georgia, and his wife, Mary; and Alec Poitevint, State chairman and national committeeman, Georgia Republican Party, and his wife, Doreen.

Interview With Diana Moukalled of Future Television of Lebanon March 9, 2006

Lebanese Freedom

Ms. Moukalled. Mr. President, thank you for receiving Future Television. As you know, head of U.N. inquiry, Serge Brammertz, will present his report to the Security Council in a few days. How should the international community respond if the report concluded that Syria did not fully cooperate with the inquiry, as previous efforts did?

The President. Our position is, is that we want to know the truth, and we expect all parties to be forthcoming with the truth. The truth is really important to help Lebanon meet a goal that we want for Lebanon, which is free of foreign interference, democratic and peaceful, so that people can realize dreams and so the great country of Lebanon can grow and prosper like I'm confident it can.

So the United States will constantly remind all parties that we seek the truth, and we expect parties, when asked about the truth, to be forthcoming with the truth. I'm worried about people who stall and hope that the world turns a blind eye to a terrible death. And we're not going to turn a blind eye. We will keep focused on this important issue, because we believe in the future of Lebanon.

Syrian Withdrawal From Lebanon

Ms. Moukalled. From what you say, many in Lebanon fear that there might be a deal between Washington and Damascus. In other words, if Damascus complied with Washington demands regarding Iraq, regarding Hizballah and Hamas, would you let the inquiry not reach its ultimate?

The President. Part of our desires for Damascus is, of course, to shut down terrorist bases in their country, and is, of course, to stop cross-border infiltration into Iraq, is, of course, to stop allowing people to find safe haven to plot and plan attacks in the neighborhood. But part of our demands was to—was 1559, which is, completely out of Lebanon. And so there are no deals. We are people who believe that when we say something, we've got to keep our word. And again, I repeat to you: I think that the light of truth is very important toward establishing a peace that we all want in the region.

I really do want young boys and girls in Lebanon to be able to grow up in a world free of violence. Lebanon is a fabulous country; Beirut is one of the great international cities of all time. And it's in the world's interest that this democracy survive, and not only survive but flourish and