

Week Ending Friday, September 24, 2004

Remarks in a Discussion on Women's Issues in Charlotte, North Carolina

September 17, 2004

The President. Thanks for being here. Go ahead and be seated. We've got some work to do here. *[Laughter]* Thanks for such a warm welcome here in the great State of North Carolina. It's nice to be back here. I'm here asking for the vote, and I'm here to ask for your help.

Gosh, there's a lot of people back there. Can you hear me back there? *[Applause]* That's good. Thanks for coming.

The first thing I'd like you to do is ask you to register your friends and neighbors to vote. And while you're doing that, don't overlook discerning Democrats like Zell Miller. And then after we get them registered to vote, when it comes voting time, head them to the polls and remind them if they want a safer America, a stronger America, a better America, to put me and Dick Cheney back in office.

Listen, we've got an interesting way to talk about some issues today. One of the things you've got to know is, I've got a reason to run again. I'm asking for the vote because there's more to do to make this country a safer place and a better place for everybody, a more hopeful place for those of us who live here in America. And so I asked some of our fellow citizens here to share some ideas, or to discuss some of the ideas I have about a new term. I think you're going to find it interesting. I hope you do.

Before I begin to talk with them about ways to make this country a more hopeful place, I do want to tell you that I lucked out when Laura said, "Yes." One way to maybe look at this race is, you can judge the nature of a fellow by the company he keeps. I'm keeping great company when it comes to Laura Bush. I'm proud of her. Listen, when I asked her to marry me, she said, "Fine, just so long as I don't have to give

any political speeches." *[Laughter]* I said, "Okay, you won't have to give any speeches." Fortunately, she didn't hold me to my word. The other night the country got to see what I've seen in Laura for all these years: She's compassionate; she's decent; she's strong; she is a great mom, a wonderful wife, and a fantastic First Lady for our country.

I want to thank my friend Elizabeth Dole. She's a great United States Senator for the State of North Carolina. I want to thank my friend Robin Hayes. I appreciate you being here, Congressman. I'm glad you're here. Nice to see you, sir. Congresswoman Sue Myrick, she's here. Thanks for coming, Sue. It's great to see you. Richard Burr, is he here? Where is he? Burr, how are you? I'm in town not only to talk about my race; I'm in town to talk about his race. He needs to be elected to the United States Senate.

I want to thank Pat McCrory, the great mayor of Charlotte, North Carolina. Mr. Mayor, thank you for coming. Cherie Berry is with us today. We got some statehouse folks. We got Patrick Ballantine, the next Governor, with us today.

I want to thank the grassroots activists who are here today. These people put up the signs and do the hard work. I want to thank you for what you have done and what you're going to do, which is, coming down the pike, turn people out to vote. We carried North Carolina last time, and with your help, we're going to carry it this time.

I know Teresa Earnhardt is with us today. I'm proud you're here, Teresa. It's good to see you. Thanks for coming. There you are. Appreciate you being here. I was going to the NASCAR race in New Hampshire on Sunday, but I'm going down to help provide as much comfort as I can to the folks whose lives have been turned upside down by the hurricane that hit the coast so hard. I know it's affecting parts of North Carolina. We send our prayers to the people whose lives are being affected in your great State, and

we stand ready to help when this storm passes through.

I appreciate you all coming. Let me tell you something about what I believe. I believe Government should stand side by side with people, not try to tell people how to run their life. I believe the proper role of Government is to help people help themselves, not dictate to people. There's a fundamental difference in this campaign in philosophy of Government. And in the course of the next days coming down the stretch, people are going to see a clear difference.

Today I also want you to understand I understand the world of ours is changing, and the fundamental systems of Government must change with the changing world. The Government of the—the society of ours has changed dramatically. For example, in the old days women used to stay at home. Now they're staying at home and working; they're inside the house and outside the house. That's a fundamental shift in our labor market. And yet, the labor laws haven't changed. So we're going to talk about flex-time and comp-time today, to help women juggle the needs of work and family. We want the labor laws to be family-friendly here in America. We want them to adjust with the times.

In the old days, you know, the dad or granddad worked for one company and one career, and today, people are now changing jobs and careers oftentimes. And yet, the worker training programs haven't adjusted with the times. If you've got a workforce where people are changing jobs often, you've got to have a worker training program that helps train people for the jobs which actually exist. And so we're going to talk about how to make sure the worker training programs here in America work.

See, what I'm telling you is many of the systems of Government were designed for yesterday. I'm running for President to make sure they're designed for tomorrow—our tax system is designed for tomorrow, our health care systems are designed for tomorrow, our pension plans are designed for tomorrow. I want to make sure Government helps people be able to realize their dreams here in the greatest country on the face of the Earth.

[At this point, a portion of the President's remarks were missing from the transcript

made available by the Office of the Press Secretary.]

I already worked through one mike. *[Laughter]*

In order to make sure there's a hopeful society, we've got to make sure this economy continues to grow. Now, when you're out gathering the vote, remind your friends and neighbors what this economy has been through. We've been through a recession. We've been through corporate scandals. That meant some people forgot what it meant to be a responsible citizen. We passed laws that now make it clear we're not going to tolerate dishonesty in the boardrooms of our country. And we went through that attack on our country on September the 11th, 2001, that cost jobs. It affected our economy.

We're overcoming these obstacles. These are obstacles in the way for economic growth and vitality. We're overcoming them because we've got great workers, great farmers and ranchers, great small-business owners, and because of tax relief.

The economy has added 1.7 million jobs since August of last year. The national unemployment rate is 5.4 percent, which is lower than the average of the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s. The unemployment rate here in North Carolina is 5 percent. The tax relief we—the economic stimulus plan we passed is working. And so the fundamental question is, how are you going to make sure this recovery is sustained economic growth? I'm going to talk a little bit about that, if you don't mind.

First, we need an energy plan to make sure jobs stay right here in America. In order to make sure people can find work, this country must have an energy plan. I submitted one to Congress that said: We're going to encourage conservation; we'll use renewables like ethanol and biodiesel; we'll use clean coal technologies; we'll use technologies to explore in environmentally friendly ways for natural gas. But it's a plan that understands this: In order to make sure people can find work here in America today and tomorrow, we need to be less dependent on foreign sources of energy.

In order to make sure we have jobs here in America, we need to do something about these junk lawsuits that are threatening

small-business owners. In order to do something about making sure we got jobs here in America, we got to be wise about our regulatory policy. Many small-business owners fill out regulations. I can't guarantee you whether anybody in the Federal Government has ever read them. [Laughter] But I do know paperwork is costly.

In order to make sure jobs stay in America, we got to have wise trade policy. Now, we've opened up our markets for foreign goods, which is good for the American consumers. If you have more choices in the marketplace, you're more likely to get the product you want at a better quality and a better price. So what I'm saying to other nations is, "You treat us the way we treat you." That's why we were the first administration to invoke the China Textile Safeguard. That's why we were the first administration to file a WTO case against China. The message is clear: If you want to trade with us, you treat us fairly, because Americans can compete with anybody, anytime, anywhere if the rules are fair.

Two other things I want to tell you about in order to make sure jobs are here. See, I've got a six-point economic plan to make sure the recovery that we're witnessing is a lasting recovery, so people can realize their dreams here in America. Listen, a hopeful society is one not only that changes fundamental systems to help people, but it's one in which the economic vitality is strong enough for people to be able to find work or start their own business or have a chance to realize their dreams.

Now, we got to be wise about how we spend your money in Washington if we're going to make sure this economy continues to grow. Here's my view of things. We're going to set priorities, and then we're going to let you keep as much money as we possibly can. Because once the Federal Government meets those priorities, I think you can spend your money better than the Federal Government can.

To make sure this economy grows, we got to keep your taxes low. We're going to talk to a small-business owner here in a minute, a woman-owned business. One of the most amazing—one of the most important changes that has taken place in this changing world is that there are 10 million women-owned

businesses here in America. What a phenomenal change in society, isn't it?

I think tax policy ought to encourage the formation of women-owned businesses, and I think tax policy ought not to harm women-owned businesses. Do you realize most businesses today—small businesses are Subchapter S corporations or limited partnerships, which means they pay tax at the individual income-tax level? So when you cut individual income taxes, you're really helping small businesses. You're helping women-owned small businesses.

I think raising taxes on small businesses would be a mistake. It would hurt our economy. I'm running against a fellow who's promised \$2.2 trillion in new Federal spending so far, and we haven't even got to the stretch run yet. So they said, "How are you going to pay for it?" He said, "Oh, that's simple. We'll just tax the rich." You run up the top two brackets of the individual income taxes, you're taxing about a million small businesses here in America. Seventy percent of new jobs in America are created by small businesses, and you're taxing the job creators.

That doesn't make any economic sense. You've heard the talk before, haven't you, "We're just going to tax the rich." Yes. The rich hire accountants and lawyers, so you get stuck with the bill. You can't tax the rich enough to pay for \$2.2 trillion of new spending. There's a tax gap. And guess who gets stuck with that tax gap? You do. But we're not going to let him tax you, because we're going to win in November.

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

The President. Okay. Thank you. We've got work to do here.

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

The President. We've got a little work to do. Thanks. I told you one of the most amazing statistics is the fact there's 10 million small-business owners. I think, in the State of North Carolina, I think 45 percent of the small businesses are owned by women. That is an incredibly hopeful statistic, isn't it? It's a fantastic statistic.

See, when I talk about a changing world, that's what I'm talking about. And so we got one of those entrepreneurs with us today.

Stewart Gordon is with us, a businessowner, The Buttercup, Inc. What do you do?

Stewart Gordon. We're a gift and stationery shop, and we started 29 years ago, five women with an investment of \$500 each—only in America.

The President. Wait a minute. You're obviously still in business.

Ms. Gordon. We are. We're still going strong.

The President. Do you have employees?

Ms. Gordon. We have 37 talented women that work with us. We own our own building, and we have a good time. It's a nourishing environment, not only for us, our staff, but also for our customers. We are true "steel magnolias." So with determination and a little hard work, The Buttercup is strong.

The President. Good. The Buttercup is a Subchapter S corporation. That means they pay tax at the individual income-tax level, and so when you hear them coming out of Washington saying, "Oh, we're just going to tax the rich," keep The Buttercup in mind. See, when they run up the top two brackets, companies like The Buttercup get affected. And if they start taking money out of The Buttercup's coffers, it's less likely the women who work there are going to be able to keep their jobs.

How many people did you hire this year, do you know?

Ms. Gordon. We hired six.

The President. Six people. See, that's what's happening in the economy. Six people hired by this small business here, six there. This economy is growing because the small-business sector is strong. Tax policy ought to help women-owned business, not hurt women-owned businesses. Let's talk about flex-time, do you want to?

[*Ms. Gordon made further remarks.*]

The President. See, Federal labor law—[*applause*—]hold on for a minute—labor law prevents there to be maximum of flex-time. The labor law is stuck in the past. It was written when women stayed at home. The world has changed. We've got women now working in the house and out of the house, like I said, and that's good for our economy. But the labor laws need to adjust to allow moms to be able to juggle the needs of the

workplace and the family. I'm running again because I want to change systems of Government that prevent people from realizing their dreams.

If you make it easier for a mother—or a father, for that matter—to be a good mom or a dad, it's more likely they're going to be a better employee and have a higher quality of life.

Good job. Are you ready? Yes, she's ready. Frances, you're ready. My old buddy Frances. We met before.

One of the things we've changed is to change this concept of Government—getting people dependent upon Government. We changed welfare laws in a more compassionate way, as far as I'm concerned. We made the system more compassionate so as to help people realize their dreams.

And Frances Cunningham is with us—my old buddy, right?

Frances Cunningham. I'm here.

The President. Until I asked her to come on the stage. [*Laughter*] Mother of two.

Ms. Cunningham. Yes. Can you hear me?

The President. Oh, yes, they can hear you loud and clear.

[*Ms. Cunningham made brief remarks.*]

The President. You're doing good.

Ms. Cunningham. Thank you.

The President. Frances is a great story, you know. She was on welfare. They have a great welfare department here. They said, "Let's help—let's help somebody help themselves." That's what I'm telling you about. We're changing systems so people have a chance to realize dreams.

Now what she's saying, she wants to go to the next level. Hopefully, somebody is listening out there in the camera that says, "Wait a minute, maybe Frances could make a"——

Ms. Cunningham. And I have been promoted on my job, and it just opened up a lot of doors for me. And I'm sure a lot of women out here understand, you know, when you have to depend on the Government to help you, that is fine for a while—to help you get your life in order. And it's been great. And I just encourage business to just help one another and help people and

help us to become better citizens out here and mothers and fathers, you know?

The President. That's good. You're doing great. Listen, she has the hardest job in America, though. I want you to know she's got the toughest job in America—a single mother is the toughest job in America. And we need to help. And I appreciate you, you did great.

I want to talk to Kema Jenkins. We're going to talk to Kema right now—

Ms. Cunningham. Can I say one more thing?

The President. Absolutely. You've got the mike and it's still on.

Ms. Cunningham. I just want to thank my supervisor.

The President. Where is your supervisor?

Ms. Cunningham. That's her, right there.

The President. Good job. Thanks for coming.

Ms. Cunningham. She's been very supportive.

The President. Appreciate you being here.

Ms. Cunningham. Give her a handshake for me.

The President. Handshake right now? Well, let me finish the thing here. [Laughter]

Ms. Cunningham. Okay. All right. Thank you. And Mr. Jacobson, he's not here, Department of Social Service director. He's been like a mentor.

The President. That's good. See, people can make a difference in somebody's life. We can change one America one heart and one soul at a time if somebody just takes time out of their life to love a neighbor like you'd like to be loved yourself.

Are you ready, Kema? I told you one of the real challenges we have is to help people have the skills necessary to fill the jobs of the 21st century. We've got a really interesting story here in Kema Jenkins. She is a—she's a good soul who—well, tell us. You used to work for?

Kema Jenkins. A textile company. That is now—

The President. Yes. You don't want to say its name? No? Okay. Pillowtex—I will. [Laughter]

[Ms. Jenkins made brief remarks.]

The President. Let me—if I can help say what you just said. Look, the Government needs to help people gain the skills necessary to fill jobs. I know what it's like here with the textile industry, and so do you. It's been hit hard. But the amazing thing about your economy is that it is diversifying. There are health care jobs available. And the Government, I think, has a responsibility to help people like Kema gain the skills necessary to fill the jobs of the 21st century.

Nobody likes jobs going away. But there's new opportunity. In a changing economy like ours, there are new opportunities for people. When an economy changes it certainly creates dislocation, and I understand that. And that's not good. But what is good is that jobs are replaced with higher paying jobs so long as the people have the skill set necessary to fill the jobs. And that's what we're talking about here. Women need help. If they get laid off from work, they need help. That's why I'm such a big believer in the community college system, in helping people go back and gain the skills.

You can't say—Government can't pass a law that says Kema has got to go back to school. She's got to make up her own mind. She said, "I want to embetter myself," and "Is there a place to find help?" I think it's a legitimate use of your taxpayer—of your money, is to help somebody like Kema be able to realize dreams in the workplace.

Now, let me ask you something. One of the interesting things about education—I didn't see you all over there; that's the end zone. Okay, never mind.

One of the interesting things about education is that as you increase your skill level, you increase your productivity. It means you're a more productive worker. And when you become more productive, you make more money. One of the interesting things about a changing economy is that our workers are more productive than ever before. That means instead of using a hoe, you use a backhoe. Or instead of using, you know, a regular old standard typewriter, you use a computer. In other words, that's an example of becoming more productive.

But that creates a challenge for us. It creates a challenge for us in our society because the more productive workers become, the

faster the economy has to grow so people can find work. That's why my six-point plan is essential to making sure people in a productive world can find work.

So you worked there for Pillowtex for a while and—so what's the difference in pay? I'm not—maybe not exactly numbers. More, less, same?

Ms. Jenkins. I'm going to be making more this year than I've made the past 21 years at Pillowtex.

The President. Yes. See, that's the great opportunity for women. It's the great opportunity for women in the workplace. If you can help a person with the skill set necessary to work, help them become more productive, they make more money. She's making more money in the beginning of a new career than she made at the end of her other career.

And that's what's happening all around America. That's why it's important for us to change fundamental systems to help women—and men, for that matter—realize their dreams. And that's what we're talking about. It's helping people. It's a difference of philosophy. As opposed to saying, you know, "You will be dependent on Government," or, "You will do this, or you will do that," my philosophy says, "Can we help you, and can we help you help yourself." In a changing world, helping people help themselves creates a more hopeful America.

Let me talk about health care right quick. It's an issue in this campaign. There is a fundamental difference between what I believe and my opponent believes when it comes to health care. I believe the best health care decisions are made by doctors and patients. I believe it is essential that the Federal Government does not run your health care.

And I put out some practical plans to help people. Do you know that about 50 percent of the working uninsured work for small businesses? And the reason why they're uninsured is because small businesses have trouble purchasing affordable health care for their employees. And yet, most small-business owners want to purchase affordable health care for their employees. I see a lot of the women businessowners here nodding. They—the best way to help small businesses and their employees and their families is to allow small businesses to pool together, to

bind together across jurisdictional boundaries so they can buy insurance at the same discounts that big businesses get to do.

Those are called association health plans. My opponent is against them. I think they make a lot of sense. Government should help people solve problems. The—health savings accounts are a very interesting way for people to save money when it comes to health care and to help small businesses afford insurance for their employees. Health savings accounts are basically catastrophic plans with a high deductible and that the employer and employee contribute, based upon the contractual arrangement, tax-free money into an account. So, in other words, if you've got—say, the insurance company will pay for everything over \$2,000, you cover from zero to 2,000 either as a contribution to your employee or the employee puts it in, and it's your money. And if you spend the 2,000, you replenish next year. If you spend nothing on your health care because you're a good exerciser, you make good choices, you've been lucky, things went well, that 2,000 is your money. It earns interest tax-free. You carry it over from one year to the next, and then you've got a nest egg for the next year.

And basically what it says is, it says that people make decisions on health care, not some faceless bureaucrat. It means that you've got a chance to control this health care plan. In a changing world, people change jobs and careers quite often, which means you take your health savings account with you wherever you go.

To make sure health care is available and affordable, we're going to spend some money to make sure that children who are eligible for the low-income health programs at the government level get signed up. See, there's too many of the kids not signing up what they call SCHIP. It's a good program, and we ought to encourage families to take advantage of the low-income health programs for our children.

I also want to tell you another interesting idea. Actually, we're doing it right now. To make sure health care is available for all of us, we're going to expand community health centers. Now, community health centers are places where the indigent and the poor can get primary care and preventative care. It's

a good use of your money to expand community health centers. It's better that people get this kind of care and get this kind of care at a community health center and not in an emergency room of a local hospital. And so, in a second term, we will expand community health centers to every poor county in America.

Two other things on health care I want to talk about—want to talk about Medicare. I went to Washington to fix problems, not pass them on to future Presidents and future generations. We had an issue in Medicare. We had an issue in Medicare. A lot of senior women were affected by a Medicare system that hadn't modernized. People say, "What are you talking about?" I say, "Well, Medicare would pay for the \$100,000 for the heart surgery but would not pay for the prescription drugs that might prevent the heart surgery from being needed in the first place." That didn't make any sense. It didn't make any sense for Medicare recipients. It didn't make any sense for taxpayers.

And so we're modernizing the system. They've got drug discount cards now available for our seniors. I urge our seniors to look at the drug discount card. People are having great savings when it comes to prescription drug coverage, particularly our poor seniors, because we're helping them with the purchase of drugs. In 2005, there will be preventative screenings paid for by Medicare for the first time ever in the system. It helps us solve problems by diagnosing problems early. And in 2006, our seniors will get prescription drug coverage, and the system makes sense.

And finally, we've got a healer with us today, a doc, Andrea Torsone. One reason why it's hard for small businesses to afford health care, one reason why your health care costs are going up, one reason why docs are becoming less available for people is because these junk lawsuits are beginning to hurt the health-care industry significantly. If you're a doctor and you're getting sued all the time or your neighbor is getting sued all the time, you're going to practice defensive medicine so that you can defend yourself in a court of law. That costs—practicing of defensive medicine, in other words, you're prescribing more than you need to do; you're just doing

the extra X ray here or extra test there—that costs the Federal Government \$28 billion a year, to practice defensive medicine. I mean, there is a direct correlation between these lawsuits and the cost of Government.

We need to do something about it. Too many good docs are leaving practice. Too many women are having trouble with keeping their ob-gyn. Particularly the ob part of the ob-gyn. And they're getting run out of business. I've talked to too many women who are pregnant, and they don't have their local doc because the local doc had to surrender the practice due to the high cost of premiums caused by lawsuits. And that's not right. That's not right. Good health care for women and good health care for every American depends on having a legal system that is reasonable. We need medical liability reform—now.

And this is an issue in this campaign. This is an issue in this campaign. There's a fundamental difference of opinion. See, I don't think you can be pro-doctor and pro-patient and pro-hospital and pro-trial-lawyer at the same time. I think you have to choose. I think you have to choose. My opponent made his choice, and he put a trial lawyer on the ticket.

Audience members. Boo-o-o!

The President. I made my choice. I'm standing with the docs and patients. We're for medical liability reform in this campaign.

All right, Doc. You are a—what kind of doc?

[Dr. Andrea Torsone made brief remarks.]

The President. See, this is a problem. Here is a kind, compassionate soul who is obviously talented and went to school because she wanted to deliver babies. And the cost of doing medicine is so high because of lawsuits that she no longer does so. It's just one less person to help a woman, and it's—we got a national problem with this issue. She said her premiums have gone up 300 percent in a very brief period of time. That's because it's like a legal lottery out there, and you just keep filing these lawsuits, one after another. And it's happening State after State. Good people are saying, "I'm through. I wish I could practice. I wish I could heal. I wish I could help, but I can't afford it anymore."

And this is a living example of why we need medical liability reform in Washington, DC. Listen, I believe that this is a national issue. I believe it is a national problem. And I know it's causing our budgets to go up, and that's why I submitted a plan to the House and the Senate. It passed the House. It's stuck in the Senate because there's too many trial lawyers in the United States Senate.

I also want to share some thoughts with you about my most important duty, which is protect you and your children. That's the most important duty I have. Let me share some lessons I've learned from September the 11th.

One, we face an enemy that has no conscience. They—it's hard for us to understand people that will kill for the sake of an ideology of hatred, but they do. And therefore, you cannot negotiate with these people. You cannot hope for the best. You cannot sit down and maybe think, "Well, gosh, there's a chance we can rationalize with them." You cannot. And that's why our strategy in this Government is to find them in places around the world so we do not have to face them here—is to bring them to justice in foreign lands. *[Applause]* Okay, hold on a second. Thank you all, but not yet.

Secondly—I've got more than one lesson to share with you. Secondly, this is a different kind of struggle. It's a different kind of war. There are places where these people can hide and wait and plan. And therefore, I laid out a doctrine which said, "If you harbor a terrorist, you're just as equally—you're just as guilty as the terrorist." Now, when the President says something—hold on for a second—when the President says something, he better mean what he says in order to make this world more peaceful. I meant what I said. I meant what I said.

The Taliban ignored what we said. And thanks to a lot of really fine, fine soldiers, the Taliban is no longer in power in Afghanistan. And we're better off for it. The world is safer for it, and so is America. No longer does Al Qaida have a safe haven. See, these people are like parasites, and they try to find a weak host so they can eventually kind of become the host. And as a result of removing the Taliban from power, we're safer. These Al Qaida no longer have safe haven there.

There's still some hiding in remote regions of that part of the world, and we're after them. Day after day, we're slowly but surely dismantling the Al Qaida network. Seventy-five percent of their leaders and associates have been brought to justice. Over the next 4 years, we'll continue to keep the pressure on. That's our duty to the American people.

But I also want to tell you what else happened in Afghanistan. This is a country where many young girls didn't get to go to school. When I talk about ideologies of hate, I'm talking about people that would not allow girls to be educated. That's part of an ideology of hate. Their mothers were taken to the squares of that country and whipped or killed in some cases, in the sports stadium, because they would not toe the line of this dark ideology. That's the way these people think. There is no freedom, in their view. As a matter of fact, freedom frightens them, freedom of thought, freedom of religion, freedom of speech.

Today, in Afghanistan—this is 3 years ago, which really isn't very long, when you think about it—3 years after these people were brutalizing much of that society, 10 million citizens, 41 percent of whom are women, have registered to vote in the upcoming Presidential election. Isn't that fantastic? Think about that. This is a society which has gone—which is going from darkness to light because of freedom. And we're better off for it. We're better off that Afghanistan is a free country. It helps us to have an ally in the war on terror there, as opposed to a place where the terrorists can hide.

Third lesson is that we must take threats seriously before they fully materialize. That's one of the lessons of September the 11th. It's a harsh lesson, but it's one we must never forget. Prior to September the 11th, planners and thinkers in Washington, DC, could see a threat and say, "Well, we don't have to worry about it because it could never come and hurt us." That's what we thought. It wasn't that way during the cold war, admittedly, but we had a plan, mutually assured destruction. But after the cold war, we thought we were safe, didn't we? If you really think about the time, 3 short years ago, we felt like we were protected. And so when we saw threats we could decide to deal with it

if we wanted to deal with it or not. After that day, every threat must be taken seriously.

In Saddam Hussein, I saw a threat. I saw a threat because he was a sworn enemy of the United States of America. He was our enemy. As a matter of fact, they were firing missiles—he was firing missiles at U.S. aircraft enforcing the world's sanctions. We had been to war with Saddam Hussein before. He had been to war in his neighborhood. In other words, he was a destabilizing influence. He had terrorist ties. Abu Nidal killed Leon Klinghoffer, if you remember. Remember that incident? The guy was in Baghdad, as were people in his organization. Zarqawi, the beheader, was in and out of Baghdad, and he had a poisons network in Iraq. He was a terrorist. Saddam Hussein paid the families of suicide bombers. Suicide bombing is a terrorist activity. He had terrorist ties. He also had the capability of making weapons of mass destruction, and he had used weapons of mass destruction. And the intelligence I looked at and the intelligence Congress looked at said he actually had them there.

So I saw a threat. And I went to the United States Congress and said, "We got an issue here that we're going to have to deal with." Members of the Congress of both political parties looked at the very same intelligence I looked at—the very same intelligence—and they remembered the same history I remembered, and they concluded that Saddam Hussein was a threat and authorized the use of force. My opponent looked at the same intelligence I looked at, and when they said, "Do you authorize the use of force," he voted "yes."

Before the Commander in Chief commits troops into harm's way, before the Commander in Chief looks a mom or dad in the eye and says, "I'm sending your son or daughter into harm's way," we must have tried all options—all options. And I was hopeful diplomacy would solve this problem. I was hopeful that we could diplomatically deal with the threat. And so I went to the United Nations, said, "We see a problem." They looked at the same intelligence I looked at. They remembered the same history I remembered, and with a 15-to-nothing vote in the United Nations Security Council, they

voted to tell Saddam Hussein, "You disclose, disarm, or face serious consequences."

Now, I told you when I say something, you better mean it if you're the President. I think when international bodies speak, they better mean it as well. And they said this. Saddam Hussein, as he had for resolution after resolution after resolution after resolution, ignored this one. He wasn't about to disclose, disarm. So he didn't believe there would be serious consequences, I guess. As a matter of fact, when they sent inspectors in, the U.N. sent inspectors in, he systematically deceived them. And I knew he was deceiving them. So I have a choice to make at this point in time: Do I take the word of a madman and forget the lessons of September the 11th, or take action to defend our country? Given that choice, I will defend America every time.

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

The President. Okay, hold on.

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

The President. Thank you all. Thank you all.

A couple of other things I want to share. Let me share some other things with you right quick. We didn't find the stockpiles we thought we would find, the stockpiles that everybody thought was there. But I do know that he had the capability of making those weapons, and he could have passed that capability on to an enemy. And that's a risk we could not afford to take after September the 11th. Knowing what I know today, I would have made the same decision. The world is better off with Saddam Hussein sitting in a prison cell, make no mistake about it.

Prime Minister Allawi is coming here next week. He's a tough guy who believes that Iraq should be free. And he cares about the hopes and aspirations of the Iraqi people. He is—I'm looking forward to meeting him. I think he's coming to speak to the Congress—I hope I didn't let the cat out of the bag. Everybody knows that? Okay, good. [Laughter] Hope he knows it. [Laughter] I'm looking forward to the American people hearing him. It's important that we hear from someone there on the ground who believes that

people want to be free, believes that the people of Iraq really want to be free.

Here's our strategy in both Afghanistan and Iraq. We're going to help the Iraqis hold elections. The Afghan people are holding their elections soon. There will be free elections in Iraq in January of this year. People want to vote. People want to participate. We're going to help train Iraqi police and army so they can defend themselves against the few who are trying to stop the dreams of the many in that country. We'll help them, and we're making progress. We're making progress. It's tough. Of course it's tough, because there are killers there who are trying to shake our will and shake the will of the Iraqis. It's tough on the Iraqi citizens. These people are indiscriminately killing because they want to cause us to leave, and they want the Iraqis to grow weary of trying to be a free society. Listen to Allawi. He'll talk about what it means to be free.

Once we get these folks trained and get them on the path to stability and democracy, our troops are coming home with the honor they earned. And I appreciate those in the United States military. I'm proud you all are here.

Here's the fourth lesson I want to share with you. The fourth lesson is, when we put troops in harm's way, they deserve the full support of the Federal Government, full support. That's why I went to the Congress and asked for \$87 billion of support for our troops. And this is important funding, really important funding. As a matter of fact, it was so important that there was wide bipartisan support in the Senate and in the House. As a matter of fact, when I say "wide bipartisan support," I'm talking only 12 Members of the Senate voted against the funding, two of whom are my opponent and his runningmate.

Audience members. Boo-o-o!

The President. When you're out rounding up the vote, when you're rounding up the vote, remind people of this fact. Only four Members of the Senate voted to authorize the use of force and then voted not to fund the troops, two of whom are my opponent and his runningmate.

Now, you might remember, when they asked him, they said, "Why," and he said, "Well, I actually did vote for the \$87 billion,

before I voted against it." There's not a lot of folks in Charlotte, North Carolina who speak that way, I can assure you.

We've done hard work. We've done hard work. Because of the hard work we've done, this world is becoming more peaceful. I believe in the transformational power of liberty. That's what I believe. It's the heart of much of what I think, is because I believe liberty can change enemies to allies and change distressed societies to hopeful societies. I like to share with people my feelings about Japan. You know, Prime Minister Koizumi is a friend of mine. I like him. He's a good guy to talk to. And he is the Prime Minister of a country with which we were at war during my dad's lifetime. After all, he was there, as was your dads and granddads. Think about that. It wasn't all that long ago that Japan was the sworn enemy of the United States of America. We were fighting them. Young men went off to war, and a lot didn't come back.

And yet, after World War II, Harry Truman and other American citizens believed that if Japan became a democracy the world would be better off. And that was hard work, really hard work. You can imagine why. You can imagine the moms here saying, "What do you mean, working with Japan to make a democracy. They just killed—caused great harm." And yet, there was this unshakeable faith that liberty could change societies. And as a result of that unshakeable faith of a prior President and citizens of this country, I now sit down at the table with Prime Minister Koizumi talking about keeping the peace. Think about that.

Someday, an American President, whoever he or she may be, will be sitting down with a duly elected leader of Iraq talking about how to keep the peace in the greater Middle East. And our children and grandchildren will be better off for it.

Liberty can change societies. Free societies are peaceful societies. Free societies help change the world. I believe everybody longs for freedom. And I believe this not because freedom is America's gift to the world; I believe it because freedom is the Almighty God's gift to each man and woman in this world.

I'm here today to let you know I have a reason to seek the office again. I'm running to help transform systems of Government so people can realize their dreams. I'm running again to continue to lead so this world will be a safer place. I'm running again because I want to help spread the peace we all want. I'm running again because I have great faith in the American people and have great faith in the values that make us a great nation. I know where I want to lead. And I want to thank your help—for your help in helping us get there. With your help, we'll win a great victory in November of this year.

God bless. God bless you all.

NOTE: The President spoke at 4:01 p.m. at the Charlotte Merchandise Mart. In his remarks, he referred to Senator Zell Miller of Georgia, who made the keynote address at the Republican National Convention; Representative Richard Burr of North Carolina, senatorial candidate in North Carolina; North Carolina Commissioner of Labor Cherie Berry; North Carolina gubernatorial candidate Patrick Ballantine; Teresa Earnhardt, chief executive officer and president, Dale Earnhardt, Inc.; senior Al Qaida associate Abu Musab Al Zarqawi; Prime Minister Ayad Allawi of the Iraqi Interim Government; and Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi of Japan. This item was not received in time for publication in the appropriate issue.

Proclamation 7816—National Hispanic Heritage Month, 2004 *September 17, 2004*

*By the President of the United States
of America*

A Proclamation

During National Hispanic Heritage Month, we recognize Hispanic Americans for helping to shape our national character and strengthen our communities. The warmth and vitality of the Hispanic culture are great gifts to America and are part of the unique fabric of our country.

Hispanic Americans have enriched our Nation through contributions in many professions and fields, including education, law, government, business, science, sports, and the arts. Since our Nation's founding, Hispanic Americans have served bravely in the

United States Armed Forces, earning more than 3 dozen Medals of Honor and numerous distinguished military decorations for their leadership, courage, and patriotism. Today, Hispanic Americans in our Armed Forces, National Guard, and Reserve units continue this proud legacy as they stand watch on the front lines of freedom. The hard work, values, and devotion to community of Hispanic Americans set a positive example for all Americans.

Across our country, we are working to continue helping Hispanic Americans realize the great promise of America. In 2002, I set a goal of increasing the number of minority homeowners by at least 5.5 million by the end of the decade. We are making good progress—having added more than 1.6 million minority homeowners so far. My Administration's business agenda and economic policies have helped create an environment in which Latino small business owners in the United States are starting new businesses and employing millions of people, expanding trade throughout the Americas, and generating billions in revenue. Through the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, we are working to ensure that schools are serving every student. In addition, we are committed to improving immigration services while strengthening national security.

I join with all Americans in celebrating the heritage, culture, spirit, and contributions of Hispanic Americans. To honor the achievements of Hispanic Americans, the Congress, by Public Law 100–402, as amended, has authorized and requested the President to issue annually a proclamation designating September 15 through October 15, as “National Hispanic Heritage Month.”

Now, Therefore, I, George W. Bush, President of the United States of America, do hereby proclaim September 15 through October 15, 2004, as National Hispanic Heritage Month. I call upon public officials, educators, librarians, and all the people of the United States to observe this month with appropriate ceremonies, activities, and programs.

In Witness Whereof, I have hereunto set my hand this seventeenth day of September, in the year of our Lord two thousand four, and of the Independence of the United