Remarks and a Question-and-Answer Session in Niles, Michigan

May 3, 2004

The President. Thank you all. Thanks a lot. Thank you all very much. Thanks a lot. Thanks for coming. Thank you all. Please be seated. Thanks for coming. Do you think it's all right if I take off my jacket? We're not in Washington anymore. We're in Michigan. Thanks for coming out. Thanks for coming out today. Laura and I are thrilled you're here.

Audience member. Four more!

The President. I'm ready for it. That's what I'm here to assure you: I know what I want to do for the next 4 years. I look forward to having a dialog about that. Sometimes there are kind of fancy speeches, and sometimes we have dialogs. This is a dialog. I want to share some thoughts with you. I'd like to answer some of your questions.

But first, I want to tell you how much Laura and I appreciate you coming out to say hello. It is awfully generous of you and the folks lining the streets to have been so friendly, and we appreciate it.

I told the people back here they had the best view. [*Laughter*] I am really proud of Laura. I love her dearly. She is a fabulous First Lady. She and I are having the time of our life. It's hard to believe this, but the Presidency and living in the White House has made a strong marriage richer, and that's because she is such a loving, calm soul. And I love the influence she's had on our country. She speaks about libraries and reading. One of the things she loves to do is encourage teachers or those who want to be teachers to join the teaching ranks. And for those of you who are teachers, thanks for doing what you're doing, on behalf of me and Laura. Probably the best reason to send me back is so Laura Bush will be the First Lady for 4 more years.

Thank you all for coming. Listen, I'm here to ask for your help. I can't win Michigan without you. I can't win Indiana without the folks in South Bend helping as well. Listen, I need you to go to your coffee shops and your community centers and your places of worship, and you tell the people, "George W. Bush has a positive, hopeful vision for everybody in this country."

The way you win elections is you count on the people. You listen to the people, and you count on the people to turn out the vote. We've got what we call georgewbush.com. We didn't have that in 1978 when we were running for Congress. We've got it now. It's an opportunity for people to get on the Internet to figure out how to help, how to become a volunteer in the campaign, how to help register the voters, how to help turn people out to the polls in November. And with your help, there is no doubt in my mind I can carry Michigan, and I will be reelected for 4 more years.

I want to thank Congressman Fred Upton for his service to the great State of Michigan. As we say out in west Texas, he's a good hand. [*Laughter*] That means he's a good Congressman. I really enjoy working with him. He cares a lot about the people—about how the people of Michigan are doing, and he's really a good, honest, honorable soul.

And I appreciate Congressman Chris Chocola coming up from Indiana today. Thank you, Chris. He's done a fine job in the Congress as well. He's what they call a freshman. That would be the first-term Congressman. But he's made his mark. He's an honorable guy. He's an effective United States Congressman, like Fred is, and I'm proud of the service you've shown. I'm glad Sarah is here. Happy birthday, Sarah. Today is Sarah Chocola's birthday. I wouldn't have known that if her thoughtful husband, Chris, hadn't have told me on Air Force One. [*Laughter*]

I appreciate the mayor. Mr. Mayor, the mayor of Niles, is with us today. Mike, thank you for coming. I like to remind mayors, fill the potholes. [*Laughter*] Thanks for coming, Mayor. Glad you're here.

Statehouse Speaker Rick Johnson is here. Mr. Speaker, thank you for coming. Members of the legislature and the State senate are here; local officials are here. But more importantly, you're here. I'm proud to have you here.

I'm proud to share with you why I'm upbeat about the future of this country. One reason I'm upbeat is because I understand the strength and character of the American

people. We're a strong nation. We're a decent nation, and we're a compassionate country. What I want to do is share with you why I want to be President for 4 more years, and it's to make sure America is a safer country, a stronger country, and a better country.

You know, I wasn't sure—when I was campaigning in Michigan in 2000, I never would have dreamt I'd be standing in front of you 4 years later saying we were at war. It never crossed my mind. But we are at war. And my most important job is to make sure America is a safe country by defeating the enemy. That's the task ahead.

We're doing everything we can in Washington to organize our Government so we can better respond to threats. I want to thank the first-responders who are here today, the local police and firefighters and emergency teams who are dedicating their lives to the service of their—of the men and women in this part of the world. I want to thank you for what you're doing. I want to thank you for your—[*applause*].

And we're talking better between the Federal Government and the State government and the local government. We're sharing information better. We're better prepared. But we've got to be right 100 percent of the time to protect the homeland, and the enemy has got to be right only once. The best way to defend the homeland is to stay on the offensive and bring the killers to justice, which is precisely what I will continue to do as the President of the United States. I've got a plan to win the war on terror.

And we're making progress in this different kind of war. See, we're dealing with individuals who will hide in caves and order attacks. They have no conscience. It's hard for Americans to understand that, but they don't care about innocent life. We do. They hate us because of what we love, and we love our freedom. And we're not going to change—we're not going to change. They won't intimidate us. They're not going to frighten us. This is America.

Audience member. We're behind you, Mr. President!

The President. Thank you, sir.

We're cutting off their money. We're—about two-thirds of their known leaders have been brought to justice. Slowly but surely, we're winning, but we must not relent. I've got a plan to defeat the enemy by better sharing intelligence, by making sure our troops have got all they need.

Listen, some have said this is just a matter of law enforcement. This isn't a matter of law enforcement. We tried that attitude before. And while we had that attitude that this was just a law enforcement matter, the enemy was planning and plotting. No, this isn't a law enforcement matter. This is a war, and the President of the United States must use all the assets of the United States to defend America.

The President must be clear-sighted and, when he says something, mean it. It's essential that the President of the United States speak clearly and mean what he says. So when I say that if you harbor a terrorist, you're just as guilty as the terrorist, I meant what I said. And the Taliban, which had harbored Al Qaida and helped train Al Qaida, found out what the United States and our friends meant. They're no longer in power. And the world is better off for it, and America is safer because of the actions we took in Afghanistan.

Part of making sure you're effective as the President and the world is more peaceful is for the President to speak clearly and not send contradictory signals to the world. I want you to know how life is significantly better for, particularly, young women in Afghanistan, thanks to America. Listen, we're a compassionate country because we love freedom. Our hearts break when we hear that young girls were literally enslaved to the ideological backwardness of the Taliban. And now, thanks to the United States' action and our coalition action in Afghanistan, a free country is emerging. We are safer, and young girls in Afghanistan for the first time now go to school.

Those are the kinds of things Americans care about. That's what we love about our country. We're not only tough when we have to be to defend ourselves; we're compassionate toward people from all walks of life. Laura has been especially important to the women of Afghanistan because of the messages she has sent, and so have the American people. Afghanistan is far from perfect, but it's a heck of a lot better today than it was

2 years ago. And as a result, the world is a better place.

My job is also to remember lessons learned. You've got to be clear-sighted when you're the President. The lesson I learned on September the 11th is, not only are we facing an enemy that will kill at the drop of a hat, trying to shake our will, but that when we see a threat overseas, we've got to take it seriously. You know, not every threat will be dealt with with military means, but certain threats get to the point where after diplomacy has failed, the United States of America has no other option. That was the case in Iraq.

The lesson of September the 11th is oceans no longer protect us, and therefore, we cannot let threats fully materialize. In other words, we can't see a threat and hope it goes away. We can't see a threat and say, "Oh, gosh, maybe the person will change their mind and all of a sudden their hatred for America will diminish." We've got to deal with threats.

I looked at intelligence on Iraq and saw a threat. The United States Congress looked at that same intelligence; people from both political parties looked at the same intelligence I did. They saw the threat. The United Nations Security Council looked at the intelligence, and it saw a threat and, therefore, voted unanimously to say to Saddam Hussein, "Get rid of your weapons and your programs, or you will face serious consequences."

Now, remember, I'm the kind of fellow that when I say something, I mean it. And I said when the United Nations Security Council—we meant it—"Disarm, or face serious consequences." Saddam Hussein, as he had for nearly a decade, defied the demands of the free world, and so I was faced with a choice. Do I trust the word of a madman who had used weapons of mass destruction, who had professed his hatred for America, who had ties to terrorist organizations, who had funded suiciders into Israel, or do I defend America? Given that choice, I will defend America every time.

The world is better off without Saddam Hussein in power. The world is better off because he sits in a prison cell. Because we acted, torture rooms are closed; rape rooms no longer exist; mass graves are no longer a possibility in Iraq. Listen, the world is better off. We've still got hard work to do. And we've been through tough times. We've been through tough times recently. We've got a lot of brave folks over there helping the Iraqis become a free society. It's in our interests we succeed.

See, not only did we make America more secure by getting rid of Saddam, we are literally changing the world by insisting that freedom and democracy prevail in a part of the world where there's hatred and violence and recruitment of suiciders.

What America loves is our freedom. But we also understand that freedom is not America's gift to the world. Freedom is the almighty God's gift to each man and woman in this world.

We'll prevail—we will prevail. And when Iraq is free and democratic, that part of the world will start to change. And then those soldiers and the families who mourn for the loss will be able to look back, and they will be able to say about their loved one, "Job well done." The world is better off for it, and generations of Americans are more likely to live in peace and freedom. A secure America is my most important job, and America will be more secure when freedom prevails in parts of the world that have never seen the freedom that we know in America.

We'll pass sovereignty on June the 30th. That's what we told the Iraqi people. There's a lot of people there wondering whether or not America will keep its word. They're wondering whether or not politics will cause politicians to change their mind in the midst of this transfer of sovereignty. I'm not changing my mind. I'm not going to change my mind at all. We're doing the right thing. We'll always honor those who have sacrificed for our freedom. We will not allow them to die in vain. Iraq will be free, and America will be more secure.

A stronger America means an America that has got a strong economy, and I fully understand there are some people in this part of the world who still hurt, people that are looking for work. My attitude is, you know, the statistics are good, but they're not good if you're somebody looking for work. My attitude is, so long as we've got people looking

for work, the President has got to make sure there's an environment in which there's—jobs are being created.

And listen, we've been through a lot. They say, "How can you be optimistic—such an optimistic fellow?" I say, "Well, I'm optimistic because I know what we have been through." Think about what the economy has been through. Recession—when we first came into office, the economy was going backwards. The stock market was declining.

And then we got hit, and the attacks on September the 11th hurt our economy, if you really think about it. It shook our minds a little bit. It kind of was a tough moment, incredibly tough moment in our history, and yet we rebounded from that.

Then we had some corporate citizens forget to tell the truth. They forgot what it meant to be responsible. We passed tough laws, by the way. It's clear now that you'll get busted if you don't tell the truth to your shareholders and your employees.

Then my decision to go into Iraq obviously affected capital formation. Listen, when you're reading the TV screens that say "March to War," it's not very good for planning. If you're a small-business owner and you see "March to War," it's not conducive to risking new capital.

So we've overcome a lot because our economy is growing. The GDP growth is strong. Job creation is good, but there are certain parts of the world where they're not good. Homeownership is great. Listen, minority homeownership in America is at the highest rate ever since I've been the President of the United States. Seven-hundred-fifty-thousand new jobs created since last August, that's positive; 5,700—or 5,900 new jobs in Michigan in the month of March. But Michigan lags behind, and I fully understand that.

But I want to remind you how we got—overcome those obstacles. See, I believe that the best way to generate economic growth is to let people keep more of their own money. There are some people in Washington who think the best way to generate jobs and growth is to grow the size of the Federal Government. No, I think it's to let people keep more of their own money. The tax cuts we passed came at the absolute right time.

I'm going to talk to a small-business owner here and a family that benefited from the tax cuts. It's probably a better way for me to describe to you what I'm talking about to let other people describe their lives and what the tax relief meant. But it made a difference.

The fundamental question is not, "What have you done," though—"What are you going to?" And the first thing I'm going to do is to continue pressing to make sure America is the best place to do business in the world. If you're interested—the question about job creation and job growth depends upon this being a good place to do business. If it's a lousy place to do business, we won't have the job growth. If it's a good place for the entrepreneur to realize his or her dreams, it will be a great place.

And so therefore, we need tort reform in America. Listen, I'm all for people getting justice in the courts. I'm against the frivolous lawsuits that make it very difficult for business to expand.

And so if we want to be competitive and be the leader in the world in the economy, if we want to be a strong nation, we've got to have an energy policy. We don't have an energy policy. It's bottled up in the United States Congress. These two good Members of the Congress voted for one. They can't get it out of the Senate. It's stuck. But you can't have a vibrant economy unless you become less dependent on foreign sources of energy, and there's ways to do that.

Fred and I were talking about how wonderful it will be if some President sometime said, "The corn crop is up, and we're less dependent on foreign sources of energy." That requires a different attitude about alternative sources of fuel. We've got to have clean coal technology. We've got to have different kind of automobiles in the out-years—hydrogen-powered automobiles. We've got to encourage conservation, but we've also got to use the resources we have to get there. We've got to use the resources we have in an environmentally friendly way to transition to the time when technology will make us less dependent on foreign sources of energy. We need to be exploring for energy. We need to be less dependent on foreign sources of fuel if we expect this economy to be competitive and for the jobs to be created.

The cost of health care makes it hard for small business to expand and people to find work. And therefore, we've got to have reasonable policy. By the way, there's a debate in Washington as to who best to run the health care industries of America, whether it be the Federal Government or whether it be the consumers. I believe we ought to empower consumers, not the Federal Government, to make the decisions in the health care industry.

That's why I'm for association health care plans that will allow small businesses to pool risk in order to bring down the cost of health care for their employees. That's why I'm for health savings accounts, which empower consumers. These are new products. This is something that makes eminent sense for the future of our country because it puts the decisionmaking power into the hands of the consumer. It makes sure the doctor-patient relationship is central to health care.

I'm for medical liability reform at the Federal level so that we've got docs available and affordable. Listen, junk lawsuits run up the cost of medicine, and it makes it hard for people to find work in this country. We need medical liability reform in Washington, DC.

Finally, I want—I hope you understand that—how important education is to making sure that we've got jobs here in America. First of all, we're not going to be able to compete for the jobs of the 21st century if our kids can't read. It's as simple as that. If we want jobs here at home, we'd better make sure we get it right when it comes to public education. The No Child Left Behind Act is a great piece of legislation. You know why? It challenges the soft bigotry of low expectations. It raises the bar. It expects the best. It believes that every child can learn. It's got money in there to make sure that when you find problems early, that they're solved before it's too late. It says, "Why don't you show us whether or not the children can read and write and add and subtract." It is a hopeful piece of legislation that's going to change America.

We're about to talk about the community college system and how important it is to make sure the workers have the skills to fill the jobs of the 21st century. Our economy is transitioning. In other words, there's some industries that are not competitive, but there are other new industries that are growing, and they're looking for workers. And so therefore, we've got to make sure we've got a system that is able to take a person and train that person so they can fill the new jobs.

We're about to talk to a person who went to the community college system after having worked in the manufacturing sector. I'll let him tell the story. But what I'm telling you is, is that with good job training, we can have jobs in the short run—good job training, we can have jobs in the long run.

So this is part of the way to make sure America is not only strong today but strong in the future. I have a plan. I have a plan that says basically this: The role of Government is not to create wealth; the role of Government is to create an environment in which the entrepreneurial spirit flourishes, in which innovation is strong and important, and in which our workers get the skills necessary to fill the jobs that will be coming in the 21st century.

When I came in, Laura said, "You better keep this thing short, or otherwise the bus driver is going to leave." [*Laughter*] I obviously didn't listen to her.

Finally, I want to talk about a better America. In order to understand how to have a better America, you've got to understand the relationship between Government and people. Government is not a loving organization. Government is justice and law. Love comes from the hearts and souls of the citizens. If you're interested in changing America, if you want America to be a better place, it's really important for the President and others to rally the true strength of the country, which lies in the hearts and souls of our citizens.

I've spent a lot of time talking about the examples in different communities of people who are taking time out of their lives to love their neighbor just like they'd like to be loved themselves. It's such a powerful part of our uniqueness that America is defined—if you think about it, America's compassion is defined not by Government but by loving acts that take place on a daily basis in communities all across our country. I call that the American spirit, and the job of the President is to understand that that spirit exists, to lift it up, to herald it, and to nurture it.

Today we're going to—okay, I'm through blowing off. I'm now going to ask some citizens to maybe share some thoughts with us, and then I'll answer some of your questions. First, I had the privilege of meeting Mike Welch, a small-business owner. Mike brought his family. Mike, it was nice of you to bring your family. [*Laughter*]

He is the president of Express-1. Now, it is what they call an S corp. In other words, Mike's small business pays taxes at the individual income-tax rate. So when you hear me talking about cutting individual income taxes, not only think about your own wallet, but think about what individual income-tax cuts do to small businesses.

An integral part of our economic policy has been—and if I'm fortunate enough to win President, will continue to be—to make sure that the small-business sector of America is vibrant and alive. And I'll tell you why. Seventy percent of new jobs in America are created by the small-business sector. And therefore, when you hear people talking about job creation, you better hope that they understand the vitality and importance of the small business.

So, again, I repeat, we cut taxes on everybody who pays taxes. We don't want Government saying, "Okay, you have to pay more, and you don't get to pay any kind of thing. In other words, if we're going to have tax relief, the fair thing is for everybody to have tax relief, but it was especially effective for helping businesses like Mike.

Mike, first of all, welcome.

Mike Welch. Thank you, Mr. President. I'm honored to be here.

The President. Where do you live?

Mr. Welch. I live in Stevensville, Michigan.

The President. There you go.

Mr. Welch. And our business is—we started here in Niles, Michigan, with a business incubator. It was a great help locally, and we've moved just down the street to Buchanan, Michigan. And the city of Buchanan has helped us greatly also start our business. And starting in 1989, we had two vehicles, and now our fleet has grown to over 170 vehicles.

The President. Good. What do you do? Why do you have all those vehicles?

Mr. Welch. We're an expedited transportation firm, and what that means is when manufacturers or factories or printers need something shipped right away today, we do it. So it's basically just-in-time inventory.

The President. How many employees?

Mr. Welch. In the office, we have over 50 right now.

The President. Good. And that's up from two in 1989?

Mr. Welch. It's up quite a bit, yes, and over the last 9 months, we've seen huge growth. In this quarter alone, we're up over 70 percent from last year. So things are going good.

The President. That's good, yes. It says on my notes here that you're going to invest this year.

Mr. Welch. Yes.

The President. How much are you going to invest?

Mr. Welch. We're going to invest up to $400,000. We already have currently invested over $205,000 in our Qualcomm satellite units. All our vehicles are satellite tracked, and we plan on adding at least 50 more vehicles this year, which will hit right up to that $400,000 mark.

The President. Listen, the tax relief we passed encouraged investment. And I want you to understand the importance of the decision he has made to other people's work, the ability for other people to find work.

See, when Mike says he's going to invest, that means he's going to purchase something, in this case. And when he makes the decision to purchase something, somebody has to produce it. And when somebody produces it, it means somebody is more likely to keep a job and/or, if the orders are enough, they will expand the job base. And so when you hear that tax relief encouraged investment, I hope you really understand what that means is the tax relief encouraged somebody to spend some money, which meant somebody was more likely to find a job.

See, the decision that Mike makes—needless to say, it's optimistic to hear him say that his sales are up so strong. He's kind of a leading indicator, sounds like to me, of whether or not the economy is improving.

Are you going to hire anybody else this year? If not, I've got a suggestion for you. [*Laughter*]

Mr. Welch. Absolutely.

The President. You are?

Mr. Welch. Absolutely. We're looking for a couple people right now, so——

The President. That might not sound like a lot to some, two people or three people. But there are a lot of Mikes in this world. There are a lot of entrepreneurs in America. One of the true strengths of our system is there's a lot of small-business owners who are working hard to meet demand and are employing people. So when you hear Mike say, "Well, I'm thinking about adding three people this quarter," just think about the fact that there's a lot of people like Mike, a lot of small-business owners who are feeling much better about their future and, therefore, are confident in standing up in front of the President with all the TV cameras, saying, "I'm thinking about hiring three more people."

I appreciate you, Mike. Thank you very much.

I also had the privilege of talking to Phil and Lynn Hegg. They're a hard-working couple. They've got three beautiful girls. Is that right?

Phil Hegg. That's right, Mr. President.

The President. Proud father, I might add. So here's the thing. The tax relief meant that he and Lynn had $2,200 extra in their pocket last year and this year. Again, in Washington terms, that's not much. In this family's terms, it's a lot. The tax relief was important to the Heggs. I'm going to tell you what they did with the money—I'm not going to try to spend it for them. That's the other avenue; that's when you raise the taxes, and you spend it for them. [*Laughter*] This is where you let them keep the money. It's their money, after all—$2,200.

Some of the reason why they got to save $2,200—in other words, the child credit went up. It's going back down unless Congress acts. The marriage penalty was reduced. It doesn't make any sense, by the way, to penalize marriage. It ought to be the kind of thing we're encouraging. If Congress doesn't act, they're going to raise the taxes on these good folks. If they don't act immediately, their taxes go up by $1,000. It's the wrong time to be raising taxes, the wrong time, when the economy is getting better, for Congress to be taking $1,000 out of their pocket.

Tell us what you did with the money.

Mr. Hegg. Well, Mr. President, first I'd like to thank you for making a difference in that, because between the reduction in marriage penalty, the child tax credit, and, obviously, putting more money back into our pocket, I was able to keep a promise to my 4½ year-old daughter. When she was 2½ going through potty training——

The President. Wait a minute. We've got cameras here, and she might be watching. [*Laughter*]

Mr. Hegg. She is hiding out over there. But I did promise her that if she learned to use the potty correctly on a regular basis, I was going to take her to see Mickey Mouse's house someday. And you know, we've had a couple kids since then. So timing wasn't always great——

The President. So you haven't made the promise since? [*Laughter*]

Mr. Hegg. We didn't make the promise since, but the reality is that this year, we were able to carry through on that promise. And it was—so we were able to have those moments like at the end of the evening, we were sitting in the hotel; we were playing a game called, you know, "What's your favorite part? What did you enjoy today?" And my daughter Regan, she told me that her favorite part of the day was riding on Thunder Mountain with her father. That was pretty cool.

The President. That's great. It also says here that Lynn convinced you to maybe make some household repairs or buy some appliances. Is that right?

Lynn Hegg. We were able to go ahead and make—get a new washer and dryer.

The President. New washer and dryer. Somebody had to make the washer and dryer.

Mrs. Hegg. And we went ahead and we bought—within our community, which is—Whirlpool is right up the street from us in St. Joe there, in Benton Harbor, the world headquarters. So we would not be stoned by our friends, you have to buy within your area.

The President. That's good. You purchased locally?

Mrs. Hegg. Exactly.

The President. The reason I asked the Heggs to come today is it's really important for people in Congress to hear stories about people who have benefited from tax relief. Oftentimes, you hear—you read about statistics, or this might have made a difference or that—what matters is how it has affected people's lives. What matters about tax relief is it's made people more optimistic about their future. It's enabled them to do, in this case, a better job of being a mom or a dad, enabled this dad to fulfill a promise. He understands, like most of the people here, I suspect, understand his biggest responsibility is to be a good dad, is to love his child with all his heart.

Thank you all for coming. Part of making sure that we're prosperous in the future is to have a President who is not going to raise taxes on the American people, and that President is George W. Bush. [*Applause*] Thank you all. Thank you all.

Okay, David Mathews is with us. David is the president of the Southwestern Michigan College. That's a community college. The community colleges have got a fantastic opportunity to make sure that the workforce is educated for the jobs of tomorrow. As I mentioned, we're in a period of transition. In other words, some jobs aren't as competitive as they used to be—or industries aren't as competitive as they used to be—and therefore, the jobs are not as plentiful as they used to be. But there are some fantastic opportunities in our society today available for people who want to find work. And a great place to learn the skills necessary to fill those jobs is at the community college system.

David, tell us about some of the interesting things that are going on on your campus. People need to hear this. This is a vital part—community colleges are a vital part of Michigan. They're a vital part of the national fabric, and they provide a fantastic opportunity to help people. That's what we want. We want to help people have the skills so they can fill these jobs that are being created.

Go ahead.

[*David Mathews made brief remarks.*]

The President. Yes, let me stop you there. Did you hear what he said? He said, "We partnered with businesses." In other words, what the community college has been able to do is say, "If you've got a need for a worker, come to us. We'll provide the training ground. Help us design a curriculum that will meet your needs." In other words, it's kind—it's a market-based approach, really, isn't it, to education, which says, "If there's a demand for jobs, we'll help you fill it." And the key is the collaborative effort between the community college and those who are looking for workers.

Go ahead.

[*Dr. Mathews made further remarks.*]

The President. Good. It's a—I think the better way to describe what takes place on your campus is to call on Dan—if that's all right—unless you've got something else to say.

Dr. Mathews. No, absolutely. That's—we're very happy to hear Dan's story.

The President. Let me tell you something about Dan. He probably won't say it. I will. He got laid off from a manufacturing job. Is that an accurate statement?

Dan Hodge. Yes.

The President. Right after 9/11.

Mr. Hodge. Absolutely.

The President. Pick it up from there.

[*Mr. Hodge made brief remarks.*]

The President. Part of the vision for America has got to be to understand the power of education and to make sure the education system meets the needs of the 21st century.

A couple of points in his story. One, as you noticed, he said Government helped him go back to school. In other words, some people are probably saying, like Dan did, "I'm not so sure I can go back." He doesn't look that old, but he looks a little older, doesn't he? [*Laughter*] Let's just say he just didn't graduate from high school last year. And they're wondering whether or not there's financial help there. There's—part of making sure that America is hopeful in the future is, better have a President who understands the need for Pell grants, which I do, to make sure that people can find the assistance necessary to go back to community college.

Second, he said he made up his mind. One thing Government cannot do is make people be ambitious. That's up to Dan. That's up to Dan to make the decision. Dan made up his mind. See, our job is to help make sure the opportunities are available, is to grow the economy. But it's up to Dan to go back and get the skills necessary.

And the final point that is really important for people to understand, by going back to school and learning new skills, his pay is a lot better. You hear a lot about productivity in our society. A productive society means that a worker is able to do more in a less period of time than before. And therefore, the more productive your society—your economy becomes, the faster it has to grow in order to increase the job base. See, if you got one person being able to put out more widgets than before, you need demand for more widgets to grow in order for somebody else to find work. And that has created a short-term problem for us in the economy. We're overcoming it now because the economy is beginning to pick up, but a productive society is an important society for the future, because you know why? People's standard of living goes up. The more productive a society is, the more likely it is people are going to be able to have better wages and better earnings. The more productive a society we have in America, the more likely it is we're the leader in the world.

And it's very important for us to be the technological leader in the world and to be the leader in innovation, and that's why we've got to have broadband technology in Niles, Michigan, for every home in Niles, Michigan.

And so you're looking at the smallest unit of productivity increase. Collectively, however, it makes America the leader in the world. Education is vital to this good man's life. It's really an important part of making sure he's got a hopeful future. Education is really important to make sure people can find the jobs which will exist, but education is also important to make sure this Nation remains the strongest economic nation in the world, which is vital. And it's vital not only so people can make a good living; it's hard to be a hopeful nation unless we've got a good economy. And by hopeful nation, I mean people—all people being able to realize the American Dream.

Some people need help, though. Some people need help beyond just education. Some people need help of the heart. Government can't fix hearts, but Government can call on people that will help heal hearts. We've got such a person here today in Michelle Dunlap. She's the project director of Southwest Michigan Faith and Community-Based Training Institutes.

I want you to describe your program if you don't mind, Michelle. Tell people about it.

Before she begins, though, I want to tell you I believe that Government should stand on the side—not against but on the side—in other words, stand side by side with faith-based programs.

Tell us what you do.

[*Michelle Dunlap made brief remarks.*]

The President. I was talking about business entrepreneurs and educational entrepreneurs. Now, Michelle is helping to foster social entrepreneurship, and that is to encourage people of faith, in her case, to step up and to become a vibrant part of healing lives.

Listen, we've got people who are hooked on drugs. As a matter of fact, a lot of the drug abuse can be traced to serious addiction. In other words, a few using a lot is a way to maybe describe drug abuse in the country. And the question is, how do you crack the addiction? In some cases, it requires a higher being to help crack the addiction, and therefore, substance abuse programs based upon faith can be very effective.

I want to thank the folks for helping me enrich the story about the vision for an America that is safer, stronger, and better. And before we head up the road to Kalamazoo, I do want to answer some questions. If anybody has got some, now is your chance. I'm used to answering questions—[*laughter*]—maybe not in Niles, Michigan, but I am used to answering them. But I'll be glad to answer some. Step up. There's a mike right there.

Latino Vote in Michigan

Q. Hello. I would like to know, how can I help you win more Latino votes in the State of Michigan?

The President. Thank you. Now, those are the tough kind of questions. Thank you, sir. *En primer lugar, vamos a ganar.* I said, "In the first place, we're going to win." I think you need to explain to the people from all walks of life that the American vision I have is for everybody to be able to realize their dreams, not just a few people but everybody. It starts with a good education system. It starts with a system that just doesn't shuffle kids through.

See, we've changed the dynamic in Washington. We fully understand that local control of schools is essential for excellence. I fully understand that most funding is going to come from the States, as it should be. But when the Federal Government spends money, particularly for Title I students, we have now started to ask the question: Can the kids read and write and add and subtract?

This never happened before. The question has never been asked from the Federal Government. That's important for Hispanic moms and dads to hear that question asked, because guess what happens sometimes? They're the easiest kids to quit on. They're the hardest to educate, supposedly. And they just get shuffled through, and they end up coming out of high school without the capacity to read.

We're using accountability to analyze curriculum to see if it's working. We're using accountability to detect problems early, so that a young child will get intensive reading instruction at an early age, so he or she can become a good reader, so he or she can learn the basics of math before it's too late.

You ought to tell your Hispanic friends that the Bush vision is challenging the soft bigotry of low expectations, believes in the hopes of, aspirations of every mom and dad in the country, regardless of their heritage, says, "If you want to own something in this country of ours, we're promoting an ownership society." We want Latinos owning their own small business if they have a dream and an inclination to do so. We want more African Americans and Latinos owning their own home, because this team understands if you own something in America, you have a vital stake in the future of our country.

You've got a question?

President's Visit

Q. Why did you come to Niles?

The President. Why did I come to Niles? [*Laughter*] Because I wanted to get out of Washington. Because there's good people here. Because I find it really fun to go to a place where people didn't expect the President to come. Right, Mayor? [*Laughter*] Thank you very much for your hospitality, Mayor. Tell your police, thanks for making sure that the bus got in all right, too.

Let's see, what else? Yes, sir.

Haiti

Q. I'm from Brandywine High School here in Niles. I'm an educator.

The President. Thank you.

Q. And from the staff and the students, welcome to Niles.

The President. Thank you, sir.

Q. I have a question regarding Haiti.

The President. Sure.

Q. We do a unique thing at our school. We have two teachers who take students overseas. One goes to the Netherlands, and the other one goes to Haiti on active learning field trips. My question to you is, how long do you predict that our troops will remain in Haiti? And two, what is the United States doing to help with the economic condition in Haiti?

The President. Yes, thanks. Great question. Our troops will stay there as—until the United Nations peacekeepers will move in, which we hope is relatively quickly. In other words, we moved in with the Canadians and the French to provide stability. The United Nations will be moving peacekeepers in to make sure that the current Government has a chance to bring a rule of law and democracy to bear in Haiti.

In terms of helping Haiti, we've got a robust aid package. The problem is you want to make sure the aid package gets spent properly. And therefore, it's important to have a stable Government. We're also helping a lot with HIV/AIDS in Haiti.

Let me talk about America and compassion. You know, oftentimes, people talk about our ability to fight and win war, which is an important part of keeping the peace. But we're also a compassionate nation. Where we see hunger, we act, as a Government and

as a people. We'll never use food as a diplomatic weapon, by the way. We care about people who are hungry in the world. We're the largest food donor in the world; we're providing more help for the hungry people.

We're now leading the fight against HIV/AIDS on the continent of Africa and in nations in the Caribbean that suffer from HIV/AIDS. Our aid is robust and strong because when we see people suffer from disease, we want to help.

We're the greatest nation on the face of the Earth and, therefore, have a duty not only to spread freedom and, therefore, peace but have a duty, have an obligation to help the suffering. And that's exactly what the United States of America is doing in Haiti as well as other countries around the world. And it makes me darn proud to be the President of a country that is so compassionate.

Yell it out.

Safety in Public Schools

Q. [*Inaudible*]

The President. Yes, well, I think it's a great question. I think that, first of all, the—safety in public schools is a local issue. It's up to State and local authorities to make sure the schools run well. You don't want the Federal Government running the public schools in the country. You want the Federal Government helping.

When I was the Governor of Texas, I used to say, "You can't teach self-esteem, but you can teach a person how to read and write, and they will learn self-esteem." And so to answer your question—I mean, I repeat exactly what I said before to my Latino friend here, and that is in order to keep people—the best way to keep people out of the prisons is to teach them to read and write and add and subtract early, so they realize they've got a hopeful future.

Now, again, we can't make people love one another. Many of the kids that you deal with have been, you know, hadn't had the proper amount of love. But what we can do is encouraging mentoring programs, which we're doing. We can encourage faith-based programs that have heard the call to help a child understand that he or she may be loved, even though they don't find that love oftentimes in their own home.

There are ways to help a child. But from an education perspective, and where the Government really does interplay, is to make sure the education system works well, so there's not that frustration necessary for a child who says, "I have no hope. I have no future."

Thank you for what you're doing. It's a tough line of work. But the idea is to keep—[*applause*].

Yes, sir.

Energy Prices

Q. [*Inaudible*]

The President. Yes, I appreciate that. Here's a man who started his own business 50 years ago. He's still in business, which says he's a heck of a good businessman. [*Laughter*] It's not easy to be in business, by the way. For those of you who have started your own business, you know how hard it is. And yet he is saying, after 50 years, the problem he now faces is high energy costs. The problem that people in Michigan are now facing are energy costs at the pump. You're up to about $1.90 here, I understand. And it's—this is an issue of deep concern. Not only it's a short-term issue for America; it's a long-term issue for this country to become less dependent on foreign sources of energy. That's why we've got to get us an energy bill out.

Now, the long-term solution are actually going to change the nature of the automobile and have automobile powered by hydrogen. That's my dream. That's my vision. But we're 15 years away from that. Now, there's more research that has to be done to make sure the engines run well, to make sure consumer demand is met—I mean, people aren't going to want to get in a hydrogen automobile and not have it go very fast—and to make sure the infrastructure is available so that there's convenience for the consumer.

In the short run, we've got to increase our energy. We've got to use clean coal technologies to increase coal. We've got to relieve the pressure on the energy supplies. Now, the problem we face right now is a worldwide increase in demand. The economy in America is stronger, which increases demand for energy. But so is the world economy, and that's positive in many ways, but it also has

had the negative effect of increasing demand relative to supply for world supplies of energy.

I tell you, I think this country ought to be wiser about how we use nuclear power. I know the technologies have changed so we can build safe nuclear power and store it safely. A strong effort to provide more safe nuclear power will help us on the environment, will make us less dependent on foreign sources of energy.

And so it's a—yes, you bring up a point that I made earlier. How can you be hopeful if you're worried about supply of energy and the price of energy? And that's why we need an energy plan out of the United States Congress.

Yes, sir.

Diversity in Government

Q. I'm really concerned about you sharing with America how you have chosen to make sure that African Americans, Hispanics, women, these coalitions, how you are putting them to the task and getting involved with your election. Can you talk about that?

The President. Sure, I will. First thing, there's a lot of rhetoric in politics and—sometimes empty, sometimes not. I hope people judge me on the decisions I've made.

In terms of African Americans, I've empowered many African Americans to positions of prime responsibility. I want you to think about—envision this: Sitting down with foreign leaders, and if it's a small delegation, I'll have my Secretary of State and my National Security Adviser. And guess—they are great Americans who happen to be African American.

The Secretary of Education is African American. My lawyer is a Latino. The Secretary of Housing and Urban Development is an African American. In other words, what I'm saying is that I brought people from all walks of life into my Government for a reason. These are competent, really good people, and they bring diversity into our Government, which is important.

Not only have I listened to strong women like Laura; I have done so with people like Karen Hughes, Condi Rice, Harriet Miers, Domestic Policy Adviser Margaret Spellings. I mean, I can go down the list. I am proud of the diversity that I brought into Government. I think it's important. It makes me a better President when I have people from different walks of life to listen to.

President's Goals

Q. If you're reelected President, what will be your main focus?

The President. Yes, thank you. I guess I didn't make myself very clear. [*Laughter*] Thank you. My main focus will be to win the war on terror so America is secure. My main focus will be to continue to spread freedom, and that's an important focus.

I want to remind you about obligations and duties. I believe where we see suffering, we must help. And a lot of times, people suffer because they're not free. Freedom is so important for you to be able to—for—the spread of freedom is important for you to be able to grow up in a peaceful world. And free societies are peaceful societies, see? Free societies are more likely societies which are able to address the anger and hopelessness that we oftentimes find in societies that have spawned terror. Free societies don't threaten neighbors. Free societies don't develop weapons of mass destruction to blackmail the world.

Freedom is such an integral part of—should be an integral part of the U.S. foreign policy. Some say, "Well, let's work for stability in parts of the world." No, that's not what we're interested in. Of course, we want stability. Free societies will bring stability. The ultimate long-term objective for American foreign policy must be the spread of freedom.

Here at home, I want to make sure people can realize their dreams. You can't realize your dream if the economy is not doing very well. That's a period of—that's just a period when people don't aspire—can't aspire—they may aspire, but they can't realize their aspirations, is a better way to put it.

And the other thing I want to do is to make sure that everybody can feel the great power of love. Again, I fully understand Government's role is limited in love. Government is not a loving organization, particularly around April 15th. [*Laughter*] But people, whether it be me or the Governor or the

mayor, can inspire people, call upon people to serve our Nation by loving a neighbor.

That's part of how we've got to make sure America is a hopeful country. You've just got to understand, amidst our plenty, there are people who hurt. There are people who are lonely. There are people who are hungry, and yet, those problems can be solved if the American people decide to solve them.

And one of my jobs is to set the high aspirations for the American people and call upon our citizens to fulfill a duty I think each of us have to help somebody who hurts. And it can happen. Listen, we'll change America one heart, one soul, one conscience at a time.

Funding for Volunteer Programs

Q. Mr. President, my name's Christine Van Landingham, and I have the privilege of working with 120 senior citizens in these 3 counties who volunteer as foster grandparents in our local schools, and each and every one of them touching the hearts of many, many kids. What my question to you is, this year that program funding saw a cut in Federal funding. How do you propose to support those programs and, more importantly, those volunteers?

The President. Well, was it cut at the Federal level? It was? Well, it's what you get for trying to make sure the deficit gets cut in half. I think it's very important for you to continue your work and calling on people to volunteer. These are volunteers. The good thing about volunteers, they don't cost much. I don't know the specifics about your request, but I'll look into it.

Final question. Yes, sir.

Freedom of Religion/President's Faith

Q. I'm curious to know—I hear you mention God in most of your speeches, and I'm curious to know how your faith in God affects your daily routine.

The President. Thank you, sir. First, you've got to understand, my job is never to promote a religion. My job is to promote freedom for people to worship the way they see fit. The job of the President is to make sure that America is a free society where you can worship or don't worship. You're just as strong a patriot if you worship—than if you don't worship. That's—the job of the President is to make sure this precious aspect of our society is strong.

Personally, I do rely upon the Almighty. I'm reading Oswald Chambers. If you've read Oswald Chambers, you understand that Oswald Chambers is a pretty good gauge to test your walk. I rely upon—let me say this, I appreciate the prayers of the people. The fact that people pray for me and Laura is a powerful part of our life. It is humbling to know that people in Niles, Michigan, who I probably will never get to thank personally, say a prayer for us. And it sustains me. Somebody said to me one time, "Well, how do you know they're praying for you?" And I said, "I just do. I know it." And it's an important part of the Presidency, from my perspective.

Come on, Baby. Laura just gave me the hook. [*Laughter*]

I want to thank you all for coming. I want to appreciate your presence here. I'm counting on you. Just like you have been counting on me, I'm counting on you to help your neighbors understand the importance of this election. Peace and freedom depend upon this election. Prosperity for the people depend upon this election.

You can make a big difference. And I hope you—I hope—and I think you will—join me and Laura as we work together to make sure this country is a safer country, a stronger country, and a better country.

May God bless you. Thank you all. Appreciate you being here.

NOTE: The President spoke at approximately 1:45 p.m. in the Niles Senior High School gymnasium. In his remarks, he referred to Mayor Michael T. McClausin of Niles; former President Saddam Hussein of Iraq; and Karen Hughes, former Counselor to the President. The transcript released by the Office of the Press Secretary also included the remarks of the First Lady, who introduced the President. A portion of these remarks could not be verified because the tape was incomplete.

Remarks at a Bush-Cheney Reception in Kalamazoo, Michigan

May 3, 2004

The President. Thank you all. Thanks for coming. Be seated, unless you don't have a seat. [*Laughter*] I appreciate you being here.