

Remarks at Madison Central High School in Madison, Mississippi
August 7, 2002

Thanks for a warm welcome. Thanks for having me. It's true, Congressman, I did bring Laura her coffee this morning. [Laughter] The only thing that was different from the past is, I brought it to her in Crawford, Texas. [Laughter] I have moved my office to Crawford, and I'm so honored my first stop after having moved my office to Crawford is in the great State of Mississippi.

I want to thank you all for coming. I want to talk about three important goals for our country: One, win the war on terror; two, to protect the homeland; and three, to make it clear we will not rest until we have economic security for everybody who lives in America.

That's a goal shared by the Mississippians for Economic Progress, and I want to thank them for hosting me today. I appreciate you all coming. I also want to thank the Congressman for introducing me. I also appreciate so very much two fine—I mean fine—United States Senators from the great State of Mississippi who are here, and that's, of course, Thad Cochran and the man I call Leader, Trent Lott. I want to thank very much Ronnie Shows for being here. Congressman, thank you for coming. I'm honored you're here. I appreciate it. And I want to thank Roger Wicker, another member of the Mississippi congressional delegation, for coming. We've got Congressmen everywhere. [Laughter]

But there's one special former Congressman with us. It's a man—when I'm in Washington, I go to church right across the street from the White House, and this fellow always saves me a pew—a spot in the pew. He's been a great friend of my family's. He's a great friend of Mississippi. He is the namesake of the Montgomery Institute in Meridian, Mississippi, and that's Sonny Montgomery. [Applause] It looks like

they still remember you, Sonny—[laughter]—and love you, just like I do.

I want to thank members of the state-house for coming. The Governor kindly came out to greet me today, and I'm thankful for the Governor for being there. I want to thank the Lieutenant Governor, Governor Tuck, for coming today. I want to appreciate the State senator, Travis Little, and all the other members of the state-house who are here. It makes me feel welcome for you to come and to greet me. I thank you from the bottom of my heart.

I also want to thank the mayors who are here. Mayor Mary Hawkins-Butler of Madison is here. I want to thank you, Madam Mayor, for coming. And Mayor Gene McGee, the mayor of Ridgeland, Mississippi, is here. David Allen is the vice chairman of the Mississippians for Economic Progress, who gathered you all up. And I want to thank you, David, and your group for supporting this event.

I want to thank J. Reeves, who is the principal of the Madison Central High School, for having us. I want to thank the Madison High band. Listen, you all were great when you serenaded us coming in. [Laughter] I tried to pop out of the limousine—[laughter]—to say thanks, but it was moving a little too fast. [Laughter] But I do want to thank you all. The principal was telling me you're an award-winning band, and I so much appreciate the fact that you played. Unfortunately, most band members are in the overflow room, so if you're listening, thanks. I also want to thank Mike Kent, who is the Madison County superintendent of education.

I want to thank the folks who I just met with, Mississippi citizens from all walks of life who expressed their concerns to me on a variety of issues. And I'll be discussing some of those issues. I met with some of the kindest, most decent doctors you can

possibly imagine who are with us today, people who love their communities, love their profession, are deeply concerned about the future of medicine in this State.

I met WorldCom employees who no longer have work, who are disillusioned, like me and others, about the corporate fraud which is taking place in our country. I met with small-business owners who long to have an environment that will allow them to flourish. So I want to thank them for coming. I'm going to talk more about some of the issues around these participants. But you've got some fine folks in this State, and they took time to visit and share their frustrations with me. I want to thank them all for coming today, very much.

I also want to welcome Star Wallin here. One of the things I love to do as I travel the country is to meet soldiers in the armies of compassion, people who have heard the call to love a neighbor just like they'd like to be loved themselves; people who don't wait for a President to say, "You will go love somebody," or Congress to pass a law; people who understand that part of being an American is to serve your community by helping people in need.

Star is here. She's the founder of what's called Project CARE, Compassion in Action creates a Ripple Effect for positive change. The unusual thing about Star is, she's 18 years old. She has—that's not unusual; there's a lot of 18-year-olds. [*Laughter*] What is unusual is, is that she is signing up people who went to her school to help people in need. As a result of her vision and her work and her compassion, 300 elementary school students were mentored by upperclassmen. The 300 benefited, as did the mentors. As a result of her vision, she has rallied people to feed the needy, to provide furniture for those who want. She has helped restore playgrounds on public schools. As a result of her vision, her community is better. She has set a fabulous example. Star, thank you for being here, and thank you for what you do. And I

want to thank your family for being here as well. They did a pretty darn good job of raising you.

My most important job as the President of this country is to protect the homeland. My most important job is to rally our governments to do everything humanly possible to prevent the enemy from taking innocent life again. That job goes on because the enemy still exists, an enemy that hates freedom and therefore hates America, people who can't stand the thought that we worship freely in this country and therefore hate us, coldblooded killers who don't value life the way we value life. And so they're still a threat to the homeland. There is still a threat that they might attack us again. And therefore, you need to know that your Government is doing everything humanly possible. A lot of fine folks are working overtime doing everything humanly possible to run down every hint, every lead, every piece of evidence to protect the homeland.

I got to Washington, and after being there for a while, I took a look at the homeland security apparatus there in the Nation's Capital. There are over 100 different agencies involved with homeland security. As I like to say, they're scattered everywhere. And if they're scattered everywhere, it makes it hard to hold people accountable. And we need accountability all throughout Government—nothing more important, though, than to have accountability when it comes to protecting the homeland. I felt like, having taken a look at the situation, that in order to set the number one priority of all those agencies as the protection of the homeland, they needed to be under one agency, one Cabinet officer. And so I proposed to the country, to the Congress, that we have a Department of Homeland Security that will be in charge, enforcing our borders. Listen, we need to know who's coming in the country, what they're bringing in the country, why they're coming into the country, and if they're leaving when they're supposed to be leaving the country.

We need to work with our courageous first-responders, the firefighters and the police and the EMS teams, all across our country to prepare—prepare as best as we possibly can for emergency. We need to be prepared to respond to a terrorism attack using weapons of mass destruction. We need to better coordinate intelligence. We get intelligence gathered here and there, and we need somebody to analyze this, to address the vulnerabilities—assess the vulnerabilities so that we can address them to make the homeland more secure. That’s a major task of the office of homeland security.

This isn’t a Republican issue, folks. This isn’t a Democrat issue. This is an American issue. This is what we need to do. We need to leave a legacy behind. And when we create the Department, we’ve got to do it right. See, we’re trying to leave a legacy not only for future Presidents but future Congress, so they can deal with the true threats of the 21st century. We’re in a different era here.

And you need to know that I’m not interested in having to try to run a clumsy, slow-moving bureaucracy, that when we fashion a new Department, we must be able to react. We’ve got to be able to put the right people in the right job at the right time, without a thick book of rules that have little to do with protecting the American people.

The number one priority of this agency must be the protection of the people, as opposed to representing narrow political interests. I want to thank the Members of the House of Representatives who heard that message, who put their political turf aside and focused on the American people. Now the Senate must hear the message. These two Senators have heard the message, and I want to thank them for their leadership—I want to thank them for their leadership. The leadership of the Senate must focus on what’s best for America, not what’s best on narrow interests, and get a bill to my desk that will enable me to

say to the American people, “We’re doing everything we can to protect the homeland.”

The best way to protect the homeland in the long run is to hunt the killers down one by one and bring them to justice, which is what we’re going to do. This is a different kind of war. The leaders hide in caves and send youngsters to their death. But there’s no cave deep enough, no cave dark enough for an America, a resolved America, that loves our freedom. And so no matter how long it takes, no matter what the cost might be, for the sake of our freedom and for the sake of our children and our children’s children, we’re going to hunt them down. These are nothing but international criminals, and they’re going to be treated as international criminals.

And we’re making good progress. We really are. It’s hard to tell it sometimes, because as we make progress, sometimes it doesn’t get on your cable channel. [Laughter] But you need to know we’re making progress. We’ve hauled in or captured—and I say “we”—we’ve got a mighty coalition of countries from around the world that love freedom just like we love freedom, and they understand the true threats that we face. And we’ve captured over 2,000 of them in a pretty quick period of time. Another group of them, just about the same number, weren’t quite as lucky.

But we’ve got a lot of work to do. I want the youngsters here, the high school students here, to know that we seek—we don’t seek revenge; we seek justice. And when we go into a country, we do so not to conquer but to liberate. There are young girls going to school in Afghanistan for the first time, thanks to the mighty Government—mighty United States military and our friends and allies. And that’s important for you to remember.

We face threats because we love freedom. Al Qaida represents threats, and we’re dealing with them. There are countries which harbor and develop weapons of mass destruction, countries run by people who

poison their own people, countries whose leadership has got a terrible record when it comes to valuing life, particularly inside their own country. And these are real threats, and we owe it to our children to deal with these threats.

I will promise you that I am—will be patient and deliberate, that we will continue to consult with Congress, and of course, we'll consult with our friends and allies. We will discuss these threats in real terms, and I will explore all options and all tools at my disposal, diplomacy, international pressure, perhaps the military. But it's important for my fellow citizens to know that as we see threats evolving, we will deal with them. We must deal with them. History has called us into action. We love freedom, and we'll deal with the threats that could eventually hurt our freedoms.

I've asked for the biggest increase in defense spending since Ronald Reagan was the President for two reasons. One, anytime we commit our troops into harm's way, they deserve the best pay, the best training, the best equipment possible. And two, the defense budget sends a signal to our friends, allies, and to the enemy that we're in this for the long haul, that we love our freedom so much that we're in it for the long pull.

I appreciate the fact that the House of Representatives has passed the defense appropriations bill and the Senate has passed a defense appropriations bill. But taking care of our military must be the first order of business when Congress returns back to Washington. We owe the military every tool they need and every dollar it takes to win this war. And therefore, I call upon the leadership of the Congress to resolve, quickly resolve the differences between the House appropriations bill for defense and the Senate appropriations bill for defense and get that bill to my desk first thing when they get back so I can sign it.

I'm going to continue to work to build the economics—the foundations for economic security for our people. And I be-

lieve the foundation is strong. Listen, our economy is growing. It's getting better. Inflation is low. The great news—and I'm not surprised at this—is that worker productivity is increasing dramatically. I'm not surprised because I know the American people. I know that the true strength of the country is our people. But listen, so long as anybody is looking for work and can't find work, I think we've got a problem. When somebody is out there who says, "I want to work and can't find a job," we need to do something about it. Look, the role of Government is not to create wealth but an environment in which the economy can grow. Everybody here knows this: We're not going to tax our way to prosperity; we won't regulate our way to prosperity; we certainly won't litigate our way to prosperity. What we need to do is to always ask the question, "How do we increase job growth and honest enterprise—and honest enterprise?"

When I took office, our economy was beginning a recession. That's what the facts have shown. Then our economy was hit by terrorists. Then our economy was hit by corporate scandals. But I'm certain of this: We won't let fear undermine our economy, and we're not going to let fraud undermine it either.

I appreciate the work of both Republicans and Democrats to pass the biggest corporate reforms since Franklin Roosevelt was the President. And I had the honor of signing that and working with members of both parties to get this bill done. We're going to make sure the books are honest, the numbers are real, the auditors are audited, and the criminals are punished. And the task force I put together is beginning to make progress. They're investigating, arresting, and will soon be prosecuting those who have betrayed the trust of employee and shareholder alike. For corporate leaders found guilty of fraud and theft, there will be no more easy money, just hard time.

And here in Mississippi, you know what I'm talking about. You know what it means

to be let down by shady corporate practices. Two of the good folks with whom I met earlier today had been let down by shady corporate practices. They lost their jobs and a good portion of their retirement funds because there was corporate malfeasance. They were cooking the books. They weren't open and honest. People who dedicate their lives to building the company who hired them deserve better, not only here in Mississippi but all over the country. People who invested in a local company because of State pride deserve better. By raising the standards of conduct in corporate America, we're going to protect the jobs. By holding people accountable, we'll protect jobs and, as importantly, retirement security all across the country.

And speaking about that, we've got to do more to protect worker pensions. Right now too many workers are locked into plans that force them to hold a large portion of their accounts in their company stock. There are a lot of plans that won't let people diversify, and that's not right. I believe workers ought to be able to diversify after 3 years in their company's plan. I think we ought to trust workers with their own money. Right now workers get an update every year. They ought to get updates every 3 months on their plan. They should be able to get sound investment advice. After all, it's their money.

I proposed these reforms months ago. The House acted. The Senate hasn't. The Senate leadership, those who are running the Senate now, ought to bring these worker reforms forward. They ought to get this pension reform bill up and to my desk as soon as they get back from their vacations. And I'm not talking about the Senate leaders here on the front row, either. [*Laughter*]

Here in Mississippi you're learning a hard lesson, that one of the biggest obstacles to growth is the lawsuit industry. That's one industry we don't want to see grow. Junk and frivolous lawsuits can ruin an honest business. Listen, small business is the

backbone of our society. Most new jobs are created by small business. And when you have junk and frivolous lawsuits that could completely wipe out a small business hanging over the heads of small-business people, it doesn't help. It hurts economic vitality and economic growth, and you've got to understand that.

And in this State, the lawsuit industry is devastating the practice of medicine. And people around the country understand this is happening here. They're getting the message that the fastest growing industry is the lawsuit industry. Too many frivolous lawsuits in this State are being filed against doctors. That's a fact. And too many jury awards are out of control. You've got too many of your doctors that are being forced to settle cases for large amounts of money even when they haven't committed an error. And that's not right, because you know who it hurts? It hurts the people; it hurts the people of Mississippi. It causes medicine, the cost of medicine, to go up, and that means people have to pay more money out of their pocket—all people. You may not think so, but it's a hidden cost of your health care bill.

You know what else it does? Because premiums go up or liabilities are threatening—lawsuits are threatening doctors—I mean, some of the docs can't get insurance coverage, which means they no longer want to provide care. And that hurts people too. Not only does excessive lawsuits cause your bill to go up, it makes it awfully hard for people in some parts of your State to even get medical care. And that's a crime, and that's a shame.

And that's a problem here in Mississippi and in other States too. I just met with some Mississippi doctors. These are people that love their communities and care deeply for their patients. But they are practicing their medicine in the face of hostile legal environments. These are good docs who can't get liability insurance or—giving up their specialties or leaving their practices to go somewhere else. It's estimated by

some that this great State could lose 10 percent of your physicians this year, unless you do something about it.

I want to tell you about Dr. Kooyer. He's sitting right out there. He and his wife went to Rolling Fork, Mississippi, in the heart of the Delta. They did because, as he said, he felt a Christian calling to care for children, children who need help. That's what he heard. Not only did he have skills, he's got a heart. But because of frivolous lawsuits, because every time he turns the corner somebody might sue him and because of his rising liability insurance premiums, he's leaving your State. He doesn't want to leave your State. He loves Mississippi. He loves helping those who need help. He loves being a pediatrician, and so does his wife, but he's had it. And so he's leaving, which means there will be no pediatrician in that county in Mississippi. And that's a shame. Lawsuits are driving them out of your State. It's hurting people. It's not hurting big institutions; it's hurting the people.

Dr. Frothingham—you talk about a man with a heart. You think Kooyer has got a heart? Wait until you hear Frothingham. [Laughter] He's a great Mississippian, grew up here, thought he might try to live in South Carolina, realized what he was missing, came back to Mississippi. [Laughter] He's a neurosurgeon. He talked with deep compassion about a man who suffered a trauma, a fellow he was with—Johnny was with us today. He's a guy who understands that practicing medicine is more than just technology. It's concern and care. They're running him out of business. There's too many frivolous lawsuits. And that hurts the State, and it hurts the country. It hurts people.

Jill Mahaffey says she got lucky. She and her husband are here. They live in the Delta too. She got lucky. She heard she's pregnant. She's getting there, getting ready. She goes to the doctor. He says, "I've got to leave"—ob-gyn getting ready to leave because of lawsuits, because of the threats,

because even if you're a doctor who practices good medicine, you're going to get sued in this State and in other States. Believe this or not, fortunately, she was getting toxic, and the doc induced labor before he quit his practice. She says she was lucky, and she was.

But these human stories, these stories of people going without or could go without have got to end in this country. And it's not just in Mississippi. There are other States being affected by the lawsuit industry, and we need to do something about it. This State needs to do something about it, and so does Washington, DC, need to do something about these frivolous lawsuits.

Well, some say, "That's not a Federal issue. Here you are in Mississippi. You're talking about Mississippi's problem. Leave it in Mississippi." That's a Federal issue. I'll tell you why. If you agree with me that these junk lawsuits run up the cost of medicine, then it becomes a Federal issue when you realize all the dollars we spend on Medicare. It's a Federal issue when you think about all the money we spend on Medicaid to help people. It's a Federal issue when you think about all the veterans hospitals around the country.

No, it's a Federal issue, and it's time for the Congress to pass a minimum Federal standard which says this: One, if you're hurt, you ought to have your day in court, and you ought to be able to recover full economic damages—no problem about that. Everybody agrees with that. If you get hurt, you ought to be able to go to your court, the courthouse, and be treated—you ought to get fair compensation for your economic damages. But we cannot have unlimited noneconomic damages and punitive damages drive health care away from the people. So I strongly support and I urge Congress to have reasonable Federal limits on noneconomic damages—\$250,000 is reasonable. I think we ought to have a cap on punitive damages. I think we ought to have joint and several liability reform. And I know we ought to allow doctors and folks

who work in hospitals to be able to evaluate practice, to be able to analyze best practices on behalf of the patients without fear of a frivolous or junk lawsuit. It's time for Congress to act. It's time. This liability system of ours should serve patients, not trial lawyers.

There's more we can do, and I look forward to working with Congress to make sure economic security is solid in America. You know, I believe that when you let a man or a woman keep more of his or her own money, it means he or she is going to demand a good or a service. And when they demand a good or a service, somebody is going to produce the good and service. And when somebody produces the good and service, somebody is likely to expand the job base. That's the school of economic thought I come from. And that's why I worked closely with then-Leader Lott and Speaker Hastert and people from both parties to pass a significant tax reduction on behalf of the American people. This tax reduction was well-timed. When you look at the fact that our economy was now—as we found out—in recession when I took office, it's well-timed. When people have more of their own money, it's how you fight a recession, and that was important.

But interestingly enough, as a result of a quirk in the law of the Senate, these tax reforms, these tax reductions—not only income tax reductions but significantly reducing the marriage penalty and repealing the death tax—all those go away, all those reductions, after 10 years. For the sake of economic vitality, for the sake of allowing people to plan, for the sake of small businesses and farmers and ranchers all across the country, we need to make the tax reductions permanent.

We need to make sure that construction projects go forward. After September the 11th, about \$8 billion worth of construction projects were delayed or killed because people couldn't get lending, couldn't get commercial property financing for the lack of terrorism insurance. The Congress needs

to act on this issue. For the sake of the hardhats here in America, for the good, hard-working people in Mississippi that are building bridges and commercial projects, for the people's sake—blue-collar workers all across America—we need to get a terrorism insurance bill that will provide some surety so that these commercial projects can go forward, so that our construction workers will be back to work. It's time for the House and the Senate to reconcile its differences and, as you do so, make sure that you keep the workers in mind and not the lawyers.

So I wanted to come to Mississippi to talk to you about our Nation's priorities. And I want to thank you for giving me a chance to come. I want to tell you how I feel about the country and its future. You're looking at an optimist. There is no problem we can't solve in this country. I believe out of the evil done to America is going to come some incredible good. I say that with certainty because the strength of the country is the American people. The American people have got great hearts, great resolve, great compassion, and great determination.

This country is going to lead the world to peace. No, I know all the war rhetoric, but it's all aimed at achieving peace. That's my dream. I want there to be peace for generations of Americans. I want there to be peace for generations of Israelis and Palestinians, peace in South Asia. And by being strong and determined, by speaking clearly about good and evil, by being patient and resolved, I believe that we can help lead the world to peace.

And here at home, we can lead, all of us can lead our country to a more compassionate future. There are pockets of despair in America. There are pockets of addiction and hopelessness. So long as one of us suffers, all of us suffers, as far as I'm concerned. And yet, I fully understand the limitations of Government. We can hand out money in Washington, DC, but we can't put hope in people's hearts or a sense of

purpose in people's lives. I wish I knew the law that would say, "We will all love each other." Lott would sponsor it. I'd sign it. [Laughter] There is no Government law. There's a universal law. There's a higher law, and that's really the strength of America.

People have heard that call. People say, "What can I do to help after September the 11th?" I've said, "Love your neighbor." If you want to help, mentor a child. If you want to help, go see a shut-in and tell them you love them. If you want to help, feed the hungry. Build a house with Habitat. Run a Boy Scout troop or Girl Scout troop. If you want to help, just tell somebody, "I care for you. I hope you—I hope if you've got a problem, you come and call on me."

You see, America can be saved one heart, one soul, one conscience at a time. One person can't do everything. I know that. The task seems large, but one person can do something. I'm asking you to be that one person doing something to help make your community and Mississippi and our

Nation a place of hope, a place of decency, a place of compassion for every citizen who is fortunate enough to be an American.

No, the enemy hit us. They hit us, but they didn't know who they were hitting. Oh, they probably thought we'd file a lawsuit or two. [Laughter] But they hit a nation that loves freedom, and we'll defend our freedoms. They also found out about our heart, that out of the evil done to America will come incredible good, because we're the greatest nation on the face of the Earth.

Thank you for coming.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:50 a.m. in the gymnasium. In his remarks, he referred to Representative Charles W. "Chip" Pickering of Mississippi; Gov. Ronnie Musgrove and Lt. Gov. Amy Tuck of Mississippi; pediatricians Dr. Kurt Kooyer and his wife, Maria Weller; and neurosurgeon Dr. Rodney Frothingham. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of these remarks.

Remarks at a Luncheon for Representative Charles W. Pickering in Jackson, Mississippi August 7, 2002

Thank you. Well, Chip, thank you very much. It's nice to be back here to Mississippi. I did bring Laura her coffee this morning. [Laughter] I don't want to put any pressure on Trent. [Laughter] But the good news is, it was in Crawford, Texas. [Laughter]

I want to thank you for having me. I'm not going to stay for lunch; I'm going to head on home. I've changed addresses for a brief moment. I took my office from Washington to Crawford. I look forward to spending some time outside of our Nation's Capital. And I'm honored that the first place that I've come to since I've moved

my office was the great State of Mississippi. It's wonderful to be back here again. Laura and I have got a lot of friends here, and we appreciate our friends.

I want to thank you all for coming to help Chip. I'm here today because I want to make it as clear as I possibly can: You need to send Chip Pickering back to the United States House of Representatives. And I want to thank you all for helping. I want to thank you for contributing not only your money but your time. I know many of you are involved with grassroots politics, and that's good. That's how you win, is to invigorate the grassroots, like this