

Remarks to Employees at the Boeing F-18 Production Facility in St. Louis, Missouri
April 16, 2003

Thank you all very much. Be seated, please. So I'm on my way to Crawford—[laughter]—part of the real world, I want you to know—and I decided to stop here in St. Louis, Missouri, to say thanks to some of the finest workers we have in America. And it's a perfect time to do so. The successes of our military begin right here on the factory floors. The quality of the workmanship that goes into the aircrafts that you build here is one of the main reasons why we were successful in making the world a more peaceful place. Our Nation thanks you for your efforts and your work.

Seeing all the good workers here reminds me of one of the big tasks we have in America, and that is to make sure anybody who's looking for a job can find one. Too many of our fellow Americans are looking for work, and that bothers me. So I sent some suggestions up to the United States Congress about how to stimulate job growth, and it starts with letting you keep more of your own money.

I have sent to the Congress a jobs-and-growth package that will reduce the burden on our taxpayers, that will give you more of your money in your pockets so you get to decide how to save or invest and spend. In order for all Americans who are looking for work to find work, the Congress must pass this jobs package as soon as they come back from their recess.

And the other big task for this Nation is to overcome any threats to our country, wherever they gather. Each of you has had a part of preparing this Nation to meet the dangers of our time. Today, half a world away, America is leading this great coalition of free nations to end a brutal regime and to remove a threat to our society. We've applied the new powers of technology—like the F-18s—to strike an enemy

force with speed and incredible precision. Our work is not done. The difficulties have not passed, but the regime of Saddam Hussein has passed into history. Thanks to the courage and the might of our military, the American people are more secure. Thanks to the courage and might of our military, the Iraqi people are now free.

I want to thank management and worker alike for inviting me here today. It's truly an honor to be here. I want to thank Phil Condit and Jim Albaugh and Rick Smith for the invitation. It gives me a chance to come and say firsthand how much we all appreciate what you do on behalf of the security of this country.

I appreciate Senator Bond and Senator Talent for their leadership. It's good to work with these two men to make sure this Nation remains strong. I appreciate Matt Blunt, representing the State government, for being here.

Today I had the honor of meeting John Sant. He was so anxious to see me at the foot of the stairs of Air Force One, he was standing in the rain. And I'm grateful for that. But I'm grateful to share his story with you. Here's a man who decides to take time out of his busy life to volunteer to help children become more literate, volunteers to help the AmeriCorps program to make sure that the public education system of St. Louis, Missouri, fulfills its promise that no child should be left behind in any community in America. It is appropriate that we talk about the compassion of our fellow Americans at the same time as we talk about the might of our great country.

I asked John to come and to stand because one of my calls to our fellow Americans is to love your neighbor just like you'd like to be loved yourself. When you see somebody who hurts, put your arm around

them and tell them you love them and make sure that—[*applause*].

And also standing out there at the stairs was Adrian Fakes, private first class, United States Marine Corps, St. Louis native, wounded in An Nasiriyah, soon to recover, anxious to get back to his unit. He represents the finest of the fine—those of our country who wear the uniform. Thank you for coming, Adrian.

You and I and all the world are witnessing historic days in the cause of freedom. One month ago—just one month ago—the forces of our coalition stood at the borders of Iraq with orders to advance hundreds of miles through hostile territory against a ruthless enemy. Today, organized military resistance has virtually ended; the major cities of Iraq have been liberated.

Two weeks ago, the Iraqi regime operated a gulag for dissidents and, incredibly enough, a prison for young children. Now the gates to that prison have been thrown wide open, and we are putting the dictator's political prisons and torture chambers out of business.

One week ago, Baghdad was filled with statues and giant pictures of the dictator. They're kind of hard to find today. [*Laughter*] The fall of that statue in Baghdad marked the end of a nightmare for the Iraqi people, and it marked the start of a new day of freedom.

Four days ago, seven American soldiers, six men and one woman, were held captive by forces still loyal to the fallen regime. Today, those brave Americans are with their fellow comrades and are headed home to their loved ones.

American and coalition forces still face serious risks in Iraq. Scattered enemy is still capable of doing harm to our forces and to the innocent. But we'll stay focused. We will finish what we've begun. We will press on until our mission is finished and victory is complete.

On September the 11th, 2001, America found that we are not immune to the threats that gather for years across the

oceans, threats that can arrive in sudden tragedy. Since September the 11th, we've been engaged in a global war against terror, a war being waged on many fronts. That war continues, and we are winning.

In Afghanistan, we and our allies ended the rule of the Taliban and closed down camps where terrorists plotted and trained to attack us. In Iraq, our coalition has now removed an ally of terrorists and a producer of weapons of mass destruction. In other nations, we're hunting and capturing members of Al Qaida, disrupting their plans before they can strike. Across the world, terrorists and tyrants are learning this, that America and our friends and our allies will act in our own defense. Instead of drifting toward tragedy, we will protect our security, and we will promote the peace in the world.

We are fighting terror with all the tools we have at our disposal, diplomacy and law enforcement, intelligence and homeland security. As a last resort, we have turned to our military. And the skill and the heroism of American Armed Forces are making this country proud.

From Kabul to Baghdad, American forces and our fine allies have conducted some of the most successful military campaigns in history. By a combination of creative strategies and advanced technologies, we are redefining war on our terms. Even before the fighting began in Iraq, Special Operations forces were inside the country, moving in to protect key infrastructure, protect the oilfields owned by the Iraqi people, to secure vital bridges. Overwhelmingly yet carefully targeted airstrikes left entire enemy divisions without armor and without organization. Precision-guided weapons fatally disrupted the regime's system of command and control.

Every armed conflict brings sacrifice and grief. That's why the use of our military is our last option. Yet, more than ever before, the precision of our technology is protecting the lives of our soldiers and the

lives of innocent civilians. The overwhelming majority of the munitions dropped in the Iraqi campaign were precision-guided. In this new era of warfare, we can target a regime, not a nation. Our aim is to track and strike the guilty. Terrorists and tyrants have now been put on notice; they can no longer feel safe hiding behind innocent lives.

Our military is strong and our military is ready, and we intend to keep it that way. Our Armed Forces must have every resource they need to carry out and complete the missions we give them. This morning at the White House, I signed a \$79 billion wartime supplemental to cover the needs directly arising from Operation Iraqi Freedom and the reconstruction of Iraq. People who serve in the military are giving their best to America, and I want to thank the Members of Congress for acting quickly to give our men and women in arms the support they need.

For the sake of the security of this country and for the sake of peace in this world, the United States must maintain every advantage in weaponry and technology and intelligence. Our edge in warfare comes, in part, because of the American spirit of enterprise, great companies such as Boeing, great workers such as yourselves.

In any conflict, however, this Nation's greatest single asset is the kind of men and women who put on the uniform of the United States. The methods of war have changed, but the need for courage has not. And we've seen once again the courage of the men and women who wear the uniform of the United States of America. These are young Americans who engaged in furious battles, then carried wounded enemies to medical treatment. These are young Americans willing to accept any danger to rescue one of their own. These are the kind of people who, when they are wounded themselves, ask to rejoin their comrades in battle. Some of our soldiers and marines will never be returning to their families, and these are the men

and women who our Nation will honor forever.

The character of our military reflects the character of our country. America uses its might in the service of principle. As we defend our security, we value the lives and the liberty of the Iraqi people. Having rid Iraq of an oppressive regime, we are committed to helping Iraq build a future of freedom and dignity and peace.

By swift and effective military action, we avoided the massive flow of refugees that many had expected. By delivering food and water and medicine to the Iraqi people, even as coalition units engaged the enemy, we have helped to avert a humanitarian crisis. Emergency supplies are now moving freely to Iraq from many countries. Now that Iraq is liberated, the United Nations should lift economic sanctions on that country.

We're also addressing Iraq's urgent medical problems, problems left by a regime that built palaces in a country that needed hospitals. Right now, hundreds of Iraqis are being treated at U.S. and British military facilities. Governments from Europe and the Middle East are moving field hospitals to Iraq. Coalition members and the United Nations and other international organizations are sending much-needed medical supplies. The Red Cross is working to keep water and electricity flowing to hospitals. And very soon our coalition will be making direct emergency payments to Iraqi doctors and nurses who will be providing desperately needed care to their fellow citizens. With all the hardships of this transition, the lives of the Iraqi people will be better than anything they have known for generations.

The journey from a totalitarian, brutal dictatorship to a free society is not easy. It will take time to build the institutions of democracy and the habits of freedom. Today, civil order is being restored in communities throughout Iraq, and Iraqis themselves are helping in the effort. Iraqis are

leading coalition forces to caches of weapons and volunteering for citizen patrols to provide security. In Basra, British forces and Iraqis have formed joint patrols to maintain order. Just days after the fall of the dictator, just days after the people of Iraq realized they were free from the clutches of his terror, the Iraqi people are reclaiming their own streets, their own country, and their own future.

Yesterday an historic gathering occurred in the city of An Nasiriyah, where Iraqis met openly and freely to discuss the future of the country. They even had some protesters outside the meeting, a sure sign of freedom. [Laughter] Many more of these meetings will take place in the weeks and months to come. In An Nasiriyah, the Iraqi people have made a good start. And out of that meeting came this declaration: Iraq must be democratic. And the nations of our coalition share that commitment. We also share this commitment: We will not impose any form of government on Iraq. We will help Iraq to build a government of, by, and for the Iraqi people.

In Iraq, the world is witnessing something dramatic and something important. We're seeing the deep and universal desire of men and women to live in freedom. As Americans, this shouldn't surprise us. We believe that no force, no threat, can make human beings love tyranny. We believe that the appeal of liberty will, in time, overcome any coercive power on Earth. We believe that people across the Middle East and across the world are weary of poverty, weary of oppression, and yearn to be free. And all who know that hope, all who will work and sacrifice for freedom, have a friend in the United States of America.

Our country and our good allies are united by a great goal. We're working to create the conditions for peace. We're confronting the threats to peace from terrorism and weapons of mass destruction. And we're aiding the advance of peace by seeking the advance of freedom. Free societies do not nurture bitterness or the ideologies of terror and murder. Free societies are founded on the belief that every life has equal value. Free societies turn the creative gifts of men and women toward progress and the betterment of their own lives. American interests and American founding beliefs lead in the same direction: We stand for human liberty.

This past month has been a time of testing and uncertainty for our country. The American people have responded with resolve and with optimism. Whatever challenges may come, we can be confident. Our Nation is strong; our purpose is firm; and our cause is just.

God bless you all.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:20 p.m. in the F/A-18 E/F aircraft assembly facility at Boeing Integrated Defense Systems. In his remarks, he referred to former President Saddam Hussein of Iraq; Philip M. Condit, chairman and chief executive officer, and James F. Albaugh, executive vice president, The Boeing Company; Rick Smith, president, International Association of Machinist and Aerospace Workers, District 837; and Missouri Secretary of State Matt Blunt. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of these remarks.