

Statement on the Report of the Columbia Accident Investigation Board August 26, 2003

Today the Columbia Accident Investigation Board released its report on the tragic accident that claimed the lives of seven brave astronauts. These men and women assumed great risk in service to all humanity. On behalf of a grateful Nation, I once again recognize their sacrifices and those of their loved ones. Their service will never be forgotten.

Our Nation also owes its appreciation to Admiral Harold Gehman, Jr. (retired) as well as the other 12 members of the Columbia Accident Investigation Board. As

Board Chair, Admiral Gehman and his team have worked tirelessly over the past seven months conducting an exhaustive review of the circumstances surrounding this accident. The next steps for NASA under Sean O'Keefe's leadership must be determined after a thorough review of the entire report, including its recommendations.

Our journey into space will go on. The work of the crew of the *Columbia* and the heroic explorers who traveled before them will continue.

Remarks at a Dinner for Senator Christopher S. "Kit" Bond of Missouri in St. Louis August 26, 2003

Thanks for the warm welcome. It's such an honor to be here in the great State of Missouri. I am here because I believe Kit Bond is the right man for the United States Senate.

And I want to thank you for his—for your strong support for this fine Senator. Looks like you've got a few friends here in Missouri, Senator. [*Laughter*] Actually, I wasn't his first choice to come tonight. [*Laughter*] Laura is stuck on the ranch. [*Laughter*] But she sends her very best to Kit and to Linda.

Just as a kind of step back, I am really fortunate that Laura Bush said yes when I asked her to marry me. She is a great First Lady and a fabulous wife. I appreciate—you know, Senator Bond and I both married above ourselves. [*Laughter*] And it's great to see Linda. She's done a lot for him. She shortened his speeches and shortened his waistline. [*Laughter*] He's getting in fighting form for the '04 elections.

I'm also honored to be here with former Senator Jack Danforth. What a distinguished citizen of your State he is. He's working hard to bring peace to the Sudan. It's about as tough as an assignment as somebody can be given. But because of his steady demeanor and patience and his faith in freedom and peace, I think we'll achieve peace in the Sudan, and Jack Danforth will deserve a lot of credit.

I'm also honored to be here with the junior Senator from the great State of Missouri, a man who's doing a fabulous job on your behalf, Senator Jim Talent.

Speaking about Missouri citizens doing a fine job, John Ashcroft is a very good Attorney General. I am proud of the job he is doing. You trained him well. [*Laughter*]

Also traveling with me today is another member of my Cabinet, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, a friend of the veterans, Tony Principi. Thank you for coming, Mr. Secretary. He and I were at the American

Legion Convention today and had a chance to talk about our foreign policy. And I'll speak a little bit about that later on.

I appreciate Congressman Todd Akin and Congressman Kenny Hulshof as well from the mighty delegation from the State of Missouri. These are two strong allies and good friends, and I appreciate their service.

I know that Secretary of State Matt Blunt is with us, and his wife, Melanie. I know that Catherine Hanaway, the speaker of the house, is with us, and I know that State Senator Peter Kinder are here. And I appreciate the members of the State delegation from Missouri for coming as well.

Ann Wagner is the cochair of the Republican National Committee, and I'm really proud of her service to the Republican Party not only here in Missouri but across the Nation. Annie, thank you very much for your hard work.

And finally, I want to thank the State chairman for Bush-Cheney 2004. Everybody's got to have a good uncle—*[laughter]*—and I've got a great uncle.

The reason I'm here is because Kit Bond understands the challenges which face our Nation, and he's willing to join in constructive ways to do something about it. I think the best types of people who go to Washington are those who can recognize a problem and then have the courage and will to do something about it. And that's what I appreciate about Kit Bond. He and I share this value, that the future of freedom and peace depends upon the actions of America. We believe that this Nation is freedom's home and freedom's defender. We believe that everybody yearns for freedom and that every nation should be free.

This is—history has given this country a charge to keep, and we're keeping it. You know, this Nation was pretty secure for a while, secure that oceans could protect us. And then 9/11, 2001, came upon us. It was an historic moment because we realized that we weren't safe from an enemy which hates what we stand for. Be-

cause we love freedom and human dignity, because we love the fact that people can worship freely and speak freely, there's an enemy in the world which hates us. And since we're not going to change, in order to do our jobs, we must find them before they hurt America again.

Kit Bond understands that the best way to secure the homeland of America is to find the enemies of freedom one by one and bring them to justice. And I appreciate his support in making this world more free, making America more secure, and making the world more peaceful.

We're after Al Qaida. Slowly but surely, we're dismantling the terrorist network which has hijacked a great religion, which murders in the name of Islam. One by one, we're bringing them to justice. We've captured or killed over two-thirds of the Al Qaida operative network. Just a while ago, we got this guy Hambali, who we think was the instigator of the bombing in Bali. One by one, Al Qaida is meeting its demise. It doesn't matter where they hide, it doesn't matter where they cringe, the United States of America will find them and bring them to justice.

Part of the war on terror is to prevent hostile regimes from teaming up with terrorist networks. And that's why we went into Afghanistan. I sent a clear message: If you harbor a terrorist, if you feed a terrorist, you're just as guilty as the terrorist. And the Taliban in Afghanistan understand exactly what we mean.

And I appreciate Senator Bond's understanding of the need for the United States to uphold doctrine. When we say something in this country, we better do it, for the credibility of the world.

We've got a lot of work to do in Afghanistan, and we're doing it. We're training an Afghan army so they can best protect themselves. NATO is now involved in Afghanistan. And I want to thank our German friends for taking an active role in making Afghanistan more secure. We're building roads; we're opening up hospitals; and

many young girls go to school for the first time, thanks to the United States of America.

We gave a clear ultimatum to Saddam Hussein that he must disarm. He chose defiance, and Saddam Hussein is no more. He will not be able to threaten anybody with weapons of mass destruction. He will not be able to provide money for suicide bombers that were killing Israelis. Saddam Hussein will no longer have torture chambers. He is a man who is not in power, thanks to the United States of America and our friends and allies.

And we've got a lot of work to do in Iraq. You see, terrorists can't stand the thought of a free society in the Middle East. People who hate freedom are revolted at the fact that there may be a society that honors human rights and dignity, that treats men and women equally. Terrorists can't stand the thought of success in Iraq.

We're at a crucial point in history in Iraq. And I look forward to working with Senator Bond and Senator Talent and Members of the House to provide the resources necessary to make sure that Iraq is not only secure but that Iraq is free and peaceful. A peaceful Iraq is in the long-term interest of the United States of America.

And we're making progress there. You see, if you've been tortured—and remember, this is a country where we discovered thousands of people who had been executed and placed in mass graves, men, women, and children executed by Saddam Hussein. It's a country which had been terrorized and brutalized. It's a country which couldn't comprehend freedom. So it's going to take awhile for people to develop the habits necessary for a free society to emerge. But I'm absolutely confident, when we stay the course, a strong ally of the United States and any country which loves freedom will emerge. And that will have a positive effect on Israel and a Palestinian state. It will have a positive effect in a

region which is—harbored and educated and grew terrorists.

The long-term interests of the United States of America depend on this country doing what's right. And I'm proud to have Senators who understand that and are willing to stand with this administration to make sure we keep our word to the people of Iraq, that we hear the ambitions of those who love freedom in Iran, that we stand strong against the terrorists who would like to destroy the Middle East peace process. This country is leading the world to freedom and peace. It's inherent in our values. We understand that freedom is not America's gift to the world; freedom is God's gift to every individual in the world.

I appreciate Senator Bond's support of a policy which says that when this country sees hopelessness and despair around the world, we will not turn our back. I'm proud to be leading a nation which is leading the world in the fight against AIDS on the continent of Africa.

I recently traveled to Africa. I'll never forget going to Uganda, a country which is beginning to show what is possible in arresting that terrible pandemic. We went to a clinic, and we saw young mothers ravished by AIDS, the desperate look in their eyes. I could tell when they looked at the President of the United States, they saw hope. I remember seeing the children's choir—these are children of orphans—who sang hymns to us. It's a sad moment for me because I realized their moms and dads were gone. It was a joyous moment, though, to realize that people of faith had come to surround them with love. They too look at the United States for hope.

I want to thank Senator Bond for his support on the AIDS initiative. The United States is leading the world in an incredibly important work of human rescue.

I believe our foreign policy is compassionate when it needs to be compassionate and tough when it needs to be tough. But it's based upon a strong belief that freedom

is universal and the strong knowledge that free societies will be peaceful societies.

When I came to Washington, DC, our military was underfunded, and morale was beginning to suffer. I proposed defense budgets to prepare our military for threats of a new era. Senator Bond was a strong supporter of those defense budgets, and no one in the world today can question the skill, the honor, the sacrifice, the utility of the United States military.

When we came into office, the country was in recession, and we started getting better. The economy was getting a little better; then the enemy hit us. And then we had some corporate scandals; we had some people in our society who forgot what it means to be a responsible citizen. They didn't tell the truth to their shareholders and their employees, and that affected the people's confidence. And then on your TV screens you saw the words "march to war," which is not a very conducive phrase for economic development. But we acted. We passed tough laws to hold corporate criminals to account, and I want to thank Senator Bond's support on that.

And in order to get our economy growing, I called upon the Congress. Senator Bond and Senator Talent and others were strong supporters of historic tax relief. We understand that when people have more money in their pocket, they will save, spend, invest. And when they do so, somebody is more likely to find a job.

I appreciate Senator Bond's willingness to join the administration and insisting that Congress hold the line on spending. We understand whose money we spend in Washington. It is not the Government's money; it is the people's money. And he is a good steward of the people's money.

When Congress returns, we'll be debating a crucial issue, and that is Medicare. For the first time since the creation of Medicare, we have a chance to reform the system that needs to be reformed. Inherent in both plans out of the House and the Senate is the idea that we will trust seniors

to make the choices that they need in order to develop their health care plans and health care needs. And inherent in both plans is the knowledge and understanding that we need to have prescription drug coverage for our seniors. I want to thank Senator Bond for his willingness to stand up and join us in modernizing Medicare. We owe our seniors a modern Medicare system.

There are a lot of issues that relate to health that will be before our Congress. A significant issue is the issue of frivolous lawsuits. Frivolous lawsuits drive up the cost of health care. Frivolous and junk lawsuits drive up the cost of Medicare, Medicaid, veterans health benefits. Medical liability reform, therefore, is a national issue which requires a national solution.

We got a good bill out of the House of Representatives. It is stuck in the United States Senate. Kit Bond is one of the Senators, if it does get unstuck, will be responsible for passing good medical liability reform out of the United States Senate.

This country needs an energy bill. We need to have a national energy strategy. The blackouts on the east coast should make it clear to the skeptics in Congress that we need to modernize the electricity grid. We need mandatory reliability law. We need to encourage more investment into the transmission of electricity. We need to conserve more. We need more efficiency. But for the sake of economic security and for the sake of energy security and national security, we need to become less dependent on foreign sources of energy.

I appreciate working with Senator Bond on commonsense environmental policy. We both disagree with the judge's decision about the waterflows into the Missouri River. And we both agree that we must do a better job of preserving one of the most important assets we have in America, which is our national forests. We need a commonsense, reasonable forest policy to

prevent the raging forest fires from destroying this incredibly valuable asset.

I have an obligation to fill the judiciary with capable, honest, decent people. I have fulfilled that obligation. I have nominated superb women and men to the Federal bench, people who will interpret the law, not use the bench from which to legislate. And Senator Bond has been a strong supporter of my judicial nominees. But we have a problem in the United States Senate. There are some Senators who refuse to give my nominees an up-or-down vote. It is time for some of those Senators to stop playing politics with American justice.

I have an obligation to set great goals for this country. One of the goals I've set is to spread peace and freedom. Another great goal is to spread compassion throughout our land. I want our society to be an ownership society. See, I believe if you own something, you have a vital stake in the future. I believe if you own something in America, it helps with dignity and independence of life. We want more people owning their home. We have a minority homeownership gap in America. I look forward to working with Senator Bond to help narrow that gap.

We want people owning and managing their own health care plans. We want people owning and managing their own retirement plans. Kit Bond is a strong believer in the small-business owner of Missouri and America. We want more people owning their own small business. I look forward to working with Senator Bond to promote the ownership society of America.

Finally, I look forward to working with Senator Bond to get a faith-based initiative out of the United States Senate. I believe strongly that this Government should not fear faith but should welcome faith-based givers, neighborhood healers and helpers, when we see somebody who hurts. We all asked a question in Washington, DC: "Is the program effective that's helping save life? Is the Christian program or the Jewish

program or the Muslim program effective at changing lives and saving lives?"

That's the question we ought to be asking in Washington. The truth of the matter is, the great strength of America lies in the hearts and souls of the American people. We have people who hurt in our country. We have children who need to be mentored. We've got people who are hopelessly addicted to drugs. We need to welcome the armies of compassion, no matter what their faith, into the compassionate delivery of help and succor to those of our citizens who hurt.

Kit Bond will be a valuable ally in the passage of a much needed faith-based initiative that allows for faith-based programs to access Federal money, all in the aim of loving a neighbor just like we'd like to be loved ourself.

You just heard some of the reasons you need to send him back up there. Perhaps the greatest reason is he believes like I do, that both of us are fortunate to represent great people, that we're fortunate to be in positions of responsibility to represent the greatest nation on the face of the Earth.

I want to thank you for helping this good man. May God bless you all, and may God continue to bless America.

NOTE: The President spoke at 6:40 p.m. at the Renaissance Grand Hotel. In his remarks, he referred to former Senator John C. Danforth, Special Envoy for Peace in the Sudan; Missouri Secretary of State Matt Blunt and his wife, Melanie; Catherine Hanaway, speaker, Missouri State House of Representatives; Missouri State Senator Peter Kinder; Ann Wagner, cochairman, Republican National Committee, and chairman, Missouri Republican Party; William H.T. "Bucky" Bush, Missouri State chairman, Bush-Cheney '04, Inc.; Nurjaman Riduan Isamuddin (known as Hambali), Al Qaida's chief operational planner in Southeast Asia; and former President Saddam Hussein of Iraq.