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of a peaceful and hopeful society. They want to throw the country into chaos. The terrorists believe their attacks on innocent people will weaken our resolve. They don't understand our country. See, they believe we'll run from a challenge. This country will not be intimidated by a group of cold-blooded killers. This country will stay the course.

We're making good progress in Iraq. We're after the killers. We've got better intelligence now. The Iraqi citizens are coming forward to help us secure their own country. We've got great strike teams of brave soldiers who are moving on a moment's notice to bring people to justice. And at the same time, we're making the country more secure. We're opening up hospitals and schools and roads. We're bringing electricity to the people who suffered under the hands of a tyrant, who spent his money on weapons and palaces and not on the people. Slowly but surely, this country is emerging as a peaceful and democratic and hopeful place. And that's in our national interest. A peaceful and hopeful Iraq will make America more secure, because there will be freedom in the heart of a part of the world that needs freedom. Free countries don't attack their neighbors. Free countries are peaceful countries.

But we also believe something else about freedom and liberty. We don't believe that freedom is America's gift to the world. We believe freedom is the God Almighty's gift to each and every person in the world.

No, we're making progress, and we'll do the job the right way. We'll make sure that Iraq has got a constitution and free elections. We'll make sure the job gets done the right way, so that the Iraqi people will show the Middle East and the world that liberty is the hope and the right of every land. The work in Iraq and the work on the war against terror has been tough, and it's been hard, but we're doing our duty to future generations of Americans. We're doing our duty to make sure that we spread freedom and peace and, at the same time, make America more secure.

This country has overcome a lot. We've overcome attacks and recessions and corporate scandals. We've overcome tyrants, people who have harbored terrorists. But there's no doubt in my mind that because of who we are and who we—what we stand for, this Nation can not only overcome challenges, but we'll do our duty to make sure America is as hopeful and secure for every person who is fortunate enough to live in this land.

May God bless you all, and may God continue to bless America.

Thank you all very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:30 a.m. at the Ruiz Foods plant. In his remarks, he referred to Fred Ruiz, cofounder and chairman, Kim Ruiz Beck, vice chairman, and John Signorino, president, Ruiz Foods, Inc.; Fred Ruiz' parents, Rosie and Louis; Governor-elect Arnold Schwarzenegger of California; and former President Saddam Hussein of Iraq.

Remarks at a Bush-Cheney Reception in Fresno, California
October 15, 2003

Thanks for the warm welcome. It's great to be back in California. It's great to be back in Fresno. I was trying to figure out, since I've been running for President, this is either my third or fourth time here. And every time I come, I'm better off for it. [*Laughter*] It kind of reminds me of where

I was raised—good people, except you've got water and trees. [*Laughter*]

I know there's been some interesting changes here in the State of California. [*Laughter*] And tomorrow I have the honor of congratulating the Governor-elect in Riverside. And today I want to thank you all for your contributions and for your support. See, what we're doing is, we're laying the groundwork for what is going to be a great national victory in 2004.

I want you to know that your contributions are important, but so is your grassroots support. And by that I mean, when you go to the coffee shop—and I know there's a lot of farmers here who go to the coffee shops—[*laughter*]—tell everybody, or when you go to your community centers or your places of worship, you tell them that this administration is dedicating its efforts to making sure our country is hopeful for every citizen, that our message is optimistic, because we believe in the future of this country. That's what I'm counting on you to do.

And I'll do my part, but the political season is going to come in its own time. I'm warming up, and I'm getting ready, but I've got a job to do. I've got a job to do for our country, and there's a lot on the agenda. And I'm going to continue to work hard to earn the confidence of every American, regardless of their political party or where they're from, by keeping this Nation strong and secure and prosperous and free.

I bring greetings from First Lady Laura Bush. She is—[*applause*]—you got the B team. [*Laughter*] She has been in the Dominican Republic recently, meeting with the First Ladies of the different countries in our hemisphere. I'll be meeting her tomorrow in Riverside as we take off to Tokyo, and I'll be getting some advice from her about diplomacy. [*Laughter*] You may remember the picture of her trip to France. [*Laughter*] I went to France. [*Laughter*] And they were kind to me, but they—I wasn't treated that way by Jacques Chirac. [*Laughter*] But she is great. I am a lucky man that she agreed to marry me, and she's a fabulous First Lady.

I appreciate my friend Brad Freeman, who is the State finance chairman. I appreciate my friend Mercer Reynolds from Cincinnati, Ohio, who is the national finance chairman. These are two very capable, able business people who are taking time out of their lives to make sure this campaign is well funded.

I want to thank Members of the Congress who are here. George Radanovich is with us today. He is a good friend and a fine Congressman, as is Devin Nunes, and I appreciate Devin being here as well.

I had the honor of traveling from the airport out to Ruiz Foods, by the way, which was a fantastic experience, going out there. I love the story of America. I love the fact that people started with nothing and have built a fantastic food processing business. The Ruizes are here with us today. They were great hosts. They now process 3 million burritos a day. Are you having burritos for lunch?

But on the way out to the facility, Alan Autry was traveling with me, the great mayor of Fresno, California. And I appreciate him being here today, and I thank him for his friendship. Chuck Poochigian is here, the State senator, who's been a longtime friend of mine. And it's great to see his wife, Debbie. Bob Waterston is the supervisor of the Fresno County Board of Supervisors—all politics is local politics, and thank you for coming, Bob. My friend Bill Jones is here. He's a Fresno lad who has made a name for himself here in the great State of California. It's great to see you again, Bill. Thank you for coming.

Gerry Parsky is with us today; he's the State campaign chairman. Rosario Marin is with us today, the former Treasurer of the State—of the country. I want to thank all the cohosts for working so hard to make this event a recordbreaking event.

I appreciate Lance Corporal Nolan Cochran, who gave the Pledge of Allegiance. He's a brave young guy. He served his country with distinction. I had the honor of meeting him at the Bethesda Naval Hospital as he came back from the battlefields. And I was pleased to see his mom and dad. I'm glad to know his spirits are high and that he understands that he was making our country more secure in his sacrifice.

And finally, I want to thank JoAnna Dias, who sang the national anthem.

In the last 2½ years, our Nation has acted decisively to confront great challenges. I came to this office to solve problems, not to pass them on to future Presidents and future generations. I came to seize opportunities and not let them slip away. This administration is meeting the tests of our time.

Terrorists declared war on the United States of America, and war is what they got. We've captured or killed many of the key leaders of the Al Qaida network, and the rest of them know that we're on their trail. In Afghanistan and Iraq, we gave ultimatums to terror regimes. Those regimes chose defiance, and those regimes are no more. Fifty million people in those two countries once lived under tyranny, and now they live in freedom.

Two-and-a-half years ago, our military was not receiving the resources it needed, and morale was beginning to suffer. And so we increased the defense budgets to prepare for the threats of a new era. And today, no one in the world can question the skill and the strength and the spirit of the United States military.

Two-and-a-half years ago, we inherited an economy in recession. And then the attacks came on our country, and we had a march to war to defend ourselves, and we had scandals in corporate America, all of which affected the people's confidence. But this administration acted. We passed two tough new laws to hold corporate criminals to account. And to get the economy going again, I have twice led the United States Congress to pass historic tax relief for the American people.

Here's what I know. I know that when people have more take-home pay, more money in their pocket to save or to spend or invest, the whole economy will grow and someone is more likely to find a job. I also know this: I understand whose money we spend in Washington. We don't spend the people's money—I mean, we don't spend the Government's money; we spend the people's money. [*Laughter*] So we're returning more money to families. We've increased the child credit. And we said, "The check was in the mail," and it was in the mail. We reduced the taxes on dividends and capital gains to encourage investment. We gave small businesses incentives to expand and to hire new people.

With all these actions, by the fact—because we led, we are laying the foundation for greater prosperity and more jobs so that every single person in this country has a chance to realize the American Dream.

Two-and-a-half years ago, there was a lot of talk about education reform, but there wasn't much action. So I acted. I called for and the Congress passed the No Child Left Behind Act. With a solid bipartisan majority, we delivered the most dramatic education reforms in a generation. We insisted on high standards for every public school because we believe every child can learn.

Because we believe every child can learn, we're now saying that in return for Federal money, you must measure to determine whether every child is learning. We're challenging the soft bigotry of low expectations. We believe every child can learn the basics of reading and math. And we expect every public school in America to teach reading and math so that not one single child is left behind.

We reorganized our Government, the largest reorganization of any time in our Government's history since the Defense Department was reorganized. We created

the Department of Homeland Security to better safeguard America.

We passed trade promotion authority to open up new markets for California farmers and ranchers and entrepreneurs. Listen, I understand free trade, and the cornerstone of free trade is not only for us to open up our markets but to make sure the playing field is level. We're really good at growing things in California. I want California farmers selling their crops overseas.

We passed budget agreements in Washington that is helping to maintain spending discipline. On issue after issue, this administration has acted on principle; we have kept our word; and we have made progress for the American people.

The Congress deserves credit. We've got a great Speaker in Denny Hastert and a great majority leader in Bill Frist. I appreciate the Congressmen who are here with us today. See, we're working to change the tone in Washington. There's too much politics in the Nation's Capital, too much zero-sum activity. And the best way to do that is to focus on the people's business and to focus on results. And those are the kind of people I've attracted to my administration. I think you can judge a President by the kind of people that he brings to Washington to serve the people, and I have put together a great team to serve the American people. We've had no finer Vice President than Dick Cheney. Mother may have a second opinion. [*Laughter*]

In 2½ years—in 2½ years—we have done a lot, and we have come far, but our work is only beginning. I have great goals worthy of a great nation.

First, America is committed to expanding the realm of freedom and peace for our own security and for the benefit of the world. And second, in our own country we must work for a society of prosperity and compassion, so that every citizen has a chance to work and succeed and to realize the promise of our country. It is clear that the future of freedom and peace depend on the actions of America. This Nation is freedom's home and freedom's defender. We welcome this charge of history, and we are keeping it.

Our war on terror continues. The enemies of freedom are not idle, and neither are we. This country will not rest. We will not tire. We will not stop until this danger to civilization is removed. And we are confronting that danger in Iraq, where Saddam holdouts and foreign terrorists are desperately trying to throw Iraq into chaos by attacking coalition forces, by attacking international aid workers, and by killing innocent Iraqis. They know that the advance of freedom will be a major defeat in the cause of terror.

This collection of killers is trying to shake the will of the United States. They're trying to frighten us. They do not understand our country. We will not be frightened. We will stay on the offensive. We're aggressively striking the terrorists in Iraq, defeating them there so we will not have to face them in our own country.

We're calling other nations to help Iraq to build a free country. A free and peaceful Iraq will make the world more secure. And we'll stand with the Iraqi people, the long-suffering Iraqi people—they are people who put up with torture chambers and rape rooms and mass graves. We will help them assume more of their own defense and move as rapidly as possible toward self-government. These tasks are not easy, but they are essential tasks. And we will finish what we have begun. We will win this essential victory in the war on terror.

But I understand this: Our greatest security comes from the advance of human liberty, because free nations do not support terror. Free nations do not attack their neighbors. Free nations do not threaten the world with weapons of mass terror. Americans believe that freedom is the deepest need and hope of every human heart. And I believe that freedom is the right of every person. And I believe that freedom is the future of every nation.

America also understands that unprecedented influence brings tremendous responsibilities. We have duties in this world, and when we see disease and starvation and hopeless poverty, we will not turn away. On the continent of Africa, this great Nation, this strong Nation, is committed to bringing the healing power, the healing power of medicine to millions of men and women and children now suffering with AIDS. I am incredibly proud of the fact that this great land is leading the world in the important work of human rescue.

We've got challenges here at home, and our actions will prove equal to those challenges. So long as somebody in our economy—in our country is looking for a job, I will continue to try to create the conditions for job growth, to foster the entrepreneurial spirit, to make it easier for the small businesses who hire most new workers to be able to grow and to expand. I want everybody in this country finding a job.

And we have a duty to keep our commitment to our seniors by strengthening and modernizing Medicare. A few weeks ago, the Congress finally passed some Medicare reform. The House passed a version, and the Senate passed a version. For the first time since the creation of Medicare, both Houses have passed reforms to increase the choices for seniors and to provide a much needed prescription drug benefit. It is time for both bodies to reconcile their differences and to do their duty, not only for today's seniors but for those of us who will be seniors, to modernize the Medicare system.

For the sake of our health care system, we need to cut down on the frivolous lawsuits which increase the cost of medicine. People who have been harmed by a bad doc deserve their day in court. Yet, the system should not reward lawyers who are simply fishing for a rich settlement. Frivolous lawsuits drive up the cost of health care and, therefore, affect the Federal budget: Medicare goes up; Medicaid goes up; veteran health care costs go up because of the frivolous lawsuits. Medical liability reform is a national issue which requires a national solution.

And so I proposed a good, strong piece of legislation. The House passed it. It is stuck in the Senate. The Senate must act on behalf of the American people, and they must hear loud and clear that no one has ever been healed by a frivolous lawsuit.

I have a responsibility as President to make sure the judicial system runs well, and I have met that duty. I have nominated superb men and women for the Federal courts, people who will interpret the law, not legislate from the bench. Some Members of the Senate are trying to keep my nominees off the bench by blocking up-or-down votes. Every judicial nominee deserves a fair hearing and an up-or-down vote on the Senate floor. It is time for some of the Members of the United States Senate to stop playing politics with American justice.

Congress needs to complete work on a comprehensive energy plan. This Nation must promote energy efficiency and conservation and develop cleaner technology to help us explore for energy in environmentally sensitive ways. But for the sake of economic security and for the sake of national security, we need to be less dependent on foreign sources of energy.

Our strong and prosperous Nation must also be a compassionate nation. I will continue to advance our agenda of compassionate conservatism by applying the best and most innovative ideas to the task of helping our fellow citizens in need. There are still millions of men and women who want to end their dependence on the Government and become independent through hard work. We must build on the successes of the welfare reform to bring work and dignity into the lives of more of our fellow citizens. Congress should complete the "Citizen Service Act" so more Americans can serve their communities and their country.

And both Houses should reach agreement on my Faith-Based Initiative, so we can support the armies of compassion that are mentoring children, that are caring for the homeless and offering hope to the addicted. Our Government must not fear the influence of faith in our communities. We must welcome faith programs to help solve the intractable problems of our society.

A compassionate society promotes opportunity for all, including the independence and dignity that come from ownership. This administration will constantly strive to promote an ownership society in America. We want more people owning their homes. Today I discussed the minority homeownership gap. I described a plan that we put before Congress to close that gap. We want more people to own and manage their own health care plans. We want people to own and manage their own retirement accounts. We want more people owning their own small business in America, because we understand that when a person owns something, he or she will have a vital stake in the future of this country.

In a compassionate society, people respect one another, and they take responsibility for the decisions they make. We're changing the culture of this country from one that has said, "If it feels good, do it," and "If you've got a problem, blame somebody else," to one in which each of us understands that we are responsible for the decisions we make. If you are fortunate enough to be a mother or father, you're responsible for loving your child with all your heart. If you're concerned about the quality of the education in the community in which you live, you're responsible for doing something about it. If you're a CEO in America, you have a responsibility to tell the truth to your shareholders and your employees. And in this new responsibility society, each of us is responsible for loving our neighbor just like we'd like to be loved ourselves.

We see the culture of service and responsibility growing around us. Right after September the 11th, I started the USA Freedom Corps to encourage Americans to extend a compassionate hand to a neighbor in need, and the response has been strong. Our charities are strong. Our faith-based organizations are vibrant. Police and firefighters and people who wear our Nation's uniform are reminding us what it means to sacrifice for something greater than yourself. Once again, the children of America believe in heroes, because they see them every day.

In these challenging times, the world has seen the resolve and the courage of America. And I have been privileged to see the compassion and the character of the American people. All the tests of the last 2½ years have come to the right nation. We're a strong country, and we use that strength to defend the peace. We're an optimistic country, confident in ourselves and in ideals bigger than ourselves. Abroad, we seek to lift whole nations by spreading freedom. At home, we seek to lift up lives by spreading opportunity to every corner of America. This is the work that history has set before us. We welcome it. And we know that for our country and for our cause, the best days lie ahead.

Thank you for coming. God bless. Thank you all.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:09 p.m. in Exhibit Hall South at the Fresno Convention Center. In his remarks, he referred to Governor-elect Arnold Schwarzenegger of California; President Jacques Chirac of France; Brad Freeman, California State finance chairman, and Mercer Reynolds, national finance chairman, Bush-Cheney '04, Inc.; Bill Jones, former California secretary of state; Gerald L. Parsky, chairman, Team California, California Republican Party Board of Directors; former U.S. Treasurer Rosario Marin; and former President Saddam Hussein of Iraq.