

running back Jerome Bettis; Pennsylvania State Attorney General Mike Fisher; Allegheny County Chief Executive Jim Roddey; and David Girard-diCarlo, Pennsylvania

State cochairman, and Leslie Gromis Baker, campaign chairperson for the mid-Atlantic region, Bush-Cheney '04, Inc.

Remarks Honoring 2003 NASCAR Drivers December 2, 2003

The President. Good to see you all. Thanks for coming. Welcome. Please be seated. Thanks for coming. Welcome to the White House, and congratulations on a great NASCAR Winston Cup Series. We're honored you all are here. I see a lot of the "Bubbas" who work in my administration who have shown up. [Laughter] I wonder why. I've hosted champions from many sports here at the White House—first time, however, we ever parked stock cars in the South Lawn. [Laughter] We're proud you all are here.

I'm proud to be here with such an outstanding group of NASCAR drivers. I didn't realize you all dressed up so well—[laughter]—with the NASCAR owners, the crew members, and the executives of this fine sport.

I appreciate the Members of Congress who are here. I see Senator Jon Kyl of Arizona. I didn't realize you were such a race fan, Senator—helped us get the Medicare bill through the Senate, by the way. I appreciate Bart Gordon of Tennessee for joining us. Congressman Mac Collins—I knew he was a race car fan. It's good to see you, Mac.

Representative Collins. [Inaudible]

The President. Yes, you are a "Bubba." [Laughter] I'm glad you all are here. I thought you might be here just because you were looking for a fast ride back up to the Capitol.

I want to congratulate Matt Kenseth, the 2003 Winston Cup points champion. Like all champs, he succeeded because of his dedication and his hard work. He started

racing late-model cars in his home State of Wisconsin before he was 20 years old. He worked his way up the ranks to the Busch Series. I kind of like the name of that series. [Laughter] This year, he drove his number 17 Ford all the way to the Winston Cup title. He's a great driver, and, like me, he married well. We appreciate Katie coming here today. Thanks for being here, Katie.

But every NASCAR fan knows that behind the—the talent behind the wheel is not just enough, that NASCAR is a team sport. When you hear these drivers talk after a victory, they're always talking about how well their team performed, how well the team did. He had a great group in the pit, obviously—otherwise, he wouldn't be the champion—starting with the cat in the hat, the team owner, Jack Roush. Thank you for coming, Jack, and congratulations. Every team needs a strong crew chief, and Matt had a great one in Robbie Reiser. Robbie, thank you for coming. I appreciate you being here. Some of the other members of the crew are here as well. Where are they, Robbie? Where are the members of your crew? Well, they must have—couldn't pass the security check. Let them in the gate. [Laughter] But all of you have earned your right—earned the right to call yourselves champs. I congratulate you. We welcome you to the White House. I'm really proud of the job you've done.

One of the reasons for the success of NASCAR is the strength of its leadership. I want to thank Mike Helton, who is the

president of NASCAR, for coming today. Mike, you're doing a great job.

But there's no doubt NASCAR is where it is today because of a great entrepreneur, a person who understands the consumer, the customer, and built this sport up to what it is, and that is Bill France, Jr. We're honored you're here, Bill. Thank you for coming. I appreciate Betty Jane coming as well. It's great to see you again, Betty Jane. I'm also so pleased that Lesa Kennedy, who is the president of the Daytona International Speedway, is with us; Brian France, who's taken over his dad's position at NASCAR. You know, there's nothing wrong, Brian, with following your father's footsteps. [*Laughter*] The France family is a great American family, and we're really proud you're here.

We're proud some of the members of the board from NASCAR are with us today. I'm glad my friend, former Governor Bill Graves, is here. Thank you all for coming.

We also have some former Winston Cup champs—Tony Stewart—I had the honor of greeting Tony at the Oval Office last year. Bill Elliott is with us. Some pretty fine Texans are up here too—the Labonte boys, Bobby and Terry—from Corpus, right? That's what I thought. You still from Corpus? They still claim you in Corpus. Yes. [*Laughter*]

Mark Martin is not on the stage with us, but he's one of the fine drivers on the NASCAR circuit. Mark, we're proud you're here. Thank you for coming. Some of the young drivers are with us today. These are the ones that are attracting some of the young fans to this fantastic sport—Jimmie Johnson and Dale Earnhardt, Jr., Kevin Harvick, and Ryan Newman. I'm really glad you all are here. Thanks for coming. It's such a thrill to have you on the South Lawn.

NASCAR is one of the fastest growing sports in America today; 75 million Americans now count themselves as fans. And NASCAR has followers around the world who listen to your races in 21 languages

and a hundred different countries. It's a fantastic international sport. And it's easy to figure out why the sport is so popular. The competition is intense, the drivers and their crews are skillful, the finishes are oftentimes dramatic.

NASCAR has a proud history dating back to 1948. And today, you're carrying on the tradition set by some of the great legends of American sport, Richard Petty and Cale Yarborough and Dale Earnhardt.

It's a time of change for NASCAR. It's one of the reasons why the sport is continuing to attract a lot of fans. Yet the values long held by the drivers in this sport endure. It's one of the things I like most about NASCAR. You know the work you do away from the track is really what makes the NASCAR drivers the true champs. After Hurricane Isabelle and the California wildfires, Jimmie Johnson worked with Lowe's and the American Red Cross to raise money for the victims for those disasters. Tony Stewart donated \$1 million to the Petty family for the Victory Junction Gang Camp, which is a great facility in North Carolina where seriously ill children can have fun while undergoing treatment. Jeff Gordon has run a foundation to benefit children and families in need. These champs are champs on the racetrack, and they're champs off the racetrack, for which this country is grateful.

I also appreciate the strong support that NASCAR's drivers and crew members and executives continue to give to our Armed Forces. By reminding your millions of fans that America's heroes are the men and women who defend our Nation, you're reminding us all about the importance of serving a cause greater than ourself.

I want to thank you all for coming today. I want to congratulate you all for being such great champs. Good luck in the upcoming year. May God bless you all, and may God continue to bless our great country. Thanks for coming.

NOTE: The President spoke at 3:05 p.m. on the South Lawn at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Jack Roush, owner, Roush Racing; Bill France, Jr., co-vice chairman, NASCAR, his wife, Betty Jane, and their children, Brian France, chief executive

officer and chairman of the board, NASCAR, and Lesa France Kennedy, president, International Speedway Corp.; and Bill Graves, member, board of directors, International Speedway Corp.

Remarks on Signing the Healthy Forests Restoration Act of 2003 *December 3, 2003*

Thanks for coming. Thanks for finally inviting me to the Department of Agriculture. [Laughter] It's an honor to be here. I'm really glad to be here as our Government takes a major step forward in protecting America's forests.

Almost 750 million acres of forest stand tall and beautiful across the 50 States. We have a responsibility to be good stewards of our forests. That's a solemn responsibility. And the legislation I sign today carries forward this ethic of stewardship. With the Healthy Forest Restoration Act, we will help to prevent catastrophic wildfires; we'll help save lives and property; and we'll help protect our forests from sudden and needless destruction.

I appreciate so very much Secretaries Veneman and Norton for working hard on this issue. These two members of my Cabinet are doing a great job, and I'm proud that they're in my Cabinet. I want to thank Mark Rey. I also want to thank Dale Bosworth, who is the Chief of the Forest Service. From the Interior Department, I want to thank Rebecca Watson and Lynn Scarlett for their hard work and their good work for these important issues. I want to thank the officials and employees of the Department of Agriculture and the Department of Interior for doing a great job on behalf of the American citizens. Thank you for your dedication and your work on behalf of all of us.

I appreciate the Hotshot team members from the great State of California. These

are the folks in the yellow shirts. I spent some time with the Hotshot members as a—this summer in California, last summer in Arizona, a time in Oregon, Washington State. These are brave, brave citizens. These are fantastic citizens in the country. We're proud to be standing with them up here.

I appreciate the Members of Congress who have joined us, strong Members who brought some common sense to what had been an acrimonious debate, who listened to the people—[applause]—Members who listen to the people, who know what they're talking about, and came up with a good piece of legislation, starting with Senator Thad Cochran, who's the chairman of the Committee of Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry. Thad has done a fabulous job of getting this bill out of the United States Senate, along with Max Baucus and Mike Crapo—Baucus being of—from Montana and Crapo being from Idaho, great Members of the Senate, and thank you all for coming. I appreciate your coming. We have two other Members of the Senate with us here. From the West, Kyl and Smith—Gordon Smith from Oregon. I appreciate you two coming.

From the House, onstage are three Members: the chairman of the Committee of Agriculture, Bob Goodlatte, from the great State of Virginia; Scott McInnis, who is the sponsor of the Healthy Forest bill—[applause]—McInnis is having a family reunion in Washington. [Laughter] Richard