

home.” “*Bienvenidos a mi casa.*” [Laughter] “Thanks for coming to my piece of property.” And we must be dedicated to the proposition that ownership ought to extend to every neighborhood and every group.

I set a goal to have 5.5 million new minority homeowners by the end of this decade. And we’re on track to meet the goal—1.6 million new minority homeowners bought homes in the last 2 years. It’s a fantastic statistic, I think. I think it’s part of helping bring hope into people’s families.

Also I’d like to talk about entrepreneurship. I mean, the Latino community is entrepreneurial. I mean, you talk about small-business owners who have got vision and drive and desire, sit down with Latino businessowners. They have a great sense of business and balance sheet and, as importantly, a great desire to own their own business. And one of the most hopeful aspects of our society today is the number of Hispanic-owned businesses that thrive throughout America. I love it when I meet an Hispanic entrepreneur, particularly somebody who came up with an idea at their kitchen table and said, “I want to own something. I want to own my business.” And now they’re employing people. Seventy percent of new jobs in America are created by small businesses. Think about that. And the role of Government is to encourage the expansion of small-business opportunity and entrepreneurship through every society, every part of our society. And we’re doing just that in America, and our country is better for it.

Listen, we’re a diverse nation, but there are things that bind us, our love of free-

dom, our belief in God, our understanding of the importance of family, our desire to realize dreams, the deep desire for people to live in a free society. I’m proud of your heritage. I’m proud of the ancestry. I’m proud to call Latinos Americans, and I’m proud to be your President.

God bless, and welcome to the White House.

NOTE: The President spoke at 3:37 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to President Vladimir Putin of Russia; Gov. Haley Barbour of Mississippi; Gov. Bob Riley of Alabama; Gov. Kathleen Babineaux Blanco of Louisiana; Gov. Jeb Bush of Florida; Hector V. Barreto, Administrator, Small Business Administration; Luis Alberto Moreno Mejia, Colombia’s Ambassador to the United States; Carlos Alberto De Icaza, Mexico’s Ambassador to the United States; Carlos Westendorp y Cabeza, Spain’s Ambassador to the United States; Nevada State Attorney General Brian Sandoval; entertainers Marcos Witt, Joaquin Cortes, and Emilio Estefan; actor Jimmy Smits; television personality Myrka Dellanos; Elizabeth Vargas, reporter, and Alex Wallau, president, ABC Television Network; professional soccer players Eliseo Quintanilla, Marco Etcheverry, and Amado Guevara; and Shawn McCollough, principal, Gainesville Elementary School. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of these remarks. The National Hispanic Heritage Month proclamation of September 17 is listed in Appendix D at the end of this volume.

Remarks in St. Cloud, Minnesota September 16, 2004

The President. Thank you all. Thank you all for coming. I’m honored to be here in St. Cloud. I understand I am the first

sitting President—[applause]—I am glad I came, and the other Presidents missed a lot. Thanks for coming out today. It’s such

an honor to be here. I really want to thank you for being here. A little early in the morning, I know. [Laughter] It seems like I provided a pretty good excuse for some kids to miss school. Don't make a habit of it. [Laughter]

I'll tell you what I'm doing. We're taking a bus trip across your beautiful State. I'm asking for the vote. That's what I'm doing today. I'm here to tell you in St. Cloud, I want your vote. And I'm asking for your help. I know we've got a lot of people working hard here to register voters. Keep doing it. See, we have a duty in this country to participate in the elections, is what I believe we have. And I'm asking you to find people and register them to vote. And when you're registering people to vote, don't overlook discerning Democrats, people like Zell Miller. And then when you get people registered to vote, head them to the polls. And when you get them headed to the polls, tell them, if they want a safer America, a stronger America, a better America, to put me and Dick Cheney back in office.

So I told Laura I was going to St. Cloud. She said, "Tell everybody hi." I wish she were here. I know—I love Laura too. [Laughter] She is a great mother, a wonderful wife. You know, when I married her, or asked her to marry me, she was a public school librarian in Texas. She said, "Fine, I'll marry you. Just, I don't want to give any political speeches." I said, "Okay, you won't have to give any speeches." Fortunately, she didn't hold me to that promise. [Laughter] She is a great speaker, because she is a compassionate, decent soul. I'm going to give you some reasons to put me back in today, but perhaps the most important one of all is so that Laura is First Lady for 4 more years.

I'm proud of my runningmate, Dick Cheney. Admittedly, he doesn't have the waviest hair in the race. [Laughter] I didn't pick him because of his hair. I picked him because he's a man of great experience,

sound judgment, and he's a man who can get the job done.

I appreciate working with Mark Kennedy. He's a fine Member of the United States Congress. He's a good fellow. Every time I see him, he says, "Don't forget those Minnesota farmers." As you can tell by some ag prices, we haven't.

I appreciate your Governor, Tim Pawlenty. He's a fine man, too. I'm honored. Norman Coleman is not with us, but I tell you, he's a good one for the United States Senate. I'm proud to work with him. I want to thank all the other State and local officials who are here. I want to thank John Stone. I appreciate his—country music songs he sings. I'm honored that he has joined us today.

I want to thank my friend Lieutenant Colonel Joe Repya. He runs the veterans program for this campaign. First of all, I want to thank all the veterans who are here. I appreciate your strong support. And I want to thank my friend Joe for his leadership. He's scheduled to deploy to Iraq soon, and of course, Joe, you'll be in our prayers, and we appreciate your service.

I know Coach John is with us today, the great coach from St. John's University. We had him to the White House a while ago, and it was such an honor to receive such a class act. He is a wonderful man. He's got a great family. He lifts everybody's spirits, and I'm proud to have him on my team. Coach John, thanks for coming.

I want to thank the grassroots activists. Those are the people who put up the signs and make the phone calls and turn out the vote. I can't thank you enough for what you have done. And I'm going to thank you for what you're going to do, and that is, keep working, because I'm going to be working right alongside of you. I want to win, and I know we are going to win.

I like getting out with the people. I like to get out and tell people where I stand, what I believe, and where I'm going to lead this Nation for the next 4 years. I believe every child can learn, and every

school must teach. I went to Washington to challenge the soft bigotry of low expectations. I thought it was wrong to shuffle children through the schools, grade after grade, year after year, without teaching the basics. So we increased Federal help, but we also are now measuring. And we're measuring so we can determine problems early, before they're too late.

[At this point, the audio system failed, and a portion of the President's remarks were not available.]

The President. —schools. We're closing an achievement gap in America, and we are not turning back.

I believe we have a moral responsibility to honor our seniors with good health care. I went to Washington to fix problems, not pass them on to future Presidents. Medicare needed to be strengthened. People say, "What do you mean by that." I'll tell you what I mean. Medicare would pay \$100,000 or so for heart surgery, but it would not pay for the prescription drugs necessary to prevent the heart surgery from not being needed. It didn't make any sense, did it, not to pay drugs that would stop the heart surgery from being needed and yet pay for the heart surgery?

I worked with Republicans and Democrats. We're modernizing Medicare. Prescription drugs will be available for our seniors, and we're not turning back.

I believe in the energy and innovation, the spirit of our farmers, workers, small-business owners. And that's why we unleashed that energy with the largest tax relief in a generation.

Listen, when you're out gathering the vote, remind people what we have been through. We have been through a recession. We've been through corporate scandals, and that affected economic growth by the way. And secondly, we passed laws, tough laws. It's now abundantly clear to everybody in America, we're not going to tolerate dishonesty in the boardrooms of America. And the attacks of September the

11th hurt us. They hurt our economy. But our economy is strong, and it's getting stronger. We're overcoming these obstacles.

You tell folks out there that our economy is growing at rates as fast as any in nearly 20 years, that we've added 1.7 million new jobs since August of last year, that the national unemployment rate is 5.4 percent, below the average rate of the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s. The unemployment rate in your great State is 4.4 percent. This economy is strengthening, and we're not turning back.

I believe the most solemn duty of the American President is to protect the American people. If America shows uncertainty and weakness in this decade, the world will drift toward tragedy. This isn't going to happen on my watch. I'm running for President with a clear and positive plan to build a safer world and a more hopeful America. I'm running with a compassionate conservative philosophy that Government should help people improve their lives, not try to run their lives. I believe this Nation wants steady, consistent, principled leadership. And that is why, with your help, we're going to carry Minnesota and win a great victory in November.

Listen, the world in which we live is changing. Think about how much it's changed since our dads and granddads' generations started working. I mean, it used to be the man worked outside the home, and one job, one career, had one pension plan, one health care account. Today, people oftentimes change jobs and careers. The most fundamental shift in the workforce has been women work both inside the home and outside the home now. And yet, the fundamental systems of our Government have not changed. See, the Tax Code and health coverage and pension plans and worker training were created for yesterday, not tomorrow. In a new term, I will work to transform these systems so that all our citizens are equipped, prepared, and thus truly free to make your own

choices, so you can pursue the great promise of our country.

Any hopeful society requires a growing economy. And I've got a plan to keep this economy moving forward. To create more jobs in America, America must be the best place in the world to do business. We need to reduce the burden of regulation on small-business owners if we want to keep this economy growing. We need to stop junk lawsuits if we want to keep this economy growing.

To make sure this country's economy is strong and people can find work at home, Congress needs to pass my energy plan. It's a plan that encourages conservation. It's a plan that uses biodiesel and ethanol. It's a plan that says we can burn our coal cleaner and explore for natural resources in an environmentally friendly way. But it's a plan that understands that in order to keep America's economy strong, we must be less dependent on foreign sources of energy.

To keep this economy strong, we've got to have good agriculture policy. I worked to phase out the death tax, so families can pass their farm from one generation to the next. We're working with our farmers and ranchers on the Conservation Reserve Program, so we can improve land, protect wildlife, and help our farmers. We've got a dairy policy that treats all people equally across this country.

And to make sure our farm economy is strong, we're going to continue to open up markets around the world. See, here's the issue when it comes to trade. We've opened up our markets for foreign goods, and it's good for you to do so. If you're a consumer and you have more choices, you're likely to get that which you want at a better price and higher quality, with more products available. And so what I'm telling you is, is that we're going to continue to say to countries like China, "You treat us the way we treat you." See, we can compete with anybody, anytime, anywhere, so long as the rules are fair.

In order to make sure this economy grows, we've got to be wise about how we spend your money and keep your taxes low. Taxes are an issue in this campaign. See, they're an issue because I'm running against a fellow who has already promised over \$2 trillion of new Federal spending.

Audience members. Boo-o-o!

The President. And so they said, "How are you going to pay for it?" And he said, "Well, that's easy. I'm just going to tax the rich." We've heard that before, haven't we? [Laughter] First of all, you can't raise enough money by taxing the rich to pay for \$2.2 trillion worth of new programs. There's a tax gap. Guess who's going to get stuck if he has his way?

The other thing about the language "taxing the rich" is, the rich hire lawyers and accountants for a reason, so you get stuck with the tab. We're not going to let him tax you. We're going to win in November.

Audience members. Four more years! Four more years! Four more years!

The President. This Tax Code of ours—we need to change the Tax Code of ours. It's a complicated mess. It's full of all kinds of special interest loopholes. You realize the Tax Code is over a million words long. That's why Americans spend about 6 billion hours annually trying to fill out the tax returns. Listen, we need to simplify the Tax Code. To keep this economy growing, we need to simplify the Tax Code. To treat our citizens fairly, we need to simplify the Tax Code. In a new term, I'm going to bring Republicans and Democrats together to change the Tax Code for the good.

A changing world is one in which the jobs—the nature of the jobs change. See, look at your own community. Look at the health care industry. It's changing the workforce. But oftentimes our workers don't have the skills necessary to fill the jobs of the 21st century. In order to keep jobs here at home, we've got to help our workers gain the skills they need to fill the jobs. That's why I'm such a big backer in the community college system. I believe

we ought to make community colleges more accessible for worker training programs, and we will do so.

I also recognize most new jobs are filled with people with at least 2 years of college. Yet only one in four of our students gets there. That's why I believe we ought to fund early intervention programs at our high schools to help at-risk students. I know we need to emphasize math and science in our high schools. Over time we will require a rigorous exam before graduation from our high schools. By raising performance in our high schools and expanding Pell grants for low and middle-income families, we will help more Americans start their career with a college diploma.

In a time of change, we've got to also reform our health care systems. Health care costs are rising rapidly. They're burdening our economy. They're leaving too many people uninsured. I have a commonsense, practical plan to make high-quality health care more affordable and more accessible. When it comes to health care, we have a difference of opinion, and it's a big difference of opinion in this campaign. My opponent wants Government to dictate. I want you to decide when it comes to health care.

More than half of the Americans who are currently uninsured are small-business employees and their families. I want to change law to allow small firms to pool together so they can purchase insurance at the same discounts that big companies can purchase insurance.

My opponent opposes this plan. He calls it association health plans, and he opposes them. He says that health plans such as these, association health plans, would hurt consumers. No, what hurts consumers is not having health insurance. What hurts consumers is small businesses don't have the same advantages that big businesses have. Under my plan, the same laws that protect workers at large companies will protect consumers at small companies. It is time to stop the excuses. It is time to act

to give more Americans quality health insurance coverage.

We need to expand tax-free health savings accounts. These are important for our consumers. These are tax-free way to save for your own health care needs. Small businesses will be given tax credits that encourage them to put money into health savings accounts for their employees. We want more people to have their health savings accounts. So they make decisions based on the advice of their doctor, not somebody working at a distant HMO. In order to make sure health care is available and affordable, we need to expand community health centers all across our country. These are places where the indigent and poor can find preventative care and primary care help. In order to make sure health care is available and affordable, we're going to spread health information technology throughout our society.

In order to make sure health care is available and affordable, we need to do something about the junk lawsuits that are running good docs out of business and running up the costs of health care. I hear from people everywhere I go about the problems of these junk lawsuits. I hear from ob-gyns how hard it is to practice their profession. I hear from pregnant women who are worried about the fact they can't find a good doc. See, I don't think you can be pro-doctor and pro-patient and pro-trial-lawyer at the same time. [*Laughter*] I think you have to choose. My opponent has made his choice, and he put a trial lawyer on the ticket. I made my choice: I am for medical liability reform—now.

See, I think the problem in this campaign that my opponent has is that it's a plan that is massive, and it's big, and it puts the Government in control of health care. And you can tell it's massive by the price tag. This week an independent group estimated the cost of Senator Kerry's plan would be \$1.5 trillion. That's trillion with a T. [*Laughter*] And that's big even for

a Senator from Massachusetts. [Laughter] The only possible way for him to pay for this plan is to tax you.

The other problem is that it expands the Government. See, now let me give you an example. His plan will crowd out private health insurance, giving businesses an incentive to drop the health care plans they currently provide. That's the reality of expanding Medicaid coverage. A recent study showed that the plan would cause 8 million low- to moderate-income workers to lose private health coverage they currently get at work and be placed on Medicaid. Now, here's the problem with that: Medicaid is a Government program. And when the Government is in charge, bureaucrats make the decisions, deciding what doctors you can see and what health services are covered. That's the exact opposite of what we believe. I believe that when we reform and strengthen health care, the health decisions must be made by doctors and patients, not by bureaucrats in Washington, DC.

In changing times, it helps to promote—it helps families to promote ownership. If you own something, it brings stability into your life. During my administration, the homeownership rates in America are at an all-time high. More and more people are owning their own home. It's a fantastically hopeful sign for our country when people are opening the front door where they live, saying, "Welcome to my house." Welcome to my piece of property." Over the next years, we'll continue to expand ownership to every corner of America to help our families bring stability in times of change.

And we've got to understand, our retirement systems need to be strengthened. If you're a Social Security recipient, nothing is going to change. I don't care how hot the political rhetoric gets; you're safe. Nothing changes. There's ample money in the Social Security trust to take care of you. For baby boomers like me, there's money in the trust to take care of us. But we need to think about our children and our grandchildren when it comes to Social

Security. And I believe, in order to strengthen Social Security for the young, they must be allowed to take some of their tax money and set up a personal account, a personal savings account that strengthens Social Security, a personal savings account they call their own, and a personal savings account that Government cannot take away.

Listen, we have a difference of philosophy in this campaign. It's a clear difference. My opponent's programs will expand Government. Our programs will expand opportunity. And I believe that is necessary because I trust the American people. I trust the American people to make the right decision with their own money. I trust the American people to make the right decisions about schools. I trust the American people to make the right decisions about their health care plans. I trust the American people, and the Government must do so as well.

There are some things in this world that aren't going to change. In changing times, values matter. The values we try to live by, courage, compassion, reverence and integrity, will provide stability in changing times. In changing times, we'll support the institutions that give our lives direction and purpose, our families, our schools, our religious congregations. We stand for a culture of life in which every person matters and every being counts. We stand for marriage and family, which are the foundations of our society. We stand for the appointment of Federal judges who know the difference between personal opinion and the strict interpretation of the law.

This election will also determine how America responds to the continuing danger of terrorism. Since the terrible morning of September the 11th, 2001, we fought the terrorists across the Earth, not for pride, not for power, but because the lives of our citizens are at stake. Our strategy is clear. We're defending the homeland. We're transforming our military. We're strengthening the intelligence services.

We're staying on the offensive. We're striking the terrorists abroad, so we do not have to face them here at home.

We'll work to advance liberty around the world, in the broader Middle East and elsewhere, and we'll prevail—we will prevail. Our strategy is succeeding—it's succeeding. Four years ago, Afghanistan was the home base of Al Qaida; Pakistan was a transit point for terrorists; Saudi Arabia was fertile ground for fundraising for the terrorists; Libya was pursuing—secretly pursuing nuclear weapons; Iraq was a gathering threat; Al Qaida was largely unchallenged as it planned attacks.

Because we acted, because we led, the Government of a free Afghanistan is fighting terror; Pakistan is capturing terrorist leaders; Saudi Arabia is making raids and arrests; Libya is dismantling its weapons programs; the army of a free Iraq is fighting for freedom; and more than three-quarters of Al Qaida's key leaders and associates have been brought to justice. We have led. Many have joined, and America and the world are safer.

This progress involved careful diplomacy, clear moral purpose, and some tough decisions. And the toughest came on Iraq. We knew Saddam Hussein's record of aggression and his support for terror. We knew his long history of pursuing and even using weapons of mass destruction. We knew he was the sworn enemy of America, and we knew that after September the 11th, our country must think differently. We must take threats seriously before they fully materialize.

In Saddam Hussein, we saw a threat. I went to the United States Congress. They looked at the same intelligence I looked at. They remembered the same history I remembered. And they came to the conclusion that I came to: Saddam Hussein was a threat. And they voted to authorize the use of force. My opponent looked at the same intelligence. And when they said, "Show of hands for the authorization of force," he said, "Yes."

Before the Commander in Chief commits troops into harm's way, we must try all options. I was hoping diplomacy would work. I went to the United Nations. The United Nations looked at the same intelligence I looked at. They concluded Saddam Hussein was a threat. They voted by 15 to nothing in the U.N. Security Council for Saddam Hussein to disclose, disarm, or face serious consequences. I believe when bodies say something, they better mean it. I believe when a President speaks, he better mean what he says.

Saddam Hussein ignored the demands of the free world again, as he had for over a decade. He wasn't interested in what the free world had to say. As a matter of fact, he systematically deceived inspectors that were sent into his country. So I have a choice to make at this point in time, diplomacy isn't working. Do I forget the lessons of September the 11th and trust a madman, or do I take action to defend this country? Given that choice, I will defend America every time.

Because we acted to defend ourselves, because we acted in our self interest, more than 50 million people in Iraq and Afghanistan are now free—50 million people. You know, it wasn't all that long ago in Afghanistan where young girls won't allowed to go to school because the Taliban was so backward and so barbaric that they wouldn't allow for education for young kids, that their mothers were taken to the public square and whipped sometimes in sports stadiums and killed, because they wouldn't toe their line.

Today, over 10 million citizens—3 short years after the Taliban has been removed—10 million citizens, 41 percent of whom are women, have registered to vote in the upcoming presidential elections. It's unbelievable.

In Iraq, there's ongoing acts of violence. This country is headed toward democracy. There's a strong Prime Minister in place. They have a National Council, and national elections are scheduled for January. It

wasn't all that long ago that Saddam Hussein was in power with his torture chambers and mass graves, and today, this country is headed towards elections.

Freedom is on the march, and that helps us in America because free societies don't export terror. Free societies are hopeful societies, which leads to peace. Free societies will join us in fighting the terrorists, instead of harboring them. No, we're standing with the people of Afghanistan and Iraq. It's not only in our self-interest to do so, but when America gives its word, America will keep its word under my administration.

Our mission is clear in Afghanistan and Iraq. We'll help these new leaders to train their armies so citizens of Afghanistan and Iraq can do the hard work of protecting their people against a few who would try to destroy the hopes of the many. We'll help them get their elections. We'll get them on the path of stability and democracy as quickly as possible, and then our troops will return home with the honor they have earned.

We've got a great military. I'm incredibly proud of the men and women who wear our Nation's uniform. I've traveled around our country, at bases here, and I've been overseas and seen them at bases overseas. I'm telling you, these troops are fantastic. They are people of great courage and decency. The cause of freedom is in really good hands.

And they deserve the full support of our Government. I made a commitment that we'll give the troops that which they need in order to complete their missions. That's why last September I went to the Congress and asked for \$87 billion in funding for body armor and spare parts, ammunition, fuel, supplies needed for troops in combat in both Afghanistan and in Iraq. And we received great support for that request. Matter of fact, the support was so strong that only 12 Members of the United States Senate voted against the funding request, 2 of whom are my opponent and his runningmate.

Audience members. Boo-o-o!

The President. When you're out gathering the vote, when you're out gathering the vote, remind your fellow citizens that only four United States Senators voted to authorize the use of force and then voted against funding our troops—only four—two of whom are my opponent and his runningmate. They asked him, said, "Why did you do that vote?" He said, "Well, I actually did vote for the \$87 billion right before I voted against it." [Laughter] Yes. I don't know, here on the town square of St. Cloud, whether many people talk that way. [Laughter] I doubt it.

They then said—well, he's—kept pressing. He said he's proud of the vote. And he—finally, he just said, "It's a complicated matter." There's nothing complicated about supporting our troops in combat.

You know, knowing what I know today, even though we haven't found the stockpiles of weapons we thought were there, I'd have still made the same decision. America and the world are safer with Saddam Hussein sitting in a prison cell. I would have made the same decision because he had the capability of making weapons, and he could have passed that capability on to an enemy. I would have made that same decision because I'll never forget the lessons of September the 11th, 2001.

Now, during the course of this campaign, the fellow I'm running against has probably had about eight positions on Iraq: for the war but wouldn't provide the funding; then he was the antiwar candidate; then he said, "Knowing everything we know today, I'd have done—did the same thing;" then he said, "Well, we're spending too much money"—that's after he said we weren't spending enough money. [Laughter] And so yesterday in a radio interview, he tried to clear things up. He said, there were no circumstances—none—under which we should have gone to war. Although he said his own vote to go to war was the right vote, and it was right to hold Saddam

Hussein accountable. [Laughter] The radio interviewer concluded, “I can’t tell you what he said.” [Laughter] Let me be clear: Mixed signals are the wrong signals to send to our troops in the field, the Iraqi people, to our allies, and most of all, to our enemies.

It is critical—

Audience members. Four more years! Four more years! Four more years!

The President. It is critical—it is critical that the President of the United States speak clearly and consistently at this time of great threat in the world and not change positions because of expediency or pressure.

I appreciate the contributions our friends and allies have made in our efforts. We work hard to convince people to join us—about 40 nations involved in Afghanistan, and some 30 nations are involved in Iraq. I speak to leaders of those countries often and thank them for the contributions their folks have made to help us. It’s in their interests that they work to make the world a freer place and a more peaceful place. In the next years, I’ll continue to work to build alliances, but I will never turn over America’s national security decisions to leaders of other countries.

At the heart of my policy is my deep belief in the transformational power of liberty to change the world. The wisest use of American strength is to advance freedom. I spend time with Prime Minister Koizumi, the Prime Minister of Japan. It wasn’t all that long ago that we were at war with Japan. If you really think about it, in the long march of history, it really wasn’t all that long ago that Japan was a sworn enemy. My dad fought against the Japanese. I’m sure your dads, granddads, loved ones did the same thing.

Yet after World War II was over, my predecessor, Harry Truman, citizens of this country had great faith in the ability of liberty to transform an enemy into a friend. And so they worked with Japan to build a democracy. There was a lot of skeptics

during then. You can understand why. We’re trying to help an enemy grow into a democracy. People couldn’t fathom that the people—the country with whom we were at war could conceivably be an ally. And yet because we had great faith in the ability of liberty to transform countries, I today sit at the table with Prime Minister Koizumi talking about the peace we all want, talking about making sure this world is a more peaceful place.

See, I believe that millions in the Middle East want liberty, that in their silence, they want there to be a free society. I believe women in the greater Middle East long to be able to realize their hopes and aspirations in a free society. I believe in freedom. I believe in the transformational power of liberty because freedom is not America’s gift to world, see? That’s not what I’m telling you. I believe in the transformational power of liberty because freedom is the Almighty God’s gift to each man and women in this world.

This young century will be liberty’s century. By promoting freedom at home and abroad, we’ll build a safer world and a more hopeful America. By reforming our systems of Government, we will help more people in our country realize their dreams. We will spread ownership and opportunity to every corner of the country. We will pass the enduring values of our country on to a new generation. We will continue to lead the cause of freedom and peace.

For all Americans, these years in our history will always stand apart. There are quiet times in the life of a nation when little is expected of its leaders. This isn’t one of those times. This is a time that requires firm resolve, clear vision, and a deep faith in the values that make this a great nation.

None of us—none of us will ever forget that week when one era ended and another began. September the 14th, 2001, I stood in the ruins of the Twin Towers. It’s a day I’ll never forget. There were workers in hardhats there yelling at the top of their lungs, “Whatever it takes.” You know, I’m

doing my best to console these—thank these folks that had been in the rubble looking for a buddy. A guy grabbed me by the arm, he looked me right in the eye, and he said, “Don’t let me down.” Ever since that day, I wake up thinking about how to better protect our country. I will never relent in defending America, whatever it takes.

Four years ago, when I traveled your beautiful State asking for the vote, I made a pledge that said if I—if you gave me the chance to serve, I would uphold the honor and the dignity of the office to which I had been elected. With your help, with your hard work, I will do so for 4 more years.

God bless. Thank you all for coming. Thank you all for being here. Now you can tell them a sitting President came to St. Cloud, Minnesota. Thank you all.

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:47 a.m. at Dick Putz Field. In his remarks, he referred to Senator Zell Miller of Georgia, who made the keynote address at the 2004 Republican National Convention; Gov. Tim Pawlenty of Minnesota; entertainer John Stone; Lt. Col. Joe Repya, USA (Ret.), Bush-Cheney ’04 Minnesota Veterans Co-Chair; John Gagliardi, head football coach, St. John’s University; Prime Minister Ayad Allawi of the Iraqi Interim Government; and Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi of Japan.

Remarks in a Discussion on Health Care in Blaine, Minnesota September 16, 2004

The President. Thank you all for being here today. Pleased be seated. Please be seated. We got some work to do here. I’m here to ask for your vote; that’s what I’m doing today. I’m here to ask for your help. I believe everybody has the duty to vote in America, and I’m asking that you register your friends and neighbors, encourage them to do their duty in democracy. And while you’re out registering people to vote, make sure you don’t overlook discerning Democrats—you know, people like Zell Miller. And then after you register them to vote—I know a lot of you are working hard in the grassroots here—as you register them to vote and election time comes upon us, head them to the polls. And then when you head them to the polls, say, “If you want a stronger America, a safer America, and a better America, put Dick Cheney and me back into office.”

What a great place to spend the day, the great State of Minnesota. I tell you, what a fantastic bus trip we’re having. Just had a sandwich in Anoka, the Halloween

capital of America. And I started my morning in St. Cloud. Actually, I didn’t start my morning in St. Cloud. I started my morning at the White House. And I said to Laura, “I’m heading to Minnesota.” She said, “Well, tell everybody hello.” So I am. The First Lady sends her best.

This is a true story—kind of true. [Laughter] It may have been slightly embellished at times. [Laughter] So I said, “Laura, will you marry me?” She said, “Fine.” She was a public school librarian, by the way. And she said, “I’ll marry you, just so long as I don’t have to give a political speech.” [Laughter] I said, “Okay.” Fortunately, I didn’t—she didn’t hold me to that promise. America got to see a fabulous mom, a great wife, and a wonderful First Lady in New York City. I’m really proud of Laura.

Today, at the end of this interesting dialog we’re going to have on a lot of issues, we’re going to focus mainly on health. We’ve got some citizens from the area here who are going to discuss different aspects