

Remarks Following a Lunch With Senator John McCain and an Exchange With Reporters March 5, 2008

The President. It's been my honor to welcome my friend John McCain as the nominee of the Republican Party. A while back, I don't think many people would have thought that John McCain would be here as the nominee of the Republican Party, except he knew he would be here, and so did his wife Cindy.

John showed incredible courage and strength of character and perseverance in order to get to this moment. And that's exactly what we need in a President, somebody that can handle the tough decisions, somebody who won't flinch in the face of danger.

We also need somebody with a big heart. I have got to know John well in the last 8 years. I've campaigned against him, and I've campaigned with him. Laura and I have spent time in their house. This is a man who deeply loves his family. It's a man who cares a lot about the less fortunate among us. He's a president, and he's going to be the President who will bring determination to defeat an enemy and a heart big enough to love those who hurt.

And so I welcome you here. I wish you all the best, and I'm proud to be your friend.

Sen. McCain. Thank you, sir. Well, I'm very honored and humbled to have the opportunity to receive the endorsement of the President of the United States, a man who I have great admiration, respect, and affection. We—he and I, as is well known, had a very good competition in the year 2000, and I was privileged and proud to have the opportunity to campaign for his election and reelection to the Presidency of the United States.

I appreciate his endorsement. I appreciate his service to our country. I intend to have as much possible campaigning events together, as it is in keeping with

the President's heavy schedule. And I look forward to that opportunity. I look forward to the chance to bring our message to America.

Last night, as you know, both Senator Obama and Senator Clinton called to congratulate me. I pledged at that time, and I pledge again, a respectful campaign, a respectful campaign based on the issues and based on the stark differences in vision that we have for the future of America.

I hope that the President will find time from his busy schedule to be out on the campaign trail with me. And I will be very privileged to have the opportunity of being again on the campaign trail with him—only slightly different roles this time. *[Laughter]*

I thank you, Mr. President, and it's a pleasure to be here.

The President. Yes, we'll answer a couple of questions.

Abramowitz *[Michael Abramowitz, Washington Post]*. Sorry you got such a lousy seat back there. *[Laughter]*

2008 Presidential Election

Q. I wanted to ask about—*[inaudible]*. The voters, according to a lot of the exit polls, seem to be searching for change this year. And I'd like to ask both of you—excuse me—I'd like to ask both of you how the Republican Party, which has been here for 8 years, is going to make the case that you're going to provide the change that the voters seem to want, both on Iraq and on the economy?

The President. Yes. Let me start off by saying that in 2000, I said, vote for me; I'm an agent of change. In 2004, I said, I'm not interested in change; I want to continue as President. Every candidate has got to say "change." That's what the American people expect.

And the good news about our candidate is, there will be a new President, a man of character and courage, but he's not going to change when it comes to taking on the enemy. He understands this is a dangerous world, and I understand we better have steadfast leadership who has got the courage and determination to pursue this enemy so as to protect America.

John McCain will find out, when he takes the oath of office, his most important responsibility is to protect the American people from harm. And there's still an enemy that lurks, an enemy that wants to strike us. And this country better have somebody in that Oval Office who understands the stakes, and John McCain understands those stakes.

Sen. McCain. Thank you, sir. I don't have anything to add. [Laughter]

Q. Can I follow up, sir? How would you—

The President. No, you can't follow up. Thank you. [Laughter]

Q. Yes, on—

The President. No, no, not you. Going to call Kelly [Kelly O'Donnell, NBC News]. Kelly.

President's Endorsement/2008 Presidential Election

Q. Senator McCain, given President Bush's low approval ratings, will this be a negative or a positive for you? And how much do you hope he'll campaign for you on the trail?

Sen. McCain. I hope that he will campaign for me as much as is keeping with his busy schedule. I'll be pleased to have him with me, both from raising money and the much-needed finances for the campaign and addressing the challenging issues that face this country. I'm pleased to have him as is—as it fits into his busy schedule.

Kelly.

Vice Presidential Candidates/2008 Presidential Election

Q. Mr. President, Senator McCain—sir, how would you counsel Senator McCain to choose a runningmate? How quickly? And given the fact that Democrats will field a nominee who will make some kind of history—a woman, an African American—should Republicans consider that in selecting a Vice Presidential nominee?

The President. I'd tell him to be careful about who he names to be the head of the selection committee. [Laughter] Look, now, he's got plenty of experience. He knows what he needs to do, which is to have a process that vets candidates, and the person—it's got to be somebody he's going to be comfortable with and somebody whose advice he relies upon. And he can answer his own question on that, but—

Sen. McCain. Could I just say, Kelly, I didn't think it was appropriate to contemplate this process, as I've discussed before, until after we had secured the nomination of the party. Now we'll begin that process.

Q. Should history make a difference with a woman or an African American on the Democratic side?

The President. People don't vote for Vice Presidents, as much as I hate to say that for those who have been candidates for Vice President. They're going to vote for who gets to sit inside that Oval Office and make decisions on how to protect the country and keep taxes low and how to have a culture that respects the dignity of every human being. And that's what the race is all about. I know there's going to be a lot of speculation on who the Vice President, this and that, but the speculation is over about who our party is going to nominate.

Sen. McCain. Liz [Liz Sidoti, Associated Press].

President's Endorsement/Presidential Campaign

Q. Mr. President, do you—how much do you intend to do for Senator McCain? And do you think, in some cases, that your help could actually hurt him more than help him?

The President. Look, if it—if my showing up and endorsing him helps him, or if I'm against him and it helps him, either way, I want him to win. [*Laughter*] You know, look, this is an age-old question that you—every President has had to answer, and there's an appropriate amount of campaigning for me to do.

But they're not going to be voting for me. I've had my time in the Oval Office. It's been a fabulous experience, by the way. And they're going to be voting for the next person to come in here and make the tough decisions about America: America's security, America's prosperity, and you know, America's hopefulness. That's what this race is about, and it's not about me. You know, I've done my bit.

And by the way, I'm not through, and I'm going to do a lot. And John is right; I do have a day job to keep, and I plan on keeping it. I've told the people that follow me in this press corps that I'm going to sprint to the finish, and I mean what I say. I've got a lot to do. But I'm going to find ample time to help, and I can help in raising money, and if he wants my pretty face standing by his side at one of these rallies, I'll be glad to show up.

But they're going to be looking at him, you know. I'm going to be in Crawford—[*laughter*]—with my feet up. He's going to be sitting in there behind that desk making the decisions on war and peace, and I'm thankful our party has nominated somebody plenty capable of making those decisions. And when the American people take a hard look, they're going to feel comfortable, like I feel comfortable, in recommending him to take my place.

Listen, we thank you.

Wolf [Richard Wolf, USA Today], where's Wolf? No, I'm not calling you. Wolf. No, not you either. Where's Wolf?

Q. Right here.

The President. Well, go ask something, will you? [*Laughter*]

Q. Where do you think you can be most helpful campaigning for him around the country?

The President. You know, look—I mean, if—

Q. And, Senator McCain, where would you like the President to campaign with you?

The President. As I told you, you know, if he wants me to show up, I will. If he wants me to say, "You know, I'm not for him," I will. Whatever he wants me to do, I want him to win. And, you know, Wolf, I don't know where. I mean, look—

Sen. McCain. Could I start out with—

The President. I'm focusing on, you know, protecting America and succeeding in Iraq and dealing with the North Korean and dealing with the Iranian and dealing with the issues around the world where we're making a difference in terms of keeping peace. I want to get this in as good as a position as possible so that when John McCain is the President—and he will be—he can deal with these issues in a way that yields peace.

Sen. McCain. Wolf, could I say, I—one State springs to mind: Texas. [*Laughter*]

The President. He's not going to need me in Texas. He's going to be a landslide in Texas.

Sen. McCain. Could I just say that I do intend to campaign all across this country. I think that literally every section in this country is at play—in play. And I will be glad to have the President with me, in keeping with his schedule, in any part of America. And we're going to go everywhere in America with this campaign.

The President. Listen, thank you all very much for coming.

Q. Did you talk names for Vice President? [*Laughter*]

Q. One press conference every week if you're elected, Senator?

The President. Thank you all very much. It's been a pleasure to see you. Obviously, we've invited some unruly members of the fourth estate here. I'm disappointed in the conduct of some of the people that have come. I told John it would be a nice and polite crowd. Thank you all very much.

Sen. McCain. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:10 p.m. in the Rose Garden at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Chairman Kim Jong Il of North Korea; and President Mahmud Ahmadi-nejad of Iran.

Remarks Following a Meeting With Frank W. Buckles March 6, 2008

Sitting next to me is Mr. Frank Buckles, 107 years young, and he is the last living doughboy from World War I. And it has been my high honor to welcome Mr. Buckles and his daughter, Susannah, here to the Oval Office.

Mr. Buckles's mind is sharp, his memory is crisp, and he's been sharing with me some interesting anecdotes. I asked him where he lived, and he said, "That reminds me of what General Pershing asked me." And he told the general that he was raised on a farm in Missouri. And the general said, "Well, you know, as the crow flies,

it's 40 miles from where I was raised." So Mr. Buckles has a vivid recollection of historic times.

And one way for me to honor the service of those who wear the uniform in the past and those who wear it today is to herald you, sir, and to thank you very much for your patriotism and your love for America.

So we're glad you're here. Thanks for coming.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:49 a.m. in the Oval Office at the White House.

Remarks on the Fifth Anniversary of the Department of Homeland Security March 6, 2008

Thank you very much. Thanks for the warm welcome. Mr. Secretary, thank you for your kind introduction, and I appreciate your outstanding leadership for this Department. I'm really pleased to join you on the fifth anniversary of the creation of the Department of Homeland Security. Man, does time fly. [*Laughter*]

When this Department was established following the September the 11th terrorist attacks, it was hard to imagine that we

would reach this milestone without another attack on our homeland. For those of you who were here 5 years ago, if you think back to that time, I don't think we would have predicted that 5 years later there had not been another attack on us. Yet we've been—[*applause*]—and it's your vigilance and your hard work that have helped keep this country safe. And so I want to thank you. I hope you take enormous pride in the accomplishments of this Department,