

**Remarks at a Bush-Cheney
Reception in Palm Beach Gardens,
Florida**

January 8, 2004

Thank you all. Thanks for coming. It's great to be back in the great State of Florida. We carried it once, and we're going to carry it again.

And I want to thank you all for your help. I appreciate you showing up today. I appreciate your contributions. I appreciate your friendship, appreciate your prayers. I appreciate you laying the foundation for what is going to be a great national victory in November of '04.

And I'm getting ready. *[Laughter]* I'm loosening up. *[Laughter]* But there's plenty of time for politics. See, I've got a job to do. I'm focused on the people's business in Washington, DC. I want you to remind your friends and neighbors that I will continue to work hard to earn the confidence of every American by keeping this Nation secure and strong and prosperous and free.

I love my brother Jeb. He is a great Governor. He is a great Governor, first and foremost, because he has a large heart. He cares deeply about the people. He and I share some things in common. We share the same last name. *[Laughter]* We share the same political consultant—*[laughter]*—Mother. *[Laughter]* And we both married extremely well.

I'm honored to be onstage with a fabulous first lady for the State of Florida, Ms. Columba. And a great First Lady for America sends her love. I'm sorry Laura is not here. I know she was Jeb's first choice to be the speaker today. *[Laughter]* She's in Washington. But I'm a lucky man to have married Laura Bush. She is a great wife, a fabulous mother, and a wonderful First Lady for America.

I know my friend and former colleague in the Cabinet Mel Martinez is with us. Mel, thank you for being here today. I know Congressman Mark Foley is with us. Mr. Congressman, I'm glad you're here. I'm sorry Congressman Clay Shaw is not here. This is his district, I understand, but he is traveling with Speaker Denny Hastert. He made a good choice. When the Speaker calls, it's

probably a pretty good thing to travel with him. I know the Lieutenant Governor, Toni Jennings, is here. The attorney general, Charlie Crist, is here. Tom Gallagher is here. Where's Gallagher? I appreciate you coming.

A lot of members of the statehouse are here. It's a good sign when State senators and State reps show up. After all, you win campaigns by energizing the grassroots. I appreciate the members of the statehouse being here. I'm looking forward to working with you to carry Florida. I want to thank all the grassroots activists who are here. I want to thank you for what you're going to do, which is to put up the signs, to man the phone booths, to put out the mailers, and to turn out the vote.

I want to thank the mayors and local officials who are here. I want to thank all those who worked hard to make this event such a successful event. We've had three event co-chairmen, the Guzzettas, the Gaineses, and Elizabeth Fago. I want to thank you for your hard work. I appreciate your good work.

My friend Mercer Reynolds is here. He's the national finance chairman. He's from Cincinnati, Ohio. He's taken a lot of time out of his private life to help make sure we get well funded in what's going to be a tough campaign. I want to thank my friend Al Hoffman from the great State of Florida, who is doing such a fantastic job as the—raising money. And of course, there's Tom Petway and Zach Zachariah, two good buddies as well, who have been working hard to make this campaign go well.

In the last 3 years, our Nation has acted decisively to confront great challenges. I came to this office to solve problems instead of passing them on to future Presidents and future generations. I came to seize opportunities instead of letting them slip away. My 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 we're on their trail. In Afghanistan and in Iraq, we gave ultimatums to terror regimes. Those regimes chose defiance, and those regimes are no more. The world is better off, and so are the 50 million people

in those two countries who once lived under tyranny, and today, they live in freedom.

Three years ago, our military was not receiving the resources it needed and morale was beginning to suffer, so we increased the defense budgets to meet 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.

Three years ago, the economy was in trouble and a recession was beginning. And I want you to remember what we have come through. Not only was a recession beginning, but our country was attacked. And then there were corporate scandals and war, all of which affected the people's confidence. But this administration acted. We passed 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.

This administration understands that when Americans have more take-home pay to spend, to save, or invest, the whole economy grows, and people are more likely to find a job. So we're returning more money to the people to help them raise their families. We've reduced taxes on dividends and capital gains to encourage investment. We've given small businesses incentives to expand and to hire new people. With all these actions, we have laid the foundation for greater prosperity and more jobs across America, so every single citizen has a chance to realize the American Dream.

Today, the American economy is strong, and it is getting stronger. The figures for the third quarter of the year 2003 show the economy grew at an annual rate of 8.2 percent, the fastest pace in nearly 20 years. Productivity is high. Business investment is rising. Housing construction is expanding. Manufacturing activity is increasing, and we've added over 300,000 new jobs in the last 4 months. The tax relief we passed is working.

Three 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've increased spending out of the Federal Government, particularly

for Title I students, for the poorest of students. But now, because we believe every child can learn to read and write and add and subtract, we're insisting that States measure. We want to know.

The State of Florida, led by this great Governor, is on the leading edge of education reform because he holds people to account. And the reason he does is because he and I both know every child can learn. We are challenging the soft bigotry of low expectations. We've raised the bar. We've raised the standards. We expect results so that not one single child in America is left behind.

We've reorganized our Government during the past 3 years and created the Department of Homeland Security to better guard Florida's ports, better guard our borders, to better protect the American people. We passed trade promotion authority to open up new markets for Florida's ranchers and farmers and entrepreneurs and manufacturers. We passed budget agreements, much-needed budget agreements, to help bring spending discipline to Washington, DC.

And last month, we completed the greatest advance in health care coverage for America's senior citizens since the creation of Medicare. The new Medicare law that I fought for and signed—the bill that I campaigned for, worked for, and signed will give older Americans the option of a prescription drug benefit and more control over their own health care, so they can receive the modern medical care they deserve.

On issue after issue, this administration has acted on principle, has kept its word, and has made progress for the American people. The Congress gets a lot of credit. I enjoy working with Majority Leader Bill Frist, Speaker Denny Hastert, Congressman Mark Foley. We're working hard in Washington, DC, to change the tone of the Nation's Capital. There's too much politics, endless backbiting, zero-sum attitudes. And the best way to do that is to stay focused on the people's business and on results. And we have delivered results over the last 3 years.

A major reason this administration has been successful is because I have surrounded myself with really good, decent, capable, honorable people, people from all walks of life, people who have come to the Nation's

Capital to serve the United States of America, not a special or self interest. This Nation has had no finer Vice President than Vice President Dick Cheney. Mother may have a second opinion. [*Laughter*]

In 3 years, we have come far. We've done a lot, but our work is only beginning. I have set 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 that is prosperous and compassionate so that every citizen—every citizen—regardless of their background, has a chance to work and to succeed and realize the great promise of this 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. The war on terror goes on. 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.

We are confronting that danger in Iraq, where all the people of that country can now be certain they will never again have to fear the rule of Saddam Hussein. The Ba'athist holdouts largely responsible for current violence now know there will be no return to the corrupt power and privilege they once held. All Iraqis who have taken the side of freedom have chosen the winning side.

We still face terrorists who would rather go on killing the innocent than accept the rise of liberty in the Middle East. You see, they know that the advance of freedom in Iraq would be a major defeat for the cause of terror. This collection of killers is trying to shake the will of the United States. The United States will never be intimidated by a bunch of thugs and assassins.

We are on the offensive in Iraq. We're aggressively striking the terrorists in Iraq. We will defeat them there, so we do not have to face them in America. And a lot of nations are helping to build a free Iraq, because they understand a free Iraq is in their interest. A free Iraq will make the world more peaceful. And we're standing with the Iraqi people as they assume more of their own defense

and more of their own self-government. These are not easy tasks, but they are essential tasks. And America will finish what we have begun. We will win this essential victory in the war on terror.

We're working to oppose proliferation of weapons around the world. Last month, after talks with the United States and Great Britain, Libya volunteered to disclose and dismantle all its weapons of mass destruction programs. Leaders around the world now know weapons of mass destruction do not bring influence or prestige. They bring isolation and other unwelcome consequences. And nations who abandon the pursuit of these weapons will find an open path to better relations with the United States of America.

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. I believe that freedom is the future of every nation, and I know that freedom is not America's gift to the world, freedom is the Almighty God's gift to each man and woman in this world.

America 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, America is now committed to bringing the healing power of medicine to millions of men and women and children suffering with AIDS.

We face challenges here at home as well, and we will prove that we're equal to the challenges. This administration will continue to promote a progrowth, pro-small-business, pro-entrepreneur economic agenda until everybody who wants a job can find one.

And for the sake of our health care system, we need to cut down on the frivolous lawsuits which increase the cost of medicine. I appreciate Jeb's leadership on this issue. He and I understand that 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 they therefore affect the Federal budget.

Medical liability reform is a national issue that requires a national solution. I put forth a good plan. The House of Representatives passed it. However, the bill is stuck in the Senate. And I know two United States Senators who keep it stuck in the United States Senate, and they might happen to be from your State. The Senate must act on behalf of the American people and pass medical liability reform, and the Senators must understand no one has ever been healed by a frivolous lawsuit.

I have a responsibility as the 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 from the United States Senate, two of them from this State—[laughter]—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 those Members of the United States Senate to stop playing politics with American justice.

This country needs an energy plan, and the Congress needs to get an energy plan to my desk. I've been calling for one for several years now, an energy plan that encourages energy efficiency and conservation, that uses technology in wise ways to find additional supplies of energy. For the sake of economic security and for the sake of national security, this country must become less dependent on foreign sources of energy.

A strong and prosperous nation must also be a compassionate nation. I will continue to advance our agenda of what I call compassionate conservatism, which means we'll apply the best and most innovative ideas to the task of helping fellow citizens who are in need. There are still a lot of people, millions of men and women, who want to end their dependence on government, become independent through hard work. We must continue to build on the success of welfare

reform to bring work and dignity into the lives of more of our fellow citizens.

With the help of Congress, we're working to ensure more Americans serve their communities and through their country—through the citizen service programs. Both Houses should come together and pass my Faith-Based Initiative. Our Government should not fear the influence of faith in the lives of our fellow citizens. As a matter of fact, the great strength of the country is the fact that we're a nation of many faiths. And faith-based community programs are those that are often able to change people's hearts. And when you change a person's heart, you help save a person's life.

We need to rally the armies of compassion, those who mentor our children, those who care for the homeless, those who offer hope to the addicted. A compassionate society is a society that promotes opportunity for every citizen, 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 own home. We have a minority homeownership gap in America, and I have put forth a plan to close that gap. We want people owning and managing their own health care plans and their own retirement accounts. We want more people owning their own small business, because we understand that when a person owns something, he or she has a vital stake in the future of America.

In a compassionate society, people respect one another. They respect their religious beliefs. They respect their opinions. And they take responsibility for the decisions they make in life. The culture of this country is changing from one that has said, "If it feels good, just go ahead and do it," and "If you've got a problem, blame somebody else," to a culture in which each of us understands that we're responsible for the decisions we make in life.

If you're fortunate enough to be a mother or a father, you're responsible for loving your child with all your heart. If you're worried 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 corporate America, you're responsible for telling the truth to your shareholders and your employees.

In a responsibility society, each of us is responsible for loving our neighbor just like we'd like to be loved ourselves. And we see the culture of service and responsibility growing around us. You know I started—right after September the 11th, I started what's called the USA Freedom Corps. It's a chance for people to find out ways to extend a compassionate hand to a neighbor in need, and the response has been strong, really strong.

A lot of Americans—and I'm sure many are here—understand that patriotism can mean helping somebody who hurts. Charitable organizations in America are vibrant, neighborhood healing groups are really good, faith-based programs are strong. Police and our firefighters and people who wear the Nation's uniform remind us on a daily basis what it means to serve 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've been privileged to see the compassion and the character of the American people. All the tests of the last 3 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 up 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 know that for our country, the best days lie ahead. May God bless you. Thank you for coming.

NOTE: The President spoke at 6:10 p.m. at the PGA National Resort. In his remarks, he referred to Gov. Jeb Bush of Florida and his wife, Columba; former Secretary of Housing and Urban Development Mel R. Martinez; Lt. Gov. Toni Jennings of Florida; Charlie Crist, Florida State attorney general; Tom Gallagher, chief financial officer, Florida Department of Financial Services; Al Hoffman, finance chairman, Republican National Committee; Mercer Reynolds, national finance

chairman, and Tom Petway III and Zach Zachariah, Florida State finance cochairmen, Bush-Cheney '04, Inc.; former President Saddam Hussein of Iraq; and Senators Bob Graham and Bill Nelson of Florida. The President also referred to Title I of the Improving America's Schools Act of 1994 (Public Law No. 103-382), which amended Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (Public Law No. 89-10).

Remarks in a Discussion With Women Small-Business Owners

January 9, 2004

The President. Thank you all. Thank you, Mr. Secretary. You wrote that—you read that just like I wrote it. [Laughter] It's good to be here at the Commerce Department. After all, that's what we're here to discuss, is commerce and jobs and how to keep the entrepreneurial spirit strong in America.

Let me start off by saying, first of all, thank you all for coming. We're going to have an interesting discussion about what it means to own your own business and risk capital and employ people, what it takes to be a businessowner. And we've got five really smart, capable women who are running their own businesses. Before we get to this discussion, though, I want to say I'm really optimistic about the future of our Nation's economy. This economy is strong, and it is getting stronger.

I'm optimistic for one reason, because I just spent a little bit of time with five people who are on the frontline of hiring. Their optimism was really evident, as I think you'll soon hear. Secondly, I'm optimistic because I see things happening. Unemployment dropped today to 5.7 percent. That's not good enough. We want more people still working. But nevertheless, it is a positive sign that the economy is getting better.

I see the manufacturing orders are up dramatically. I know the productivity is high in America. Home construction is strong. All the signs in our economy is—are very strong. And that's positive for somebody who might be wondering about whether he or she is going to find a job.

Secondly, I know what we have overcome in this country. I mean, this economy has got to be pretty darn strong to have come