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Remarks to the American Conservative Union 40th Anniversary Gala

May 13, 2004

Thank you all very much. Thanks a lot. I'm honored to join you here for the 40th anniversary of the American Conservative Union. I bring greetings from the A team in my family: Laura Bush. I am a—you got stuck with the junior varsity. [*Laughter*] I'm a lucky man to be married to Laura. She is a fabulous person, great mom, great wife, and I think she deserves 4 more years as the First Lady.

I just left a meeting with our fabulous Vice President, and he sends his best. He's still pretty proud of his last year in the House, when he received a 100-percent rating from the ACU. He didn't mention that one when you gave him a 90. [*Laughter*] The ACU doesn't rate Presidents, but a President can rate you. This is a fine group of decent citizens, principled citizens, and tonight I am proud to stand with the ACU.

And I appreciate my friend David Keene, the chairman. This is his 20th anniversary. He is the longest serving chairman in ACU history. As one of his predecessors said about David's long tenure, "So long as it's not a paying job, he won't have any competition." [*Laughter*]

I met David's daughter, Private 1st Class Lisa Keene. And I'm proud that she is volunteering in the United States Army, but not nearly as proud as her dad.

I appreciate being up here with some fine Members of Congress. Senator Mitch McConnell, the dinner cochair, good to see you, Mitch. Thank you. I see Senator Jim Bunning is here today. Thank you for cochairing this as well. I'm pulling for you in the reelection. I know Chris Cox is here as well. Congressman Cox is a fine Member of the Congress and a good friend. And of course, former ACU chairman—I don't think he was the guy that gave me that quote, by the way—and that would be Congressman Phil Crane. Appreciate you being here. I see other Members of the Senate and the House who are here. Thanks for coming; good to see you all.

I know members of my administration are here. I see Kay James, who's the Director of the Office of Personnel Management. I appreciate you being here, Kay. John Bolton, the Under Secretary of State of Arms Control and International Security—[*applause*]. I told you we were going to get out of the ABM Treaty—[*laughter*]—and we did. And I want to thank you for your help.

I appreciate being here with a member of the ex-Governors club—I'm a member too—[*laughter*]—in my friend Jim Gilmore. Good to see you, Jimmy. Thanks for being here.

I like to be around celebrities. You know, I don't get out much. [*Laughter*] So it's good to rub elbows with Snow. [*Laughter*] And I appreciate the president of Catholic University, Father David O'Connell, for coming as well. I'm honored you're here.

Some here tonight were there for that first meeting of the ACU in the fall of 1964. Back then, as David mentioned, you weren't feeling too good about the President from Texas. As a matter of fact, you stood behind a good man from Arizona, Barry Goldwater. You knew that the principles he represented, freedom and limited Government and national strength, would eventually carry the day, and you were right. And that day came when President Ronald Reagan—I might add, supported by a great Vice President—[*laughter*]—came to Washington, DC. President Reagan taught America the power of an optimistic spirit. He also understood the power of ideas to transform our country and to change the world.

The conservative movement has become the dominant intellectual force in American politics, on the strength of writers and thinkers like Whittaker Chambers and Bill Buckley and Russell Kirk. The movement has inspired many hundreds of fine Americans to run for office and to serve in government. It's easy to understand why. On the fundamental issues of our time, conservatives have been right. Conservatives were right that the cold war was a contest of good and evil. And behind the Iron Curtain, people did not want containment; they awaited for liberation. Conservatives were right that the free enterprise system is the path to prosperity and that

free enterprise is the economic system consistent with human freedom and human dignity. Conservatives were right that a free society is sustained by the character of its people, which means we must honor the moral and religious heritage of our great Nation.

These convictions, once defended by a few, are now broadly shared by Americans. And I am proud to advance these convictions and these principles as I stand for reelection in 2004.

I'm looking forward to the campaign. I'm looking forward to taking our message to the American people. And it's going to be a tough campaign. I need your help. I'm running for a reason. You're about to hear why. I've got a purpose to be your President for 4 more years. I'm running against a person who has got a lot of experience. He just shares a different philosophy from us.

When the nonpartisan National Journal did his ratings, they found that my opponent had the most liberal record of all 100 United States Senators. That's a heck of a feat. [*Laughter*] It isn't very easy to make Ted Kennedy the conservative Senator from Massachusetts.

My opponent has earned more than Senator Kennedy's endorsement. You may have heard he claims to have picked up some endorsement from foreign leaders as well. [*Laughter*] He just won't give us their names. He did drop a hint the other day on national TV when he was asked about the leaders. "What I said is true," is what he said—he, my opponent. "What I said is true. I mean, you can go to New York City, and you can be in a restaurant, and you can meet a foreign leader." [*Laughter*] I've got a hunch this whole thing might be a case of mistaken identity. [*Laughter*] Just because somebody has an accent—[*laughter*]—a nice suit, and a good table at a fancy restaurant doesn't make him a foreign leader. [*Laughter*]

Whoever these mystery men are, they're not going to be deciding the election. The American people will be deciding this election. And great events will turn on this election. The man who sits in the Oval Office will set the course of the war on terror and the direction of our economy. The security and prosperity of America are at stake. The voters this year are going to have a clear choice. It's an unmistakable choice between keeping the tax relief that is moving our economy forward or putting the burden of higher taxes back on the American people. It is a choice between an America that leads the world with strength and confidence or an America that is uncertain in the face of danger.

The other side hasn't offered much yet in the way of clear strategies to win the war or to expand our economy. Thus far, all we've heard is old bitterness and outbursts, instead of calm debate. They will learn that anger is not an agenda for America's future.

I look forward to taking on the big issues, setting big goals, with optimism and resolve and determination, and I will make it clear to the American people, I stand ready to lead this Nation for 4 more years.

A big issue for every family in America is the Federal tax burden. With the largest tax relief since Ronald Reagan was President, we've left more money in the hands that earned it. By spending and investing and helping create new jobs, the American people have used their money far better than the Federal Government would have.

This economy is strong, and it is getting stronger. Last month, America added 288,000 new jobs. Manufacturing jobs have increased for 3 straight months. Since August, our economy has added more than 1.1 million new jobs. In the first quarter of 2004, the economy grew at a strong rate of 4.2 percent, and over the past year, economic growth has been the fastest in nearly two decades. Business investment is up. Inflation is low. Mortgage and interest rates are near historic lows. The homeownership rate in America is the highest ever. America's economy is the fastest growing of any major industrialized nation. The tax relief we passed is working.

There's a difference of taxes in this campaign. My opponent has a different view. When we passed an increase in the child credit to help families, he voted "no." When we reduced the marriage penalty, he voted against it. When we created a lower 10-percent bracket for working families, he voted "no." When we reduced taxes on dividends that helps our senior citizens, he said "no." When we gave small businesses tax incentive

to expand and hire, he voted against it. When we phased out the death tax, he voted "no." I think we got a trend here. [*Laughter*]

It's easier to get a "yes" vote out of him when it comes to raising taxes. That's his record. Senator Kerry has voted over 350 times for higher taxes on the American people. He supported higher gas taxes 11 times and once favored a tax increase of 50 cents a gallon. That would cost you another $5 or more every time you fill up your tank. With that kind of money, you'd think he'd throw in a free car wash. [*Laughter*]

My opponent has proposed a lot of new spending, and we're counting. At last count, he's proposed $1.9 trillion of new spending, and the election is 6 months away. [*Laughter*] He's going to have to pay for that somehow. Of course, you've heard the old, tired rhetoric of how he's going to pay for it. He's going to tax the rich, but there's not enough money to pay for all those new programs by taxing the rich. He's got what we call a tax gap. That gap needs a lot of money to pay for all his promises. And given his record, there's no doubt where that money is going to come from. It's going to come from the working people in America. The good news is, we're not going to give him the chance.

The American people know what you and I know, that higher taxes would undermine growth and destroy jobs, just as this economy is getting stronger. No, I have a better idea. We should keep taxes low. We will not raise taxes on the American people.

We must do more to keep this economy growing and make sure America is the best place to do business in the world. We need to maintain spending discipline in our Nation's Capital. I look forward to working with Members of the United States Congress to do just that. We have a plan to protect small-business owners and employees from frivolous and needless lawsuits. We need tort reform out of the United States Congress.

I've developed plans and a strategy to help control the cost of health care by giving people better access through association health care plans and tax-free health savings accounts. And for the sake of affordability and availability of good medicine, we need to pass medical liability reform out of the United States Senate.

As we are learning at our gas pumps, this country needs an energy plan. We need an energy strategy, one that encourages conservation, one that develops alternative uses for energy, one that modernizes the electricity grid. But we need to make sure we use our coal resources, our natural gas resources, our nuclear resources. We need to become less dependent on foreign sources of energy.

In order to make sure we grow our economy, we need to reject economic isolationism. We've opened our markets, for the sake of consumers, to other countries. Rather than walling ourselves off and stopping the creation of new jobs, we need to get other countries to open up their markets for us. When you're good at something, we ought to promote it. We're good at manufacturing things. We're good at growing things. Our technology sector is the best in the world. We need to be opening up markets so people can find jobs here in America.

What I'm telling you is, if you're interested in job creation in America, you need to reelect a President who's pro-growth, pro-entrepreneur, and pro-small-business, and that's George W. Bush.

I'll tell you something else we understand loud and clear, and that is a hopeful society is one that encourages ownership. We want more people owning their own home. There's a homeownership gap in America. Not enough minorities own their own home. We've got plans to make sure people from all walks of life have a chance to say, "This is my home. Welcome to my home." We want more people owning their own small business. We want people owning and managing their own health care plan. We want younger workers to own and manage their own retirement accounts. See, we understand, when people have assets to call their own, they gain independence and security and dignity. See, I believe in private property so much, I want every American to have some.

On issue after issue, the American people have a clear choice. My opponent is against personal retirement accounts, against giving patients more control over their medical decisions through health savings accounts, against providing parents more choices over

education for their children, against tax relief for all Americans. He seems to be against every idea that gives Americans more authority and more choices and more control over our own lives.

The other side will make a lot of promises over the next 6 months. The American people need to listen closely, because there is a theme. Every promise will increase the power of politicians and bureaucrats over your income, over your retirement, over your health care, over your children's education. It's the same old Washington mindset: They'll give the orders, and we'll pay the bills. I've got news for him. America has gone beyond that way of thinking, and we are not going back.

Our future also depends on America's leadership in the world. The momentum of freedom in our time is strong, but we still face serious dangers. Al Qaida is wounded but not broken. Terrorists are testing our will in Afghanistan and Iraq. Regimes in North Korea and Iran are challenging the peace. If America shows weakness and uncertainty in this decade, the world will drift toward tragedy. This will not happen on my watch.

This Nation is strong and confident in the cause of freedom. We know that freedom is not America's gift to the world. Freedom is the Almighty's gift to every man and woman in this world.

Because of our principled stand and clear speaking, today, no friend or enemy doubts the word of the United States of America. America and our allies gave an ultimatum to the terror regime in Afghanistan. The Taliban chose defiance, and the Taliban is no longer in power. America and our allies gave an ultimatum to the dictator in Iraq. He chose defiance, and now he sits in a prison cell.

September the 11th, 2001, taught a lesson I will never forget and America must never forget. America must confront threats before they fully materialize. In Iraq, my administration looked at the intelligence, and we saw a threat. Members of the United States Congress from both political parties looked at the intelligence, and they saw a threat. The United Nations Security Council looked at the intelligence, and it saw a threat. As a matter of fact, the previous administration and Congress looked at the intelligence and made regime change in Iraq the policy of the United States.

In 2002, the U.N. Security Council, yet again, demanded a full accounting of Saddam Hussein's weapons programs. They remembered what we remembered. They remembered he attacked countries in his neighborhood. They remembered that he paid suiciders to kill innocent Israelis. They remembered he had ties to terrorist organizations. They remembered that he used weapons of mass destruction against his own people. As he had for over a decade, Saddam Hussein refused to comply with the demands of the free world. So I had a choice to make: Either trust the word of a madman, or defend America. Given that choice, I will defend America every time. [*Applause*] Thank you.

My opponent admits that Saddam Hussein was a threat. He just didn't support my decision to remove Saddam from power. Maybe he was hoping Saddam would lose the next Iraqi election. [*Laughter*]

We showed the dictator and a watching world that America means what it says. Because our coalition acted, Saddam's torture chambers are closed. Because we acted, Iraq's weapons programs are ended forever. Because we acted, nations like Libya have gotten the message and have renounced their own weapons programs. Because we acted, an example of democracy is rising at the heart of the—at the very heart of the Middle East. Because we acted, the world is more free, and America is more secure.

We face challenges in Iraq, and there's a reason why. Illegal militias, remnants of the regime, and foreign terrorists are trying to take the power they can never gain by the ballot. They hate free societies. They can't stand the thought of freedom arising in a part of the world that they want to control. They know that a free Iraq will be a major defeat in the war on terror. They find little support amongst the Iraqi people. And they will find no success in their attempt to shake the will of the United States of America. They don't understand us in this country. We will never be intimidated by thugs and assassins.

We're on the offense in Iraq. We will defeat them there so we do not have to face

them in our own country. And we're not alone. Other nations are helping. They're helping because they understand the historic opportunity we have. They understand the stakes. They know that a free Iraq will be an agent for change in a part of the world that so desperately needs freedom and peace.

The Iraqi people want to run themselves. And so, on June 30th, a sovereign Iraqi interim Government will take office. And there will be tough times ahead. These are not easy tasks. They are essential tasks. And America will finish what we have begun, and we will win this essential victory in the war on terror.

On national security, Americans have a clear choice. My opponent says he approves of bold action in the world but only if other countries don't object. I'm for united action. I believe in building coalitions. We have built coalitions in Afghanistan. We have built coalitions in Iraq. We have built coalitions to stop the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, but I will never turn over America's national security decisions to leaders of other countries.

Some are skeptical that the war on terror is really a war at all. My opponent said, "The war on terror is far less of a military operation, and far more of an intelligence-gathering, law enforcement operation." I disagree. Our Nation followed this approach after the World Trade Center was bombed in 1993. The matter was handled in the courts and thought by some to be settled. And yet, the terrorists were still training in Afghanistan. They were still plotting in other nations. They were still drawing up more ambitious plans. After the chaos and carnage of September the 11th, it is not enough to serve our enemies with legal papers. With those attacks, the terrorists and their supporters declared war on the United States of America, and war is what they got.

Winning the war requires us to give our troops the best possible support. I want to thank the Members of Congress who are here for supporting the $87 billion appropriations, called a supplemental, that I encouraged them to spend last fall. We owe it to our troops to support them. Not everybody voted for the 87 billion, however. When asked why my opponent didn't vote for it, here is what he said, "I actually did vote for the 87 billion before I voted against it." [*Laughter*] The American President must speak clearly and mean what he says.

Our men and women in the military are taking great risks on our behalf. We've got a fantastic United States military. The conduct of a few inside an Iraqi prison was disgraceful. Their conduct does not represent the character of the men and women who wear our uniform, nor does it represent the character of the United States of America.

At bases across our country and the world, I've had the privilege of meeting with those who defend our country and sacrifice for our security. I've seen their great decency and unselfish courage, and I assure you, ladies and gentlemen, the cause of freedom is in really good hands.

This Nation is prosperous and strong, yet we need to remember that our greatest strength is in the hearts and souls of our citizens. We're strong because of the values we try to live by, courage and compassion, reverence and integrity. We're strong because of the institutions that help give us direction and purpose, our families, our schools, and our religious congregations. These values and institutions are fundamental to our lives, and they deserve the respect of our Government.

We stand for the fair treatment of faith-based groups so they can receive Federal support for their works of compassion and healing. We stand for welfare reforms that require work and strengthen marriage, which have helped millions of Americans find independence and dignity. We stand for a culture of life in which every person matters and every person counts. We stand for institutions like marriage and family, which are the foundations of our society.

And we stand for judges who strictly and faithfully interpret the law. I have nominated people from all walks of life to serve on our bench, highly qualified, decent Americans, men and women who will not undermine democracy by legislating from the bench. Yet, because a small group of United States Senators are willfully obstructing the process, many of my nominees have been forced to wait months, years, for an up-or-down vote. The needless delays in the system are harming the administration of justice, and they are deeply unfair to the nominees themselves. It

is time for liberal Senators to stop playing politics with American justice.

The culture of this country is changing. It is changing from one that has said, "If it feels good, do it," and "If you've got a problem, blame somebody else," to a culture in which each of us understands we are responsible for the decisions we make in life. 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 worried about the quality of the education in the community in which you live, you're responsible for doing something about it. If you are a CEO in corporate America, you are responsible for telling the truth to your shareholders and your employees. And in the responsibility society, each of us is responsible for loving our neighbor just like we'd like to be loved ourself.

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. These aren't one of those times. You and I are living in a period when the stakes are high, the challenges are difficult, a time when firm resolve is needed.

None of us will ever forget that week when one era ended and another began. On September the 14th, 2001, I stood in the ruins of the Twin Towers. It is a day that I will never forget. There were firefighters and policemen in the crowd shouting, "Whatever it takes." A guy in a hardhat looked at me and said, "Don't let me down." As we all did that day, these men and women searching through the rubble took it personally. I took it personally. I have a responsibility that goes on. I will never relent in bringing justice to our enemies. I will defend the security of America, whatever it takes.

In these times, I've also been witness to the character of this Nation. Not so long ago, some had their doubts about the American character, our capacity to meet serious challenges or to serve a cause greater than self-interest. But Americans have given their answer. I've seen the unselfish courage of our troops. I've seen the heroism of Americans in the face of danger. I've seen the spirit of service and compassion renewed in our country. And we've all seen our Nation unite in common purpose when it mattered most.

We will need all these qualities for the work ahead. We have a war to win, and the world is counting on us to lead the cause of freedom and peace. We have a duty to spread opportunity to every corner of this country. This is the work that history has set before us. We welcome it, and we know that for our blessed land, the best days lie ahead.

May God bless you all.

NOTE: The President spoke at 7:05 p.m. at the J.W. Marriott Hotel. In his remarks, he referred to former Gov. James S. Gilmore III of Virginia; and former President Saddam Hussein of Iraq.

Remarks at a Victory 2004 Luncheon in Bridgeton, Missouri

May 14, 2004

The President. Thanks for coming. Please be seated. As Kimmy Brauer said, we have done extremely well with a few people. [*Laughter*] This is the way we like to do it in politics. I want to thank you all for your generosity. I want to thank you for helping to make sure that our ground game in the great State of Missouri is as good as it can possibly be.

We won the State in 2000, and there's no doubt in my mind we're going to carry it in 2004, and one of the reasons why is because of your generosity. And another reason why is because we're going to be really well-organized. And finally, a reason why is because our message is so positive and hopeful for all the citizens of this State. I mean, when the campaign is all said and done, people will realize we've got a plan to make the country safer and stronger and better.

I think there's a lot of reasons to put me back in office for 4 more years. But perhaps the most important reason to send me back up there is so that Laura can be the First Lady for 4 more years. She is really, really a great soul and a wonderful wife, a fantastic mother, and is really making a difference in a lot of people's lives. Both of us have come to realize that the President and the First Lady have got a fantastic opportunity to affect people's lives in positive ways.

I'm going to Concordia University Wisconsin after this, to give the graduation speech. My speech is on compassion. My