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## Remarks in a Discussion at Okaloosa-Walton College in Niceville, Florida

*August 10, 2004*

***The President.*** Thank you all very much. Let's get started here. We'd better get started before all the oxygen leaves. [*Laughter*] Thanks for coming. I'm on a bus tour today. You know why? I think you have to ask for the vote if you're running for office, and I'm here to ask for the vote. That's what I'm doing.

I'm here to tell you there's more to do. We've done a lot, but there's more to do. I have a reason for running, and I'm going to share some of those reasons with you in a little bit. But first, I want to thank you all for coming. I'm here for another reason, and that's to ask for your help. I need your help to get people registered to vote. Listen, there's a lot of people for us out there. If that many people are standing in the rain, it means we got a pretty good shot here in the Panhandle.

But I can't win it without your help. And so I'm asking you to register your friends and neighbors. See, I believe everybody has a duty to vote. I believe that's a—you know, the other day in Afghanistan they were talking about, "Oh, maybe they're not too interested in voting." And I think there was maybe 3 or 4 million had registered to vote. And the Taliban drug some women out of a bus and killed them because they were involved in the electoral process, and a lot of people say, "Well, gosh, that's going to discourage people from doing their duty, from participating in a free society." Now there is over 8 million people who've registered to vote in Afghanistan.

It's an amazing story, isn't it? It's an amazing story how people respond when given a chance to exercise their—what we believe are their God-given rights as free people. We need to do the same thing here in America. So I'm here to ask you to get your fellow citizens to participate. Of course, once you get them headed to the polls, I've got a suggestion on who they might be for. [*Laughter*] And that's what we're going to talk about today.

I'm proud of brother Jeb. I had the honor of spending the weekend with him. His oldest son, George P., got married, and the father of the groom handled his duties perfectly. [*Laughter*] He's a great Governor and a great brother. And I love him a lot. I love him a lot.

And I love the First Lady a lot too. When I asked Laura to marry me, she was a public school librarian. [*Applause*] There you go, yes! She didn't care for politics or politicians. [*Laughter*] Now she's the First Lady of the United States, and she's doing a great job. She really is. I wish she were here today, but she's campaigning in the Midwest, and she's doing a really neat experience. I like to tell people I've got reasons why I'd like you to put me back in, but perhaps the most important one is so that Laura is the First Lady for 4 more years.

I'm going to talk a little bit about what I'd like to do. We've got some citizens here who are going to help me make some points about how America can be a better place. And then I'm going to answer some questions if we've got time.

I first want to say thanks to my friend John McCain. John is an amazing guy who—he's an amazing person. He's a great public servant. He served his Nation in many ways. And I'm proud to be traveling with him. It's—he's a lot of fun to be with. Plus, it helps—[*laughter*]—helps to have him stand by my side. So thanks for coming, friend. Appreciate you being here.

After the ranch, he and I are going to go over to Crawford—I mean, after campaigning here in Panama City, he and I are going to go over to Crawford, and I'm going to show him the ranch. Then we're going to New Mexico, Arizona, Nevada, California, Oregon, Washington, and Iowa.

I want to thank Congressman Jeff Miller, who is doing a fine job for the people. You're doing a great job, Congressman. Thanks for coming.

Statehouse Speaker-designate Allan Bense—he's with us today. Allan, thank you for traveling. Where are you? He was with us. He probably heard I'm going to talk for about 45 minutes and left. [*Laughter*] I'm proud to be traveling as well with Bev Kilmer. She's running for the congressional seat right next door to this one. Good luck to you. Thanks for coming.

I'm proud to be here at Okaloosa-Walton College. I want to thank Bob Richburg, the president of this fine institution.

I tell people I'm running again because I want to work to make America safer, stronger, and better. The biggest task we have in this country is to fight and win this war on terror. The most solemn duty a President has, the most solemn duty those of us who hold high office have is to do everything we can to safeguard our country.

I never thought I'd be having to say this when I ran in 2000—John, we campaigned together. I don't remember saying, "I anticipate war." Nobody wants to be the war President. People want to be the peace President. People want to be able to say, "Gosh, the world is peaceful." But that's not what happened under my watch. The country changed on September the 11th, 2001, and it's vital for the President to clearly see the world the way it is.

I'll tell you some lessons I've learned that I don't think the country should ever forget. First of all, these people that killed us, they were training for years. They were preparing for years. They're evil people who cannot stand what we believe in. You cannot negotiate with these people. You cannot—these are not the kind of people you can reason with. You cannot hope for the best. That's just the nature of these people. It's hard for the American people to understand the nature of somebody who's willing to kill an innocent child to achieve an objective. That's not the way we think. Nevertheless, we must be realistic about the nature of these folks.

The second lesson after September the 11th is when you say something, you better mean it, in order to make the world a more peaceful place. I recognized right after September the 11th, we were in a different kind of conflict. I noticed some World War II veterans who are here who fought a different kind of war. Freedom and liberty were at stake, but it was a different kind of war. This is a different kind of war here. This is a war that said not only must we bring justice to our enemies, wherever they hide, we cannot allow nations to provide them safe harbor or training or to feed or equip them. We just can't do that. In order to be able to protect ourselves—[*applause*].

So that's why I said to the Taliban—we gave the Taliban a warning: Quit harboring these people; quit feeding these people; quit providing safe haven so they can train to come and kill. And the Taliban chose defiance. And thanks to the United States and a coalition of the willing, the Taliban no longer is in power. And the world is safer for it. The world is safer for it. You know why? We've now got an ally in the war on terror. Al Qaida can no longer find—you know, attack and escape into the confines of a sovereign nation. That no longer is possible. But guess what else happened that is important? We liberated people. We freed people.

You know, I was in Cleveland the other evening. I helped kick off the International Children's Games. And I was standing up giving this welcoming address, and right to my right was a group of young girls from Afghanistan. They were part of a soccer team, a young girls soccer team. Now, that probably doesn't sound like a momentous event, but think about it. These young children couldn't even go to school under the Taliban. Their mothers were often paraded into public squares and humiliated, because this country was under the clutches of a barbaric regime that had evil in their hearts.

Our action in Afghanistan fulfilled a word. It said if you harbor, you'll be held accountable. The world is peaceful for it when we keep our word. Our action in Afghanistan has converted an enemy into an ally in the war on terror. And our action in Afghanistan is a part of freeing 50 million people—25 in Afghanistan, 25 in Iraq. And the world is better for it.

Another lesson of September the 11th is that when we see threats, we must deal with them before they fully materialize. See, prior to September the 11th, we thought if we saw a threat, we could deal with it if we felt like it or maybe it would go away; maybe it wouldn't happen, because we felt secure. Remember those days? I do. I also know what it's like now to be vulnerable to the attacks of enemies that could care less about the rules of warfare. I mean, these are uncivilized people. And probably the most dangerous—not probably—the most dangerous worry that we should have is whether or not these

killers are able to get weapons of mass destruction. And where would they get them? Well, they'd get them from people who have the capability of making them, and they'd get them from people that hate us.

So I looked at Iraq and saw a threat. Think about Iraq. This is a country that had—were firing at our pilots. This is a country with which we'd already had a war. This is a country which had used weapons of mass destruction against its own people and against its neighbors. This is a country that paid families of suiciders. This is a country that allowed terrorist networks to be in and out of their borders. Remember Abu Nidal? He's the guy that killed Leon Klinghoffer. His network was in Iraq. Zarqawi—he's still in there chopping people's heads off. His network was in Iraq. And they were in and out of the country.

And so we looked at the facts and said this guy is a threat. That's what we looked at. And then we all looked at the intelligence as well. And my administration looked at it. The United States Congress looked at it. Members of both parties in the Congress looked at that intelligence. My opponent looked at that intelligence. And we all came to the same conclusion: Saddam Hussein was a threat.

Now, I recognize it's important to rally the world on issues such as these. And so I went to the United Nations and said, "We think he's a threat. What do you think?" And the United Nations Security Council voted 15 to nothing, saying—and here's what they said. They said, "We think you're a threat, so disclose, disarm, or face serious consequences." That's what the world said. By the way, it's not the first time the world had said it, is it? The world had been saying it for over a decade. And every time the world said it, Saddam kind of—didn't take it very seriously, and he became dangerous.

And so I had a choice to make. I had a choice as to whether or not to trust this madman, to trust whether or not we would be more secure with him in his own country, defying the demands of the free world once again. This is a guy who had used weapons of mass destruction. Do I forget the lessons of September the 11th, or do what I think is necessary to protect this country? Given that choice, I'll protect America every time.

You know, they ask you, they say, "Well, you haven't found the stockpiles you thought were going to be there." And they're right. We thought there would be stockpiles of weapons there. But we do know that he had the capability of making weapons. And we do know that he had the capability of passing that knowledge on to an enemy which hates us. He was dangerous. Knowing what I know today, I would have still made the same decision. The world is better off, and America is safer. No question about it.

Let me tell you something. I want you all to think about a world in which Saddam Hussein was still in power. There's an enemy out there. He'd have been stronger if he had been in power still. The world is safer and America is safer because he sits in a prison cell.

I want to share a story with you about seven Iraqi citizens who came to see me in the Oval Office. The Oval Office is a powerful place. It's the kind of place where my mother walks in and feels so overwhelmed, she won't tell me what to do. [*Laughter*] That's powerful. In walk seven Iraqis. They had all had their right hands cut off by Saddam Hussein. You know why? Because the dinar had declined in value—that was his currency—and he was looking for a scapegoat. And he found these seven small merchants, small-business people. I asked one guy, "Why you?" And he said, well, he happened to sell dinars on that particular day to buy, I think he said euros, so he could buy gold to make jewelry. And he just sold on the wrong day, because he got plucked out of the population and, like his other six friends there, had his right hand cut off and an X branded into his forehead.

And these fellows walk into the Oval Office—the reason why is, is a fellow named Marvin Zindler; he's a newsman out of Houston—[*applause*]—there you go—who heard of their plight. He had done well, set up a foundation, flew them over to Houston so they could outfitted with new hands. [*Applause.*] Yes. The contrast between a society where one person gets to decide the fate of somebody's right hand and a society that's willing to raise people who contribute to heal

the hands is the difference between Iraq and totalitarianism and tyranny, and a free country like America.

It's hard work. It is hard work to go from a society in which somebody can cut your right hand off just like that, to a society that adopts the responsibilities and habits of a free country. And that's what you're seeing. You're seeing that conversion. And it's hard. I'm telling you, it's hard. But we've got some strong allies, staring with the Prime Minister of Iraq, Prime Minister Alawi. They tell me the story of him. He was in London, England. He was in exile from his country because Saddam hated him. He wakes up one night and an ax-wielding group of men tried to hatchet him to death, or ax him to death. I guess you don't hatchet somebody with an ax. [*Laughter*] And you don't ax them with a hatchet. [*Laughter*] He wakes up, the glint of the blade coming at him, and he gets cut badly, escapes. The guy hit his wife, who never recovered, really. So he's seen what it means to be chased down and tried to kill by a tyrant. He—this guy believes that Iraq can and will be free.

See, step one is for there to be leadership. We need leadership in this world. We need people who believe in principles and are willing to stand on those principles and lead.

More and more Iraqis are now stepping up to defend their country against these killers, and that's what's going to happen. They got the choice to make: Do they want to be a free society, or do they want to be a society where mothers and dads cannot raise their children in a hopeful world. We believe—I believe—that moms and dads all over the world want to raise their children in peace and hope. That's what Americans believe. And therefore, it's important for us to stay side by side with these Iraqis as they assume more responsibility to bring freedom to their country.

And a free Iraq and a free Afghanistan is a big step toward making the world more peaceful. See, all this action that's taken is to do two things: One, to defend ourselves, is to deal with the realities of the 21st century, is not turn a blind eye to the lessons of September the 11th; and to bring peace. I want these little kids in this audience in this hall to be growing up and going to college in a peaceful world. We got hard work to do, but peace is possible.

A couple of points I want to share with you about my philosophy. We'll work with allies and friends. Remember, we got 60 nations involved in what they call the Proliferation Security Initiative. That's to help interdict weapons of mass destruction and technologies and equipment. We got nearly 40 in Afghanistan, nearly 30 in Iraq. But I'm not going to turn over national security decisions of this country to leaders of other countries.

One other thing I want to assure you is that when we put our troops into harm's way, they'll have the support of this Government. I want to thank our troops who are here. I want to thank the families of the troops who are here. Let me tell you something, I understand that these deployments are hard on the wives and husbands and moms and dads and sons and daughters. I know that. And the very least we can do is to make sure your loved ones have got the best pay, the best training, that you've got the best possible housing, the best equipment.

That's why I sent up to Congress a supplemental calling for $87 billion extra money last September to help our troops. And we got great response. This was for equipment and spare parts, fuel, all the elements necessary to make sure our people have got their missions. We got good support. Only 12 Senators voted against it. That's all. And two of them are the guy I'm running against and his runningmate.

***Audience members.*** Boo-o-o!

***The President.*** Two of them were Kerry and Edwards. And you know, that's—my attitude is, is that when you put your troops in harm's way, they deserve the best. They said, you know—he said, "I voted for the 87 billion, right before I voted against it." That's not a good enough explanation, I know, for the people of the Panhandle. And then he said it was a complicated matter. Listen, there is nothing complicated about making sure our troops have got the best. And that's what I'll continue to do as the Commander in Chief.

No, I'm running because I want to spread freedom and peace. We have an obligation

in this country to lead toward a more peaceful world. And we believe that freedom is the pathway to peace. We also believe this, 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.

Let me talk real quick about how to make America stronger. That starts with making sure people can find work. And we want our people working. We want people to be able to do their duties as moms and dads by putting food on the table. We've been through a lot in this economy, if you really think about it. In 3½ years we've been through a recession and then that terror attack; we had some corporate scandals; marching to war in order to liberate Iraq and to make this country more secure. All that was hard on our economy.

And yet, we're growing. And the economy is—the growth rate to the economy—they're good. They're as good as they've been in nearly 20 years. People are working here in Florida. I think your unemployment rate is 4.7 percent. Yes. Jeb said it's because of him. [*Laughter*] I'll give credit where credit is due—and those entrepreneurs and farmers and workers of America. That's why we're doing well.

The tax cuts helped. They helped people. The—people say, "Well, that's great, but don't rest on your laurels." That's what Mother always said. She obviously said it outside the Oval Office. [*Laughter*] She's right. What more are you going to do? I'll tell you what more we're going to do. We're going to make sure the entrepreneurial spirit stays strong by keeping taxes on small businesses low. Most people—most small businesses in America pay tax at the individual income tax rate—that's a fact—by far the vast majority. If you're a small business, you're likely to be a sole proprietorship or a Subchapter S corporation, which means, when your taxes—your tax liability is due, you look at the individual tax tables. So when we reduce taxes on individuals, you're really providing extra capital for small businesses. And since by far the vast majority of new jobs are created by small businesses, it makes sense to stimulate the small-business sector of our economy. And that's what's happening in America today. People are growing.

Now, there's some things we've got to do to make sure the economy stays strong. You hear a lot of talk about jobs in America. All of us want jobs to stay here in America. The best way to keep jobs in America is for America to be the best place to do business in the world. Now, what does that mean? I'll tell you what it means. It means we need an energy policy to make us less dependent on foreign sources of energy. If we want to keep jobs here, we've got to conserve better, we've got to work on renewables, and we've got to explore for environmentally friendly ways, in particular, in places like ANWR in Alaska. You know, there's 17 million acres up there, and all they're asking to do is explore on 2,000 of the 17 million, which, had we done this nearly a decade ago, we'd have an additional million barrels of oil—of U.S. oil helping to fuel our economy.

In order to make sure this economy of ours is strong, we've got to reject this notion of economic isolationism. We can't isolate ourselves from the world. We've got to be confident about our abilities to produce. You know, what has happened in the past is most Presidents have said let's open up our markets for foreign goods. And that's good for you as consumers, by the way. If you've got more goods from which you can choose, you're going to get a better price at better quality. That's how the marketplace works.

But the problem is other countries haven't treated us like we've treated them. And so the best policy is to open up their markets, not close ours, open up their markets so Florida entrepreneurs and manufacturers and farmers can sell their products. Free and fair trade will help keep this economy growing.

You know what else we need? We need to worry about the high cost of health care. If you're a small-business owner, you're worried about health care costs. We're helping in health care. We've increased the number of community health centers. Those are for low-income Americans. We want people getting their primary care at community health centers, not at emergency rooms. We've opened up SCHIP. We've strengthened Medicare.

There's some other things we need to do. Small businesses need to be able to pool risk just like big businesses do, so they can be

able to afford health insurance for their employees. And we need to expand health savings accounts. Health savings accounts are a tax-free policy which enables people to buy better health insurance at a lower cost and maintains the patient-doctor relationship as the core decisionmaking entity of health care.

And finally, in order to keep jobs here, in order to make sure our businesses are competitive places, we need medical liability reform. These junk lawsuits are driving out doctors and running up the cost of health care. This is a big issue in this campaign. It's a big issue in the State of Florida. It's a big issue all over the country. You cannot be pro-patient and pro-doctor and pro-trial-lawyer at the same time. You have to choose. My opponent made his choice, and he put him on the ticket. [*Laughter*] I made my choice: I am strongly in favor of medical liability reform—now.

We need tort reform. We need tort reform in this country if we expect people to be able to find jobs here. And we need an education system which works. And that's what we're going to talk a little bit about here. We've got some people who benefited from an interesting way they use our schools. By the way, good education first starts with starting early. And it did my heart good to drive down the highway and see, "This is an A-plus school." This is an A-plus school here. [*Applause*] Yes, that's good. But you know what, you wouldn't have known it if you didn't measure. Yes. Otherwise you would have been guessing, right? "We think it's an A-plus school." [*Laughter*] "It might be an A-plus school. We hope it's an A-plus school." That's not what the sign said. The sign said, "This is an A-plus school," because—[*applause*].

All right, keep it that way. You know how we know and how you know in Florida—because you got a Governor who said, "Let's measure." And that's the whole crux of the No Child Left Behind Act. The No Child Left Behind Act says we're going to increase Federal spending for public schools—up 49 percent, by the way, since I took office.

But in return for increased funding, we said, "Now why don't you show us whether or not the children can read." That didn't seem like that tough of a request. Some people call that an unfunded mandate. I call that an obligation of schools. To be able to teach a child to read is fundamental to learning. And so now we're measuring. And if we find out early a child can't get there, to grade-level by the third grade, that bill enables people to get extra help early, before it's too late.

So one way to make sure we got jobs here is to start this process of making sure every child can read—no child is left behind—and then as they head into high school, is to elevate our science and math, is to make sure the high school diploma means something; and then make sure when they get out of high school, there's an opportunity to go to college. I want you know that during my administration we've increased the number of children who received Pell grants by one million—one million additional children. So they have a chance to go to college. The loans are up. I mean, we're trying to help people go to college.

But also it's important—is to make sure our community college system is vibrant. And that's why we've had this assembly here, because I want to tell you how important I think community colleges are to a country which is hopeful and stronger and better. First, I want the community colleges to be relevant for our kids, and they are for a lot of kids. A lot of people use the community college system as a way to gain the skills necessary to fill a job. But we've got a lot of older Americans who need help too, going to the community colleges.

I'm going to tell you what's happening. This job base is changing, and that makes people nervous. And I can understand that. But my job isn't to be nervous; my job is to act. My job is to figure out how to solve problems. And when the job base is changing, it says we've got a problem. And the best way to solve that problem is to make funds available for the community college system so people can be trained for the jobs which actually exist. In other words, the job base changes, there are jobs available, but sometimes the skill set doesn't meet the jobs, the skill set required by the jobs.

And that's what we're going to talk about. Jill White is with us today. She is a—where are you? Where is Jill? Stand up. Thank you, Jill. She is—[*applause*]—she brought all her

second cousins over. [*Laughter*] Thanks for coming, Jill. Tell us what you do.

***Dr. White.*** I'm the Vice President for Instructional Services here at Okaloosa-Walton College.

***The President.*** Which means?

***Dr. White.*** Which means the academic programs and registration, faculty, all the student issues live in my office.

***The President.*** Yes, good. Well, kind of the enforcer. [*Laughter*] And so one of the things I want you to describe to people is how a displaced worker can access your college. I mean, you see—I presume you see people that are, like, your age and my age—not that old, I'm sure—my case. [*Laughter*] Tell me—seriously, tell me kind of the nature of the student body here.

[*Dr. White made brief remarks.*]

***The President.*** Yes, good. So you take all comers.

***Dr. White.*** You betcha.

***The President.*** See, community colleges are accessible; they're available; they're affordable; and their curriculums don't get stuck. In other words, if there's a need for a certain kind of worker, I presume your curriculums evolved over time.

***Dr. White.*** You betcha. If this community needs——

***The President.*** See, I'm not even a lawyer, and here I am leading the witness. [*Laughter*] Go ahead.

***Dr. White.*** You betcha. If this community needs it, we're there to do that. We've partnered with businesses. We do retraining. We welcome short-term projects, 2-year degrees. We're even opening some bachelor's degree programs that are workforce-oriented to respond to this military and defense-oriented community.

***The President.*** Yes, see, there are jobs in this community, and sometimes the skill sets of the workers don't meet the skill sets required for the job. And so what she's saying is the community college is available to train people for the jobs which actually exist.

I appreciate that. Thank you, Jill. Very good job.

***Dr. White.*** You're welcome.

***The President.*** Okay, we've got Wayne Campbell with us. Let me tell you something interesting. He is the CEO—that's the chief executive officer—of Fort Walton Beach Medical Center. [*Applause*] Huge, thunderous ovation. Look—never mind, don't get carried away.

Are you looking for workers?

[*Mr. Campbell made brief remarks.*]

***The President.*** And what kind of workers?

***Mr. Campbell.*** I'd have to say all, but primarily nursing.

***The President.*** Yes, so you've got a nursing shortage?

***Mr. Campbell.*** Nationwide, there's a nursing shortage.

***The President.*** Right. And obviously nurses require a certain skill set. What do you do to help people that you're trying to hire have the skill set necessary to fill the jobs?

[*Mr. Campbell made further remarks.*]

***The President.*** That's good, yes, but they partnered with the school. See, here is what you're hearing. Here is a guy looking for work; there is health care jobs. If you're out there and listening to whether or not there's a job available for you, they're looking for workers. They're looking for nurses. They're looking for people in the health care field. That's just one area where there's a job shortage here in America.

And what he just said was they came to this community college to partner with the community college. The community college was openminded enough to say to a local employer, how can we work together in a collaborative fashion to educate people for the jobs which actually exist? One way to keep jobs in America is to utilize the community college system of America to make sure people have the skills necessary to fill the jobs that are growing here in this country.

And I want to thank you for coming. I appreciate you being here.

Tammy Ford is with us. She used to work in a textile company—for how long?

***Ms. Ford.*** Fourteen years.

***The President.*** What happened?

***Ms. Ford.*** They shut down, took it to Mexico.

***The President.*** See, the textile company went to Mexico. Then what happened?

***Ms. Ford.*** I didn't have a job anymore.

***The President.*** I know that. [*Laughter*]

[*Ms. Ford made brief remarks.*]

***The President.*** Yes, let me tell you what she just said. Good job. Thank you. Very good. I knew you were going to do great. She got laid off. Her life was—it was a traumatic moment in her life. Fortunately, the Government has got plans to help. It's called trade adjustment assistance, which means if you get laid off—in this case, because the job went elsewhere—there's money to help you retrain. It's important for everybody to know here. That's wise use of taxpayers' money, by the way, is to help people retrain for the jobs which exist.

Now, we can't—the Government can't pass a law that says, "Tammy, you've got to go back to school." She had to make up her mind to do that herself. But Government has got a role to help people who want to help themselves. And that's what you're hearing. You're hearing a story about somebody who chose to go back to school with Government help. But listen to what she said. She said with extra education, she makes more money. In other words, she became a more productive worker. And when you hear productivity increases, that means there's a chance you can make more money. Not everybody—unless their skills—unless they go back to school. And the Government's role is to help you. That's what I'm telling you.

This is a robust plan to help people like Tammy gain the skills necessary to fill the higher-paying jobs which are being created. And it's one of the real challenges of this economy. And we've got to be wise about how we use our resources. And I can't think of a wiser way than to help people go back to the community colleges to train for the jobs which exist.

Marina Hobson is with us. You ready, Marina? Tell us your story real quick.

[*Ms. Hobson made brief remarks.*]

***The President.*** See, let me just say that there are people out there probably listening, say, "Gosh, I wonder if I could do this?" And the answer is, of course you can. You just heard her. She said it's exciting to learn new things. Go ahead.

***Ms. Hobson.*** And I graduated in 2001 with honors here, in our A-plus school—[*applause*].

***The President.*** There you go.

***Ms. Hobson.*** And after I graduated, I worked for the Chamber of Commerce in Crestview for 3 years, and now I just recently changed jobs. I now work for a small tree service company called Fritz Brothers Tree Service.

***The President.*** Fantastic.

***Ms. Hobson.*** The number one tree service in—[*laughter*].

***The President.*** There you go; you just got a raise. Go ahead—making a little more money now than you did before?

***Ms. Hobson.*** Oh, most definitely—most definitely.

***The President.*** See, education pays off. It pays off when people take education seriously early in life. But the key is not to give up on anybody in America if we want this country to be a vibrant place, a chance where people can realize their dreams. Both these examples are examples of people that at one time their life was shattered because the jobs—just couldn't compete, yet new jobs are available. And we just got to help people get them.

Thanks for coming, Tammy—Marina. Thank you, appreciate you coming.

I'm running because I want this country to be a hopeful place. I'm running because I want to keep economic growth alive and well. I'm running so people can realize their dreams. One way to make sure this economy stays strong is to be wise about how we spend your money and keep taxes low, which is what I'm going to do.

And finally, I'm running again because I understand the strength of this country is the heart and soul of our people. That's the strength of America. I mean, think about it. This is a country that has got—people from all walks of life are willing to love a neighbor just like they'd like to be loved themselves. The ability to change our country one heart and one soul at a time is real because there are people who are willing to love a neighbor.

And my job as the President is to call upon that compassion, is to rally the great strength of the country. Government is limited in its

ability to love. Government is not a very loving organization. Government is about law and justice. Love comes from the soul of people. Love comes from their hearts. And the job of a President—part of the job of a President is to rally that compassion and call upon people to serve.

And that's why this Faith-Based and Community-Based Initiative is so important. It's an initiative that recognizes that sometimes only problems—problems can be solved when you help change a person's heart. If you're hooked on drugs or alcohol, sometimes a counselor can work it for you, but a lot of times it requires a change of your heart in order to change your behavior. And Government should not fear programs like that, programs based upon faith. They ought to welcome programs based upon faith to change this soul, one heart and one conscience at a time.

I'm running for a reason. There's more to do to make this country a safer country, a stronger country, and a better country. And I want thank you for giving me the chance to come and explain to you why I'm running again. And thank you for giving me a chance to ask for you help.

Now, before we get on the bus heading up to Panama City, I'll be glad to answer some questions if somebody has one or two.

***Q.*** Right here, Mr. President! [*Laughter*]

***The President.*** Whew. I'm glad that turned out to be a question. [*Laughter*] Let her go. What do you got? Yell it.

***Q.*** It's an honor to be here.

***The President.*** Thank you.

***Q.*** You're the man for the job in this time.

***The President.*** Thank you.

### *Tax Reform*

***Q.*** [*Inaudible*]—I want you to take up, and it's to make the world—that's H.R. 25—[*inaudible*].

***The President.*** All right, thank you. He's talking about getting rid of the current tax system and replacing it with a national sales tax. It's in interesting idea. You know, I'm not exactly sure how big the national sales tax is going to have to be, but it's the kind of interesting idea that we ought to explore seriously. You know, we're working to try to simplify the Code. It is, no question, complex. The more simple it is, the better it is for the American people. That's certainly one idea. That's an interesting idea that we ought to explore. And the Senator and I—we'll grill old Miller here on the bus to see if he can explain it all to us. [*Laughter*]

Yes, you got a question?

***Q.*** Why do kids my age have to pay taxes?

***The President.*** Why do kids your age have to pay taxes? That's an interesting question. I guess because you're earning money, to begin with. [*Laughter*] I don't know what your circumstances are. I will tell you some principles I believe. I don't believe anybody ought to pay more than 35 percent to the Federal Government, for starters. I believe that if we set priorities in Washington, we don't need to be raising taxes on the people right now. I think we can keep taxes low in order to make sure this economy continues to grow.

I'll tell you what I'm worried about. I'm worried about if we don't make permanent the child credit—if we don't, the child credit goes down, which will hurt families with children. If we don't make this tax relief permanent we passed, the marriage penalty is going up. If we don't, the 10-percent bracket goes away. In other words, we're raising taxes on the working people right now, which is the wrong time to raising taxes on the working people.

Yes, sir.

### *2004 Campaign/Support for the President*

***Q.*** I have two things to say for you. One is, if you would use more testimonials in your campaign from military people, that would prove to the American people that the Army is behind you and they're being accepted where they are and they're doing the job that they do.

***The President.*** Good idea. Thank you. And not only that, I got that advice for free. Here I'm paying thousands of dollars to these high-paid political consultants, and this guy comes up with a good idea for free.

***Q.*** And the other thing is, is I'm 60 years old, and I've voted Republican from the very first time I could vote. And I also want to say this is the very first time that I have felt that God was in the White House.

***The President.*** Thank you. [*Applause*] Thank you all. Thank you all. Let me ask you a question. Do you like Jeb? Jeb plants him right here on the front row. [*Laughter*]

Yes, go ahead.

### *Constitutional Amendment on Marriage*

***Q.*** Mr. President, how do you feel about the Republic standing strong in these current times on a constitutional amendment that has been burdening our Nation?

***The President.*** Be a little more specific.

***Q.*** Well, specifically, like one man and one woman getting married——

***The President.*** Yes, okay. He's asking me about—I think you're asking me about why I proposed a constitutional amendment to support traditional marriage. Is that right?

***Q.*** Well, how you feel about it.

***The President.*** Well, I support it, and I'll tell you why.

***Q.*** Yes, sir, constitutional cleansing for things that have burdened our Nation that should be under the cover of the Republic instead of the courts.

***The President.*** Yes, that's a good question. See, yes, what he wants to know is—he's worried that the courts are defining the issue of marriage. That's what he's asking. And so am I. I believe that—first of all, I just want everybody to take a step back from this issue, and this is an issue where all of us need to treat people with different opinions with the utmost respect. This is a sensitive topic. The debate needs to be conducted in a civilized way. But it's a serious debate.

I'll tell you why it's a serious debate. I happen to believe traditional marriage, marriage between a woman and man, is necessary for a stable society. It's served civilization well throughout the years. Now, people say, "Why the constitutional amendment?" And the reason why is, is because I am concerned that law on the books will be overturned by the courts. The courts have been very active in this area. As a matter of fact, in one State they redefined—four judges redefined marriage as we know it—four judges—and the people didn't have a decision in that process.

And I am concerned that that will continue to happen on Federal law as well. And someday we're going to wake up and realize that the courts have defined marriage, and not the people. And so one way to guarantee that the people are involved with this very important debate is through the constitutional process. After all, States must be involved in the ratification of a constitutional amendment.

And so I support a constitutional amendment to define marriage as between a man and a woman. I also believe the States have got the right, should they choose, to provide legal guarantees for other types of couples. To me, that is a different issue from the definition of marriage. And so that's why I take the position I took. And I appreciate your question.

Yes, sir.

### *Possibility of Military Draft/Support for Troops*

***Q.*** President Bush——

***The President.*** Yes, ma'am.

***Q.*** I understand that the Democratic leadership in Congress wants——

***The President.*** I'm looking around for you.

***Q.*** I'm here. I'm over here.

***The President.*** No, not for you. [*Laughter*] Oh, okay. I got you, yes. Thank you.

***Q.*** I understand that the Democratic leadership in Congress wants to reinstate the draft that will include women with no exception. What is your position——

***The President.*** No, I don't think so. I haven't heard that, to be fair to the Democrat leadership. Maybe they have. I don't think I've heard it. John hasn't, either. No, we're not going—we don't need the draft. Look, the All-Volunteer Army is working. The All-Volunteer Army—I really don't think, in all fairness, I haven't heard that. Maybe you have. I have not heard any leader in the Congress of either party advocating a draft. I beg your pardon—John said a couple of the guys in the House have. They will—I know Senator McCain and I agree on this issue for certain: The All-Volunteer Army works.

And the way—I'll tell you one way how you make it work—I just signed a defense appropriations bill, which is the fourth year in a row in which we've raised the pay of those who wear our uniform. And the pay's

getting better. And the housing is getting better. In other words, the quality of life issues are improving. And that's one way you make—that's how you make the All-Volunteer Army work, by making sure that when somebody signs up, they're treated well, that they're paid well, and that they're housed well and that—the best way to encourage reenlistment is to make sure that the families feel welcomed and well-treated.

I'm really proud of our military. You know, one of the hard things I've got to do—[*applause*]—let me finish here—one of the hard things that I've got to do, and I know John does it as well, and I'm sure the Congressman does, is to visit the wounded. We did so in Fort Lewis, Washington, together. And I can tell you that your Government provides fantastic medical service to those who have been wounded on the battlefield. I mean, we're taking these kids from Iraq to either a hospital in Germany or a field hospital and then to Walter Reed or Bethesda Naval Hospital in record time. And we're saving a lot of lives.

And the question I always ask their loved ones is, "Are you being treated well?" You've got a wife there that is worried about her husband who has been wounded, and I say, "Are they treating you well? Is your loved one getting the care needed?" And, to a person—now, look, I, admittedly—sometimes it's hard to tell me a different thing than, "Yes, we're doing great." But it's—but the response from those whose lives we're trying to heal and save and their loved ones has been unbelievable.

I mean, your Government cares deeply about somebody who is in harm's way and who has been injured in harm's way. And that is—you've got to know something, as the Commander in Chief it means a lot to be able to tell a relative, "We're doing all we can to help your loved one." And we are. And we're a great country. We really are. What a fabulous nation we are.

Go ahead and yell it out.

***Q.*** First of all—[*inaudible*].

***The President.*** Thank you. Yes, I better give you a mike for that one.

***U.S. Mission in Iraq***

***Q.*** [*Inaudible*]—I have a brother who served in Afghanistan and is going back to Iraq—[*inaudible*].

***The President.*** Right.

***Q.*** [*Inaudible*]—people from around the world, but my concern is how, in Iraq, they have so many hands in the pot. I want—[*inaudible*].

***The President.*** Yes, thanks. That's a very interesting question. Really—your son's going back to Iraq?

***Q.*** My brother.

***The President.*** Brother. And what she's worried about is whether or not we've got the vision and a plan to complete the vision—to complete the mission. That's a very legitimate question. And the answer is, we do. We do.

I'll tell you, the—first, let me talk to you about my plans for your brother. When he gets over there, I'd like him to come back as soon as possible, but that's after the mission has been completed. All of us want our troops out, but what we don't want is to cut short the mission. We don't want politics to decide the mission. We want—I think the best solution is to put good commanders on the ground, say, "What do you need?"

And so, people—what is the mission? The mission is a free Iraq that can stand up and defend herself. That is going to change the world. I just want you to know that your brother is going on a mission that has got historic proportions to it. I mean, this is a—we're changing history. Just think about what a free Iraq will mean in the heart of the Middle East. It's not only going to make America more secure; it's going to help change a part of the world that is desperate for freedom. People long to be free.

Too often, our foreign policy has been, "Let's just don't worry about the freedom aspect of society." But look where it got us. Think about it. In that part of the world, there's such resentment and poverty, and we've got kids looking for work and they can't find anything, so they become recruited by these killers. And yet, there's an opportunity to change that, by working for a free society.

And so the mission of your brother is clear. And the mission will be better accomplished

and more quickly accomplished when we train Iraqis to do the job that our coalition forces are doing now. And that's the task at hand. That's the task at hand. The task at hand is to train these folks and equip these folks as quickly as possible and as efficiently as possible.

I mean, the key is not to set artificial timelines. See, you set an artificial timeline, it says to the enemy, "Well, gosh, all we've got to do is wait them out." It says to the Iraqis, "We're going to quit on you." If the Iraqi people think that the United States is not true to its word, they will grow timid. They don't want to take a risk, in case somebody comes back that's going to cut off their hands.

And so your brother is going on a mission that is a vital mission. I know you're worried about him. I can see it in your eyes. And I don't blame you.

***Q.*** He's ready.

***The President.*** Well, he's ready, but sister, you're worried, and I don't blame you. You love him, is why you're worried. And that's wonderful.

Let me tell you an interesting story, though, and I hope you keep this story—I hope this helps you and helps everybody understand. So I'm having dinner with Prime Minister Koizumi. He's the Prime Minister of Japan. And we're having Kobe beef—pretty good. [*Laughter*] It was in Tokyo. And guess what we were talking about? We were talking about peace. We were talking about how to deal with Kim Chong-il in North Korea. He's dangerous. I thought it didn't make any sense for us to have a bilateral relationship with him because he—the last time we tried to have one, he didn't tell the truth. So I learned a lesson and then started to rally other nations to be involved with us to convince this man to get rid of his nuclear weapons program. And one of our partners in convincing Kim Chong-il to disarm is Japan.

Now, the interesting part of the story, I think, as far as your brother is concerned, is that during the course of the conversation, I thought it was pretty neat to be talking to a Prime Minister of a country that we had been at war with, that my dad had actually, as a young Navy pilot, trained down the road here, went overseas—and I know many of your dads did as well—to fight against the Japanese, our enemy. They were our sworn enemy. And today—or that day, I was talking to the head of a former enemy, and we're talking about keeping the world more peaceful. [*Applause*]

Now, let me finish—let me finish. There were a lot of people after World War II who did not believe that Japan could be a self-governing, peaceful nation. There were a lot of people who said, "Well, the reconstruction effort isn't going to work. These people can't do this." But fortunately, our predecessors in the Presidency and the Senate and the Congress believed that liberty can change lives and never forgot that fantastic American belief that freedom has the capacity to transform lives, transform enemies to allies in peace. Some day an American President is going to be sitting down with an elected leader from Iraq, huddled and talking about how to keep the peace. That's what your brother—[*applause*].

Go ahead, yes.

***Support for the President***

***Q.*** My dad is a retired vet—[*inaudible*].

***The President.*** Thank you so much. Where is he? Where's the colonel?

***Q.*** [*Inaudible*]

***The President.*** Well, you tell the colonel I saluted him. Thank you. I appreciate that. God bless you. Thank you. That's very sweet of you.

Okay, who was yelling up there? You? Okay, fine. Are you the spokesman for the rowdy bunch up there?

***Q.*** Yes.

***The President.*** Okay, well, good.

***Q.*** Okay, first of all, I want to say that I love you.

***The President.*** Thank you.

***Q.*** And I would like to see you in office for 4 more years.

***The President.*** Thank you. Are you registered to vote?

***Q.*** No.

***The President.*** See, you get to ask a question; I get to ask one. Are you registered?

***Q.*** No, not yet. And——

***The President.*** Are you 18?

***Q.*** No, and I don't want to talk about it because it upsets me. [*Laughter*]

***The President.*** Okay, good. That's a teenager—I'm used to that. [*Laughter*] I've been there. [*Laughter*]

***International Criminal Court***

***Q.*** My question is, why did you let the International Court try our troops?

***The President.*** Yes, I haven't. I'm against the International Court. That's a pretty darn sophisticated question. I didn't join the International Criminal Court because I don't want to put our troops in the hands of prosecutors from other nations. Look, if somebody has done some wrong in our military, we'll take care of it. We got plenty of capability of dealing with justice.

Very good question. Make sure you register.

Yes, ma'am. Anybody about ready to fall out? [*Laughter*] Getting a little hot? Okay, I get the message.

***Q.*** Mr. President.

***The President.*** Yes, ma'am.

***Message to Children/Homeland Security***

***Q.*** I am the attorney for the Guardian Ad Litem Program here in our area. And we advocate for the best interest of children. And I know that you have a heart for our children.

***The President.*** Right.

***Q.*** And I would like to ask if you could address our children and even the young adults who are here and tell them something that you want—that you think is important about your past 4 years and your next 4 years——

***The President.*** Thanks, yes.

***Q.*** ——about their safety in this country.

***The President.*** Yes, I appreciate that. First, my message to the children is, make right choices in life. Understand that the decisions you make as a youngster can affect you. My second message is, love your parents. My third message is—seriously. My third message is, take advantage of your schooling opportunities. It's really important to learn early in life. They're—hold up a second. [*Laughter*]

You're growing up in a different time. It's probably hard for you to realize it because you don't realize what it was like, for example, to grow up in the fifties. [*Laughter*] McCain and I grew up in the fifties. It was a different time. It used to be when we were younger, oceans would protect us. And we were in a pretty unique position here in America where we could say, gosh, there could be a threat gathering over there, but we didn't have to worry about it.

And that's what happened on September the 11th. I hope you just understand this, that this is a demarcation point in history, the history of our country, because it changed the whole way that we've got to look at our own security. It meant that if there is a threat somewhere, we can no longer not expect it to come here. And that's what you've got to understand. This is a different time. That's why you hear a lot of talk from those of us in office about securing the homeland. There wasn't a lot of talk about securing the homeland prior to September the 11th. We saw some terrorists threats. Nothing was done about them, hardly. But very few people really dreamt that somebody would take our own airplane and fly it into our own building and kill 3,000 people. No one—you ask any adult that you might run into, could you envision that, and the answer was no.

And so your question is—for the past 4 years what the kids have been learning is, is that the history of our Nation changed in a way that can create difficult circumstances for people, because our job is to try to tell the truth and to remind people that there's still danger. Believe me, a President—it would be much easier for a President if he could say, "There is no danger. Gosh, the world is peaceful, and everybody is doing great." But that's just not the hand we got dealt during this period of our history. So you will—what happened the last 4 years—she asked me to talk about the last 4 and the next 4—the last 4 you really began to see this country understanding and coming to grips with the nature of the world we live in.

I think the next 4 years what you'll see is, because we're wiling to do hard work and stick to our word and take action when necessary—and we've had a lot of successes—the next 4 years will be more peace. I think you're going to see the world changing for peace. And you've got to understand one reason why, and that's because there are just some fundamental values in life that can

change societies, starting with the thing that we take for granted in America, which is freedom. Freedom is a—when societies become free societies and the people's aspirations are listened to and the leaders are responsive to the people, not to their own whims, those societies become hopeful societies, and the world becomes a more peaceful place. That's what you'll see over the next 4 years.

Last question, right here. This guy has a question—okay, two more questions. The people's choice will go last.

Yes, ma'am. What have you got?

### *President's Faith/Religious Freedom*

***Q.*** Mr. President, I was wondering if you were a Christian.

***The President.*** I—yes, I am. Now, let me talk about religion. I want you all to hear me on religion right quick. It is very important for this country to honor religion this way: You can be religious or you can choose not to be religious, and you're equally American. You have a right in this country to worship freely. It is a fundamental right that must never change. And if you choose to worship the Almighty, you are equally American if you're a Christian, Jew, Muslim, or Hindu. That's the precious nature of how we view religion in this country. That freedom to worship and not be condemned because of the choice you make, by man, is a—it must be jealously guarded by any of us, Republican or Democrat or independent, who are honored with a public office. I can't tell you what a valuable part of our past, present, and future the freedom to worship as you see fit is. It's just an important part of our country, and it's not going to change.

Great question. Final question, sir—the people's choice. [*Applause*] Can you please explain why you have got such a huge entourage?

### *Charter Schools*

***Q.*** Here we go. Mr. President, OWC has a charter high school.

***The President.*** Oh, yes.

***Q.*** And this is the charter high school.

***The President.*** Good job.

***Q.*** The charter high school is number one in the State of Florida of all high schools. We are the "A."

***The President.*** Now, how do you know that?

***Q.*** Your test.

***The President.*** Yes, thank you very much. He didn't guess, did he?

***Q.*** What I want to know is, what is the security that we have of sharing our great experience with the rest of the country and also of keeping our charter high school and making it flourish and continue to flourish like it is?

***The President.*** Good question. First of all, let me ask you something. How many of you all are going to college? [*Applause*] That's good. Good job. Secondly, high schools are chartered not by the Federal Government, and they will not be chartered by the Federal Government so long as I'm the President. That's called—that's not local control of schools. Schools need to be locally controlled. High schools are chartered by the State, and that's where they should be, by the county, by somebody other than the Federal Government. You don't want your Federal Government running the schools. No, believe me. And they're not going to.

And the question is, how do you know—I mean, how do you spread charter schools? I'll tell you how. You hold schools to account. And you put the scores out for everybody to see. And if, in fact, you're number one in the State, and I believe you are—you wouldn't have said it in front of the national cameras if you weren't. People say, "Why—why is this charter school number one?" That's how you begin to spread educational excellence—not from dictates from above but from excellence from below.

That's why the accountability systems that we're now developing at the State level, with kind of insistence from the Federal Government in return for extra money—that's why those accountability systems are so vital, so that a principal—I guess you're a principal—can stand up and say, "We're number one." The President says, "Well, how do I know?" And he says, "Because we measure." But as a result of an accountability system, it enables the best practices to emerge.

You're obviously doing something well. You've got great teachers, I'm confident, but you're using the right curriculum. You're using a great curriculum. And so somebody

will say, "Gosh, my charter school or my high school isn't doing as good as my neighbor's. I better figure out why." That's what the accountability system does. It creates an atmosphere where we're raising that bar, we're challenging what I call the soft bigotry of low expectations. You know, when you lower the bar, guess what you get? You get lousy results. I suspect you've raised those standards, haven't you? We'll keep raising the bar.

Listen, I want to thank everybody for coming. We're on to victory. Thanks for your help. God bless. I appreciate you coming.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:55 p.m. In his remarks, he referred to Gov. Jeb Bush of Florida; Speaker-designate Allan Bense of the Florida House of Representatives; Bev Kilmer, candidate for Congress in Florida's Second Congressional District; senior Al Qaida associate Abu Musab al Zarqawi; former President Saddam Hussein of Iraq; Prime Minister Ayad al-Alawi of the Iraqi Interim Government; and Chairman Kim Chong-il of North Korea.

## Remarks in Panama City, Florida

*August 10, 2004*

***The President.*** Thank you all. Thank you all for coming. Thank you all very much. So Little Brother says, "Why don't you come to north Florida; maybe we can get come people to show up." We are so honored so many came out to say hello. Thanks a lot. We really appreciate you being here. I'm here to ask for your vote. I'm here traveling—I'm traveling this part of your State to let the people of north Florida know there is more to do to make this country safer, stronger, and better. And I want your help.

I'm keeping fine company. I'm proud to be traveling with Senator John McCain. What a fantastic American he is. I'm glad Brother is here. He's doing a great job for the people of Florida, and I'm proud to call him Brother. I know you're proud to call him Governor.

I'm sorry Laura is not here. No, I know it. She's a great wife and a wonderful mother, and she's doing a heck of a job as the First Lady of this country. Today I'm going to give you some reasons to put me back into office, but perhaps the most important one of all is so that Laura is the First Lady for 4 more years.

And I'm proud of my runningmate. I admit he's not the prettiest face in the race. [*Laughter*] But I didn't pick him for his looks. I picked him because of his experience, his judgment. I picked him because he can do the job.

I'm proud my friend J.C. Watts is here, I appreciate you being here, J.C. I want to thank Lieutenant Governor Toni Jennings and Attorney General Charlie Crist for joining us today. I'm proud to be on the stage with them. I want to thank the House Speaker-designate Allan Bense for being on the bus and traveling with us today. We've been traveling with Bev Kilmer as well. Put her in the House. She'll be a great Member of the U.S. Congress.

I want to thank Aaron Tippin for being here. I want to thank all the grassroots activists. Those are the people who put up the signs, make the phone calls. Make sure you go out and register your friends and neighbors. See, we have a duty in this country to vote. We have an obligation in a free society to show up at the polls. Don't be afraid of convincing discerning Democrats and wise independents to go to the polls as well. They know what good government is. They know strong leadership when they see it. They understand the world is going to be safer and stronger and better with 4 more years.

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

***The President.*** In the past few years, we've been through a lot together, and we've accomplished a great deal together. But there's only one reason to look backwards, and that is to determine who best to lead this Nation forward. I'm asking for your vote because so much is at stake. We have so much more to do to move this Nation forward. I want to be your President for 4 more years. From creating jobs to improving our schools, from fighting terror to spreading the peace, we made much progress, and there is more to do—and there is more to do.

We've got more to do to make our schools, our public schools, the centers of excellence we know they can be so no child is left behind in America. Listen, when we came to office 3½ years ago, too many of our children