

a problem, blame somebody else,” to a culture in which each of us understands we are responsible for the decisions we make in life. Listen, if you’re fortunate enough to be a mother or a father, you are responsible for loving your child with all your heart and all your soul. If you’re worried about the quality of the education in Sioux City, Iowa, you’re responsible for doing something about it. If you’re a CEO in corporate America, you are responsible for telling the truth to your shareholders and your employees. And in a responsibility society, each of us is responsible for loving our neighbor just like we’d like to be loved ourself.

No, I understand the strength of this country is in the hearts and souls of our citizens. Government can hand out money, but Government cannot put hope in a person’s heart or a sense of purpose in a person’s life. Compassion* happens when a loving neighbor puts their arm around somebody who hurts and says, “I love you,” and “Can I help you?” I will continue to rally the armies of compassion so that we change America one heart, one soul, one conscience at a time.

For all Americans these years in our history will always stand apart. There are quiet times in the life of nations when little is expected of its leaders. This isn’t one of those times. This is the times where we need firm resolve and clear vision, strong belief in the values that make us such a wonderful country.

None of us will ever forget that week when one era ended and another began. I stood in the ruins of the Twin Towers on September the 14th, 2001. It’s a day that I’ll never forget. Amidst all the scenes in my memory that day, a couple stand out—the workers in hardhats that were chanting, “Whatever it takes.” I was working the rope line. A guy grabs me. His eyes were blood-shot. He says, “Do not let me down.” I remember meeting with the victims’ families who had this great hope of all hopes that somehow a loved one who had rushed in the rubble to save life would still be alive. All of us there took that day personally. I took it personally. I know you took it personally.

* White House correction.

I have a duty that goes on. Every day that I wake up, I think of best how to defend our country. I will never relent. I will stay firm in my desire to bring justice to the enemies, to keep America safe and secure, whatever it takes.

We’ve come through a lot. We’ve come through a lot together, and we’ve done hard work and important work. But there’s more to be done. During the next 4 years, we’ll spread ownership and opportunity to every corner of America. We will pass the enduring values of our country on to a young generation. We’ll stay focused and firm in our resolve to secure America and to spread the peace.

You know, when I campaigned through your State in 2004, I said that if I had the high honor of holding this office, I would pledge to you that I would uphold the dignity and the honor of the office of the Presidency. And with your help, during the next 4 years, I will continue to do so.

May God bless you all. Thanks for coming. God bless. Thank you all.

NOTE: The President spoke at approximately 1:15 p.m. at the Tyson Events Center. In his remarks, he referred to Iowa State Auditor David A. Vaudt; Speaker Christopher Rants and State Representative Ralph Klemme, Iowa House of Representatives; former Representative John R. Thune, senatorial candidate in South Dakota; Mayor Dave Ferris of Sioux City, IA; Jeff Fortenberry, candidate for Congress in Nebraska’s First Congressional District; former President Saddam Hussein of Iraq; and Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi of Japan. The transcript released by the Office of the Press Secretary also included the remarks of the First Lady, who introduced the President.

Remarks on the Devastation of Hurricane Charley and an Exchange With Reporters in Punta Gorda, Florida

August 15, 2004

The President. The job of the Federal Government and the State Government is to surge resources as quickly as possible to disaster areas. And that’s exactly what’s happening now. We choppered over and saw the devastation of this area. A lot of people’s lives are turned upside down. We’ve got ice and

water moving in, trailers for people to live in are moving in. State is providing security so that people can have peace of mind that their neighborhoods will be safe. There's a lot of compassion moving in the area. The Red Cross is here.

What I'm telling is that there's a lot of help moving into this part of the world. It's going to take a while to rebuild it. But the Government's job is to help people help rebuild their lives, and that's what's happening.

The coordination between the Federal Government and the State government and the local government is really important. I think it's excellent now. The Governor can speak to that, if you like. But it's really important that when we say we're going to do something, that it actually happens. And that's what we're following through on now.

I'll answer some questions, if you've got some.

Community Response

Q. Can you tell us about some of the people who you spoke with and what they told you?

The President. Well, I've got—you know, these good folks here—this is this man's house here. His parents were uprooted from where they were living. They came here to spend the night. And that's what you're beginning to see. You're beginning to see neighbors helping neighbors. A lot of people who have been dislocated are staying with a friend or a neighbor. You know, out of these catastrophes the spirit of America really shines, and that spirit is neighbor helping neighbor. So that's the lesson here.

The fellow down the street came out okay; he had taken precautions necessary. Nearly everybody here that I've talked to had evacuated, as the State asked them to do, and therefore, the loss of life was minimized. Still, too many people lost their lives, but nevertheless, it was not as significant as it could have been. We're here, now, obviously, in a residential neighborhood where people's lives have been destroyed. They're beginning to worry about insurance claims, and the State is organized to handle insurance claims. The key is just to make sure that they expedite the services which are available as quickly as possible.

Federal Response

Q. There was some consternation after Andrew that the Federal aid didn't arrive soon enough. Can you promise that there will be a more expeditious response this time?

The President. It's happening now—

Q. Sir—

The President. Hold up for a second. We're moving a lot of aid very quickly, and again, you can ask the Governor whether or not he's satisfied with how fast the aid is moving. All I can tell you is that FEMA was on the ground yesterday morning, and there's a lot of supplies surging this way.

Yes, ma'am.

Estimates of Damage

Q. Have you gotten an updated tally of the cost of the damage—

The President. Not yet. Jeb estimated billions. We'll see.

President's Visit

Q. Mr. President, some people are going to say that there's a political component to your rapid visit to Florida.

The President. Yes, and if I didn't come they would have said, "He should have been here more rapidly."

Q. Yes. [Laughter]

Federal Response

Q. What about what happened in '92, with Hurricane Andrew? That was obviously in August of a Presidential—

The President. That was then; this is now. And the Government is set up to respond very quickly, and we are.

Q. Was there a lesson learned back then, though?

The President. The lesson is, respond quickly. And we are responding quickly. And we're surging equipment. And the coordination between the Federal Government and the State Government is excellent. And the Homeland Security Department is doing its job. FEMA Director Brown is doing an excellent job. You can talk to the Governor. He can give you a sense for—from the State perspective. But from the Federal perspective, I was notified that they're going to move as quickly as possible, and they are. A lot of stuff is coming. And thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:46 a.m. In his remarks, he referred to Gov. Jeb Bush of Florida.

Remarks to the Veterans of Foreign Wars Convention in Cincinnati, Ohio

August 16, 2004

Thank you all very much. Thanks for the warm welcome. And thanks for inviting me for your 105th national convention. I'm proud to be here.

One of the great honors of being Commander in Chief is meeting the courageous men and women who stand watch for freedom. Nothing gives me greater pleasure than to look them in the eye and say on behalf of our country, "Thank you for your service." The same is true of each of you here today. When the enemies of freedom were on the march and our country and the world needed brave Americans to take up arms and stop their advance, you stepped forward to serve. And today I'm proud to stand before you as Commander in Chief, look you in the eye, and say, America thanks you for your service.

I want to thank Ed Banas for his service in being an effective commander of the VFW. I appreciate the job he's done, and I want to thank his wife, Sandra, for standing by his side during this important time for the VFW. Ed, thank you, sir, for your service. I also thank my friend Bob Wallace, the executive director of the VFW.

I want to thank Governor Bob Taft for joining us today, from the State of Ohio; my friend Tony Principi—I'll say something about him here in a minute; and Congressman Rob Portman, Congressman from Ohio, is with us as well. I'm honored that these elected officials—and in Principi's case, appointed official—is with us today.

I want to thank John Furgess, the incoming VFW national commander in chief, and Alma. I want to thank Evelyn McCune, the VFW Ladies Auxiliary national president, and her husband, Don. I want to thank JoAnne Ott. I want to thank the VFW and Ladies Auxiliary members for letting me come and address you.

In the audience today are two people I've gotten to know during a very traumatic period during their lives. Carolyn and Keith

Maupin are with us today. They're from this part of the world. Their son, Matt, has been missing in action for 4 months in Iraq. I have vowed to them we will do everything we can to find their loved one, Matt. I appreciate their courage. I continue to send my prayers to these two fine Americans during these difficult times for them. May God bless you, Keith and Carolyn.

The Veterans of Foreign Wars have always stood up for our Nation and those who wear the uniform. Since your founding in 1899, the members of the VFW have been serving the men and women who served America. I appreciate your dedication. The VFW and its Ladies Auxiliary are volunteering by transporting sick and disabled vets to and from their medical appointments. You're showing great compassion. You're supporting the men and women who serve today. Some 1,500 VFW posts have adopted military units deployed in Afghanistan, Iraq, and other distant theaters. You've distributed more than 3.5 million prepaid calling cards to our deployed forces. You've sent thousands of care packages to our troops in the field. You've helped the families back home with groceries and home repairs and other necessities. America respects our military and their families. I thank you for showing that respect every day.

All our Nation's veterans have made serving America the highest priority of their lives, and serving our veterans is one of the highest priorities of my administration. To make sure my administration fulfills the commitments I have made to America's veterans, I selected one of the finest men ever to serve as the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, a combat-decorated Vietnam veteran, Secretary Tony Principi.

Thanks in large part to Tony's leadership, my administration has a solid record of accomplishment for our veterans. When my 2005 budget is approved by Congress, we will have increased overall funding for our Nation's veterans by almost \$20 billion or 40 percent since 2001. We have increased funding for our veterans more in 4 years than the previous administration did in 8 years. To provide health care to veterans, we've increased VA medical care funding by 41 percent over the past 4 years.