

Week Ending Friday, October 1, 2004

Remarks in Racine, Wisconsin

September 24, 2004

The President. Thank you all. Thanks for coming out. As you can tell, I've been traveling your good State by bus. Nothing better than taking a bus trip throughout southern Wisconsin. What a fantastic, beautiful part of the world, full of great people. And a great place to end is right here in Racine. Thanks for coming out today.

Listen, the reason I'm traveling around by bus is because I'm asking for the vote. I'm here to ask for your vote, and I'm here to ask for your help. I think it's really important for you to convince your friends and neighbors to go to the polls. We live in a free society, and we have an obligation to vote in a free society. So the first thing I'm doing—I'm going to ask you to do is to register your friends and neighbors. And make sure that as you register your friends and neighbors, to register discerning Democrats like Zell Miller. And then, after you register them to vote, head them to the polls. And when you get them to the polls, tell them, if they want a safer, stronger, and better America, to put me and Dick Cheney back in office.

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

The President. I'm sorry that Laura is not here. I wish she were here. She is a great wife, a wonderful mother, and a great First Lady. And I appreciate my runningmate, Dick Cheney. Look, he doesn't have the waviest hair in the race. [Laughter] I didn't pick him for his hair. [Laughter] I picked him for his experience, his judgment, and the fact that he can get the job done for the American people.

Listen, I'm proud of my Secretary of Health and Human Services. You've trained him well. You taught Tommy Thompson a lot. He is a great friend, and he's doing a terrific job on behalf of our country.

I'm proud to be traveling with Congressman Paul Ryan. He is a breath of fresh air. He's a good, honest man who, like me, married well. [Laughter] I appreciate Congressman Mark Green being here today too. Both of them represent your State well.

The State treasurer is with us; Milwaukee County Executive Scott Walker. I call him Scott W. [Laughter] A lot of State and local officials here. Tim Michels, running for the United States Senate is here. I look forward to working with him in the United States Senate.

I appreciate my friend Rick Graber, who is the party chairman of Wisconsin. I appreciate him being here. Mary Buestrin is the national committeewoman.

Listen, what I'm doing is I'm telling you thanks for the grassroots activists. All of the people who have put the signs and get on the telephones and encourage people to register and vote, thank you for what you're doing, and thank you for what you're going to do as you're coming down the stretch. We're going to carry the State of Wisconsin.

I appreciate Charlie Sykes, who emceed this program.

Listen, today on the bus, I had the honor of meeting with Casey Perry and some other State—members of the National Troopers Coalition. These are law enforcement officers who are out there every single day to protect the people of Wisconsin and around the country. I always found, when you're riding down the highway, it's good to have some troopers with you. [Laughter] These men were here to inform me that the National Troopers Coalition endorsed my candidacy for President. I am honored to have their endorsement. I'm honored to have it because of the risks they take. I'm honored to have it because of the values they stand for. I'm honored to have it because of the kind of people they are. I'm proud to have you by my side. God bless you all. Thank you.

You know, I'm looking forward to this campaign. I've been coming to Wisconsin a lot. I suspect I'll be coming some more. I enjoy coming here. I'm looking forward to coming back. I want to tell you where I stand, what I believe, and where I intend to lead this Nation for 4 more years.

I believe every child can learn and that every school must teach. That's what I believe. I went to Washington to challenge the soft bigotry of low expectations. See, like you, I was tired of that practice of just shuffling kids through the schools, year after year, grade after grade, without teaching them the basics. I believe every child can learn, and I expect every school to teach. That's why we've raised the standards. That's why we're measuring early, before it's too late to solve problems. That's why we believe in local control of schools. And that's why we're closing an achievement gap in America, and we're not turning back.

I believe we have a moral responsibility to honor our seniors with good health care. Medicine was changing, but Medicare wasn't. I went to Washington to solve problems. We had a problem in Medicare. See, Medicare would pay nearly \$100,000 for the heart surgery but would not pay one dime for the prescription drugs to prevent the heart surgery from being needed in the first place. That didn't make any sense. Medicare needs to be modernized. I worked with Republicans and Democrats. We've strengthened Medicare. Seniors will get prescription drugs in 2006, and we're not going to turn back to the old days.

I believe in the energy, innovative spirit of America's workers, small-business owners, farmers. And that's why we unleashed that energy with the largest tax cut in a generation. When you're out rounding up the vote, remind people what this economy has been through. It's been through a recession. As a matter of fact, the stock market started to head down about 5 months before we showed up in Washington. Then there was a recession. And then we found out some of our citizens didn't tell the truth. There were some corporate scandals. We passed new laws, and we made it abundantly clear we're not going to tolerate dishonesty in the boardrooms of America.

And then we got attacked, and that hurt our economy. But our economy is strong and growing stronger. We've overcome these obstacles. We've got great workers, great farmers. The entrepreneurial spirit is strong, and the tax cuts made a difference.

We've added about 1.7 million new jobs since August of '03. We've added 107,000 manufacturing jobs since January. The national unemployment rate is 5.4 percent, which is lower than the average of the seventies, the eighties, and the 1990s. And right here in Wisconsin, your unemployment rate is 4.8 percent. This economy is strong. It's getting stronger, and we're not turning back.

I believe the most solemn duty of the American President is to protect the American people. If we show uncertainty and weakness in this decade, the world will drift toward tragedy. This isn't going to happen on my watch.

I'm running for President with a clear and positive plan to build a safer world and a more hopeful America. I'm running with a compassionate conservative philosophy that Government should help people improve their lives, not try to run their lives. I believe this Nation wants steady, consistent, principled leadership. And that is why with your help, we'll carry Wisconsin and win a great victory in November.

The world in which we live is changing. The generation of our dads and granddads—in that generation, a man generally had one job, one career, and moms stayed at home. But times have changed a lot since then. Many workers have more than one job and more than one career, and many women work inside the house and outside the house. And yet the systems of our Government, the most fundamental systems, the Tax Code, health coverage, pension plans, worker training, labor law, was all designed for yesterday, not tomorrow. In the next 4 years, we'll work to transform these systems so that all citizens are equipped, prepared, and thus truly free to be able to make your own choices and to realize the great promise of America.

I fully understand a hopeful society is one that has a growing economy. I have a plan to make sure this recovery is lasting prosperity. If you want to keep jobs here in America, America must be the best place in the

world to do business. It's as simple as that. That means less regulations on the employers and job creators. That means less frivolous lawsuits on the employers and job creators.

If we want to keep jobs here in America, Congress needs to pass my energy plan. I sent up a plan that encourages conservation, encourages the use of renewables like ethanol and biodiesel, that says we've got to modernize our electricity grid, that says we'll use clean coal technology, that we'll explore for natural gas in environmentally friendly ways. In order to keep jobs here in America, this country must be less dependent on foreign sources of energy.

In order to make sure this economy grows and people in Racine, Wisconsin, can find work, we've got to open up markets. See, we open up our markets for goods from other countries. If you've got more products to choose from, you're likely to get the product you want at a better price and better quality. That's why Republicans and Democrat administrations have opened up our markets. So what I'm saying to places like China is, "You treat us the way we treat you." See, we can compete with anybody, anytime, anywhere so long as the rules are fair.

In order to make sure this economy grows, we've got to be wise about how we spend your money in Washington. And we've got to keep your taxes low. Taxes are an issue in this campaign. Make no mistake about it. The fellow I'm running against has promised \$2.2 trillion in new Federal spending—so far.

Audience members. Boo-o-o!

The President. I say "so far" because we still got October to go. [Laughter] Two-point-two trillion is a lot, even for a Senator from Massachusetts. [Laughter] So they said, "How are you going to pay for it?" He said, "That's easy. We'll just tax the rich." We've heard that before, haven't we? First of all, you can't raise enough money by taxing the rich to pay for \$2.2 trillion in new spending, so there's a tax gap. Guess who usually gets stuck with filling the tax gap? Secondly, when you hear that language "tax the rich," hold on to your wallets, because the rich hire lawyers and accountants for a reason. So you get stuck. The good news is, we're not going to let him tax you, because we're going to win in November.

Let me say something else about the Tax Code. It's a complicated mess. It's a million pages long. The American people spend 6 billion hours a year filling out the tax forms. In a new term, I'm going to bring Republicans and Democrats together to simplify the Tax Code so you're treated more fairly.

Today, down the road, I talked about making sure workers have the skills necessary to fill the jobs of the 21st century. Our workforce is changing. Sometimes workers don't have the skills necessary to fill the jobs of the 21st century. That's why I'm such a big believer in the community college system here in Wisconsin and around the world. We're going to spend more Federal money to make sure community colleges are more accessible.

Do you realize most jobs—or new jobs are filled by people with at least 2 years of college, yet only about one in four of our students gets there. That's why I believe, in our high schools, we should fund early intervention programs to help at-risk students. We need to place special emphasis on math and science. Over time, we'll require a rigorous exam before graduation. By raising performance in our high schools and by expanding Pell grants for low- and middle-income American families, we'll make sure more families—more workers start their career with a college diploma.

We're going to do something about our health care system too. But I promise you this: When we reform health care, we're going to let you make the decisions. There's a fundamental difference in this campaign; there is a philosophical divide. My opponent wants Government to dictate to you.

Audience members. Boo-o-o!

The President. I think that's the wrong approach to health care. See, we're going to make sure the poor and the indigent get good health care by expanding community health centers in every poor county in America. That makes sense. We'll make sure the children's health programs for low-income Americans are fully subscribed to by those who qualify. That makes sense. We have a practical, commonsense plan.

I understand half the working uninsured work for small businesses. There's a reason why they're uninsured. Small businesses are

having trouble affording health care. And one of the reasons they're having trouble affording health care is because they can't pool risk. So I think we ought to allow small businesses to pool together across jurisdictional boundaries so they can buy health care at the same discounts big companies get to. We'll expand tax-free health savings accounts. We'll give small-business tax credits to encourage them to put money into health savings accounts for their employees.

In order to make sure that health care is available and affordable in Wisconsin and around the country, we've got to do something about these frivolous lawsuits that are driving good doctors out of practice and running up your costs. There's a difference of opinion in this campaign. You cannot be pro-doctor, pro-patient, pro-hospital, and pro-trial-lawyer at the same time. I think you have to make a choice. My opponent made his choice, and he put a trial lawyer on the ticket. I made my choice. I am for medical liability reform—now.

Listen, we have a commonsense, practical plan to make sure health care is available and affordable. In all we do to make sure medicine works in America, we will make sure that the decisions are made by doctors and patients, not by bureaucrats in Washington, DC.

In times of change, in a changing world, it helps if somebody owns something to bring stability in their lives. The homeownership rate is at an alltime high under my administration. More and more people from all walks of life are able to open up the door where they live and say, "Welcome to my home. Welcome to my piece of property." And over the next 4 years, we'll continue to expand homeownership to every corner of our country.

In terms of our retirement systems, they were designed for yesterday. They need to be designed for tomorrow. If you're on Social Security today, you have nothing to worry about. You will get your check. I don't care what the political rhetoric is in a campaign, you're going to get paid. You remember, 4 years ago in Wisconsin, they were saying, "If George W. gets in, the seniors aren't going to get their checks." You might remember that. Yes, well—[laughter]—that's what hap-

pens. Seniors got paid. You will get paid again. If you're a baby boomer, you're fine. We're fine. There's enough money in the trust to take care of us.

But we need to worry about our younger workers. We need to worry about our children and our grandchildren. I think in order to make sure Social Security is around for a new generation, younger workers ought to be able to take some of their own money and set up a personal savings account that they can call their own.

In a world of change, some things won't change, the values we try to live by, courage and compassion, reverence and integrity. In times of change, we will support the institutions that give our lives direction and purpose, our families, our schools, our religious congregations. We stand for a culture of life in which every person matters and every being counts. We stand for marriage and family, which are the foundations of our society. I stand for the appointment of Federal judges who know the difference between personal opinion and the strict interpretation of the law.

This election will also determine how America responds to the continuing danger of terrorism. Since the terrible morning of September the 11th, 2001, we have fought the terrorists across the globe, not for pride, not for power, but because the lives of citizens are at stake. Our strategy is clear. We're defending the homeland. We're transforming our military. We're strengthening our intelligence-gathering services. We're staying on the offensive. We are striking the terrorists abroad so we do not have to face them here at home.

We will continue to work to advance liberty in the broader Middle East and around the world, and we'll prevail. Our strategy is succeeding. Our strategy is succeeding. Think about the world only 4 short years ago: Afghanistan was the home base of Al Qaida; Pakistan was a transit point of terrorist groups; Saudi Arabia was fertile ground for terrorist fundraising; Libya was secretly pursuing nuclear weapons; Iraq was a gathering threat; and Al Qaida was largely unchallenged as it planned attacks.

Because we acted, the Government of a free Afghanistan is fighting terror; Pakistan

is capturing terrorist leaders; Saudi Arabia is making raids and arrests; Libya is dismantling its weapons programs; the army of a free Iraq is fighting for freedom; and more than three-quarters of Al Qaida's key members and associates have been brought to justice.

Audience members. U.S.A.! U.S.A.! U.S.A.!

The President. We have led. Many have joined, and America and the world are safer.

This progress involved careful diplomacy, clear moral purpose, and some tough decisions. And the toughest came on Iraq. We knew Saddam Hussein's record of aggression and support for terror. We knew he had harbored Abu Nidal, the leader of a terrorist organization that carried out attacks in Asia and Europe. We knew Abu Abbas had been in Iraq—he's the fellow that killed Leon Klinghoffer. We knew Zarqawi had been in Baghdad. He's the person now beheading our citizens in order to shake our will. We knew that—we knew his long history, Saddam's history of pursuing and even using weapons of mass destruction. He was firing at our pilots enforcing the world's sanctions. Saddam Hussein was a threat. It is important this country never forget the lessons of September the 11th. We must take threats seriously before they fully materialize. We cannot forget that lesson.

So I went to the Congress. The Congress looked at the intelligence, the same intelligence I looked at, remembered the same history I remembered, and concluded that Saddam Hussein was a threat and authorized the use of force. My opponent looked at the same intelligence I did, concluded that Saddam was a threat, and voted "yes" when it came to the authorization of force.

Before the Commander in Chief commits troops into harm's way, he must try all options to solve a problem. And so I was hopeful that diplomacy would work. I was hopeful that we wouldn't have to commit our troops. And so I went to the United Nations, and I gave a speech there, and I said, "We see a threat." They looked at the same intelligence. They remembered the same history, and they concluded that Saddam Hussein was a threat. As a matter of fact, by a U.N. Security Council resolution they voted 15 to nothing to say, "Disclose, disarm, or face se-

rious consequences." I believe when an international body speaks, it must mean what it says.

Saddam Hussein wasn't about to listen to the demands of the free world. He had ignored the demands of the free world for over a decade. I think this was maybe the 17th resolution that had been passed. He doubted whether or not the international body would keep its word. He defied the inspectors the U.N. sent in. So I have a choice to make at this point in time. Diplomacy has failed. Saddam Hussein was given a last chance. Do I forget the lessons of September the 11th and trust a madman—

Audience members. No-o-o!

The President. —or do I take action to defend this country? Given that choice, I will defend America every time.

Listen, we didn't find the stockpiles we all thought would be there, but Saddam Hussein had the capability of manufacturing weapons, and he could have passed that capability on to an enemy. And after September the 11th, that is a risk we could not afford to take. Knowing what I know today, I would have made the same decision. And America and the world are safer with Saddam Hussein sitting in a prison cell.

Because we acted in our self-interests, 50 million people in Afghanistan and Iraq are now free. Think about Afghanistan, what life was like there less than 4 years ago. Think about it. Young girls were not allowed to go to school. The Taliban was so dark in their vision that they'd haul their mothers out in the public square and whip them if they didn't toe their line. They didn't believe in freedom at all. Their mindset was the exact opposite of what America stands for. Today, because we acted, 10 million citizens in Afghanistan, 41 percent of whom are women, have registered to vote in the upcoming Presidential election. Fantastic. This society is going from darkness to light because the people are free, and we're better off for it. Afghanistan is an ally in the war on terror.

In Iraq, despite ongoing acts of horrible violence, that country has got a strong Prime Minister, and it's going to have elections in January. It's in our interests that Iraq be free. Free societies will be hopeful societies. Free

societies will not breed resentments and export for terror. Free societies will fight terrorists instead of harboring them. Our strategy is clear. We'll help the Iraqis and the Afghans defend themselves by training citizens—their own citizens so they can do the hard work. We'll help them get on the path of stability and democracy as quickly as possible, and our troops will come home with the honor they have earned.

We got a great military. I want to thank the veterans who are here for having set such a great example to those who wear the uniform. We appreciate your service. I've had the privilege of meeting those who wear the uniform at bases here at home and across the world. I know their courage and their unselfish decency. Ladies and gentlemen, the cause of freedom is in really good hands.

And we owe our troops and their loved ones the full support of the Federal Government. That's why I went to the Congress last September, a year ago, to ask for \$87 billion of supplemental funding to support our troops in harm's way. This was really important legislation. This was vital money, money for spare parts and ammunition, for body armor, for hazard pay, for health benefits. It's the kind of thing that you'd want your troops to have—and the troops not only in Iraq but Afghanistan as well. We received great bipartisan support for that funding request, so strong that only 12 United States Senators voted against it, 2 of whom are my opponent and his runningmate.

Audience members. Boo-o-o!

The President. When you're out there campaigning, tell people about this statistic: Only four United States Senators voted to authorize the use of force and then voted against funding for our troops. And two of those four are my opponent and his runningmate. They asked him. Of course, you know this. He said his answer to why he voted the way he did, he said, "I actually did vote for the \$87 billion, before I voted against it." [Laughter] You've heard that. They then said, well—they kept pressing him. He said he was proud of his vote. And finally, he just said, "The whole thing was a complicated matter." There's nothing complicated about supporting our troops in combat.

We've got hard work to do in Iraq. And it's tough, and it's hard. I know it's hard. The terrorists over there cannot defeat our military. The only tool they've got is the ability to shake our will. We care for human rights and human dignity. Every life matters to the American people. And therefore, when we see people beheaded on our screens, we cry and we weep, and the terrorists know that. They know we've got a conscience. And we know they don't have a conscience. We must not allow them to shake our will. It's important that we succeed in Iraq. It's important for our security and for the peace of the world that we defeat the terrorists there. This is a central front in the war on terror.

Fortunately, we've got a partner, a strong partner in Iraq named Prime Minister Allawi. I was with him yesterday in the Oval Office, had a great visit with him. When I was in New York and saw him, I asked him, "Is it true that—about the story I had heard?" He said, "It's true." He told me the story about the night he woke up in a bed in a flat in London. See, he had been—he had left the country because Saddam Hussein wanted to kill him. And he woke up one night—this is a true story—his wife in his bed next to him, and there's two people next to his bed with axes, sent by Saddam Hussein. They were trying to ax him to death. He survived. He's now the Prime Minister of that country. He's a tough guy who understands. He understands we must not yield. We'll stand with him. When America gives its word, America must keep its word.

If we expect to win this war on terror and secure the homeland, we must be clear about what we say. And the President must mean what he says. That's why you can't keep changing positions based upon polls. My opponent has had seven or eight different positions on Iraq. He can't decide if we should be there or not be there. You cannot lead if you don't know where you want to lead. You cannot lead if you don't know what you believe. You cannot lead if you get blown around by the political winds. Yesterday he criticized the Prime Minister of Iraq.

Audience members. Boo-o-o!

The President. Right after the Prime Minister spoke to the United States Congress, right after he gave an important

speech, Senator Kerry went out and stood in front of the cameras and questioned Prime Minister Allawi's credibility.

Audience members. Boo-o-o!

The President. Earlier this week, he said he would prefer the dictatorship of Saddam Hussein to the situation in Iraq today.

Audience members. Boo-o-o!

The President. In order for us to succeed in Iraq, the Iraqi people must believe the American people will stand with them. In order to have credibility with those people who are fighting for freedom, the leaders of this country must not send mixed signals. They must earn the credibility of the Iraqi people. Twenty-five million people want to be free in that country, and when they're free, we're better off for it. I'll continue to lead this country with clarity. When I say something, I'll mean what I say.

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

The President. Part of our strategy is to continue working with our friends and allies. I was on the phone this morning with Prime Minister Tony Blair. He understands that Iraq is a central front in the war on terror. He understands the stakes. He understands the need for leaders to stand up and lead, and he is a leader. And I appreciate him. I thank him every time I have a chance to for joining this coalition. Do you realize we've got over 40 nations involved in Afghanistan, some 30 nations involved in Iraq. Over the next 4 years, I'll continue to work to strengthen alliances, but I will never turn over America's national security decisions to leaders of other countries.

Audience members. U.S.A.! U.S.A.! U.S.A.!

The President. I believe in the transformational power of liberty. That's what I believe. The wisest use of American strength is to advance freedom. Recently in New York, I had a visit with Prime Minister Koizumi of Japan. I said, "I'll tell you, I'm traveling the country talking about you." He said, "Fine, make sure you tell them I like Elvis." [Laughter] And so I do talk about him because I find it really interesting, really interesting. And I want the youngsters to understand—to listen to this because I think it will give you some clarity about why I de-

cide what I decide—is that I sit down and talk with the leader of a country that we were at war with some 60 years ago. That's a lot of time if you're 58 like me. [Laughter] It seems like forever. [Laughter] It's not a lot of time, though, in the march of history. It wasn't all that long ago, in other words, that we were at war with Japan. My dad fought against the Japanese. I promise you, a lot of folks out here relatives fought against the Japanese too in what was one tough war. A lot of people lost their lives.

After World War II, my predecessor Harry S. Truman believed that we should work with the Japanese to build a democracy. A lot of people in this country questioned the wisdom. You can understand why. There was a lot of bitterness toward the Japanese. They were our enemy. We had just fought them. But there were folks in this country that believed in the power of liberty to transform an enemy into an ally. And so they did the hard work after World War II, developing that country, and to build that country into a democracy. And because of that work, today, I talk to Prime Minister Koizumi, talking about the peace we all want, talking about how to make the world more peaceful.

So when you hear me say, "I believe in the transformational power of liberty," think about the fact that the American President and the leader of Japan are working together for peace. Some day, an American President and a duly elected leader of Iraq will sit down at the table to talk about peace, and our children and our grandchildren will be better off for it.

I believe that millions in the Middle East plead in silence for their freedom. I believe women in the Middle East long to be free. I believe they want their young daughters to be able to grow up in a hopeful society. I believe that if given a chance, the people in the broader Middle East will embrace the most honorable form of government ever devised by man. And I believe these things because freedom is not America's gift to the world; freedom is the Almighty God's gift to each man and woman in this world.

This young century will be liberty's century. By promoting freedom at home and abroad, we'll build a safer world and a more hopeful America. By reforming our systems

of Government, we'll help more Americans realize their dreams. We'll spread ownership and opportunity to every corner of this land. We'll pass the enduring values of our country on to a new generation. We'll continue to lead the cause of freedom and peace.

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. This isn't one of those times. This is a time when we need firm resolve, clear vision, and a deep faith in the values that makes us a great nation.

None of us will ever forget that week when one era ended and another began. On the bus, we were talking to the troopers about that day, September the 14th, 2001, when we stood in the ruins of the Twin Towers. It's a day I know I'll never forget. There were workers in hardhats there yelling at the top of their lungs, "Whatever it takes." I remember talking to a guy who came out of the rubble, had bloodshot eyes, and he's exhausted for trying to find his buddies and people that were hurt. And he looked me right in the eye and said, "You don't let me down." I wake up every morning since that day trying to better figure out how to protect our country. I will never relent in defending the security of America, whatever it takes.

Four years ago, as I traveled your great State and our country, I made a pledge that if you gave me the chance to serve I would uphold the honor and the dignity of the office to which I have been elected. With your hard help—with your hard work and your help, I will continue to do so for 4 more years.

God bless. Thank you all for coming. On to victory. Thank you all. Thanks for coming.

NOTE: The President spoke at 4:20 p.m. at General John J. Pershing Park. In his remarks, he referred to Senator Zell Miller of Georgia, who made the keynote address at the Republican National Convention; Wisconsin State Treasurer Jack C. Voight; Richard W. Graber, State chairman, and Mary F. Buestrin, national committeewoman, Republican Party of Wisconsin; radio show host Charlie Sykes; senior Al Qaida associate Abu Musab Al Zarqawi; Prime Minister Ayad Allawi of the Iraqi Interim Government; Prime Minister Tony Blair of the United Kingdom; and Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi of Japan. This item was not received in time for publication in the appropriate issue.

Proclamation 7822—National Hunting and Fishing Day, 2004

September 24, 2004

By the President of the United States of America

A Proclamation

America is a land of majestic beauty, and we take pride in our wildlife, forests, mountains, lakes, rivers, and coastlines. Outdoor recreation is an important part of our Nation's heritage. On National Hunting and Fishing Day, we celebrate the remarkable progress we have made in conserving our environment and recognize those who have worked to conserve our natural resources.

America's hunters and anglers represent the great spirit of our country and are among our Nation's foremost conservationists. These citizens have worked to protect habitat and restore fish and wildlife populations. They volunteer their time, talents, and energy to countless conservation projects, because they recognize the importance of maintaining the natural abundance of our country for future generations.

My Administration is committed to achieving a cleaner, safer, and healthier environment for all Americans, including our hunters and anglers. My Administration has expanded opportunities to hunt and fish at national wildlife refuges and improved habitat on public and private lands. We have cut phosphorus releases into our rivers and streams, and I signed the Healthy Forests Restoration Act to help protect our forests from the risk of wildfires.

Americans are blessed to live amid many wonders of nature, and we have a responsibility to be good stewards of the land. I commend all who advance conservation and help our citizens enjoy the benefits of our environment. These efforts ensure that our national heritage remains a source of pride for our citizens, our communities, and our Nation.

Now, Therefore, I, George W. Bush, President of the United States of America, by virtue of the authority vested in me by the Constitution and laws of the United States, do hereby proclaim September 25, 2004, as National Hunting and Fishing Day. I call upon the people of the United States