

Week Ending Friday, March 9, 2007

Remarks at a Dinner for Senatorial Candidate Mitch McConnell and the National Republican Senatorial Committee in Louisville, Kentucky
March 2, 2007

Thank you all. Thank you. Okay, thank you, sit down, please. [*Laughter*] That Kentucky whiskey still works. [*Laughter*] How about being with the ultimate power couple—[*laughter*]—a Secretary in my Cabinet and a powerful United States Senator. This has got to be good for the State of Kentucky.

I heard Elaine talk about Alben Barkley. In other words, Mitch is the second party leader in the United States Senate since—and the first was Alben Barkley. I don't know how good Alben Barkley was—this guy is really good for the people of this State. And he's very good for the country, and I'm proud to be with him. And I thank you for contributing to Mitch McConnell.

If you want to get something done in the United States Senate, you go to Mitch McConnell, whether you're from Kentucky or anywhere else. It seems like to me that if you're a citizen of this important State, whether you're Republican, Democrat, or independent, it makes sense to have somebody representing you in Washington, DC, who is full of integrity and decency and who can get the job done for the people. And that person is Mitch McConnell.

And I'm proud to call him friend. But I am tired of him constantly reminding me about the success of the Louisville Cardinal football team. I'm not begrudging the success; I'm just tired of hearing about it from Mitch McConnell. If he told me Orange Bowl once, he told me Orange Bowl 10 times. [*Laughter*]

You know, it's interesting, I asked Mitch about what we could do here. I went to New Albany, across the line there, to go to a school—and I want to share some thoughts about public education in a minute—but I

said, "What can we do that would be interesting?" And he said one thing—he said, "I want you to talk to McConnell scholars at the University of Louisville." Isn't that interesting? He said the one thing he would like his buddy, the President, to do, would be to spend time with the young scholars in a program that he helped start. I think that's insightful into the nature of the person. We could have been parading around in front of the TV cameras or doing this, that, and the other, but not—this Senator's idea of utilizing his friend's time was to sit down and talk to people who he's trying to inspire to serve.

In other words, he's a selfless person. He's a person who puts the State above his self-interests. And I'm really proud to know and to work with a man of his caliber. He's a really—look, when it comes to voting here in Kentucky, you've got to help make sure the people do the right thing, the right thing for the United States of America, and that's send Mitch McConnell back to the United States Senate.

You know, people oftentimes ask me what it's like to be President. I said, it is a decision-making experience, and in a complex organization like we have in Washington, you've got to learn to delegate. And I'm very comfortable delegating to members of my Cabinet, particularly since they are people of the caliber like Elaine Chao. And I thank Elaine for her service to our country, and I appreciate her being here.

Mitch married well, and so did I. If Mitch were smart, he would have invited the A-team to do the fundraiser, but she happens to be on the road today. But I do bring greetings from Laura. You know, it's a—I'm sure some of you are probably wondering, "Gosh, what's it like to be married to the President and everything?" It can be awfully, I guess, difficult, unless you happen to be a person who is patient, calm, and loving. And that's my wife. And I'm really proud of her, and

I happen to think she's a great First Lady for the country.

I want to recognize Mike Duncan, who is now the chairman of the Republican National Committee. So when we needed somebody to lead our party into an important year, 2008, we came to Kentucky. When we needed somebody to accomplish the objective to make sure that Mitch is majority leader and that we have a Republican Speaker of the House and we hold the White House, we asked Mike Duncan to lead the charge. And I appreciate you doing it, Mike, and I want to help you in any way I can over these next couple of years.

I welcome the Lieutenant Governor, Steve Pence. Thanks for coming, Governor. I appreciate you being here. I bet you 10 years ago, you would have been shocked if you heard somebody say this—the Kentucky State Senate President, David Williams. And Judge Robyn; thank you for coming, Judge Robyn. It's good to see you. Dave, it's good to see you again. I'm not shocked that you're the president, but shocked that a Republican is the president. *[Laughter]* Maybe some are shocked you're the president—*[laughter]*—I'm not going there, though. *[Laughter]*

I want to thank all the other State and local officials. Rachel Schrepferman, who happens to be the chairman of this fantastic event, the mother of twins. We're all members of the, like, twins club.

I want to thank Gail Russell, who is the acting chairwoman and national committee-woman of the Republican Party. I want to thank the grassroots activists—that's what I'm doing. I'm thanking the grassroots activists for the work that you do and have done and will do. See, Mitch is going to win because the grassroots activists are going to man the phones and turn out the vote. And this is a good start to what's going to be a successful campaign. It's a good sign when this many people show up in 2007 for a 2008 election. And I appreciate you all kicking off—helping kick off this good man's campaign. And I want to thank those of you who are going to help him get elected for what you're going to do when he's coming down the stretch in November of 2008.

He's going to win because he backs really solid ideas. Mitch believes in a strong na-

tional defense, and so do I. Mitch believes in less government and low taxes, and so do I. And Mitch believes in the values and the good judgments of the citizens of this Commonwealth of Kentucky. That's what he believes in. Those are values that Kentuckians from all walks of life can share.

We got a lot to do in Washington, DC, and I'm looking forward to working with Senator McConnell to achieve them. And I want to share some of the thoughts about what we've got to do. Mitch mentioned the war on terror. I wish I could report to you that it was over. It is not over. And the most important function of the Federal Government is to safeguard the American people. Our most important job—*[applause]*. And the best way to do that in the short term is to stay on the offensive, bring the killers to justice, defeat them overseas so we don't have to face them here in the United States of America.

And Mitch McConnell understands it as well as anybody in Washington, DC. He's clear-eyed about the realities of the world in which we live, and we need clear-eyed thinkers in the Nation's Capital. If the most important duty of our Government is to protect you, then we'd better have people in Washington who are steadfast in understanding the responsibilities that come with the offices we hold. And Mitch understands it.

In the long term, the best way to defeat these ideologues of hate is to offer a better ideology, one of hope. Remember, the killers are the people that advocated no rights for women; that children—young girls shouldn't go to school; that there's no such thing as religious tolerance; that if you disagreed, you'd be taken into the public square and whipped. That's what they believe.

I know it's hard for some in Kentucky and the country to understand, but these folks are motivated by an ideology—and so are we. Ours is an ideology of human dignity and human rights and decency. Ours is an ideology based upon liberty and freedom. We believe there is universality when it comes to freedom. We believe all want to be free. And I believe it's in the interests of the United States of America to help promote

liberty as the alternative to the hateful ideology of the extremists, so we can lay the foundation of peace for generations to come.

This war against the extremists is being fought on a variety of fronts. The most notable front is Iraq. I was confronted with the decision on Iraq. I was unhappy with the conditions on the ground last fall. And as the Commander in Chief, I have an obligation, if dissatisfied with the status quo, to make decisions that would alter the status quo.

One decision I was confronted with was withdrawing and hoping for the best, as I knew the capital city of that young democracy was engaged in sectarian violence. In other words, one option was to kind of let the so-called fight burn out. My worry with that option was that the violence and the chaos in the capital city of a young democracy could spill out into the countryside and eventually spill out into the region. And I know that chaos is to the advantage of the extremists, and that chaos emboldens those who would do us harm. I also understand, and it's important for our citizens to understand, that if we were to fail in Iraq, the enemy would follow us here to the United States of America, and we cannot let that happen.

It's a new concept that we have to learn to deal with after the attacks of September the 11th, 2001. What happens overseas matters to the security of the United States. And if our job is to secure this country, then we've got to make sure that we succeed in helping this young democracy flourish and survive and become an ally in the war on terror.

And so the option that I chose was one that recognizes the realities of the world in which we live, which said, as opposed to leaving, we're going to send more people in there to reinforce the troops that are on the ground. I understand it's a controversial decision for some. But the citizens of this State must understand I made the decision after thoughtful consideration and after consultations with people like Mitch McConnell and those who don't agree. I listened carefully. But most importantly, I listened to the United States military about what it takes to help this democracy defeat the ideology of terror, help this democracy not become a safe haven for those who would do us harm, help this young democracy survive. And their

recommendation was, "Mr. President, we need more troops in the capital city."

And not only did I accept their suggestion, I nominated a new commander in General David Petraeus. And he went up in front of the United States Senate for a hearing, and he got a fair hearing. Senator, I think the Senate conducted themselves with dignity and gave him a chance to talk about what he thought was necessary to succeed in Iraq. And he was approved unanimously, not one negative vote against General David Petraeus. And shortly thereafter, the House of Representatives passed a resolution expressing disapproval for the very plan that the General suggested we do—the man who was unanimously confirmed. This may be the first time in the history of our country that the Senate has voted to send a new commander in battle, and then the House of Representatives immediately voted to oppose his plan.

I understand differences of opinion, and I expect that in the Nation's Capital. It's good for our country that there be differences of opinion. Everybody has the right to express their opinion. And nobody should say, "If you disagree or agree with the President, you're more patriotic, or not." But soon Congress is going to have to make a decision that's got real consequences, and that is whether to fund our troops and give us the flexibility necessary to achieve our mission. Our men and women in uniform risk their lives as they carry out this plan to secure Baghdad and to secure this country, and they need the support of the United States Congress.

No matter where Members stand on my decision, they have a solemn responsibility to support those who wear the uniform of the United States and to make sure that we have the flexibility necessary to protect this homeland.

I want to thank Mitch for his steadfast leadership on this issue. I appreciate his clarity of thought. The troops of the United States have no stronger friend than Senator Mitch McConnell from the State of Kentucky.

We also—let me say one other thing about foreign policy; it's important for me to share this with you. I believe to whom much is given, much is required. We've been given

a lot in this country, and I'm going to continue to call upon Congress to fund initiatives like the HIV/AIDS initiative on the continent of Africa. I'll tell you why. It matters to me personally, and it matters to this country, when we see a pandemic like HIV/AIDS sweeping through a continent and we can do something about it. Thanks to the generosity of the American people—I want to share something with you—thanks to the generosity of the American people, in 3 short years, 800,000 people on the continent of Africa now receive antiretroviral drugs; 800,000 lives have been affected as a result of this initiative that's making the world a better place.

And now I'm going to look forward to working with Mitch on the next initiative, which is to free countries from malaria. It's an achievable goal, and it's a good goal, and it's good for the world to see the generosity and compassion of the United States of America. It's also in our interests that we help feed the hungry when we can, and to help deal with disease. What happens overseas matters to home. And so whether it be in fighting the extremists or battling disease, we'll have an aggressive, compassionate, decent foreign policy. And I'm glad to have Mitch McConnell by my side.

Here at home, Mitch talked about the economy. He says, "You should get credit for it, Mr. President." No, I don't deserve credit for the economy. It's the American people who deserve credit for the economy. The American people are working hard. It's the entrepreneurs who are taking risks. It's those small-business owners that have got their ideas, and they're working to make it work.

Listen, our economy is strong because America is strong. And the fundamental question is, will we keep policies in place to keep the economy growing? And I've got a good idea for the United States Congress. We passed tax relief. It's worked. They need to make the tax relief permanent.

Oh, you'll hear them saying, "We need to raise taxes to balance the budget." That's what you'll hear them say. Well, raising taxes hurts the economy, which means less tax revenues come in. And by the way, they'll figure out new ways to spend the money. That's the way Washington works, unless you have

got people like Mitch McConnell, who is watching out for the taxpayers' interests. Washington says, "Give me a little bit more of your own money, just a little bit, and we'll figure out how to spend it better." What Mitch McConnell says, and George Bush says, we're going to let you keep more of your own money so the economy continues to grow, and we're going to balance the budget by being wise about the money—by setting priorities.

You might remember I said, we would cut the deficit in half in 5 years. And I'm sure the critics scoffed a little bit, but we did it 3 years in advance. And now we've sent a new budget up to Washington, DC, that says we'll balance the budget in 5 years. And we will—without raising one dime of taxes.

I appreciate Mitch's attitude about big issues. He knows what I know, that it's important to address problems and not pass them on. The temptation sometimes in life and in politics is to see a big problem and say, "We'll just let the next group deal with it. We'll kind of shuffle it on to the next Congress or the next President." We've got a big problem in entitlements; that's basically Social Security and Medicare.

And the reason it's a big problem is baby boomers like me and some of you are getting ready to retire. It turns out my retirement date, when I turn 62, is 2008, which is quite convenient in my case. *[Laughter]* And yet, there's a lot of us retiring and fewer people paying for the benefits that we've been promised. And those benefits are going up faster than the previous generation's benefits are going up. So you begin to calculate it in your head, the math—a lot of people getting greater benefits, living longer, with fewer people paying—you can understand why we got a problem. And if you've got somebody fixing to get in the workforce, that person is going to be paying money into a system that's going broke. And a lot of us in Washington know it's going broke, including Senator Mitch McConnell. And he wants to work with me to convince people of both parties to come together and, in good will, sit down at the table. And my call to both Republicans and Democrats is, put your best ideas out there, come to the table, think about how to solve it, and let's put your ideas out so

we can show to the American people that we're capable of setting aside politics and focusing on solving big problems for the United States of America.

Mitch thinks that way, and the Senate is better off to have somebody, a statesman like Mitch McConnell, who is willing to call people to sit down and solve these big problems now, before it's too late.

Now that I've got you here, I'd like to run a few other issues by you. [*Laughter*] No Child Left Behind is a really good piece of legislation. It has to do with public schools. Just quickly—I believe that unless you measure, you can't tell whether or not a child is getting a good education. And I don't like a system that says to—says, we're just going to move you through without knowing whether or not you can read and write and add and subtract. It doesn't do this country any good. As a matter of fact, we've got an issue when it comes to education, because if we don't get it right early, we're not going to get it right late, and if we don't get it right at all, jobs are going to go overseas. That's just the nature of the world in which we live.

So I went to New Albany today to talk about No Child Left Behind. It is a piece of legislation which says, we believe in local folks figuring out how to run their schools, but when we send you Federal money, you need to measure. And you need to measure whether or not a child can read. And if a child can't read, you better do something about it now, before it's too late. That's why it's called the No Child Left Behind. In other words, we're going to measure; we're going to correct; so we can say with certainty we've done our duty all across the country to make sure children have the basics necessary to be able to fill the jobs of the 21st century.

That bill needs to be reauthorized. I'm looking forward to working with Senator McConnell to get the Senate and the House to get the bill to my desk this year.

Health care: Costs are going up; businesses can't afford it; we need to do something about it. The big debate in Washington, DC, is who best to make health care decisions. Mitch and I believe the best people to make the health care decisions are the doctors and the patients, not insurance companies and government officials. And there-

fore, I'm looking forward to working with him to do things such as change the Tax Code so that there is no disadvantage in the Tax Code for the individual and/or that person who is working for a small-business company that can't afford insurance relative to those who work for businesses.

I'm looking forward to working with Mitch to help deal with the cost of health care by the spread of information technology. I mean, for those of you in medicine, you kind of know what I mean when you say, you're a little lagging, relative to other fields. We've got doctors still writing things on paper. And the writing is illegible half the time—[*laughter*—and therefore, there are medical errors and unnecessary expenses.

I'm looking forward to working with Mitch to enhance transparency in medicine. How many of you have ever asked, how much does it cost? Very rarely does anybody in health care ask, how much does it cost? And therefore, since the Federal Government is a big health care user, we're going to insist that those we work with let us know what it costs and what the quality is, so that as consumers become more involved in health care through plans like health savings accounts, there's actual consumerism in health care; there's something helpful when it comes to dealing with rising costs when somebody says, "I think I may try to find a better deal. If the cost is too high, I'm going to try an alternative."

I'll continue to work with Mitch to make sure that people in Congress don't undermine the Medicare reforms that we put in place. I believe we have an obligation to make sure Medicare works for our seniors. We put forth a prescription drug benefit for poor seniors, cheaper prescription drugs for all seniors. You know what happens, the marketplace actually works in America. We believed in the marketplace, and therefore, it's up to Congress to leave the marketplace alone when it comes to Medicare.

And I'm looking forward to working with Mitch to make sure that medicine is accessible and affordable by doing something about these junk lawsuits that are running good doctors out of practice and running up the cost of your medicine.

One final point—this is an energy State. You produce a lot of coal, and that's good. We need to do something about coal emissions so that we can say that we're energy independent and good stewards of the environment. And that's why Mitch and I are going to work with the Congress to pass substantial monies on clean coal technologies. Listen, we've got 250 years of supply. People are concerned about the dependency on foreign sources of energy; you ought to be. Dependency upon energy from somewhere else is a national security risk, and it's an economic security risk. And we can do something about it through technologies.

I want to share with you right quick an interesting—some interesting breakthroughs that are coming along. One, we spent a lot of money on research, as is the private sector, on new battery technologies. I believe within a reasonable period of time, you'll be able to plug your battery in your car—a plug-in battery in your car, so that you can run your first 40 miles on electricity, and you'll be happy to hear that the car is not going to look like a golf cart. *[Laughter]*

I believe you're going to be running your automobiles on ethanol made from switch grass or wood chips. I know that sounds science fiction to some of you, but that technology is coming. We're now using about 7 billion gallons of ethanol a year made from corn. I believe not only can we expand corn-based ethanol; I believe we're on the verge of technological breakthroughs to be able to make ethanol from things that—from refuse—as I said, switch grass. That's good for people like me who come from a State that's awfully dry.

But isn't it interesting, to be able to predict to the American people that our farmers are going to be vital producers of energy, that we'll be able to use our cars. And the more ethanol we use, obviously, the less gasoline you use, and the less gasoline you use, the less dependency on oil.

We're on the verge of some incredible—which leads me to conclude—oh, let me say one other thing about Mitch. Well, not one—it may not be the only thing I say about him. *[Laughter]* Mitch understands what I know, that we have a responsibility to fill our benches with judges who strictly interpret the law

and not try to legislate from the bench. We've got plenty of legislators in Washington; we don't need them doing that from the third branch of our Government. I am very proud—when it came time for tough fights on our judges, judges like John Roberts and Sam Alito, there was no stronger advocate for a sound judiciary than Senator Mitch McConnell.

And so I'd like to conclude by telling you, we've got a big agenda. And I believe we're going to get a lot of it accomplished, and one of the main reasons we're going to get a lot it accomplished is because you've sent a skillful legislator, a master of the United States Senate, to Washington, DC.

I'm here to ask the people of this State, when it comes time to vote, to think very carefully about your Senator. I know that some of them say, "Well, I can't vote for somebody who is a Republican, or somebody"—you know, based upon party. I ask the people to vote for a man who is competent, who is accomplished, who is good for the United States.

I want to thank you all for supporting this good man. I appreciate you coming out tonight. May God bless you, and may God continue to bless the United States.

NOTE: The President spoke at 6 p.m. at the Seelbach Hilton Louisville. In his remarks, he referred to District Judge Robyn Williams of Kentucky's 40th Judicial District; and Gen. David H. Petraeus, USA, commanding general, Multi-National Force—Iraq. This item was not received in time for publication in the appropriate issue.

Remarks Following a Briefing on Tornado Damage in Enterprise, Alabama

March 3, 2007

You know, Mayor, I told the people yesterday that I come down with a heavy heart, and I will try, to the best of my ability, to comfort those who lost life and property. I know you and your council and the citizens here have done that as well.

I hope it helps for the citizens here to hear that we declared your county a major disaster area, which will provide some relief. You can