

Remarks in Rochester, Minnesota

September 16, 2004

The President. Thank you all.

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

The President. Thank you all. That's what I'm here to tell you. I'm ready to serve this country for 4 more years. Thanks for coming. Rochester, Minnesota, is a fantastic city. I appreciate—I know something about it. You see, my mother is a trustee of the Mayo Clinic, and I'm still listening to my mother, after all these years. And she said, "When you get over to Rochester, you tell them to keep doing what they're doing, and Barbara Bush sends her best."

Thanks for coming out today. Today, as I traveled your State on the bus, I've been on the telephone getting updates on the devastation being caused by Hurricane Ivan in Florida and Alabama and parts of Mississippi and Louisiana. Federal teams are there to do everything possible to help the folks down there. I know all my fellow Americans join me in sending our prayers and concern for the families who lost loved ones and for those whose lives are being affected by this devastating storm.

I also want to express my sympathy and concern for the people just down the road in Austin, Minnesota, and the surrounding areas who have been affected by flash flooding there.

I've had a great day traveling your State—St. Cloud, Anoka, the Halloween capital of America—[laughter]—Blaine, Minnesota, and right here in Rochester. What a great way to spend a day. I kind of like to spend an afternoon in the ballpark. I also like coming to ask people for their vote, and that's what I'm doing here in the great State of Minnesota. I want your vote. I also want your help. I'm traveling on this bus to let people know that I'd like your help coming down the stretch in this campaign.

We have a duty in this country to vote. And I'd like you to go out and register your friends and neighbors to vote. Remind them we have an obligation in a free society to go to the polls. And when you're registering people, don't overlook discerning Democrats like Zell Miller. And after you get people reg-

istered to vote—and voting time is around the corner—get them headed to the polls, and tell them if they want a safer America, a stronger America, and a better America, to put me and Dick Cheney back in office.

My only regret of today is that Laura is not traveling with me. When I asked her to marry me, she said, "Fine, just so long as I don't ever have to give a political speech." [Laughter] I said, "Okay." Fortunately, she didn't hold me to her word. The American people in New York City got to see a compassionate, strong, fine First Lady in Laura Bush. Today I'm going to give you some reasons why I think you ought to put me back into office, but perhaps the most important one of all is so that Laura will be First Lady for 4 more years.

I want to thank my friend Gil Gutknecht, the fine United States Congressman from this part of the world. I appreciate his service. I appreciate working with him to do what's right for our country. He's a stalwart friend, and he's a great Member of Congress.

Today I had the privilege of being on the bus with your Governor, Tim Pawlenty, who has done such a fine job for the people of Minnesota. I'm proud to work with United States Senator Norm Coleman. I want to thank all the State and local officials who are here. I want to thank the people running for office.

I want to thank the grassroots activists. You are the people who put up the signs and make the phone calls and do all the hard work and never get enough credit. I'm here to give you credit for what you have done and what you're going to do, as we're coming down the pike. There's no doubt in my mind, with your help, we will carry the great State of Minnesota.

I'm looking forward to this campaign. I like to get out amongst the people and tell people where I stand, what I believe, and where I'm going to lead this Nation for the next 4 years. I believe every child can learn and every school must teach. I went to Washington, DC, to challenge the soft bigotry of low expectations. I didn't like a system that just shuffled kids through the schools, year after year, without learning the basics. So we raised standards. We measure early to solve problems before it's too late. We believe in

local control of schools. We're closing an achievement gap here in America, and we're not turning back.

I believe we have a moral responsibility to honor our citizens with good health care. I went up to Washington to solve problems. We had a problem in Medicare. Medicine was modernizing. Medicare wasn't. Medicare would pay \$100,000 for heart surgery and would not pay for the prescription drugs to prevent the heart surgery from being needed in the first place. That didn't make any sense. It didn't make any sense for our seniors. It certainly didn't make any sense for the taxpayers. We've modernized Medicare. In 2006, our seniors are going to get prescription drug coverage, and we're not turning back.

I believe in the energy and innovation and spirit of our workers, our small-business owners, our farmers, and ranchers. And that is why we unleashed that energy with the largest tax relief in a generation. Listen, when you're out gathering the vote, when you're out there in the hustings convincing people to go to the polls, remind them what this economy has been through. We've been through a recession. We had corporate scandals. We passed tough laws in Washington. By the way, it's now abundantly clear we're not going to tolerate dishonesty in the boardrooms of America. And the attack on our country hurt. It hurt people looking for work. They estimate in the 3 months after September the 11th, we lost a million jobs.

But we're overcoming these obstacles. This economy of ours is strong, and it is getting stronger. Our economy has been growing at rates as fast as any in nearly 20 years. We've added 1.7 million new jobs in the last 12 months. The national unemployment rate is at 5.4 percent, which is lower than the average of 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s. The unemployment rate in Minnesota is less than 5 percent. This economy is overcoming the obstacles we have faced, and we're not turning back.

I believe the most solemn duty of the American President is to protect the American people. If America shows uncertainty and weakness in this decade, the world will drift toward tragedy. This will not happen on my watch. I am 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 with your help, we're going to win a great victory in November.

Listen, the world in which we live is changing. You know, when our dads and granddads were coming up, a man usually worked at one company all his life, and there was a pension plan and health care. And women stayed at home. This world of ours is different. Men change—or people change careers and jobs often. And women not only work inside the house; they're now working outside the house. And yet the systems of our Government, the fundamental systems haven't changed with the times. Tax Code, health care, pensions plans, worker training were created for the world of yesterday, not tomorrow. In the new term, we'll transform these systems so all citizens are equipped, prepared, and thus truly free to be able to make your own choices and to pursue the great American Dream.

A hopeful society is one in which the economy grows. The best way to keep jobs here in America is to make sure America is the best place in the world to do business. To make sure we have jobs here, we've got to lessen the regulations on our job creators. To make sure we have jobs here in America, we've got to stop these frivolous lawsuits that are plaguing small-business owners.

To create jobs here, Congress needs to pass my energy plan. I proposed a plan over 2 years ago that encourages conservation, that uses technologies to explore for hydrocarbons in environmentally friendly ways, that promotes clean coal technology, that uses ethanol and biodiesel. It's an energy plan that understands in order to keep jobs in America, we must be less dependent on foreign sources of energy.

To create jobs, we've got to reject economic isolationism and open up markets for our farmers and entrepreneurs. We open up our market, and it's good for you. When you have more choices, you're likely to get the product you want at better quality and better

price. And so what I tell countries like China and elsewhere is, “You treat us the way we treat you.” I say that because I know we can compete with anybody, anytime, anywhere, so long as the rules are fair.

Listen, to create jobs, we’ve got to be wise about how we spend your money and keep your taxes low. Taxes are an issue in this campaign. They’re an issue. I’m running against a fellow who’s promised 2.2 trillion—that’s with a “T”—new dollars so far. And we’re coming down—we haven’t even got to the stretch run yet. [*Laughter*] So they said to him, “Well, how are you going to pay for it?” He said, “Oh, that’s easy, we’re just going to tax the rich.”

Audience members. Boo-o-o!

The President. You’ve heard that before, haven’t you? Yes. First of all, you can’t tax the rich enough to pay for \$2.2 trillion. There’s a tax gap. If he has his way, guess who’s going to get stuck with the bill? You’ve heard the rhetoric about taxing the rich before. Well, the rich hire accountants and lawyers for a reason, so you get stuck with the tab. We’re not going to let him raise your taxes. We’re going to win in November.

Speaking about taxes, this Tax Code of ours is full of special interest loopholes. It’s a complicated mess. It’s a million words long. The American people spend 6 billion hours a year on taxes. I think we need to do something about the Tax Code. In a new term, I’m going to bring Republicans and Democrats together to make this Tax Code more simple and more fair for the American people.

Listen, in a changing world, jobs change. You know as well as anybody here in Rochester, Minnesota, that the health care field offers fantastic opportunities. But oftentimes, there’s a skills gap in America. You know, workers don’t have the skills necessary to fill the new jobs of the 21st century. That’s why I’ve laid out a comprehensive plan to make sure our worker training programs are modernized. That’s why I’m such a big backer in the community college system, to enable our workers to gain the skills necessary to fill the jobs of the 21st century.

In this changing world, most new jobs are filled by people with at least 2 years of college. Yet one in four of our students gets

there. So in our high schools, we’ll fund early intervention programs to help students at risk. We’ll emphasize math and science. Over time, we will require a rigorous exam before graduation. See, by raising performance in our high schools and expanding Pell grants for low- and middle-income families, we will help more Americans start their career with a college diploma.

In a time of change, we’ve got to do something to reform our health care system. People in this town know what I’m talking about. See, Government must understand that it should stand side by side with patients and doctors, not try to dictate to patients and doctors. A good health care system is one that honors the provider and the patient. When it comes to health care, my opponent wants Government to dictate. I want you to decide.

More than half of the Americans who are currently uninsured are small-business employees and their families. That’s because small businesses are having trouble affording health care. I want to change the laws to allow small firms to pool together and purchase insurance at the same discounts big companies get. My opponent opposes this reform because he says it will hurt consumers. No, what hurts consumers is not having health insurance. Under my plan, the same laws that protect workers at large companies will protect consumers at small companies. It’s time to stop excuses, and it’s time to act to give Americans more quality health care coverage.

We need to expand tax-free health savings accounts. We’ll help the working uninsured purchase health savings accounts. We’ll help small businesses with health savings accounts. We want there to be a tax-free plan for Americans from all walks of life to be able to call a health plan their own. If they change jobs, they ought to be able to take the plan from one job to the next. If they save money in their plan, it ought to be theirs tax-free. We want plans where they make the decisions, not faceless bureaucrats and HMOs.

We’re going to continue to expand community health centers to make sure the indigent and the poor get primary care and preventative care. It’s better they get care in the health centers than in emergency rooms of

hospitals. We're going to continue to expand health information technology, which will reduce costs.

But I'll tell you what else we need to do. We need to stop these frivolous lawsuits that are running good docs out of business and running up the cost of your medicine. Listen, I don't think you can be pro-doctor and pro-patient and pro-trial-lawyer at the same time. I think you have to choose. 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 high-quality health care more affordable and more accessible. This is a big issue in this campaign, and there is a big philosophical difference. My opponent's plan is a massive, big-Government plan. And you can tell it is, because it costs a lot—[laughter]—1.5 trillion, with a "T," and that's a lot even for a Senator from Massachusetts. [Laughter]

Two problems with the plan. Only one way to pay for it, is to raise your taxes, and the other problem is he's expanding Government. For example, he's going to increase Medicaid coverage, which will crowd out private insurance. It will mean 8 million families are now going to be on the Government's insurance policy. The problem with that is, is that when you're on a Government insurance policy, it means the Government is in charge of the decisionmaking. When you're on a Government insurance policy, bureaucrats make the decisions, deciding what doctors you can see and what health services are covered. That's the wrong plan for America. The right plan for America is to have a practical plan that keeps the decisionmaking between doctors and patients, not bureaucrats in our Nation's Capital.

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

The President. In a new term, we'll continue to promote ownership in America. In changing times, ownership brings stability to people's lives. Homeownership rates are at an alltime high in America today. It's a hopeful statistic, isn't it? More and more people are opening up the door where they live, and they're saying, "Welcome to my home. Welcome to my piece of property." In a new

term, we'll continue to spread ownership to every corner of America.

And we've got to think differently about retirement plans as well. We've got to do something about Social Security. Now, if you're a senior on Social Security, the Government has got enough money in the Trust Fund to take care of you. I don't care what the politicians tell you, you have nothing to fear when it comes to Social Security. As a matter of fact, baby boomers like me, and a couple others out there I see—[laughter]—are just fine when it comes to Social Security.

But we need to worry about our children and our grandchildren when it comes to Social Security. I believe younger workers ought to be able to take some of their own tax money and set it aside in personal savings accounts to help fulfill the promise of Social Security, an account they call their own, an account the Government cannot take away.

In this world of change, some things do not change, the values we try to live by, courage and compassion, reverence and integrity. In a time of change, we will support the institutions that give our lives directions and purpose, our families, our schools, our religious congregations. We stand for a culture of life in which every person matters and every person counts. We stand for marriage and family, which are the foundations of our society. And we 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 that terrible morning of September the 11th, 2001, we have fought the terrorists across the Earth, not for pride, not for power, but because the lives of our citizens are at stake. Our strategy is clear. We're defending the homeland. We're transforming our military. We're strengthening our intelligence services. We're staying on the offensive. We will strike the terrorists abroad so we do not have to face them here at home. We will work to advance liberty in the broader Middle East and around the world, and we will prevail.

Our strategy is succeeding. Four years ago, Afghanistan was the home base of Al Qaida; Pakistan was a transit point for terrorist

groups; Saudi Arabia was fertile ground for terrorist fundraising; Libya was secretly pursuing nuclear weapons; Iraq was a gathering threat; Al Qaida was largely unchallenged as it planned attacks. Because we acted——

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

The President. Because we acted, the Government of Afghanistan is fighting terror; Pakistan is capturing terrorists; 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. 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 his long history of pursuing and even using weapons of mass destruction. And we know that after September the 11th, our country must think differently. We must take threats seriously before they fully materialize.

In Saddam Hussein, we saw a threat. I went to the United States Congress. They looked at the same intelligence I looked at. They remembered the same history I remembered. They concluded Saddam was a threat and authorized the use of force. My opponent looked at the same intelligence I looked at. He came to the same conclusion we came to, that Saddam was a threat, and he voted "yes" for the authorization of force.

Before the Commander in Chief commits troops into harm's way, we must try all avenues to solve the problem. That's why I went to the United Nations. I was hoping that diplomacy would work. The United Nations looked at the same intelligence we looked at. They remembered the same history we remembered, and by a 15-to-nothing vote in the United Nations Security Council voted to declare to Saddam Hussein, "Disclose, disarm, or face serious consequences." I believe when international bodies speak, they must mean what they say, in order to make the world peaceful.

But as he had for over a decade, Saddam Hussein wasn't interested in what the free

world said. He ignored this resolution like he ignored resolutions and resolutions and resolutions for the decade before. When the United Nations sent inspectors into the country, he systematically deceived the inspectors. So I'm faced with a choice: Do I forget the lessons of September the 11th and take the word of a madman, or take action to defend this country? Given that choice, I will defend America every time.

We didn't find the stockpiles that we thought would be there, but Saddam Hussein had the capability of making weapons, and he could have passed that capability on to the enemy. And that was a risk we could not afford to take after September the 11th. 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 to defend our country, more than 50 million in Afghanistan and Iraq are now free. Think about Afghanistan. Three years ago, many young girls couldn't go to school because the Taliban was so backward and barbaric, and their moms would be pulled out in the public square and whipped if they didn't toe the line of these backward people. Today in Afghanistan, 10 million people, 41 percent of whom are women, have registered to vote in the upcoming Presidential election.

There's a lot of violence in Iraq. I understand that. But Iraq now has a strong Prime Minister, National Council, and national elections are scheduled in January. The world is becoming more free. Parts of the world where people never dreamt there would be liberty are becoming more free. And we're standing with the people of Afghanistan and Iraq. When America gives its word, America will keep its word under my administration.

We're also serving an historic cause that will make us safer and make generations of Americans grow up in a safer world. See, free societies in the Middle East will be hopeful societies which no longer feed resentments and breed violence for export. Free governments in the Middle East will fight terrorists instead of supporting them, and that makes us all safer.

Our mission in Afghanistan and Iraq is clear. We will help new leaders to train their police and armies, so they can do the hard work of defending their countries against the few who would deny the ambitions of the many. We'll help them have elections. We'll get them on the path to stability and democracy as quickly as possible, and then our troops will return home with the honor they have earned.

I'm proud of our United States military. I've traveled to bases across our country and around the world. I've seen their great courage and wonderful decency. I want to thank the veterans who are here for having set such a great example for those who wear the uniform. I assure you, ladies and gentlemen, the cause of freedom is in great hands.

And I want to thank the military families who are here. We appreciate your service and your sacrifice. The Federal Government owes your loved ones all the support necessary to complete their missions. That's why I went to the United States Congress last September and asked for \$87 billion of supplemental funding to support our troops in harm's way in both Afghanistan and Iraq. This was vital legislation. It was important legislation. It was so important that we received great bipartisan support in Congress. As a matter of fact, only 12 United States Senators voted against the funding for our troops, 2 of whom are my opponent and his runningmate.

Audience members. Boo-o-o!

The President. When you're out gathering the vote, remind citizens that only four United States Senators voted to authorize the use of force and then voted against funding our troops. And two of those four are my opponent and his runningmate. So they asked him, they said, "Why did you make the decision you made?" And you might remember his famous answer: "I actually did vote for the \$87 billion, before I voted against it." You know, I doubt many people talk like that in Rochester, Minnesota. They pressed him further. He said he's proud of the vote. Finally he just said, "It's a complicated matter." There is nothing complicated about supporting our troops in combat.

The Commander in Chief must be clear and mean what he says. In order to make

this world a more peaceful place, when the President of the United States speaks, he better mean what he says. During the course of this campaign, my opponent has probably seven or eight different positions on the war in Iraq. He's for it and wouldn't fund. Then he became the antiwar candidate. Then last summer he stood there—I believe it was on the edge of the Grand Canyon—and said, "Well, knowing everything we know today, I would have voted to go into Iraq." Then he got pressure and said, "Well, maybe that wasn't the right thing to do." Then he said, "We're spending too much money." That's right after he criticized me for not spending enough money.

So yesterday in a radio interview he tried to clear things up, and here's what he said: He said there were no circumstances, none, under which we should have gone to war, although his own vote to go to war was the right vote, and it was right to hold Saddam Hussein accountable. [Laughter] Even the radio host said, "I can't tell you what he said." [Laughter]

Let me be clear about something. Mixed signals are the wrong signals to send to our troops in the field, the Iraqi people, our allies, and most of all, the enemy.

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

The President. I appreciate the contributions our friends and allies are making. I particularly want to thank the lady Member of Parliament for being here from our strong ally Great Britain. Welcome. We put together a coalition of nations all bound together to make this world a better place. There are some 40 nations involved in Afghanistan, some 30 nations involved in Iraq. Please don't listen to the language by some who said this coalition is feeble and not strong. It's a strong coalition. The next 4 years, I'll continue to work to build coalitions. But I'm never going to turn over America's national security decisions to leaders of other countries.

I believe in the transformational power of liberty. The wisest use of our strength is to advance freedom. I like telling people about the fact that I sit at the table with Prime Minister Koizumi of Japan. You know, it

wasn't all that long ago in the march of history that our dads and granddads were fighting the Japanese as a sworn enemy. Think about that.

Because of Harry Truman and Americans who believed in the power of liberty, after World War II, we helped Japan become a democracy. There were a lot of skeptics during that period of time. You can understand why. People were saying, "Wait a minute. We just fought these people and here we are helping them become a democracy. That doesn't make any sense." It did make sense. It made sense because today I sit at the table with Prime Minister Koizumi of Japan talking about the peace we all want, talking about how to make the world a more peaceful place.

Someday, an American President and a British Prime Minister are going to be sitting down with a duly elected leader of Iraq, talking about the peace, and our children and grandchildren are going to be better off.

I believe that millions in the Middle East plead in silence for their liberty. I believe women in the greater Middle East want to have a free society so they can realize their dreams. And I believe that given the chance, they will embrace the most honorable form of government ever devised by man. I believe all 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 will build a safer world and a more hopeful America. By reforming systems of Government, we will help more Americans realize their dreams. We'll spread ownership and opportunity to every corner of America. We'll pass the enduring values of our country on to a new generation. We will continue to work to spread freedom and peace around the world.

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 that requires 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 September the 14th, 2001, I stood in the ruins of the Twin Towers. It's a day I'm never going to forget. There were workers there in hardhats yelling at me at the top of their lungs, "Whatever it takes." I remember trying to console a—one of the fellows came out of the rubble. He looked me right in the eye, and he said, "Do not let me down." Ever since that day, I wake up thinking about how to better protect our country. I will never relent in defending America, whatever it takes.

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

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

NOTE: The President spoke at 4 p.m. at Mayo Field. In his remarks, he referred to Senator Zell Miller of Georgia, who made the keynote address at the Republican National Convention; Gov. Tim Pawlenty of Minnesota; Prime Minister Ayad Allawi of the Iraqi Interim Government; Theresa May, Member of Parliament for Maidenhead, United Kingdom; and Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi of Japan.

Statement on the Millennium Challenge Account

September 16, 2004

The Millennium Challenge Account (MCA) is a groundbreaking initiative that encourages all nations to embrace political and economic reform and has enjoyed bipartisan support since I announced it 2 years ago. The powerful combination of trade, open markets, and good government is history's proven method to defeat poverty on a large scale, to vastly improve health and education, to build a modern infrastructure while safeguarding the environment, and to spread liberty and enterprise.

Already, the MCA has encouraged countries to govern justly, invest in their people, and promote economic freedom. The MCA