

keynote address at the Republican National Convention; Gov. Jeb Bush of Florida; Apollo 11 astronaut Edwin “Buzz” Aldrin; Mel R. Martinez, senatorial candidate in Florida; country music entertainers Little Texas; Usama bin Laden, leader of the Al Qaida terrorist organization; and Prime Minister Ayad Allawi of the Iraqi Interim Government.

Remarks in Jacksonville, Florida

October 23, 2004

The President. Thank you all. Thank you so much for coming today. Brother Jeb said, “Why don’t we go to Jacksonville; maybe a couple of folks will show up to say hello.” Laura and I thank you so very much for coming out on a Saturday afternoon. I’m here to ask for your vote, and I’m here to ask for your help. People are voting here in Florida. You need to get your friends and neighbors to go to the polls. And by the way, when you’re getting people to go to the polls, don’t overlook discerning Democrats, people like Senator Zell Miller from Georgia. With your help, we’ll carry Florida again and win a great victory in November.

So when I asked Laura to marry me, she said, “Fine, just so long as you—I never have to give a political speech.” I said, “Okay, you got a deal.” Fortunately, she didn’t hold me to the promise. Laura is giving a lot of speeches, and when people see her speak, they see a warm, compassionate, great First Lady. I’m going to give you some reasons to put me back into office. Perhaps the most important one of all is so that Laura is the First Lady for 4 more years.

I’m proud of my runningmate, Dick Cheney. I admit it, he doesn’t have the waviest hair in the race. [*Laughter*] I didn’t pick him because of his hairdo. I picked him because of his judgment, his experience, and his ability to get the job done for the American people.

I’m proud of my brother, your Governor, Jeb Bush. You don’t have to worry about where he stands. He doesn’t take a poll or focus group to find out what he should believe. Jeb Bush stands on principle, and when times are tough, he leads this State with compassion. He has done a masterful job of helping to bring comfort for those who have been

afflicted by the four hurricanes. Florida showed its true strength not only in your Governor but because people cared for people who were hurting in this State. I am really proud of how Florida handled the four hurricanes.

Mel Martinez is the right man for the United States Senate from Florida. And when you vote for him and put him in office, he’ll be joining a fine United States Senator who has joined us today from the State of Utah, Senator Orrin Hatch. Thank you, Senator.

Congressman Ander Crenshaw is doing a great job in the House of Representatives. Thank you, Ander. Congressman Cliff Stearns is with us today. I appreciate you coming, Cliff.

I want to thank the State chief financial officer, Tom Gallagher, for joining us today. I want to thank the mayor of the great city of Jacksonville, Florida, Mayor John Peyton.

When I came in, I had the opportunity to say hello to Nelson Cuba, who’s the president of the Jacksonville Fraternal Order of Police. I am proud to have the endorsement of the FOP. I’m proud to be standing with the policemen all across this country.

I want to thank Bill Cerveny and Aaron Tippin for providing such wonderful entertainment here for this great crowd.

I want to thank the people who put on this event. It takes a lot of work to get this many people to come. I want to thank the grassroots activists, the people who are putting up the signs, making the phone calls, turning out the vote. With your help, we will win a great victory on November the 2d.

We have just 10 days to go in this campaign, and voters have a clear choice between two very different candidates and dramatically different approaches and records. You know where I stand, and sometimes, you even know where my opponent stands. [*Laughter*] We both have records. I’m running on my record. Senator Kerry’s running from his record, and there is a reason why. There is a reason why. There is a mainstream in American politics, and my opponent sits on the far left bank. I am a compassionate conservative and proudly so. At a time when our country has much to accomplish and

much more to do, I offer a record of reform and results.

This election comes down to five clear choices for America's families, five choices on issues of great consequence: your family's security; your family's budget; your quality of life; your retirement; and the bedrock values that are so critical to our families and to our future.

The first clear choice is the most important because it concerns the security of your family. All our progress on every other issue depends on the safety of our citizens. The most—this is the first Presidential election since September the 11th, 2001. Americans will go to the polls in a time of war and ongoing threats unlike any we have faced before. The terrorists who killed thousands of innocent people are still dangerous. They are determined to strike us again. The outcome of this election will set the direction of the war against terror. I believe the most solemn duty of the American President is to protect the American people. If America shows uncertainty or weakness in this decade, the world will drift toward tragedy. This will not happen on my watch.

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've strengthened protections for the homeland. We're reforming and strengthening our intelligence capabilities. We're transforming our All-Volunteer Army. We will not have a draft. We will keep the All-Volunteer Army an all-volunteer army. We are staying on the offensive. We are relentless. We are determined to protect the American people, and we're succeeding. More than three-quarters of Al Qaida's key members and associates have been brought to justice, and the rest of them know we are on their trail.

My opponent has a different approach. He says that September the 11th, quote, "didn't change me much at all," end quote.

Audience members. Boo-o-o!

The President. And that's pretty clear. He considers the war on terror primarily a law enforcement and intelligence gathering operation.

Audience members. Boo-o-o!

The President. His top foreign policy adviser has questioned whether it's even a war at all, saying "That's just a metaphor, like the war on poverty."

Audience members. Boo-o-o!

The President. Anyone who thinks we're fighting a metaphor does not understand the enemy we face, and you cannot win a war if you're not convinced we're even in one.

Senator Kerry misunderstands our battle against insurgents and terrorists in Iraq. After voting to authorize force against Saddam Hussein, after calling it the right decision when I sent troops into Iraq, the Senator now calls it the "wrong war."

Audience members. Boo-o-o!

The President. The Senator used to recognize that Saddam Hussein was a gathering threat who hated America. After all, the Senator said so. He used to recognize that Saddam was a state sponsor of terror with a history of pursuing and even using weapons of mass destruction. After all, the Senator said so. He used to understand that Saddam was a major source of instability in the Middle East. After all, the Senator said so. And when he voted to authorize force, the Senator must have recognized the nightmare scenario that terrorists might somehow access weapons of mass destruction. Senator Kerry seems to have forgotten all that as his position has evolved during the course of this campaign. You might call it election amnesia. [*Laughter*]

I knew then and I know now that America and the world are safer with Saddam Hussein sitting in a prison cell.

Senator Kerry now calls Iraq a "diversion."

Audience members. Boo-o-o!

The President. But the case of just one terrorist shows how wrong his thinking is. A man named Zarqawi is responsible for planting car bombs and beheading Americans in Iraq. He ran a terrorist training camp in Afghanistan until American troops arrived. Then he fled to Baghdad, where he's fighting us today. He publicly announced his allegiance to Usama bin Laden. If Zarqawi and his associates were not busy fighting Iraqi and American forces in Iraq, what does Senator Kerry think they would be doing? Simple shopkeepers? [*Laughter*] Running benevolence societies? I don't think so. And our

troops will defeat Zarqawi and his friends and allies overseas so we do not have to face them in America.

The choice in this election could not be clearer. You cannot lead our Nation to decisive victory, on which the security of every American family depends, if you do not see the true dangers of the post-September the 11th world. My opponent has a September the 10th point of view. At his convention, he declared that his strategy will be to respond to attacks after America is hit.

Audience members. Boo-o-o!

The President. That would be too late. In our debates, he said we can defend America only if we pass a “global test.”

Audience members. Boo-o-o!

The President. I’m not making that up. He was standing about that far away from me when he said it. I’ll work with our friends and allies. We’ll continue to build strong coalitions. But I will never turn over America’s national security decisions to leaders of other countries.

I want to thank those who wear the uniform who have joined us today. I want to thank the veterans who are here today for having set such a great example. I want to thank the military families who are here today. And I’m going to assure you, so long as I’m the Commander in Chief, our Federal Government will make sure your loved ones have what is necessary to complete their missions.

And that’s why I went to the United States Congress in September of 2003, asking for \$87 billion in supplemental funding to support our troops in combat in Iraq and Afghanistan. I appreciate the strong bipartisan support for this very important request. When you’re out gathering up the vote, I want you to remind your friends and neighbors that only four Members of the United States Senate voted to authorize the use of force and then voted against the funding necessary to support our troops in harm’s way, and two of those four were my opponent and his runningmate.

Audience members. Boo-o-o!

The President. They asked him, “Why did you make the vote?” And he issued perhaps the most famous quote of the 2004 campaign,

“I actually did vote for the \$87 billion, right before I voted against it.”

Audience members. Boo-o-o!

The President. They’ve asked him time and time again, and he must have given five or six explanations of that vote. At one point, he said, “The whole thing is a complicated matter.” There is nothing complicated about supporting our troops in combat.

We’ll protect America by leading the cause of freedom. I believe in the transformational power of liberty. I want you to remember what has taken place in Afghanistan in a short period of time. That country has gone from darkness to light. Three-and-a-half years ago, young girls couldn’t go to school. If their mothers did not toe the line of the ideologues of hate who ran Afghanistan, they were whipped in the public square and sometimes executed in a sports stadium. Because we acted in our self-interest, because we upheld doctrine, 25 million people in Afghanistan are free. Millions went to vote in a Presidential election. The first voter was a 19-year-old woman in Afghanistan.

Iraq will be holding elections in January. Think about how far that country has come from the days of torture chambers and mass graves. Freedom is on the march, and America is more secure because of it.

I believe every person in the world wants to be free. I believe this 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.

On September the 14th, 2001, I stood in the ruins of the Twin Towers. It is a day I will never forget. There were workers there in hardhats yelling at me at the top of their lungs, “Whatever it takes.” I remember the man coming out of the rubble—we were doing our best to console people—he grabbed me by the arm; he looked me in the eye; and he said, “Do not let me down.” Ever since that day, I wake up every morning thinking about how to better protect our country. I will never relent in defending America, whatever it takes.

The second clear choice in this election concerns your family budget. When I ran for President 4 years ago, I pledged to lower taxes for American families. I kept my word. We raised the child credit. We reduced the

marriage penalty. Listen, our Tax Code ought to encourage marriage, not penalize marriage. We dropped the lowest bracket to 10 percent to help our working families. We reduced income taxes for everyone who pays taxes. As a result of these good policies, after-tax income, money in your pocket that you can spend, is up by about 10 percent since I became your President.

We've been through a lot together. When you're out rounding up the vote, remind your friends and neighbors that the stock market had been in serious decline for 6 months prior to my arrival in Washington, DC. And then we had a recession and corporate scandals and the attacks on our country. We lost nearly one million jobs in the 3 months after September the 11th.

But our economic policies are working. Our economy is growing at rates as fast as any in nearly 20 years. We've added more than 1.9 million new jobs in the last 13 months. The unemployment rate is 5.4 percent, lower than the average rate of the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s. Our farmers and ranchers are making a living. The small businesses are flourishing. The entrepreneurial spirit is strong. Homeownership rate is at an alltime high, and the unemployment rate in Florida is 4.5 percent.

My opponent has very different plans for your family's budget. He intends to take a big chunk out of it.

Audience members. Boo-o-o!

The President. He voted against the higher child tax credit. He voted against the marriage penalty relief. He voted against lower taxes. If he had had his way, an average middle-class family would be paying 2,000 more dollars a year to the Federal Government.

Audience members. Boo-o-o!

The President. It's part of a pattern. See, the Senator voted 10 times to raise taxes on gasoline. All told, during his 20 years in the United States Senate, he has voted 98 times to raise your taxes.

Audience members. Boo-o-o!

The President. That's about five times a year. When a Senator does something that often, he must really enjoy it. [Laughter] During this campaign, he's also made a lot of big, expensive promises. He's promised \$2.2 trillion of new Federal spending. That's

trillion with a "T." That's a lot even for a Senator from Massachusetts. [Laughter]

They asked him how he's going to pay for it. He said, "Oh, we'll just pay for it by taxing the rich." There's a problem with that promise. When you run up the top two brackets, you're taxing many small businesses. Most small businesses pay tax at the individual income-tax level. Seventy percent of new jobs are created by small businesses in America. Taxing small businesses is bad economic policy.

And there's a gap between what he's promised and what he can deliver. Running up the top two brackets like he wants to do raises between 600 and 800 billion dollars. And remember, there's \$2.2 trillion of spending promises. So there's a gap, a gap between what he's promised and what he says he's going to pay. And guess who usually fills the gap?

Audience member. We do!

The President. You do. The good news is, we're not going to let him tax you; we are going to carry Florida and win on November the 2d.

Third clear choice in this election involves the quality of life for our Nation's families. A good education and quality health care are important to a successful life. When I ran for President 4 years ago, I promised to end the soft bigotry of low expectations by reforming our public schools. I have kept my word. We passed good, sound education reforms to bring high standards to the classroom and make our schools more accountable to parents and teachers. We're seeing progress. Math and reading scores are rising. We're closing the achievement gap by helping minority students. We will build on these reforms and extend them to our high schools so that no child in America is left behind.

And we'll continue to improve our—life for our families by making health care more affordable and accessible. We'll expand health savings accounts so more small businesses can cover their workers and more families are able to get health care accounts they manage and they call their own. We'll create association health plans so small businesses can join together and buy insurance at the same discounts that big companies are able to do. We will help our families in need

by expanding community health centers. We'll make sure every eligible child is enrolled in our Government's low-income health insurance program.

And we'll help patients and doctors all across this Nation by doing something about the frivolous and junk lawsuits that are running up your costs and running good doctors out of practice. I have met too many good docs being run out of practice because of these junk lawsuits. I met too many ob-gyns who are not able to practice their skill. I met too many pregnant women who are having to drive miles, which isn't right. Our expectant moms need good, quality health care, and these lawsuits are making it tough for them to find good, quality health care. You cannot be pro-doctor, pro-patient, and pro-personal-injury-lawyer at the same time. You have to make a choice. My opponent made his choice, and he put a personal injury trial lawyer on the ticket.

Audience members. Boo-o-o!

The President. I have made my choice. I'm standing with the docs and the patients. I am for medical liability reform—now.

Senator Kerry has a different point of view on our schools and health care. Listen, he voted for the No Child Left Behind Act, but now he wants to weaken the accountability standards. He's proposed including measures like teacher attendance to judge whether students can read and write and add and subtract. He voted against health savings accounts. He opposes association health plans. He has voted 10 times against medical liability reform. He can run from his record, but he cannot hide.

Now he's proposing a health care plan in this campaign, a big Government health care plan that would cause 8 million families to lose private coverage they get at work and have to go on a Government plan. Eighty percent of the people who get coverage under his proposal would be enrolled in a Government program.

Audience members. Boo-o-o!

The President. In one of our debates, he looked in that camera and he told the Americans that when it comes to his health care plan, and I quote, "The Government has nothing to do with it." I could barely contain myself. [Laughter] My opponent's plan

would move America down the road to Federal control of health care. It's the wrong road for American families. He can run from his plan—

Audience members. But he cannot hide!

The President. In all we do to improve health care, we will make sure the decisions are made by doctors and patients, not by officials in Washington, DC.

The fourth clear choice in this election involves your retirement. Our Nation has made a solemn commitment to America's seniors on Social Security and Medicare. When I ran for President 4 years ago, I promised to keep that commitment and improve Medicare by adding prescription drug coverage. I have kept my word. Seniors are now getting discounts on medicine with drug discount cards. Low-income seniors are getting \$600 this year and \$600 next year to help pay for prescriptions. And beginning in 2006, all seniors will be able to get prescription drug coverage under Medicare.

My opponent voted against the Medicare bill that includes prescription drug coverage, even though it was supported by AARP and other seniors groups. This campaign, he said, "If I'm the President, we're going to repeal that phony bill." A little later he said, "No, I don't want to repeal it." That sounds familiar. As your President for the next 4 years, I will defend the reforms we have worked so hard to pass and keep the promise of Medicare for our country's seniors.

We'll keep the promise of Social Security for our seniors, and we will strengthen Social Security for generations to come. Every campaign is predictable. It is predictable that you'll hear once again that our seniors will lose their checks. I want you to remind our seniors that in the 2000 campaign, they said, "If George W. gets elected, the seniors will not get their Social Security checks." You might remember that. Well, remind them of this: George W. got elected, and the seniors got their checks. And the seniors will continue to get their checks. And baby boomers like me are just fine when it comes to the Social Security trust.

But we need to be concerned about children and our grandchildren. We need to make sure that the Social Security system will be there when they need it too. And that

is why I believe younger workers ought to be able to take some of their own money and put it in a personal savings account, a savings account they call their own, a savings account the Government cannot take away.

My opponent takes a different approach. He talks about protecting Social Security, but he's the only candidate in this race who has voted eight times for higher taxes on Social Security benefits.

Audience members. Boo-o-o!

The President. He can run——

Audience members. But he cannot hide!

The President. And when it comes to the next generation, he's offered nothing in terms of Social Security reform. The job of the President is to confront problems, not to pass them on to future Presidents and future generations. In a new term, I'll bring Republicans and Democrats together and strengthen Social Security so a younger generation can count on it.

The fifth clear choice in this election is on the values that are so crucial to keeping America's families strong, and here my opponent and I are miles apart. I believe marriage is a sacred commitment. I believe marriage is a pillar of our civilization, and I will always defend it. This is not a partisan issue. When Congress passed the Defense of Marriage Act, defining marriage as the union of a man and a woman, the vast majority of Democrats supported it, and Bill Clinton signed it into law. But Senator Kerry was part of an out-of-the-mainstream minority that voted against the Defense of Marriage Act.

Audience members. Boo-o-o!

The President. I believe that reasonable people can find common ground on the difficult issues. Republicans and Democrats and many citizens on both sides of the life issue came together and agreed we should ban the brutal practice of partial-birth abortion. I was honored to sign that bill. But Senator Kerry was part of the out-of-the-mainstream minority that voted against the ban.

Audience members. Boo-o-o!

The President. He also voted against parental notification laws——

Audience members. Boo-o-o!

The President. ——and against the Unborn Victims of Violence Act.

Audience members. Boo-o-o!

The President. I will continue to reach out to Americans of every belief and move this goodhearted Nation toward a culture of life.

During this campaign, my opponent has said that you can find the heart and soul of America in Hollywood.

Audience members. Boo-o-o!

The President. Most American families do not look to Hollywood as a source of values. I believe the heart and soul of America is found in communities like Jacksonville, Florida.

All of these choices make this one of the most important elections in our history. The security, the prosperity of our country, the education of our children, and the health of our families, the retirement of our seniors, and the direction of our culture are—all are at stake. And the decision is in the best hands, the hands of the American people.

I see a positive future for this country. I see a better day. One of my favorite quotes was written by a fellow Texan. He said, "Sarah and I live on the east side of the mountain. It's the sunrise side, not the sunset side. It's the side to see the day that is coming, not to see the day that is gone." During this campaign, my opponent has spent much of his campaign talking about the day that is gone. I see the day that is coming.

We have been through a lot together in the last nearly 4 years. Because we have done the hard work of climbing the mountain, we can see the valley below. We'll protect our families, build up the prosperity of this country, and defend our deepest values. We will spread freedom in this world and achieve the peace we all long for.

When I campaigned in your State 4 years ago, I said if you gave me the honor of serving, I would uphold the honor and the dignity of the office to which I had been elected. With your help, I will do so for 4 more years.

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

NOTE: The President spoke at 4:20 p.m. at Alltel Stadium. In his remarks, he referred to Gov. Jeb Bush of Florida; Senator Zell Miller of Georgia, who made the keynote address at the Republican National Convention; Mel R. Martinez, senatorial candidate in Florida; country music entertainers Bill Cerveney and Aaron Tippin; former President

Saddam Hussein of Iraq; senior Al Qaida associate Abu Musab Al Zarqawi; and Usama bin Laden, leader of the Al Qaida terrorist organization.

Remarks in Alamogordo, New Mexico

October 24, 2004

The President. Thank you all. Thanks for coming out on a beautiful Sunday afternoon. Laura and I are so pleased to be here in Alamogordo. It's great to be back in the great State of New Mexico.

We're getting close to voting time, and I'm here to ask for your vote and for your help. Tell your friends and neighbors in the coffee shops and community centers and places of worship, we have a duty to vote in the United States. Get them headed to the polls. Don't overlook discerning Democrats like Zell Miller of Georgia. And when you get them headed to the polls, remind them if they want a safer America, a stronger America, and a better America, to vote for Bush-Cheney.

I'm keeping really good company in the First Lady. You know, when I—I don't know if you know this or not, we both grew up kind of around the corner. As a matter of fact, we were in the seventh grade together at San Jacinto Junior High in Midland. And then we became reacquainted. She was a public school librarian when I met her again.

Audience member. [*Inaudible*]—moment!

The President. It sure was. When I asked her to marry me, she said, "Fine, just make me a promise." I said, "Okay, what is it?" She said, "Promise me I'll never have to give a political speech." [*Laughter*] I said, "Okay, you got a deal." Fortunately, she did not hold me to that promise. She's giving speeches all over the country, and when people see her speak, they see a compassionate, warm, strong First Lady.

And I'm proud of my runningmate, Dick Cheney. Now, look, I admit it—I admit it, he does not have the waviest hair in the race. [*Laughter*] I didn't pick him because of his hairdo. I picked him because of his judgment, his experience. He's getting the job done for the American people.

I'm proud to be sharing this platform with a great United States Senator in Pete

Domenici. You know, if you had to describe Senator Domenici, you would call him a class act. And he is. I know you're proud of him, and Laura and I are proud to call him friend. I want to thank Congressman Steve Pearce and his wife, Cynthia.

I want to thank the Alamogordo Tiger Band for being here today. It's good to be in country where the cowboy hats outnumber the ties. I want to thank the people who have helped put on this rally and are putting up the signs, making the phone calls, turning people out to vote. There is no doubt in my mind that with your help, we will carry New Mexico and win a great victory in November. *Con su apoyo, vamos a ganar.*

You know, we've just got 9 days to go. And the voters have a clear choice between two very different candidates with dramatically different approaches and records. You know where I stand, and sometimes you even know where my opponent stands. [*Laughter*] We both have records. I'm proudly running on mine. The Senator is running from his. [*Laughter*] And there's a reason why. There is a mainstream in American politics, and my opponent sits on the far left bank. I'm a compassionate conservative and proudly so. At a time when our country has much to accomplish and much more to do, I offer a record of reform and a record of results.

This election comes down to five clear choices for America's families, five choices on issues of great consequence: your family's security; your family's budget; your quality of life; your retirement; and the bedrock values that are so critical to our families and our future.

The first clear choice is the most important, because it concerns the security of your family. All progress on every other issue depends on the safety of our citizens. This will be the first Presidential election since September the 11th, 2001. Americans will go to the polls in a time of war and ongoing threats unlike any we have faced before. The terrorists that killed thousands of innocent people are still dangerous, and they are determined to strike us again. The outcome of this election will set the direction of the war against terror. The most solemn duty of the American President is to protect the American people.