



For Immediate Release
Office of the Vice President
October 19, 2004

Vice President and Mrs. Cheney's Q & A in Johnstown, Pennsylvania

Vice President and Mrs. Cheney's Remarks and Q&A in Johnstown, Pennsylvania
Frank J. Pasquerilla Conference Center
Johnstown, Pennsylvania
October 18, 2004

1:35 P.M. EDT

MRS. CHENEY: Thank you so much. Well, what a great welcome, what a great day to be here in Johnstown. The leaves, could they be more beautiful? Moreover, we are just 15 days away from electing George Bush to his second term as President of the United States. (Applause.) And I am so proud to be here with a man who will serve at his side. I just introduce Dick all across the country. And it's a great thing to do.

I've been chosen for this because I've known him for so long. (Laughter.) I have known him since he was 14 years old, and that first summer I knew him he was sweeping out the Ben Franklin store in Casper, Wyoming. That was his job. (Laughter.) And I've known him through a lot of jobs since. I have known him since he was digging ditches at the Central Wyoming Fair and Rodeo Grounds outside our home town, and I've known him since he was loading bentonite, 100-pound sacks of bentonite onto railroad cars. And I've known him since he was building power line all across the West, to help pay his way through school. And I like to tell about all those jobs because I think when you grow up working hard, you learn some really important lessons. And one of them is that the hardworking men and women of this country ought to get to keep as much of their paychecks as possible. (Applause.)

And, of course, that's one of the issues this campaign is about. And there are so many issues that I know are important to you and are important to me. But I got to tell you, if I were going to say what it is that compels me most, it is the safety and security of our country. (Applause.) I've got children, I've got grandchildren, and I got to tell you, when I think about this election, I think to myself, you know, the terrorists will try to come and get us again -- we all know they're going to try that. And I ask myself, who do I want to have standing in the doorway. And I'll tell you, it's not John Kerry and it's not John Edwards. It is George Bush and Dick Cheney. (Applause.)

And I just want to read you something. I was so moved when I saw this. The President is giving a big speech today, a really hard-hitting, forward-looking speech on how we're going to deal with the terrorist threats. And another thing that's happening today is that 222 9/11 family members are sending a letter out to the American people. And it is long and eloquent. I just want to read you a little part of it. I was so touched -- I just got this on my Blackberry. And they say in this letter:

"We speak to you from the heart as citizens from all across the country and every political stripe. We are Republicans and Democrats, liberals and conservatives, young and old, mothers and fathers, husbands and sisters, wives, brothers, sons, daughters, friends. We speak from a profound sense of obligation to those we have lost, and to the country that we love, guided by core principles. President Bush has steadfastly told us who he is, what he believes, and what he will fight for.

As Americans who have keenly felt the scourge of terrorism, we are inspired and energized to follow the President's lead, to rise to the occasion and get the job done. Three years ago, George Bush stood with us and vowed that he would never forget. We stand with him now." (Applause.)

So if I were going to make a list of all the things that make me proud to be an American, right at the top of it I'd put our President, George W. Bush. (Applause.) He's been a magnificent leader these last four years. And if you'll permit me to say so, the Vice President is no slouch either. (Applause.)

And so it gives me great pleasure to introduce to you, my husband, Dick Cheney, the Vice President of the United States. (Applause.)

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Thank you. Well, thank you all very much. A great welcome. We're delighted to be back in Pennsylvania. And I want to thank Lynne for that outstanding introduction. I didn't know she was going to read from that letter. It was a very potent letter.

She has known me since I was 14. She wouldn't go out with me until I was 17. (Laughter.) And I often explain to people that the reason we got married is because Dwight Eisenhower got elected President of the United States. It was in 1952. I was a youngster living in Lincoln, Nebraska, with my folks. Dad worked for the Soil Conservation Service. Eisenhower got elected, reorganized the government. Dad got transferred to Casper, Wyoming. And that's where I met Lynne, grew up together and went to high school together, and recently celebrated our 40th wedding anniversary. (Applause.)

I explained to a group of folks the other night that if it hadn't been for Eisenhower's election victory, Lynne would have married somebody else. (Laughter.) And she said, right, and now he'd be Vice President of the United States. (Laughter.)

Well, these town halls have gotten to be an important part of the campaign, and of course, we are coming down now -- we've got two weeks to go. It's been a remarkable campaign. Lynne and I have been in 48 states in this election cycle, and seen just some fantastic things all across the country. It's a great privilege to have the opportunity to participate in a national campaign, and we get to travel the breadth and width of the country and meet some fantastic people. And so we're blessed to have been given that opportunity, and we've got two more weeks to go now. I just met with the President this morning before we took off, and it looks to me like November 2nd is going to be a good day for the Bush-Cheney ticket. (Applause.)

AUDIENCE: Four more years! Four more years! Four more years!

THE VICE PRESIDENT: All right! That is good. But what we usually do at these town halls is I make some opening remarks and talk about a subject or two. Then we throw it open to questions, and you'll have an opportunity, if you want to ask a question, make a comment, to do that. I try not to take up too much time with my opening remarks. But I do want to spend a little bit of time on the subject Lynne raised at the outset.

There are obviously a lot of issues that are being debated during the course of the campaign and that we're making decisions on as we pick a President for the next four years. But I think foremost, at least in terms of our concern, my concern, while we're concerned about the economy and focused on that, and education and health care and Social Security and so many other issues, and we can talk about those, as I say, in the Q&A session, what I really want to focus on with that decision we're going to make in two weeks, about who is going to be Commander-in-Chief for the next four years.

And I think it's important to try to put it in some kind of perspective, to recognize that every once in a while in our history, we come to a breakpoint, a watershed, if you will, where we're faced with a new set of threats, where we have to devise a new strategy, sometimes new institutions in order to meet that threat, and put in place a set of policies that oftentimes then will govern and determine the safety and security of the nation for the next 30 or 40 years.

We had one of those periods right after World War II -- after we'd won those great victories in Europe and the Pacific, and within a few years we suddenly were faced with the Cold War that had taken half of Europe, that had acquired nuclear weapons. And we were forced to devise a whole new strategy to cope with the threat that the Soviet Union represented for the rest of the 20th century. And we created a Department of Defense, the CIA we created, North Atlantic Treaty Organization, reconfigured our military forces -- did all those things we had to do to put in place a strategy that was then supported by Republican and Democrat administrations alike for the next 40 years, until we won the Cold War.

I think we're now at another one of those points in history, where we're faced with a new threat -- in this case, the threat of terrorism. The events of 9/11 forced us to think a new way about how we defend the country, about what the threat is out there, and about how we best secure the safety of our children and grandchildren for a good many years to come. And I think we're going to make a decision on the 2nd of November, on election day, that

will have a direct bearing on where we go as a nation on those issues for the next, perhaps -- certainly the next four years, but perhaps far beyond that in terms of putting in place policies that several administrations will follow and support.

What 9/11 represented for us, obviously, was a dramatic break with the past in terms of being the worst attack ever on American soil -- we lost more people that morning than we lost at Pearl Harbor; a sudden recognition that 1970s, the 1980s, and the 1990s men armed with boarding passes and knives could do enormous damage to New York, Washington, and of course, right here in Pennsylvania, where United 93 went in. And it forced the nation, I think, to come to grips with the fact that we were at war, that it was, in fact, the kind of conflict we had not had to deal with before; that it required us to come up with new ways to defend the nation.

We did several things. First of all, of course, was we toughened our defenses here at home. It's been a major thrust. You want to do everything you can to make the United States a tougher target than it was when the terrorists struck us. And of course, we created the Department of Homeland Security, got a great Pennsylvanian in Tom Ridge who's been intimately involved in running that effort, and now runs the department. We passed the Patriot Act to give law enforcement better tools to be able to prosecute terror. We passed Project BioShield which gives new authority to the National Institutes of Health and the FDA to prepare us to defend against an attack with biological weapons. We toughened up all our travel regulations, improved our border security, and so forth.

But having done all that, put all those policies in place, it also was abundantly clear that a good defense isn't enough. And given the nature of the threat -- and the threat, now, remember, is the possibility of terrorists coming into one of our own cities, possibly with weapons more deadly than anything we've ever seen -- not just with knives and boarding passes, but because we know they're doing everything they can to get their hands on deadlier weapons -- on chemical weapons or biological agents, or even a nuclear weapon -- that the ultimate threat is the possibility of their succeeding and getting, say, a biological agent or a nuclear weapon, smuggling it into the United States, into one of our own cities, and raising the specter of being able to kill hundreds of thousands of Americans in very short order. That's the ultimate threat we have to deal with today. And we have to think about that and get our heads around that if we're going to put in place that's adequate to the task of defending against that threat, and defeating it.

So the notion that you can have a perfect defense, that you can erect barriers, we can sit here safe behind our oceans and not have to worry, I think was pretty well put to rest on 9/11. I don't think anybody believes -- or shouldn't -- no should believe that there's such a thing as a perfect defense.

The President made the decision, I think absolutely the correct one, that we had to also go on offense. And that's what we've done. We've taken the full might of the United States and gone after the terrorists wherever we could find them, wherever they train and plan and organize. We've also used the full might of the United States to go after those who sponsor terror. And this was a major departure from the past. In the past, we sort of turned the other cheek with respect to those states that had sponsored terror. But the President said we're never going to do that again, and that, in fact, governments or organizations that provide sanctuary or safe harbor or finances or training or weapons to terrorists and terrorist organizations will be held to account, will be deemed just as guilty of the acts of the terrorists as the terrorists themselves.

That's a big, new departure, a major part of the strategy, and I think the one place where there's been some debate about how committed people are to pursuing that. I don't think our opponents are quite as committed as we are. But I'll come back to that in a minute. So with that proposition -- strong defenses here at home, and aggressively go after the terrorists and after those who sponsor terror overseas, we launched into Afghanistan, took down the old Taliban regime, closed the training camps for some 20,000 terrorists who trained in the late '90s, including some of those who hit us on 9/11, captured or killed hundreds of al Qaeda. And having done all of that, we're now in the midst of standing up a government to replace the one that we took down when we took down the regime of the Taliban.

And this is the fourth step. And the final, vital step in the process, is to establish democratically elected government in Afghanistan, because we think that's the best antidote to terror -- if you can't simply go in and take down the old regime and close the training camps and kill some terrorists and then leave, because what you leave behind is a failed state and they'll simply revert back to the problems they had in the past and breed more terror.

So you've got to stand up a representative, democratically elected government behind what was there previously,

and that's what we're doing. And it's been a remarkable experience. We've got a lot of people wringing their hands, saying, oh, it's tough to do, you can't do it, the Afghans don't understand, they'll never be able to have a democracy there.

But you know what happened, was the Afghans worked hard, they created an interim government under Hamid Karzai, wrote a constitution, registered 10 million people to vote -- nearly half of them women -- for the first time ever -- and a week ago Saturday held the first election in that country in the five thousand year history of Afghanistan. (Applause.)

Now, there's a lot of hard work left to do; nobody should assume it's clear sailing from here on in Afghanistan. We've got to stand up an Afghan national army, and we're doing that. We're spending time and money training and equipping their own security forces, so they can take over responsibilities for their own security in that country. And some days it'll be three yards and a cloud of dust, there's no touchdown pass here that solves all the problems at one time. But they're off to a great start and it's in our interest that they succeed, because that's the best way to guarantee that Afghanistan never again becomes a threat to the United States or a place where people like those who hit us on 9/11 can train and plan and plot against the United States.

In Iraq, somewhat different set of circumstances, obviously. But we went into Iraq because Saddam Hussein had a track record as a sponsor of terror; he had been on the State Department terror-sponsoring list for over 15 years; he provided home to Abu Nidal, to Palestinian Islamic jihad, making \$25,000 payments to the families of suicide bombers; had a relationship with al Qaeda. He also previously had started two wars; he had produced and used weapons of mass destruction in the past; he had used chemical weapons on the Kurds and on the Iranians, back in the late '80s; and a long history as the potential spot that concerned us that Iraq had become the nexus, if you will, between the terrorists, on the one hand, and those deadly technologies, on the other.

Remember, again, what the major threat is we've got to deal with -- that possibility of terrorists smuggling deadly weapons into the United States to use against us. So we went in and we got rid of Saddam Hussein's regime and to everybody's great benefit he is in jail today, which is where he belongs. (Applause.)

And we're working there, as well, now. We've had Iraqis in charge of their own government since late June, a little over 90 days now, but all the ministries are now staffed by Iraqis. We've got a Prime Minister in place on an interim basis, they'll hold elections in January for a constitutional assembly that will write a constitution for Iraq, and by the end of next year should have in place a democratically elected government. We're also working very hard to stand up, train and equip Iraqi security forces so they can take over more responsibility and, ultimately, the total responsibility for guaranteeing the safety and security in Iraq and we'll be able to bring our guys home.

But we don't want to leave too soon; we don't want any artificial deadline there. We don't want to stay any longer than necessary, but we want to stay long enough to make sure we get the job done.

So that's the process we're involved in, in Iraq now. Our adversaries -- the terrorists and the remnants of the old regime obviously will do everything they can to disrupt that timetable as we move toward elections. And they know that if we're ever successful at getting a democratically-elected government in place, with control over the sovereign territory of Iraq, they're toast, they're history, they're finished. They've said as much in communications that we've intercepted between the Zarqawi organization in Iraq and the al Qaeda organization in Afghanistan.

Again, we're making significant process there. But everybody needs to understand these are difficult, hard, challenging tasks. You'll find a lot of people who will tell you that it can't be done. But, again, it's our absolute conviction that the best antidote to terror out there are democratically-elected governments and changing the circumstances on the ground in that part of the world is the best possible guarantee we've got that, long-term, they will -- those areas -- Afghanistan and Iraq -- won't once again become breeding grounds for terror or for the development of weapons of mass destruction.

So that's the chore we've assigned ourselves, that's the strategy we're pursuing. That's the President's strategy; he's absolutely committed to it and I think things are generally going very well, given the difficulty of the task and the length of time we've been at it.

The question, of course, arises, is John Kerry committed to that same course of action? And, of course, it's been awful hard to find out what he is committed to -- (laughter) -- because he's been all over the lot. But the concern I

have is, when I look at Senator Kerry -- and I am not challenging his patriotism, I don't question his patriotism for a minute -- I do challenge his judgment. And like all of us who've been in public life for a long time, you can go back and look at how you've acted under previous circumstances, what kind of votes have you cast as a member of Congress, member of the Senate, where have you been on the issues of the day when we had major national security issues in front of the country -- how did he come down, how did he vote?

And if you look at that record over the years, you'll find that John Kerry does not convey any indication -- at least, there's no indication in his record that I can find -- that he would pursue the kind of aggressive course, with respect to the global war on terror, that I think is required. And why do I say that? Well, if you go back and look at the record. When he ran for Congress the first time, back in the '70s, he ran on the basis that the U.S. should never commit troops without U.N. authorization. In 1984, when he ran for the Senate the first time, he ran on the basis, a platform of cutting or eliminating a great many of our major weapons systems that were vital to winning the Cold War and subsequently then vital to our safety and security of the nation ever since.

In 1993, after the World Trade Center was hit the first time, he was then serving on the Senate Intelligence Committee, and, as best I can tell, didn't attend a meeting, a single meeting of the Senate Intelligence Committee for a year after the bombing -- but then offered up an amendment to cut billions of dollars out of our intelligence budget, an amendment that was so far out that even Ted Kennedy wouldn't support it. That's the record, that's the track record you can find out there if you look at it.

The thing that in some ways is disturbing -- a couple points, I guess I'd mention. You know, he's talked -- in the first debate he talked he talked about a global test, some kind of global test before he'd commit U.S. forces. Well, given the benefit of the doubt for a minute, let's assume there -- I, personally, don't think there ought to be a global test; I think only the President of the United States can make that decision and he should never delegate it to anybody else -- but with respect to this so-called global test, there was a time when we had a situation that sort of seemed to meet all the criteria. And this was the first Gulf crisis, back in 1990 and '91, when I was Secretary of Defense.

And Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait. And the President went to Congress for authorization to use force to kick him out of Kuwait and send him back to Iraq. The United Nations Security Council had specifically voted to authorize the use of force; 34 countries signed up in a coalition to send troops to work alongside us. And we went before the Congress and asked for their approval for the use of force and John Kerry voted "no." It would seem to me every conceivable criteria you could possibly want for the use of U.S. force, and that wasn't good enough for John Kerry.

We have now seen, most recently in the last week -- I guess it was a week ago yesterday -- a piece in the Sunday New York Times Magazine that Senator Kerry had given an interview to a New York Times reporter, so these were direct quotes from him -- that is, it wasn't through some anonymous source. And in there, Senator Kerry was asked what his, sort of his objectives were with respect to the global war on terror. And basically what he said was he'd like to get terror back to the point where it was just viewed as a nuisance once again. That's the word he used. And he compared it to the kind of problem you can sort of manage, as we do in our cities, like illegal gambling and prostitution. That was the analogy he used.

And I asked myself after I read that, I said, well, when was terrorism ever a nuisance? When can you go back prior to 9/11 and start to look at some of the major terrorist events in that period, and you go back four years ago to the attack on the USS Cole, off Yemen, where we lost 17 sailors and nearly lost the ship -- or six years ago, when there was a simultaneous attack on two of our embassies in East Africa and hundreds of people were killed that day, including a number of Americans. Or 1993, when the first attack on the World Trade Center took place. Were those nuisances? Didn't strike me that they were. In 1988, December, when Pan Am 103 was blown out of the skies over Lockerbie, Scotland; or maybe 1983, in Beirut where the spring -- first they set off a truck bomb outside our embassy and killed a lot of people, and then later that fall, a suicide bomber in a truck loaded with explosives drove into the barracks we'd had a lot of our people put up, and killed 241 Marines in 1983 -- over 20 years ago. Not a nuisance.

The whole concept that it could be deemed as a nuisance, or that there's some acceptable level of terror out there we want to manage towards is, in my opinion, the wrong mind-set. That's not the mind-set of somebody who wants to go win the war on terror, who understands this is a global conflict, that not only have they hit us here in the United States, but they've hit in Madrid and Casablanca and Mombassa and Riyadh and Jakarta and Bali and Istanbul and Beslan in Russia. It's a global conflict and that the only way to wrap it up here is victory, you have to

defeat the terrorists. (Applause.)

There's no treaty at the end of the day here. There's not going to be any peace negotiations in Paris, or arms control agreement. Those concepts are irrelevant when you try to apply them to al Qaeda. A handful of the people, motivated by an intense desire to commit jihad, to kill the infidel -- and we're the infidel. And motivated by a fundamentalist, extremist view of their Islamic faith -- it's an extreme of Islam, it's not representative Islam at all. But there isn't any way the concept of deterrence or some kind of a negotiation or containment works with these folks. The only way you can deal with them, basically, is to destroy them and make certain that nobody again is ever tempted to support them or lend them territory for training or sanctuary or anything else.

Now, if we have a good, tough, aggressive policy in this area, it pays dividends, and we saw it two years ago, when -- you may remember when we launched into Iraq, Moammar Ghadafi in Libya, who had been spending millions trying to develop nuclear weapons -- and he had outside help to do it -- called us shortly after we started into, launched into Iraq. He didn't call the United Nations, he contacted George Bush and Tony Blair. And we began negotiations that went for nine months, and then five days after we dug Saddam out of his hole in Northern Iraq, Colonel Ghadafi went public and announced he was going to give up all of his nuclear materials, the uranium, the enrichment capabilities, the weapons design, all that he'd acquired. (Applause.)

And we also, as a result of that, were able to put out of business illegal suppliers network that had provided this nuclear weapons technology not only to Libya, but also to Iran and North Korea. And so that operation has been closed down. All of that a direct byproduct of what we did in Iraq and Afghanistan. The determination of the President of the United States put these issues front and center and make it clear to nations around the world that the United States was not going to sit back and let one of these attacks be mounted against us, we were going to go out -- actively and aggressively -- and defeat our adversaries before they could launch more strikes against us.

I think that's what has to happen for us to win the war on terror. (Applause.)

Now, there's a cost associated with all of this, obviously. It's one of the hardest things that a President ever has to do, and I've seen -- I've seen three of them do it now -- is commit U.S. forces, send them in harm's way. None of what we've done over these last three years would have been possible without the magnificent performance of the men and women in the U.S. Armed Forces. (Applause.) They're the ones doing the heavy lifting, and it's tough for them and it's tough on their families, but we all owe them an enormous debt of gratitude. And it's important for us to recognize when we pick a Commander-in-Chief, you've got to have somebody who's consistent, knows what he thinks and says what he means, who's steadfast in the pursuit of an ideal, who isn't blown off course here by the political pressures of the moment. And I think that's what we've got in George W. Bush as President of the United States. (Applause.)

And difficult as this challenge is now, it's going to be easier for us in the long-term to deal with it now than it is to wait. Because over time we saw what happened in the '80s and '90s. We didn't do anything to deserve the attack of 9/11. But what happened over time was the terrorists grew bolder, they got better organized, they got more sophisticated, in terms of their techniques and their approach and, all of a sudden, bingo, it's 9/11 and we lose 3,000 people in a couple of hours one morning. Waiting, delaying, not acting now, turning the other cheek, going back to the pre-9/11 mind-set, where we treat criminal attacks as some kind of criminal enterprise instead of a war isn't going to help, it's only going to make things worse. And it'll raise the ultimate cost we have to pay to deal with this problem. Far better we deal with it now, while it still is a manageable problem and while we've got a lot of allies out there and while we go deal with it overseas, rather than have to face them here in the streets of our own cities. (Applause.)

So I'm convinced, obviously, that that's the right way to go. I'm convinced that with the superb leadership of the President, the great efforts of the American people and a lot of good folks around the world who are on the side with us, helping us in this battle that we can, in fact, surmount this challenge, just like we have so many others in our history. No reason in the world while we can't do it. But we've got to pick the right man on November 2nd, to make certain that we've got the kind of Commander-in-Chief in the years ahead we can have confidence in, we can have faith in, that our troops can follow willingly, and that our adversaries know they better hang it up because if they don't, defeat is their only other option.

So let me stop at this point. I'm rambled on long enough. We can go to questions now and talk about this subject some more if you want, or move off into any other area. I would urge you to think about questions for Lynne. (Laughter.) She's good at it. But we've got some folks running around here in these attractive orange jerseys --

(laughter) -- they've got microphones, and if you've got a comment you want to make or a question you want to ask, just try to grab them and I'll call on them as they -- as somebody has got something they want to say. So number six.

Q Thank you for coming, Vice President Cheney. The Republican Party has a proud history of fighting injustice. A hundred and four years ago, in its infancy, it faced one of the worst cultural war issues this country has ever faced, which was slavery. And the Republican leaders at the time were saying in no uncertain terms that Dred Scott was a bad established case law decision of the U.S. Supreme Court.

During the recent debates, President Bush was asked if he would unequivocally state that he was against Roe versus Wade, that he would have it overturned. Is your administration willing to say that, yes, it's time to overturn this bad case law, just like it was time to overturn Dred Scott? And what legislative efforts is the GOP going to put forward during the next four years to limit these judicial activists who are taking over our culture and overturning our morals?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Well, the President has made it clear, and I think my record speaks for itself, we both believe very deeply in the pro-life cause. That's been our consistent view and I think you'll find, if you look back on our actions, that that's always been the position we've taken.

We've also said -- the President has also said that what we need to do, since the country is deeply divided on the abortion question, that assuming for now, anyway, you're not going to resolve that basic fundamental issue, that we ought to look for ways where reasonable people on both sides can come together in order to reduce the incidents of abortion. And there, specifically, we believe we've made significant

progress in things like the ban on partial birth abortion, which had been passed twice in the Congress in the '90s, vetoed both times by Bill Clinton. We got it passed again and signed into law by the President, and it's overwhelmingly supported by the American people. (Applause.)

There's the Laci Peterson law which we've also got signed on the books. That's protection for the fetus in the event of the murder of the mother, while she's expecting, would be, in effect, a double crime. And that's on the books as well, too. I might add, John Kerry opposed both those measures, voted against the -- didn't show up for the vote. The situation with respect to the ban on partial birth abortion is now in court, it's being challenged and will now be fought out through the court system.

The best approach, I believe, in terms of judges who want to legislate from the bench -- and I think that is a problem that doesn't relate just to the life question, the issue of abortion -- founded, for example, in this whole issue of whether or not we should be allowed to say "under God" when we pledge allegiance to the flag. Most Americans believe deeply that we ought to be able to do that. The 9th circuit out in California, legislating from the bench, decided we shouldn't be able to do that. And, fortunately, the Supreme Court has now thrown out that basic decision. But we need good, solid judges, judges who will interpret the Constitution; judges who will not take it upon themselves to "legislate from the bench." The President has, in fact, appointed judges exactly like that. We've gotten a good number confirmed; we've also run into a block in the Senate, in that the Democrats set up a filibuster, especially against our appointments to the appellate courts and blocked many good judges from being confirmed -- judges that have 55, 56, 57 votes on the floor, but they need 60 in order to get confirmation. And a number of them have been blocked by that filibuster route. The best way I know to deal with that problem is to elect more Republicans to the United States Senate. (Applause.)

Yes, number two.

Q Yes, thank you for -- so much for coming to Johnstown. It gives us yet one more reason to make sure that you're reelected for four more years in November. (Applause.)

On behalf of all of us in health care, we applaud your efforts on health care tort reform. I wonder if you could tell us the difference between your position on tort reform and that of your opportunity?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: We're for it and they aren't. (Laughter and applause.)

In fairness before they jump all over me, it comes up in several ways, obviously. I've seen it just during the course

of this campaign. I recently was in Minnesota, visiting a company there. It didn't even exist 20 years ago, and now is the second largest producer of piston-driven aircraft in the country; 900 employees, great success story. The cost of their product liability insurance is so high that if he could take the funds that he's using to buy insurance, he could hire 200 more employees -- just one example of the litigation cost that's built into our society.

It's a special problem these days in the medical area. And because of our failure to reform our medical liability system, we are having, I think, devastating consequences in many states. I know Pennsylvania is one. My home state of Wyoming is one. We've got about 20 states now across the country that are at a crisis level. We've lost, I believe, a fourth of our OB/GYN specialists in my home state of Wyoming. We've got people now who have to -- literally have to go out of state to find a specialist, an OB/GYN specialist. The malpractice rates have gone up so much that doctors are either dropping that specialty altogether, or in some cases -- I talked to one OB/GYN the other day who explained that she was no longer taking high-risk patients. She just can't. She has to screen them. That's the place where a lawsuit might be filed if there's some kind of a problem or complication, and if, in fact, she gets hit with a lawsuit, her malpractice rates go up, she's through. She's out of business. So there's now a category of people, high-risk people in that community that won't get OB/GYN services, and they're probably the ones that need it most. But the failure to reform the medical liability system has generated costs maybe as much as a hundred billion dollars in added cost to medicine and health care in the U.S.

It forces doctors to practice defensive medicine, to order up costs that you have to pay for, order up tests you have to pay for because they want to protect against a potential lawsuit. So it has rippled throughout the system. And the way to deal with it is to cap non-economic damages. In other words, people would be compensated, and you ought to have access to the courts when there's a problem here. You don't want to deny that. But you would be fully compensated for any economic damages, but there would be a cap of some kind -- maybe a quarter of a million dollars on non-economic damages. Such a cap has been enacted in California, and it has worked. Their rates there haven't gone up nearly as fast as elsewhere in the country. Another proposal that I think makes sense is to cap the size of the legal fee going to the lawyers. They collect about 50 percent of the total award, and again, in California, they've established a sliding scale. So the larger the award, the smaller the percentage that goes for the trial lawyers. (Applause.)

And those two steps will have -- the Rand Corporation just got through doing an extensive study of the California system, looking at it compared to the rest of the country. And in fact, it has produced some decidedly positive results. My state of Wyoming now has had a special session of the legislature. They've got a constitutional amendment on the ballot for November. They're trying to address the issue, too.

And the federal level, this has come up in legislation that has gotten through the House -- the part capping on economic damages and then blocked in the Senate. We've not been able to get it through the Senate. Senator Kerry has consistently voted against it. Senator Edwards is opposed to it. And what he has suggested -- they've suggested an ap of trying to reform the system by setting up a special panel of trial lawyers to oversee the process. That's what they did, recommended. It's like putting the fox in charge of the chicken coop.

I don't think it will work. I don't think it will produce the desired result. And the President and I believe very deeply in the importance of addressing tort reform, especially in the medical area. And I say, we've gotten great success on the House, and we'll keep working it in the Senate. And all we need is a couple more senators and we can get it through there, too. So we're working on all those issues, but it's a big issue, and it affects not just the health care question in this country, but when you think about how much we build the cost of litigation into everything we manufacture and produce, that adds to the cost of doing business and makes our products less competitive. It's a problem for us. So tort reform, I think is definitely in order.

Somebody over here. Yes, number one.

Q Mr. Vice President, thank you for serving our nation. I'd also like to thank you and your lovely wife for visiting our safe, clean and friendly community. (Applause.)

The fact that I'm one of many numerous physically exceptional people in America who got excited when we learned about stem cell research, what direction is our country going in stem cell research?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Well, we think it has great promise. The President spent a lot of time on this, focusing on it. This is the first administration that has authorized funding for stem cell -- embryonic stem cell research. It had

never before been done. The President sat down and decided to do it, but he thinks it also raises ethical questions in terms of how we do it. And what he specifically after he consulted with a whole range of experts and put together a panel to look at both the medical side of it, and the science side of it, as well as the ethical questions that were raised, was the policy he came up with, which is to provide funding for already established stem cell lines, but not to support with federal funds the destruction of any embryos to produce additional stem cells. (Applause.)

Now, some people have suggested that what we've done is ban embryonic stem cell research. No, absolutely not. We've just said that there are limits to kinds of activities you'll support with federal funds, because we do think there's an ethical question there. But there's no bar on what the private sector wants to do, or what people want to do with respect to private funds in this area. I think it's a sound decision. I understand, and I think many Americans have great hopes for what stem cells may be able to generate in the future by way of solutions for major health problems. My own mother had Parkinson's for 10 years. Stem cell is viewed as one way that we might be able ultimately to get on top of that deadly disease. So I think there is great potential there.

And there's a lot of work being done, as well, with adult stem cells. Right now the limit isn't on the availability of stem cells. It's more on the number of ideas and concepts at this point that are ripe to actually be developed. So we're, I think, in good shape on it. I thought, frankly, the other day what John Edwards suggested when he made his comments about Christopher Reeve, that somehow if John Kerry were President, Christopher Reeve could get up out of his wheelchair and there all of his problems would be solved, I really thought was an inappropriate remark -- especially given -- well, given the false hope it engendered. I thought it was not -- not a careful, statesmanlike statement that you would expect out of a prospective vice presidential candidate. I thought he went overboard. (Applause.)

Somebody back here.

Q Mr. Vice President, welcome. For starters, I am a World War II, Korean, and Vietnam conflict veteran. (Applause.) Thank you very much, I didn't do it for the accolades. (Laughter.)

THE VICE PRESIDENT: You don't look that old.

Q Only to say that a veteran of these three conflicts, I'm proud what I did. I'm proud of what Mr. Kerry did. But I think it is totally irrelevant and does not qualify me to become President of these great United States. (Laughter.)

Now, my question, are we gaining headway in causing or persuading North Korea to follow Moammar Ghadafi in stopping his nuclear weapons pursuit?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: The North Korean problem is one that's right of the President's list. We spend a lot of time on it. The approach we've taken -- North Korea, of course, had developed the ability to reprocess spent fuel and produce plutonium. And they had enough spent fuel so that there was a realistic concern that they might develop nuclear weapons. So in the early '90s, back in '94, the Clinton administration entered into a bilateral framework agreement with North Korea where North Korea supposedly gave up all their nuclear aspirations, and in return for that, the outside world was going to provide them with power and other means of support so they could take care of their requirements. It turned out that they -- the North Koreans almost from the outset violated the agreement. And we discovered after we took over that in fact, Mr. A.Q. Khan, the man who had been supplying the materials to Libya had also supplied uranium enrichment technology to North Korea, and that was a direct violation of the agreement they'd entered into with the Clinton administration.

So we're now at a stage where what we've done is gone out and organized the Chinese, the South Koreans, the Japanese, and the Russians to work with us in six-party talks with North Koreans to basically persuade the North Koreans that their only real option is to give up their aspirations to have nuclear weapons, and that if they want to have normal relationships with the rest of the world, if they want to enter into the normal kind of commercial and trading relationships that they badly need because their economy is an absolute disaster, then they need to make it clear that they are not going to go down this road.

Those conversations are continuing. We don't have a date yet set for the next round of talks, but my guess is there will be talks in the near future, and we'll continue to push hard on it. China is important to this, and Japan, as well -- especially China because they've got that huge border with North Korea, and because they, more than

anybody else, have been involved in supporting and sustaining the regime in Pyongyang, keeping them in business, basically.

But we think we're on the right course. We're trying to resolve this diplomatically. We think that's the way to go about it. But it is something that we've spent a lot of time on and it will be a top priority for us going forward. And thank you for your service, sir. (Applause.)

Somebody over here.

Q I'd like to thank you both for visiting Johnstown again. As a local police officer and a member of the Fraternal Order of Police, I am glad to say that the FOP is endorsing you and President Bush. (Applause.)

Knowing that Senator Kerry misrepresents President Bush's successful hiring of 118,000 new law enforcement officers through the COPS grant, how will you and President Bush continue to build on the local law enforcement?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Well, if you think about the whole homeland security problem, and dealing with the threat, the nation's defenses, if you will, against further terrorist attacks, the front line is -- really our local first responders, our police, fire and medical personnel. If you go back and think about what happened on 9/11, the guys who were in the trenches that day and on the front lines and most intimately involved, and frankly, suffered the most casualties as a result of it were the New York City police and fire departments. And I think as we think now about how we defend the country against this new threat, and the steps we've taken with respect to homeland security, there has been a major effort underway to beef and provide resources from a financial standpoint to make certain that the kind of training that's needed is available, but also to do a much better job than we've ever done before with respect to sharing intelligence. There's always been a bit of a tendency at the federal level when we got intelligence on a threat, there's a natural tendency to want to protect it.

Now, we've established -- Tom Ridge has done this -- a much more effective process by which we actually share information and intelligence from the federal level down to the state and local level so that the people that are out there on the firing line know exactly what we're dealing with and, I think, we've got it all knitted together much better than we ever have in the past.

But we'll continue to make a major resource commitment in this area. We've tripled the amount of money we're spending on homeland security from 2001 to this year, 2004, over \$30 billion now directly on homeland security. And a lot of that will end up in the hands of our first responders and local law enforcement personnel. (Applause.)

MRS. CHENEY: In response to your question, too, that as we get down to these closing days of the campaign, and I see the President really having momentum, and the Kerry folks not, I see a whole lot of this going on -- complete misrepresentation of the President's record. And two instances I wanted to just mention because they kind of make me angry. One is trying to scare people, trying to, first of all, scare young people by saying that if President Bush is elected, there's somehow going to be a draft. President Bush stood 10 feet from Senator Kerry and said that absolutely was not the case. And Senator Kerry knows that the only people who have supported the idea of a draft are in his party, that the Republican Party and -- (applause) -- and this President know that the all-volunteer army is working just as well as we could possibly hope. It has been great, and I've heard Dick talk about this many times, a great sea change from the days when we had a draft. It's the way our country should be defending itself. So you see him trying to scare young people. And then you see him trying to scare seniors. Doesn't this happen every time? It gets down to the end, the Democrats think they're losing, and sure enough, you hear about, well, Social Security is going to go away. Again, the President has said time and again, and is absolutely committed to the idea that we made a promise to people who are on Social Security, we're going to keep that promise. Social Security will be there for them and for those close to retirement age. (Applause.) And just one more sentence, and the President is also going to work to see that maybe it will be there for our kids by establishing personal savings accounts that will part of their lives. So my point -- thank you, Dick.

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Well, all right. (Applause.)

MODERATOR: Excuse me, Mr. Vice President. We only have time for one more question, so the next one will be the final question.

THE VICE PRESIDENT: All right, thanks, Bill. Number one.

Q John Kerry claims to have a plan to add programs and to reform Medicare and health care. But he also says that he's only going to tax the wealthy and not small businesses, and not the people of America. But to me it seems like there's a tax gap, and that you can't get all that money just from the wealthy no matter how much you tax them. Is that plan feasible? Or is it just the wishful thinking of the most liberal senator in Congress? (Laughter and applause.)

THE VICE PRESIDENT: How would you like to travel with me for the next two weeks? (Laughter and applause.)

No, I think you're absolutely right. I think if you add up the proposals and try to assess -- take him at his own word, in terms of wanting to do a couple of things -- one, he wants to tax only the rich, only those over 200,000. And secondly, he wants to cut the deficit in half. Third, he wants -- he's got about \$2.25 trillion worth of new spending in terms of the proposals he's making with respect, especially for example, in the health care area. It just doesn't add up. His budget is about a page or two pages long. The President has got a budget up there that he's had to submit to the Congress. It's a thousand pages long. We lay it all out in great detail, what we'll do program by program. We're doing this now -- it's because we're the incumbents. We submitted that budget back in January, February to the Congress. It's now being debated in the Congress. Some of the appropriations bills have passed; others will be acted upon right after the election. There's a clear difference there in terms of both what we would recommend, but also the fact that the numbers are there, the proposals are there, the work has been done, it's all there for anybody who wants to look at it from the standpoint of the administration. And John Kerry has got another plan. Somebody said the other day -- I guess, it was the President in the debate said, a plan is not a litany of complaints. I thought that was a pretty good argument. (Applause.)

We don't think it will add up. And again, if you look at the Senator's record in the United States for 20 years, he had an opportunity to vote on all these things, he voted 277 times to bust the caps on spending that he now claims he's for, and that he would put in place in order to reduce the overall size of the deficit. So, obviously, I don't think that much of his plan. Some people would say I'm -- yes, whatever it is -- some people would say I'm maybe not an objective source. I think I am. But I think, again, it's the basic fundamental question here of the Senator having tried very hard, both on the domestic side, but also especially on the national security side, to obscure a 20-year record. There is a reason why the National Journal, which is a nonpartisan, independent publication in Washington, does the most thorough research on people's congressional records of just about any publication in the nation. They print these ratings every Congress. They used to rate me when I was there. You can go back and look at my ratings. And in fact, they concluded that John Kerry was the most liberal member of the United States Senate. And another way to look at it is, it took a John Kerry to make Ted Kennedy the most conservative senator from Massachusetts. (Laughter and applause.) But that's the record.

And I think we've got in George Bush, as I say, this is a man I've gotten to know very well. I've been proud to serve alongside him. When he first asked me to take this job, I was in the private sector and had not great desire to return to government. And then I worked with him and watched him, and he finally persuaded me that I was the guy he wanted for the job. And, boy, I don't regret it for a minute. It has been the experience of my life. (Applause.)

But he's done a superb job under extraordinarily difficult circumstances. I think that it's not just a question of earning four more years. It's not -- you don't get voted into office because the voters owe us something. I think what you do is you look at the record that George Bush has established in the last four years, and you look at the record that John Kerry has established, and it's not a close call in terms of who you want as Commander-in-Chief and addressing the biggest issues of the day.

This is the President who went to Washington and said he'd work to reform Medicare, and he has. And 15 months from now, 40 million American seniors will have access for the first time through Medicare to prescription drugs.

He went to Washington and said he was deeply concerned about our public schools, and our education system. And his first legislation he introduced was HR 1 No Child Left Behind, and he has. He's done. He's put it on the books. He got the piece of work done.

He's done more with respect to tax policy than any President in at least 20 years, and the American people today are better able to keep more of what they earn, rather than send it off to Washington. And they do a better job. They make better decisions with it. And we've seen significant economic recovery as the result. And of course, obviously, he's been, I think, exactly the leader we needed to meet this challenge of the global war on terror that is going to be a dominate feature of our lives for some considerable period of time to come.

So we appreciate your support, thank you very much for being here. (Applause.)

END 2:33 P.M. EDT

Return to this article at:

<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2004/10/20041019-2.html>

 [CLICK HERE TO PRINT](#)