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## **Claim vs. Fact: The President on Meet the Press**

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Center for American Progress

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### **Statement of John Podesta, President and CEO, Center for American Progress**

"President Bush wouldn't have agreed to an hour long network interview without a good reason and today he had one: in the span of a week he's faced the dual challenges of a loss of credibility on the war in Iraq and his management of the economy.

"His statement this morning that he would cut the deficit in half is simply laughable. Analyses by independent organizations like Goldman Sachs, the Concord Coalition, the Committee for Economic Development, and Decision Economics all project deficits of about \$5 trillion over the next decade, even assuming a return to strong growth.

"The President's statement that there is 'good momentum' on the job creation front is dishonest: while we are averaging 72,000 new private sector jobs created per month, at that pace, it would not be until May 2007 that this President would have created his first net job. President Bush is well on his way to having the worst job creation record since the Great Depression. His bragging today only served to reinforce his lack of credibility on managing the nation's economy.

"And what the President referred to as a 'word contest' regarding the threat from Iraq is, in fact, his attempt to change the rationale for going to war and rewrite the history of what has occurred. His argument today that Iraq had the capacity to make weapons of mass destruction and pass them into the hands of shadowy terrorist





networks is inconsistent with the intelligence provided to him.

"President Bush sought to restore his credibility today and he clearly failed to do so."

**CLAIM vs. FACT**  
***Pre-War Assertions***

***PRE-WAR INTELLIGENCE HYPE***

**CLAIM:** "I expected to find the weapons [because] I based my decision on the best intelligence possible...The evidence I had was the best possible evidence that he had a weapon."

**FACT - WHITE HOUSE REPEATEDLY WARNED BY INTELLIGENCE COMMUNITY:** The Washington Post reported this weekend, "President Bush and his top advisers ignored many of the caveats and qualifiers included in the classified report on Saddam Hussein's weapons." Specifically, the President made unequivocal statements that Iraq "has got chemical weapons" two months after the DIA concluded that there was "no reliable information on whether Iraq is producing and stockpiling chemical weapons." He said, "Iraq has attempted to purchase high-strength aluminum tubes suitable for nuclear weapons production" three months after the White House received an intelligence report that clearly indicated Department of Energy experts concluded the tubes were not intended to produce uranium enrichment centrifuges. He said, "Saddam Hussein recently sought significant quantities of uranium from Africa," three months after "the CIA sent two memos to the White House in October voicing strong doubts about" the claim. [Sources: WP, 2/7/04; Bush statement, 11/3/02; DIA report, 2002; Bush statement, 1/28/03; NIE, October 2002; WP, 7/23/03; Bush statement, 10/7/02; WP, 9/26/03]

***IGNORING INTELLIGENCE***

**CLAIM:** "We looked at the intelligence."

**FACT – WHITE HOUSE IGNORED INTELLIGENCE WARNINGS:** Knight Ridder reported that CIA officers "said President Bush ignored warnings" that his WMD case was weak. And Greg Thielmann, the Bush State Department's top intelligence official, "said suspicions were presented as fact, and contrary arguments ignored." Knight Ridder later reported, "Senior diplomatic, intelligence and military officials have charged that Bush and his top aides made assertions about Iraq's banned weapons programs and alleged links to al-Qaeda that

weren't supported by credible intelligence, and that they ignored intelligence that didn't support their policies." [Knight-Ridder, 6/13/03; CBS News, 6/7/03; Knight Ridder, 6/28/03]

### ***IGNORING INTERNATIONAL INTELLIGENCE WARNINGS***

**CLAIM:** "The international community thought he had weapons."

**FACT – INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY TOLD WHITE HOUSE THE OPPOSITE:** The IAEA and U.N. both repeatedly told the Administration it had no evidence that Iraq possessed WMD. On 2/15/03, the IAEA said that, "We have to date found no evidence of ongoing prohibited nuclear or nuclear-related activities in Iraq." On 3/7/03 IAEA Director Mohamed ElBaradei said nuclear experts have found "no indication" that Iraq has tried to import high-strength aluminum tubes for centrifuge enrichment of uranium. At the same time, AP reported that "U.N. weapons inspectors have not found any 'smoking guns' in Iraq during their search for weapons WMD." AP also reported, "U.N. weapons inspector Hans Blix said his teams have not uncovered any WMD." [Source: WP, 2/15/03; NY Times, 3/7/03; AP, 1/9/03; AP, 2/14/03]

### ***INFORMING CONGRESS OF INTELLIGENCE CAVEATS***

**CLAIM:** "I went to Congress with the same intelligence. Congress saw the same intelligence I had, and they looked at exactly what I looked at."

**FACT – CONGRESS WAS OUTRAGED AT PRESENTATION BY THE WHITE HOUSE:** The New Republic reported, "Senators were outraged to find that intelligence info given to them omitted the qualifications and countervailing evidence that had characterized the classified version and played up the claims that strengthened the administration's case for war." According to Rep. Paul Kanjorski (D-PA), many House members were only convinced to support the war after the Administration "showed them a photograph of a small, unmanned airplane spraying a liquid in what appeared to be a test for delivering chemical and biological agents," despite the U.S. Air Force telling the Administration it "sharply disputed the notion that Iraq's UAVs were being designed as attack weapons." [Source: The New Republic, 6/30/03; Wilkes Barre Times Leader, 1/6/04; WP, 9/26/03]

### **CLAIM vs. FACT Pre-War Assertions**

## ***PRE-WAR "IMMINENT THREAT" ASSERTION***

**CLAIM:** "I believe it is essential that when we see a threat, we deal with those threats before they become imminent. It's too late if they become imminent."

**FACT – ADMINISTRATION REPEATEDLY CLAIMED IRAQ WAS AN "IMMINENT THREAT":** The Bush Administration repeatedly claimed that Iraq was an imminent threat before the war – not that it would "become imminent." Specifically, White House communications director Dan Bartlett was asked on CNN: "Is [Saddam Hussein] an imminent threat to US interests, either in that part of the world or to Americans right here at home?" Bartlett replied, "Well, of course he is." Similarly, when White House spokesman Ari Fleischer was asked whether America went to war in Iraq because of an imminent threat, he replied, "Absolutely." And White House spokesman Scott McClellan said the reason NATO allies – including the U.S. - should support the defense of one of its members from Iraq was because "this is about an imminent threat." Additionally, the Administration used "immediate," "urgent" and "mortal" to describe the Iraq threat to the United States. [Source: American Progress list, 1/29/04]

## ***BUSH'S THREAT RHETORIC BEFORE THE WAR***

**CLAIM:** "I think, if I might remind you that in my language I called it a grave and gathering threat, but I don't want to get into word contests."

**FACT – BUSH MADE FAR MORE DIRE STATEMENTS BEFORE THE WAR:** While the President did call Iraq a "grave and gathering" threat, that was not all he said. On 11/23/02, he said Iraq posed a "unique and urgent threat." On 1/3/03 he said "Iraq is a threat to any American." On 10/28/02 he said Iraq was "a real and dangerous threat" to America. On 10/2/02 he said, "The Iraqi regime is a threat of unique urgency" and that Iraq posed "a grave threat" to America. [Bush, 11/23/02; Bush; 1/3/03; Bush, 10/28/02; Bush, 10/2/02; Bush, 10/2/02]

## ***SADDAM-AL QAEDA-WMD CONNECTION***

**CLAIM:** "Iraq had the capacity to make a weapon and then let that weapon fall into the hands of a shadowy terrorist network."

**FACT – ASSERTION BELIES PREVIOUS INTELLIGENCE ASSESSMENTS:** This assertion belies the 2002 National Intelligence

Estimate which told the White House that Iraq would most likely only coordinate with Al Qaeda if the U.S. invaded Iraq. As the NYT reported, "[A] CIA assessment said last October: 'Baghdad for now appears to be drawing a line short of conducting terrorist attacks' in the United States." The CIA added that Saddam might order attacks with WMD as 'his last chance to exact vengeance by taking a large number of victims with him.'" Previously, the CIA had told the White House that Iraq "has not provided chemical or biological weapons to Al Qaeda or related terrorist groups." And David Kay himself said, " I found no real connection between WMD and terrorists" in Iraq. [Source: NIE, 2002; NY Times, 1/29/03; NY Times, 2/6/02; NBC News, 1/26/04]

### ***DAVID KAY'S REPORT***

**CLAIM:** "And when David Kay goes in and says we haven't found stockpiles yet, and there's theories as to where the weapons went. They could have been destroyed during the war. Saddam and his henchmen could have destroyed them as we entered into Iraq. They could be hidden. They could have been transported to another country, and we'll find out."

**FACT – KAY ACTUALLY SAID WMD HAD BEEN DESTROYED AFTER 1991:** David Kay didn't say we haven't found the stockpiles of chemical weapons because they are destroyed, hidden or transported to another country. Kay said that they were never produced and hadn't been produced since 1991. As he said, "Multiple sources with varied access and reliability have told ISG that Iraq did not have a large, ongoing, centrally controlled CW program after 1991. Information found to date suggests that Iraq's large-scale capability to develop, produce and fill new CW munitions was reduced - if not entirely destroyed - during Operations Desert Storm and Desert Fox, 13 years of U.N. sanctions and U.N. inspections." [Kay Testimony, 2004]

### **CLAIM vs. FACT Investigative Commissions**

#### ***WMD COMMISSION***

**CLAIM:** "The reason why we gave it time is because we didn't want it to be hurried... it's important that this investigation take its time."

**FACT – OTHER COMMISSIONS SHOW THAT THE REPORT IS BEING DELAYED FOR POLITICS:** Regardless of upcoming Parliamentary elections, British Prime Minister Tony Blair has set up a similar commission to investigate intelligence that will report by July.

Additionally, in 1983 after the terrorist attack on U.S. troops in Beirut, a commission was appointed and completed its report within 2 months.

### **9/11 COMMISSION**

**CLAIM:** "We have given extraordinary cooperation with Chairmen Kean and Hamilton."

**FACT – WHITE HOUSE HAS STONEWALLED THE 9/11 COMMISSION:** According to the Baltimore Sun, President Bush "opposed the outside inquiry" into September 11th. When Congress forced him to relent, Time Magazine reported he tried to choke its funding, noting, "the White House brushed off a request quietly made by 9-11 Commission Chairman Tom Kean" for adequate funding. Then, the NY Times reported, "President Bush declined to commit the White House to turning over highly classified intelligence reports to the independent federal commission investigating the Sept. 11, 2001, terror attacks, despite public threats of a subpoena from the bipartisan panel." And as the Akron Beacon Journal reported last week, "the 9/11 panel did not receive the speedy cooperation it expected. In a preliminary report last summer, the panel's co-chairmen, Thomas Kean, a Republican and former governor of New Jersey, and Lee Hamilton, a Democrat and former congressman from Indiana, complained about lengthy delays in gaining access to critical documents, federal employees and administration officials. They warned the lack of cooperation would prove damaging, ensuring that a full investigation would take that much longer to complete, if at all." [Source: Baltimore Sun, 6/14/02; Time Magazine, 3/26/03; NY Times, 10/27/03; Akron Beacon Journal 2/2/04]

### **CLAIM vs. FACT Economy/Budgetary Priorities**

### **UNEMPLOYMENT**

**CLAIM:** "How about the fact that we are now increasing jobs or the fact that unemployment is now down to 5.6 percent? There was a winter recession and unemployment went up, and now it's heading in the right direction."

**FACT – THE JOB MARKET CONTINUES TO STAGNATE:** Since President Bush's first tax cut in March 2001, the economy has shed more than 2 million jobs. He will be the first president since Herbert Hoover to end his term with a net job loss record. Additionally, the White House Counsel of Economic Advisors pledged that the

President's "jobs and growth" package would create 1,836,000 new jobs by the end of 2003 as part of its pledge to create 5.5 million new jobs by 2004. But the economy added 221,000 jobs since the last tax cut went into effect, meaning the White House has fallen 1,615,000 jobs short of their mark. [Source: EPI, 2/4/2003; Jobwatch.org]

### ***JOB CREATION***

**CLAIM:** "There is good momentum when it comes to the creation of new jobs."

**FACT – STATISTICS SHOW THERE IS NOT GOOD JOB MOMENTUM:** In the last two months we've seen an average of 73,000 private sector jobs created. At this pace, we wouldn't see a new net job created until May 2007. Even beyond the recession and 9/11, just looking at the recovery since November 2001, the current pace of job growth puts us on track to have the worst jobs recovery since the Great Depression.

### ***TAXES***

**CLAIM:** "But what the people must understand is that instead of wondering what to do, I acted, and I acted by cutting the taxes on individuals and small businesses, primarily. And that, itself, has led to this recovery."

**FACT – BUSH TAX CUTS HAD LITTLE EFFECT ON SMALL BUSINESS OWNERS:** The Bush tax cuts had little effect on small business owners. Under the first tax cut, the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities reports, small business owners "would be far more likely to receive no tax reduction whatsoever from the Administration's tax package than to benefit" because only 3.7% of small business owners are affected by the top tax rate cuts that were the bulk of the plan. Under the 2003 tax cut, the Urban Institute-Brookings Tax Policy Center estimates "nearly four out of every five tax filers (79%) with small business income would receive less than the amount" while "52% of people with small business returns would get \$500 or less." [Source: CBPP, 5/3/01; CBPP, 1/21/03]

### ***DEFICIT***

**CLAIM:** "The budget I just proposed to the Congress cuts the deficit in half in five years."

**FACT – WHITE HOUSE ESTIMATES OMIT INEVITABLE COSTS:**

The President's proposal to cut the deficit in half deliberately "omits a number of likely costs" such as the continued cost of Iraq and its own defense spending plans. All told, he is proposing roughly \$3 trillion in new tax cuts and spending, including \$1 trillion to make his tax cuts permanent, \$70 billion for the Alternative Minimum Tax, and \$50 billion more for war in Iraq. The result is that the deficit is predicted to be "in the range of \$500 billion in 2009" – not even near half of what it currently is. [Source: CBPP, 1/16/04; Washington Times, 1/20/04; Reuters, 2/2/04]

***STIMULUS***

**CLAIM:** "The economic stimulus plan that I passed is making a big difference."

**FACT – STUDY SHOWS TAX CUTS BARELY MADE A DENT:** A study by Economy.com attributes only 0.9 percent out of the total 7.2 percent annualized growth in the third quarter to the 2003 tax cut. In other words, the Economy.com analysis suggests that the strength of the economy in the third quarter was not due primarily to the tax cut: Without the tax cut, growth would have still been an impressive 6.3 percent. [Peter Orszag in the New Republic, 11/6/03]

**CLAIM vs. FACT**

**Personal Military Records**

***RELEASE OF RECORDS***

**CLAIM:** Russert – "Would you authorize the release of everything to settle this?" Bush – "Yes, absolutely. We did so in 2000 by the way."

**FACT – RECORDS OFF-LIMITS:** "[A]s Bush has risen in public life over the last several years, Texas military officials have put many of his records off-limits and heavily redacted many other pages." [Source: Boston Globe, 5/23/2000]

***REPORTING FOR DUTY***

**CLAIM:** "I did show up in Alabama."

**FACT – UNIT COMMANDER DOESN'T BELIEVE HE SHOWED UP FOR DUTY:** The Boston Globe reports that Bush's assigned unit commander, William Turnipseed, and his administrative officer,

Kenneth K. Lott, do not believe that Bush reported. In an interview Turnipseed said, "Had he reported in, I would have had some recall, and I do not. I had been in Texas, done my flight training there. If we had had a first lieutenant from Texas, I would have remembered." [Source: Boston Globe, 5/23/2000]

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## **Transcript From Bush's Television Interview**

By Reuters

Sunday 08 February 2004

**WASHINGTON - Following is a transcript of an interview aired on Sunday by NBC's Meet the Press with President Bush. The interviewer was Tim Russert.**

**RUSSERT:** And we are in the Oval Office this morning with the President of the United States. Mr. President, welcome back to Meet The Press.

**BUSH:** Thank you, sir.

**RUSSERT:** On Friday, you announced a committee, commission to look into intelligence failures regarding the Iraq war and our entire intelligence community. You have been reluctant to do that for some time. Why?

**BUSH:** Well, first let me kind of step back and talk about intelligence in general, if I might. Intelligence is a vital part of fighting and winning the war against the terrorists. It is because the war against terrorists is a war against individuals who hide in caves in remote parts of the world, individuals who have these kind of shadowy networks, individuals who deal with rogue nations.

So, we need a good intelligence system. We need really good intelligence. So the commission I set up is to obviously analyze what went right or what went wrong with the Iraqi intelligence. It was kind of lessons learned. But it's really set up to make sure the intelligence services provide as good a product as possible for future presidents as well. This is just a part of analyzing where we are on the war against

terror.

There is a lot of investigations going on about the intelligence service, particularly in the Congress, and that's good as well. The Congress has got the capacity to look at the intelligence gathering without giving away state secrets, and I look forward to all the investigations and looks. Again, I repeat to you, the capacity to have good intelligence means that a president can make good calls about fighting this war on terror.

**RUSSERT:** Prime Minister Blair has set up a similar commission in Great Britain.

**BUSH:** Yeah.

**RUSSERT:** His is going to report back in July. Ours is not going to be until March of 2005, five months after the presidential election.

**BUSH:** Yeah.

**RUSSERT:** Shouldn't the American people have the benefit of the commission before the election?

**BUSH:** Well, the reason why we gave it time is because we didn't want it to be hurried. This is a strategic look, kind of a big picture look about the intelligence gathering capacities of the United States of America, whether it be the capacity to gather intelligence in North Korea or how we've used our intelligence to, for example, learn more information about AQ Kahn. And it's important that this investigation take its time.

Now, look, we are in a political season. I fully understand people saying he's trying to avoid responsibility. There is going to be ample time for the American people to assess whether or not I made good calls, whether or not I used good judgment, whether or not I made the right decision in removing Saddam Hussein from power, and I look forward to that debate, and I look forward to talking to the American people about why I made the decisions I made.

The commission I set up, Tim, is one that will help future presidents understand how best to fight the war on terror, and it's an important part of the kind of lessons learned in Iraq and lessons learned in Afghanistan prior to us going in, lessons learned that we can apply to both Iran and North Korea because we still have a dangerous world. And that's very important for, I think, the people to understand where

I'm coming from to know that this is a dangerous world. I wish it wasn't.

I'm a war president. I make decisions here in the Oval Office in foreign policy matters with war on my mind. Again, I wish it wasn't true, but it is true. And the American people need to know they got a president who sees the world the way it is. And I see dangers that exist, and it's important for us to deal with them.

**RUSSETT:** Will you testify before the commission?

**BUSH:** This commission? You know, I don't testify? I will be glad to visit with them. I will be glad to share with them knowledge. I will be glad to make recommendations, if they ask for some.

I'm interested in getting, I'm interested in making sure the intelligence gathering works well. (Let me) just give you a sense of where I am on the intelligence systems of America. First of all, I strongly believe the CIA is ably led by George Tenet. He comes and briefs me on a regular basis about what he and his analysts see in the world.

**RUSSETT:** His job is not in jeopardy?

**BUSH:** No, not at all, not at all. We've got people working hard in intelligence gathering around the world to get as good an information as possible. Intelligence requires, you know, all kinds of assets to bring information to the President, and I want that intelligence service to be strong, viable, competent, confident, and provide good product to the President so I can make judgment calls.

**RUSSETT:** There is another commission right now looking into Sept. 11.

**BUSH:** Yeah.

**RUSSETT:** Will you testify before that commission?

**BUSH:** We have given extraordinary cooperation with Chairmen Kean and Hamilton. As you know, we made an agreement on what's called "Presidential Daily Briefs," and they could see the information the CIA provided me that is unique, by the way, to have provided what's called the PDB.

**RUSSETT:** Presidential Daily Brief?

**BUSH:** Right. And see, the danger of allowing for information that I get briefed on out in the public arena is that it could mean that the product I receive or future presidents receive is somewhat guarded for fear of it being revealed, and for fear of people saying, Well, you know, we're going to second guess that which you told the President. I need good, honest information, but we have shared this information with both those gentlemen, gentlemen I trust, so they could get a better picture of what took place prior to September the 11th.

And again, we want, I want the truth to be known. I want there to be a full analysis done so that we can better prepare the homeland, for example, against what might occur. And this is all in the context of war, and the more we learn about, you know, what took place in the past, the more we are going to be able to better prepare for future attacks.

**RUSSERT:** Would you submit for questioning, though, to the 9/11 Commission?

**BUSH:** Perhaps, perhaps.

**RUSSERT:** Senator Charles Grassley, a Republican

**BUSH:** Yes.

**RUSSERT:** said he is absolutely convinced we will capture Osama bin Laden before the election.

**BUSH:** Well, I appreciate his optimism. I have no idea whether we will capture or bring him to justice, may be the best way to put it. I know we are on the hunt, and Osama bin Laden is a cold-blooded killer, and he represents the nature of the enemy that we face. These are people that will kill on a moment's notice, and they will kill innocent women and children. And he's hiding, and we're trying to find him. There's I know there is a lot of focus on Iraq, and there should be, but we've got thousands of troops, agents, allies on the hunt, and we are doing a pretty good job of dismantling al Qaeda better than a pretty good job, a very good job. I keep saying in my speeches, two thirds of known al Qaeda leaders have been captured or killed, and that's the truth.

**RUSSERT:** Do you have a pretty good idea where Osama is?

**BUSH:** You know, I'm not going to comment on that.

**RUSSERT:** Let me turn to Iraq. And this is the whole idea of what you based your decision to go to war on.

**BUSH:** Sure, sure.

**RUSSERT:** The night you took the country to war, March 17th, you said this: "Intelligence gathered by this and other governments leaves no doubt that the Iraq regime continues to possess and conceal some of the most lethal weapons ever devised."

**BUSH:** Right.

**RUSSERT:** That apparently is not the case.

**BUSH:** Correct.

**RUSSERT:** How do you respond to critics who say that you brought the nation to war under false pretenses?

**BUSH:** The first of all, I expected to find the weapons. Sitting behind this desk making a very difficult decision of war and peace, and I based my decision on the best intelligence possible, intelligence that had been gathered over the years, intelligence that not only our analysts thought was valid but analysts from other countries thought were valid. And I made a decision based upon that intelligence in the context of the war against terror. In other words, we were attacked, and therefore every threat had to be reanalyzed. Every threat had to be looked at. Every potential harm to America had to be judged in the context of this war on terror. And I made the decision, obviously, to take our case to the international community in the hopes that we could do this, achieve a disarmament of Saddam Hussein peacefully. In other words, we looked at the intelligence. And we remembered the fact that he had used weapons, which meant he had weapons. We knew the fact that he was paying for suicide bombers. We knew the fact he was funding terrorist groups. In other words, he was a dangerous man. And that was the intelligence I was using prior to the run up to this war. This a vital question.

**RUSSERT:** Nothing more important.

**BUSH:** Vital question. And so we, I expected there to be stockpiles of weapons. But David Kay has found the capacity to produce weapons. And when David Kay goes in and says we haven't found stockpiles yet, and there's theories as to where the weapons went.

They could have been destroyed during the war. Saddam and his henchmen could have destroyed them as we entered into Iraq. They could be hidden. They could have been transported to another country, and we'll find out. That's what the Iraqi survey group, let me finish here. But David Kay did report to the American people that Saddam had the capacity to make weapons. Saddam Hussein was dangerous with weapons. Saddam Hussein was dangerous with the ability to make weapons. He was a dangerous man in the dangerous part of the world. And I made the decision to go to the United Nations. By the way, quoting a lot of their data in other words, this is unaccounted for stockpiles that you thought he had because I don't think America can stand by and hope for the best from a madman, and I believe it is essential that when we see a threat, we deal with those threats before they become imminent. It's too late if they become imminent. It's too late in this new kind of war, and so that's why I made the decision I made.

**RUSSERT:** Mr. President, the Director of the CIA said that his briefings had qualifiers and caveats, but when you spoke to the country, you said "there is no doubt." When Vice President Cheney spoke to the country, he said "there is no doubt." Secretary Powell, "no doubt." Secretary Rumsfeld, "no doubt, we know where the weapons are." You said, quote, "The Iraqi regime is a threat of unique urgency." "Saddam Hussein is a threat that we must deal with as quickly as possible." You gave the clear sense that this was an immediate threat that must be dealt with.

**BUSH:** I think, if I might remind you that in my language I called it a grave and gathering threat, but I don't want to get into word contests. But what I do want to share with you is my sentiment at the time. There was no doubt in my mind that Saddam Hussein was a danger to America.

**RUSSERT:** In what way?

**BUSH:** Well, because he had the capacity to have a weapon, make a weapon. We thought he had weapons. The international community thought he had weapons. But he had the capacity to make a weapon and then let that weapon fall into the hands of a shadowy terrorist network. It's important for people to understand the context in which I made a decision here in the Oval Office. I'm dealing with a world in which we have gotten struck by terrorists with airplanes, and we get intelligence saying that there is, you know, we want to harm America. And the worst nightmare scenario for any president is to realize that these kind of terrorist networks had the capacity to arm up with some of these deadly weapons, and then strike us. And the President of the

United States' most solemn responsibility is to keep this country secure. And the man was a threat, and we dealt with him, and we dealt with him because we cannot hope for the best. We can't say, Let's don't deal with Saddam Hussein. Let's hope he changes his stripes, or let's trust in the goodwill of Saddam Hussein. Let's let us, kind of, try to contain him. Containment doesn't work with a man who is a madman. And remember, Tim, he had used weapons against his own people.

**RUSSERT:** But can you launch a preemptive war without ironclad, absolute intelligence that he had weapons of mass destruction?

**BUSH:** Let me take a step back for a second and there is no such thing necessarily in a dictatorial regime of ironclad absolutely solid evidence. The evidence I had was the best possible evidence that he had a weapon.

**RUSSERT:** But it may have been wrong.

**BUSH:** Well, but what wasn't wrong was the fact that he had the ability to make a weapon. That wasn't right.

**RUSSERT:** This is an important point because when you say that he has biological and chemical weapons and unmanned aerial vehicles.

**BUSH:** Which he had.

**RUSSERT:** And they could come and attack the United States, you are saying to the American people: we have to deal now with a man who has these things.

**BUSH:** That's exactly what I said.

**RUSSERT:** And if that's not the case, do you believe if you had gone to the Congress and said he should be removed because he's a threat to his people but I'm not sure he has weapons of mass destruction, Congress would authorize war?

**BUSH:** I went to Congress with the same intelligence, Congress saw the same intelligence I had, and they looked at exactly what I looked at, and they made an informed judgment based upon the information that I had. The same information, by the way, that my predecessor had. And all of us, you know, made this judgment that Saddam Hussein needed to be removed. You mentioned "preemption." If I might, I went to the United Nations and said, Here is

what we know, you know, at this moment, and you need to act. After all, you are the body that issued resolution after resolution after resolution, and he ignored those resolutions.

**BUSH:** So, in other words, when you say "preemption," it almost sounds like, Well, Mr. President, you decided to move. What I decided to do was to go to the international community and see if we could not disarm Saddam Hussein peacefully through international pressure. You remember U.N. Security Council Resolution 1441 clearly stated show us your arms and destroy them, or your programs and destroy them. And we said, there are serious consequences if you don't. That was a unanimous verdict. In other words, the worlds of the U.N. Security Council said we're unanimous and you're a danger. So, it wasn't just me and the United States. The world thought he was dangerous and needed to be disarmed. And, of course, he defied the world once again.

In my judgment, when the United States says there will be serious consequences, and if there isn't serious consequences, it creates adverse consequences. People look at us and say, they don't mean what they say, they are not willing to follow through. And by the way, by clearly stating policy, whether it be in Afghanistan or stating the policy that we expect you, Mr. Saddam Hussein, to disarm, your choice to disarm, but if you don't, there will be serious consequences in following through, it has had positive effects in the world. Libya, for example, there was an positive effect in Libya where Moammar Khaddafy voluntarily disclosed his weapons programs and agreed to dismantle them, and the world is a better place as a result of that. And the world is a safer and better place as a result of Saddam Hussein not being in power.

**RUSSERT:** There is a sense in the country that the intelligence that was given was ambiguous, and that you took it and molded it and shaped it, your opponents have said "hyped" it, and rushed to war.

**BUSH:** Yeah.

**RUSSERT:** And now, in the world, if you, in the future, say we must go into North Korea or we must go into Iran because they have nuclear capability, either this country or the world will say, 'Excuse you, Mr. President, we want it now in hard, cold facts.'

**BUSH:** Well, Tim, I and my team took the intelligence that was available to us and we analyzed it, and it clearly said Saddam Hussein was a threat to America. Now, I know I'm getting repetitive, but I'm just

trying to make sure you understand the context in which I was making decisions. He had used weapons. He had manufactured weapons. He had funded suicide bombers into Israel. He had terrorist connections. In other words, all of those ingredients said to me: Threat. The fundamental question is: Do you deal with the threat once you see it? In the war on terror, how do you deal with threats? I dealt with the threat by taking the case to the world and said, Let's deal with this. We must deal with it now.

I repeat to you what I strongly believe that inaction in Iraq would have emboldened Saddam Hussein. He could have developed a nuclear weapon over time. I'm not saying immediately, but over time which would then have put us in what position? We would have been in a position of blackmail. In other words, you can't rely upon a madman, and he was a madman. You can't rely upon him making rational decisions when it comes to war and peace, and it's too late, in my judgment, when a madman who has got terrorist connections is able to act.

**RUSSETT:** But there are lots of madmen in the world, Fidel Castro

**BUSH:** True.

**RUSSETT:** in Iran, in North Korea, in Burma, and yet we don't go in and take down those governments.

**BUSH:** Correct, and that's a legitimate question as to why we like felt we needed to use force in Iraq and not in North Korea. And the reason why I felt like we needed to use force in Iraq and not in North Korea, because we had run the diplomatic string in Iraq. As a matter of fact, failed diplomacy could embolden Saddam Hussein in the face of this war we were in. In Iraq I mean, in North Korea, excuse me, the diplomacy is just beginning. We are making good progress in North Korea. As I've said in my speeches, every situation requires a different response and a different analysis, and so in Iran there is no question they're in danger, but the international community is now trying to convince Iran to get rid of its nuclear weapons program. And on the Korean peninsula, now the United States and China, along with South Korea and Japan and Russia, are sending a clear message to Kim Jung Il, if you are interested in a different relationship, disclose and destroy your program in a transparent way. In other words, the policy of this administration is to be clear and straightforward and to be realistic about the different threats that we face.

**RUSSETT:** On Iraq, the vice president said, "we would be greeted

as liberators."

**BUSH:** Yeah.

**RUSSERT:** It's now nearly a year, and we are in a very difficult situation. Did we miscalculate how we would be treated and received in Iraq?

**BUSH:** Well, I think we are welcomed in Iraq. I'm not exactly sure, given the tone of your questions, we're not. We are welcomed in Iraq.

**RUSSERT:** Are you surprised by the level and intensity of resistance?

**BUSH:** No, I'm not. And the reason I'm not surprised is because there are people in that part of the world who recognize what a free Iraq will mean in the war on terror. In other words, there are people who desperately want to stop the advance of freedom and democracy because freedom and democracy will be a powerful longterm deterrent to terrorist activities. See, free societies are societies that don't develop weapons of mass terror and don't blackmail the world. If I could share some stories with you about some of the people I have seen from Iraq, the leaders from Iraq, there is no question in my mind that people that I have seen at least are thrilled with the activities we've taken. There is a nervousness about their future, however.

**RUSSERT:** If the Iraqi people choose

**BUSH:** Well, let me finish on the nervousness. I don't want to leave it on that note. There's nervousness because they're not exactly sure what their form of government will look like, and there is, you can understand why. In nine months' time, there's we're now saying, democracy must flourish. And as I recall from my history, it took us quite a while here in the United States, but nevertheless we are making progress. And so, when you see the debate and the discussion about freedom, those are welcoming signs as far as I'm concerned. People are saying how best to develop this system so that we are free and minority rights are protected.

**RUSSERT:** If the Iraqis choose, however, an Islamic extremist regime, would you accept that, and would that be better for the United States than Saddam Hussein?

**BUSH:** They're not going to develop that. And the reason I can say that is because I'm very aware of this basic law they're writing. They're

not going to develop that because right here in the Oval Office I sat down with Mr. Pachachi and Chalabi and al Hakim, people from different parts of the country that have made the firm commitment, that they want a constitution eventually written that recognizes minority rights and freedom of religion.

I remember speaking to Mr. al Hakim here, who is a fellow who has lost 63 family members during the Saddam reign. His brother was one of the people that was assassinated early on in this past year. I expected to see a very bitter person. If 63 members of your family had been killed by a group of people, you would be a little bitter. He obviously was concerned, but he I said, you know, I'm a Methodist, what are my chances of success in your country and your vision? And he said, it's going to be a free society where you can worship freely. This is a Shiia fellow. And my only point to you is these people are committed to a pluralistic society. And it's not going to be easy. The road to democracy is bumpy. It's bumpy particularly because these are folks that have been terrorized, tortured, brutalized by Saddam Hussein.

**RUSSERT:** You do seem to have changed your mind from the 2000 campaign. In a debate, you said, "I don't think our troops ought to be used for what's called 'nation-building.'"

**BUSH:** Yes.

**RUSSERT:** We clearly are involved in nation- building.

**BUSH:** Right. And I also said, let me put it in context. I'm not suggesting you're pulling one of these Washington tricks where you leave half the equation out. But I did say also that our troops must be trained and prepared to fight and win war and, therefore, make peace more possible. And our troops were trained to fight and win war, and we did, and a second phase of the war is now going on. The first phase, of course, was the Tommy Franks troop movement.

**RUSSERT:** But this is nation building.

**BUSH:** Well, it is. That's right, but we're also fighting a war so that they can build a nation. And the war is against terrorists and disgruntled Baathists who are saying we had it good in the past, and therefore we don't want this new society to spring up because they have no faith in democracy, and the terrorists who want to stop the advance of freedom. And if I might, people say to me, 'Okay, you made a judgment as to how to secure America for the short term with

the Taliban and with Saddam Hussein, and we are staying on the hunt for al Qaeda, but what about the long term?' Which is a legitimate question. And the best way to secure America for the long term is to promote freedom and a free society and to encourage democracy. And we are doing so in a part of the world where people say it can't happen, but the long term vision and the long term hope is -- and I believe it's going to happen -- is that a free Iraq will help change the Middle East. You may have heard me say we have a forward strategy of freedom in the Middle East. It's because I believe so strongly that freedom is etched in everybody's heart, I believe that, and I believe this country must continue to lead.

**RUSSERT:** Are you now willing to allow the United Nations to play a central role in the reconstruction?

**BUSH:** In the reconstruction, in spending our money, no. They don't want to spend our money, the money that was appropriated by the United States Congress I think you're talking about, but they will play a vital role in helping the Iraqis determine the proper course to democracy.

**RUSSERT:** In transferring power, the U.N. will play a central role?

**BUSH:** Yeah. I call it a vital role because there is a lot of roles being played by different players, but the U.N. will play and this role is a very important role. It says to the Iraqi citizens who again are trying to figure out the right balance as they head toward this new democracy after years of being enslaved by a tyrant -- how best to do this, and I think it's very helpful to have the stamp of the international community be placed upon the political process. In terms of reconstruction, of course we want the international community to participate, and they are. There is a lot of participation by the international community in restoring this infrastructure of the country of Iraq that Saddam Hussein had just totally, I shouldn't say "totally," but destroyed a lot of.

**RUSSERT:** Before we take a break, now that we have determined there are probably not these stockpiles of weapons that we had thought, and the primary rationale for the war had been to disarm Saddam Hussein, Paul Wolfowitz, the Deputy Defense Secretary, said that you had settled on weapons of mass destruction as an issue we could agree on, but there were three. "One was the weapons of mass destruction, the second is the support for terrorism, and third is Saddam's criminal treatment of his Iraqi people."

He said the "third one by itself is a reason to help Iraqis but it's not a

reason to put American kids' lives at risk, certainly not on the scale we did."

**BUSH:** Um,hmm.

**RUSSERT:** Now looking back, in your mind, is it worth the loss of 530 American lives and 3,000 injuries and woundings simply to remove Saddam Hussein, even though there were no weapons of mass destruction?

**BUSH:** Every life is precious. Every person that is willing to sacrifice for this country deserves our praise, and yes.

**RUSSERT:** But

**BUSH:** Let me finish.

**RUSSERT:** Please.

**BUSH:** It's essential that I explain this properly to the parents of those who lost their lives. Saddam Hussein was dangerous, and I'm not gonna leave him in power and trust a madman. He's a dangerous man. He had the ability to make weapons at the very minimum. For the parents of the soldiers who have fallen who are listening, David Kay, the weapons inspector, came back and said, "In many ways Iraq was more dangerous than we thought." We are in a war against these terrorists who will bring great harm to America, and I've asked these young ones to sacrifice for that. A free Iraq will change the world. It's historic times. A free Iraq will make it easier for other children in our own country to grow up in a safer world because in the Middle East is where you find the hatred and violence that enables the enemy to recruit its killers.

And, Tim, as you can tell, I've got a foreign policy that is one that believes America has a responsibility in this world to lead, a responsibility to lead in the war against terror, a responsibility to speak clearly about the threats that we all face, a responsibility to promote freedom, to free people from the clutches of barbaric people such as Saddam Hussein who tortured, mutilated, there were mass graves that we have found, a responsibility to fight AIDS, the pandemic of AIDS, and to feed the hungry. We have a responsibility. To me that is history's call to America. I accept the call and will continue to lead in that direction.

**RUSSERT:** In light of not finding the weapons of mass destruction,

do you believe the war in Iraq is a war of choice or a war of necessity?

**BUSH:** I think that's an interesting question. Please elaborate on that a little bit. A war of choice or a war of necessity? It's a war of necessity. We-- in my judgment, we had no choice when we look at the intelligence I looked at that says the man was a threat. And you know, we will find out about the weapons of mass destruction that we all thought were there. That's part of the Iraqi survey group and the group I put together to look at.

But again, I repeat to you, I don't want to sound like a broken record, but David Kay, who is the man who led the Iraqi survey group, who has now returned with an interim report, clearly said that the place was a dangerous place. When asked if President Bush had done, had made the right decision, he said yes. In other words, the evidence we have uncovered thus far says we had no choice.

**RUSSERT:** We are going to take a quick break.

**BUSH:** Thank you.

**RUSSERT:** We are going to come back and talk to the President a lot more about our world and our economy here at home and the presidential election of 2004. We are in the Oval Office with President George W. Bush. (Commercial)

**RUSSERT:** And we are back in the Oval Office talking to the President of the United States. Mr. President, this campaign is fully engaged. The chairman of the Democratic National Committee, Terence McAuliffe, said this last week: "I look forward to that debate when John Kerry, a war hero with a chest full of medals, is standing next to George Bush, a man who was AWOL in the Alabama National Guard. He didn't show up when he should have showed up."

**BUSH:** Yeah.

**RUSSERT:** How do you respond?

**BUSH:** Political season is here. I served in the National Guard. I flew F-102 aircraft. I got an honorable discharge. I've heard this, I've heard this ever since I started running for office. I put in my time, proudly so. I would be careful to not denigrate the Guard. It's fine to go after me, which I expect the other side will do. I wouldn't denigrate service to the Guard, though, and the reason I wouldn't, is because

there are a lot of really fine people who served in the National Guard and who are serving in the National Guard today in Iraq.

**RUSSERT:** The Boston Globe and the Associated Press have gone through some of their records and said there's no evidence that you reported to duty in Alabama during the summer and fall of 1972.

**BUSH:** Yeah, they're just wrong. There may be no evidence, but I did report; otherwise, I wouldn't have been honorably discharged. In other words, you don't just say "I did something" without there being verification. Military doesn't work that way. I got an honorable discharge, and I did show up in Alabama.

**RUSSERT:** You were allowed to leave eight months before your term expired. Was there a reason?

**BUSH:** Right. Well, I was going to Harvard Business School and worked it out with the military.

**RUSSERT:** When allegations were made about John McCain or Wesley Clark on their military records, they opened up their entire files. Would you agree to do that?

**BUSH:** Yeah. Listen, these files, I mean, people have been looking for these files for a long period of time, trust me, and starting in the 1994 campaign for governor. And I can assure you in the year 2000 people were looking for those files as well. Probably you were. And absolutely. I mean.

**RUSSERT:** But would you allow pay stubs, tax records, anything to show that you were serving during that period?

**BUSH:** Yeah. If we still have them, but you know, the records are kept in Colorado, as I understand, and they scoured the records. And I'm just telling you, I did my duty, and it's politics, you know, to kind of ascribe all kinds of motives to me. But I have been through it before. I'm used to it. What I don't like is when people say serving in the Guard may not be a true service.

**RUSSERT:** Would you authorize the release of everything to settle this?

**BUSH:** Yes, absolutely. We did so in 2000, by the way.

**RUSSERT:** Were you favor of the war in Vietnam?

**BUSH:** I supported my government. I did. And would have gone had my unit been called up, by the way.

**RUSSERT:** But you didn't volunteer or enlist to go.

**BUSH:** No, I didn't. You're right. I served. I flew fighters and enjoyed it, and we provided a service to our country. In those days we had what was called "Air Defense Command," and it was part of the air defense command system. The thing about the Vietnam War that troubles me as I look back was it was a political war. We had politicians making military decisions, and it is lessons that any president must learn, and that is to set the goal and the objective and allow the military to come up with the plans to achieve that objective. And those are essential lessons to be learned from the Vietnam War.

**RUSSERT:** Let me turn to the economy.

**BUSH:** Yes.

**RUSSERT:** And this is one of my charts that I would like to show you.

**BUSH:** I was hoping to see one of them.

**RUSSERT:** The Bush-Cheney first three years, the unemployment rate has gone up 33 percent, there has been a loss of 2.2 million jobs. We've gone from a \$281 billion surplus to a \$521 billion deficit. The debt has gone from 5.7 trillion, to \$7 trillion, up 23 percent. Based on that record, why should the American people rehire you as CEO?

**BUSH:** Sure, because I have been the President during a time of tremendous stress on our economy and made the decisions necessary to lead that would enhance recovery. We'll review the bidding here. The stock market started to decline in March of 2000. That was the first sign that things were troubled. The recession started upon my arrival. It could have been some say February, some say March, some speculate maybe earlier it started, but nevertheless it happened as we showed up here. The attacks on our country affected our economy. Corporate scandals affected the confidence of people and therefore affected the economy. My decision on Iraq, this kind of march to war, affected the economy, but we have been through a lot. And what those

numbers show is the fact we have been through a lot.

But what the people must understand is that instead of wondering what to do, I acted, and I acted by cutting the taxes on individuals and small businesses, primarily. And that, itself, has led to this recovery. So, you show that the numbers kind of, I'm not suggesting the chart only shows the bad numbers, but how about the fact that we are now increasing jobs or the fact that unemployment is now down to 5.6 percent? There was a winter recession and unemployment went up, and now it's heading in the right direction. The economic stimulus plan that I passed, or I asked the Congress to pass, and I worked with Congress to pass, is making a big difference.

**RUSSERT:** But when you proposed your first tax cut in 2001, you said this was going to generate 800,000 new jobs. Your tax cut of 2003, create a million new jobs. That has not happened.

**BUSH:** Well, it's happening. It's happening. And there is good momentum when it comes to the creation of new jobs. Again, we have been through a lot. This economy has been through a lot, which is why I'm so optimistic about the future because I know what we have been through. And I look forward to debate on the economy because I think one of those things that's very important is that the entrepreneurial spirit of this country be strong and the small business sector be strong. And the policies I have laid out enhance entrepreneurship, they encourage small business creation, and I think this economy is coming around just right, frankly.

**RUSSERT:** The General Accounting Office, which are the nation's auditors

**BUSH:** Yeah.

**RUSSERT:** have done a study of our finances.

**BUSH:** Um,hmm.

**RUSSERT:** And this is what your legacy will be to the next generation. It says that our "current fiscal policy is unsustainable." They did a computer simulation that shows that balancing the budget in 2040 could require either cutting total Federal spending in half or doubling Federal taxes.

**BUSH:** Um,hmm.

**RUSSERT:** How, why, as a fiscal conservative as you like to call yourself, would you allow a \$500 billion deficit and this kind of deficit disaster?

**BUSH:** Sure. The budget I just proposed to the Congress cuts the deficit in half in five years. Now, I don't know what the assumptions are in the GAO report, but I do know that if Congress is wise with the people's money, we can cut the deficit in half. And at that point in time, as a percentage of GDP, the deficit will be relatively low. I agree with the assessment that we've got some long-term financial issues we must look at, and that's one reason I asked Congress to deal with Medicare. I strongly felt that if we didn't have an element of competition, that if we weren't modern with the Medicare program, if we didn't incorporate what's called "health savings accounts" to encourage Americans to take more control over their healthcare decisions, we would have even a worse financial picture in the long run. I believe Medicare is going to not only make the system work better for seniors but is going to help the fiscal situation of our long-term projection.

We got to deal with Social Security as well. As you know, these entitlement programs need to be dealt with. We are dealing with some entitlement programs right now in the Congress. The highway bill. It's going to be an interesting test of fiscal discipline on both sides of the aisle. The Senate's is about \$370, as I understand, \$370 billion; the House is at less than that but over \$300 billion. And as you know, the budget I propose is about \$256 billion.

**RUSSERT:** But your base conservatives, and listen to Rush Limbaugh, the Heritage Foundation, CATO Institute, they're all saying you are the biggest spender in American history.

**BUSH:** Well, they're wrong.

**RUSSERT:** Mr. President

**BUSH:** If you look at the appropriations bills that were passed under my watch, in the last year of President Clinton, discretionary spending was up 15 percent, and ours have steadily declined. And the other thing that I think it's important for people who watch the expenditures side of the equation is to understand we are at war, Tim, and any time you commit your troops into harm's way, they must have the best equipment, the best training, and the best possible pay. That's where we owe it to their loved ones.

**RUSSERT:** That's a very important point. Every president since the Civil War who has gone to war has raised taxes, not cut them.

**BUSH:** Yeah.

**RUSSERT:** Raised to pay for it. Why not say, I will not cut taxes any more until we have balanced the budget? If our situation is so precious and delicate because of the war, why do you keep cutting taxes and draining money from the treasury?

**BUSH:** Well, because I believe that the best way to stimulate economic growth is to let people keep more of their own money. And I believe that if you raise taxes as the economy is beginning to recover from really tough times, you will slow down economic growth. You will make it harder. See, I'm more worried about the fellow looking for the job. That's what I'm worried about. I want people working. I want people to find work. And so, when we stimulate the economy, it's more likely that person is going to find work. And the best way to stimulate the economy is not to raise taxes but to hold the low taxes down.

**RUSSERT:** How about no more tax cuts until the budget is balanced?

**BUSH:** Well, that's a hypothetical question which I can't answer to you because I don't know how strong the economy is going to be. I mean, the President must keep all options on the table, but I do know that raising the child, lowering the child credit thereby raising taxes on working families does not make sense when the economy is recovering, and that's exactly what some of them are calling for up on Capitol Hill. They want to raise taxes of the families with children, they want to increase the marriage penalty. They want to get rid of those taxes on small businesses that are encouraging the stimulation of new job creation, and I'm not going to have any of it.

**RUSSERT:** We are going to take another quick break. We will be right back with more of our conversation with the President in the Oval Office, right after this. (Commercial)

**RUSSERT:** And we are back. Mr. President, last time you were on the show you said that you wanted to change the tone in the nation.

**BUSH:** Yes.

**RUSSERT:** This is Time magazine: "Love Him or Hate Him: Why

George Bush arouses such passion and what it means for the country."

**BUSH:** Yes.

**RUSSERT:** Tom Daschle, the Democratic Leader in the Senate, said that you've changed the tone for the worse; that it's more acrimonious, more confrontations, that you are the most partisan political president he's ever worked with. Our exit polls of primary voters, not just Democrats but Independents in South Carolina and New Hampshire, more than 70 percent of them said they are angry or dissatisfied with you, and they point to this whole idea of being a uniter as opposed to a divider. Why do you think you are perceived as such a divider?

**BUSH:** Gosh, I don't know, because I'm working hard to unite the country. As a matter of fact, it's the hardest part of being the president. I was successful as the Governor of Texas for bringing people together for the common good, and I must tell you it's tough here in Washington, and frankly it's the biggest disappointment that I've had so far of coming to Washington. I'm not blaming anybody. It's just the environment here is such that it is difficult to find common ground. I'll give you a classic case: the Medicare bill. The Medicare bill was a tough vote, but the Medicare bill is a bill that a lot of people could have signed on to and had it not been for kind of the sense of, well, 'Bush might win, we might lose,' you know, or 'Bush might lose, we might win' kind of attitude. And but I will continue to work hard to unite the country. I don't speak ill of anybody in the process here. I think if you went back and looked at my comments, you will see I don't attack. I don't hold up people. I talk about what I believe in, and I lead, and maybe perhaps I believe so strongly in what we are doing around the world or doing here at home.

**RUSSERT:** But around the world, in Europe, favorable ratings, unfavorable ratings, 70 in Germany, 67 in France.

**BUSH:** But you know, Tim, that

**RUSSERT:** Why do people hold you with such contempt?

**BUSH:** Heck, I don't know, Ronald Reagan was unpopular in Europe when he was President, according to Jose Maria Aznar. And I said, 'You know something?' He said to me, he said, 'You're nearly as unpopular as Ronald Reagan was.' I said, 'so, first of all, I'm keeping pretty good company.' I think that people when you do hard things,

when you ask hard things of people, it can create tensions. And heck, I don't know why people do it. I'll tell you, though, I'm not going to change, see? I'm not trying to accommodate, I won't change my philosophy or my point of view. I believe I owe it to the American people to say what I'm going to do and do it, and to speak as clearly as I can, try to articulate as best I can why I make decisions I make, but I'm not going to change because of polls. That's just not my nature.

**RUSSERT:** Two polls out this weekend show you --

**BUSH:** See there, you're quoting polls.

**RUSSERT:** You're trailing John Kerry in both U.S.A. Today and Newsweek polls by seven and five points.

**BUSH:** Yeah.

**RUSSERT:** This is what John Kerry had to say last year. He said that his colleagues are appalled at the quote "President's lack of knowledge. They've managed him the same way they've managed Ronald Reagan. They send him out to the press for one event a day. They put him in a brown jacket and jeans and get him to move some hay or move a truck, and all of a sudden he's the Marlboro Man. I know this guy. He was two years behind me at Yale. I knew him, and he's still the same guy." Did you know him at Yale?

**BUSH:** No.

**RUSSERT:** How do you respond to that?

**BUSH:** Politics. I mean, this is, you know, if you close your eyes and listen carefully to what you just said, it sounds like the year 2000 all over again.

**RUSSERT:** You were both in Skull and Bones, the secret society.

**BUSH:** It's so secret we can't talk about it.

**RUSSERT:** What does that mean for America? The conspiracy theorists are going to go wild.

**BUSH:** I'm sure they are. I don't know. I haven't seen the (unintel) yet. (Laughs)

**RUSSERT:** Number 322.

**BUSH:** First of all, he's not the nominee, and I look forward

**RUSSERT:** Are you prepared to lose?

**BUSH:** No, I'm not going to lose.

**RUSSERT:** If you did, what would you do?

**BUSH:** Well, I don't plan on losing. I have got a vision for what I want to do for the country. See, I know exactly where I want to lead. I want to lead us, I want to lead this world toward more peace and freedom. I want to lead this great country to work with others to change the world in positive ways, particularly as we fight the war on terror, and we got changing times here in America, too.

**RUSSERT:** Biggest issues in the upcoming campaign?

**BUSH:** Who can properly use American power in a way to make the world a better place, and who understands that the true strength of this country is the hearts and souls of the American citizens, who understands times are changing and how best to have policy reflect those times. And I look forward to a good campaign. I know exactly where I want to lead the country. I have shown the American people I can lead. I have shown the American people I can sit here in the Oval Office when times are tough and be steady and make good decisions, and I look forward to articulating what I want to do the next four years if I'm fortunate enough to be their president.

**RUSSERT:** Mr. President, we thank you for sharing your views, and I hope we could come back and talk about issues during the course of the campaign.

**BUSH:** Thank you, Tim.

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