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Laura Bush

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Thank you all. Thank you so much and thank you, George. I like being introduced by the President of the United States. And Barbara and Jenna, you were great. We are so proud of you both. I also want to recognize the best father and mother-in-law anyone could ever ask for: President Bush and Barbara Bush. And my husband's brothers and sister who have become my brothers and sister too. Thank you all; thanks so much for being here. And watching tonight from her home in Midland, Texas, my mother, Jenna Welch. Hi mom! And Vice President Cheney and Lynn and all the Cheney family, thank you all so much; thanks for everything you do. And I want to thank everybody here tonight; thank you all very much for the wonderful privilege you have given me and my husband of serving our great country.

Our lives have been enriched by meeting so many of our fellow Americans. We've visited your communities; we've witnessed your decency, your kindness and your character. I am enjoying this campaign. It has reminded me of our very first one, 25 years ago. George and I were newlyweds and he was running for Congress. Our transportation wasn't quite as fancy back then - an Oldsmobile Cutlass, and George was behind the wheel. Even then, he was always on time and he knew where he wanted to go. You learn a lot about your husband when you spend that much time in a car with him. By the end of the campaign, he had even convinced *me* to vote for him.

This time I don't need any convincing.



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I am so proud of the way George has led our country with strength and conviction. Tonight, I want to try to answer the question that I believe many people would ask me if we sat down for a cup of coffee or if we ran into each other at the store: You know him better than anyone -- you've seen things no one else has seen -- why do you think we should re-elect your husband as President?

As you might imagine, I have a lot to say about that.

I could talk about my passion: education. At every school we visit, the students are so eager. Last fall, the President and I walked into an elementary school in Hawaii, and a little 2nd-grader came out to welcome us and bellowed, "George Washington!" Close, just the wrong George W."

When my husband took office, too many schools were leaving too many children behind, so he worked with Congress to pass sweeping education reform. The No Child Left Behind Act provides historic levels of funding with an unprecedented commitment to higher standards, strong accountability and proven methods of instruction. We are determined to provide a quality education for every child in America.

I could talk about the small business owners and entrepreneurs who are now creating most of the new jobs in our country -- women like Carmella Chaifos -- the only woman to own a tow truck company in all of Iowa. The President's tax relief helped Carmella to buy the business, and modernize her fleet, and expand her operations. Carmella is living proof of what she told me. She said: "If you're determined and you want to work hard, you can do anything you want to. That's the beautiful thing about America."

I could talk about health care. For years, leaders in both parties said we should provide prescription drug coverage in Medicare. George was able to bring Republicans and Democrats together to get it done.

I could talk about the fact that my husband is the first President to provide federal funding for stem cell research. And he did it in a principled way, allowing science to explore its potential while respecting the dignity of human life.

I could talk about the recent record increase in home ownership. Home ownership in America, especially minority home ownership, is at an all time high.

All of these issues are important. But we are living in the midst of the most historic struggle my generation has ever known. The stakes are so high. So I want to talk about the issue that I believe is most important for my own daughters, for all our families, and for our future: George's work to protect our country and defeat terror so that all children can grow up in a more peaceful world.



As we gather in this hall and around our television sets tonight, Joshua Crane stands watch aboard the USS John C. Stennis. His brothers, Matthew and Nicholas, stand watch near Fallujah. At home in Colorado, their mother, Cindy, stands watch too -- with worry, and prayer. She told me all three of her sons enlisted after September 11, because they recognized the threat to our country. Our nation is grateful to all the men and women of our armed forces who are standing guard on the front lines of freedom.

A dad whose wife is deployed in Iraq recently wrote about what he is learning as he struggles to rear his three children alone. "I have ruined at least three loads of laundry," he said, "Once you turn everything pink, it stays pink." He goes on: "I have learned what our soldiers' wives have known for generations: hope and grief and perseverance."

This time of war has been a time of great hardship for our military families. The President and I want all our men and women in uniform and their wives and husbands, mothers and fathers, sons and daughters, to know we appreciate their sacrifice. We know it will mean a more peaceful future for our children and grandchildren.

No American President ever wants to go to war. Abraham Lincoln didn't want to go to war, but he knew saving the union required it. Franklin Roosevelt didn't want to go to war, but he knew defeating tyranny demanded it. And my husband didn't want to go to war, but he knew the safety and security of America and the world depended on it.

I remember some very quiet nights at the dinner table. George was weighing grim scenarios and ominous intelligence about potentially even more devastating attacks. I listened many nights as George talked with foreign leaders on the phone, or in our living room, or at our ranch in Crawford. I remember an intense weekend at Camp David. George and Prime Minister Tony Blair were discussing the threat from Saddam Hussein. And I remember sitting in the window of the White House, watching as my husband walked on the lawn below. I knew he was wrestling with these agonizing decisions that would have such profound consequence for so many lives and for the future of our world.

And I was there when my husband had to decide. Once again, as in our parents' generation, America had to make the tough choices, the hard decisions, and lead the world toward greater security and freedom.

I wasn't born when my father went to World War II. Like so many of our greatest generation, he is now gone, lost to Alzheimer's nine years ago. He served in the US Army in Europe for almost three years, and helped liberate Nordhausen, one of the concentration camps. You can imagine his horror at what he found there. The methods of the terrorists we face today are different, but my father would know this struggle.

Our parents' generation confronted tyranny and liberated millions. As we do the hard work of confronting today's threat, we can also be proud that 50 million more men, women and children live in freedom thanks to the United States of America and our allies.



After years of being treated as virtual prisoners in their homes by the Taliban, the women of Afghanistan are going back to work. After being denied an education, even the chance to learn to read, the little girls in Afghanistan are now in school. Almost every eligible voter -- over ten million Afghan citizens -- have registered to vote in this fall's Presidential election. More than 40 percent of them women. And wasn't it wonderful to watch the Olympics and see that beautiful Afghan sprinter race in long pants and a t-shirt, exercising her new freedom while respecting the traditions of her country.

I recently met a young Iraqi woman. She is one of the new Iraqi Fulbright scholars, studying in the United States. She survived horrific ordeals, including the gassing of her village by Saddam Hussein. She told me that, when people look at Iraq, what they don't see is that Iraq is a country of 25 million people, each with their own hope.

As we watch the people of Iraq and Afghanistan take the first steps to build free countries, I am reminded of what Vaclav Havel once told me. Vaclav Havel -- playwright, intellectual, freedom fighter, political prisoner, then President of the Czech Republic -- said "Laura, you know, democracy is hard: it requires the participation of everybody." I think of how long it took us in our country, even though we were given such a perfect document by our founders. It took almost 100 years after the founders declared that all men are created equal to abolish slavery -- and not until 84 years ago this month did American women get the right to vote. Our nation has not always lived up to its ideals -- yet those ideals have never ceased to guide us. They expose our flaws, and lead us to mend them. We are the beneficiaries of the work of the generations before us and it is each generation's responsibility to continue that work.

These last three years since September 11 have been difficult years in our country's history, years that have demanded the hope, grief and perseverance that our soldier's husband wrote about. We've learned some lessons we didn't want to know -- that our country is more vulnerable than we thought, that some people hate us because we stand for liberty, religious freedom and tolerance. But we've also been heartened to discover that we are also braver than we thought, stronger and more generous.

These have been years of change for our family as well. Our girls went off to college and graduated, and now they are back home. We are so happy they are campaigning with us this fall and so proud they will be pursuing their own careers soon. My mother moved out of my childhood home and into a retirement community. We lost our beloved dog, Spotty, and had our hearts warmed by the antics of Barney.

People ask me all the time whether George has changed. He's a little grayer -- and of course, he has learned and grown as we all have. But he's still the same person I met at a backyard barbecue in Midland, Texas and married three months later. And you've come to know many of the same things that I know about him. He'll always tell you what he really thinks. You can count on him, especially in a crisis. His friends don't change -- and neither do his values. He has boundless energy and enthusiasm for his job, and for life itself. He treats every person he meets with dignity and respect-- the same dignity and respect he has for the office he holds.



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And he's a loving man, with a big heart. I've seen tears as he has hugged families who've lost loved ones. I've seen him return the salute of soldiers wounded in battle. And then, being George, he invites them to come visit us at the White House. And they've come, bringing an infectious spirit of uniquely American confidence that we are doing the right thing and that our future will be better because of our actions today.

Many of my generation remember growing up at the height of the Cold War, hiding under desks during civil defense drills in case the communists attacked us. And now, when parents ask me -- What should we tell our children? -- I think about those desks. We need to reassure our children that our police and firemen and military and intelligence workers are doing everything possible to keep them safe. We need to remind them that most people in the world are good. And we need to explain that, because of strong American leadership in the past, we don't hide under our desks anymore. Because of President Bush's leadership and the bravery of our men and women in uniform, I believe our children will grow up in a world where today's terror threats have also become a thing of the past.

These are also years of hope for our country and our people. We have great confidence in our ability to overcome challenges. We have gained a new appreciation of the many blessings of America, and been reminded of our responsibilities to the country that we love.

George and I grew up in West Texas, where the sky seems endless and so do the possibilities. He brings that optimism, that sense of purpose, that certainty that a better day is before us to his job every day -- and with your help, he'll do it for four more years. These are times that require an especially strong and determined leader. And I'm proud that my husband is that kind of leader.

Thank you, God bless you and God bless America.