

## I Saw Bush

Monday, August 9<sup>th</sup>, 2004, I took a day of vacation and drove three hours north to the Federally-Occupied-Zone of Virginia, NoVa, to see President George W. Bush. I was happy to take the invitation from the Republican Party of Virginia. The only other time I saw a President in the flesh was when Richard Nixon visited West Point. Nixon was an odd-looking man with a huge head. President Bush looked like my neighbor, or anyone's neighbor, who is vigorous at the end of his 50s. He sounded far better than his critics cavil.

I've seen a lot of political theater as a Party activist and official. President Bush was more genuine and less arrogant than many of the grandees of the Virginia General Assembly. His eye contact was steady and sure. His grin was unaffected. His humor was very quick and natural.

President Bush spoke without notes freely and forcefully. Yet, his speaking was, well, Bushian. I listened and graded with the mind of a former professor and the eyes and ears of a grassroots political advisor. If he were more fluent with every word, his speech would be the practiced glibness of professional politician stumpese. Quite the contrary, occasional sentences would be suspended in mid-air waiting for the thought to complete and bring the words for their conclusion. I liked it. It showed he was actually thinking and speaking to this audience and not repeating rehearsed lines. Only his drumbeat on multi-syllabic words seemed off to my affinity for melodic Southern speech.

Yet, from my time in the Army, I see that President Bush is giving emphasis to the words that have meaning to him and his advisors far beyond simply saying them. For example, when the President talked about a "culture of ownership", the words 'culture' and 'ownership' were said with hard thumps on each and every syllable. And, I think he meant to pound out those words. Those two words, and no others, were forged in wordsmithery of meeting after meeting and draft upon draft of powerpoint slides – if the Office of the President is anything like the office corridors trod by Generals. President Bush knows how significant it is that he proposes a 'culture', not a program, a policy, a bill, etc. Likewise he advocates 'ownership', not entitlement, community, village, etc.

President Bush's remarks in the 'town meeting' portion with living examples of entrepreneurship, home ownership, health savings accounts, tax cuts and retirement savings were fluid, personal and pointed.

Then President George W. Bush took questions from the audience. Nothing was canned. He opened himself up to any question on any issue. His candor was based on his confidence. Well done, Mr. President.

The crowd loved him. The President's supporters reflected and sounded like the world melting pot that is the D.C. metropolis. Their enthusiasm was contagious. The President had them at 'Good Morning'. He had me too, except when he oversold the promise of democracy and peace from this Iraq War.

I fully support the liberation and occupation of Saddam Hussein's Iraq. I'm not as optimistic that a democracy will flower in the sand there. Furthermore, I don't buy it when the President says democracies are peaceful. Maybe democracy in the Middle East (other than Israel) will lead to more democracies and a 'more peaceful world'.

The worst war in American history was the bitter civil war between two representative democracies (1861-1865). The only wars and terrible atrocities in post WWII Europe came from elected governments in the Balkans.

The majority in an Iraqi democracy may elect Shiite Muslim fundamentalist theocrats to rule. Any democracy in Muslim culture will have problems with freedom of religion and speech – especially religious speech.

Peace among nations comes from common national interests. National interests are concepts. Ideas motivate humankind. Ideas impassion people to war. Ideas lead democracies to let loose the terrible dogs of war.

Our present global conflict, World War IV is a global war against Islamist terrorism. The Islamists follow a Totalitarianism that comes from their ideas of grievances and Muslim identity. Their ideas will war with ours for decades to come. The President should know this. I'm sorry if he doesn't. The People shouldn't be fed false hope for quick, easy and lasting peace.

Finally, I see what national pundits say. President Bush is, indeed, a man 'comfortable in his skin'. President George Bush looks like a good man. All Presidents are mere men, even the few great men – Washington and Lincoln.

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