



**Opening Statement by Scott McClellan
Former White House Press Secretary
to the House Judiciary Committee**

June 20, 2008

Good morning Mr. Chairman, Congressman Smith, and members of the committee.

I am here today at your invitation to answer questions about what I know regarding the Valerie Plame episode. Back in 2005, I was prohibited from discussing it by the White House ostensibly because of the criminal investigation underway, but I made a commitment to share with the public what I knew as soon as possible. That commitment was one of the reasons I wrote my book.

Unfortunately, this matter continues to be investigated by Congress because of what the White House has chosen to conceal from the public. Despite assurances that the administration would discuss the matter once the Special Counsel had completed his work, the White House has sought to avoid public scrutiny and accountability.

The continuing cloud of suspicion over the White House is not something I can remove because I know only one part of the story. Only those who know the underlying truth can bring this to an end. Sadly, they remain silent.

The result has been an increase in suspicion and partisan warfare, and a perpetuation of Washington's scandal culture, one of three core factors that have poisoned the atmosphere in Washington for the past two decades. The central message in my book is the need to change the way Washington governs. We need to minimize the negative influence of the permanent campaign, end the scandal culture, and move beyond the philosophy of politics as war.

No one has a better opportunity to make that happen than the president. To do so, he must first fully embrace openness and candor and then constantly strive to build trust across the aisle and seek common ground to unite Americans from all walks of life and political persuasions.

I believed President Bush could be that kind of leader for the country when I first went to work for him in Texas. He was a popular, bipartisan leader who had a record of working with Democrats.

Unfortunately, like many good people who come to Washington, he ended up playing the game by the existing rules rather than transforming it.

The larger message of my book is bigger than any person or party. It is about restoring civility and bipartisanship and candor to our national political discourse. It is about putting our Nation's interests above partisan goals. Indeed, all of us—especially those in elected office—can do more to make this happen by promoting openness and engaging in civil discourse.

The permanent campaign leads to just the opposite. Substantive debates over policy give way to a contest over which side can most effectively manipulate the media narrative to its advantage. It is about power and electoral victory. Governing becomes an offshoot of campaigning rather than the other way around.

Vicious attacks, distortions, political manipulation and spin become accepted. Complex issues are reduced to black-and-white terms and oversimplified in the

context of winners and losers and how they will affect the next election. Too often, the media unwittingly ignores the impact of government on the daily lives of Americans, focusing foremost on the Beltway game and lionizing those who play it most skillfully.

There is no more recent example of this unsavory side of politics than the initial reaction from some in Washington to my book. I received plenty of criticism for daring to tell the story as I knew it. Yet few of my critics tried to refute the larger themes and perspectives in the book. Instead of engaging in a reasoned, rational, and honest discussion of the issues raised, some sought to turn it into a game of "gotcha," misrepresenting what I wrote and seeking to discredit me through inaccurate personal attacks on me and my motives.

The American people deserve better.

Governing inevitably has an adversarial element. People and groups will always differ about the proper use of limited government resources. But should government be a process of constant campaigning to manipulate public opinion, or should it be centered as much as possible on rational debate, deliberation, and compromise?

Writing this book was not easy for me to do. These are my words, my experiences, and my conclusions. I sought to take a clear-eyed look at events. To do so, I had to remove my partisan lens and step back from the White House bubble. Some of the conclusions I came to were different from those I would have embraced at the outset.

My book reflects the only idea of loyalty that I believe is appropriate in democratic government, and that is loyalty to the ideals of candor, transparency and integrity, and indeed to the constitutional system itself. Too often in Washington, people mistakenly think that loyalty to an individual officeholder should override loyalty to basic ideals. This false loyalty is not only mistaken, but can exercise a corrupt influence on government.

I am here because in my heart I am a public servant who, like many Americans, wants to improve the way Washington governs and does not want to see future administrations repeat the mistakes this White House made.

I do not know whether a crime was committed by any of the Administration officials who revealed Valerie Plame's identity to reporters. Nor do I know if there was an attempt by any person or persons to engage in a cover-up during the investigation. I do know that it was wrong to reveal her identity, because it compromised the effectiveness of a covert official for political reasons. I regret that I played a role, however unintentionally, in relaying false information to the public about it. I'll do my best to answer any questions on this matter that members of the committee may wish to ask.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.