



U.S. Department of Defense

Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (Public Affairs)

News Transcript

On the Web:

<http://www.defenselink.mil/cgi-bin/dlprint.cgi?http://www.defenselink.mil/transcripts/2005/tr20051215-12155.html>

Media contact: +1 (703) 697-5131

Public contact:

<http://www.dod.mil/faq/comment.html>

or +1 (703) 428-0711

Presenter: Secretary of Defense Donald H. Rumsfeld and Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. Peter Pace

**December 15,
2005**

Secretary Rumsfeld Pentagon Town Hall Meeting

SEC. RUMSFELD: (Applause.) Thank you very much. Have a seat. Good afternoon, folks, and thanks so much for coming. And a very special greeting to the troops. I think they're watching around the world -- in this country and overseas -- on the Pentagon channel. And we thank all of you for what you do to help keep our -- the American people safe and for your service to our country. Certainly, those overseas are very much in our thoughts and prayers.

This is a good day. I suppose all of you have been working so you haven't seen the television about the Iraqi elections. But it is going very well, and the polls are closed.

They think there was an excellent turnout. The reports thus far indicate that the level of violence has been low, and I think that we have every prospect of seeing a highly successful election in Iraq, a country that wrote its own constitution, went out and risked violence when they voted to ratify that constitution in a referendum, and today went out and voted to elect an assembly under that new constitution that they wrote and that they ratified. And that is just an historic accomplishment, and it's greatly to the credit of the Iraqi people, for the courage they have shown, and it's certainly to the credit of the men and women in uniform from our country and from the coalition countries who have done so much to create an environment where this historic event could actually happen.

2005 has been a -- quite a year for the men and women of the Department of Defense, uniformed and civilian alike. They have responded compassionately to the needy affected by the tsunami in Southeast Asia, helping our fellow Americans who were flooded and in need in the New Orleans and Louisiana-Mississippi-Alabama areas as a result of Katrina and Rita, providing so much needed assistance in Pakistan to the victims of that terrible earthquake that probably killed as many as 73(,000), 74(,000), 75,000 human beings and left certainly hundreds of thousands of people homeless, and possibly millions.

And all of this has been done while battling terrorists and helping to make possible a free election in Afghanistan which was also a big success, the January election in Iraq, the referendum I mentioned, and then the election today. Each of you have contributed to these important achievements, and I want to personally thank you and all the troops that are watching around the world, that your country is grateful to each of you. And there's no question but that the cause of freedom is stronger and healthier because of you.

The election today in Iraq is something that the American people, I am sure, understand the importance of. And today, as we begin the holiday season, Iraqis have completed that election, the views of the Iraqi people I think are reflected in a recent ABC News poll that indicated that some 70 percent of the Iraqis say they think things are going well in their country, and two-thirds thinks that things will be better, still better in the coming months. And that's encouraging, because hope's important. It brings refugees back into a country, it encourages people to take risks, to make investments, and go about their business, be willing to go to school and look ahead.

So this election, of course, is not only important to those Iraqis, it's important to the people in the region. It would be the first real democracy in the Arab world. And I think the back-side of it is also important. This election constitutes a defeat for the enemies of the Iraqi people, the enemies of the legitimate Iraqi government. It constitutes a defeat to the people who have been doing the beheadings and conducting the suicide raids and threatening people and assassinating people who were bold enough to go out and run for public office, or to go out and vote, or to serve. Yet, if you think about it, the moderate Muslim nations in the region have been under threat. And so it's a victory for them as well.

The violent extremists who constitute the opposition there, the goal is to end those moderate Muslim nations in the region, and is to attack the West, and certainly to attack the United States. We know that's their goal. They've said so. They've put it down in writing. Zawahiri, a member of bin Laden's top council, has explained why Iraq is so crucial to the terrorists. He outlined al Qaeda's goals as the following: to expel Americans, to establish a radical Islamic caliphate, and to extend the jihad worldwide. To America Zawahiri said, quote, "Oh, Americans, the losses you are having in Afghanistan and Iraq are only the losses of the initial clashes," unquote.

So let there be no doubt. Defeating the terrorists in Iraq is key to protecting Americans here at home and securing a peaceful future for our children and for our grandchildren.

Our troops in the region are doing a superb job, let there be no doubt. They know that. They see the progress every day. It is -- the most encouraging thing I do is to visit the troops at Walter Reed or Bethesda, or out in the field and hear their perspective on what they're doing and why they're doing it. And they understand. They get it. And they know the progress just in the last year.

The Iraqi security forces are growing in size and capability. The political process is on schedule. Every single benchmark has been made.

There seem to be growing divisions among the enemies. And it's not a single entity that's against the Iraqi government; it's a combination of some rejectionist Sunnis who have ruled the country for so long and think they could bring back Saddam Hussein. There is the Zawahiri jihadists, who are -- come from various countries and are really just violent terrorists determined to kill people. And there are criminals involved and other elements.

But there are divisions among those groups. More of Iraq's friendly neighbors have been watching what's taking place and have decided that instead of sitting on the sidelines, they'd best be involved and interested in seeing that it succeed. And that's a good thing.

And the Sunnis, who decided they would opt of the first election in January, did participate and lean forward during the constitutional referendum, and they -- from everything we can hear on the radio and television, and from General Casey and folks, today the Sunnis have voted in very large numbers, which is a good thing, to have all elements in that country participating in the election.

Despite these tangible measures of progress, some here at home still say we should withdraw from Iraq, before

the Iraqis are ready to defend their own country. The truth is that that would not save American lives. Indeed, it would likely put many more American lives at risk. And let there be no doubt about that.

Consider that if we left Iraq today, terrorists would concentrate their efforts against our troops in Afghanistan and elsewhere in the region. And if we left Afghanistan, they'd concentrate on our friends in the region. And if we withdrew from the region, they would likely attack us here at home again, and we need to know that. This is a global struggle, and the only way to win this long war against violent extremists is to stay on the offense. U.S. forces are fighting the terrorists in Iraq so that we don't have to fight them here in the United States.

The challenges of Iraq and of the larger global war on terror have accelerated our efforts to make this department more agile and more responsive and more joint in the way we do our business.

Change is hard, and I suspect it would be fair to say that in the history of the U.S. Department of Defense, no generation of military or civilian officials have been called upon to do so much in such a short period of time. For many, these challenges have meant long days and nights for many of you, and I know that -- a lot of short deadlines, some of which often look leisurely to me. (Laughter.)

The truth is the truth.

Q (Off mike.) (Laughter.)

SEC. RUMSFELD: And I know a lot of folks have missed weekends and time with family and friends.

So it seems to me that when you celebrate with your families this season, you can know that you have given them a very special gift. You have helped to defend them in a -- and defend their freedom, and they are and we are all safer because of your service to our country.

It's really a great privilege, if you think about it, to work in this department and to do what we do, because our work here is so important. Indeed, it's central to our country's maintaining our way of life.

The holiday season, of course, is a time that we do reflect on family and friends and what's important, and out of a sense of gratitude that we might also reflect on what a special place our country is. Consider the Americans who have come to the aid of the victims of the tsunami and the hurricanes and the natural disasters. And they're still doing it in Pakistan. The folks are there. They've got helicopters. They've got medical facilities. They're doing a wonderful job. Think of the American doctors who've been operating on Afghans who need particular types of medical assistance and on Iraqis who've come to this country for that help.

And think of the billions of dollars that individual Americans, including all of you, in the various charitable activities that you participate in, give every year to help other people in this country and other countries around the world, and also the fact that every single person in uniform in this country is a volunteer. They weren't conscripted. They weren't forced. You weren't drafted. (Pauses.) Every single person said, "Send me."

So this is an amazing country, if you think about it. And the folks here and those watching overseas have enormously important responsibilities and because the task has fallen to you to protect our way of life and to keep America a very special place, a place where people all across the globe look at our country in times of turmoil and tragedy, and so many get in line to try to come here, to live here, to work here.

So in this long war ahead, the freedom and opportunity that earlier generations sought here are the very things that the enemy attacks and that the enemy hopes to take away from us. They are what some have called the American dream, and what led one writer to say, "America is a willingness of heart." And that dream, that willingness of heart, is what each of you have sacrificed to help defend.

And finally, let's take a moment to remember those individual soldiers and sailors and airmen and Marines who will not be celebrating Christmas, those who were wounded in battle, the line of duty, and especially those who have fallen defending our freedom.

We pray for them and we certainly pray for their families and their loved ones. They are supporting troops whose service will never be forgotten and whose mission of defending our nation will never be abandoned. We are deeply in their debt, and we hope they know the depths of our gratitude for their courage and for their dedication.

General Pete Pace, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, has a few words.

GEN. PACE: (Applause.) Thank you, Mr. Secretary.

I just want to take a minute to add my thanks to the secretary's. This is a great time of year for us to reflect on the incredible blessings that we have. It's a blessing that we have 2.4 million Americans -- active, Guard and Reserve -- who are either wearing the uniform today or willing to put it on tonight to do what this nation needs done. It's a blessing that we have several hundred thousand civilians and contractors who are willing to do what they do every day to keep us free.

It's a blessing that there are several hundred thousand Americans overseas tonight protecting us in ways that they probably are not recognizing for what it is, which is truly to be part of a front-line defense against the -- in the war on terrorism by providing stability and hope in the regions where they currently reside.

It is certainly a blessing for the almost quarter of a million Americans in the Gulf region who are in fact in an area that is certainly dangerous to them personally but that is providing hope in Afghanistan, hope in Iraq, and because of those two regions, providing hope across the entire Gulf region for the future.

And it is certainly a blessing for the secretary and I to work in this building with you. The members of the Office of Secretary Defense's staff and the chairman's staff are just simply incredible in all you do. I thank you for what I know about, but more importantly, I thank you for what I don't know about, because you all do so many things that do not rise to the observable, but because you do what you do, you provide support to all those other Americans that I just mentioned, who look to us to ensure that when we give them a mission, that they are properly sustained.

So again, thank you. And Mr. Secretary, I'll turn it back to you, sir.

SEC. RUMSFELD: Now I might just call attention to the posters. There's one over there and one over there that says, "We're at war. Are you doing all you can?"

And I know you are, and I thought what we'd try to do is to see if -- we can't bring everyone who's serving overseas to this room to say hello or to talk a bit about what took place in Iraq today. But we're going to try to bring in General George Casey, who is doing such a truly outstanding job leading our forces. Is that possible?

There he is! George Casey. (Applause.)

GEN. CASEY: It's a miracle! Thank you, Mr. Secretary. Hello, everybody.

SEC. RUMSFELD: George, I don't think you can see us, but we can see you. Let us know a little bit about what happened today.

GEN. CASEY: Hello, Mr. Secretary. I -- (inaudible) -- four or five points here for everybody.

First of all, the Iraqi people are having a great day today. It's the third national poll that they've had this year. And there was a high voter turnout, and we expect it to be far above the October level. There was low violence across Iraq. We expect the violence to be at or below the October level. The Iraqi security forces performed wonderfully all across Iraq today and maintained security on the polling sites. And one element that I'm particularly proud of is we expect the turn-out in Anbar province, which is a west province in Iraq that has been a trouble spot for us, we expect the turn-out out there to have increased fairly substantially over the October referendum levels.

So again, a great day for the Iraqis. And the sentiment was really set this morning, when there was an IED attack against a polling site in Kharma. And the Iraqis went out, repaired the wall, and were open for voting at 7:00. And that's the spirit that led the day. So, another great performance here by the people of Iraq.

The second thing to tell you is that what the Iraqi people and the coalition have accomplished here in less than three years is unprecedented. And if you think about it, three years ago Saddam Hussein was still tyrannizing the Iraqi people. And in the year period, or less than three years since then, the Iraqis have taken sovereignty to their country, they've had elections for a transitional government, the peaceful transition of governments from the interim government to the transitional government. They've written a constitution. They've approved the constitution. They've built up Iraqi security forces of over 200,000. And today they elected an assembly that will select a government based on that constitution. All of that in less than three and a half -- three years, and done against a ruthless and resilient insurgency. It's remarkable, and as I said, it's unprecedented.

The third point, we still have a lot of work to do here in Iraq in 2006. The new government's got to get elected, make the transition and come in.

Now, the good news about that is they'll be here for four years -- (audio break) -- but there's still some tough political and economic development challenges ahead of Iraq. And there will be a debate on the constitution, amending it in the first six months of next year, and there will be a debate on federalism. And I would expect both of those to be fairly divisive -- (audio break) -- I mentioned the economic challenges. There's a decades-long economic challenge here. So there's lots of tough work to do, and we should expect the insurgency not to just go away because there were great elections today, but to gradually reduce as the root causes of the insurgency are -- (audio break) -- it's remarkable and as I said, it's unprecedented.

A fourth point, we couldn't do what we're doing over here without the support of all of -- (audio break) -- here in the Pentagon. And having just left the vice chief of staff of the Army's Office 18 months ago, I appreciate what force -- (audio break) -- for the people in the field. And I will tell you that the support here from the services and from the department is absolutely transparent. It just happens, and it empowers us to spend our energy and our time on the things that will make us successful in this mission -- (audio break) -- thank you very much for all you do for us and for your country.

The last point I'd close with is I couldn't be prouder of the -- (audio break) -- men and women of the coalition and in particularly of the men and women of our armed forces. I got to a point about 11:00 last night when a general -- (audio break) -- realizes there's not a darn thing he can do to affect things anymore, and it's all in the hands of the great men and women of the armed forces. I've been -- (audio break) -- I was there in Najaf, I was there in Fallujah, and I was there for the January elections. And I can't tell you what a great solace for all of our senior leaders to know that they have the best armed forces in the world out there when the going gets the toughest. And they have never let us down. (Audio break.)

So Mr. Secretary, Pete, thanks for asking me to come back. It's great to see everybody there in the Pentagon, and I wish you all a very happy holiday season from everybody here in Iraq.

Thank you. (Audio break.)

SEC. RUMSFELD: Someone call him up and thank him. He's doing a great job. God bless him. (Applause.)

Now we're supposed to answer some questions. Uh-oh. (Laughter.) Uh-oh. When they're that eager -- (laughter) -- that scares me. Who's someone in the back or somewhere -- (laughter -- somewhere over in the side? Where's a mike? Who's got the mikes?

GEN. PACE: (Off mike.)

SEC. RUMSFELD: Right there. Think we should let him do this?

GEN. PACE: Probably not, sir.

SEC. RUMSFELD: (Chuckles) Some questions? Thoughts? Where's some hands? I can't see any. Where's the fellow who always asks about the Metro? (Laughter.) He's always over there. Look at this. Here you go. Right here. There's one.

GEN. PACE: (Off mike.)

Q Mr. Secretary, one of the hot topics in the trade press recently has been future size of the Navy fleet. And different numbers have gotten kicked around, both coming out of the building and over on Capitol Hill. And I just wonder if you could share your thoughts, sir, on how big you see the Navy in the future as far as ship size and if you've given that thought as it relates to transformation and the Navy's role in the joint force.

SEC. RUMSFELD: Yes, indeed. The Quadrennial Defense Review process has raised that issue, and it's been discussed. General Pace and General -- Admiral Giambastiani and Gordon England and all the folks in the department -- in fact, we have a thing called the Senior Level Review Group, which is all the chiefs and the undersecretaries and the chairman and the vice chairman. And then we have the -- that group in a senior leadership group, which adds in the combatant commanders. And we've spent literally, what, six, eight months on it --

GEN. PACE: (Off mike.)

SEC. RUMSFELD: -- eight months on it. And it will be released in February. So there's a great deal of attention going to that issue and issues involving the other services.

One thing I'd say is the way you ask the question as to the size is the way we've always thought of it in this country and in other countries. And we're -- we've kind of migrated over the last four years from the last Quadrennial Defense Review to today, where we're trying to move away from looking at size, numbers of things, and mass, and look more at agility and speed and the capability that can be delivered.

If you have -- and I've used this example, but it's a good example -- if you've got 50 dumb bombs and it takes 10 to hit a target, you're likely to get five targets. And if you have five precision weapons, if you're 45 less than 50, and they each can hit a target, you have equaled it. So you could have fewer things and be vastly more capable.

Speed also can affect things. To the extent you can move very rapidly, you can accomplish something with greater effect than if you have greater mass but it's very late coming into the game.

So under the terrific leadership of Admiral Vern Clark and his successor, Mike Mullen, and Gordon England, they have in the last five years undertaken in the Navy, as you know, a whole series of steps that have improved their efficiency. That is to say, with a smaller number of ships, they've attained an equal number of deployable days because of ship swaps and a variety of things, and the ships that we have today are increasingly considerably more capable than the -- in terms of lethality and precision, and the ability to do something that this department is designed to do -- that is to say, put power on a target, in addition to creating presence.

It is a different world today, and so we're trying to get ourselves and our allies and our Congress to start looking at things in terms of the ultimate effectiveness of those capabilities as opposed to numbers of things.

The -- I don't know if this is right, Pete, but it was something like if you had multiple hundreds of ships and you come down to minus a hundred or two numbers of ships but you have exactly the same number of deployable days, and the deployed fleet is vastly more capable per ship than the old fleet, what you've done is you've addressed the issues in a way that has advantaged our country and our -- our military, and the deterrent effect of it's greater, and the war-fighting effect of it's vastly greater. And we demonstrated this just in the tsunami very recently, if you think about it. What they did was they took that naval capability and put so many people and so much good on the victims of that tsunami and so quickly that it demonstrated their ability to move rapidly because of their presence.

Pete, do you want to comment?

GEN. PACE: Sir, that was a great answer. Thank you. (Laughter.)

SEC. RUMSFELD: Well, I was in the Navy, and he's a Marine. I mean -- (laughter).

Question. Good. Behind me?

Here comes the mike. (Pause.) (Laughter.)

Q Good afternoon, sir. Captain Newhouse (sp). I work for installations and logistics.

Sir, my question: The ABC News poll, sir, that you cited, I know I saw the same thing, sir, and I also saw a portion where they said that a lot of Iraqis weren't necessarily crediting U.S. forces for the jobs they'd done and that sort of thing. And having been over there myself a few -- a couple times, sir, and I know many others, what

can be done to improve that side of it? And I just -- that would go a long way, I think, to the overall strategy in the Middle East and our relations, I would think, with them -- themselves.

Thanks.

SEC. RUMSFELD: That's a good -- let me start, Pete, and then you can clean up.

I just saw some information that said like -- the approval of the American forces in Afghanistan is something like 80 percent. They are welcomed. They are appreciated. That country sees what was accomplished in a landlocked country thousands of miles away in a matter of weeks, where the Taliban and the al Qaeda are pushed out, and they have their own parliament, their own president, their own constitution, and they're just enormously appreciative.

The situation in Iraq, as -- I believe, is it captain? -- as the captain indicated is different. The approval of the foreign forces is low, and not high. And fair enough. Most countries don't want an occupying power in their country.

And they're a proud country.

And it seems to me that there has been such an enormous amount of misinformation that's been peddled in that part of the world on various networks, like Al-Jazeera and others, that are constantly telling the people in that part of the world things that aren't true about America. They say it's a war against Muslims; and there isn't a person in this room who doesn't know that that's not true. They say it's to get their oil; and that's utter nonsense. It's simply not true. They say it's to occupy the country and stay there permanently. And if they knew the tone and tempo of the American people and of the military people who -- families who want their troops home, they don't want them over there unless they have to be there. They want them there if there's an important job to do, but they don't want them there any longer than they have to be there.

Well, those misimpressions are far a field in Iraq and elsewhere, and it seems to me that we have to overcome the kinds of misinformation that is just drummed into the heads of those people in that part of that world. I mean, I think if the person asking this question, the captain, and all of you or I lived over there and saw what was said about our country every single day, we'd begin to believe it too. It's hard not to if you hear all that stuff and the lies that get perpetrated and the allegations that get made, unsubstantiated.

So I think it's something that over time will solve itself because eventually the truth prevails. The truth comes around and people find that they are misled and that they're lied to and that the things that they were told about our wanting to stay there and take over the country and just in there to take their oil -- that oil belongs to the Iraqi people, and that's where it ought to belong.

Pete, do you want to say anything?

GEN. PACE: Sir, it was just another great answer. (Laughter.)

SEC. RUMSFELD: Now he's putting me on.

Ask General Pace a question, quickly. (Laughter.) Who's got the mike? Yes? Don't be shy. Get your hands up. Let people know you want to ask a question. We're happy to do it. As long as we like the question. (Laughter.)

Q Good afternoon, Mr. Secretary, Chairman. I am a civilian for the Army, and I anticipate being deployed in July. I'd like to hear you guys' opinion on civilians in theater.

GEN. PACE: First of all, thank you for your service here and your willingness to go serve overseas. That is critical.

Second, we would not be asking you to go do this job if you were not the right person to do it.

Third, because you are a civilian, you will be an example to our Iraqi counterparts as we try to not only help them understand how to do what we think they should be doing inside their ministries, but by example, showing them the interrelationship between U.S. military and U.S. civilians, and especially the very important part of civilian control of the military.

So the fact that you are going is going to help us strategically get the proper messages across.

I am very comfortable that the way that General Casey has his forces arranged that your force protection will be taken care of, which is very important. But thank you for being willing to do that because I truly believe that you will have a long-lasting impact beyond what you do every day when you go to work.

SEC. RUMSFELD: I agree. (Laughter.)

But I'd say one other thing. I think everyone who serves over there is going to look back in five or 10 years and be so proud of what's been accomplished and what you will have contributed to it, and the historic aspect of that accomplishment.

Question?

STAFF: Over here, sir.

SEC. RUMSFELD: I've got one more back here with the mysterious hand the mike there. (Laughter.) There you go.

Q Good afternoon, sir, General. Sergeant DiSantis (ph) from the National Guard Bureau.

My question is rather simple. With the Guard transformation, how will that affect training and operation tempos for the guard? Kind of stealing my lieutenant's question.

GEN. PACE: A couple of things. Excuse my back, but I've got to look this way to get the voice to travel.

What we are doing -- what the Army is doing with the National Guard is ensuring that every single National Guard unit is properly manned, trained and equipped. That is a huge undertaking to ensure that we do that right, and I have great faith in General Schoomaker and Lieutenant General Blum and all those who are working to make that happen.

As a result of having units that are fully manned and fully trained, the opportunities for units to deploy will come

periodically. We're looking at potentially, if a war is ongoing, one year out of every six years, if a war is ongoing. But we will not have to then kludge together units like we have had to do sometimes currently, where we need to take two units to put them together to come up with enough equipment and enough manpower to have one.

I believe that, as a result of that, that the tempo for the National Guard will be more predictable over time, that we will have better trained individuals, and that the units themselves will be much more combat capable.

Does that answer your question?

Q Yes, sir.

SEC. RUMSFELD: Question? Right down here.

Q Mr. Secretary, General. Lieutenant Drake Forrest (sp) from the Washington Army National Guard 1st Brigade Combat Team, currently just returned from Iraq in March, and -- (inaudible) -- to my question.

With regard to the optempo that's going overseas, currently I work in the National Guard Bureau and are (sic) working on the Army Force Generation Model with all the brigades transforming into brigade combat teams. With the optempo that's going on overseas right now, do you foresee a(n) increase in dwell time of the National Guard and Reserve units being back home, or a -- basically being deployed more frequently overseas, or less frequently, sir?

SEC. RUMSFELD: The arrangements that the Army is undertaking -- and they're complicated, and they take time to get there. But by increasing from 33 brigades up to 42, or in that range, brigades that are more capable, that are better equipped and modularized, and doing a similar thing on the Reserve side, I believe up from -- (to Gen. Pace) -- 28 enhanced brigades, wasn't it?

GEN. PACE: It'll be 15 -- (off mike) -- sir.

SEC. RUMSFELD: Fifteen enhanced brigades, which, really, in many cases weren't enhanced. They didn't have the equipment, they didn't have the full complement of people in every instance. We're going to try to have both the active and the Guard and Reserve fully equipped, fully trained, fully manned, and that will enable us to sustain on the rhythm that General Pace mentioned -- I guess it was one in three and one in six -- for the active versus the Guard.

We believe that the dwell times would be more certain. And it would be a minimum, and -- as opposed to the maximum. In other words, unless you're in a sustained effort that requires something higher than the combined number of brigades that those combinations produce -- which is, one would think, not likely.

So I think that -- I think that people who run around saying that the Army is broken are wrong. They're just flat wrong. I don't think we've got a -- there's never an army that's as well trained, as well led, as well equipped as the army we have today. Now, because of the changes that are being undertaken in the Department of the Army, it's going to get better every month as we go through the period ahead.

Question.

SEC. RUMSFELD: Go ahead.

Q Mr. Secretary, Colonel Doug Reese (ph), Air Force, and -- what would you say is the most gratifying and then the most frustrating aspect of transitioning from chief executive of a large commercial company back into the service of the country as the secretary of Defense?

SEC. RUMSFELD: (Pause, light laughter.) There's no one from the press here, is there? (Laughter.)

You know, in the -- the best thing about being in government is the feeling that all of you have to feel every day. And that is that you're doing something that's enormously important, something that is valued, something that is critical to the success of our way of life and our country and our values. And that is something that no matter when you serve in government, you have to have that feeling, and it's an important one.

The -- in the private sector, you have a board of directors of 10 or 12 people, and here you've got the Congress, which is 535, and they all have different views and different perspectives. And I was a congressman, and it's a wonderful thing to be the human link between your constituency and the federal government of the United States. And you feel that obligation, and you have an obligation to represent those people. But it's a quite different thing from a board of directors in a company. In a company, you can decide what you think you want to do, go do it, put it in place, see what happens in the marketplace, discover it wasn't perfect, change it, adjust it, calibrate it, and then go in that direction, and leave it there long enough to see if it works.

In the public sector, you can meet with your people, decide what you think you want to do, it leaks out -- (laughter) -- there are public hearings -- public hearings held on why it's such a lousy idea because, you know, if you're going to do something, somebody's not going to like it. And if you don't do anything, you don't have that problem. On the other hand, it wouldn't be a very satisfying life if you didn't do anything. So what do you do you decide what you think you want to do. We meet -- General Pace and I meet in -- so long with meetings with wonderful people, work things out, and the next thing you know it's in the paper. And it's a totally different thing in the paper, and then, you're suddenly defending against something you never even thought about doing. And you end up with hearings and discussions and debates and letters and complaints and speeches, and so you waste an enormous amount of time on things that are not important in the public sector.

Now, you can say, "Well, they are important because they're part of the public dialogue on these issues, and these issues are important." The problem is so often everyone's chasing the wrong rabbit, and you find people putting something out. They've got one snippet of information. It ends up in the press, and then everyone focuses on that when in fact that's not the central issue at all. There must have been three in this morning's paper.

It makes you want to stop reading. (Laughter, laughs.)

SEC. RUMSFELD: But believe you me, you asked about serving in government, it is a privilege, and I feel so fortunate to be able to work with the people I work with on the subjects we work on that are so important to the country. So I'm a lucky guy.

Question? Yes.

It's for General Pace. (Laughter.)

Q Okay, so it's actually for either of you. I'll set the question if I may. I'm a -- (inaudible) -- with the Air Force Reserve.

The secretary of the Air Force has recently clarified our mission as to fly and to fight and to win, naturally, to win, and we do that in the airspace and cyberspace. I imagine the other services have a similar aggressive kind of a mission. We want to accomplish that. Now, with the new emphasis or the new portfolio that's been added to our task of stabilization activities, or nation building as it were, how would you suggest, General Pace or Mr. Secretary -- will you transition or adopt that new methodology?

SEC. RUMSFELD: I only have -- you're going to answer this -- but let me just say a word on nation building because it -- for some reason, it gets carried in the press as though it's nation building.

I don't believe in it. I don't think it's possible. I think people of a nation build their own nation. And you can't go into another nation and build it. And the concept is a misunderstanding, I think, of human nature. What we can do as a country, and what other countries can do and what international organizations can do is to contribute to an environment where the people of that country can build their country. But it's their country, and they're the ones that are going to have to defend it, in the case of Iraq or Afghanistan or anywhere else in the world, ultimately. They're the ones who are going to have to rebuild it and pay for the penalty of -- goodness -- decades of Saddam Hussein underfunding his infrastructure. They're the ones who are going to have to fashion the political system that fits them, not us. We can't go in and say here's the political system that -- a cookie mold, the template we're going to plop down on another set of people who have a different history, a different culture, a different background.

So I think we ought to try to avoid the nation-building concept, and we ought to think of it as creating an environment that is hospitable for those people to be able to build their own nation and to fashion it in a way that fits them. That's what's going on in Afghanistan. That's what's going on in Iraq, notwithstanding the way it's characterized in the press.

I'll leave the rest of it to you.

GEN. PACE: If you go back and read the document itself, we were very, very precise and careful about what we said. And we said it's military in support of stability, reconstruction, not military in the lead of. And it is a -- simply a recognition of the fact that when the major kinetic actions are done, there is still an interim period between when the military has the compliance, the capability, and when civilian authorities are able to come in and establish it and to have that proper planning and proper linkage, so we can transition. But it does not say we will do stability, that we will do -- it says we will support in those capacities.

SEC. RUMSFELD: Question? Yes, sir? Right down here in front. Anymore back there? Okay. The sergeant's trying to give us a hook. (Laughter.)

Q Mr. Secretary, Mr. Chairman, what are your thoughts about some colleges and universities not wanting military recruiters there on campus?

SEC. RUMSFELD: Well, you know, I'm kind of a free enterprise- type, and I think that a college ought to be able to do anything they want. And then they ought to pay the penalty for it. And -- (laughter, applause).

(Pause, laughter.) Here's one down here. Yeah, leave that mike with me. We've got a bunch of folks in the front here.

Go ahead.

Q How are you, sir? My name's Kevin Klosterbar (ph). I work in the office of the assistant secretary of the Navy. And my question was -- actually, it was one of your comments in a(n) article that appeared in my hometown newspaper in Texas. It was in regards to the U.S.-Mexican border and the ongoing problems that are occurring down there. And it went on to say that the Pentagon was searching for ways of sending military units to either man or safeguard areas of the border in addition to duties that they currently have.

SEC. RUMSFELD: Not to my knowledge. There was a moment in our history -- I think the vice president was secretary of Defense -- when the Department of Defense was asked to help out on a border issue. There was another moment during our administration when there was a shortfall along the northern border. And some assistance was needed, and I believe we arranged for a relatively small number of people to fall in with the border guards, not in a law enforcement role but in an assisting role, and they did that again for a very short window.

But my view is, the folks didn't -- in the United States Department of Defense didn't come into the military to do that function, and that it's -- if we're needed -- for example, after 9/11 we put some folks in airports. The president said we need some guards in airports. We put them in, but we also signed a memorandum of understanding with the Department of Transportation back in those days that said, look, that's your job, you're going to get going and train people and take over this responsibility in x number of months. And that's what happened.

So, I don't see the Department of Defense doing that. And I -- and I didn't see the article, but it sounds like it was not completely accurate, to my utter amazement. (Laughter.)

MR. : Sir, this needs to be the last question.

SEC. RUMSFELD: The voice! The voice! (Laughter.) He controls the sound and the mike. (Laughter.) He turns his up and mine down. (Light laughter.)

Where's the last question? Yes, ma'am. Right there. Or, yes, miss, I should say.

Q How do you do, sir. I'm Major Collins (ph) from the Army Surgeon General, and thank you for giving me the opportunity to ask you this question.

Years ago, I believe our training with industry policy had changed whereby active duty DOD members could train for a certain period of time with interagency organizations: i.e., FEMA.

Due to the lessons learned from the recent Katrina response, do you now feel that maybe it would be good training, both to interagency and DOD military members, that we re-look that program, or what lessons learned actually have come out of Katrina that now DOD assets can again train with FEMA?

GEN. PACE: Well, first of all, as I think you know, as soon as we started responding to that emergency, we had teams of individuals collecting lessons learned, so we would not rely on our memory banks three months later. So we have collected an enormous amount of data which is being crunched right now. Certainly, one of the capacities of our armed forces is our medical capabilities and our ability to move quickly to the area. But just like with regard to border guards and other things, we need to make sure that we provide for the period of time that

we're the only ones who can provide it -- that capacity -- and that as quickly as civilian authorities are able to provide it through other means, that we back away and let the proper authorities due the proper mission.

So we should be available. We should respond quickly. We should save lives. We should do the things that we are uniquely able to do and then transition.

If I could just take one minute, though, because you mentioned that you're in the medical profession. All of you who are working in the medical field today should have enormous satisfaction and pride in what you're doing. I was looking at some numbers this morning, and the fact is that if an individual service member is wounded in combat today, the statistics say that about 75 percent of those wounded are returned to duty, are not medevac'd maybe longer than three days, but do not leave the country and are able to rejoin their units. That's an incredible number. And of those who are medevac'd, it's -- the overwhelming majority live to be able to have a useful life. That's an incredible accomplishment that has taken a huge team effort, so that everybody in -- from the pickup helicopter to the people who give first aid right away to those who take care of them at the battalion aid stations to those who put them on the planes and travel with them to those who get them at the hospitals and work the miracles they work should have enormous pride in what they're doing for all of us.

Thanks. (Applause.)

SEC. RUMSFELD: And thank you very much. Merry Christmas to all of you. (Continued applause.)

(C) COPYRIGHT 2005, FEDERAL NEWS SERVICE, INC., 1000 VERMONT AVE. NW; 5TH FLOOR; WASHINGTON, DC - 20005, USA. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. ANY REPRODUCTION, REDISTRIBUTION OR RETRANSMISSION IS EXPRESSLY PROHIBITED. UNAUTHORIZED REPRODUCTION, REDISTRIBUTION OR RETRANSMISSION CONSTITUTES A MISAPPROPRIATION UNDER APPLICABLE UNFAIR COMPETITION LAW, AND FEDERAL NEWS SERVICE, INC. RESERVES THE RIGHT TO PURSUE ALL REMEDIES AVAILABLE TO IT IN RESPECT TO SUCH MISAPPROPRIATION. FEDERAL NEWS SERVICE, INC. IS A PRIVATE FIRM AND IS NOT AFFILIATED WITH THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT. NO COPYRIGHT IS CLAIMED AS TO ANY PART OF THE ORIGINAL WORK PREPARED BY A UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT OFFICER OR EMPLOYEE AS PART OF THAT PERSON'S OFFICIAL DUTIES. FOR INFORMATION ON SUBSCRIBING TO FNS, PLEASE CALL JACK GRAEME AT 202-347-1400.

-END-

<http://www.defenselink.mil/transcripts/2005/tr20051215-12155.html>