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President Discusses Patriot Act

Ohio State Highway Patrol Academy
Columbus, Ohio

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THE PRESIDENT: Thank you all very much. Thank you. Please be seated. Thanks for the warm welcome. It's great to be back in Columbus, Ohio. I remind people that my grandfather was raised here in Columbus, Ohio. One time I reminded people when I was in Columbus that my grandfather was raised here, my Dad's dad -- my mother called me; she said, "Why didn't you tell them my father was raised in Dayton?" (Laughter.) I said, "From this point forward I will, Mother." (Laughter.) My dad's dad was raised in Columbus, and my mother's dad was raised in Dayton. (Laughter.) It's nice to be back.



VIDEO Multimedia

President's Remarks

[view](#)

I want to thank you all for letting me come by the Ohio State Highway Patrol Academy. I appreciate what you do here. I appreciate the hard work that you put forth in order to train men and women to be on the front line of serving our communities and our country. I appreciate the fact that these are tough times for those who wear the uniform. But you've got to understand that the men and women who wear the badge of peace -- the peacekeepers, the people on the front lines of keeping our community safe -- have got the gratitude of the American people. On behalf of a grateful nation, thank you for what you do. (Applause.)



And I appreciate my friend, Attorney General Al Gonzales, joining me today. Thanks for coming over to introduce me. Get back to work. (Laughter.)

I want to thank Governor Taft joining us. Governor, I appreciate you being here. I want to thank Senator Mike DeWine for joining us today. Proud you're here, Senator. Congressman Pat Tiberi -- this is his district -- Congressman, I appreciate you coming. He said, by the way, Ohio State is in my district. He said, you tell those Texas Longhorns -- (laughter) -- I'm not going to tell them what you said. (Laughter.)

I appreciate Congressman Dave Hobson joining us, as well. I want to thank the State Attorney General, Jim Petro, for joining us; U.S. Attorney Greg Lockhart. I want to thank Director Ken Morckel for joining us today. Thank you, Ken, for being here. Paul McClellan; state and local officials; most of all, people who wear the uniform -- I'm proud you're here.

Today when I landed at the airport, I met Dianne Garrett, who is with us today. Dianne has been a volunteer with the Whitehall Citizens Police Academy Alumni Association for eight years. She represents thousands of people across our country who are working hand in glove with their local law enforcement to make the police stations work better. She's a part of the citizen corps. She's a part of the emergency response team in Whitehall community.

The reason I bring up people like Dianne is, it's important for us to always remember that the great strength of America lies in the hearts and souls of our citizens. The true strength of this country lies in the hearts of those who are willing to help volunteer to make our communities a more compassionate, decent and safe place. If you want to serve Ohio, if you want to serve America, help feed the hungry, find shelter for the homeless, volunteer to help our law enforcement do their job. Love a neighbor just like you'd like to be loved yourself, and you're making a big contribution to America. Dianne, thank you for coming. (Applause.) Go ahead, stand up. (Applause.)

My most solemn duty as President is to protect the American people. And I'm honored to share that responsibility with you. We have a joint responsibility. As sworn officers of the law, you're devoted to defending your fellow citizens. Your vigilance is keeping our communities safe, and you're serving on the front lines of the war on terror. It's a different kind of war than a war our nation was used to. You know firsthand the nature of the enemy. We face brutal men who celebrate murder, who incite suicide, and who would stop at nothing to destroy the liberties we cherish. You know that these enemies cannot be deterred by negotiations, or concessions, or appeals to reason. In this war, there's only one option -- and that option is victory.



Since September the 11th, 2001, we have gone on the offensive against the terrorists. We have dealt the enemy a series of powerful blows. The terrorists are on the run, and we'll keep them on the run. Yet they're still active; they're still seeking to do us harm. The terrorists are patient and determined. And so are we. They're hoping we'll get complacent, and forget our responsibilities. Once again, they're proving that they do not understand our nation. The United States of America will never let down its guard.

This is a long war, and we have a comprehensive strategy to win it. We're taking the fight to the terrorists abroad, so we don't have to face them here at home. We're denying our enemies sanctuary, by making it clear that America will not tolerate regimes that harbor or support terrorists. We're stopping the terrorists from achieving the ideological victories they seek by spreading hope and freedom and reform across the broader Middle East. By advancing the cause of liberty, we'll lay the

foundations for peace for generations to come.

And one of the great honors as the President is to be the Commander-in-Chief of a fantastic United States military -- made fantastic by the quality and the character of the men and women who wear the uniform. Thank you for serving. (Applause.)

As we wage the war on terror overseas, we'll remember where the war began -- right here on American soil. In our free and open society, there is no such thing as perfect security. To protect our country, we have to be right 100 percent of the time. To hurt us, the terrorists have to be right only once. So we're working to answer that challenge every day, and we're making good progress toward securing the homeland.

We've enhanced security at coastlines and borders and ports of entry. And we have more work to do. We've strengthened protections at our airports and chemical plants and highways and bridges and tunnels. And we got more work to do. We've made terrorism the top priority for law enforcement, and we've provided unprecedented resources to help folks like yourselves do their jobs.



Since 2001, we've more than tripled spending on homeland security, and we've increased funding more than tenfold for the first responders who protect our homeland. Law enforcement officers stand between our people and great dangers, and we're making sure you have the tools necessary to do your job.

We've also improved our ability to track terrorists inside the United States. A vital part of that effort is called the USA Patriot Act. The Patriot Act closed dangerous gaps in America's law enforcement and intelligence capabilities -- gaps the terrorists exploited when they attacked us on September the 11th. Both houses of Congress passed the Patriot Act by overwhelming bipartisan majorities -- 98 out of 100 United States senators voted for the act. That's what we call bipartisanship. The Patriot Act was the clear, considered response of a nation at war, and I was proud to sign that piece of legislation.

Over the past three-and-a-half years, America's law enforcement and intelligence personnel have proved that the Patriot Act works, that it was an important piece of legislation. Since September the 11th, federal terrorism investigations have resulted in charges against more than 400 suspects, and more than half of those charged have been convicted. Federal, state, and local law enforcement have used the Patriot Act to break up terror cells in New York and Oregon and Virginia and in Florida. We've prosecuted terrorist operatives and supporters in California, in Texas, in New Jersey, in Illinois, and North Carolina and Ohio. These efforts have not always made the headlines, but they've made communities safer. The Patriot Act has accomplished exactly what it was designed to do -- it has protected American liberty, and saved American lives.

The problem is, at the end of this year, 16 critical provisions of the Patriot Act are scheduled to expire.

Some people call these "sunset provisions." That's a good name -- because letting that -- those provisions expire would leave law enforcement in the dark. All 16 provisions are practical, important, and they are constitutional. Congress needs to renew them all -- and this time, Congress needs to make the provisions permanent. (Applause.)

We need to renew the Patriot Act because it strengthens our national security in four important ways. First, we need to renew the critical provisions of the Patriot Act that authorize better sharing of information between law enforcement and intelligence. Before the Patriot Act, criminal investigators were separated from intelligence officers by a legal and bureaucratic wall. A federal prosecutor who investigated Osama bin Laden in the 1990s explained the challenge this way: "We could talk to citizens, local police officers, foreign police officers -- we could even talk to al Qaeda members. But there was one group of people we were not permitted to talk to -- the FBI agents across the street from us assigned to parallel intelligence investigations of Osama Bin Laden and al Qaeda. That was a wall."

Finding our enemies in the war on terror is tough enough --law enforcement officers should not be denied vital information their own colleagues already have. The Patriot Act helped tear down this wall, and now law enforcement and intelligence officers are sharing information and working together, and bringing terrorists to justice.

In many terrorism cases, information-sharing has made the difference between success and failure -- and you have an example right here in Columbus, Ohio. Two years ago, a truck driver was charged with providing support to al Qaeda. His capture came after an investigation that relied on the Patriot Act, and on contributions from more than a dozen agencies in the Southern Ohio Joint Terrorism Task Force. And members of that task force are with us today. I want to thank you for your contribution to the safety of America, and you'll understand this story I'm about to tell.

For several years, Iman Faris posed as a law-abiding resident of Columbus. But in 2000, he traveled to Afghanistan and met Osama bin Laden at an al Qaeda training camp. Faris helped the terrorists research airplanes and handle cash and purchase supplies. In 2002, he met Khalid Shaykh Muhammad -- the mastermind of the September the 11th attacks -- and he agreed to take part in an al Qaeda plot to destroy a New York City bridge.

After Faris returned to the United States, federal investigators used the Patriot Act to follow his trail. They used new information-sharing provisions to piece together details about his time in Afghanistan, and his plan to launch an attack on the United States. They used the Patriot Act to discover that Faris had cased possible targets in New York, and that he'd reported his findings to al Qaeda. In the spring of 2003, the FBI confronted Faris, and presented the case they had built against him. The case against him was so strong that Faris chose to cooperate, and he spent the next several weeks telling authorities about his al Qaeda association. Faris pled guilty to the charges against him. And today, instead of planning terror attacks against the American people, Iman Faris is sitting in an American prison.

The agents and prosecutors who used the Patriot Act to put Faris behind bars did superb work, and they know what a difference information-sharing made. Here is what one FBI agent said -- he said, "The Faris case would not have happened without sharing information." That information-sharing was

made possible by the Patriot Act. Another investigator on the case said, "We never would have had the lead to begin with." You have proved that good teamwork is critical in protecting America. For the sake of our national security, Congress must not rebuild a wall between law enforcement and intelligence.

Second, we need to renew the critical provisions of the Patriot Act that allow investigators to use the same tools against terrorists that they already use against other criminals. Before the Patriot Act, it was easier to track the phone contacts of a drug dealer than the phone contacts of an enemy operative. Before the Patriot Act, it was easier to get the credit card receipts of a tax cheat than an al Qaeda bank-roller. Before the Patriot Act, agents could use wiretaps to investigate a person committing mail fraud, but not to investigate a foreign terrorist. The Patriot Act corrected all these pointless double standards -- and America is safer as a result.

One tool that has been especially important to law enforcement is called a roving wiretap. Roving wiretaps allow investigators to follow suspects who frequently change their means of communications. These wiretaps must be approved by a judge, and they have been used for years to catch drug dealers and other criminals. Yet, before the Patriot Act, agents investigating terrorists had to get a separate authorization for each phone they wanted to tap. That means terrorists could elude law enforcement by simply purchasing a new cell phone. The Patriot Act fixed the problem by allowing terrorism investigators to use the same wiretaps that were already being using against drug kingpins and mob bosses. The theory here is straightforward: If we have good tools to fight street crime and fraud, law enforcement should have the same tools to fight terrorism.

Third, we need to renew the critical provisions of the Patriot Act that updated the law to meet high-tech threats like computer espionage and cyberterrorism. Before the Patriot Act, Internet providers who notified federal authorities about threatening e-mails ran the risk of getting sued. The Patriot Act modernized the law to protect Internet companies who voluntarily disclose information to save lives.

It's common sense reform, and it's delivered results. In April 2004, a man sent an e-mail to an Islamic center in El Paso, and threatened to burn the mosque to the ground in three days. Before the Patriot Act, the FBI could have spent a week or more waiting for the information they needed. Thanks to the Patriot Act, an Internet provider was able to provide the information quickly and without fear of a lawsuit -- and the FBI arrested the man before he could fulfill his -- fulfill his threat.

Terrorists are using every advantage they can to inflict harm. Terrorists are using every advantage of 21st century technology, and Congress needs to ensure that our law enforcement can use that same advantage, as well.

Finally, we need to renew the critical provisions of the Patriot Act that protect our civil liberties. The Patriot Act was written with clear safeguards to ensure the law is applied fairly. The judicial branch has a strong oversight role. Law enforcement officers need a federal judge's permission to wiretap a foreign terrorist's phone, a federal judge's permission to track his calls, or a federal judge's permission to search his property. Officers must meet strict standards to use any of these tools. And these standards are fully consistent with the Constitution of the U.S.

Congress also oversees the application of the Patriot Act. Congress has recently created a federal

board to ensure that the Patriot Act and other laws respect privacy and civil liberties. And I'll soon name five talented Americans to serve on that board. Attorney General Gonzales delivers regular reports on the Patriot Act to the House and the Senate, and the Department of Justice has answered hundreds of questions from members of Congress. One Senator, Dianne Feinstein of California, has worked with civil rights groups to monitor my administration's use of the Patriot Act. Here's what she said: "We've scrubbed the area, and I have no reported abuses." Remember that the next time you hear someone make an unfair criticism of this important, good law. The Patriot Act has not diminished American liberties; the Patriot Act has helped to defend American liberties.

Every day the men and women of law enforcement use the Patriot Act to keep America safe. It's the nature of your job that many of your most important achievements must remain secret. Americans will always be grateful for the risks you take, and for the determination you bring to this high calling. You have done your job. Now those of us in Washington have to do our job. The House and Senate are moving forward with the process to renew the Patriot Act. My message to Congress is clear: The terrorist threats against us will not expire at the end of the year, and neither should the protections of the Patriot Act.

I want to thank you for letting me come and talk about this important piece of legislation. I want to thank you for being on the front lines of securing this country. May God bless you and your families. And may God continue to bless our nation. Thank you very much. (Applause.)

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