



THE WHITE HOUSE  
PRESIDENT  
GEORGE W. BUSH

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Office of the Vice President  
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## Vice President's Remarks at a Rally for the Troops

Fairchild Air Force Base  
Spokane, Washington

(April 17, 2006)

2:24 P.M. PDT

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Thank you all very much. I appreciate the welcome and the chance to visit Fairchild Air Force Base and the great state of Washington this afternoon.

Colonel Johnson, I want to thank you for your kind words. And I also want to thank our distinguished guest, including your Congresswoman, Cathy McMorris, and other elected officials, including the mayors of Spokane, Spokane Valley, Liberty Lake and Cheney, Washington. Sounds like a nice place to visit. (Laughter.)

I also want to thank the 560th Air Force Band for playing today. And above all, I want to thank the Air Force personnel who make Fairchild one of the finest military installations in America. If I may paraphrase a tanker community motto: "No one can do without tanker gas." (Laughter.) Well, what do you say? That's the G-rated version I'm told. (Laughter.)

But I count it an honor to be here today with you and your families, as well as to have an opportunity in a few minutes to participate in a re-enlistment ceremony. It's a pleasure to be in your company, and I bring good wishes to each and everyone from our Commander-in-Chief, President George W. Bush.

I'm here because the President and I want you to know how much we appreciate everything you do on behalf of the United States. You're serving in an eventful time for the country, and for the cause of freedom. And because you're based here at Fairchild, your work is at the very center of a lot of critical assignments. You excel in warfighting, homeland defense, medical evacuation, search and rescue, counter-drug operations, and disaster relief. We depend on the KC-135s and their crews to support missions across the world, to refuel fighters, bombers and recon and airlift vehicles, and to provide rapid, reliable airlift all over the globe.

The work carried out by this team is helping to sustain the U.S. military in the global war on terror. And that war goes on. Thanks in part to all of you, it's a war we are going to win. (Applause.)

Many demands come with military service, and the sacrifice is shared by spouses and children, as well. I want all the loved ones here today to know that our whole country is proud of our military families.

Let me also acknowledge the people of the area, the residents of Spokane and the surrounding communities, and the Calispell Indian Tribe. Thank you for providing outstanding support to Team Fairchild and its families.

This nation depends on our military to serve our highest ideals abroad and to defend America against those who want to hurt us. And our military is repaying that confidence every single day. When America was attacked on a terrible September morning four-and-a-half years ago, President Bush said the struggle would be lengthy and difficult, and would require our best effort and unfailing resolve. And in this fight some of the hardest duties have come to our people in uniform.

Hundreds of men and women from Fairchild Air Force Base have been deployed worldwide in the fight against terror. From Iraq to Southwest Asia, to the skies over the Western United States, you do your part every single day to protect the American people.

Since the attacks of 9/11, you've flown more than 21,000 sorties; logged more than 100,000 flight hours; off-loaded over 900 million pounds of fuel; delivered 889 tons of cargo and supported Operation Noble Eagle alert missions 24 hours a day, seven days a week. So let me thank the units that serve here at Fairchild: the 92nd Refueling Wing; the 141st Refueling Wing of the Washington Air National Guard. (Applause.) Don't hold back. The tanker experts of the 509th Weapons Squadron. The survival trainers of the 336th Training Group. (Applause.) The 373rd Training and Readiness Squadron. Detachment 13 and the Joint Personnel Recovery Agency. Let's hear it again for the 92nd Air Refueling Wing. (Applause.)

You carry out difficult work with precision, and focus, and with a consistent standard of excellence. A lot of people have been counting on you to get the job done, and you've never let them down.

It's impossible to overstate just how much our military has done over the last several years to make this nation safer, to bring freedom, stability, and peace to a troubled part of the world. Afghanistan, a little over four years ago was in the grip of a violent, merciless regime that harbored terrorists who plotted murder for export. There is still tough fighting going on in that country, some of it in very rough terrain, high in the mountains, up along the borders. But our people are doing terrific work, together with coalition partners and an increasingly strong and professional Afghan military. And Afghanistan is a rising nation -- with an elected government, a market economy, and millions of children going to school for the first time ever. It is impossible to overstate all that our coalition has achieved in Afghanistan -- and when our forces return home from that part of the world, they can be proud of their service for the rest of their lives. (Applause.)

The same is true for the men and women serving in Iraq. Americans understand what is at stake in that country -- and so do the terrorists. That's why they commit acts of random horror, calculated to shock and intimidate the civilized world. The terrorists know that as freedom takes hold, the ideologies of hatred and resentment will lose their appeal, and the advance of democracy will inspire reformers

across the broader Middle East. And as that region experiences new hope and progress, we will see the power of freedom to lift up whole nations, and the spread of liberty will produce a much safer world for our children and our grandchildren. The war on terror is a battle for the future of civilization. It is a battle worth fighting. It is a battle we are going to win. (Applause.)

Our strategy in Iraq is clear, our tactics will remain flexible, and we'll keep at the job until we finish it. The work is still difficult. We can expect further acts of violence and destruction by the enemies of freedom. But progress has been steady, and we can be confident going forward. By voting in free elections, ratifying a constitution, and by going to the polls with a turn-out of over 70 percent last December, Iraqis have shown that they value their own liberty and are determined to choose their own destiny.

Our coalition has also put great effort into standing up the Iraqi Security Forces. As those forces gain strength and experience, and as the political process advances, we'll be able to decrease troop levels without losing our capacity to defeat the terrorists. And as always, decisions about troop levels will be driven by conditions on the ground and by the judgment of our commanders -- not by artificial timelines set by politicians in Washington, D.C. (Applause.) Every American serving in this war can be absolutely certain that the people of our country do not support a policy of passivity, resignation, and defeatism in the face of terror. The only way to lose this fight is to quit, and that is not an option. (Applause.) The United States will never go back to the false comforts of the world before September 11, 2001. Terrorist attacks are not caused by the use of strength. They are invited by the perception of weakness. And this nation made a decision: We will engage these enemies -- facing them far from home, so we do not have to face them on the streets of our own cities. (Applause.)

The work goes on, because we are dealing with an enemy that views the entire world as the battlefield. The terrorists have made clear the dark vision they have for the world. They want to end American and Western influence in the Middle East. Their goal in that region is to gain control of a country, so they have a base from which to launch attacks and to wage war against governments that do not meet their demands. The terrorists believe that by controlling an entire country, they will be able to target and overthrow other governments in the region, and to establish a radical Islamic empire that encompasses that part of the globe from Spain, across North Africa, through the Middle East and South Asia, all the way around to Indonesia. They've made clear, as well, their ultimate ambitions: to arm themselves with weapons of mass destruction, to destroy Israel, to intimidate all Western countries, and to cause mass death right here in the United States. In the face of such a threat, those of us in positions of responsibility have a duty to wage a broad-scale effort for the sake of this nation's freedom and security.

That effort includes a home front -- and here at Fairchild you know that the home front is every bit as important as the battlefields abroad. We are facing enemies who hate us, hate our country, and hate the liberties for which we stand. They dwell in the shadows, wear no uniform, and are determined to kill as many innocent Americans as they can. That's why President Bush told Congress after 9/11 that our country would "direct every resource at our command -- every means of diplomacy, every tool of intelligence, every instrument of law enforcement, every financial influence, and every necessary weapon of war -- to the disruption and to the defeat of the global terror network." The Congress backed him up, fully authorizing the President to defeat an enemy that had already slipped into our country and waged an attack that morning that killed more than 3,000 of our fellow citizens.

The President also signed the Patriot Act, which is helping us to disrupt terrorist activity, break up terror cells within the United States, and to protect the lives of Americans.

Another vital step the President took in the days following 9/11 was to authorize the National Security Agency to intercept a certain category of terrorist-linked international communications. There are no communications more important to the safety of the United States than those related to al Qaeda that have one end here in the United States.

If you'll recall, the report of the 9/11 Commission focused criticism on our inability to uncover links between terrorists at home and terrorists abroad. The authorization the President made after September 11th helped address that problem in a manner that is fully consistent with his constitutional responsibilities and the legal authority of the executive office and with the civil liberties of the American people.

We are talking here about a wartime measure, limited in scope to surveillance associated with terrorists and conducted in a way that does safeguard the civil liberties of the American people. It's important to note that leaders of Congress have been briefed on this activity more than a dozen times. I have personally presided over most of those briefings. They take place in my office in the West Wing. In addition, the entire program is reconsidered and reauthorized by the President himself every 45 days, and only after it's been approved by the Attorney General of the United States to make certain it is in compliance with all statutes and with the Constitution. The President has reauthorized this program more than 30 times since 9/11, and he's indicated his intent to do so as long as our nation faces a continuing threat from al Qaeda and related organizations.

I'm afraid that, as we get farther away from September 11th, 2001, some in the Nation's Capital are starting to downplay the threat, and to back away from the hard work at hand. That mind set is dangerous. We're all grateful that this nation has gone more than four years without another 9/11. Obviously, no one can guarantee that we won't be hit again. But we have been protected by a lot more than just dumb luck. We've been protected by sound policy decisions by the President, by decisive action at home and abroad, and by round-the-clock efforts on the part of people in the armed services, law enforcement, intelligence, and homeland security. The enemy that struck on 9/11 is weakened and fractured, yet still lethal, still determined to hit us again. We've never had a fight quite like this -- and we have a lot more to do before it's finished. Either we are serious about fighting this war or we are not. And the enemies of America need to know: We are serious, and we will not let down our guard. (Applause.)

Ladies and gentlemen, as members of the United States Armed Forces, each and every one of you is helping to write a proud chapter in the history of freedom. At times you may wonder if your fellow citizens truly realize the extent of your achievements. I want you to know that Americans do realize it, that we do not take our military for granted. We look with admiration on all of you, people superbly trained who put the mission first, work as a team, put in long hours, and carry out highly technical assignments with excellence. We appreciate fellow citizens who go out on lengthy deployments and face the hardship of separation from home and family. We care deeply about those who have returned with injuries, and who have a hard road ahead. And our nation grieves for the families of the fallen. These Americans gave their lives in a noble and a necessary cause. This nation will honor their

memory forever.

None of us can know every turn that lies ahead for America in this fight against terror. Yet the direction of events is plain to see. And this period of struggle and testing is also a time of promise. The United States of America is a good country, a decent country, and we are making the world a better place by defending the innocent, confronting the violent and bringing freedom to the oppressed. We understand the continuing dangers to civilization, and we have the resources, the strength, and the moral courage to overcome those dangers and to lay the foundations for a better world.

The men and women of Team Fairchild are part of that great effort. In your devotion to duty, in the ideals you serve, and the oath you live by, you give your fellow Americans an example of service, bravery, and achievement that makes us all very proud. You believe in America, America believes in you.

Thank you very much. (Applause.)

END 2:36 P.M. PDT

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