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President Addresses Military Families, Discusses War on Terror

Idaho Center
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11:00 A.M. MDT

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you all. (Applause.) Thank you all very much. (Applause.) Thanks for the warm welcome. Glad I finally got here. (Applause.) You got a beautiful state. (Applause.) Full of really decent people. And Laura and I are thrilled to be here. I'm particularly thrilled to be with the courageous men and women who wear our nation's uniform. (Applause.) I'm honored to stand with the brave men and women of the Idaho National Guard. (Applause.)

I don't know if you know this or not, but 19 individuals have served both as Guardsmen and as President of the United States. And I'm proud to have been one. (Applause.) In times of crisis, our nation depends on the courage and determination of the Guard. You know that the call to active duty can come at any time. You stand ready to put your lives on hold and answer that call. And you do so because you love your state and your country. America appreciates your courageous decision to serve. And we appreciate your families and employers who support you in your vital work. Together with your comrades in the Army, Navy, Air Force and Marine Reserves, you're showing that patriotism and public service are alive and well in Idaho and throughout the United States of America. (Applause.)



I'm also proud to be here with the Gunfighters of Mountain Home Air Force Base. (Applause.) After our nation was attacked on September the 11th, 2001, air crews from the 366th Wing flew more than a thousand combat missions over the skies of Afghanistan. In the war on terror, you're bringing justice to our enemies and honor to the uniform, and our country is grateful to your service. (Applause.)

You can see coming in here I'm keeping pretty good company. (Laughter.) I'm proud to be traveling today with a great wife, wonderful mother, Laura Bush. (Applause.) She said, when you get in there keep your speech short. (Laughter.) I said, I hadn't been to Idaho yet as President, how can I keep my speech short? (Applause.) Anyway, I'm listening to her. (Laughter.)

I'm proud to be here with your Governor, Dirk Kempthorne, and his wife Patricia. He's a really fine man and a great Governor for Idaho. (Applause.)

Last night we spent the night in Tamarack. I want to thank the good folks of Tamarack for their wonderful hospitality and thanks for putting up with us, and the entourage. (Laughter.) But we invited the congressional delegation from your great state to join us for dinner, and so we were honored to have the likes of Senator Larry Craig and Suzanne join us for dinner. (Applause.) Senator Mike Crapo -- (applause) -- Congressman Butch Otter -- (applause) and Congressman Mike Simpson and his wife Kathy are with us today. (Applause.)

I found it particularly interesting that Larry Craig's mom, Dorothy, is with us, and Butch Otter's mom, Regina, is with us. I guess it's "mothers bring their boys to work day." (Laughter and applause.)

I want to thank all the members of the Statehouse who are here. I appreciate you being here. Thanks for serving your state. I want to thank Mayor Tom Dale of Nampa. I appreciate you, Mr. Mayor. (Applause.) Mr. Mayor -- he didn't ask for any advice, but I'll give you some anyway -- fill the potholes. (Laughter.) I want to thank Mayor David Bieter of the city of Boise, for joining us. Mr. Mayor, thank you. Thanks for your hospitality. (Applause.) Appreciate you being here.



I want to thank Generals Blum, Lafrenz, Saylor for their service to our country. Thanks for greeting me when I came in today. I'm proud of your service. (Applause.) Colonel Charlie Shugg, Commander of the 366th, is with us. Colonel, thank you for being here. (Applause.)

But most of all, thank you all for coming. I appreciate you taking time out of your Wednesday morning to say hello. (Applause.)

Our nation is engaged in a global war on terror that affects the safety and security of every American. In Iraq, Afghanistan and across the world, we face dangerous enemies who want to harm our people, folks who want to destroy our way of life. Throughout our nation's history, whenever freedom has been threatened, America has turned to the National Guard. From the War of Independence to today's war on terror, the Guard has defended this country with courage and determination. I'm proud to be the Commander-in-Chief, and I respect and honor all those who serve in the United States Armed Forces Active Guard and Reserve. (Applause.)

The role of the Guard in our military is unique. You're the only part of the Armed Forces that serve both your state and your country. Here in Idaho there's 4,300 soldiers and airmen of the Guard who are meeting their state and federal responsibilities with distinction and with courage. The Idaho Guard has been called up to provide disaster relief eight times in the past decade. You've helped your fellow citizens through fires and floods and snow emergencies. The people of this state take comfort knowing you're on call. When tragedy strikes, they know they can count on the men and women of the Guard. And as you protect your neighbors from national disasters -- natural disasters, you're also helping to protect all Americans from terrorist threats.

A special WMD response team in the Idaho Guard is based in Gowen Field. These good folks are ready to mobilize within hours in the case of a terrorist attack. You're not only protecting the American homeland, you're also taking the fight to the enemy.

Since September the 11th, 2001, more than 243,000 members of the National Guard have been mobilized for various missions in the war on terror. Idaho now has a higher percentage of its Guard forces mobilized than any other state. (Applause.) At this moment, more than 1,700 soldiers of the Idaho Guard are serving in Iraq. It's the largest Guard mobilization in the history of Idaho. Laura and I are here to thank you for your service and your courage in defending the United States of America. (Applause.)



A time of war is a time of sacrifice, and a heavy burden falls on our military families. They miss you and they worry about you. By standing behind you, you're standing up for America -- the families are standing for America. And America appreciates the service and the sacrifice of the military families. (Applause.)

There are few things in life more difficult than seeing a loved one go off to war. And here in Idaho, a mom named Tammy Pruett -- (applause) -- I think she's here -- (laughter) -- knows that feeling six times over. (Applause.) Tammy has four sons serving in Iraq right now with the Idaho National Guard -- Eric, Evan, Greg and Jeff. Last year, her husband Leon and another son, Eren, returned from Iraq, where they helped train Iraqi firefighters in Mosul. Tammy says this -- and I want you to hear this -- "I know that if something happens to one of the boys, they would leave this world doing what they believe, what they think is right for our country. And I guess you couldn't ask for a better way of life than giving it for something that you believe in." America lives in freedom because of families like the Pruetts. (Applause.)

Our nation depends on our Guard families, and we depend on the understanding and support of the employers of our Guardsmen and women. Your service would not be possible without the employers, without the help of the employers. In offices and schools and factories across Idaho, your colleagues do without your talents so that you can serve our nation. Businesses are putting patriotism ahead of profit, because they know that our prosperity and way of life depend on the freedom you defend. Guard employers are serving this nation, and they have the gratitude of all Americans. (Applause.)

In this time of call-ups and alerts and mobilizations and deployments, your employers are standing behind you, and so is your government. (Applause.) The country owes you something in return for your sacrifice. We've taken a number of steps to improve the call-up process so it's more respectful of you and your families. In most cases, we're now giving you at least 30 days notification before you mobilize so that you and your families have time to make arrangements.

We're working to give you as much certainty as possible about the length of your mobilization, so you can know when you're able to resume civilian life. We're working to minimize the number of extensions and repeat mobilizations. We're working to ensure that you and your families are treated with the dignity you deserve. (Applause.)



We're also taking steps to improve the quality of life. We've expanded health care benefits for Guard and Reserve forces and their families, giving you access to the military's TRICARE system for up to 90 days before you report, and 180 days after deactivation.

We're also expanding access to education for those who serve as citizen soldiers. Last year I was proud to sign legislation providing our Guard and Reserve forces between 40 to 80 percent of the education benefit available to active duty forces, depending on the length of their mobilization in the war on terror.

We've also tripled the amount that can be paid for re-enlisting in the Guard and Reserve. I've asked Congress to authorize a new retention bonus for Guardsmen and Reservists with critical skills. What I'm tell you is this: We understand that as the Guardsmen and Reservists stand up for America, this administration and the government of the United States will stand with the Guard and Reserves people. (Applause.)

Your service is needed in these dangerous times. We remain a nation at war. The war reached our shores on September the 11th, 2001, when terrorists murdered nearly 3,000 of our citizens. And since then, they've continued to kill -- in Madrid, in Istanbul, in Jakarta, Casablanca, Riyadh, Bali, Baghdad, London, Sharm el-Sheikh and elsewhere. Our enemies murder because they despise our freedom and our way of life. We believe in human rights, and the human dignity of every man, woman and child on this Earth. The terrorists believe that all human life is expendable. They share a hateful ideology that rejects tolerance and crushes all dissent. They envision a world where women are beaten, children are indoctrinated, and all who reject their ideology of violence and extremism are murdered.

During the last few decades, the terrorists grew to believe that if they hit America hard, as in Lebanon and Somalia, America would retreat and back down. Before September the 11th, Osama bin Laden said that an attack could make America run in less than 24 hours. So now they're trying to break our will with acts of violence. They'll kill women and children, knowing that the images of their brutality will horrify civilized people. Their goal is to force us to retreat. See, they have a strategy. They want us to retreat so they can topple governments in the Middle East and turn that region into a safe haven for

terrorism.

We saw the terrible harm the terrorists did when they took effective control of the failed state of Afghanistan. After all, it was there that they trained and plotted and planned the attack that killed thousands of our citizens. We will not allow the terrorists to establish new places of refuge in failed states from which they can recruit and train and plan new attacks on our citizens. (Applause.)

On September the 11th, 2001, we saw the future that the terrorists intend for our country and the lengths they're willing to go to achieve their aims. We faced a clear choice. We could hunker down, retreating behind a false sense of security, or we could bring the war to the terrorists, striking them before they could kill more of our people. (Applause.)

I made a decision -- America will not wait to be attacked again. Our doctrine is clear: We will confront emerging threats before they full materialize. And if you harbor a terrorist, you're just as guilty as the terrorist. (Applause.)

We will stay on the offense. We'll complete our work in Afghanistan and Iraq. An immediate withdrawal of our troops in Iraq, or the broader Middle East, as some have called for, would only embolden the terrorists and create a staging ground to launch more attacks against America and free nations. So long as I'm the President, we will stay, we will fight, and we will win the war on terror. (Applause.)

Since September the 11th, we've followed a clear strategy to defeat the terrorists and protect our people. First, we are defending the homeland. We've strengthened our intelligence capabilities; we've trained more than 800,000 first responders; we have taken critical steps to protect our cities and borders and infrastructure. We have taken the fight to the enemy in our midst. We've disrupted terrorist cells and financing networks in California and Oregon and Illinois and New Jersey and Virginia, and other states. (Applause.)

This is a different kind of war. Today's enemies do not mass armies on borders, or navies on high seas. They blend in with the civilian population. They emerge to strike, and then they retreat back into the shadows. And that's why there are thousands of our fellow citizens running down every single piece of intelligence we can find, doing everything we can to disrupt folks that might be here in America trying to hurt you.

The second part of our strategy is this -- and it's based upon this fact: In an open society like ours -- and we will keep it open and we will keep it free -- it is impossible to protect against every threat. That's a fact we have to deal with. In a free society it is impossible to protect against every possible threat. And so the only way to defend our citizens where we live is to go after the terrorists where they live. (Applause.)

When the terrorists spend their days and nights struggling to avoid death or capture, they are less capable of arming and training and plotting new attacks on America and the rest of the civilized world. So we're after the enemy across the globe. And we're determined, and we're relentless, and we will stay on the hunt until the terrorists have nowhere to run and nowhere to hide. (Applause.)

And the third part of our strategy is this: We're spreading the hope of freedom across the broader Middle East. In the long run, the only way to defeat the terrorists is by offering an alternative to their ideology of hatred and fear. So a key component of our strategy is to spread freedom. History has proven that free nations are peaceful nations, that democracies do not fight their neighbors. (Applause.) And so, by advancing the cause of liberty and freedom in the Middle East, we're bringing hope to millions, and security to our own citizens. By bringing freedom and hope to parts of the world that have lived in despair, we're laying the foundation of peace for our children and grandchildren. (Applause.)

We're using all elements of our national power to achieve our objectives -- military power, diplomatic power, financial, intelligence and law enforcement. We're fighting the enemy on many fronts -- from the streets of the Western capitals to the mountains of Afghanistan, to the tribal regions of Pakistan, to the islands of Southeast Asia and the Horn of Africa. You see, this new kind of war, the first war of the 21st century, is a war on a global scale. And to protect our people, we've got to prevail in every theater. And that's why it's important for us to call upon allies and friends to join with us -- and they are.

One of the most important battlefronts in this war on terror is Iraq. Terrorists have converged on Iraq. See, they're coming into Iraq because they fear the march of freedom. Their most prominent leader is a Jordanian named Zarqawi, who has declared his allegiance with Osama bin Laden. The ranks of these folks are filled with foreign fighters who come from places like Saudi Arabia and Syria and Iran and Egypt and Sudan and Yemen and Libya. They lack popular support so they're targeting innocent Iraqis with car bombs and suicide attacks. They know the only way they can prevail is to break our will and the will of the Iraqi people before democracy takes hold. They are going to fail. (Applause.)

The stakes in Iraq could not be higher. The brutal violence in Iraq today is a clear sign of the terrorists' determination to stop democracy from taking root in the Middle East. They know that the success of a free Iraq, who can be a key ally in the war on terror and a symbol of success for others, will be a crushing blow to their strategy to dominate the region, and threaten America and the free world. They know that when their hateful ideology is defeated in Iraq, the Middle East will have a clear example of freedom and prosperity and hope. And the terrorists will begin to lose their sponsors and lose their recruits and lose the sanctuaries they need to plan new attacks.

And so they're fighting these efforts in Iraq with all the brutality they can muster. Yet, despite the violence we see every day, we're achieving our strategic objectives in Iraq. The Iraqi people are determined to build a free nation, and we have a plan to help them succeed. America and Iraqi forces are on the hunt, side-by-side, to defeat the terrorists. And as we hunt down our common enemies, we will continue to train more Iraqi security forces.

Like free people everywhere, Iraqis desire to defend their own country. That's what they want to do. They want to be in a position to defend their own freedom and their own democracy. And we're helping to achieve that goal. Our approach can be summed up this way: As Iraqis stand up, we will stand down. And when the Iraqi forces can defend their freedom by taking more and more of the fight to the enemy, our troops will come home with the honor they have earned. (Applause.)

At the same time, we're helping the Iraqi people establish a secure democracy. The people of Iraq

have made a choice. In spite of the threats and assassinations, eight and a half million Iraqis went to the polls in January. (Applause.) By casting their ballots in defiance of the terrorists, they sent a clear and unmistakable message to the world: It doesn't matter where you're born; it doesn't matter what faith you follow, embedded in every soul is the deep desire to live in freedom. (Applause.) I understand freedom is not America's gift to the world; freedom is an Almighty God's gift to each man and woman in this world. (Applause.)

The Iraqi people want to live in freedom. Part of securing America for our children and grandchildren is to help them secure their freedom. Members of the Idaho Guard know the Iraqi people's desire for liberty because they've seen it up close. Specialist Matt Salisbury is with us today. (Applause.) He helped provide security for the election. He described seeing an Iraqi family helping an elderly man to the polls vote that day.

Is it all right if I quote you? (Laughter.) "The pride radiating from his face was unmistakable," Matt said. "With one act, he recovered his dignity which had been stolen by a tyrant. How can I possibly describe the return of hope and dignity that I saw in these people's eyes? It is worth the sacrifice of leaving families, jobs and a safe life. I am proud to be a citizen soldier in the 116th Brigade Combat Team serving in Iraq. And I'm proud to stand on my watch." (Applause.)

You see, the Iraqi election that Matt witnessed was more than a momentary victory for the Iraqi people. It was part of a series of defeats for the terrorists. The terrorists have sworn havoc and destruction across -- sown havoc and destruction across Iraq. Yet the violence has not stopped the Iraqi people from building a free Iraq. The terrorists failed to stop the transfer of sovereignty. They failed to stop Iraqis from running for office and going to the polls. They have failed to stop a democratic government from taking power in Iraq. The terrorists can kill the innocent, but they cannot stop the political process which ultimately will lead to freedom.

And right now, the Iraqi people are achieving another important victory over the terrorists. Despite threats, intimidation and the assassination of some of its members, Iraq's Constitutional Drafting Committee has submitted a constitution to Iraq's Transitional National Assembly. Iraqi negotiators are now further debating and revising the text. The establishment of a democratic constitution will be a landmark event in the history of Iraq and the history of the history of the Middle East. It will bring us closer to a day when Iraq is a nation that can govern itself, sustain itself, and defend itself. (Applause.)

It will send a clear signal to the people across the Middle East who are desperate for freedom that the future belongs to freedom. See, producing a constitution is a difficult process. It involves a lot of debate and compromise. We know that from our own history. Our Constitutional Convention was the home to political rivalries and regional disagreements. And the document that our founders produced in Philadelphia was not the final word. After all, it has been amended many times over the century.

Iraqis are now at the beginning of a long process, and like our founders, they're grappling with difficult issues, such as the role of the federal government. Idaho people have a pretty good view of the role of the federal government. (Laughter and applause.) Like, limit it. (Applause.) They're arguing about the proper place of religion in the life of their nation. And like our founders, they will come up with a system that respects the traditions of their country and guarantees the rights of all their citizens.

They understand that in order to have a free democracy, you must have minority rights. The will of the majority, coupled with minority rights and human dignity and rights for women is important for a free society. They understand that. (Applause.) But what's important is that the Iraqis are resolving these issues through debate and discussion, not at the barrel of a gun. (Applause.) And we admire their thoughtful deliberations, and we salute the determination of the Iraqi leaders to lay the foundation of a lasting democracy amid the ruins of a brutal dictatorship. (Applause.)

The battle lines in Iraq are now clearly drawn for the world to see, and there is no middle ground. Transforming a country that was ruled by an oppressive dictator who sponsored terror into a free nation that is an ally in the war on terror will take more time, more sacrifice, and continued resolve. Terrorists will emerge from Iraq one of two ways: emboldened or defeated. Every nation -- every free nation -- has a stake in the success of the Iraqi people. If the terrorists were to win in Iraq, the free world would be more vulnerable to attacks on innocent civilians. And that is why, for the sake of our children and our grandchildren, the terrorists will be defeated. (Applause.)

There will be more difficult moments on the path to victory, yet we can have confidence in the future. We have seen freedom conquer evil and secure the peace before. In World War II, free nations came together to fight the ideology of fascism. Freedom prevailed. And today, the enemies of World War II are allies in the cause of peace. (Applause.) In the Cold War, freedom defeated the ideology of communism and led to a Europe that is whole, free and at peace. Now, once again, freedom is confronting the followers of a murderous ideology, and like the hate-filled ideologies that came before it, the darkness of terror will be defeated, and the forces of freedom and moderation will prevail throughout the Muslim world. (Applause.)

In the end, the terrorists will fail because they have nothing positive to offer. The terrorist Zarqawi sums up their appeal this way: Anyone who stands in the way of our struggle is our enemy and target of the swords. That's the sum of his grim vision. They're brutal, but nothing more. They seek to exploit a great religion, but in truth, they are animated by nothing but their own lust for power and their desire for dominion over others. And while they may sow death and destruction for a time, the history of the last half-century is clear -- the will to power cannot withstand the will to live in freedom. (Applause.)

We will prevail in this struggle because freedom is the permanent hope of mankind, and because we have on our side the greatest force for freedom in the history of the world -- the brave men and women of the United States Armed Forces. (Applause.)

Since the founding of our republic, every generation has produced patriots willing to sacrifice for our freedom. Since the morning of September the 11th, we have known that the war on terror required great sacrifice, as well. In this war, we have said farewell to some very good men and women, including 491 heroes of the National Guard and Reserves. We mourn the loss of every life. We pray for their loved ones. These brave men and women gave their lives for a cause that is just and necessary for the security of our country, and now we will honor their sacrifice by completing their mission. (Applause.)

The men and women of the Idaho Guard are serving freedom's cause with courage and distinction, and your courage is changing the world. Specialist Charles Glenn of Boise has been on the front lines

in Iraq. He has seen the progress firsthand, and he says, "I know Idaho has made a big difference here. We have been a part of history." The citizen soldiers of Idaho are making history. You're fighting to ensure that our freedom, like the state of Idaho, may endure forever. Americans are grateful for your devotion to duty and your courage under fire. We live in freedom and peace because of your determination to prevail.

I want to thank you for your service. May God bless the people of this great state. May God bless our troops. And may God continue to bless the United States of America. (Applause.)

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