



For Immediate Release
Office of the Press Secretary
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President Bush Celebrates Independence Day With West Virginia Air National Guard

167th Airlift Wing
C-5 Maintenance Hangar
Martinsburg, West Virginia

 [Independence Day 2007](#)

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 [Presidential Remarks](#)

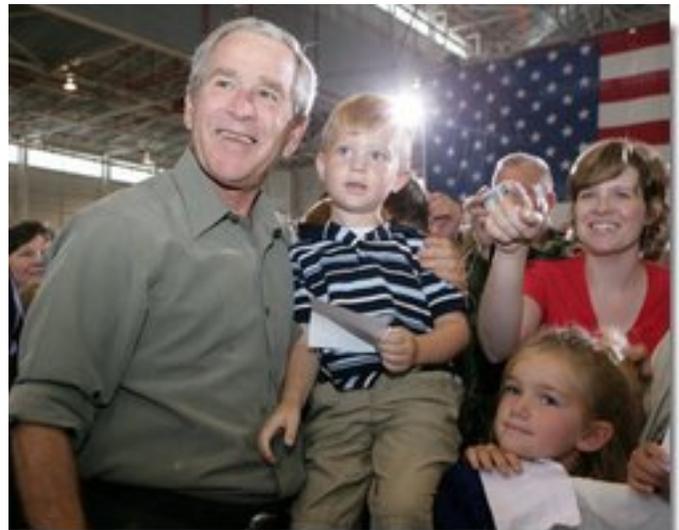
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9:21 A.M. EDT

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you all. Thanks for the warm welcome. Happy 4th of July. I'm thrilled to be here in Martinsburg. This is the fourth Independence Day that I have spent in the great state of West Virginia since I've been your President. (Applause.) I appreciate General Tackett's introduction. Thank you, sir -- you read it just like I wrote it. (Laughter.)

I love coming to your state because it's a state full of decent, hardworking, patriotic Americans. And I can't think of a better way to celebrate the 4th of July than to spend it with some of what we call the Mountain State's bravest and most dedicated citizens -- the men and women of the West Virginia Air National Guard. (Applause.)

I am proud to stand with the 167th Airlift Wing. (Applause.) I like your slogan: "Mountaineer Pride, Worldwide." (Applause.) I'm also honored to be with West Virginia's great military families. Some of you have loved ones deployed overseas this 4th of July. I know that. And I know it may be hard to enjoy the fireworks and the picnics and the other celebrations while they're away on dangerous duty in a faraway land. And so I've come today to express our affection -- the affection of the United States of America for the military families who stand strong in the face of the difficult struggle we face to secure the United States of America. We're blessed to have our military families in the United States and I'm blessed to be here with you. Thanks for letting me come by. (Applause.)



Speaking about Laura -- speaking about families, Laura sends her love. She would be with me, but I told her to fire up the grill. (Laughter.) Don't tell her I said that. (Laughter.) I thank Brigadier General Terry Butler, Commander, West Virginia Air National Guard, and his wife, Susan. I want to thank Eric

Vollmecke, he's the 167th Wing Commander, and his wife, Sigrid.

I appreciate being here today with a really fine United States Congresswoman, Shelly Moore Capito, and her husband, Charlie. (Applause.) You don't have to worry about her supporting the military. When we've got somebody in harm's way, she understands what I understand: that that military person and his or her family deserve the very strongest support from the federal government at all times. (Applause.)

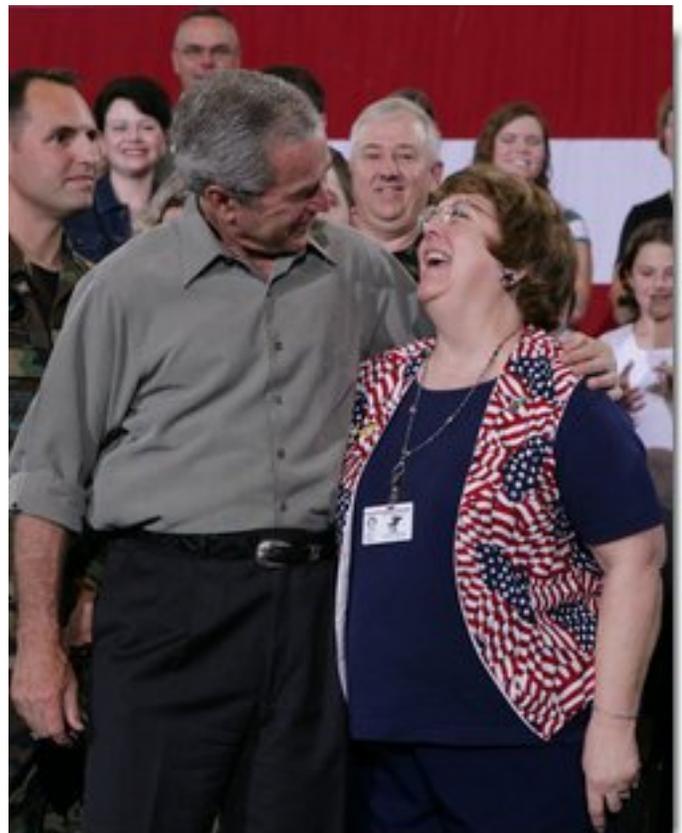
I enjoyed reciting the Pledge of Allegiance with some of the children from our military families. I thought they handled their task quite well. I appreciate Major Dave Reynolds, Chaplain, for giving the blessing. I thank the 249th Army Band of the West Virginia Army National Guard for playing here today. (Applause.)

But most importantly, thank you all for coming. Thanks for being here. The 4th of July is a day for celebration and a day for gratitude. Across America, our citizens are going to come together for parades and pyrotechnic displays, and readings from our Declaration of Independence. It's a grand celebration. It's a great day to be an American.

And when we carry on these festivities, it's important you know we're carrying on a grand tradition. This isn't the first time our country has celebrated the 4th of July. As a matter of fact, I would like to read a couple of paragraphs from a 1777 newspaper. And here's what it said on the first anniversary of the Declaration, as it described the scene in Philadelphia:

"The 4th of July was celebrated with joy and festivity, fine performances, a number of toasts, followed by a discharge of artillery and small arms" -- don't do that today. (Laughter.) "And at night there was a grand exhibition of fireworks and the city was beautifully illuminated." This newspaper article from Philadelphia in 1777 went on to say: "Thus may that glorious and memorable day be celebrated through America by the sons of freedom, from age to age till time shall be no more." We're still celebrating, and rightly so.

Our first Independence Day celebration took place in a midst of a war -- a bloody and difficult struggle that would not end for six more years before America finally secured her freedom. More than two decades [sic] later, it is hard to imagine the Revolutionary War coming out any other way -- but at the time, America's victory was far from certain. In other words, when we celebrated the first 4th of July celebration, our struggle for independence was far from certain. Citizens had to struggle for six more years to finally determine the outcome of the Revolutionary War.



We were a small band of freedom-loving patriots taking on the most powerful empire in the world. And one of those patriots was the founder of Martinsburg, West Virginia -- Major General Adam Stephen. Of course, it wasn't West Virginia then, but it was Martinsburg. (Laughter.) He crossed the Delaware with Washington. He helped secure America's victory at the Battle of Trenton -- and he later went -- and later, when our liberty was won, delivered stirring remarks in the Virginia House of Delegates that helped secure ratification of our Constitution.

On Independence Day we give thanks, we give thanks for our Founders, we give thanks for all the brave citizen-soldiers of our Continental Army who dropped pitchforks and took up muskets to fight for our freedom and liberty and independence.

You're the successors of those brave men. Those who wear the uniform are the successors of those who dropped their pitchforks and picked up their muskets to fight for liberty. Like those early patriots, you're fighting a new and unprecedented war -- pledging your lives and honor to defend our freedom and way of life. In this war, the weapons have changed, and so have our enemies, but one thing remains the same: The men and women of the Guard stand ready to put on the uniform and fight for America. (Applause.)



In this war against radicals and extremists, in this war on terror, you're showing that the courage which won our independence more than two centuries ago is alive and well here in West Virginia. Since the attacks of September the 11th, 2001, every operational unit of the West Virginia National Guard has been deployed -- and some are on their second and third deployments.

One member of the 167th Airlift Wing, Master Sergeant Richard Howland, has deployed seven times since the 9/11 attacks -- and this good man just volunteered to go to Baghdad for an eighth deployment in September. (Applause.) Our fellow citizens should listen to what Richard has said, what this volunteer has said. He said: "It is my patriotic duty to do whatever I can do to help." It feels "good that I'm keeping a lot of people safe." We're an incredible nation that has produced men like Richard Howland and you, who in the face of danger wear the uniform of the United States of America and step forward in freedom's defense. And I thank you for that. (Applause.)

Since September the 11th, members of the West Virginia Air National Guard have earned seven Bronze stars and four Purple Hearts. Two of those Purple Hearts were awarded to Staff Sergeants Brad Runkles and Derek Brown. They're here today. (Applause.) You're not related to them, are you? (Laughter.)

Brad and Derek are childhood friends; they grew up right here in Martinsburg and they signed up together to serve in the West Virginia Guard. In 2004, they were driving together in the lead gun truck of a convoy in Iraq when their vehicle was hit by a roadside bomb. Brad and Derek made it out, but they suffered burns on their hands and faces. They recovered from their wounds -- and in May of last

year, they both re-enlisted. (Applause.)

Today is the day to celebrate courage in the face of adversity. I want you to hear what Derek says. He said: "This war is something that has to be done -- either over there or here. And I think it's best we fight it over there," he said. (Applause.) "I'm proud to serve my country like those before me -- for the cause of freedom." America is proud to have citizens like Derek and Brad, that we call neighbors and friends and defenders of the peace. (Applause.)

And your service is needed. We need for people to volunteer to defend America. Because in this war, we face dangerous enemies who have attacked us here at home. Oh, I know the passage of time has convinced some -- maybe convinced some that danger doesn't exist. But that's not how I see it, and that's not how many of you see it. These people want to strike us again. We learned on September the 11th that in the age of terror, the best way to do our duty, which is to protect the American people, is to go on the offense and stay on the offense. And that's exactly what we've been doing against these radicals and extremists. (Applause.)



It is best that we take the fight to where the enemy lives, so we don't have to face them where we live. And so since 9/11, that's precisely the strategy we have followed. In Afghanistan -- where I know some of you have been deployed and some of you are deployed -- we removed a regime that gave sanctuary and support to al Qaeda as they planned the 9/11 attacks which killed nearly 3,000 citizens. They found safe haven. That's what they like. They like a place where they can plot and plan in relatively -- in security, all aiming to come and harm the citizens of the greatest face for liberty in the world.

Today, because we acted, the terrorist camps in Afghanistan have been shut down, 25 million people have been liberated, and the Afghan people have elected a government that is fighting terrorists, instead of harboring terrorists. (Applause.) This enemy of ours -- they have got an ideology. They believe in something. In other words, the attacks are just a tactic to enable them to spread their dark vision of the world. Perhaps one way to differentiate between our thoughts is just think about religion. In the great country of the United States, we believe that you should be able to worship any way you see fit; that you're equally American, regardless of your religious beliefs. They believe that if you don't worship the way they see it, then they're going to bring you harm.

We believe in an Almighty, we believe in the freedom for people to worship that Almighty. They don't. They don't believe you should worship the way you choose. They believe the only way you should worship is the way they choose. And, therefore -- and, therefore, they will do anything they can to spread that ideology. And it's our charge, it's our calling to keep the pressure on these people, to defend America and to spread an ideology of hope and an ideology of peace so that the kids who came up here to give the Pledge of Allegiance will be able to live in peace and security. (Applause.)

There's more than one front in this war against these radicals and extremists. And, obviously, the



toughest threat of all is in Iraq. In that country, we removed a cruel dictator who harbored terrorists, paid the families of Palestinian suicide bombers, invaded his neighbors, defied the United Nations Security Council, pursued and used weapons of mass destruction. The world is better off without Saddam Hussein in power. (Applause.) And today, U.S. and coalition troops are standing with the Iraqi troops and the nearly 12 million Iraqis who voted for a future of peace. We're opposing ruthless enemies who want to bring down Iraq's democracy and turn that nation into a terrorist safe haven.

Earlier this year, I announced a new strategy in Iraq, under the leadership of General David Petraeus, and new Ambassador, Ryan Crocker. Our goal is to help the Iraqi government protect their population, so they can make progress toward reconciliation and build a free nation that respects the rights of its people, and upholds the rule of law, and is an ally against these extremists and terrorists and killers. And so we sent reinforcements to help the Iraqis secure their neighborhoods, and go after the terrorists and insurgents and militias that are inciting sectarian violence, and help get the capital under control.

It's a tough fight, but I wouldn't have asked those troops to go into harm's way if the fight was not essential to the security of the United States of America. (Applause.) Many of the spectacular car bombings and killings you see are as a result of al Qaeda -- the very same folks that attacked us on September the 11th. A major enemy in Iraq is the same enemy that dared attack the United States on that fateful day.

Al Qaeda hasn't given up its objectives inside Iraq. And that is to cause enough chaos and confusion so America would leave, and they would be able to establish their safe haven from which to do two things: to further spread their ideology; and to plan and plot attacks against the United States. If we were to quit Iraq before the job is done, the terrorists we are fighting would not declare victory and lay down their arms -- they would follow us here, home. If we were to allow them to gain control of Iraq, they would have control of a nation with massive oil reserves -- which they could use to fund new attacks and exhort economic blackmail on those who didn't kowtow to their wishes. However difficult the fight is in Iraq, we must win it -- we must succeed for our own sake; for the security of our citizens, we must support our troops, we must support the Iraqi government, and we must defeat al Qaeda in Iraq. (Applause.)

Victory in this struggle will require more patience, more courage, and more sacrifice. And we've lost some good men and women in this fight. And so on this 4th of July, we pause to remember the fallen -- and the grieving families they have left behind. We hold them in our hearts, we lift them up in our

prayers, and we pledge to honor their memory by finishing the work for which they have given their life.

Here at the Martinsburg Air National Guard Base, you're living in a wonderful and caring community. Over the course of this struggle, you've looked out for each other and you've given strength to each other in difficult moments. One of the community leaders making a difference on this base is Joy Enders. A couple of you -- (applause.)

In case you haven't ever heard of Joy, she's the President of the 167th Airlift Wing Family Readiness Group. She and the other members of the group make it their mission to care for the families of our deployed Guardsmen and women. Before one recent deployment, they took pictures of all the deploying airmen, and created iron-on transfers to place on pillowcases for the children of the deploying troops. It's a simple act, but it's an act of love and compassion that gave the children a sense that their moms and dads were nearby -- even though they were deployed a thousand miles away.

Our military families miss their moms and dads, and husbands and wives, and sons and daughters. And they look forward to welcoming their loved ones home. And we all long for the day when there are far fewer American servicemen and women in Iraq. The time will come when Iraq has a stable, self-sustaining government that is an ally against these extremists and killers. That time will come when the Iraqi people will not need the help of 159,000 American troops in their country. Yet, withdrawing our troops prematurely based on politics, not on the advice and recommendation of our military commanders, would not be in our national interest. It would hand the enemy a victory and put America's security at risk -- and that's something we're not going to do.

Our troops in Iraq, Afghanistan and other fronts in the war on terror are serving in a cause that is vital and just. And on this 4th of July, I ask every American to find a way to thank the men and women who are defending our freedom -- and the families that support them. (Applause.) There are many ways to show your gratitude. There are many ways for our fellow citizens to say thanks to the men and women who wear the uniform and their families. You can send a care package. You can reach out to a military family in your neighborhood with a mom or dad on the front lines; you can ask somebody, "What can I do to help you? What do you need?" You can car pool. You can be on bended knee and pray for a soldier and their families. To help you find ways to help, the Department of Defense has set up a website -- I would hope our fellow citizens all across the United States would call up AmericaSupportsYou.mil. At this website, AmericaSupportsYou.mil, you can learn about efforts in your own community as to how you can support our troops.

As we celebrate our independence this 4th, we can have confidence in the enduring principles of our founding. The words of our Declaration hold a promise for all mankind -- and those ideals continue to inspire millions across the world.

Recently, I traveled to Prague, the Czech Republic, where I spoke to a conference of dissidents and democratic activists from 17 nations on five continents. I was proud to represent our country at that historic meeting. I was proud to tell those brave souls that America stands with them in their struggle for liberty, because we believe in the universality of liberty. I personally believe that freedom is a gift from an Almighty to every man, woman and child on the face of the Earth.

I looked out in that audience and I saw men and women who believe in the power of freedom to transform their countries and to remake the world. And I saw that those who live in tyranny and yearn for freedom still place their hopes in the United States of America.

For the past six and a half years, it's been a privilege to be the President of such a good and decent nation that inspires and holds out hope to people all across the world. It's an awesome experience, and a humbling experience to hold a powerful office like President. It brings with it the great honor of being the Commander-in-Chief of the finest military the world has ever known. (Applause.) Because of the service of our military men and women, because our nation has got a military full of the bravest and most decent people that I've ever met, America remains a beacon of hope for all around the world; America remains the place where peace has the best chance to be encouraged.

We're doing the hard work now so generations of American kids can grow up in peace. It's necessary work, it's important work, and I thank you for your sacrifices. (Applause.)

May God bless you, and may God bless America. (Applause.)

END 9:49 A.M. EDT

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