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PRESIDENT GEORGE W. BUSH

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Remarks by the Vice President at the 123rd Coast Guard Academy Commencement Ceremony

15 Mohegan Avenue
New London, Connecticut

11:28 A.M. EDT

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Thank you very much. Thank you, Admiral Collins, Admiral Olsen, Lieutenant Governor Rell, Dr. Cohon, Captain Sevim, Ambassador Grdesec, Academy staff and faculty, friends, family members, officers, cadets, and graduates.

Thank you all. It's a pleasure to be in New London, and a high privilege to stand before the newest officers in the United States Coast Guard.

I want to commend each of you for this achievement, and for the years of hard effort that brought you to this day. And I am honored to extend to the Class of 2004 the personal congratulations of your Commander-in-Chief, President George W. Bush. (Applause.)



This is my first visit to the Coast Guard Academy, and I'm delighted to be here. This institution has been in steady service to the United States for well over a century -- carefully selecting each incoming class from among America's finest young people, and producing generations of superb officers. The cadet corps is drawn from every region of the nation, and from eight or more foreign nations as well. For my part, as a resident of Wyoming, I was interested in knowing how many current cadets are from my home state. I found out there's only one -- a rising junior from Ranchester, Wyoming. I would have expected more, considering the breadth of Wyoming's coastline. (Laughter.) But I'll remind this future Coast Guard officer of the motto that I had when I was Wyoming's sole member of the House of Representatives: It may be a small delegation, but it is quality. (Laughter.) Somebody from Ranchester. (Applause.)

As members of the corps gather in tribute to the Class of 2004, I want you to know about a small matter that the President and I discussed before I came here today. We realize that the academic year may be over, but there are still cadets on restriction. Now we're, of course, known as compassionate conservatives -- (laughter) -- so the question was just how much compassion the Coast Guard Academy needed this year. It turned out to be a lot. (Laughter.) The President and I talked about it. He felt very strongly we should be lenient. Me, I could have gone either way. (Laughter.) But he's the boss. And so, at his direction, I hereby absolve the cadets on restriction for minor conduct offenses, leaving up to Admiral Olsen the definition of "minor." (Laughter and applause.)

Ladies and gentlemen, you are about to collect a degree and a commission that will command respect everywhere you go, for the rest of your life. Becoming a Coast Guard officer is a high calling, and in this institution you rose to its demands. Every day in New London has brought tests of mental discipline, tests of physical endurance, tests of moral character. At times in these four years, you may have even surprised yourselves. You found strength you didn't know you had. You pushed on through the toughest moments. You showed yourself, and others, what you're really made of.

Nor did your path of success begin with Swab Summer. It started as all great achievements begin -- well before you arrived here, you set a goal, and you never wavered from it. And you had some help along the way. The people who helped you the most, believed in you the most, are watching here today. This is a great day for them as well. So let me ask all the parents here today to rise, and receive the thanks they deserve. (Applause.)



You are taking your place as leaders in the oldest life-saving service in the world. You do so at a time of unprecedented challenge for our country. In the four years since you entered this Academy, our nation has experienced direct enemy attack, undertaken a sustained effort against a global terror network, and conducted two land wars more than 8,000 miles away. And in that same period, the responsibilities of the Coast Guard have been transformed to meet the dangers of this new era.

Americans still look to Coast Guardsmen and women as our brave rescuers on the seas. We depend on your vigilance in the fight against drug smuggling, and as the front-line agents for enforcing our maritime law. We rely on your skill in protecting the environment and fisheries, and tending to navigational aids. And now, as enemies continue to plan attacks against the United States, your fellow citizens are counting on you to help protect and secure our homeland.

This work is as critical as any in the Coast Guard's history, and the task is enormous. We are a nation with more than 95,000 miles of coastline, and 26,000 miles of navigable waterways serving some 361 seaports. And each year, more than 9 million containers arrive at American ports from abroad. The safety of those ports, and of the seaward approaches to our country, are essential to national security, and to our economic security.

Defending against infiltration and attack has required the most comprehensive reorganization of the federal government since the end of World War II, with the creation of the Department of Homeland Security. In a free country, especially a vast continental democracy like ours, there is no such thing as perfect security. But this new department allows us to coordinate our defenses in a systematic way -- analyzing threats, guarding our borders and airports, protecting critical infrastructure, and coordinating the response of the nation to any future emergency. And the armed service at the center of that department is the United States Coast Guard.

The attacks on our country increased the Coast Guard's homeland security responsibilities dramatically, prompting rapid growth in the capabilities and size of the service. As the stewards of these new responsibilities, the officers of the Class of 2004 will protect our nation in new and innovative ways.

As you rise through the ranks of the post-9/11 Coast Guard, you will command the burgeoning fleet of 87-foot coastal patrol boats; serve in the high-speed Cyclone-class patrol craft transferred from the Navy; act as sea marshals, escorting high-risk vessels into port; man maritime safety and security teams

to protect our harbors; pilot armed helicopters, stopping drug smugglers and safeguarding our critical infrastructure, deploy with port security units to support worldwide military operations; oversee up to 700 smaller, faster response boats being added to the Coast Guard inventory; and gain the benefits of cutting edge command and control, aircraft, and cutter technologies that will be generated by the Deepwater program.

Deepwater will introduce the replacement or modernization of up to 90 cutters, 200 aircraft and UAVs, and state-of-the-art communications and logistical support systems that dramatically increase the Coast Guard's control over the approaches to our nation. By gaining awareness of the maritime domain, the Coast Guard will be far better poised to identify and intercept dangers before they reach our coast. Deepwater is the future of the Coast Guard, and vital to America's future defense. President Bush is committed to implementing the program in full. And as President Bush said in New London last year, "Terrorists who seek to harm our country now face your 'Shield of Freedom.' Every citizen can be grateful that the Coast Guard stands watch for America." (Applause.)

All of these actions, and many other steps we have taken to defend the homeland, represent the considered judgment of a nation at war. September 11th, 2001, changed everything for this country. In the space of a few hours, we saw the violence and the grief that 19 men can inflict. And we had a glimpse of the even greater harm that terrorists wish to do to us. The terrorists hate our country and everything we stand for in the world. They serve a fanatical ideology that sets itself against progress and against humanity. They seek to impose their will across the Middle East and beyond. They seek to persecute women, and to oppress entire populations by spreading violence, fear, and putting dissenters to death. They seek to intimidate America into panic and retreat, and to set free nations against each other. And they seek weapons of mass destruction, to blackmail and murder on a massive scale.

This danger has required a shift in our national security policy. For many years prior to 9/11, terror attacks against Americans were treated as isolated incidents, and answered -- if at all -- on an ad hoc basis, rarely in a systematic way. Even after an attack inside our own country -- the 1993 bombing at the World Trade Center in New York -- there was a tendency to treat terror attacks as criminal acts, to be handled primarily through law enforcement. Ramzi Yousef, the main perpetrator of that 1993 attack in New York was tracked down, arrested, convicted, and sent off to serve a 240-year sentence. Yet behind that man was a growing network with operatives inside and outside the United States, waging war against our country.

Among the attacks after the World Trade Center were the murders at the Saudi Arabian National Guard facility in Riyadh, in 1995; the simultaneous bombings of our embassies in East Africa, in 1998; and the attack on the USS Cole, in 2000. In 1996, Khalid Shaykh Mohammad -- the mastermind of 9/11 -- first proposed to Osama bin Laden that the use airliners to attack targets in the United States. Later, in 1996 and again in 1998, Osama bin Laden declared war upon the United States. During the same period, thousands of terrorists were trained at al Qaeda camps throughout Afghanistan. And we've seen the work of terrorists in many attacks since 9/11 -- in Riyadh, Casablanca, Istanbul, Karbala, Mombasa, Bali, Jakarta, Najaf, Jerusalem, Baghdad, and Madrid.

Something else has become clear over the last several decades. We've learned that any concession or retreat on our part will only embolden this enemy and invite more attacks on Americans. The terrorist enemy holds no territory, defends no population, hides among the innocent and seeks their death by the thousands. Such an adversary cannot be deterred, contained, appeased, or negotiated with. Nor can we hope that defensive actions are enough to protect our country. Wars are not won on the defensive. To fully and finally remove this danger, we have only one option -- and that's to take the fight to the enemy. (Applause.)

On the very night this nation was attacked, President Bush declared that the United States would no longer make the distinction between terrorists and those who support them. This principle is now understood by all: Any person or government that supports, protects, or harbors terrorists is complicit in the murder of the innocent, and will be held to account. The first to see its application were the Taliban, who ruled Afghanistan by violence while turning that country into a training camp for terrorists. With allies at our side, we took down the regime and destroyed the al Qaeda camps.

In Iraq, where a dictator cultivated ties to terror and sought to develop the world's most deadly weapons, America led a mission to make the world safer, and to liberate the Iraqi people. Saddam Hussein defied the demands of the civilized world and he has experienced the consequences. The dictator and his sons will never again terrorize Iraqis, never again threaten Iraq's neighbors, and never again threaten the United States of America. (Applause.)

The Coast Guard played a vital role in the liberation of Iraq -- sending cutters and more than a thousand active duty members to the Persian Gulf and surrounding waters. The Coast Guard remains on duty in that region today, helping to secure Iraqi ports and oil platforms, and ensuring harbor and waterway safety. Members of the Coast Guard are serving with all the skill and honor this nation expects of them - - and our entire nation is grateful.

America's military continues its work -- striking hard against the forces of murder, conducting heroic raids, countering attacks, seizing weapons, and capturing killers. Many of our men and women have faced hard duty, long deployments, and the loss of comrades. Just three weeks ago, a Coast Guard petty officer, Nathan Bruckenthal, was killed in a suicide attack as his interception team moved to protect an oil platform and American vessels. The United States honors the memory of this young man, as we honor all who have fallen in this cause. And as President Bush has made very clear, we will honor their sacrifice by completing their mission. (Applause.)

That mission is peace and stability in a free, self-governing Iraq. It is a mission consistent with the ideals of the United States, and vital to our interests, as well. Iraq will either be a peaceful, democratic country, or it will again become a source of violence, a haven for terror, and a danger to America and the world. Every member of our military working to secure a free Iraq is adding to the future security of the American people.

The terrorists recognize this just as well as we do. That's why Iraq has become a central front in the war on terror. A collection of killers is trying to undo Iraq's progress and throw that country into chaos -- and these men are not just acting from blind rage. The terrorists in Iraq understand that the defeat of tyranny and violence in that nation, and the rise of democracy in the heart of the Middle East, will be a crucial setback for international terror. They understand that a free Iraq will confirm that America's word is good. And so these enemies are employing the tactics of terror -- from hostage-taking, to roadside bombings, to the assassination of Iraq's leaders, to the beheading of an American civilian on camera. They want to destroy the democratic hopes of the Iraqi people. They want to shake the will of the American people, and show the world that America runs from a challenge. In all of this, the terrorists will fail. (Applause.)

The President of the United States has made a commitment, and that commitment will be kept. With good allies at our side, America will do what is necessary -- destroying the terrorists, returning sovereignty to the Iraqi people, and helping them to build a stable, self-governing nation. Because we are strong and resolute, Iraq will never go back to the camp of tyranny and terror. And the United States will never go back to the false comforts of the world before 9/11. Terrorist attacks are not caused by the use of strength. They are invited by the perception of weakness. And this nation has made a decision: We will engage the enemy, facing him with our military in Afghanistan and Iraq today, so we do not

have to face him with armies of firefighters, police, and medical personnel inside our own country. (Applause.)

I am told that the Coast Guard Academy Class of 2004 has adopted a three-word motto: "Forward without fear." Those are not idle words in this time of testing for the United States, when so many are called upon to defend this nation at considerable risk to themselves. But your motto reflects perfectly the character of our country. We look to the future with confidence -- knowing that freedom is the direction of history, that the resolve of our people is firm, and that the men and women who wear the uniform are the best of America.

As superbly trained new officers in the United States Coast Guard, all of you leave here today rightfully proud of your achievements, and well prepared for the duties that lie ahead. And I leave here knowing that you will bring credit to your uniform, to this great Academy, and to the nation that we are all privileged to serve. I want to thank you for the honor of sharing this day with you. Good luck and Godspeed to the United States Coast Guard Academy Class of 2004. Semper Paratus.

END 11:46 A.M. EDT