



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 Minnesota National Guard

133rd Airlift Wing
Minneapolis-St. Paul, Minnesota

2:08 P.M. CDT

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Thank you. (Applause.) Well, thank you very much. I appreciate the warm welcome to the Twin Cities, and I'm honored to stand with the Minnesota National Guard.

Let me thank General Shellito, Minnesota's Adjutant General, for his kind word of introduction. And I also want to thank Governor Tim Pawlenty. You can all be proud of your governor who stands behind our military and all our veterans here in the State of Minnesota. (Applause.)

I also want to acknowledge your United States Senator Norm Coleman, Lieutenant Governor Carol Molnau, Colonel Tim Cossalter, all of the family members who have joined us today, and the fine musicians of the 34th Infantry Division Band. Thank you very much for being here today. (Applause.)

Let me thank Minnesota's communities for their continued support for the National Guard -- for the Air and Army National Guard. I also want to recognize the Minnesota Army National Guard Soldier of the Year, Specialist Matthew Small and the Air National Guard First Sergeant of the year, Mark Wasserbauer. (Applause.)

And to the men and women of the 1st Brigade who will be watching these remarks this week in Iraq, we appreciate that you're back in the saddle again. You have the full support of the American people behind you.

It's been my privilege to work with National Guard personnel over the years, not only as Vice President but also as Secretary of Defense when our nation was fighting Desert Storm. I have immense respect for our citizen soldiers, so I've been looking forward to being here today to say thank you to all of you.

Our country is going through a period of challenge and change at a fast pace, and we're faced with unprecedented dangers. In such a time we rely on the men and women of the National Guard to take on many urgent and difficult assignments. You are doing so with all the skill and the honor that we expect of you, you're writing new chapters of accomplishment and excellence for the National Guard. I'm honored to be in your presence today, and I bring you good wishes from the President of the United States, our Commander-in-Chief, George W. Bush. (Applause.)

By its very nature, service in the National Guard involves a dual mission. You defend the country against enemies abroad, and you step in to protect lives and property here at home. Service is part of a long tradition here in the upper Midwest. Even before Minnesota joined the Union as the 32nd state, people in this part of the country were able to count on the help and dedication of citizen soldiers. In April of 1856, leaders of the Minnesota territory organized the "Pioneer Guard," and ever since those early days, Minnesotans in the Guard uniform have helped make history.

From flood fighting and blizzard relief at home, to service in major conflicts including the Civil War, World War I and World War II -- you've always been there for Minnesota and for America. So I congratulate the Minnesota National Guard for 150 years of outstanding service to the nation.

Every day you live by the Midwestern values of hard work, community spirit, and shared sacrifice. Those values translate to National Guard recruiting and retention rates that Minnesota can be proud of. And both units of the Minnesota Air National Guard have maintained themselves at above 100 percent authorized strength.

Since the attacks of September 11th, 2001, more than 11,000 members of the Minnesota National Guard have carried out active federal duty. The 133rd Airlift Wing, based here in Minneapolis/Saint Paul, has carried out numerous C-130 missions in support of our operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. You are "Projecting Peace Proudly," and the nation is grateful.

We're also grateful to the 148th Fighter Wing of the Air National Guard. The 148th took to the sky on the morning of 9/11, and has flown patrols over cities across North America in these past four-and-a-half years. You've also deployed to Iraq -- always performing to your vision: "Expect the Best, Be the Best, Provide the Best." And I want to thank the fine pilots and crews from the great city of Duluth, Minnesota. (Applause.)

America is also deeply grateful to the men and women of the Red Bull Division -- the 34th Infantry Division. Your recent missions include operations in Bosnia, Kosovo, Egypt, and Honduras. And you have mobilized and deployed in the global war on terror. You've sent in units as part of Operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom, and right now soldiers of the 1st Brigade Combat Team are on the ground in Iraq as part of the largest overseas deployment of the Minnesota National Guard since the World War II.

In that conflict more than 60 years ago, the Minnesota Army National Guard served a record 517 days in combat, and the same commitment to duty, and country, and the cause of freedom inspires the current generation of citizen soldiers. America is proud of the Desert Bulls. (Applause.)

Our nation owes an incalculable debt to all branches of the armed forces, and to the Guard and Reserve units all across the country. It is impossible to overstate how much they've done to make this nation safer, and to bring freedom, stability, and peace to a troubled part of the world.

Afghanistan five years ago was in the grip of a violent, merciless regime that harbored terrorists who plotted murder for export. Today Afghanistan is a rising nation -- with an elected government, a market economy, and millions of children going to school for the first time. And when our forces return from

that part of the world, they can be proud of their service for the rest of their lives.

The same is true for the men and women serving today in Iraq. Americans understand what is at stake in that country -- and so do the terrorists. That is 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's a battle worth fighting. And it's 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 work until we finish the job. Progress has not come easily, but it has been steady, and we can be confident going forward. By voting in free elections, ratifying a constitution, going to the polls with an amazing voter turnout rate of more than 70 percent in the face of the killers and car bombers, 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 military commanders -- not by artificial time lines set by politicians in Washington, D.C. (Applause.)

Every American serving in this war can be certain that the people of our country do not support a policy of passivity, resignation, or defeatism in the face of terror. The United States will never go back to the false comforts of the world before September 11th, 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.)

There is still difficult work ahead, because the terrorists regard Iraq as the central front in the global war on terror. They are running a war against the civilized world. We're dealing with enemies that recognize no rule of warfare and accept no standard of morality. They have declared their intention to bring great harm to any nation that opposes their aims. Their prime target is the United States. So we have a responsibility to lead in that fight.

Although we've been in the struggle against terrorism for over four years now, the terrorists were actually at war with this country long before 2001. But for a long time though, they were the ones on the offensive. And they grew bolder in their belief that if they killed enough Americans, they could change American policy. In Beirut in 1983, terrorists killed 241 Marines. Following that attack, the U.S. withdrew its forces from Beirut. Time and time again, for the remainder of the 20th century, the terrorists hit America and America did not hit back hard enough. In 1993 we had the killing of American soldiers in Mogadishu and the bombing at the World Trade Center in New York. We had the murders at the Saudi National Guard Training Center in Riyadh in 1995; killings at the Khobar Towers in 1996; the attack on our embassies in East Africa in 1998; and the attack on the USS Cole in 2000. The

terrorists came to believe that they could strike America without paying a price and that if they hit us hard enough, we'd change our policies.

So they continued to wage those attacks -- making the world less safe and eventually striking us here at home on 9/11. Now they're making a stand in Iraq -- testing our resolve, trying to shake our commitment to democracy in that country. If the terrorists were to succeed, they would return Iraq to the rule of tyrants, make it a source of instability in the Middle East, use it as a staging area for ever greater attacks against America and our allies. As President Bush has said, the only way to lose this fight is to quit -- and quitting is not an option. (Applause.)

Americans know about the heroism displayed every day in this war. And we are not the kind of people to take our military for granted. All the people of this country appreciate the sacrifices of those who serve, and the invaluable commitment of their families. We appreciate, as well, employers in Minnesota and across America who have given strong support to workers called up for duty. And in times of loss, our nation is united in respect and sorrow for the families left behind. Minnesota has lost soldiers and Guard members in this war, and those losses have been deeply personal for many. We can only say, with complete certainty, that these brave Americans served in a noble and a necessary cause; their sacrifice has made the nation and our world more secure, and we will honor their memory forever.

The United States is a nation that keeps its word, and so we will carry out our strategy for victory in Iraq. America is a good and a generous country, and the conduct of our military is showing the Iraqi people the true character of the United States. Americans in uniform have worked in neighborhoods to make sure that more Iraqi families have electricity, water, and sanitation. They've seen to it that children have classrooms and school supplies. By their openness, and their decency, and their kindness to others in thousands of interactions every day, Americans have built bonds of friendship between our two countries. It's a sign that much is right with the world as democratically-elected representatives work to build a new Iraqi government while the tyrant who filled mass graves and terrorized Iraq for decades and started two wars went from a palace to a bunker to a spider hole to jail.

Ladies and gentlemen, none of us can know every turn that lies ahead for America in the 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 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. As our President has made clear, our terrorist enemies will fail -- because the movement of history is toward justice and human freedom. The terrorists will fail -- because the resolve of America and our allies will not be shaken. And, the terrorists will fail -- because the American military is standing in their way. (Applause.)

Once again, I want to thank each and every one of you for your service to the nation. It's an honor to be in your company. You've done exemplary work in a time of great need. You've reflected great credit on your state and your country. And you've made your fellow citizens very, very proud.

Thank you. (Applause.)

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