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Office of the Vice President
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Vice President's Remarks at a Rally for the Iowa Air and Army National Guard

Camp Dodge
Johnston, Iowa

1:10 P.M. CDT

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Thank you very much. It's good to be here, and I'm honored to stand with the men and women of the National Guard -- Americans at their best -- and the pride of the state of Iowa.

Each year, hundreds of thousands of military personnel and civilian law enforcement officials come to this place for the tools and training they need to serve the nation and to protect their fellow Americans. This is one of the nation's vital training posts, a place of accomplishment and distinction, and it's been in steady service to America for nearly 100 years. So I'm delighted to pay this visit, and I appreciate the warm welcome to Camp Dodge, Iowa. (Applause.)

Let me thank General Dardis for the kind words of introduction, and all of those who have arranged to help us be here today. I also want to recognize Governor Vilsack, and the mayors of nearly 40 Iowa communities and other elected officials who've joined us. Thank you all for being here.

I'm honored to share the platform with the 16 members of the Iowa National Guard-Joint Forces Headquarters, who have provided advanced combat training to soldiers of the Afghan National Army. These Iowans did a fine job -- and they are just back home after 14 months in Afghanistan. Gentlemen, welcome home. (Applause.)



All of us have come to Camp Dodge today because of our tremendous respect for the citizen soldiers of our country. For my part, I've had the privilege to work with National Guard personnel over the years, not just as Vice President but also as Secretary of Defense when our nation was fighting the Gulf War. I'm here to say how much we admire your service and your achievements and to say thank you for what you do for all of us. From homeland security, to swift and effective action after the Gulf Coast hurricanes last fall, to service in the Middle East and the Balkans, you've made a tremendous difference for the nation. And I bring gratitude and good wishes to all of you from the President of the United States, George W. Bush. (Applause.)

Each one of you follows in a long tradition of service. And you carry unique responsibilities as members of the National Guard. You serve in a time of urgent duties for this country, a period of history that has brought many alerts, mobilizations, call-ups, and deployments. And like generations that came before, you've more than met the challenge. Guardsmen and women lead busy lives and careers on your own, but you've made the commitment to be ready when your fellow citizens need you. The National Guard is "Always Ready, Always There" for Iowa, and for America -- and that's a legacy to be proud of.

I also want to note that the Guard has recruited and retained outstanding personnel from throughout the state. It comes as no surprise that the Iowa Army National Guard is a leader in strength readiness. And the Iowa National Guard stands at above 100 percent of assigned strength, with a retention rate of 98 percent. Congratulations. (Applause.)



Part of the reason for the Guard's great strength is the network of support that exists all across Iowa. That network includes employers, large and small, who provide everything from time off, to health benefits, to job security for workers who get called up for Guard or Reserve assignments. Thanks to the understanding and generosity of these employers, many men and women are able to answer the call and focus on their duties. So these patriotic employers deserve the gratitude of us all. (Applause.)

The support network also includes civic groups and community leaders -- and, above all, families. Service in uniform is very often a family commitment, with many sacrifices that are shared by wives, husbands and children. One group in this state recently received the Defense Department's top award for Reserve and Guard Family Readiness Groups -- so I want to congratulate "Keepers of the Flame" from Carroll, Iowa. And I think we owe a round of applause to all the National Guard family members who are here with us today. (Applause.)

As we meet today, the 133rd Infantry -- the Ironman battalion -- and the 194th Field Artillery battalion -- both from Camp Dodge -- are serving in Iraq. Others from the 1034th Combat Sustainment Support Battalion will be on their way soon. All told, in the months since our country was attacked September the 11th, the Iowa National Guard has mobilized and deployed over 8,500 soldiers and airmen -- more than at any other time in modern history. Your duties in the war on terror have been many, and varied, and often dangerous. And the record you've amassed is superb.

During their tour in Iraq, I've been told members of one Iowa unit logged nearly 800,000 miles in convoy escorts, cleared more than 16,000 miles of roadway, and detected and disarmed many hundreds of improvised explosive devices. And it is clear that in the process, they greatly enhanced the combat effectiveness of our forces, and without question saved many lives. So we're grateful to the 224th Engineer Battalion. (Applause.)

We're grateful to the Hawkeyes of the 132nd Fighter Wing, in Des Moines. This unit, which flew combat air patrol here at home after 9/11, deployed to the Middle East in the spring of 2005. In just 47 days, you flew nearly as many hours as a unit normally flies during an entire year. You did a great job, and kept a fully-mission capable rate of 85 percent. Congratulations. (Applause.)

We're grateful to the other units that have served in Iraq -- the 767th Firefighters, the 1088th Personnel Service Detachment, the 135th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment, the 2168th Transportation Company, and the 194th Infantry Detachment. Members of these units operated at high standards of performance, results, and readiness -- very often in desert temperatures and on long shifts.

We're grateful to another group of Iowans who recently completed a deployment to Afghanistan -- Task Force 168. Don't hold back. (Laughter and applause.) You provided security, escort, quick reaction forces, and vital assistance during the first full elections in the 5,000-year history of that country. Members of Task Force 168 even put together an agricultural project, showing Afghan farmers that the best way to grow corn is not by scattering seeds, but by planting in rows. In this way, you showed them how to improve yields dramatically. So what is true at home is true everywhere else. Even in an ancient country, on the other side of the world, if you want good advice for raising corn, ask a guy from a Iowa. (Applause.)

The men and women who wear this nation's uniform have reminded people everywhere of America's purposes. For the sake of our own security, and that of our friends, we've undertaken a lot of serious work in this world. Yet when we use our military, it's not to conquer, but to liberate. And after we throw back tyrants, we stand by our friends to ensure that democratic institutions can take hold, and to help build the freedom that leads to peace in the long run. By their openness, their decency, and their kindness to others in thousands of interactions every day, our men and women in uniform are building bonds of friendship between the U.S. and the nations we've liberated.

Five years ago Iraq and Afghanistan were both in the grip of violent, merciless regimes. Now they have democratically elected governments, the dictators are gone, and 50 million people are awakening to a future of hope and freedom. Americans who return home from that part of the world can be proud of their service for the rest of their lives. (Applause.)

We maintain forces in Afghanistan and Iraq because we're a nation that keeps its word, and because we understand what is at stake in that part of the world. The terrorists understand it, as well. The terrorists know that as freedom takes hold, the ideologies of hatred and resentment will weaken, and the advance of free institutions in the broader Middle East will produce a safer world for our children and grandchildren. The war on terror is a battle for the future of civilization. It's a battle worth fighting. It's a battle we're going to win. (Applause.)

The terrorists have made Iraq the central front in this war. And we wage this fight with good allies at our side, including an Iraqi Security Force growing in size, ability, and effectiveness. We'll continue to train the Iraqi forces so they can defend their own country and make it a source of stability in a troubled part of the world. As always, decisions about American troop levels will be driven by the conditions on the ground and the judgment of our military commanders -- not by artificial timelines set by politicians in Washington, D.C. (Applause.)

Although we've been in the struggle against terrorism for nearly five years now, the terrorists were actually at war with us long before 2001. And they were the ones on the offensive. And they grew bolder in their belief that if they killed Americans, they could change American policy. In Beirut in 1983, terrorists killed 241 Americans in a suicide truck bombing. Following that attack, the U.S. withdrew 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 then the bombing at the first World Trade Center in New York. We had murders at the Saudi National Guard Training Center in Riyadh in 1995; the killings at Khobar Towers in 1996; the attack on two of 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 and American targets without paying any price.

And so they continued to wage those attacks -- making the world less safe and eventually striking the United States here at home on 9/11. That day changed everything -- 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 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.)

That effort includes a home front -- and the home front is every bit as important as the battlefields overseas. We are facing enemies who hate us, who hate our country, and hate the liberties for which we stand. They dwell in the shadows, wear no uniform, and are determined to harm as many innocent Americans as they can. That is 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 the defeat of the global terror network." The Congress backed him up in full, authorizing the President to defeat an enemy that had already slipped into our country and waged an attack that killed 3,000 of our people.

The President also signed the Patriot Act, which is helping us disrupt terrorist activity, break up terror cells within the United States, and protect the lives of Americans. Another vital step the President took in the days after 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 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 the constitutional responsibilities and the legal authority of the President and with the civil liberties of the American people.

Ladies and gentlemen, every day the President of the United States makes decisions based on the intelligence briefings he receives. The information in those briefings is critical to assessing risk, to allocating security assets inside the homeland and far beyond. Throughout our military, intelligence has a daily, in fact, hourly, influence on the movement of ships, fighter and bomber missions, and orders given to those commands at the tip of the spear. Gathering the best information, getting it into the hands of the war fighter, means that our work is more effective, our maneuvers are more safe, and our nation is more secure. As people who know first-hand what this war really involves, you can be certain of this: the President will not relent in tracking the enemies of the United States with every legitimate tool at his command. This is not a war we can win on the defensive. Our only option against these enemies is to monitor them, to find them, to fight them, and to destroy them. (Applause.)

I'm afraid that, as we get farther away from September the 11th, 2001, there is a temptation to let up in the fight against terror. We're all grateful that the nation has gone four years and 10 months without another 9/11. Obviously, no one can guarantee that we won't be hit again. But getting through these years of wartime without an additional attack on the homeland took a lot more than just luck. We've been protected by sensible 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 fractured and weakened, yet still lethal, still determined to hit us again. We've never had a fight 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.)

Americans know about the heroism displayed every day in the fight against terror. Many Iowans, including a good number here today, have been decorated for acts of bravery and superior performance. And some families in this state have also had to say a last farewell to loved ones who gave the last full measure of devotion to this country. In time of loss, our nation is united in respect and sorrow for these families. They need to know that their loved ones served in a noble and a necessary cause, and their sacrifice has made our nation and the world more secure. We will honor their memory forever. (Applause.)

By defending ourselves, and by standing with our friends abroad, the United States of America is meeting its responsibilities as freedom's home and defender. And those who serve are showing a watching world the character of the United States of America. As one general recently put it, "The National Guard brings the face of all America to the theater." And to see the face of America is to understand that we are a tremendous force for good in our world. We're a nation founded on the ideals of liberty, equality, and justice. We uphold those ideals at home, and we defend those ideals where they are threatened. Standing here today, in the great American Heartland, I want to thank each and every one of you for the vital work you do, for your daily example of skill, and perseverance, and honor. It's a privilege to be in your company. You've made your fellow citizens extremely proud. You've reflected enormous credit on Camp Dodge, on the State of Iowa, and on the United States of America.

Thank you. (Applause.)

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