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President Bush Previews War on Terror Speech

Oval Office

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THE PRESIDENT: Thanks. I wanted to highlight the speech I'm giving today to Heritage. I'm concerned that there are some who have lost sight of the fact that we're at war with extremists and radicals who want to attack us again. Part of the speech is to remind people that even though we haven't been attacked since September the 11th, there's still an enemy out there that would like to attack us.

And therefore, it's important for Congress to pass law and/or confirm nominees that will enable this government to more effectively defend the country and pursue terrorists and radicals that would like to do us harm.

So in the speech I'm going to call upon Congress to pass funding measures for our troops in harm's way -- DOD appropriations bill, as well as the supplemental. I'll remind the audience that Congress has had the details of the -- 75 percent of the details since last February. They've had ample time to study the request. And I strongly believe they need to get these funding measures passed quickly for the sake of our troops and for the sake of the operations that are ongoing, and protecting the country.

Secondly, the Protect America Act is set to expire. If it were to expire it would create an intelligence gap that, in my judgment, would jeopardize the security of the country. I call upon -- and I give credit that the Senate Intel Committee has moved a bill that is a very good start -- and that in my speech I call upon Congress to get a good bill to my desk quickly, so that an intelligence gap does not arise.

I then remind the audience that a key member of the national security team -- a key member of the team that works to protect the American people is the Attorney General. I've submitted a highly competent, smart, independent nominee in Judge Mukasey to the Senate. I am disappointed that the process is taking so long to get his name to the floor.

I believe that the questions he's been asked are unfair; he's not been read into a program -- he has been asked to give opinions of a program or techniques of a program on which he has not been briefed. I will make the case -- and I strongly believe this is true -- that Judge Mukasey is not being treated fairly. He's made the rounds on Capitol Hill, he's answered questions, he's been to hearings. I do thank the Senate for setting up what I hope will be a opportunity to move him out of Judiciary Committee to the floor on Tuesday. It is time to get his nomination to the floor so the Senate can vote him up or down.

And then finally, I'll conclude the speech by reminding people that this concept of stability has -- in other words, that foreign policy ought to promote stability as opposed to freedom has led to dangers, and that the only way to solve America's long-term security needs is to remember that the enemy that we face can only recruit when there's hopelessness and despair; and that liberty has got the capacity to transform societies from hopeless societies to

hopeful societies; and that this administration will continue to press the freedom agenda; and obviously, that freedom agenda is being tested in places like Lebanon, Iraq, and the Palestinian Territories and Afghanistan.

All those examples I've just cited are illustrative of this struggle between extremists and radicals and people who want to live in freedom.

And so that's what the speech is. I want to thank you for giving me a chance to come and share some of my thoughts about why I'm giving it to you. I'll answer a couple of questions if you got them.

Q Judge Mukasey is experienced in terrorism trials, he's been around. Why is it wrong for him -- or why will you not let him say whether he thinks that waterboarding is illegal torture?

THE PRESIDENT: He has not been read in -- first of all, let me put this in perspective. The Congress did pass a law, the Detainee Detention Act [sic]*, that I signed into law. The techniques we use informed that law and members of the Senate and House -- select members of the Senate and House, both parties, have been briefed on the law.

Secondly, he doesn't know whether we use that technique or not. And thirdly, it doesn't make any sense to tell an enemy what we're doing. One of the fundamental questions that the American people have got to know is that in order to protect America, if we capture somebody who may have data about whether or not he's going to -- he is ordering an attack or there's an impending attack or there's a threat, we need to know that. And the techniques we use by highly trained professionals are within the law. That's what's important for America to know.

Q Mr. President, is legal liability in U.S. or foreign courts a concern when it comes to this issue of waterboarding and --

THE PRESIDENT: The main concern is, is that the American people must know that whatever techniques we use are within the law. And secondly, it doesn't make any sense -- unless, of course, you don't think there's an enemy that's dangerous -- it doesn't make any sense to broadcast to the enemy what they ought to prepare for and not prepare for.

Q Are these concerns legitimate that are being raised, or is it playing politics?

THE PRESIDENT: I think it's -- I think this is -- I'm just extremely disappointed that a good man with a good reputation, who has met with a lot of senators, his nomination is being held up. You can listen to the voices that are out there talking as to whether or not this is politics or not. My point is, is that it's creating a -- to have the Attorney General seat vacant for this long -- there's an Acting Attorney General, of course, but not to have a confirmed Attorney General is not good for the country.

Okay, what else?

Q On Turkey, you're going to be meeting next Monday.

THE PRESIDENT: Yes, sir.

Q Turkey wants the U.S. to take a lead in fighting the PKK. How are you going to --

THE PRESIDENT: I look forward to visiting with Prime Minister Erdogan on this important subject as to how we can work together to prevent people from coming out of mountain ranges to do harm to Turkish troops. And we will have a good, substantive discussion, as you would expect allies to do. And I'm looking forward to seeing him here in the Oval Office.

Q What do you think of the compromise proposed by McCain, Warner and Graham on Mukasey, saying that --

THE PRESIDENT: Mukasey just needs to get -- get on the floor and get him an up or down vote. They've had plenty of hearings, plenty of ideas, get him out there and get him up and down.

Q What is your own view about waterboarding?

THE PRESIDENT: I'm not going to talk about techniques. There is an enemy out there. I don't want them to understand -- to be able to adjust one way or the other. My view is this: The American people have got to understand the program is important and the techniques used are within the law, and members of the House and Senate know what I'm talking about, they have been fully briefed.

Q Do you think the Congress has forgotten we're at war, Mr. President?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, I think there is a tendency for people to say, well, maybe -- let me just say, there are some who say, don't call this a war on terror. And there are some who have accused me of using the words "war on terror" as a way to frighten people into voting booths. And I emphasize the word "some." As I'll say in this speech, those who say we're not in a war on terror are either disingenuous or naive. Either way, the attitude is dangerous because I will have quoted the words of the enemy in the speech, an enemy that said, we're going to come and kill you.

And I think -- I'm not going to -- this speech doesn't intend -- this is a comprehensive speech about what Congress needs to do to make sure that we have the tools necessary and the people necessary to protect America. I will not in any way personalize this speech. I'm not going to say that an individual member that may disagree with me is not a patriotic person. I am going to remind people, though, of the dangers that we face.

And I knew full well that if we were successful protecting the country that the lessons of September the 11th would become dimmer and dimmer in some people's minds. Well, I just don't have that luxury, and nor do the people that work with me to protect America, because we have not forgotten the lessons of September the 11th. And I expect, and the American people expect Congress to give us the tools necessary to protect them.

Okay?

Q Thank you.

END 9:46 A.M. EDT

*Detainee Treatment Act of 2005

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