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Presenter: Secretary of Defense Donald H. Rumsfeld and Gen. Myers

Thursday, May 13, 2004

Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld and General Myers Speech at Abu Ghraib Prison

UNKNOWN: We want to go right to some videotape we're getting in from Iraq right now. Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld just a little while ago touring the Abu Ghraib prison near Baghdad speaking about what has happened there.

SEC. RUMSELD: (In Progress)... but it doesn't represent America. It doesn't represent American values. It doesn't represent the values of you, each of you here in this room. I know that, you know that, your families know that. The people who are engaged in abuses will be brought to justice. The world will see how a free system, a democratic system functions and operates transparently with no cover-ups with the world seeing the fact that we're not perfect. And goodness knows, we're not perfect. But don't let anyone tell you that America is what's wrong with this world, because it's not true.

People are lining up year after year to come to our country from every country on the face of the earth. Why do they do that? They do that because the United States is their beacon of liberty and of freedom and opportunity and it's a great country. And the American people are wonderful people. And we'll get through this tough period – let there be no question. And what's happening here is reported widely in the United States and around the world as not working. You don't read a lot about the fact that the schools are open, the hospitals are open, the clinics are open, that they've got a new dinar and the dinar's been steady and strong – their currency. You don't read a lot about the fact that the ministries have been stood up and the city councils and governing councils for the [Inaudible] provinces.

You don't read a lot about the fact – you read, once in a while about the fact that the security forces, some of them ran and didn't stay there and fight. But let me tell you, 300 Iraqi security forces have been killed. And they didn't get killed sitting in their barracks with their fingers in their ear, waiting for something to happen. They got killed because they were out there, vulnerable to intimidation, but willing to go out there and help to begin to feel a new Iraq. And the Iraqi security forces are not trained like you are. They're not equipped like you are. They are not lead like you are. And frankly, they haven't been brought up like you have, but they're human beings. They're getting trained. They're getting equipped. It's their country and they're going to have to take over security for

this country and God bless them for having the guts to do it.

Now it is your high privilege and my pleasure to hear from my good friend General Dick Myers. He is a great guy.

[Applause]

GEN. MYERS: Well, I think the secretary covered the abuse situations, so I'm going to let that go. I think that was covered adequately. But let me tell you what I have absolute confidence in. First of all, I have absolute confidence in the men and women of our Armed Forces and everybody in this room – confident of your training, your leadership, confident in what you bring to a lot. And I'm confidence in our military justice system. It's worked for a long time and it's going to work in the future. Those who have perpetrated crimes will be dealt with and I'm convinced in a way that will make Americans proud, us proud and the Armed Forces and Iraqis proud that we can deal with these issues...the region proud, for that matter.

I am very confident in your chain of command. Let me talk about it, going down. You couldn't have finer leadership than General John Abizaid, General Rick Sanchez, on down to the folks that run this facility. I have great confidence that, hopefully, you haven't been tortured by any of the testimony we've been involved in the last several days. But if you had – and you've heard me say -- that as a witness in front of several committees, that our chain of command is what it's all about and I've got great confidence in them.

Let's talk about the chain of command up. Now I can say this because I'm on the chain of command. If you remember your training, I'm merely a military advisor. I'm not in the chain of command. In fact I wish I were, but I'm not. But the chain of command up, we had a meeting this week with President Bush in the Pentagon. What we talked about was Iraq strategy and the way ahead. And I tell you what, the Commander-in-Chief to our Secretary of Defense are steadfast in their support for you, support for your mission and support for this noble cause that we all strive for here in Iraq and Afghanistan, around the world to do the best we can in the military – do our part in helping rid the world of extremists.

You can be very proud of this gentleman that's in that chain of command.

[Applause]

I'm also confident that millions upon millions upon millions of Americans are proud of what you're doing. We were sitting – I think it was just yesterday, but you'll pardon me because the last 24 hours have a little bit of a blur -- but we left the hearing room – I think it was yesterday – when Senator Ted Stevens – we got anybody here from Alaska? Oh, my goodness. [Laughter] He'll be disappointed. I'll be disappointed.

Senator Stevens, the senior senator from Alaska, you probably know, he's a chairman on the

Senate Appropriations Committee of the Subcommittee for Defense. And he said a very powerful thing yesterday. And he said, you know, and he was sitting next to Senator Inouye who has a medal of honor from World War II, Senator Stevens served in World War II. He said, you know, until recently, everybody was calling us World War II veterans the greatest generation. And he said, today, there's a new greatest generation and that's you and that's a fact. So you ought to be proud of what you're doing here. You are changing – I know it's hard when you're toting a rifle around here and carrying a pack that weighs more than you do and a lot of dust and maybe not eating the right kind of meals and a long time between hot showers. [Laughter.] All the complaints go to my EA [Inaudible]. [Laughter.]

I know it's not easy. And it's hard to step back from that and realize that what you're doing is changing the course of history. For 25 million people in this country, it is a noble cause and I'm confident that we can do this. Your Commander-in-Chief is confident. The Secretary of Defense is confident. General Abizaid is confident. And you ought to be confident, too. And we all do our part. We all do our part. No matter what our part is, no matter how trivial you think your part is, it's extremely important.

And so, thank you for you what do. Thank you for your service. Thank your families for their service, too. They serve just like you do. And if it's typical, I imagine everybody in this room has a story if you've got a family back home -- what could go wrong, did go wrong the day you left. And it just happens that way. And you're not there to show to [Inaudible] and to provide support and do the things you normally do. So as you talk to your families, e-mail your families, write to your families, tell them we appreciate their service, as well. We know they've made huge sacrifices.

Thank you very much.

[Applause.]

RUMSELD: Let me say one last thing. I don't think it will come as any great surprise to hear that I've stopped reading newspapers. [Laughter.] You've got to keep your sanity somehow. But if you read what's being written in editorials and then politicians saying things, I started reading a history book on Ulysses S. Grant. And – how many from Illinois here? [Cheers.] Yeah. Now you're talking. That's where I'm from. [Laughter.]

And there's a lot of differences between the Civil War and the war here in Iraq and what's taking place. But there are similarities in this sense. We know back on the Civil War is a thing that happened in history and it...and our country was united and we went on and it was a good thing. But you read that book and what you read is not e-mails, not digital pictures, not video clips, but what you're reading are diaries and letters home. You see the columns from newspapers and the comments of politicians and the criticisms and the concerns and the anger and how vigorous that debate was and that recurring question when they were losing 1,000, 1,500, 2,000 casualties in one or two or three days in a battle – think of that. And the questions: Is it worth it...asking that question is it worth it. And those veterans looked back and you know it was worth it. And you're going to look back and know it's worth it. Thank you.

[Applause.]

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