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Presenter: Secretary of Defense Donald H. Rumsfeld

Wednesday, December 8, 2004

Secretary Rumsfeld Town Hall Meeting in Kuwait

SEC. RUMSFELD: Thank you. Thank you very much. Thank you. My goodness. What a group this is. Impressive gathering. General Steve Whitcomb, thank you so much for your kind words. Sergeant Major Kellman, it's good to see you again. I appreciate your able leadership as well. First, I want to say thank you to each of you, to your families for your superb service to our country. You are doing noble work, it's vitally important work and your country is deeply grateful.

Today's December 8th. Sixty three years ago today our nation declared war on an enemy that had launched a sneak attack on the United States and killed thousands of people. I remember the day well. I doubt that many of you do. [Laughter] Some six decades later, America faces another global conflict. And as it was in 1941, a new generation of Americans has been asked to come to freedom's defense. In recent times, we've witnessed the advance of freedom in nearly every region of the world. In the joy of the reunited Germans dancing atop the crumbling Berlin Wall, after it was torn down. If you think about, in today's papers, the passionate debate that's taking place over free elections in Ukraine. And certainly, in the determination of the women who braved violence and cast their ballots in Afghanistan in what was the first ever democratic presidential election in the country's history.

Think of it, yesterday, December 7th, the inauguration of the first popularly elected president in Afghan's history. I was there to see that historic event and I'll never forget it. And all of you who serve in our military in all the coalition countries that assisted in Afghanistan will look back in five or ten or fifteen or twenty years and know that you were a part of something enormously important. Twenty five million Afghan people liberated, voting, tears in their eyes, yesterday at the inauguration of Hamid Karzai. And as you consider your service in Iraq, think also of the tens of thousands of Iraqis who have volunteered to risk their lives, as you have to come to the defense of their newly liberated nation – a nation that was liberated by the coalition countries at the risk of their lives.

These pivotal moments in history would not have been possible, had it not been for the determination and the daring of America's founders. And the generations of Americans who have advanced those freedoms at home and helped to nurture those freedoms abroad. Now that duty falls to you or more correctly, and I think importantly, you have each volunteered to accept that duty and I know that you are up to the task.

Now I've been told something about who's here today. Some of you are en route out, some of you are en route in, some of you are en route back in for the second time, I understand. I'm told that the Task Force Liberty includes the Rainbow Division that broke [Cheers] I was told right. That's the division that broke through the

Siegfried Line in World War II and liberated Dachau. And I believe it was a division that, decades later, came to the World Trade site within hours of the September 11th attacks.

The Swamp Fox Artillerymen [Cheers], they're a little slow on the draw. [Laughter] I understand you folks are flexible enough to become experts in military police-style convoy security. Congratulations. And the 699th Maintenance Mad Max Shop, is that right? [Cheers] Oh, good, it's an echo. [Laughter] I understand you folks have up-armored some 6,000 vehicles and we appreciate that a great deal. And two maneuver brigades from the guard and many others, as well – Active, Guard, Reserve, even some sailors.

ARMED FORCE MEMBER: Taos here sir.

SEC. RUMSFELD: Where? Where's a sailor?

ARMED FORCE MEMBER: No, I said, "Taos, New Mexico," Sir.

SEC. RUMSFELD: Oh, good. Taos, New Mexico. I know that place very well. We've got some sailors and airmen and Marines and civilians here as permanent party, all working with the same commitment. And for those nearing the end of your time in theater, know that you've done a superb job and I wish you the best, as you return home. And welcome to any of you who've been here before, like the Red Legs of the 42nd Division Artillery from Massachusetts.

And America's fortunate to have some old pros back in the field. You know, there are those who see the violence taking place in Iraq and there is violence, let there be no doubt. The beheadings, the slaughtering of innocent men, women, the bombings and they say we can't prevail. I see that violence and say we must win. Think of a world – just think of a world in which the butchers and the murderers are allowed to prevail. Think of what would happen if Iraq were to, again, be run by the extremists.

On this day, 63 years ago, Franklin Roosevelt ended his address on December 8, 1941 to the Congress by vowing that no matter how long it may take, we will not only defend ourselves to the utmost, but will make it very certain that this form of treachery shall never again endanger us. In today's global conflict, the stakes are as high. As before, it falls to you and to our country to win this test of wills and to see it through to victory. I ask you all to remember this in the difficult, in the trying moments that you'll face. There's perhaps no greater calling in life than doing what you are doing: serving on freedom's front lines.

You know there are doubters and those who say it can't be done. Well, there have always been doubters who have said it couldn't be done. Think of Afghanistan only three years ago. It was described after a few weeks as a quagmire. People were aware that the Soviet Union had some 200,000 troops in Afghanistan and they lost after decades and thousands of lives. Well, it's not a quagmire, it's a democracy. It's a democracy of 25 million liberated Afghans and it's a democracy, thanks to many of you here and all across the globe who didn't listen to the doubters and believed it was possible and understood the important fact that the great sweep of human history is for freedom and freedom is on our side. [Applause] [Cheers]

There is no finer legacy to bestow on future generations than being a part of the world's forward strategy for freedom and contributing to a safer and a more peaceful world and you are doing just that. And for that I thank you. God bless you all. I am confident that I'll have other chances to say this, but just know this for a fact – there is nothing more important for you than to understand – excuse me – understand how deeply grateful the American people are to you for what you do, indeed, for what you volunteer to do and I thank you from the bottom of my heart. God bless you all. [Applause]

Now the General said you can ask tough questions [Laughter] and you can. And I'll answer the questions that I know the answers to. And I'll have the General answer the ones that I don't. [Laughter] Now this is quite a

sight. I wish all of you could be right up here and look out at this fabulous array of soldiers and sailors and airmen, Marines. Well, who's got the first question? Who has a microphone? Are there any microphones? There's a microphone, there's a microphone. There's a couple. What you might want to do is get near a microphone. And we could save some time and I can answer some questions. And when a microphone person has a person with a question, why don't you put your hand up, so I can see you. There you go. Yes, sir.

Q: Good morning, sir. My name is Staff Sergeant Donald Ross (sp) from Bravo Company 6 of the 7th Signal Battalion. Yes, sir. My question is with numerous troops deploying and numerous troops preparing to deploy, what is your plan to maintain a balance between units deploying overseas and units back at home to maintain an adequate fighting force in case of possible terror attacks?

SEC. RUMSFELD: Well, it's a good question. And what we do is the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the vice chairman and the chiefs review all the deployments in what we call "a tank," which is a room where they meet in the Pentagon and they constantly are looking to see that the United States of America has the capability to fulfill the assigned missions that it has. And I can assure you that as troops are activated, alerted, activated, deployed, demobilized as active forces are deployed and redeployed, all of that is looked at in the context of the several contingencies that conceivably could occur in the world that the United States would have to be prepared for and that let there be no doubt, we have 1.4 million men and women in uniform in the active force.

We have something like 865,000 in the Active Reserves, the Selective Reserves. And we have something like 450,000 in the Individual Ready Reserves. We have in this AOR – Area of Responsibility – today, something in the neighborhood of – for the sake of argument – 200,000. That's 200,000 out of 1.4 million plus 600,000 and so well over 2.5 million people who we can call on at any given time. So you can be sure that we have the capability we need. There are elements of the force, however, that have been stressed and we read a lot about that and we hear a lot about that on television and it's a fact. And the reason some elements of the force have been stressed is not because we have too few total forces, it's because we have not had the right balance between the Active and Reserve. We've not had the right skill sets. And some skill sets and some capabilities have been overused, by my characterization. That is to say they've been used more than otherwise would have been necessary if we'd had the proper balance. But no one in the world should think that because of the fact that we have some stresses in portions of the force and that because we have a large number – 200,000 – deployed to the CentCom Area of Responsibility, that our country is not capable of fulfilling any conceivable contingency because, in fact, we are. Thank you.

Question, right here.

Q: Yes, sir. My question is after the January 30th elections and the Iraqi government in place, what is the plan for the U.S. forces in a post-democratic Iraq?

SEC. RUMSFELD: The president has indicated that his intent and indeed, the other members of the coalition have indicated that what we need to do is to have the appropriate number of forces in Iraq to help create an environment for them to succeed in moving their country off the path of a dictatorship towards a democracy and towards a country that's at peace with its neighbors and that they ought to be there, as long as they're necessary, but not one day longer. Now that means that the facts on the ground will determine what will happen. And it's hard to predict precisely what will take place, but there's a strong belief on most of our parts, including this individual, that once the Iraqis begin having their elections, which they're scheduled for next year, that the people of Iraq will see that they have a stake in the future of that country and that they will then begin to assume greater and greater responsibility for the management of their country.

Their security forces, as I mentioned earlier, are – oh, they're now up to something like 110[000], 120,000 -- up from zero. And they are putting their lives at risk as well. Indeed, a large number of security forces – Iraqi security forces have been killed. But they're being trained rapidly, they're standing in line and the goal is to have

them prepare to take over the security responsibility. So one would anticipate that after the elections and as the security forces grow, you'll see a reduction in the forces of the coalition countries and that's the hope and that's the expectation. The pace of that, however, is dependant completely on what the facts on the ground are.

Thank you. Yes, sir.

Q: Yes, Mr. Secretary. My question is more logistical. We've had troops in Iraq for coming up on three years and we've always staged here out of Kuwait. Now why do we soldiers have to dig through local landfills for pieces of scrap metal and compromise ballistic glass to up-armor our vehicles and why don't we have those resources readily available to us? [Applause]

SEC. RUMSFELD: I missed the first part of your question. And could you repeat it for me?

Q: Yes, Mr. Secretary. Our soldiers have been fighting in Iraq for coming up on three years. A lot of us are getting ready to move north relatively soon. Our vehicles are not armored. We're digging pieces of rusted scrap metal and compromised ballistic glass that's already been shot up, dropped, busted, picking the best out of this scrap to put on our vehicles to take into combat. We do not have proper armament vehicles to carry with us north.

SEC. RUMSFELD: I talked to the General coming out here about the pace at which the vehicles are being armored. They have been brought from all over the world, wherever they're not needed, to a place here where they are needed. I'm told that they are being – the Army is – I think it's something like 400 a month are being done. And it's essentially a matter of physics. It isn't a matter of money. It isn't a matter on the part of the Army of desire. It's a matter of production and capability of doing it.

As you know, you go to war with the Army you have. They're not the Army you might want or wish to have at a later time. Since the Iraq conflict began, the Army has been pressing ahead to produce the armor necessary at a rate that they believe – it's a greatly expanded rate from what existed previously, but a rate that they believe is the rate that is all that can be accomplished at this moment.

I can assure you that General Schoomaker and the leadership in the Army and certainly General Whitcomb are sensitive to the fact that not every vehicle has the degree of armor that would be desirable for it to have, but that they're working at it at a good clip. It's interesting, I've talked a great deal about this with a team of people who've been working on it hard at the Pentagon. And if you think about it, you can have all the armor in the world on a tank and a tank can be blown up. And you can have an up-armored humvee and it can be blown up. And you can go down and, the vehicle, the goal we have is to have as many of those vehicles as is humanly possible with the appropriate level of armor available for the troops. And that is what the Army has been working on.

And General Whitcomb, is there anything you'd want to add to that?

GEN. WHITCOMB: Nothing. [Laughter] Mr. Secretary, I'd be happy to. That is a focus on what we do here in Kuwait and what is done up in the theater, both in Iraq and also in Afghanistan. As the secretary has said, it's not a matter of money or desire; it is a matter of the logistics of being able to produce it. The 699th, the team that we've got here in Kuwait has done [Cheers] a tremendous effort to take that steel that they have and cut it, prefab it and put it on vehicles. But there is nobody from the president on down that is not aware that this is a challenge for us and this is a desire for us to accomplish.

SEC. RUMSFELD: The other day, after there was a big threat alert in Washington, D.C. in connection with the elections, as I recall, I looked outside the Pentagon and there were six or eight up-armored humvees. They're not there anymore. [Cheers] [Applause] They're en route out here, I can assure you. Next. Way in the back.

Yes.

Q: Staff Sergeant Kobeck (sp) with Charlie Company 171 Aviation. With the recent success of the elections in Afghan, what message will you take back to the States to the people that say we couldn't get it done?

SEC. RUMSFELD: Well, I guess the short answer is you folks did get it done in Afghanistan. And it was a breathtaking, thrilling moment to be there yesterday and to see that inauguration and to see the first popularly elected president take his oath of office and to hear the stories that he told – the stories of women who left maternity areas in their homes, having just had babies to go in and vote, people who got up at three in the morning and walked in the cold to get there to vote, individuals who were standing in line in a voting area and 100 meters away there was an explosion where some Taliban were trying to disrupt the elections and the people stayed right in line and voted. And that says something about the power of freedom. It says something about the desire on the part of human beings. And when people constantly look at what's going on and find everything they can say – take Iraq, there's a lot not right in Iraq. That's a fact and we know that and people are being killed and people are being wounded.

And when you visit with the wounded in Walter Reed and Bethesda your heart goes out to them. But I can tell you, they're proud of what they've been doing. They know what they're doing is important. They believe in what they're doing. Their families believe in what they're doing. And it is a – I mean, the other side of the coin is this: In Iraq, there are 25 million people who were living under a vicious dictator with killing fields, mass graves. And today the schools are open, the clinics are open, the hospitals are open, the stock markets open. People have an opportunity.

I was with one of the leaders of a Gulf country and I suppose it's not for me to talk about a private meeting. But he looked at me and he said: You know, you Americans have sent the finest young men and women from your country over to Iraq -- this is a neighbor of Iraq – and you've sent them over there to free those 25 million people and you've liberated those 25 million people and you've opened the schools and you've opened the hospitals. And now it's up to the Iraqi people. And the Iraqi people are going to have to pick up and grab a hold of their country and make that country work. In the last analysis, you can't do that for someone else. All you can do is create an environment that allows them to do that. And that's what's happening. That's what's taking place. And is it perfect, no. Is it ugly from time to time, yes. It is dangerous, you bet your life, it is. But God bless the people who've done it and who are doing and who are giving those 25 million people the opportunity to be free and to be liberated and to have opportunities they never could have thought of under that vicious dictator.
[Applause] Question.

Q: Yes, sir. Specialist Anderson, Alpha Company, 2nd Platoon. And my question is I was curious to know why I, as a single soldier, cannot enlist in the regular Army, but I can enlist in the National Guard and be deployed with a family care plan?

SEC. RUMSFELD: Your voice was dropping off on me and I've got an aviator's ear.

Q: Yes, sir. I was wanting to know why I cannot enlist as a single parent in the regular Army, but I can enlist in the National Guard and be deployed?

SEC. RUMSFELD: I don't have the vaguest idea. But by golly, we're looking for folks in the Army. You ought to be able to enlist in the Army and I'll try and figure out how in the world you ought to be able to do it.
[Applause] We want people who want to serve and we've got 'em and God bless you for it. Yes.

Q: Mr. Secretary, Specialist McKobiak (sp), 116th Cavalry Brigade. My question is what is the Department of Defense, more specifically, the Army side of the house, doing to address shortages and antiquated equipment that National Guard soldiers, such as the 116th Cavalry Brigade and the 278th ACR are going to roll into Iraq

with?

SEC. RUMSFELD: The – now settle down. Settle down. [Laughter] Hell, I'm an old man and it's early in the morning. I didn't take – just gathering my thoughts here. In any organization you're going to have equipment and materials and spare parts of different ages. And I am told – and no way I can prove it, but I'm told – that the Army is breaking its neck to see that there is not a differentiation as to who gets what aged materials in the military, in the Army, as between the active force, the Guard and the Reserve. I'm told that they are, instead, trying to see that the equipment goes to those that are in the most need and who are most likely to be using it - the equipment. And that varies among the Guard and Reserve and the active force. So any organization, any element of the Army is going to end up, at some point, with – you characterize it as "antiquated." I would say the older equipment, whatever it may be, in any category. Somebody is always going to be at that level as things are constantly replaced. And things are being constantly replaced. I mean, I believe them when they tell me that they have made a major effort to see that they're dealing equitably as between the forces and seeing that the ones who are likely to be going into combat and have the greatest needs are the ones that have the best equipment. Yes, sir.

Q: Chaplain Malone (sp), the 642nd Aviation Support Battalion. Mr. Secretary, my job is to support the spiritual fitness of the soldiers that you see in the room today. I am also here to support the morale of these soldiers. And the soldiers that you see here today have asked me to ask you this question on their behalf. Would you be kind enough, sir, to put us on your aircraft today and take us to Disneyland? [Cheers]

SEC. RUMSFELD: [Laughter] Oh, Chaplain, you did it. [Laughter] You asked it, you knocked it right out of the park and the answer is sorry. [Laughter] We've got more important things for you to do [Laughter] and we appreciate it. We've got time for a couple more questions right here.

Q: Yes, Mr. Secretary, Specialist McCullough (sp), Alpha Company 1st of the 112th Infantry. There's a lot of soldiers here from Western Pennsylvania and we were wondering if we were going to be given the opportunity to watch the Steelers win the Super Bowl this year? [Cheers] [Applause]

SEC. RUMSFELD: I can't answer the question about outcomes [Laughter], but General, they're going to have access to the...

GEN. WHITCOMB: Absolutely, sir.

SEC. RUMSFELD: Yes, you'll have access to the television, but you're going to have to figure out a way to encourage that to happen. [Laughter] Yes.

Q: Mr. Secretary, Lieutenant Colonel Alan Kronolog (sp). I'm the Inspector General for the 116th Brigade Combat team. We're helping – or trying to help about 150 soldiers get their contingency travel pay. We've gone through the chain of command; we've tried IG channels. These soldiers have gone – some since July – without getting travel pay. Thousands of dollars, they're having creditors call them at home, call their spouses at home, threatening collection action. We have a big problem. There seems to be a problem with the Defense Finance Accounting Service. Can you help us to understand that problem, Mr. Secretary or even better, can you point us to a resource that will help us get these soldiers paid? [Applause]

SEC. RUMSFELD: Can someone here get the details of the unit he's talking about? That's just not right. Folks have earned money and are due money, ought to be able to get the money and they ought not to have to put their families under stress while they're waiting for the money. Thank you. [Applause] We'll take a note and see what we can do. Yes, sir.

Q: Specialist Skarwin (Sp?) HHD 42nd Engineer Brigade. Mr. Secretary [Cheers] my question is with the

current mission of the National Guard and Reserves being the same as our active duty counterparts, when are more of our benefits going to line up to the same as theirs, for example, retirement? [Cheers] [Applause]

SEC. RUMSFELD: [Laughter] I can't imagine anyone your age worrying about retirement. [Laughter] Good grief. It's the last thing I want to do is retire. The pay and benefits for the Guard and the Reserve relative to the active force have been going up unevenly at a rate faster than the active force. If you go back over four years – matter of fact, I just went over this with the senior person in the department who looks at pay and benefits. And apparently, what's happened is that for a variety of reasons, the incremental changes that are made each year, in terms of pay and benefits and health care and retirement and what have you, have brought the Guard and Reserve up at a faster level than the active force. And what one has to do in managing the total force and the total force is critically important. We need the Guard and Reserve as well as the active force. And we have to see that we have the incentives arranged in a way that we can attract and retain the people that are needed to defend the country. At the moment, we are doing well in terms of attracting and retaining the people we need. And if anything, I think the data suggests that the Guard and Reserve forces had been advantaged relatively compared to the active force over the past four years. Question.

Q: Sergeant Carr (sp), 3 in the 116 Armored Cav from Oregon. [Cheers] Mr. Secretary, with the recent re-election of our commander in chief to another term in office, the U.S. people sent a message to the world that we are committed to fight this war on terrorism. Specifically, in regards to non-NATO countries, how has this message affected their posture or willingness to renegotiate their relationship with the United States?

SEC. RUMSFELD: You know, you read an awful lot in the paper about different countries disagreeing on various things and there's a tendency, I think, for the press to play up controversy and differences. But the reality is that since September 11th, the United States of America has put together a coalition of something like 85 or 90 nations, probably the largest coalition in the history of mankind. We have had somewhere – we've had somewhere between 25 and 30 countries helping us in Afghanistan and in Iraq. Those are large numbers of nations.

Now, why is that so important? I think it's important because in the nature of the world today, there are so many things we can – no nation, certainly not the United States, but no nation on the face of the earth can do alone. We have to have the cooperation of other countries. You can't deal with, for example, the problem of the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction around the world alone. You've got work with other countries. In the case of the global war on terror, you have to share intelligence. You have to cooperate in terms of the movement of people and money across borders. If you're going to put enough pressure on the terrorist networks, which are truly global in nature, if you're going to put enough pressure on them, you simply have to cooperate with other countries. My impression is that your question will be answered as we go through the coming weeks and months in the positive sense, that country after country that I've seen since the election – and I've been in Latin America in six countries, I've been over here since the election – and in every instance, I find countries cooperating, leaning forward, understanding the threat that exists in the world in wanting to work with the United States. We'll make that the last question. Right there.

Q: Good morning, sir. Staff Sergeant Latazinsky (sp), 1st COSCOM (sp), Fort Bragg, [Cheers] North Carolina. Yes, sir. My husband and myself, we both joined a volunteer Army. Currently, I'm serving under the Stop Loss Program. I would like to know how much longer do you foresee the military using this program?

SEC. RUMSFELD: The Stop Loss has been used by the military for years and years and years. It's all well understood when someone volunteers to join the service. It is something that you prefer not to have to use, obviously, in a perfect world. But if you think about it, the whole principle of stop loss is based on unit cohesion. And the principle is that in the event that there is something that requires a unit to be involved and people are in a personal situation where their time was ending, they put a stop loss on it, so that the cohesion can be maintained. It's basically a sound principle. It's nothing new. It's been well understood. It's been used as little

as possible. And my guess is that it will continue to be used as little as possible, but that it will continue to be used.

Folks, I am very grateful to all of you. I am so pleased that I was able to come and say hello and to thank you. I wish you Godspeed, as you do your important work. Thank you very much.

[Applause]

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