

Remarks to Members of Armed Forces Service Organizations *April 16, 2007*

Thank you all. Please be seated. Welcome to the White House. You know, I get to welcome a lot of guests here. I don't think there's a more important guest than a veteran or the family of a service man or woman or the families of those whose loved one has given their life to the country. And so I welcome an incredibly important group of guests. And thank you for coming, and thank you for your time.

I appreciate very much to be in the presence of moms and dads, husbands and wives, sons and daughters of some of the finest citizens our Nation has ever produced. I want to thank the leaders of organizations that support our military families. I appreciate your tireless work to send a clear signal that many in the United States of America support our troops. Each of you knows what is stake—what is at stake in this war on terror. And I appreciate your efforts to rally our Nation to support our troops and to support the mission for which they have risked and, in some cases, have given their lives. I thank you for coming. Thanks for your service to the United States of America.

Many of the families here today have relatives serving in harm's way. Others have lost loved ones in the struggle. They have come here to Washington with a message for their elected leaders in our Nation's Capital: Our troops need the resources, equipment, and weapons to fight our enemies. Congress needs to pass an emergency war spending bill, without strings and without further delay.

On Wednesday, I will meet with congressional leaders from both parties right here at the White House. I'm going to pass on your message to them.

I appreciate members of the Families United for Our Troops and Their Mission. Thanks for doing what you do. I want to thank the members of the Armed Forces

Foundation and those who serve with our veterans service organizations.

A time of war is a time of sacrifice for our Nation, but especially for our military families. Being left behind when a loved one goes to war is one of the hardest jobs in our military. The families here today inspire our Nation—inspire them with their sense of duty and with their deep devotion to our country.

The families gathered here understand that we are a nation at war. Like me, they wish we weren't at war, but we are. They know that the enemies who attacked us on September the 11th, 2001, want to bring further destruction to our country. They know that the only way to stop them is to stay on the offense, to fight the extremists and radicals where they live so we don't have to face them where we live.

The families gathered here understand that our troops want to finish the job. Today, because of e-mail and instant messaging and other modern technologies, our military families are able to stay in contact with their loved ones overseas. I see some baby boomers out there and—who wore our uniform. You never would have imagined e-mailing a loved one in the midst of your time overseas, but that's what's happening today. Families here know what our troops are seeing and hearing on the ground; they get instant feedback from the—as a result of modern technologies. And they know better than anyone our troops' desire to succeed and their determination to prevail.

Families gathered here understand that America is not going to be safe until the terrorist threat is defeated. If we do not defeat the terrorists and extremists in Iraq, they won't leave us alone; they will follow us to the United States of America. That's what makes this battle in the war on terror so incredibly important. One of the lessons

of September the 11th is, what happens overseas matters to the security of the United States of America, and we must not forget that lesson.

The consequences of failure in Iraq would be death and destruction in the Middle East and here in America. To protect our citizens at home, we must defeat the terrorists. We defeat them by staying on the offense, and we defeat them by helping young democracies defeat their ideology of hate. And it's hard work, but it is necessary work, and thousands of men and women who wear our uniform understand the stakes.

It's a remarkable country—isn't it?—where people stand up and volunteer to serve the United States in uniform during a time of war. And yet that's who we honor here today.

We must give our men and women in uniform the tools and resources they need to prevail. Providing these resources is the responsibility of the United States Congress. And that is why, 70 days ago, I sent Congress an emergency war spending bill that would provide the vital funds our troops urgently need. But instead of approving this funding, Democrats in Congress have spent the past 70 days pushing legislation that would undercut our troops.

They passed bills in the House and the Senate that would impose restrictions on our military commanders. They set an arbitrary date for withdrawal from Iraq. And they spend billions of dollars on domestic projects that have nothing to do with the war. After passing these unacceptable bills, House and Senate leaders then chose to leave town for spring recess without resolving their differences or sending any legislation to my desk.

As Congress delays, the clock is ticking for our troops. Last week, Secretary of Defense Gates wrote to Congress, laying out the consequences of their failure to pass emergency spending for our troops on the frontlines. He warned that because Congress has not acted, quote, "The Army will

soon begin reducing quality of life initiatives, reducing the repair and maintenance of equipment necessary for deployment training, and curtailing the training of Army Guard and Reserve units within the United States, reducing their readiness levels." He continued that if emergency funding is not received by mid-May, quote, "The Army will have to consider further actions to include reducing the pace of equipment overhaul work at Army depots, curtailing training rotations for brigade combat teams currently scheduled for overseas deployment," a step that the Secretary said "would likely require the further extension of currently deployed forces." In other words, there are consequences for Congress's delay in getting our troops the money that the Defense Department has requested.

Congress's failure to fund our troops will mean that the readiness of our forces will suffer. This is unacceptable to me, it's unacceptable to you, and it's unacceptable to the vast majority of the American people.

Listen, I understand Republicans and Democrats in Washington have differences over the best course in Iraq. That's healthy. That's normal. And we should debate those differences. But our troops should not be caught in the middle.

Last week, the Senate returned to Washington, and this week, the House has returned as well. I've invited congressional leaders of both parties to meet me at the White House 2 days from today. That's what we're supposed to do; we're supposed to talk out our differences. I'm looking forward to the meetings. I hope the Democratic leadership will drop their unreasonable demands for a precipitous withdrawal. We've only committed about a little over half of our troops into a decision I made to help secure the Iraqi capital, and yet there are some saying, we ought to leave before we get there.

I think it is wrong for Congress to restrict our military commanders. I can understand having a difference of opinion about Iraq, but our commanders need the

flexibility necessary to meet the mission. We should not be substituting political judgment for the judgment of those in our military. And the idea of putting, you know, peanut storage—which may be necessary at some point in time, I don't know; I haven't analyzed the peanut storage issue—[*laughter*—]but I do know it doesn't have much to do with—about making sure your loved ones get what's needed to do their job.

I am willing to discuss any way forward that does not hamstring our troops, set an artificial timetable for withdrawal, and spend billions on projects not related to the war. The American people expect the leaders in Washington to find common ground, but they also expect the Congress and the White House to work together to make sure our troops get funded quickly. We should not legislate defeat in this vital war.

We owe it to our men and women in uniform to give them the full support. It's important as people debate this issue to think about somebody like Merrilee Carlson, with us today. She's a Gold Star Mom. Two years ago, Merrilee's son, Michael, gave his life in Iraq when his platoon was on a night mission to take out two terrorist bomb-making factories. As they approached their target, they passed over a culvert that gave way, and their Bradley fighting vehicle plunged into the water, and Michael and four others in the vehicle died that day.

Michael penned a high school essay before he joined the Army. This is what he wrote: "I want my life to account for something. Everyone eventually loses their life. I have only so much time. I want to fight for something, be a part of something greater than myself. I want to be a soldier or something of that caliber." He became a soldier; he gave his life for something greater than himself. And now his mom and dad have just one demand, and that is to make sure Michael's sacrifice is not in vain.

We owe it to the Carlson family; we owe it to other Gold Star families here today

to complete the mission for which their loved ones gave their lives. We owe it to a future generation of Americans to help secure peace. We owe it to the American people to make this Nation safer. The most solemn obligation of the government and Washington is to provide security for the American people and to protect them from harm.

We owe it to the brave Iraqis. I just spoke to the Prime Minister; I told him I was coming to see you. He said, "Please thank the people in the White House for their sacrifices."

And we will continue to work hard to be an ally in this war on terror. We'll continue to do the hard work necessary to help change the conditions that caused 19 young men to get on airplanes to come and kill thousands of our citizens on September the 11th.

We owe it to every sailor, soldier, airman, marine in harm's way to give them the tools they need to prevail. That's what we owe them.

As we saw with last week's brutal attack on the Iraqi Parliament, our troops face depraved and determined enemies, enemies that could just as easily come here to kill us. And therefore, we must give our men and women in uniform the best equipment, the best training, and the unqualified support of our Nation.

Congress needs to put partisanship on hold. It needs to get rid of all the politics right now and send me an emergency war spending bill that I can sign that gets our troops the support they need and gives our commanders the flexibility they need to complete this mission.

I appreciate you coming. God bless.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11 a.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki of Iraq.

Remarks on the Shootings at Virginia Tech in Blacksburg, Virginia *April 16, 2007*

Our Nation is shocked and saddened by the news of the shootings at Virginia Tech today. The exact total has not yet been confirmed, but it appears that more than 30 people were killed and many more were wounded.

I've spoken with Governor Tim Kaine and Virginia Tech President Charles Steger. I told them that Laura and I and many across our Nation are praying for the victims and their families and all the members of the university community who have been devastated by this terrible tragedy. I told them that my administration would do everything possible to assist with the investigation, and that I pledged that we would stand ready to help local law enforcement and the local community in any way we can during this time of sorrow.

Schools should be places of safety and sanctuary and learning. When that sanc-

tuary is violated, the impact is felt in every American classroom and every American community.

Today our Nation grieves with those who have lost loved ones at Virginia Tech. We hold the victims in our hearts, we lift them up in our prayers, and we ask a loving God to comfort those who are suffering today.

Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 4:01 p.m. in the Diplomatic Reception Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Charles W. Steger, president, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of these remarks. The related proclamation of April 17 is listed in Appendix D at the end of this volume.

Remarks During a Memorial Convocation at Virginia Tech in Blacksburg, Virginia *April 17, 2007*

Governor, thank you. President Steger, thank you very much. Students and faculty and staff and grieving family members and members of this really extraordinary place: Laura and I have come to Blacksburg today with hearts full of sorrow. This is a day of mourning for the Virginia Tech community, and it is a day of sadness for our entire Nation. We've come to express our sympathy. In this time of anguish, I hope you know that people all over this country are thinking about you and asking God to provide comfort for all who have been affected.

Yesterday began like any other day. Students woke up, and they grabbed their

backpacks, and they headed for class. And soon the day took a dark turn, with students and faculty barricading themselves in classrooms and dormitories, confused, terrified, and deeply worried. By the end of the morning, it was the worst day of violence on a college campus in American history, and for many of you here today, it was the worst day of your lives.

It's impossible to make sense of such violence and suffering. Those whose lives were taken did nothing to deserve their fate. They were simply in the wrong place at the wrong time. Now they're gone, and they leave behind grieving families and grieving classmates and a grieving nation.