Thank you for that warm welcome. I am delighted to be here with the men and women of the National Guard Association of the United States. For 128 years, the National Guard Association has been fighting for the citizen-soldiers who fight for America. In times of crisis, America depends on the skill and devotion of the National Guard.
Our Nation is safer because you stand ready to put on the uniform and defend our freedom. And I have come to tell you: America is grateful for your service ... and I am proud to be your Commander in Chief.
Acknowledgments

• Brigadier General Bob Taylor, Chairman of the Board, National Guard Association of the United States
  (introduced you, presented bust)

• Congressman Jim Gibbons (R-NV)

• Brigadier General Steve Koper (Ret.), President, National Guard Association of the United States
• Major General

Roger Lempke [LEMP-key],
President, Adjutants General Association
of the United States and
Adjutant General of Nebraska

• Lieutenant General Danny James,
Director, Air National Guard,
and former Texas Adjutant General
• Chief Warrant Officer Lewis King (Ret.), Chairman, National Guard Association of Texas Educational Foundation and Chairman, President George W. Bush Memorial Bust Campaign

• Other military leaders here today

• Charles Parks, Sculptor
The Guard has been fighting for America since before America was a Nation. From your “First Muster” in 1636 to today’s global war on terror, Americans have counted on the Guard to protect our land and defend our way of life.
The role of the Guard in our military is unique. You are the only part of our Armed Forces that serves both your state and your country – and in the past year, Americans have witnessed the courage of our Guardsmen and women at home and abroad.
When Hurricane Katrina struck the Gulf Coast last year, more than 40,000 Guardsmen and women rushed to the impact zone – the largest stateside deployment in National Guard history.

They conducted search and rescue operations ... distributed food and water ... provided emergency medical care ... protected communities from criminal violence ... and worked around the clock to repair homes and restore power.
Guard units from all 50 states, three U.S. territories, and the District of Columbia provided assistance – and together, they saved lives and helped evacuate over 175,000 people stranded by the storm.
When the Pennsylvania National Guard came to repair the roof of a Louisiana woman, she said this to the soldiers:

"That's a long way to come to help us. We're really grateful ... you boys are going to heaven I tell you."

When tragedy strikes, Americans know they can count on the men and women of the National Guard.
As you protect your neighbors from natural disasters, you are also protecting the American people from terrorist dangers.

Since September 11, 2001, more than 260,000 members of the National Guard have been mobilized for various missions in the war on terror.
At this moment, Guardsmen and women are training the Afghan National Army ... standing watch over the world's most dangerous terrorists in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba ... and taking the fight to the enemy in Iraq. Across the world, and on every front, the men and women of the Guard are serving with courage and determination – and they are bringing us victory in the global war on terror.
Your service is vital to the security of our country and the peace of the world – and that service would not be possible without the support of your families. Your loved ones miss you and worry about you when you are deployed in far away lands.
By standing behind you, they are also serving our country – and America appreciates their service as well.

Our Nation also depends on the commitment of your employers.

In offices, schools, and factories across America, businesses do without your talents so that you can protect our Nation.

These businesses are putting patriotism ahead of profit – and they have the gratitude of all Americans.
Each of you has stepped forward to defend your country – and your country owes you some things in return. We have taken a number of steps to improve the call up process, so that it is more respectful of you and your families. In most cases, we are now giving you at least 30 days notification before you mobilize – so you and your families have time to make arrangements.
We are working to give you as much certainty as possible about the length of your mobilization – so you can know when you will be able to resume civilian life.

We are working to minimize the number of extensions and repeat mobilizations.

We are working to ensure that you and your families are treated with the dignity you deserve – and the respect you have earned.
We are also taking steps to improve your quality of life. We have expanded health care benefits for Guard and Reserve forces and their families – giving you access to the military's TRICARE system.
We are also expanding access to education for America's citizen-soldiers.

I was proud to sign legislation providing our Guard and Reserve forces between 40 and 80 percent of the education benefit available to active duty forces – depending on the length of their mobilization in the war on terror.
We have also tripled the amount that can be paid for re-enlisting in the National Guard or Reserve.

And last month, I signed into law a new retention bonus for Guardsmen and Reservists with critical skills needed in the war on terror. Our Guardsmen and Reservists are standing up for America – and my Administration is standing behind our Guard and Reserve.
We are working to give you the tools and resources you need to prevail in the war on terror – and meet your state and homeland security missions as well.

My 2007 budget increases funding for the men and women of our Armed Forces by 28.5 billion dollars – including vital funds to help the National Guard meet its responsibilities during a time of war.
The Army National Guard currently has about 333,000 soldiers – and my 2007 budget funds the Guard at that level. As the Guard recruits above that level, we will make certain that there is funding in place for every citizen who steps forward to wear the uniform.
And to ensure that the Army and Air National Guard are ready for any challenge, my budget more than doubles funding for equipment and modernization over the next five years. You are risking your lives to defend our citizens from unprecedented threats – and so long as I am the Commander in Chief, you will have the equipment and resources you need for victory.
Your service is needed in these dangerous times. We remain a Nation at war. In recent months, I have spoken extensively about our strategy for victory in Iraq.
Today, I will give you an update on the progress we are making in the broader war on terror: the actions of our global coalition to break up terrorist networks across the world ... plots we have disrupted that have saved American lives ... and how the rise of freedom is leading millions to reject the dark ideology of the terrorists – and stand with us in the struggle for justice, tolerance, and peace.
On September 11, 2001, our Nation saw that vast oceans and great distances were no longer enough to keep us safe. And I made a decision – America will not wait to be attacked again. Since that day, we have taken decisive action to protect our citizens against new dangers.
We are hunting down the terrorists using every element of our national power – military, intelligence, law enforcement, diplomatic, and financial. And we are clarifying the choice facing every nation: In this struggle between freedom and terror, every nation has responsibilities – and no one can remain neutral.
Since September 11, we have led a broad coalition to confront the terrorist threat. Four weeks after the attacks, America and our allies launched military operations to eliminate the terrorists’ principal sanctuary in the nation of Afghanistan.
Together, we removed a cruel regime that oppressed its people, brutalized women and girls, and gave safe haven to the terrorists who had attacked America. Because we acted, the terror camps in Afghanistan have been shut down – and 25 million people have tasted freedom, many for the first time in their lives.
Afghanistan now has a democratically elected President ... a new national assembly ... and the beginnings of a market economy. Women are working and starting their own businesses, and boys and girls are back in school. The Afghan people are building the institutions of a lasting democracy – and the foundations of a hopeful future for their children and grandchildren.
Afghanistan still faces serious challenges – from illicit drug trafficking to continued violence from al-Qaida and the remnants of the Taliban regime.

So the international community is working together to help Afghanistan's young democracy succeed. Earlier this month, Prime Minister Tony Blair hosted over 40 nations and 9 international organizations for a conference in London, where they pledged 10.5 billion dollars in aid to Afghanistan.
With the help of 35 nations, NATO is leading the International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan.

The United States, Britain, Norway, Germany, Italy, Spain, Lithuania, Canada, the Netherlands, and New Zealand are all leading Provincial Reconstruction Teams.

These teams are helping the Afghan government extend its authority and provide security in provinces across the country.
Our coalition has trained nearly 27,000 Afghan soldiers and more than 56,000 Afghan police – so they can take the fight to the terrorists and eventually provide for the security of their own citizens. Afghan forces are risking their lives to fight our common enemy – and coalition forces are proud to serve alongside such courageous and determined allies.
Our coalition is also working to root out and destroy terrorist networks in other parts of the world. More than 90 nations – nearly half the world – are now cooperating in a global campaign to dry up terrorist financing … hunt down terrorist operatives … and bring terrorist leaders to justice.
Some said that an aggressive strategy of bringing the war to the terrorists would cost us international support – and drive nations from our coalition. In fact, the opposite has happened. Today, more governments are cooperating in the fight against terror than ever before. And in one of the most significant developments of this war, many nations that once turned a blind eye to terror are now helping lead the fight against it.
A little over four years ago, Pakistan was one of only three countries in the world that recognized the Taliban regime in Afghanistan. Today, Pakistani forces are risking their lives in the hunt for al-Qaida—and President Musharraf has faced several attempts on his life since his courageous decision to join the fight against terror.
Before September 11, terrorist supporters were operating with relative ease in Saudi Arabia, where fundraisers and facilitators were providing money and logistical support to al-Qaida.
Since the Riyadh bombings in May of 2003, the Saudi government has recognized that it is a prime target of the terrorists. And in the past two and a half years, Saudi forces have killed or captured nearly all of the terrorists on their most wanted list ... reduced the flow of money to terror groups ... and arrested hundreds of radical fighters bound for Iraq.
These governments are taking important steps to confront terror -- and as they do, we will continue to encourage them to take the path of political reform. By respecting the rights and choices of their own people, these nations can marginalize the extremists ... strengthen their societies ... and eliminate the conditions that feed radicalism.
These and other governments around the world are stepping forward to fight the terrorists because they know the lives of their citizens are at stake.
As President Musharraf has said, "Terrorism threatens to destabilize all modern societies.... It cannot be condoned for any reason or cause. The people of Pakistan have suffered from terrorism ... and we are making our contribution to the fight against terrorism." President Musharraf is right. In the war on terror, there can be no separate peace — and no nation can stand on the sidelines.
By standing together, the United States and our partners are striking real blows against the enemy.

Since September 11, 2001, our coalition has captured or killed al-Qaida managers and operatives in over two dozen countries. That includes many of al-Qaida's operational commanders – the senior leaders responsible for day-to-day planning of terrorist activities across the globe.
In November 2001, coalition forces killed Mohammed Atif with an air strike in Afghanistan. In March 2003, his replacement – Khalid Shaykh Mohammad – was captured in Pakistan.
In May of 2005, the man who took over for him – a terrorist named al-Libi – was captured in South Asia. The terrorists are living under constant pressure – and this adds to our security. When terrorists spend their days working to avoid death or capture, it is harder for them to plan and execute new attacks on our country.
By striking the terrorists where they live, we are protecting the American homeland.

Since September 11, the United States and our coalition partners have disrupted a number of serious al-Qaida terrorist plots – including plots to attack targets inside the United States.
Let me give you one example:

In the weeks after September 11, while Americans were still recovering from an unprecedented strike on our homeland, al-Qaida was already busy planning its next attack.
We now know that in October 2001, Khalid Shaykh Mohammad – the mastermind of the September 11 attacks – had already set in motion a plan to have terrorist operatives hijack an airplane using shoe bombs to breach the cockpit door, and fly the plane into the tallest building on the West Coast. We believe the intended target was the Library Tower in Los Angeles.
Rather than use Arab hijackers as he had on September 11, Khalid Shaykh Mohammad sought out young men from Southeast Asia—whom he believed would not arouse as much suspicion. To help carry out this plan, he tapped a terrorist named Hambali, one of the leaders of an al-Qaida affiliated group in Southeast Asia called “J-I.”
JII terrorists were responsible for a series of deadly attacks in Southeast Asia, and members of the group had trained with al Qaida. Hambali recruited several key operatives who had been training in Afghanistan. Once the operatives were recruited, they met with Osama bin Laden, and then began preparations for the West Coast attack.
Their plot was derailed in early 2002 when a South Asian nation arrested a key al-Qaida operative. Subsequent debriefings and other intelligence operations made clear the intended target, and how al-Qaida hoped to execute it. This critical intelligence helped other allies capture the ring leaders and other known operatives recruited for this plot.
The West Coast plot had been thwarted.

And our efforts did not end there. In the summer of 2003, our partners in Southeast Asia conducted another successful manhunt that led to the capture of the terrorist Hambali.
As the West Coast plot shows, in the war on terror we face a relentless and determined enemy that operates in many nations – and so protecting our citizens requires unprecedented cooperation of many nations as well. It took the combined efforts of several countries to break up this plot. By working together, we took dangerous terrorists off the streets – and stopped a catastrophic attack on our homeland.
Across the world, our coalition is pursuing the enemy with relentless determination. And because of these efforts, the terrorists are weakened and fractured – yet they are still lethal.

We cannot let the fact that America has not been attacked in the four and a half years since September 11, 2001 lull us into the illusion that the threats to our Nation have disappeared. They have not.
Just last month, we heard
Osama bin Laden declare his intention to
attack America again. Our military,
law enforcement, homeland security,
and intelligence professionals are working
day and night to help protect us.
We are safer for their efforts –
but we are not yet safe.
America remains at risk – so we must remain vigilant. We will stay on the offense ... we will hunt down the terrorists ... and we will not rest until this threat to our people has been removed.
We will continue to take the fight to the enemy – yet we must also recognize that in the long run victory will require more than military means alone. Ultimately, the only way to defeat the terrorists is to defeat their dark vision of hatred and fear by spreading the hope of freedom to a troubled region of the world.
The terrorists have an ideology. They share a hateful vision that rejects tolerance, and crushes all dissent – a world where women are oppressed ... children are indoctrinated ... those who reject their ideology of violence and extremism are murdered.
The terrorists have aims – they seek to impose their heartless ideology of totalitarian control throughout the Middle East, and arm themselves with weapons of mass murder. Their goal is to overthrow moderate governments, take control of countries, and use them as safe havens to launch attacks against America.
To achieve their aims, the terrorists need popular support. We know this from the terrorists' own words. In a letter to his chief of operations in Iraq, the terrorist Zawahiri wrote that popular support is, quote, "a decisive factor between victory and defeat. In the absence of this popular support the movement would be crushed in the shadows. Therefore our planning must strive to involve the Muslim masses in the battle." end quote.
So a key part of the terrorists' strategy is to feed public resentment by convincing people across the Muslim world that the future holds just two choices: One of Islam, holiness, and virtue ... and one of Western decadence, immorality, and imperialism. They use every opportunity to advance this false choice.
Sometimes, they spread blatant lies about America. Other times, it is American mistakes – like the abuses at Abu Ghraib – that give them ammunition in their campaign to foment anti-Western sentiment, and rally Muslims to support their dark ideology.
The problem for the terrorists is that they cannot hide the inhumanity of their ideology. Because they lack the military strength to challenge us directly, they have turned to the weapon of fear. They seek to break our will with stunning acts of violence.

The terrorists do not understand America. They cannot shake our will. We will stay on the hunt ... we will never give in ... we will win the war on terror.
In the terrorists' campaign of violence and destruction, the majority of their victims since Nine-Eleven have been innocent Muslims. When people in the Arab world see al-Qaida murdering Iraqi children or blowing up mourners in an Iraqi mosque, their outrage grows. And as the terrorists spread violence in places like Riyadh, Istanbul, Sharm-el-Sheik, Jakarta, and Bali – the people of those countries are starting to turn against the terrorists.
After terrorists bombed a Palestinian wedding at a hotel in Amman last November, thousands of Jordanians took to the streets and rallied against al-Qaida. One protester carried a sign that read "Jordan's Nine-Eleven." Others chanted "This is not Islamic, this is terrorism!"
The outrage even reached the Jordanian town of Zarqa – birthplace of the terrorist Zarqawi who leads al-Qaida in Iraq and who was the mastermind of the Jordan bombings. A cousin standing outside the al-Qaida leader's family home said:

"We hate him even more than other people do now."
Zargawi was even expelled by his own tribesmen, hundreds of whom declared in a letter to a Jordanian newspaper, quote: we "renounce his actions, pronouncements and whatever he approves of .... We disown him until judgment day."
Before the bombings, most Jordanians reportedly sympathized with al-Qaida. Today only a minority sympathize with al-Qaida, and most Jordanians say its activities are not in conformity with the teachings of Islam. Similar shifts in public opinion are beginning to appear in other parts of the Muslim world. From Pakistan, to Indonesia, to al-Qaida's former home base of Afghanistan, more people now say they oppose the terrorists and their tactics.
These are positive signs — but we still have a long way to go. So we will continue to oppose the terrorists’ ideology by offering the hopeful alternative of political freedom and peaceful change. We are working to spread the hope of liberty across the broader Middle East because we have learned the lessons of history: Free nations do not wage wars of aggression, or give safe haven for terrorists to attack other democracies.
Free nations are peaceful nations.

And when democracy takes hold, nations replace resentment with hope, respect the rights of their citizens and their neighbors, and join the fight against terror. Every step toward freedom in the world makes our country safer – so across the world we are acting boldly in freedom’s cause.
We are standing with the brave people of Iraq, as they risk their lives to build a strong democracy in the heart of the Middle East. And their courage is changing their country, the region, and the world.

Before the January 2005 elections, the terrorists threatened anyone who voted with death.
The Iraqi people defied these threats, and went to the polls in that election and two others last year – each with larger and broader participation than the one that came before. Iraqis are rejecting terror and violence for the openness and opportunity of democracy. And they are showing the world that the terrorists' ideology cannot compete on a level playing field with the ideology of freedom.
Iraqis still face serious challenges.

The terrorists and Saddamists continue to sow terror and violence – and they will continue fighting freedom's progress with all the hateful determination they can muster.

And Iraqis still have to overcome longstanding ethnic and religious tensions – and build the institutions of a free society that will serve all the people, not narrow political or religious interests.
The challenges ahead are complex and difficult, yet Iraqis are determined to overcome them – and our coalition is determined to help the Iraqi people succeed.
We are carrying out a clear strategy for victory in Iraq: First, we are helping Iraqis build an inclusive government, so that old resentments will be eased, and the insurgency marginalized.

Second, we are continuing reconstruction efforts, and helping Iraqis build a modern economy, so all Iraq's citizens can experience the benefits of freedom.
And third, we are striking terrorist targets while we train Iraqi forces that are increasingly capable of defeating the enemy. Iraqi forces are showing their courage every day, and we are proud to be their allies in the cause of freedom.
The courage of Iraqis is inspiring others across the broader Middle East to claim their freedom as well – and the message is going forth from Damascus to Tehran that the future of the Middle East belongs to freedom.
As liberty spreads in this vital region and freedom produces opportunity and hope for those who have not known it, the terrorist temptation will start to fall away. And as more nations claim their freedom, we will gain new allies in the war on terror, and new partners in the battle for peace and moderation in the Muslim world.
Before that day comes, there will be more days of testing. The terrorists remain brutal and determined – and they still have some resources at their disposal.

The attacks in London, Madrid, and other cities are grim reminders of how lethal al-Qaida remains. Money is still flowing to radical mosques and madrassas, which are still turning out new terrorist recruits.
Some countries – like Syria and Iran – still provide terrorists with support and sanctuary. And the terrorists are sophisticated at spreading propaganda, and using spectacular attacks to dominate our evening news.
Yet from the vantage point of a terrorist sitting in a cave, the future seems increasingly bleak. Consider how the world looks four and a half years into the war on terror: The terrorists have lost their home base in Afghanistan, and no longer have control of a country where they can train recruits and plot new attacks.
Most of their leaders are dead or in custody — and the rest are on the run.

They have been reduced to using messengers to communicate.

They are running low on funds, and have been forced to beg the terrorists in Iraq to send money. Countries that once allowed them free reign are now on the hunt.
Their efforts to divide the West have largely failed – and the vast majority of the world's governments are standing firm and working together in the fight against them. Iraqis are forming a unity government – instead of fighting the civil war the terrorists hoped to foment. And Iraqi Sunnis are joining the political process.
The success of democracy in Iraq and Afghanistan is inspiring calls for change across the region. And the terrorists' strategy of attacking innocent Muslims is beginning to backfire, and expose them for what they are: murderers with no respect for human life and human dignity.
Despite the violence and suffering the terrorists are wreaking, we are winning the war on terror. Yet victory will require more courage, and more sacrifice. In this war, we have said farewell to some very good men and women – including more than 360 heroes of the National Guard. We hold their loved ones in our hearts – and lift them up in our prayers.
These brave Americans gave their lives for a cause that is just, and necessary to the security of our country. And their sacrifice is sparing millions from lives of tyranny and sorrow.
Now we will honor their sacrifice by completing their mission. And in the long run, we can be confident in the outcome of this struggle – because we have seen the power of freedom to defeat tyranny and terror before. And because we have on our side the greatest force for freedom in the history of the world: the men and women of the United States Armed Forces.
One of the great strengths of our military is that it is an all-volunteer force. And since the attacks of September 11, 2001, nearly 1.5 million Americans have stepped forward to put on our Nation's uniform – including nearly 290,000 who have joined the National Guard. Nearly 1.3 million more American troops have made the courageous decision to re-enlist and stay in the fight – including more than 350,000 members of the National Guard.
These brave Americans saw the future the terrorists intend for us – and they said:

"Not on my watch." Many of you in this room can be counted among their numbers.

I thank you for your courage, and your commitment to this vital mission.
Four and a half years into the fight, America's Armed Forces are determined, experienced, and ready for any challenge – and our Nation is blessed to have such brave defenders. All of you are bringing honor to the uniform, pride to our country, and security to our people. And America will always be grateful for your service in the cause of freedom.
Thank you. God bless you, and may God continue to bless America.