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THE WHITE HOUSE

EXCHANGE OF REMARKS  
BETWEEN THE PRESIDENT  
AND  
DONALD RUMSFELD  
AT THE  
SWEARING-IN CEREMONY  
OF  
DONALD RUMSFELD  
AS  
SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

THE DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE

11:10 A.M. EST

THE PRESIDENT: Mr. Clements, Secretary-designate Rumsfeld, Mrs. Rumsfeld, Mr. Justice Stewart, Mr. Vice President General Brown, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen:

We are assembled here today to swear in as the Secretary of Defense one of the most dedicated, talented public servants it has been my privilege to know in 27 years of public life.

A friend once asked him to give a thumbnail description of Don Rumsfeld's work pattern, and he said it could be summed up in two very simple statements: One, Don works at a stand-up desk, and two, his staff does not work at stand-up desks, but they do very little sitting down.

Don Rumsfeld, in a series of challenging legislative and administrative capacities, has demonstrated beyond question his ability to grasp the complexity of issues and organizations, to work tirelessly and effectively at whatever task may engage him, and to serve his country faithfully and well.

As a Member of Congress from Illinois, he demonstrated the unique talent for staying in tune with the will of the people that he served, for representing their interests with fidelity and with courage, and for winning the confidence and respect of his fellow Members of the Congress.

As head of the Office of Economic Opportunity, and later as Director of the Cost of Living Council, he exhibited the organizational and leadership abilities which have characterized his career in public service.

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In these varied posts, he has also shown great awareness of and compassion for the social and economic needs of our Nation. That awareness and that compassion accompany him here.

As the United States Ambassador to NATO, he demonstrated a strong commitment to a strong defense for America and our allies in Western Europe. His service as Ambassador was distinguished by a strengthening of the commitment to Atlantic security and by his own diplomatic skills, which he successfully employed in a very extensive and a very important post.

As my Assistant at the White House, he has shown that he is a man of near inexhaustible energy, a man to take charge of a situation very quickly, forcefully and efficiently, and a man with a wide variety of gifts and interests and expertise.

Don Rumsfeld knows, as I know, that a strong national defense for America is the surest guardian of our Nation's independence and peace throughout the world. He knows, as I know, as everyone in this Administration knows, that it is the certainty of America's military strength that makes possible our negotiations for peaceful cooperation with other great powers of the world. He knows, as I know, that the price of that strength and security is high, but it is a price that must be paid, for the price is never greater than the worth of a strong defense.

You all know where I stand on defense. All of those who say they are for a strong defense and a strong foreign policy should join with me, the Secretary of Defense and the Secretary of State to maintain adequate defense projects in the Congress.

As I have said before, a military capability second to none permits us to act firmly and successfully in foreign policy around the world and in defense of our national interest.

As Don begins his new duties and assumes this new challenge, he does so with my personal best wishes and my thanks for accepting a very difficult and demanding assignment. Don Rumsfeld has my complete confidence and trust. He will earn that of the Nation and the Department of Defense because he will do a superb job as our new Secretary of Defense.

It is my pleasure to introduce for swearing in by Mr. Justice Stewart the 13th Secretary of Defense-designate, the Honorable Donald H. Rumsfeld.

(Justice Potter Stewart administered the oath of office.)

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SECRETARY RUMSFELD: Mr. President, Mr. Vice President, Mr. Justice Stewart, members of the Cabinet, Members of the Congress, Mr. Deputy Secretary, General Brown and the Joint Chiefs of Staff, members of the Armed Services and the Department of Defense, honored guests:

Profoundly respectful of the leadership provided by the 12 good men who have served as Secretary of Defense I pledge to you, Mr. President, and the American people my full efforts to meet the high standards demanded by the responsibilities of this office.

These are times of stress for nations devoted to the principles of self-government, constitutional procedures, the secret ballot, the right to fair trial and the rights of free speech, of free press and the free practice of religion. These are times when the principles that characterize political decency are threatened and when democratic leadership everywhere is challenged.

Once again we are living the lesson that it is not easy for free people to govern themselves. It is essential, in fact critical, for the survival of political liberty that we teach ourselves -- for there are no other teachers -- how to govern and defend ourselves in our new and changing circumstances.

No one knows the answers to all of the problems of the survival of free Government, but there are some guideposts. One essential ingredient of self-government is trust and it works in two directions. Each public official in America has his power from the people and from no other source. That power is entrusted under specified terms as the people determine to be used only for the good of the people. This is what is meant when it is said that trust is the foundation of self-government, and trust must be earned. Certainly, officials must use their own judgment often but ultimately the people must judge and it is up to them whether policies and programs stand or fall.

On this base of public trust rests our prospects for success. Our national cohesion and purpose are the source of our leadership in the world with friends, allies, uncommitted nations and potential adversaries.

The dangers of misperception are obvious and grave. Consider, for example, that widely misunderstood word "detente." To some, detente means that peace is close at hand and that we can cease our efforts to be strong and vigilant.

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Others suspect it means giving advantages to potential adversaries without gaining corresponding benefits. To some of our allies, detente is a sign of hope, to others a sign of danger. This borrowed word "detente" means literally relaxation of tension. No one seeks to relax tension that does not exist. Detente must be seen for what it is, a word for the approach we use in relations with nations who are not our friends, who do not share our principles, whom we are not sure we can trust and who have military power and have shown an inclination to use it to the detriment of freedom.

With such nations, with vigilance and due caution, with our eyes open, we test to see if there are ways to reduce confrontations, to lessen dangers, to put affairs on a somewhat less precarious footing, to see if there might not be some interests that we share, never forgetting that in many basic things we are fundamentally opposed. On this there should be no doubt.

Finally, I would make four points: First, the safety of the American people and the hopes for freedom throughout the world demand a defense capability for the United States of America second to none. I am totally dedicated to that mission.

Second, we are rightly proud of the Armed Forces older than our Nation itself, and I will seek to strengthen that sense of pride among us all. We were born as a Nation out of military struggle. We owe our national life to men and women who had the will to fight for independence. The competence and dedication of their successors in today's Armed Forces will be drawn upon fully.

Third, that special kind of American military professionalism that is devoted to the constitutional principle of civilian control so fundamental to the political freedom in this country is a model for the world. One who has served in the Congress knows how indispensable it is that the defense of our country be a bipartisan and shared responsibility.

Finally, Let there be no doubt among us or in the world at large that the continuity of American policy can be relied upon by friend and foe alike. Our defense policies are geared to the interests of this Nation.

Mr. President, members of the Department of Defense, I look forward to working with you. America must pursue its goal, as it has throughout almost 200 years, as a guardian of liberty and a symbol by example and deed in the service of freedom.

END

(11:37 P.M. EST)