



Military Families Speak Out
Alaska Chapter

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The Honorable Lisa Murkowski
709 Hart Senate Office Building
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510-0202

September 18, 2006

Re: August 26 Meeting of the 172nd Stryker Brigade and Donald Rumsfeld

Dear Senator Murkowski

This past week Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld replied to letters delivered to him from family members who attended the August 26 meeting in Fairbanks. These letters don't answer the questions and concerns we posed to him. It is difficult to trust that his interest in speaking with the families of the 172nd Stryker Brigade was genuine. However, we believe a more important aspect of this meeting warrants your attention.

Obviously as outspoken critics of the occupation and/or the redeployment, it was easy for us to dismiss much of the information and ideas he offered. Yet there was one very bright moment when we trusted him. Early in his speech, before he took questions, he commended the work done by the 172nd Stryker Brigade and stated that their arrival in Baghdad had contributed to a 40% to 50% decrease of civilian deaths there.

We felt proud of our spouse's and children's contribution to the reputation of the unit and that their courage and dedication was so immediately contributing to saving lives of innocent civilians. It was also reassuring to believe that the streets of Baghdad were becoming safer for them personally. But last weekend we found in two news sources that the method for counting civilian deaths has been toyed with.

In a Washington Post article you will find the same description of progress that Rumsfeld referred to:

By late August, Maj. Gen. William Caldwell was claiming a 46 percent decrease in the murder rate in Baghdad for that month. "We are actually seeing progress," Caldwell said at the time. A U.S. military Web site on Thursday continued to assert a roughly 50 percent drop in killings in Baghdad. (Body Count in Baghdad Nearly Triples, Washington Post, September 8, 2006)

Yet, as indicated in the headline, the story explains that the death toll reported by the morgues in Baghdad nearly tripled in August. And it goes on to state that deaths from car bombings and mortar attacks are not included in the military's count.

A U.S. military spokesman in Baghdad, Lt. Col. Barry Johnson, said Thursday that the U.S. figures were based on the military's "consolidated reporting with the Iraqi government." Johnson also disclosed that the military's numbers included only "individuals targeted as a result of sectarian-related violence, to include executions," and did not include "other violent acts such as car bombs and mortars."

It now appears to me that Donald Rumsfeld came to Fairbanks and presented to the soldiers' families manipulated facts and offered them in a manner that was wrongfully deceptive. He gave us what we wanted to hear, to feel proud of our men and women, and less anxious about their situation.

We think you might agree with the sentiment that trust equals truth, and therefore the inability to speak truthfully with people, at home and in other nations, is a significant impediment to the development of peaceful relations that must be founded on trust.

It is readily apparent that Donald Rumsfeld, like so many in this administration, does not place this most important of values high on his personal agenda. He was not truthful to we family members when he came to discuss the hardship and pain we face as our loved ones endure the prolonged daily task of facing a dangerous enemy. By misleading us with such conveniently fabricated statistical evidence, he dishonored each of us and thus dishonored the soldiers in the field.

By manipulating the way civilian deaths are reported, he diminishes the value of the lives of innocent civilians in Iraq and undercuts whatever remaining trust they have for our country and its government.

America can no longer tolerate the lies. We urge you to stand up for the truth and immediately call for Donald's Rumsfeld's resignation and an end to this war. It's past time that the country's reputation in the world begins to heal from the damage that has been done to our image. It's past time that America find the courage to admit its mistake and bring the occupation to an immediate end. It is time to honor the troops by bringing them home now and taking care of them when they get here.

Respectfully

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