

NATIONAL PRESS CLUB LUNCHEON SPEECH BY FORMER SENATOR BOB DOLE (R-KS) SUBJECT: MAKING THE SYSTEM WORK FOR TODAY'S VETERANS MODERATOR: SYLVIA SMITH, PRESIDENT, NATIONAL PRESS CLUB LOCATION: NATIONAL PRESS CLUB, WASHINGTON, D.C. TIME: 1:00 P.M. EDT DATE: FRIDAY, MAY 23, 2008

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MS. SMITH: (Strikes gavel.) Good afternoon, and welcome to the National Press Club. My name is Sylvia Smith. I'm the Washington editor of the Fort Wayne Journal Gazette and president of the National Press Club. I'd like to welcome club members and their guests as well as those of you who are watching on C-SPAN. We're looking forward to today's speech, and afterwards, I'll ask as many questions from the audience as time permits. Please hold your applause during the speech so that we have as much time as possible for those questions. For our broadcast audience, I'd like to explain that if you do hear applause, it may be from the guests of members and the general public who attend our event, not necessarily from the working press.

I'd now like to introduce our head table guests and ask them to stand briefly when their names are called. From your right, Adam Kleimer (sp), former chief Washington correspondent for the New York Times, now retired; Jonathan Salant, Bloomberg News and a former president of the National Press Club; Don Larrabee of Griggin-Larrabee News Service and a sergeant in the army air corps in World War II and a former president of the National Press Club; Sam Stavisky a Marine combat correspondent during World War II; Brian Bowers and assistant managing editor of Stars and Stripes; Jose Ramos, a member of the Dole-Shalala commission and an Iraq vet.

Skipping over the podium, Angela Greiling Keane of Bloomberg News and chairwoman of the National Press Club speakers committee -- and we'll skip over our speaker -- Hill Montgomery of Capstone Communications and the Speakers Committee member who organized today's luncheon; John Cosgrove, a World War II Navy vet and former president of the National Press Club; David Autry who is the deputy national director of communication of the Disabled American Veterans; Karen Guice, deputy director the Dole-Shalala Commission and a guest of our speaker; Randal Mickelsen of Reuters; and Art Easley (sp), editor at large of The Hill and an Army Veteran.

Welcome. (Applause.)

As the number of casualties from the battlefields of Iraq and Afghanistan rose steadily in recent years, cracks began to show in the system of care for returning wounded fighters. We heard stories of bureaucratic delays in processing claims for benefits and stunning reports of shabby medical treatment. There's a reason the Washington Post coverage of the conditions at Walter Reed won a Pulitzer and other major journalism prizes. It was a shocker of a tale. Readers were outraged at the treatment, or lack thereof, of the wounded soldiers. They demanded immediate reform. Among the wounded were warriors suffering from massive injuries.

Defense Department statistics indicate that nearly 90 percent of those seriously wounded in today's conflicts survive due to faster and more sophisticated care. This translates to a mortality rate of just about 10 percent. That compares to 23 percent during the Vietnam War, and up to 30 percent who died of wounds during World War II. Although the mortality rate is falling, it also means some soldiers returning today have far more traumatic injuries, often requiring extensive and complex care. President Bush appointed a commission last year to make fixes in the system and stem the crisis of care. He named former senator Bob Dole and Donna Shalala, President Clinton's secretary of Health and Human Resources (sic), as co-chairs.

Following the commission's report last year, some changes are afoot. For example, the Defense Department and the Department of Veterans Affairs are cooperating on a program to assign federal recovery coordinators to follow severely injured patients. The coordinators help with the maze of military and VA hospital care, do paperwork for disability rating and benefits eligibility, a key recommendation of the commission. The co-leader of that commission is no stranger to the National Press Club podium. He's retired from politics now, but in no way is he a retiree from public service. Often, that service involves his personal and professional knowledge of veterans' issues. Bob Dole is a combat veteran of World War II. He was gravely wounded in Italy and spent 27 months in a hospital. He's also a veteran of political wars -- more than 35 years in Congress serving either as majority or minority leader of the Senate, longer than anyone in the history of the Republican Party. He was a vice-presidential candidate and the GOP nominee for president in 1996.

Dole is not limited to military care issues. He has joined three other Senate majority leaders, Tom Daschle, George Mitchell and Howard Baker, to form the Bipartisan Policy Center. Its goal is to draft a pragmatic plan to move forward the hot button issue of a national system of health care for all Americans. In addition, he is of counsel to the law firm of Alton and Bird.

Please join me in a warm National Press Club welcome for Bob Dole. (Applause.)

MR. DOLE: Thank you very much for that introduction I sent down to you. (Laughter.) And before we start, I just want a little -- you know, a little something different. Not the benediction, not that -- (laughter).

(Music plays.) (Applause.)

My sister gave me that for Christmas and I thought it was supposed to have gone to one of her grandchildren and so I was going to send it back and then I played it and I like Lee Greenwood so -- anyway, it's to kind of get you in the spirit for the weekend, and a lot of my friends here and some of my law firm people who know if I have any clients are here today -- (laughter) -- you know, just a lot of people I've worked with over the years. So -- but we have -- you know we have so many people that worked with us on the commission. And Jose here, Jose Ramos lost his arm. A wonderful young man, a big help to us on the commission. He's gotten married. I know he did, I was there for the wedding and he's in college. So he's moving on with his life, which is a very positive thing. So Jose, thank you for coming today. (Applause.)

And I got my friends like Bobby and Nancy out here used to cover me on the -- or uncover me, whatever -- (laughter) -- they were with ABC and NBC, but we're long time friends. But I wanted to mention just a few people very quickly. Karen Guice, who is on my right is what we call one of the three wise-women. And I'm going to touch on that in a minute but we have these wonderful three ladies who really gave us the direction. And Karen is a surgeon, no longer a practicing surgeon, but highly regarded and just a wonderful person.

So we were pleased -- that's the kind of people we had on the commission.

And my friend Chuck Peck (sp) -- is he out there somewhere? Colonel Peck is at Walter Reed Hospital, but he knew a lot about the things and he's almost like a brother to me. I've been going to Walter Reed for -- I don't know -- 30, 40 years and he's been a lot of help over the years. And he was a lot of help to us on the commission.

Joann Donlin (sp) has done a lot to put this together. I don't know if Joann's around, but she was of great help to us and she has her own business now. And she's doing a great job. We've got Stacey Moss (sp) in the White House and Anna Abram (sp). And we have a lot of our other staff here that I won't mention because it would take all the time, which might be a good thing, but I did want to mention Maryann Watkins (sp) and Mike Marshall (sp) on my staff who have been very helpful.

Now, just to sort of set the stage, you know, I've been around a long time, and I have been working with veterans ever since I was county attorney in Russell, Kansas in the '40s, service in the Legion and the VFW. So, I've had a lot of contact with veterans and hospitals and, you know, people who -- well, bureaucracy, and I have enjoyed almost every minute of it.

I'm now involved in what we call an Honor Flight Program, which flies all of these old guys in to see the World War II Memorial. And that's something you ought to look up on our website -- "Honor Flight." There are 31 states involved. They fly you in and back generally in one day. It doesn't cost you one dime. You can be in a wheelchair, you

can have a light cane, you can bring your son or daughter if you need care, there's always a doctor available, and it's just a wonderful program.

We never want to forget people like Jose and his generation, but we don't want to forget what we call the disappearing generation. And we're losing about -- well, John's one of our group -- 90-years-old. You wouldn't believe it looking at him. But we lose about 1,200 World War II veterans everyday. We've gone from sixteen-and-a-half million to about three-and-a-half million. And you can't -- I can't explain the emotion and what it means to one of these 85-, 90-, 95-year-old veterans, mostly men, but some women, who get a chance to touch and feel the World War II memorial. It's probably the best thing that happened to them in years, and they're going to remember it the rest of their life.

So, if you get a chance on a Wednesday or Saturday -- I've sort of become the unofficial greeter, I try to greet every group. And, you know, it's very exciting for me and it's a great thing to do.

But I want to take just a few minutes -- in fact, I've got a clock here. Where is it? I've got a little -- (inaudible) -- problem. I can see the desk, but, you know -- I see the podium.

(Laughter.)

But I think this is a good time to just speak briefly. And I know some of this is kind of dull and dry, but it's very important to veterans and their families. And we've got Memorial Day coming up, which is not an important day to most families. Seventy-eight percent of the people don't know what it is. They just took a poll recently. So that means that 32 (sic) percent understand what Memorial Day is all about. I don't know whether that's an indictment or what, but people are busy and to most of them it's just another day off. To others, it's a very, very special time. And I'm not talking just about those who died in uniform, I'm talking about your parents, your grandparents, or children, whoever a loved one may have been who has passed away.

So, it's not just another holiday, and it's going to be a wonderful day. And it started way back in the Civil War days. And everybody here probably knows the story or knows of the story where this group of women put flowers on graves of those who were killed, Civil War veterans, and the idea spread. There are different stories about where they started, but this is the one I've always accepted. Some say it started when the slaves decorated Union graves in Charleston way back in 1865, but the official birthplace is Waterloo, New York where they began celebrating on a regular basis in 1966. And so it was a big, big event then.

In the year 2000, people say Congress can't agree on anything. Congress agreed that there should be a moment of remembrance on Memorial Day at 3 P.M. local time wherever you may be. And just to pause as an act of national unity to reflect upon the sacrifices made for freedom. So, I know we're all busy, but, you know, three o'clock.

And you can be off a few minutes, nobody's watching, it's got to be three o'clock somewhere whenever you do it.

(Laughter.)

So, just stop and think about it. But I think when you think of the fact there are 26 million veterans, and some require a lot of care, and many of the hospitals -- VA hospitals -- it's more geriatrics, it's the older veterans who maybe see the person who mops the floor, the person who brings in the food, and maybe that's it. There are a lot of volunteers, but, you know, the life for some of the older veterans, men and women, is not a very pretty picture. In any event, one Dana Priest and Anne Hull wrote this story in the Washington Post that got everybody's attention. It was about Building 18. It was about a facility, not about care, but it was about a facility. I know where it is because my sister's son had a brain tumor and he was treated at Walter Reed. He didn't survive. But she stayed in that motel which later was purchased by the Army and it was run down. Nobody should have been housed there. It was a disgrace. And I credit Dana and Anne and others who wrote about it.

So, everybody then -- we had this feeding frenzy, which happens in Washington, D.C. Everybody wanted their little piece of this and a little that. And you give me 20 minutes, and I'll find you five discontented veterans and maybe five contented veterans, I don't know. But, you know, we have different views.

We had problems in World War II. I bet there are World War II or Korean or Vietnam veterans here who had trouble getting their benefits, who had trouble sometimes with their care, and I think as was stated, in World War II, for every survivor, eight died. And now they bring you home, you can be injured and wounded, whatever, in Baghdad on Tuesday and be at Walter Reed on Friday. And that's a big improvement. That's a big plus. That's why more people are surviving. That's why as bad as it is, there are probably about 4,200 seriously wounded or injured Iraq-Afghan veterans. That's too many. Now, if we can't take care of that many, and we are, we're in sad shape.

But anyway, you know, President Bush felt some responsibility. It's his administration. And Congress did something and the president appointed this commission. And I think both me and Secretary Shalala didn't really need to be on any commission. We've seen them come and go. We've been on them. And they're put on a shelf and years later they're, you know, I don't know what they do with them. But they never really make much of an impact.

Now, Secretary Shalala, if you don't know her, is just a great partner. I mean, she's tough, she's determined, she's reasonable, she's flexible, and we never talked about politics. I knew her politics and she knew mine, and I don't know anybody else's on the commission. And whatever you think about President Bush, I don't know how many times he met with us, Jose, and spent an hour -- or two hours with the commission and talked to us. And I remember the day when we walked over to the window and he didn't say how many Republicans are their on the commission -- there were nine on the

commission -- all I know is that five are disabled. Or he didn't say, "How much is this going to cost?" He said three words: whatever it takes.

And he also properly said that he was responsible for every one of these young men like Jose coming back from Afghanistan and Iraq with serious injuries. Now, remember, our charter was limited just to those two conflicts. I'm going to mention another hero here in a minute. So he took personal responsibility. He should. And then we started, and Donna had a lot of great ideas and we had some great commissioners.

You know, Mark Giamemeto (sp), who's now a student at Harvard -- government program. They pay the tuition. He's got a very badly shattered leg. The wife of a severely burned service member, Tammy Edwards. Her husband was burned over 80 percent of his body. His hands -- he can't do anything with his hands. The director of the National Rehab Center here in Washington is somebody many of you know -- Ed Eckenhoff, who's severely disabled. And Gail Walinsky, who many of you may know -- a health economist. And then, Mr. Fisher of the Fisher family. They have all these Fisher homes at many, many facilities and they raise the money privately, quietly, without fanfare. Ken was a great member. And Dr. Martin Harris, the Cleveland clinic who probably knows more about IT than anybody that I know of -- information technology. And the VA has got a great system and the DOD is trying to catch up. And so he's done a lot of work back and forth. And so these are the kind of people we had.

We didn't have a lot of time. We had report by July 31st. We only had four months to get up and running and do all these things, and I'll sort of skip along here. But I want to mention these three wise women. One was Marie Micnich, who worked for me years ago in the Senate -- she happened to be a Democrat. That wasn't a question then or now. She was the executive director. And the deputy is Karen Guice, who I've already mentioned. And then this lady that knew everything was Sue Hosek of the RAND Corporation -- been there for 30- some years. Plus we had this excellent staff of outstanding men and women, including about two dozen detailees from DOD and the VA.

Now we were only there for one purpose -- what can we do to address some of the real problems. There were real problems. Maybe some were exaggerated, but they're real problems. So it was all prompted by -- and I give credit to the Washington Post and those who wrote the story, and then there were a lot of things that followed -- but it did open up everything and we did -- we went all over the country and went to hospitals, and we tried to go where they didn't have the doctor following us around so the patient might feel intimidated. You know, we -- we're just looking for facts. We weren't trying to indict anybody. We weren't there to criticize anybody. We wanted to make the system better, and that's why some of these people like Jose there -- as I said, there were five out of the nine with disabilities -- you know, we kind of understood what a disability was and what it can do to your life.

So I think -- we concluded one thing. We concluded that, almost without exception, that the care you receive in a VA or a DOD facility is excellent -- now I'm going to jump

over here because I know I'm going to run out of time. There were a lot of stories written and there are people who are -- who didn't get the care they deserved, and that's happened -- you know, as long as I can remember. But that's no excuse. We ought to be getting better. And we are getting better. And you had Dr. Peake here on Tuesday, who's the first physician to head the Veterans Administration, who is was a wonderful man and I hope whoever's elected president keeps this guy. He's not political. He's a doctor. He cares about people.

So -- you know, we know how to make headlines. I've even learned how to do that in the Senate occasionally. (Laughter.) Not very often, but -- you know, you say something negative, you're going to make it. If you attack somebody, you're going to make it. And by the way, while I'm speaking of the Senate, I know you're all praying for my good friend and our friend Ted Kennedy. We had different views, but we worked together on a lot of things like the American Disabilities Act, and he's a -- I don't know of a harder-working senator that I've ever known than Senator Kennedy. So we all wish him well.

So -- but to get a story without some anti-VA or DOD bias was pretty hard. And of course, some of it was aimed primarily at President Bush because there hasn't been a great love affair between President Bush and the media. But we wanted that to just sort of go away. That wasn't our problem. Our problem was to try to find the facts. Now let me do it real quickly here. The first thing we did -- and I know the -- Secretary Peake talked about it -- we had a little thing like a care coordinator.

Jose, how many caseworkers did you have? You couldn't even remember. You know, when you go to the hospital, you get a, quote, "caseworker." And that caseworker takes care of you. But then they're shipped off somewhere or they go somewhere and then they give you another caseworker. And Jose had so many, he can't remember their names. Now how can somebody follow up on your appointments or your medicine or your family if they don't have somebody there who's with you from the start to the end? When you walk into Walter Reed, where one out of four who come back go -- beginning -- somebody ought to be assigned to you and somebody ought to follow you all the way through.

Well, they're doing that now. And we've got our first -- well, we're getting -- I don't know the name of the person -- the care coordinator, but I'm going to get to it in a minute. This is a very basic recommendation. It doesn't cost hardly anything. It doesn't involve thousands of people. We're talking about 100 max, maybe 200 people. We're talking about following the severest disabled man or woman who was injured or wounded in the line of duty. And to me, that's something that this -- I don't know why somebody didn't think of it. I'm trying to get to the point here, but Jose is the one who brought it up and so I'll give Jose credit right after me and Shalala and -- (laughter) -- but the first recipient of recover -- recovery coordinator system, Ted Wade -- Ted, stand up -- and his wife Sarah are with us today. (Applause.) Sarah, stand up. Turn around. Face the audience, Sarah.

Now Ted's got a -- the real TBI problem. And I remember when Sarah first testified and I remember many criticisms she made which were appropriate. And now she's written a piece which I've read and I hope gets published somewhere on about how you were saved by this care coordinator. Their care coordinator is a registered nurse. How many years?

MS. WADE: Thirty years -- (off mike.)

MR. DOLE: Yeah.

I mean, these are the kind of people we need taking care of Ted. Not everybody. Some people are -- get flesh wounds and that. But for the amputees and the TBIs and the severe PTSDs and -- you know, these things -- burns, paralysis -- we need care coordinators. And it's changed their entire life, right? So just one little thing and I'll bet it doesn't cost \$25 million. See, it's not always pushing more money at the problem -- you can go ahead and be seated -- (scattered laughter) -- but it's doing things that are important. So I'll just name the -- we also think it's time we changed the disability system. We believe when Jose loses an arm, he going to get compensated for loss of earnings. But our view was he ought to get another payment. It's called quality of life because his quality of life has just gone from a 10 to -- what, I don't know. In his case, it probably went to 11. But it's gone down for most veterans. It could be paral-- it could be sexually related -- anything. And in Ted's case -- you know, his quality of life is way down. So we say, "Okay. They're volunteers. Okay." Yeah, they volunteered.

But when they came back -- came back with an injury or wound, then "whatever it takes," as the president says, "we ought to do." Now we're getting a little resistance -- (laughs) -- see my DAV friend here -- from the veterans groups. And I don't quarrel with them because if we give Ted more money, and Jose more money, and they don't give me more money because I'm a disabled vet in World War II, it seems unfair.

But, see, I look at it differently. I don't think my father would care if I got \$100 more a month than he did. And it's a different time, and it's a different war. We're living in the age of technology, with all those things I can't use -- text message, and all that stuff -- (laughter) -- and e-mail.

So but we're trying to work it out with groups like Disabled American Veterans. They're a great outfit and I'm proud to be a member. But, if we can't get the veterans groups to sign off on this it's going nowhere, because you know what power the veterans groups have in Congress.

There's another change we recommended. When you get out of the service and you get in in a hospital, you ought to get paid for maybe six months. It's called a transition payment -- to give you a chance to get back home, and unpacked, and get your marriage



on-track, or whatever, and get your school kids enrolled. And now there isn't such an animal.

Again, it's not a big, big costly thing. And the quality of life payment, we're talking about seriously disabled. So these are just two of the better recommendations.

And also a single physical: We don't have to go to the VA, DOD, and then you go to the VA. Now we do it once. And we've already got a pilot program working, and it's cut the waiting time in half, and you get your benefit check within 30 days.

So if this pilot program that's now working in the Washington area continues to work, it's going to be a big improvement. And you're going to end up at the VA; they're going to do the physical; and if you're found unfit for duty, well then they're go on and rate you, and you're going to get paid.

And some people waited 400 or 500 days, and that's in some of the stories. Now, in some cases, they appealed, and when they appeal that takes time. And they have a right to appeal. But, in other cases, I think it's just been too bureaucratic.

So, is my time about up? Probably ended already. Okay.

So, I can -- I can sort of see the veterans groups point of view -- (not ?) completely, but. And I think Congress is going to have to act.

But nobody mentioned PTSD -- because that's sort of been the number one thing people talk about now, PTSD. It's a high percentage -- what, about 20 percent, I think, claim PTSD. And there are different kinds. There are mild and moderate and severe.

Now, my view is that when you -- when you're hurt, you want to get better. You know, you want to get back on your feet and go back to your job, or go back to school. But there are some -- not many, who want to get better, but they don't want to give up the check, the compensation.

And so we have to, kind of, watch for that. You know, it happens in every federal program. Not very much in the veterans program, but it does happen now and then. There are some people who, kind of, use the system.

But, just let me close here with PTSD. They've done a lot there, but they haven't done nearly enough. And now they're beginning -- because of the Congressional action, and the news stories, and everything else, they're really perking up. There are new PTSD programs, with 90 new treatment sites expected next year, so you don't have to drive 300 miles.

Congress has earmarked -- it's a bad word, but earmarked money for a new Center for Excellence in PTSD -- I think that's \$900 million, I'm not sure -- and TBI, to be

established to promote excellence in this area. They're hiring more people -- mental health people -- you know, experts in mental health. They were far short.

And so they're doing all these things, and we think it's going to probably cost a couple of billion dollars -- billion. Well, that's cheap. What do we spend a day in Iraq and Afghanistan? So, the president's right, "whatever it takes." Now, I don't mean we go -- you know, we'll get -- reasonable, but we have an obligation, a very special obligation.

So, they now give you an exam on PTSD before you go, and have a baseline. And then when you come back you have another examination. So they can pretty much tell whether anything changed while you were gone.

And, let's see, I think we better get to questions here. I guess what I would say, there's more support for family. There's going to be, up on the website, this month and August, where veterans can get on the website. And later on this year they can put in their own name and it profiles everything they want to know. And it's all secret -- nobody else can get in there. And just push a button and it tells you what to do, where to go, what your benefits are. You know, it just part of the new technology, and it's wonderful.

Okay, so -- and a final note is, Walter Reed. We felt Walter Reed ought to be kept in A-1 condition until the very day somebody turns off the lights. In fact, some of us think they shouldn't turn off the lights, but apparently that's been decided. So we wanted -- we want to make sure, in our recommendations, that Walter Reed was kept up to snuff. And if they had to pay these good people out there who care for people, then they have to give them incentive pay.

But the bottom line is, is to keep in mind -- sure, things have gone wrong, and the VA has made mistakes, and DOD has made a mistake, but think about it, the people in these hospitals are like the people in this room. This is their commitment. This is their life -- trying to make veterans, you know, trying to regain their health, get them back on track.

Now, sometimes you don't get 100 percent of good ones, but it just seems to me when we start going after, you know, VA or DOD, that's all one -- a whole hour program called "Waging War on the VA," it was supposed to be a documentary, with that title, if you can believe it. So, my view is, we got a lot to do. We owe these young men everything, and young women.

And so it brings me to the point where I would -- if I can find it here -- (looking for reference material) -- just remind you that, you know, we all go through life -- and it kind of fits in with how to, how to close this.

It's a, it's a little poem called "The Dash:" "I read of a man who stood to speak at the funeral of a friend. He referred to the dates on her tombstone from the beginning to

the end. He noted that first came the date of her birth, and he spoke of the following date with tears."

"But he said what mattered most of all was the "dash," the dash between those years. For that dash represents all the time that she spent alive on earth. And now only those who loved her know what that little line is worth. For it matters not how much we own -- the cars, the house, the cash, what matters is how we live and love and how we spend our dash."

"So, think about this long and hard, are there things you'd like to change, for you never know how much time is left that can still be rearranged. If we could just slow down enough to consider what's true and real, and always try to understand the way other people feel. And be less quick to anger, and show appreciation more, and love the people of our lives like we never loved before." "If we treat each other with respect, and more often wear a smile, remembering that this special dash may only last awhile. So when your eulogy is being read, with your life's actions to rehash, would you be proud of the things they'd say about how you spent your dash?" Thank you.

(Applause.)

MS. SMITH: We don't often have both music and poetry at our podium. (Laughter.) So, thank you for both, and particularly that poem by Linda Ellis.

You mentioned the generational objections to the compensation recommendations of the Commission. How do you think that will be resolved? Is somebody taking leadership on that?

MR. DOLE: On how we're going to resolve this difference. Well, it's a good -- it's going to be up to Congress to resolve it. You know, I'm -- I'm a veteran and I belong to these groups.

And I think most of them do a lot, but a lot of them -- I'm also helping Congressman Waxman, some of these scam artists that are -- one guy with 10 different groups writing in for money for some poor veteran. And he wouldn't appear voluntarily. They had to subpoena him. So we're working on that too.

But we just have to kind of -- if we're doing to -- if the Congress wants to extend this to everybody, now, all of us World War II veterans are in much worse shape than we were 60 years ago. So it's going to be kind of hard to do.

Now, if you lost an arm in World War II, well, that wouldn't be so difficult. But it's going to take -- you know, as I said in my last (sentence ?), you know, we'd like to see these recommendations passed, but don't hold your breath. Because I've been in the Congress and I've -- I know there are people who disagree, and it's -- nobody wants to take on the veterans' groups. And as I said, they've got a point.

But we need to resolve it. Somebody needs to figure out how we're going to resolve this. Why shouldn't Jose get \$100 more a month or Ted get 200 (dollars), whatever it is? Is somebody going to care that was in the Vietnam War? Well, maybe so. So we've got to figure it out. But I don't have the answer. Maybe the next president could do --

MS. SMITH: We'll get to that topic in a moment.

MR. DOLE: Whoever he is. (Laughter.)

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Ooh. (Laughter.)

MR. DOLE: Or she is. (Laughter.)

MS. SMITH: Would you have voted for the amendment that included the G.I. Bill expansion?

MR. DOLE: Well, since I haven't read it, which is not a requirement in Congress -- (laughter); in fact, it's rarely followed -- I'm for the concept. In fact, I talked about it to some of the people working on it.

I think the question was it's not paid for in the Senate bill, which is a little item overlooked. Because it's pretty expensive. And if we're going to anyway -- (inaudible). But the other question, and I don't know the answer -- we've got experts here who probably do -- are people going to leave the service early because they've got this college education? I mean, do businesses say to people if you work for us three years, you're going to get a college education? It's sort of like the NBA and college basketball. If you play one year, then you can go -- get it all. I don't know. I think that's the only question I would have.

But yeah, I'm for it. I got it. That's how I got an education. Eight million of us, World War II, got the G.I. Bill. Our parents didn't have any money. And that sparked education -- it's the biggest thing that happened in my generation. Eight million. And they got others. You don't have to go to a four-year college, do it -- (inaudible).

Yeah, I'm for the concept. I haven't seen the particulars, but I probably would have voted for it. If we get the money.

MS. SMITH: Well, where would the money come from, both for that and some of the other -- say the compensation program or the expanded medical benefits?

MR. DOLE: Well, I don't know. I don't want to keep the excuse I haven't been there for 12 years, but they're having trouble on the House side, as I understand -- I haven't followed this closely -- with the so-called "blue dogs," the more conservative Democrats who want to pay for it. Now, it's not going to be with a tax increase; nobody would suggest that at this point. So --

But if I'm on the Budget Committee, I can figure out ways to delay this program a few months and -- this for a few months and probably get enough to pay for this for a few months. It's not illegal; just creative. (Laughter.)

MS. SMITH: You also mentioned one of the objections that has been raised about the bill, the G.I. Bill, that -- and Senator McCain shares that objection -- that it would encourage people to leave the military rather than re-up for another tour. Do you think that holds water?

MR. DOLE: Well, I don't know. I mean, I -- I just don't know. We've got a bright -- we have bright young men and women in the service. There are a lot of people who don't have that view. They don't understand it and they don't think we have the top-flight people.

And I think education is the most important thing in America. And someday they may have a universal education, and this (sort of ?) fits into that. But do I know the answer to that? No, I haven't made a study. I know the DOD feels that way, but I don't know what it's based on. They want -- everybody wants them to get the education. It's a question of how many years should you serve before it happens.

MS. SMITH: Do you have an answer for that?

MR. DOLE: No. I mean, some are saying three; some are saying six. I'd probably compromise -- (Laughter.)

MS. SMITH: Do you think President Bush's threatened veto of the war spending bill which, in part, is because it includes more money for veterans' benefits than he wants, is in any way motivated by his desire to give Republicans -- Republican candidates a way to --

MR. DOLE: I hope they're all typed out. They surely couldn't have been written out --

MS. SMITH: E-mailed in to me.

MR. DOLE: Some left-winger typed all these out -- (Laughter.)

MS. SMITH: Anyway, do you think that there's any political motivation there that allows Republicans to distance themselves from him?

MR. DOLE: No. No, I think that's a very tough vote. And like every other bill, it's got a lot of stuff that shouldn't be in there. I mean, you're the taxpayers. Only 49 percent of Americans pay taxes now.

So when you take a poll, the 60 percent say, hell, raise taxes. Doesn't bother me. Now, that -- you know, we're getting fewer rich people. The upper 1 percent -- what is it, they get 17 percent of the income but pay 35 percent of the taxes. And 40 percent pay 99.9 percent of the taxes. And you're rich when you get up in the 70,000 (dollars) range.

So I don't know. I mean, I don't think that's the case here. Why -- if anything ought to be nonpartisan, it ought to be veterans' education. It was -- you know, that bill barely passed in World War II. It was, I think, three or four votes. That's how sharply divided.

Now, I don't know what the argument was, but a fellow named Harry Colmery from Kansas who had been a National Legion commander and a group of veterans in room 320 at the Mayflower Hotel wrote the first G.I. Bill of Rights. But it barely passed.

I might have the wrong room number, too. (Laughter.)

MS. SMITH: Secretary Peake, when he was here this week, said that he thinks too many young veterans are being labeled with traumatic brain injury or post-traumatic stress disorder. Do you agree that there is over-labeling? MR. DOLE: Well, we had all these witnesses come, all these experts. And I'd always ask these experts if I bring somebody in who has -- says he has symptoms of PTSD, which you can get off of the Internet, can you examine that person and give a pretty definitive answer that it's not there at all or that it's mild or whatever -- moderate or severe?

I sat down with a group of about 13 PTSD patients in Miami, Florida, early on in the Commission and I tried to -- I didn't know. I mean, I don't know. I think we called that "battle fatigue" in World War II. But if it's real, it ought to be compensated, and that's why now they're doing all these things -- and you can get free care up to five years out.

But is there some gaming of the system? Well, I don't know, but probably is. You get (millions ?) of people involved and 1.5 million go to Iraq and Afghanistan, and somebody might decide that -- but that's very -- very minor.

So we just need to make certain that they're getting the treatment, that it's available, and that we do whatever it takes.

MS. SMITH: Senator McCain will release his medical records today. How much importance should voters place on that kind of information?

MR. DOLE: Well, I think it's very important. I remember when I released mine and -- I can't remember the doctor from The New York Times, my friend who -- (off mike).

AUDIENCE MEMBER: (Off mike.)

MR. DOLE: And he thought I did a great job. I released everything, and he wrote piece, favorable piece in The New York Times, which I saved because I don't have any others. (Laughter.) And it -- said I'd stated fairly clearly what my problems were.

Now -- yeah, it's important. And I understand McCain's are very positive. I just heard some on the radio on the way over. But if age is an issue, I'll serve with him. (Laughter, applause.)

MS. SMITH: Well, somebody did ask me to ask if you're available. (Laughs.)

MR. DOLE: For what? (Laughter.) I didn't bring any samples, either, I'll tell you that. (Laughter.)

MS. SMITH: Well, we'll move on to politics, shall we? (Laughs.)

Four years ago, Republicans were aiming to establish a permanent majority in Congress. Now they're fighting to avoid being shut out of government. What went wrong, a questioner wants to know. MR. DOLE: Well, what went wrong is the Iraq War. Without getting into whether we do or don't or whatever, it's not popular and it wasn't popular. And then about the time the war looks up, the surge is working, and the economy goes down and gas prices go up. Now, maybe that's nobody's fault, but you know who gets blamed is the person in charge, or the party in charge, in this case.

But one day can be a lifetime in this business of politics. I mean, somebody could say something or do something or something happen -- I don't know other than a change of Congress. Yeah, I think, just being very candid, it's a tough year for elephants. And they're going to need a lot of water, and I'm not sure there's enough water out there.

But Democrats have an edge. That's where most of the excitement's been. They've raised the most money. They've have this race with Obama and Clinton which, you know, people follow. There's been a lot and they get bigger turnouts. But, you know, nobody stopped to add up the cost and nobody really is focused. You know -- and I'm not a very good judge since I lost, but, you know, I don't think a lot of voters have really made a decision yet. They may vote in a poll, but they're going to wait and see whether McCain and whoever, whether it's Hillary or Barack Obama, and I don't know who's going to win that one, so --

MS. SMITH: The Iraq -- and you mentioned Iraq. The Iraq and Afghanistan wars have stretched the military thin. Is it time to rethink the draft?

MR. DOLE: Oh, I don't think so. I mean, I voted for the all- volunteer Army and -- I don't know -- if there's a draft, you know, I think the people who don't want to be in are going to find a way not to be in. Put it that way. I don't want to be critical but, you know, if we get in some desperate situation, but I don't see anything coming down the road that's going to require it. Yeah, we're a little thin, but, you know, we've been around in the DMZ for 60-some years and, you know, we've got people everywhere. The world's

on fire and we're almost at every one of them with a fire hose. So it really drains -- and I'm not the best judge of that since I'm not in DOD, but I know Charlie Rangel, who's a good friend of mine, would like to have the draft reinstated. I don't think at this time I would vote for it.

MS. SMITH: Have your views about the war in Iraq evolved over the past several years? And if so, to what?

MR. DOLE: Well, I know they've evolved. I don't know whether -- you know some of these things history will decide. When President Truman left the White House, his approval rating was 24 percent. When Eisenhower left the White House, it wasn't much higher. And now that history has had a chance to look back and look at the days -- Truman days and the Eisenhower days, I'd say they're both in the top 10. I don't know where. And history is going to judge any president -- I don't care Democrat or Republican -- particularly, when -- you know, when you're talking about Iraq, preemption -- should there be preemption, if that should be part of our policy. Well, it depends on what the danger is. And if somebody's invading your house, you don't give them the first shot if you can help it. They might hurt someone in your family. So I've never been out beating the drum either way on Iraq. But I do believe that even though American people don't like it, and they'd like to see end -- everybody wants to see it end -- I don't think down deep -- I think the basic things that Americans worry about are liberty and freedom. And if we leave Iraq -- remember Vietnam and their grabbing onto the last helicopter trying to get out of Saigon? Now if we want -- I don't know, it just seems to me as a great country, we've got a lot at risk. But we're doing better. I think General Petraeus has done a wonderful job. I've only met him once, so I don't have any ax to grind either way. But I think, above all, people like Jose and Ted and others have served their country in a way that makes us proud. And Americans don't like to lose. No country likes to lose, particularly when it's some guy like the crazy guy in Iran and al Qaeda and Taliban and people like that.

MS. SMITH: A few years ago, when you were at this very podium, you closed your talk by reading a note from your friend Judy Miller who was then in jail because she refused to divulge her sources. You read her plea for a federal shield law. It's three years later and there's still no shield law. What will it take, and have you encouraged your former congressional colleagues to support it?

MR. DOLE: Well, I made it public and I let people know how I felt. I mean, I had the chance to go out and visit Judy a couple of times and, you know, whatever people might think of how it was done or what she did sitting in jail for how many days, 87 -- I don't know, it's not easy. And she did it based on principle and I thought a federal shield law was appropriate and still do. And I think it's being -- has it been debated recently? But I know there's opposition to it, too. There's some people who -- well, I won't say what I'm going to say.

MS. SMITH: Oh, go. (Laughter.)



MR. DOLE: Some of those things where you say, "No comment," you know, like Calvin Coolidge.

MS. SMITH: Do you think candidates should vet people, especially religious leaders, who offer their endorsements? In other words, what do you make of the many controversies that attached themselves to Obama and McCain because of statements or sermons made by pastors who support them?

MR. DOLE: Well, I'll give you an example in our campaign. We got a donation from a Republican gay and lesbian group and we sent it back. And it was stupid.

MS. SMITH: Stupid to do that?

MR. DOLE: Yeah. My view should have been, is what Ronald Reagan's view was, if they agree with my policies and want to support me, that's fine. And it ended up being a big press thing and distracted us from the campaign. You know, a lot of that -- I don't care what -- well, I have a preference, but -- well there's ethnicity, race, lifestyle. You know I sat up all night one night trying to think of somebody I didn't want to vote for me -- (laughter) -- and I only thought of a couple. (Laughter.) So, in my view, the door is open.

When I was chairman of the party, we took the door off the Republican Party headquarters and called it the open-door policy. And we started the Black Republican Council. It really had all this outreach. And then, of course Watergate came along and changed all that. And so I want to -- but if you say expand the party, to some people that means, uh-oh, you're going to let those liberals in. Well, my view is that most -- I agree with Eisenhower. Most of the people are in the middle of the road. They may be moderate-liberals or moderate-conservatives, and that's not a safe place to be in the middle of the road as you know. But it makes more sense politically than being off on the fringe. So that way I avoided your questions.

MS. SMITH: I noticed that. (Laughter.) You're running out the clock here. The questioner says, "As a registered lobbyist, what is your opinion of Senator McCain's decision to exclude lobbyists from his top campaign staff?"

MR. DOLE: Well, I don't really lobby. Senator Daschle and I are up there together. We don't -- I think I've been -- 12 years, I've been -- I've introduced people to 10 senators -- Senator Kennedy, Senator Biden, Senator Dodd, I don't know. I'd take them up to Senator Warner, introduce them, and then I'm out of there. But I don't know how you're going to put a team together in this -- you know there are a lot of very smart people who happen to advocates. That's the word we ought to use. Lobbyist has a connotation of evil.

I remember when our law firm represented Taiwan and they had the Foreign Registrations Act. And there was an editorial in a Kansas paper that thought I was a spy for Taiwan. (Scattered laughter.) I mean, you know, this stuff is -- it's wild. So,

advocate would be a better word. But I don't know. I mean, you have a right to petition Congress. It's in the Constitution. Now, if you want somebody else to do it for you or you want to get a group like this table -- save money and get somebody to do it for you -- that's a right -- a Constitutional right we have. My view of lobbyists always was that if they tell me the truth, you know, come in and give me the facts, AND if not they don't come back. And most people are like that. They're not up trying to make some deal or slip money under the table.

You know, there are a few bad apples everywhere -- and some of them get elected and some of them may be advocates. But I don't know how you can do that, John.

But it means I'll be available, because I'm not a lobbyist. So I could probably be, let's see -- secretary of State, something like that. (Laughter, applause.)

MS. SMITH: We're almost out of time, but before asking the last question, I have a couple things I'd to tell the audience.

First, let me remind members of upcoming speakers: On May 27th we have the president of the Czech Republic, Vaclav Klaus; on June 2nd we'll have the vice president of the United States, who will present the Gerald Ford Journalism Award.

MR. DOLE: (Off mike.)

MS. SMITH: Hmm?

MR. DOLE: Our vice president?

MS. SMITH: Our vice president -- Dick Cheney. (Laughter.)

MR. DOLE: I wondered what happened to him. (Laughter.)

MS. SMITH: On June 5th, Sharon Rockefeller, president and chief executive officer of WETA.

And I'd also like to present you with this mug, with is now part of your collection, I think, of National Press Club mugs. That's Eric Sevareid. We put him on a -- well, we didn't. The Post Office put him on a stamp.

MR. DOLE: Oh, that's great.

MS. SMITH: Yeah.

MR. DOLE: Is that my picture?

MS. SMITH: Hey, he's a nice looking man.

MR. DOLE: Yeah, nice guy -- a lot younger than me. MS. SMITH: And the last question -- you've alluded to this a couple of times: Who should McCain pick for his running mate and are you available for him?

MR. DOLE: Oh, McCain?

MS. SMITH: Yeah.

MR. DOLE: Well, I think it's far too early to pick a running mate. I know he's having a little party out in Arizona. I couldn't get a reservation. You know, they're all going out there. And I don't think either Obama or Clinton -- you know, they've thought about people.

But if I'm John McCain, I'm looking at Ohio. You don't get to be president if you're a Republican if you don't win Ohio. And Florida and maybe Michigan -- I mean, some of these states where Hillary won big in the primaries -- if she's not the nominee.

But you know, I'm certain that John McCain -- I used to find myself looking around in the audience thinking maybe, oh, that guy in the back row wouldn't be bad, you know? (Laughter.) And I think it would be a good thing if it was somebody outside politics -- some businessman or woman or professional who understood government and had a great reputation in their state and the community and a pretty high profile. My view is that would really appeal to the American people.

Now, could I close this one quote?

MS. SMITH: Absolutely.

MR. DOLE: Well, this is a quote from the British historian, John Stuart Mill. I didn't know him, but Senator Thurman said he was a nice man. (Laughter.)

"War is an ugly thing, it read, but it's not the ugliest of things. The decay and degraded state of moral and patriotic feelings which thinks that nothing is worth war is much worse. The person who has nothing for which he is willing to fight, nothing for which -- nothing which is more important than his own personal safety, is a miserable creature and has no chance of being free unless made and kept so by the exertions of better men than himself."

Thank you. (Applause.)

MS. SMITH: Thank you very much, Senator Dole.

And thank you for coming today. (Applause.)

Thank you all for coming today. And I'd also like to thank the National Press Club staff members Melinda Cooke, Pat Nelson, Jo Anne Booz and Howard Rothman for organizing today's lunch. Also, thanks for the National Press Club Library for its research. The video archive of today's luncheon is provided by the National Press Club Broadcast Operation Center. Many of our events are aired on XM Satellite Radio and available for free download on iTunes.

Thank you for coming. (Sounds gavel.) We're adjourned.

END.