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Transcript for Sept. 28

**GUESTS: Dr. Condoleezza Rice, national security adviser
Rep. Dick Gephardt, (D-Mo.), Democratic presidential candidate
Tim Russert, moderator**

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MR. TIM RUSSERT: Our issues this Sunday, Iraq: Still no weapons of mass destruction; little likelihood of more international troops, meaning more Reserve units being called up; and growing concern on Capitol Hill.

(Videotape):

REP. DAVID OBEY: If you don't, you don't have a plan, you don't have a clue. If you can't give us an answer, you're stiffing us.

MR. DAVID BREMER: Well, Congressman, I resent that.

(End videotape)

MR. RUSSERT: Where do we go from here? With us, President Bush's national security adviser, Dr. Condoleezza Rice. Then the 10 Democratic candidates debate and this man goes after Democratic presidential front-runner Howard Dean.

(Videotape):

REP. RICHARD GEPHARDT: Howard, you are agreeing with the very plan that Newt Gingrich wanted to pass, which was a \$270 billion cut in Medicare.

DR. HOWARD DEAN: I've done more for health insurance, in this country, Dick Gephardt, frankly, than you ever have.

(End videotape)

MR. RUSSERT: And what does the entry of General Wesley Clark mean for the race? With us, Democratic candidate for president, Congressman Dick Gephardt.

But first, the president's national security adviser Dr. Condoleezza Rice. Welcome.

DR. CONDOLEEZZA RICE: Morning. Thank you.

MR. RUSSERT: These are the headlines that greeted Americans this week: "Draft Reports Said To Cite No Success In Iraq Arms Hunt. An early draft of an interim report by the American leading the hunt for banned

weapons in Iraq says his team has not found any of the unconventional weapons cited by the Bush administration as a principal reason for going to war, federal officials with knowledge of the findings said." The rationale for the war, the risk, the threat of biological, chemical, perhaps even nuclear weapons, they have not been found, why?

DR. RICE: There was no doubt going into the war that successive administrations, the United Nations, intelligence services around the world, knew that Saddam Hussein had used weapons of mass destruction, that he had them, that he continued to pursue them. David Kay is now in a very careful process of determining the status of those weapons and precisely what became of them. But I would warn off jumping in to any conclusions about what David Kay's report says. For instance, I've not seen David Kay's report, and it is a progress report on the very careful work that he is doing. He's interviewing hundreds of people. He is going through miles and miles of documentation. He's collecting physical evidence and he will put together a coherent story and then we'll know the truth, but it's far too early to talk about the conclusions of David Kay's report.

MR. RUSSELL: If we go back and examine what administration officials had said prior to the war, Colin Powell said this back in February of 2001: "[Saddam Hussein] has not developed any significant capability with respect to weapons of mass destruction."

And five days after September 11th, the vice president saying: "Saddam Hussein's bottled up at this point."

And now, front page of The Washington Post, "House Probers Conclude Iraq War Data Was Weak."

This is Porter Goss, former CIA agent, chairman of the House Intelligence Committee, a Republican, suggesting that perhaps because the CIA couldn't determine that the weapons of mass destruction had been destroyed, that they therefore existed. Was the premise of the war based on faulty or hyped intelligence?

DR. RICE: The premise of the war was that Saddam Hussein was a threat, that he had used weapons of mass destruction, that he was continuing to try to get them and that was everyone's premise, the United Nations intelligence services, other governments, that was the logic that led the Clinton administration to air strikes in 1998. And one would have had to believe that somehow, after Saddam Hussein made it impossible for the inspectors to do their work in 1998, that things got better, that he suddenly destroyed the weapons of mass destruction and then carried on this elaborate deception to keep the world from knowing that he destroyed the weapons of mass destruction. It's just not logical.

You have to put into context the period between 1998 and 2003 when indeed the information was being enriched from new information that was coming in, but it was not that alone. It had to be in the context of 12 years of deception, 12 years of finding out unpleasant surprises about his biological

weapons program in 1994 and 1995, reports from the United Nations in 1999 that he had not accounted for large stockpiles of weapons. No, this was the threat that the president of the United States could no longer allow to remain there. We tried containment. We learned that he had increased his capacity to spend resources on weapons of mass destruction from \$500 million in illegal oil revenues to \$3 billion. No, all of the dots added up to a program and to weapons and a weapons program that was dangerous and getting more so.

MR. RUSSERT: What if the intelligence was just plain wrong? The CIA had said way back when that the Soviet Union was going to have a robust economy, surpass the United States. That proved to be wrong. What if the intelligence committees were just wrong here, and we went to war when there really wasn't a threat of weapons of mass destruction?

DR. RICE: Well, clearly, this is somebody who had used weapons of mass destruction. So had he have been allowed to be unchecked, he might have used them again. Clearly, this is someone who, in 1991, the inspectors found was much closer to a nuclear weapon than had been believed. So I think it's unlikely that the essence of a case that this was somebody who had weapons of mass destruction and was still pursuing them was wrong. But let's remember, Saddam Hussein is now gone and it is a great achievement of the United States and the coalition. Nobody wants to say that we would be better off had we left him in power.

We now have opportunities before us to have a democratic and prosperous Iraq that can be linchpin of a different kind of Middle East, a region that is volatile in the extreme, and is the region from which the September 11 threat came. And so, after September 11, and I note that some quotes by Colin Powell, for instance, before September 11—after September 11, you do look at threats differently. You do look at dealing with threats before they fully materialize. That was the case the president made to the American people. With Saddam Hussein gone, the world is safer and Iraq will be stable and prosperous, and it will be a historic change in the circumstances of the Middle East.

MR. RUSSERT: The administration's credibility is on the line, here in the country and around the world. And we still specifically cite the president's State of the Union message in January. Now, let me go back and play that and then talk about your role.

(Videotape, January 28, 2003):

PRES. GEORGE W. BUSH: The British government has learned that Saddam Hussein recently sought significant quantities of uranium from Africa.

(End videotape)

MR. RUSSERT: That was in January. And in June—June 8—you were on MEET THE PRESS; I asked you about that, and this was your response.

(Videotape, June 8, 2003):

DR. RICE: The president quoted a British paper. We did not know at the time, no one knew at the time in our circles—maybe someone knew down in the bowels of the agency, but no one in our circles knew—that there were doubts and suspicions that this might be a forgery. Of course, it was information that was mistaken.

(End videotape)

MR. RUSSERT: “No one in our circles.” That has proven to be wrong.

DR. RICE: No, Tim, that has not proven to be wrong. No one did know that they were forgeries. The notion of the forgeries came in February or in March when this was—when this came to the CIA. It is true that we learned, subsequent to my comments to you, that Director Tenet did not want to stand by that statement. And I would never want to see anything in a presidential statement—speech—that the director of Central Intelligence did not want to have there.

And I’m the national security adviser. When something like this happens, I feel personally responsible for it happening because it obscured the fact that the president of the United States did not go to war over whether Saddam Hussein tried to acquire yellow cake in Africa. He went to war over a threat from a bloody tyrant in the most volatile region of the world who had used weapons of mass destruction before, and was continuing to try to acquire them. And so, of course, this should not have happened.

MR. RUSSERT: But when you say that no one in our circles, and it was maybe down in the bowels of the Intelligence Agency, a month after that appearance, you said this, “The CIA cleared the speech in its entirety.”

And then your top deputy, Stephen Hadley, on July 23, said this.

“Deputy National Security Adviser Stephen Hadley told reporters that he received two memos from the CIA in October that cast doubt on intelligence reports that Iraq had sought to buy uranium from Niger to use in developing nuclear weapons. Both memos were also sent to chief speechwriter Michael Gerson and one was sent to national security adviser, Dr. Condoleezza Rice, Hadley said.”

And George Tenet called Mr. Hadley directly and put—issued a warning on that information. Were you aware of any concerns by the CIA about this incident?

DR. RICE: First of all, the CIA did clear the speech in its entirety and George Tenet has said that. He’s also said that he believes that it should not have been cleared. And we apparently, with the—in October for the Cincinnati speech, not for the State of the Union, but the Cincinnati speech, George Tenet asked that this be taken out of the Cincinnati speech, the reference to yellow cake. It was taken out of the Cincinnati speech because whenever the director of Central Intelligence wants something out, it’s gone.

MR. RUSSERT: How’d it get back in?

DR. RICE: It’s not a matter of getting back in. It’s a matter, Tim, that three-plus months later, people didn’t remember that George Tenet had

asked that it be taken out of the Cincinnati speech and then it was cleared by the agency. I didn't remember. Steve Hadley didn't remember. We are trying to put now in place methods so you don't have to be dependent on people's memories for something like that.

MR. RUSSERT: Did you ever read the memo that I referenced?

DR. RICE: I don't remember the memo. It came after it had been taken out of the speech, and so it's quite possible that I didn't. But let me be very clear: This shouldn't happen to the president of the United States, and we will do everything that we can to make sure that it doesn't happen again.

MR. RUSSERT: The Washington Post framed the issue this way: "The remarks by Rice and her associates raise two uncomfortable possibilities for the national security adviser. Either she missed or overlooked numerous warnings from intelligence agencies seeking to put caveats on claims about Iraq's nuclear weapons program, or she made public claims that she knew to be false."

DR. RICE: Well, neither happens to be true. First of all, we had a national intelligence estimate on which we relied to talk about Iraq's pursuit of nuclear weapons. I would never make claims that I know not to be true. Why would I do that to the president of the United States? The president of the United States has to be credible with the American people. I have to be credible with the American people. This was a mistake. The memories of people three months before did not trigger when they saw the language in the State of the Union. When I read the line in the State of the Union, I thought it was perfectly fine. And I can assure you nobody was trying to somehow slip something into the State of the Union that the director of Central Intelligence didn't have confidence in. The State of the Union address was about the broad threat that Saddam Hussein posed. That remained the case when we went to war. That remains the case today. And it was a strong case for removing him from power.

MR. RUSSERT: A hundred and eighty members of Congress cited the potential nuclear threat when they voted for the war. If that threat did not exist, if Saddam was not as far along as had been expected or had been reported by intelligence agencies, do you believe Congress would have voted to go to go war with Saddam absent the notion that he had weapons of mass destruction?

DR. RICE: Well, weapons of mass destruction, of course, come in two other types, chemical and biological. And on chemical and biological, the national intelligence estimate was unequivocal, that he had biological and chemical weapons. He's, of course, used chemical weapons. His biological weapons program was, of course, discovered in '94, '95.

MR. RUSSERT: What happened to them? Where are they?

DR. RICE: Well, David Kay will determine what happened to these programs. But on the nuclear side, this was always a matter of uncertainty, about his nuclear weapons program. In '91, he was closer than the

International Atomic Energy Agency had thought. They were about to give him a clean bill of health, only to find that he had the designs, he had the scientists, he had all of the means. He was only lacking the fissile material. And the estimate, the national intelligence estimate gave the following judgment: That left unchecked, Saddam Hussein would have a nuclear weapon by the end of the decade. That's something to which the president had to react, but by no means was this case made on a nuclear case alone. It was made on the weapons of mass destruction as a whole, his ability to deliver them in the past and the dangers of having those weapons, particularly biological and chemical weapons, which he was known to have had, in the hands of this bloody tyrant.

MR. RUSSERT: There was dissent of that analysis, however, but the administration emphasized the threat?

DR. RICE: Well, the dissent—not on biological and chemical weapons. There was widespread agreement that the biological—but...

MR. RUSSERT: On nuclear. On nuclear there was the dissent.

DR. RICE: On nuclear there was dissent on the extent of the program and how far along the program might be. How much had he gone to reconstitute? But the judgment of the intelligence community was that he had kept in place his infrastructure, that he was trying to procure items. For instance, there's been a lot of talk about the aluminum tubes but they were prohibited on the list of the nuclear suppliers group for a reason. So the case was very strong, that this was somebody who had weapons of mass destruction, had used them in the past. The Clinton administration had launched air strikes for that reason in 1998, citing the fact that if he were allowed to keep his weapons of mass destruction, he would be a grave threat, and there was no reason to believe that this got better after 1998, after he made it impossible for inspectors to work there.

MR. RUSSERT: Ambassador Joe Wilson was sent over to Niger by the CIA to look into this whole matter of selling uranium to Iraq. He came back with a report which was given to the administration. Then there was an article by columnist Robert Novak which cited two administration sources and identified Ambassador Wilson's wife by name. She was an undercover agent at the CIA. There is now an investigation. The CIA has requested the Justice Department to look into this. It's a crime to identify an undercover agent. And in this article in today's Washington Post, a senior administration official said that White House officials called six reporters to identify, to out, if you will, Joe Wilson's wife. What can you tell us about that?

DR. RICE: Tim, I know nothing about any such calls, and I do know that the president of the United States would not expect his White House to behave in that way. It's my understanding that when a question like this is raised before the agency, that they refer it as a matter of course, a matter of routine to the Justice Department. The Justice Department will now take appropriate action, whatever that is, and that will be up to the Justice

Department to determine what that action is.

MR. RUSSERT: What will the president do? Will he bring people in and ask them what they did?

DR. RICE: I think it's best since it's in the hands of the Justice Department to let it remain there.

MR. RUSSERT: Will the president go to the CIA and other intelligence agencies and say, "What happened? Why did you give me these analysis, these estimates and it hasn't yet borne out?"

DR. RICE: The president is waiting to see what the story really is on the ground. David Kay is a very well-respected former weapons inspector. He now has a lot of people, teams of people, working on the considerable documentation that we've been able to find. For instance, we now have access to the archives of the Iraqi Intelligence Service. That's an important source, as any of us know who've studied authoritarian systems. Programs like this were likely to be under the Iraqi Intelligence Service. And so now we have access to that documentation. Wouldn't have had it before the war.

We are now able to interview people, although there are a lot of people who are still frightened by threats of retribution, and it's one important reason that we have to protect the people who help us. He is gathering physical evidence, and he will put together a complete picture of the status of Saddam Hussein's weapons programs, of how he intended to use them. He will put together a picture of what became of the substantial unaccounted-for weapons stockpiles and media. He'll do all of that. And then we can see what we found on the ground after the war and how that compares to what we knew going in. But going in, this president relied on the same basis of intelligence that three administrations relied on, that was gathered from intelligence services around the world and that the U.N. itself relied on in keeping Saddam

Hussein under sanctions for 12 years.

MR. RUSSERT: But what if it was wrong? If the president determines that the intelligence he was given was faulty or that members of his staff or administration outed a CIA agent, will heads roll?

DR. RICE: Tim, let's wait and see what the facts are. I think in the case of the weapons of mass destruction, David Kaye is going to make a progress report but it is only a progress report. Saddam Hussein spent 12 years trying to deceive the international community. It's not surprising that it's going to take a little time to unravel this program.

MR. RUSSERT: George Will, the conservative columnist, wrote this. "Some say the war justified even if WMD"—weapons of mass destruction—"are not found nor their destruction explained, because the world is 'better off'"—with Saddam Hussein. Of course is better off. "But unless one is prepared to postulate a U.S. right, perhaps even a duty, to militarily dismantle any tyranny ... it is unacceptable to argue that Hussein's mass graves and torture chambers suffice as retrospective justifications for

preemptive war.

Americans seem sanguine about the failure—so far—to validate the war's premise about the threat posed by Hussein's "weapons of mass destruction"—"but a long-term failure would unravel much of this president's policy and rhetoric."

DR. RICE: Torture chambers and mass graves are definitely very good things to have gotten rid of, so is to have gained the opportunity of having a stable and democratizing Iraq in the Middle East...

MR. RUSSERT: But that's not a basis for a pre-emptive war.

DR. RICE: ...but let's remember that the intelligence going into the war—it's quite separable from what David Kaye now finds, but the intelligence going into the war was intelligence that led the United States to strike in 1998 against Saddam Hussein's weapons of mass destruction, that led the Congress to support that action and to actually pass a law called the Iraqi Liberation Act, because Saddam Hussein was thought to be a threat to this country, that the United Nations itself had kept Saddam Hussein under sanctions for 12 years because of his weapons of mass destruction program. So the premise on which the president launched this war was one that was shared by a number of people, including former administrations.

MR. RUSSERT: But Mr. Will's point is if the president came to the United States today and said, "We have a problem with Iran. They have an advanced nuclear capability, we have to launch a pre-emptive strike," or "We have to launch a pre-emptive strike against North Korea," would the country, would the world, say, "By all means, Mr. President, we know your intelligence is sound, go forward"?

DR. RICE: The important thing is that the president has always said that the use of military force is, of course, an option that has to remain, but that's a rare option. The president in Iran and in North Korea is pursuing other courses, and Iraq was in many ways a very special case. This was an international outlaw for 12 years. We forget that he fought a war in 1991, lost the war, signed on to a series of obligations that were supposed to keep him boxed up, because people knew he was dangerous in 1991. But when the decision was made not to overthrow him and indeed to stop the war, he signed on to an entire group of resolutions, of obligations that were supposed to keep him contained. He then systematically, over 12 years, started to wiggle out of them, ignored them, defied them. He was an international outlaw.

I think you have to look hard to see whether even this was a war of pre-emption. We were in a state of low-level conflict with Saddam Hussein from 1991 until 2003. He was shooting at our airplanes with regularity. We were trying to patrol his forces through no-fly zones in the north and the south. This was a unique case.

MR. RUSSERT: The costs of the war, administration's top budget official, Mitch Daniels, the former director of the OMB, estimated that the "cost of a

war" would be "\$50 billion to \$60 billion...he said...estimates of \$100 billion to \$200 billion" by Lawrence Lindsey, the president's former chief economic adviser, "were too high."

We've already spent, when the additional \$87 billion is allocated by Congress, some \$150 billion to \$160 billion. Why did the administration so dramatically underestimate the cost of this war?

DR. RICE: We did not have perfect foresight into what we were going to find in Iraq. The fact of the matter is that this deteriorated infrastructure, one that was completely covered and covered over by the gleaming pictures of Baghdad that made it look like a first-world city, what we're learning now is that, for instance, the entire country had maybe 55 percent of the electrical generating power that it needed, but what Saddam Hussein did was force all of that generating power into the Sunni areas and to simply starve the rest of the country. The country was probably 80 percent low on the ability to provide sanitation to the country.

Now, I'm reminded that East Germany, which was, of course, sitting right next door to West Germany and well known to the West Germans, when they unified East and West Germany, West Germans were appalled and shocked by what they found as the deteriorated state of the East German infrastructure. So it's not surprising that one might underestimate that.

But the key here is you cannot put a price tag on security. Iraq was a threat. Saddam Hussein was a threat to the region, he was a threat to America, to American interests, he was a haven and a supporter of terrorism around the world and he had launched wars, used weapons of mass destruction. He was a threat. He is now gone. The goal now is to put in his place, in the place of that horrible regime, a stable, prosperous, and democratizing Iraq. That will pay off many, many, many times over in security for the American people. What happened to us on September 11th should remind us that we have to fight the war on terror on the offense. We can't fight from preventive defense. It's fine to try and defend the country, but the president believes that we have to fight this war on the offense and Iraq is part of fighting that war.

MR. RUSSERT: But Iraq was not part of September 11th.

DR. RICE: No. Saddam Hussein—no one has said that there is evidence that Saddam Hussein directed or controlled 9/11, but let's be very clear, he had ties to al-Qaeda, he had al-Qaeda operatives who had operated out of Baghdad. The key, though, is that this is—our security is indivisible, and having a change in this region, in the center of the Middle East, is going to make a tremendous difference to our long-term security.

MR. RUSSERT: Congress will approve the \$87 billion?

DR. RICE: I am certainly hopeful that they will because the American forces deserve the support, and everything in the supplemental that is there for reconstruction is for one of three purposes. It is to provide, so that the Iraqis can provide security to themselves, police forces, the army, and

acceleration of bringing Iraqis into their own security. It is to provide infrastructure so that—and basic living services so that it doesn't become a breeding ground for terrorism, the kind of poverty that is there. And third, it is to put in place infrastructure for foreign investments, so that Iraq can emerge as a functioning member of the international economy.

MR. RUSSERT: Here's the cover of Time magazine coming out tomorrow: "Mission Not Accomplished: How Bush Misjudged the Task of Fixing Iraq." We all remember on May 1, the president landed on the USS Lincoln, where he was greeted by a banner "Mission Accomplished." The image, the message that sent to the country was, "Iraq, mission accomplished." Was that premature?

DR. RICE: Well, the mission of those forces that he went to greet had been accomplished. They were involved in the major military operations. I can remember getting briefings on the carriers of the bombing missions that they flew in those horrible sandstorms. So their mission had been accomplished. And the president wanted to congratulate them on that. But he said in that same speech, the dangerous times were still ahead, and that we still had work to do in Iraq. And we are, indeed, still doing that work in Iraq.

The advantage is that we have forces there that are now being reconfigured to deal with the tasks that are not major combat tasks, and we're making good progress. It's a hard job. And reconstructing or participating in the reconstructing of a country like Iraq is a hard job. But it's very much worth it. Much as the reconstruction of Europe was worth it to our long-term security. The reconstruction of Iraq is worth it to our long-term security. And we're going to stay the course.

MR. RUSSERT: And it is nation-building?

DR. RICE: It is helping the Iraqis to build their nation. And they are more and more involved every day. I've met, just in this past week, with ministers, minister of electricity, minister of public works, I've met with members of the Governing Council. They are now very involved in their future. And Iraq is going to emerge better for it. The Middle East is going to emerge better for it and, therefore, American security is going to emerge better for it.

MR. RUSSERT: How long is that going to take?

DR. RICE: I don't want to put a time frame on it.

MR. RUSSERT: Years?

DR. RICE: The work of the Iraqis in building their own future certainly is going to take years, and we'll try to help them and assist them. But we expect that by accelerating in this next period of time, over this—the next frame of time, which is why the supplemental is so important, in accelerating the most important task toward reconstruction, that we will hasten the day when Iraqis are able to control their own future and when American forces can come home.

MR. RUSSERT: Dr. Condoleezza Rice, we thank you for your views.

DR. RICE: Thank you very much, Tim.

MR. RUSSERT: Coming next, can Dick Gephardt stop the insurgent challenges of Governor Howard Dean and General Wesley Clark? Dick Gephardt, Democratic candidate for president. He's next on MEET THE PRESS.

(Announcements)

MR. RUSSERT: Our interview with Democratic presidential candidate Dick Gephardt after this brief station break.

(Announcements)

MR. RUSSERT: And we are back. Congressman Gephardt, welcome back to MEET THE PRESS.

REP. DICK GEPHARDT, (D-MO): Good to be here.

MR. RUSSERT: Let's go back to October 2, 2002. You were the leader of the Democrats in the House. You supported the president on the war, voted for a resolution to give him the authority, appeared with him in the Rose Garden and said this to the American people. Let's watch:

(Videotape, October 2, 2002):

REP. GEPHARDT: In our view, Iraq's use and continuing development of weapons of mass destruction, combined with efforts of terrorists to acquire such weapons pose a unique and dangerous threat to our national security.

(End videotape)

MR. RUSSERT: "A unique and dangerous threat." We have not found any such weapons. Were you wrong or misled?

REP. GEPHARDT: Tim, I didn't just take the president's word for this. I went out to the CIA three times. I talked to George Tenet personally. I talked to his top people. I talked to people that had been in the Clinton administration in their security effort. And I became convinced, from that, all of that, that he either had weapons of mass destruction or he had components of weapons or he had the ability to quickly make a lot of them and pass them to terrorists.

Look, after 9/11, we're in a world, in my view, that we have to protect the American people from further acts of terrorism. That's my highest responsibility, that's the Congress' highest responsibility, and the president. And I did what I thought was the right thing to do to protect our people from further acts of terrorism. We cannot have that happen in the United States, and I will always do that.

MR. RUSSERT: But what happened to the weapons of mass destruction? What should be done now to find out why the intelligence was misleading or just plain wrong?

REP. GEPHARDT: Obviously, Tim, we need a blue-ribbon commission. If there hasn't been one before I'm president, when I'm president, we will have one. The American people have to understand and believe that the information they're getting from their government is credible, is true. And if

there was a failure of intelligence, we've got to have more than just the intelligence committees look at it. We've got to have a blue-ribbon commission. We've got to get to the bottom of it.

MR. RUSSERT: The Washington Post reports today that a senior administration official said that White House officials called six reporters to identify the wife of Ambassador Joe Wilson, who is doing a report for the CIA on this matter, that she was an undercover agent and therefore was outed, which breaks the law. What should the president do?

REP. GEPHARDT: Well, the president ought to investigate what happened. The Congress probably ought to look at it as well. If the law was broken, if something was done that was improper and wrong legally, you know, the law ought to be enforced and people ought to be punished for doing this.

MR. RUSSERT: The Congress will have an opportunity to vote for \$87 billion more for the operation in Iraq. Will you vote for that?

REP. GEPHARDT: I'm going to support our troops in the field. We have to do that. They're performing a very, very dangerous mission and I'm in admiration of what they're doing. We've got to support them with the money they need. On the \$20 billion or so of this \$87 billion that is for the reconstruction of Iraq, there are a lot of tough questions that the Congress needs to ask and will ask, both Republicans and Democrats.

One of the things we've got to look at is: What are we going to get from other countries? What are other countries going to bring to the table? What is the president doing to get other countries to help our taxpayers? And finally, what loans are out there that could be relieved or forgiven by other countries to Iraq so that this money for reconstruction could, in effect, be a new loan so that we don't have to just ask the American taxpayers to do this.

Finally, I want some moneys for America, if we're going to be using money for the further work in Iraq.

All of our states pretty much are bankrupt. They need help. They're cutting health care, they're cutting veterans, they're cutting all kinds of important programs. We've got to make sure that the American people are taken care of here as well.

MR. RUSSERT: We'll get to the domestic issues in a second, but in terms of Iraq, you just heard Dr. Rice say we're going to stay the course. If you were the president right now, and other countries in the world said, "Mr. President, we don't have any troops to give you. Maybe another 20,000, but this is an American operation," what would you do?

REP. GEPHARDT: Tim, I have been terribly frustrated by this president's inability or unwillingness to get the help that we need. I told him a year and a half ago that if he wanted to deal with Iraq or Afghanistan or any of these situations that he had to get us help. I encouraged him in February or March of last year to go to the U.N., to start the inspections so that it can bring our allies with us.

The U.N. had inspectors there for eight years, they were out for five years. The only way you could get the U.N. with you was start up the inspections and get it done. He finally went to the U.N. In truth, he went too late. He jammed them. He didn't get the agreement he needed. But put that all aside, here we are four or five months after the conflict has ended, and he still has not gotten us the help that we need. He went to the U.N. last week.

Look, we ought to turn this over to the Iraqis as soon as we can. Secondly, we ought to have U.N. civil authority. The U.N. ought to take over the civil issues that are involved in Iraq. And we ought to get NATO and other allies helping us on the security front. If this president was doing his job right, he would be getting us the help that we need. This is costing a billion dollars a week. We're losing people every day. People are being injured. This is unacceptable and he needs to get us the help that we should have gotten a long time ago.

MR. RUSSERT: But if the Iraqis are not prepared to take on the security themselves and other countries don't have the troops to give us, to turn it over to the Iraqis now, you could create an extremist, fundamentalist, Islamic regime.

REP. GEPHARDT: Oh, no. I'm not saying turn it over to the Iraqis now. I'm saying get it turned over to the Iraqis as quickly as you can. In a practical way, do that. But in the meantime, we need help. We need money. We need troops. It is unacceptable that he has not gotten us the help that we need and it can't go on.

MR. RUSSERT: In July, this is about nine months after supporting the president on the war, you said this, "...I believe George Bush has left us less safe and less secure than we were four years ago." What do you base that on?

REP. GEPHARDT: A number of things. First of all, the homeland security effort is not what it ought to be. We have not looked in one container coming into this country. What are we worried about? We're worried about an A-bomb in a Ryder truck in New York or Washington or Los Angeles. It cannot happen. We cannot allow it to happen. We have not looked in one container. That's the most likely way it would come in. We're not doing what we need with the local police and fire departments. The money that they need—they're the new front-line troops in the war against terrorism. They have not gotten the training or the equipment that they need to do their job right.

Finally, he is not doing the job with regard to the loose nukes that are out in the work, in Russia, India, Pakistan. We should be very aggressively trying to stop this fissile material from getting into the hands of terrorists. I'll say it again: 9/11 was the ultimate wake-up call. If we don't understand that, I don't know what we understand. And our government has a solemn responsibility to do everything in its power to keep these materials out of the hands of terrorists. When I am president, I will make it my highest priority to see that it's done every day.

MR. RUSSERT: There's a sense from some critics, Congressman, that you've watched Howard Dean rise to the status of front-runner of the Democratic primaries because he opposed George Bush on the war and opposed George Bush on the tax cut, and that you now are trying to make up for lost ground by imitating some of Howard Dean's positions by saying the president's a miserable failure or this: "This phony macho business is not getting us where we need to" go. Is that appropriate, to accuse the president of being a phony macho?

REP. GEPHARDT: Tim, I try to say what's in my heart and what's right, and I don't mince my words, I don't, you know, try to find the political high ground. I try to do my job, and I'm going to say what I think is right and what's in my heart. I believe the president was right to try to deal with Saddam Hussein and weapons of mass destruction, not because of what he said, as I said, but because of everything that I learned and understood. I've never wavered from that position and never will. Because I did what I thought was right.

MR. RUSSERT: What's the phony macho?

REP. GEPHARDT: Well, saying "Bring them on," and you know, saying to our allies, "We're going to do this with or without you," and just—arrogance doesn't get you anywhere, as a country, as a leader. And I think in some cases this president demonstrates arrogance. Look, I was in Germany a few years ago, the foreign minister said to me, "The reason we so respect America is that there's never been a country in the history of the world that's had this much military power and always used it so responsibly." That's what we're in danger of losing with the way this president is leading. So if he's right, I'm going to say it, and if he's wrong, I'm going to say it, and that's what I try to do. I try to say what's in my heart.

MR. RUSSERT: Let me turn to your race for the presidency. This is your Web site, which is on the Internet: "It's Time to Show Howard Dean who's the Real Democrat, A Message from Steve Murphy, Campaign Manager"—that's your campaign manager—"...I've had enough. Howard Dean still insists that he's the candidate from 'the Democratic wing of the Democratic Party.' Well, where was Howard Dean when we needed him?" Do you think Howard Dean's a real Democrat?

REP. GEPHARDT: He is a Democrat, but we have some legitimate differences of belief, on trade, on health care, on Medicare, on Social Security, and that's what elections are about. That's why we have campaigns, and I'm going to talk about the differences, not only with Howard but with other candidates, as well.

MR. RUSSERT: Another Web site, and I'll show you this one, called DeanFacts.com: "Howard Dean on Social Security: 'I absolutely agree we need to...increase retirement age.'"

Dean on Social Security, Dean on Medicare, and who's paying for this Web site? Gephardt for President. You're devoting an entire Web site to

Howard Dean.

REP. GEPHARDT: Well, these Web sites are inexpensive. Look, some of the statements that Howard has made about Medicare demonstrate, and are hard to believe, frankly, but demonstrate the deep difference that we have on this issue. Let me just tell you two of the statements. He said Medicare is the worst federal program ever. He said Medicare is the worst thing that ever happened. Now, I just couldn't disagree more. I think Medicare is one of the best things this country's ever done. A third to a half of the elderly in this country were in poverty before Medicare. Now, every senior citizen has the benefit of Medicare.

And in our darkest hour, the day before we took up the Gingrich budget in 1995, Howard was the head of the National Governors' Association. He made a speech in which he endorsed, basically, the Republican position on the \$270 billion cut in Medicare, that Bill Clinton called the biggest cut in Medicare's history. It would have decimated the program. And so later in the year, they even shut the government down over this. They were trying to do big Medicare cuts to give tax cuts to the wealthiest Americans.

Now, we just couldn't disagree more on this. He's had a number of other statements in which he's severely critical of Medicare as a horribly run, terrible program. I just—we disagree on this. I think it's an important issue. Look, the Republicans have always been after this program. From the beginning they haven't liked this program. We need a candidate to go up against George Bush and articulate this issue, defend our proudest achievement, which is Medicare and Social Security, and re-explain to the American people why we cannot allow the Republicans to privatize and ruin these programs.

MR. RUSSERT: But if you say that Howard Dean stood with Newt Gingrich, why couldn't Howard Dean say, "Dick Gephardt, you voted for the 1981 Ronald Reagan tax cut. Back then you voted against increasing minimum wage. You stood with Ronald Reagan."

REP. GEPHARDT: Look, there are always times that we make judgments that in retrospect we think weren't the right judgment. There have been things in my past that, you know, I later on decided that wasn't the right thing to do. Howard's not backing off this. He said just a week ago, or two weeks ago, that he still thinks we ought to slow down the growth of Medicare by 7 to 10 percent. That was the \$270 billion cut. And he continues to say it's a horribly run program, and that it's not a good program.

MR. RUSSERT: But the number of people on Medicare is going to double, we've gone from 35 workers per retiree to two workers per retiree. We're going to have to do something with Medicare and Social Security or those programs will go bust or we're going to have to double the payroll tax.

REP. GEPHARDT: Tim, I have always been for doing what it takes to save Social Security and Medicare. I led the fight in 1983 to fix the Social Security program so it would have much longer time to run without having to

dip into general revenue. I've always been for improving Medicare but I've never said Medicare is the worst thing that ever happened. I mean, this is a great program. We need to improve it but we sure don't need to adopt the Republican rhetoric on this, that it's a horrible program. It's not. It's a great program.

MR. RUSSERT: The centerpiece of your campaign thus far has been your proposal on health care, to subsidize businesses so they will provide health care to their employees. You would pay for it by repealing the Bush tax cut. This is how one commentator reported on that. "Gephardt's Tax Hike. To finance government funding for business-provided health care, [Gephardt] would roll back Bush tax cuts..."

"This is heavy going for that \$40,000-a-year family of four. ... The extra taxes paid over six years, starting with President Gephardt's first year, total \$6,800. If this family's breadwinners work for a company that now provides health care, they"—only get—"pain"—for—"Gephardt."

How do you say to the American people, "I'm going to raise your taxes anywhere from \$1,500 to \$2,000 a year, because I'm subsidizing businesses that give you health care." But they already have health care?

REP. GEPHARDT: Well, what's missing in this analysis is that companies that already give health care are cutting back benefits. People have anxiety that they're going to lose their benefits altogether or that they're not going to be able to afford the family plan or that they can't ever get a wage increase. It's the only thing that's talked about between employers and employees today. I intend to solve that problem. My plan does more for the average family than the Bush tax cuts. And if you want to calculate it, I've got another Web site, mattspln.com, named after my son, or gephardt2004.com. And you can calculate, on the Web site, what you get from my plan as opposed to the Bush tax cuts. I think if you go on and look at it, you'll find that my plan is pretty good.

MR. RUSSERT: I've seen it. But people will pay more taxes. You have to be straight up and honest about that.

REP. GEPHARDT: But, Tim, it's a tradeoff, between the tax cut you get and the economic benefit you get from my plan. And what I'm arguing is even if you have insurance now, you'll get a huge economic benefit from my plan. And my plan is the only plan that helps everybody, not just one kind of employee.

MR. RUSSERT: But if you're repealing the Bush tax cut to pay for your health-care plan, earlier in the program you said we have to have more money for Homeland Security, we have to have more money to rebuild the infrastructure, we need more money to take care of medical and Social Security because those programs are going to explode with the baby boom generation, we already have a \$500 billion deficit, probably \$600 billion. How can you possibly balance the budget or reduce the deficit when all you want to do is spend?

REP. GEPHARDT: Let me tell you what I learned in 1993. I led the fight for the Clinton economic program. It's the proudest day that I was in the Congress. Because we got Democrats. We Democrats voted for a plan to raise taxes on the wealthiest Americans, cut taxes on middle class. Raise spending in some areas, cut spending in other areas that were necessary. And we got the platform created on which the American people created the best economy in 50 years. Twenty-two million new jobs created in a seven-year period. You cannot balance budgets just by raising taxes and cutting spending. You have to have a set of ideas that work together, that get the American people to create economic growth and then you get your budget balanced. We took a \$5 trillion deficit and got a \$5 trillion surplus until this president came along and turned everything in a wrong direction.

MR. RUSSERT: Can you tell the American people we have to raise taxes?

REP. GEPHARDT: I will tell the American people that we need an economic plan, a lot like we had in the early '90s. It'll be different because we had different circumstances. But an economic plan that does all the right things to get us to the right economy. There was an article yesterday in The New York Times, Roger Gibboni of Mexico, Missouri, lost his job. He was making \$19 an hour with benefits; now he's making \$8, \$9 an hour without benefits. And he said in the article, "The tax cut isn't helping me. I need a job that has good benefits." That's what we need to produce and I will as president. That's what I want to do.

MR. RUSSERT: Even if it means raising taxes as part of that puzzle?

REP. GEPHARDT: I'm gonna have an economic plan that is gonna be fair, that is gonna move us in the right direction. I've done it. This is no mystery anymore. We know how to do this. The Republicans mess it up every time they get a chance. We know how to do this and I will do it.

MR. RUSSERT: John Kerry and Howard Dean, two of your competitors for the Democratic nomination, have called for the resignations of Donald Rumsfeld and Paul Wolfowitz for their handling of the Iraq war. Do you join in their call?

REP. GEPHARDT: I'm out here trying to replace George Bush. That's the person that needs to be replaced. This is his administration. He decides who's in the administration. The buck stops on the president's desk and the president has to stand the responsibility for the failure or the success of whatever is done. So I'm not interested in trying to give him advice on who his Cabinet ought to be. I'm gonna replace him and I'm gonna bring you a Cabinet that won't have the policies of this administration.

MR. RUSSERT: Congressman Gephardt, this is your 40th appearance on MEET THE PRESS, which puts you in second place behind Bob Dole in terms of history of most appearances. This is what you looked like back in 1983, your first appearance. And here you are today. Twenty years.

REP. GEPHARDT: It's starting to show.

MR. RUSSERT: Be safe on the campaign trail.

REP. GEPHARDT: Thanks so much.

MR. RUSSERT: And we'll be right back.

(Announcements)

MR. RUSSERT: Start your day tomorrow on "Today" with Katie and Matt, then the "NBC Nightly News" with Tom Brokaw. That's all for today. We will be back next week. If it's Sunday, it's MEET THE PRESS.

Bills, bounce back. Get those Eagles.

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