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Bush Gets Boost From McCain on Iraq



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By *SCOTT LINDLAW, Associated Press Writer*

FORT LEWIS, Wash. - Before cheering troops, President Bush ([news - web sites](#)) got a strong endorsement on Iraq ([news - web sites](#)) and a boost for his re-election campaign Friday from Sen. John McCain, the Arizona Republican courted by Democrat John Kerry ([news - web sites](#)) to be his running mate.



AP Photo

Bush seemed to relish keeping McCain, his one-time rival for the presidency, out of Kerry's corner.

"Both candidates in this race are honored to be a friend of John McCain," Bush said at a campaign rally in Nevada. "Only one of us gets his vote. And I am proud that it is me."

McCain issued dire warnings about the threat from terrorists and backed the war to oust Saddam Hussein ([news - web sites](#)) in words matching the starkest language Bush and Vice President Dick Cheney ([news - web sites](#)) have employed. The support from McCain came as the president is trying to counter rising questions about the invasion.

"Should the enemy acquire for their arsenal the chemical, biological and nuclear weapons they seek, this war (on terrorism) will become an even bigger thing: It will become a fight for survival," McCain told thousands of GIs at the Army base here. "That's why your courage is so indispensable to us."

Bush sat just behind McCain on a stage erected in an aircraft hangar, basking in the endorsement from his fierce opponent for the 2000 GOP presidential nomination. They seemed determined to project unity, heaping praise on each other with no mention of the bitter contest.

The president said of McCain, who spent 5 1/2 years in a Vietnamese POW camp: "When he speaks of service and sacrifice, he speaks from experience. ... The United States military has no better friend in the United States Senate than John McCain."

McCain said of Bush: "He has not wavered in his determination to protect this country and to make the world a better, safer, freer place. You will not yield, nor will he."

McCain said 26 soldiers from this base have died in recent combat; Bush met with some of their families after the speeches, and with wounded GIs.

He offered similar praise for the Iraq war and for Bush Friday evening in Reno, Nev., at the Bush campaign rally.

"I believe just as strongly as when we began our efforts there, this was noble, achievable and necessary," McCain told several thousand Bush backers. "And for his determination to undertake this task, for his unflinching resolve to see it through to the just end we see, he deserves not only our support but our admiration."

McCain has criticized Bush on certain issues — including tax cuts, the environment and Medicare — and has said more troops are needed in Iraq. He also has declined to join other Senate Republicans in criticizing Kerry, a friend, and has even defended Kerry over his defense record.

But Bush and McCain have sought a broader political detente, cooperating when it benefited both men. Earlier this year, Bush named McCain to the commission investigating intelligence used to justify the Iraq war.

For Bush, McCain's vigorous defense of the war was a welcome rebuttal to a report this week that called into question a central pillar of the case for war.

The independent commission investigating the Sept. 11 attacks undercut the administration's insistent claims of a link between Saddam Hussein and al-Qaida. That comes on top of the administration's failure to find any weapons of mass destruction in Iraq.

In Nevada, Bush trumpeted his administration's efforts to clean up Lake Tahoe, but steered clear of a hot Nevada topic on which he has taken an unpopular stance.



Reuters Photo

 [Slideshow: President Bush](#)

Bush backs a nuclear waste dump 90 miles northwest of Las Vegas, at Yucca Mountain. Democrats cast that as a broken promise because as a candidate in 2000, Bush had promised to wait for "sound science" before making his decision on the dump. Yet, dozens of scientific studies remain incomplete.

Terry McAuliffe, Democratic National Committee ([news](#) - [web sites](#)) chairman, said Bush "lied to the citizens of Nevada and he did it for partisan political gain."

About 600 people demonstrated against Bush outside the convention hall, many of them drawn by the chance to air their opposition to the dump. Many others opposed the war in Iraq and carried signs promoting Kerry.

One protester held a sign that read, "Send Bush and nuclear waste to Texas!"

On the Net:

Bush campaign: <http://www.georgewbush.com>

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