

LOU DOBBS TONIGHT

CNN

April 27, 2004 Tuesday

As we reported, there's rising concern tonight about whether U.S. troops have the protection they need in Iraq.

My next guests have different views. House Armed Services Committee Chairman Duncan Hunter says all troops in Iraq now have the latest body armor available and that's been true since January. Duncan Hunter is, of course, the chairman of the House Armed Services Committee. We're also joined tonight by Congresswoman Jan **Schakowsky**, who says body armor is not enough. The congresswoman says the military needs to do more to protect the vehicles U.S. troops are riding in Iraq. Congresswoman

Schakowsky

is the chief deputy whip of the House Democratic leadership -- both joining us tonight from Washington.

Good to have you with us.

REP. JAN **SCHAKOWSKY** (D), ILLINOIS: Thanks, Lou.

REP. DUNCAN HUNTER (R), CALIFORNIA: Good to be with you, Lou.

DOBBS: Let me begin, if I may, with you, Mr. Chairman.

And that is the issue of body armor. There are reports, as you know, that families are still buying body armor for reservists and National Guardsmen going to Iraq. Why are they doing that if, indeed, there is adequate body armor?

HUNTER: Well, Lou, obviously, a very important question for all of us in the Armed Services Committee. We have worked this thing heavily with the military, watched them on a weekly basis.

They now have, according to the chairman of the Joint Chiefs in testimony and in letters to us,

have stated that we have produced now 260,000 sets of complete body armor, 260,000. We have 135,000 troops in theater. The statement from our DOD is that every single person not only uniformed personnel, but also every civil servant who is in Iraq has at least one set of body armor.

Now, if you look at the production number, we have twice as much body armor as we have people in Iraq. Of course, we have people in Afghanistan, too. They also are fully covered. So the answer is that every single soldier has body armor who is now -- who has a foot in Iraq and that every single civil servant who is supporting that operation in Iraq also has body armor. And I would invite, if people have sons or daughters who are in the Iraq theater don't have body armor, my name is Hunter.

You get ahold of me at the U.S. Congress. And I want to know what unit that is and who doesn't have it, and we will move immediately on that. But, again, we produced 260,000 sets. That's twice as much as we need for everybody in theater. And what we have back from DOD is that everybody, before you step over that line from Kuwait, has body armor.

DOBBS: Congresswoman **Schakowsky**...

SCHAKOWSKY: Yes.

DOBBS: The issue raised by General Ellis, and that is over inadequate Humvee armor, if we may move to that issue next, you're not satisfied with the situation. Neither is General Ellis. What is your suggestion to be done about it?

SCHAKOWSKY: Well, you know, an unofficial report, we haven't seen it yet, by a defense **contractor** estimates that one-quarter of deaths in Iraq might have been prevented had our troops had adequate equipment.

What an indictment that is. And maybe all our troops have the Kevlar vests. But they may need an extra to hang over the side in order to protect their vehicles. There's a soldier who was just deployed for another three months after his year that wrote to the Peoria paper. And what he said is, this unit does not have the extra armor that's now required for vehicle convoys.

Even though we've been here over one year, we still don't have the right protection from roadside bombs or small-arms fires. Our doors are, basically, just two sides of sheet metal. We've known for a long time that our soldiers are more likely to face RPGs, rocket-propelled grenades, than they are rosebuds and open arms.

You know, we have known that this is a very dangerous situation. As of last October, a quarter of our troops, it's estimated, did not have that body armor. I think a lot of parents -- I've met with many of them -- are very concerned that force protection, that taking care of their kids is not the top priority.

DOBBS: Chairman...

HUNTER: Let me address that, Lou.

DOBBS: Yes. Mr. Chairman, I would like you to address it from the standpoint of something that you said earlier in talking about force protection. You said, in keeping this trust, referring to the obligation of your committee to provide oversight and the assurance of force protection, that is, protecting American lives wherever their mission takes them. In this case, Iraq. You said, if we're to be successful in accomplishing this mission at any time anywhere in the world, in keeping this trust we must be honest in our assessment of whether we're doing everything to not only provide the soldiers what they need to accomplish their mission but when they need it. Mr. Chairman, are we maintaining that trust, in your judgment?

HUNTER: Well, Lou, we have now armored some 71 percent of all of the Humvees that are in theater. We've armored some 2,800, which is a total rebuild of that Jeep. The problem is that a Humvee is basically a fancy Jeep. What we've done is we've gone to war and we've discovered a new system, a new weapons system called the IED, can be detonated remotely, it can be as big as a huge artillery round just a few feet away.

Jeeps can't handle that. And that is something that we have discovered...

DOBBS: The roadside bombs.

HUNTER: The roadside bomb and we do need to manufacture systems that are much bigger than those Jeeps because even if you put 2,000 pounds of armor on those jeeps and we have now armored either by manufacturing the new heavy-duty Humvee or by putting kits in theater and having those placed on, we've done 71 percent. We still have 29 percent of the army vehicles that aren't done. All the marine vehicles have some that need to be done.

But here's the point, Lou. In October, we did know that and we put in \$240 million in a supplemental budget, which was line item, to pay for up armored Humvees. My colleague voted against the supplemental appropriation. My colleague voted against such supplemental appropriation so we in Congress bear some of the fault for not moving quickly enough to get this armor between our troops and those explosions in the road. You don't get those things for free. The answer is we have to do a lot more, I think we're going to have to go to bigger systems than Humvees. My recommendation is to use 5 and 7-ton trucks and striker vehicles on these heavy convoy operations instead of using what we have now, which is a Jeep.

DOBBS: General David Grange, as you know, our military analyst here, Mr. Chairman, would like to see the APCs, what was referred to as the old APC, the 113s, brought in to bear in Iraq. Congresswoman **Schakowsky**, we're out of time. I have to give you the last word if I may.

SCHAKOWSKY: Well, you know, the \$87 billion -- one of the reasons that I voted no is that I thought we can't trust this administration to spend this money well without a plan in Iraq. They got the money. It still turns out that many of our kids are there without the equipment that they need. A Chinook helicopter that was downed from an Illinois unit, the National Guard. They were last on the list to get the proper missile detection system. I spoke to the aunt of one of those soldiers. She certainly doesn't feel that enough is being done.

DOBBS: We thank you both very much.

HUNTER: Thank you.

DOBBS: Mr. Chairman, Congresswoman **Schakowsky**, we appreciate your time.