

Rumsfeld Steps Down as Defense Secretary

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BBC REPORT

Rumsfeld replaced after poll loss

US Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld is standing down, President George W Bush has announced after bruising losses for Republicans in mid-term elections.

Mr Bush said that both he and Mr Rumsfeld had agreed the time was right for new leadership at the Pentagon.

Former CIA Director Robert Gates has been nominated to replace Mr Rumsfeld.

The Democrats won control of the House of Representatives in the polls, and the Senate balance of power hangs on a tight race in just one state, Virginia.

Mr Bush said that his administration's Iraq policy was "not working well enough, fast enough", and that Mr Rumsfeld agreed that a "fresh perspective" was needed on the issue.

The US president described the Republicans' set-back in the elections as "thumping".

But he said that with victory, there had to be responsibility, and that was why he would be working with his Democratic opponents to get legislation passed.

Mr Bush described Mr Rumsfeld as a "patriot who served his country with honour and distinction", as well as "a trusted adviser and a friend".

Beleagured

With popular anger over the war in Iraq a major factor during the election campaign, there had been growing calls for Mr Rumsfeld, the longest serving defence secretary in American history, to quit.

Correspondents say he was a key architect of the war in Iraq and had been looking increasingly beleaguered because of its apparent failures.

Neither Mr Rumsfeld or Vice-President Dick Cheney were present at the news conference where Mr Bush spoke, which correspondents said was unusual at such events.

Asked if Mr Cheney would be with him for the rest of his term, Mr Bush said "yes he will".

Mr Bush spoke minutes after the news came that the Democrats had won the Senate race in

Montana, one of the two seats needed to wrest control of the upper chamber of Congress from the Republicans.

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