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Article published Feb 27, 2007

Inglis takes heat, but stands firm

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Nearly 100 people gathered at Wade's Restaurant in Spartanburg Monday, with most fiercely criticizing U.S. Rep. Bob Inglis' recent vote opposing a troop surge in Iraq.

Spartanburg County resident Richard Huggler said he showed up at the congressman's monthly "Let's Talk" session -- which turned out to be the most-attended that Inglis, R-S.C., has ever held -- solely to make his position clear.

"We voted for him to follow the Republican lead of our president, not to vote with the Democrats," Huggler said of Inglis' vote for the largely Democrat-supported, nonbinding resolution disapproving of President Bush's plan to send 21,500 additional U.S. troops to Iraq.

Inglis, who was one of only 17 Republicans

in Congress to vote in favor of the resolution, stood by his decision Monday, calling it a vote of "conscience." He cited an incident from a visit to Iraq, where Iraqi officials "sat there absolutely unmoved by our sense of urgency."

"If you'd seen those two guys sitting back on that couch in Baghdad, maybe you would be as insistent as I am that we put them on some schedule for success," Inglis said.

To that end, Inglis sent a letter to Bush Monday, stating, "We're committed in Iraq; let's get the Iraqis committed to us."

The congressman asked the president to announce a schedule for political decisions by the Iraqi government. The "success checkpoints" would include a fair division of oil and the return of banned Baath party members to positions of public trust.

"For those of us who doubted a military-first surge," Inglis wrote, "a schedule of success checkpoints would signal the key addition of a surge in accountable political will in the Iraqi government."

In the face of vocal opposition from constituents on Monday, Inglis did not back down from his decision, even while admitting that a survey might have shown most people in his district "really would have preferred a 'no' vote on that resolution."

Jack Millwood of Pacolet compared Inglis to Hollywood insiders such as Jane Fonda and Susan Sarandon -- the kind of "liberals who voted against my president in a time of war."

"I'll never vote for (Inglis) again," Millwood added.

Sensing people's need to vent, Inglis emphasized at the beginning that Monday's discussion would be a "you talk, I listen" forum. While most remained silent, plenty of clapping, cheering and at least one "ditto" sounded through the room after Millwood expressed his hope that Inglis' decision would "come back to haunt" him.

Wane Brenner of Lake Bowen was one of a few people who expressed support for Inglis: "Iraq has a civil war going, and we're in the middle of it," Brenner said. "Stay there the next year to keep that place safe? We'll have to stay there the next 20 years."

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