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STATEMENT OF CONGRESSMAN WALLY HERGER

On President Bush's Speech Announcing a 'New Way Forward' in Iraq

"President Bush's new Iraq initiative represents a comprehensive effort to improve the situation in Iraq. It recognizes that our Iraq policy must address the parallel needs of stopping sectarian revenge killings, establishing additional political reforms, and expanding economic opportunities. As Commander in Chief, the President has the extraordinarily heavy responsibility of sifting through sometimes-conflicting counsel and deciding which course of action will bring security and stability to Iraq. Because our current approach largely is not working, I commend the President for demonstrating leadership and adjusting our policy.

"I continue to firmly believe that it remains in our national interest to help Iraq achieve security and uphold the will of millions of Iraqis who elected a new government. In sharp contrast to the previous regime, this government is seeking to work with--not exterminate--Iraqis of differing ethnicities. Our mission to strengthen America's security by defeating terrorists and establishing a strong ally in the Middle East remains unchanged. Our men and women in uniform are performing this mission with tremendous courage, dedication, and skill. Our grateful nation will always honor their service and sacrifices.

"If the President, working with our military commanders, has concluded that a temporary increase in our troop levels, coupled with political and economic reforms, is needed to secure Baghdad and the Anbar Province, then I support this decision. Yet, I strongly believe that the Iraqi people are ultimately responsible for defending their country. That is why I have urged the President to demand that Iraqi Security Forces become more involved and effective in defending their homeland. I'm pleased the President apparently made this demand and that more Iraqi brigades will soon enter Baghdad.

"I was pleased that the President announced new political and economic reforms aimed at Iraqi reconciliation. Notwithstanding religious diversities and political disagreements, the majority of Iraqis denounce violence and terrorism. It is essential that more Iraqis develop a prevailing allegiance to their country that transcends ethnic and religious differences within Iraq. I am hopeful that new commitments to hold provincial elections, provide a more equitable distribution of oil revenues, and increase job opportunities will help Iraqis look beyond their differences and live in peace and unity with one another.

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"As our nation makes adjustments, I believe it can be helpful for Americans to pause and consider our own path toward peace and stability. History records that after gaining independence--with the military support of another country--our first constitution failed. It took several years for our mindset to change from the 'United States are', to the 'United States is.' There were rebellions. Our permanent Constitution was amended with a Bill of Rights only a few years after it was ratified. Even then, it barely addressed our nation's core division over slavery. Our path toward peace and unity was certainly not easy or immediate.

"I do not believe Iraq must go through all of the profound challenges we faced. Yet, 'America's Story' suggests that going from tyranny to a stable democracy rarely occurs without trials. While our nation's patience has a limit, I believe our own history can offer hope to Americans that the mission in Iraq can strengthen our security in the future. I believe history may yet record that this mission brought forth a strong democracy--an ally of the United States--in the heart of the Middle East, and was critical to the War on Terrorism."