

IRAQ FUNDING BILL ADVANCES IN HOUSE
As War Enters 5th Year,
House to Vote Next Week on Bill to Fund Troops,
Hold Iraqi Government and Bush Administration Accountable

To: Reporters, Editors, Editorial Writers, and Producers
From: Speaker Nancy Pelosi, Majority Leader Steny Hoyer, Majority Whip James Clyburn, and Democratic Caucus Chair Rahm Emanuel
Re: Iraq Funding Bill: The “U.S. Troop Readiness, Veterans’ Health, and Iraq Accountability Act”
Date: 03/15/2007

On Monday, the Iraq war will enter its fifth year. After four years, hundreds of billions of dollars and the loss of thousands of American lives, the American people made clear in the last election that they want a new direction in Iraq.

Today, the House Appropriations Committee approved a Fiscal Year 2007 supplemental spending bill – the “U.S. Troop Readiness, Veterans’ Health and Iraq Accountability Act” – that responds to this call for change, by a vote of 36-28. This responsible proposal supports our troops and veterans, holds the Iraqi government and the President accountable to his own benchmarks, and refocuses America’s fight in the war on terror.

President Bush Offers Open-Ended Commitment to the War in Iraq

“There is no military solution to a problem like that in Iraq...”

[General David Petraeus, Commanding General, Multi-National Force-Iraq, NY Times, 3/8/07]

“Some elements of the situation in Iraq are properly descriptive of a ‘civil war’...”

[Pentagon Quarterly Report, Washington Post, 3/15/07]

Despite the failure of his past policies and the insistence of military commanders that there is no military solution – only a political solution – the President continues to offer only an open-ended commitment in Iraq.

In January, the President called for an escalation of 21,500 more soldiers and this past weekend, he called for an additional 4,400 more troops for Iraq. This escalation further erodes our military’s readiness, while failing to hold the Iraqi government accountable for overdue reforms critical to achieving a political solution.

Congressional Republicans Want to Write More Blank Checks

“We could vote for a clear wartime supplemental before supper tomorrow.”

[House Republican Conference Chair, Adam Putnam (R-FL), Roll Call, 3/8/07]

In the face of increased violence in Iraq and the lack of real progress toward a political solution, Congressional Republicans continue to pledge allegiance to a stay-the-course strategy funded by blank checks for the Bush Administration.

During the past four years of war, Republican-controlled Congresses have rubberstamped President Bush's war funding requests, which undoubtedly perpetuated mistakes and miscalculations in Iraq. In contrast, Democrats have gone through careful deliberation and discussion to develop a responsible approach that ensures accountability and a new direction in Iraq.

A New Direction an Iraq: Real Benchmarks, Real Consequences

“America will hold the Iraqi government to the benchmarks it has announced.”

[President George W. Bush, in an address to the nation, 1/10/07]

“A Pentagon assessment of progress in Iraq through the end of last year, submitted to Congress on Wednesday, notes that Prime Minister Nuri Kamal al-Maliki “has promised to reform his government, beginning with his cabinet and the ministries,” but that none of those steps had yet happened.”

[New York Times, 3/15/07]

The U.S. Troop Readiness, Veterans' Health and Iraq Accountability Act will hold the Iraqi government accountable, measuring its performance by the standards President Bush himself outlined in his January 10th speech. If the President fails to report to Congress on July 1, 2007, that the Iraqi government has made progress on these key presidential benchmarks, a redeployment of U.S. troops would begin immediately and must be completed within 180 days.

If the President meets the July 1 requirement, then he must certify on October 1, 2007, that Iraq has met the benchmarks that he outlined. If he is not able to do so, a redeployment of U.S. troops would begin immediately and must be completed within 180 days.

The bill will also support and protect our troops by requiring troop deployment to adhere to the Department of Defense's current standards for unit readiness; length of time troops can be deployed in Iraq; and the time troops are entitled to remain at home when they return. The President would be required to certify in writing to Congress that it is in the interests of national security in order to waive any of these standards set by the DoD.

Finally, this bill provides for a responsible strategy for a phased redeployment of U.S. troops if the President and Iraqi government meets the previous benchmarks. In a similar timeframe put forward by the bipartisan Iraq Study Group, a redeployment of U.S. troops from Iraq must begin by March 1, 2008 and be completed by August 31, 2008. American troops would be permitted to remain in Iraq to perform a limited numbers of functions.

Democrats Advocate for Additional Support for Our Troops and Veterans

“The active Army is about broken.”

[Colin Powell, Former Secretary of State and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, CBS' "Face the Nation," 12/17/06]

“To meet combatant commanders' immediate wartime needs, we pooled equipment from across the force to equip soldiers deploying in harm's way . . . This practice, which we are continuing today, increases risk for our next-to-deploy units and limits our ability to respond to emerging strategic contingencies.”

[General Peter Schoomaker, Chief of Staff of the United States Army, January 23, 2007]

It is no secret that the war in Iraq has dangerously eroded our military's readiness, while the scandal at Walter Reed Army Medical Center has exposed the need for more investment in care for our returning soldiers and veterans. The Democratic bill will increase the President's original request by \$1.7 billion for military health

care, including for Walter Reed and other hospitals, \$1.7 billion for veterans' health care, \$2.5 billion for improving the readiness of our stateside troops, and \$1.4 billion for military housing allowances.

Re-focusing on the War on Terror and Afghanistan

“Vice President Cheney was inside the main U.S. air base in Afghanistan yesterday when a suicide bomber detonated his explosives just outside the gates, killing as many as 23 people and showcasing insurgents' growing capabilities in advance of a widely expected spring offensive. Within hours, a purported Taliban spokesman asserted responsibility for the attack...” [Washington Post, 2/28/07]

By calling for a responsible, phased redeployment of our troops out of Iraq, the Democratic bill will allow us to re-focus our military efforts in Afghanistan where al Qaeda and the Taliban are strengthening. Democrats provide \$1.2 billion more than the President originally requested for Afghanistan.

Fulfilling Other Important Needs

As they did with 9 of 11 Fiscal Year 2007 appropriations bills, Republicans did not tackle many challenges during the last Congress. Democrats provide in the supplemental additional assistance for Katrina survivors, farmers hit by natural disaster, the Base Realignment and Closure program, the Low-Income Heating Assistance Program, and, at the request of both Republican and Democratic governors, health care for low-income children (SCHIP).