

**Statement of Rep. Neil Abercrombie
On the Floor of the House
February 13, 2007**

MADAM SPEAKER:

As Chairman of the Armed Services Subcommittee on Air and Land Forces, my overriding concern on every issue that comes before us is whether and how it supports our men and women in uniform. Every decision about equipment procurement, training, endstrength or budget authorization must meet this test: Does it support our troops?

The question before us today — increasing U.S. forces in Iraq by 21,500 combat troops and, depending on whom you listen to, somewhere between three and 28-thousand support personnel — fails this test in every respect. Both the immediate and long-term effects of the war in Iraq on our nation's military preparedness are evident and drastic. Extended deployments, premature redeployments and sustained combat under unbelievably harsh conditions have taken a terrible toll on our forces and their equipment.

The results are an overstretched U.S. Army and Marine Corps with no fully mission-capable reserve forces, and an urgent need for billions of dollars to repair or replace worn and damaged helicopters, tanks, other armored vehicles, including up-armored Humvees, and other equipment. Chairman Ortiz of the Readiness Subcommittee and I returned Monday from an inspection of two of the Army's busiest repair depots; Corpus Christi, Texas, where they repair, upgrade and modernize the full range of military helicopters; and Anniston, Alabama, which calls itself, "Pit Crew of the American Warfighter." They maintain and repair the Army's heavy and light tracked vehicles, including the M1 Main Battle Tank and Bradley Fighting Vehicle.

What we saw were skilled, dedicated employees working feverishly to make sure that our men and women in uniform — particularly those in Iraq and Afghanistan—have every piece of equipment they need to do their jobs and keep themselves safe from harm. But, we saw maintenance and repair facilities that are just now beginning to cope with these demands because they did not have the support they needed to get the job done — from conversion equipment for M1 tanks to the latest up-armor kits for Humvees; and because they didn't get sufficient funding until three years into the war in Iraq, despite the alarms raised by Jack Murtha, David Obey, Ike Skelton and Solomon Ortiz.

What we saw were the results of this Administration's abject failure to mobilize the country's industrial base for this war of choice; to ramp up America's manufacturing capacity to fully support our troops, at home and overseas. Smugly self-righteous in its belief that U.S. troops would be targeted with nothing more lethal than rose petals, this Administration has been complacent in leaving the burden of their war on the men and women of our armed forces; active, reserve and national guard.

We are mired in what President Bush calls “The central front in the War on Terror” and “The defining challenge of our age.” Yet, in the last two weeks, he has been more comfortable discussing cutting Medicare and Medicaid benefits to the most vulnerable among us.

To have acted to ensure that the burden of this war would be more broadly shared, that the industrial sector would be mobilized, the military’s equipment supply, maintenance and repair systems would be put on a wartime footing would have been expensive and an admission of reality. The hallmark of America’s response in World War II was the mobilization of our entire society to join in the war effort. If we had had today’s leadership in 1941, the outcome of that war might have been much different.

The real and immediate concern following the leadership failures of the Administration is that forces now being deployed as part of the “surge” will not have the equipment they need when they get there. They will have to “borrow” equipment from other units. The long-term concern is that if other national security threats materialize, we are not fully prepared to respond effectively.

The House is considering an expression of support or opposition to another failure of leadership; a strictly political decision to send 21,500 more U.S. troops into the streets and back alleys of Baghdad, and to al Anbar Province. This surge has little to no chance of making a difference in the outcome of the war. It is simply a tactical convulsion of an Administration that cannot and will not admit that it is the author of the greatest strategic foreign policy folly in our nation’s history. This is a war of choice; a catastrophe conceived in ideological zeal, cloaked in misinformation and lies, and administered with breathtaking incompetence. It is an outrage that we have not had one policy in Iraq worthy of our men and women in uniform. This “surge” is yet another misstep in this tragic journey to disaster. We need to end it— now.