

End Waste & Fraud in Defense Spending -- March 2007

Since the Iraq War began in 2003, our men and women in the military have fought bravely in the face of violence and have overcome enormous obstacles to remove Saddam Hussein and begin planting the seeds of democracy in Iraq. However, despite the heroic efforts of our military personnel, the new Iraqi government has been unable to overcome the continuous instability and sectarian violence that has ravaged the country for much of the last four years.

Like many Americans, I have serious concerns about the safety of our soldiers and I have disagreed with key aspects of our strategy in Iraq. Last month, during debate over the conflict, I expressed my concern that the administration's current plan to deploy more troops to the region lacks a comprehensive diplomatic strategy to establish peace. Intense diplomacy involving all of Iraq's neighbors and a greater emphasis on the training of Iraqi security forces represent our best hopes for stability in Iraq. The recent announcement by Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice that the U.S. will join in two sets of regional meetings with Iraq and its neighbors is a very encouraging development and I am hopeful that my efforts, and those of my colleagues, have prompted the White House to move in this direction.

I firmly believe that we need a new, robust diplomatic strategy in the Middle East, and I have sponsored legislation that seeks to lift our debate above the existing political rhetoric by focusing instead on productive strategies to secure the country and allow Iraqis to take control of their own destiny. In this way, my legislation would embrace recommendations made by military experts and respected statesmen to pursue a comprehensive strategy to build regional and international support for stability in Iraq, so that our men and women in the military may come home.

Additionally, the most critical issue we will likely deal with over the next several months is whether or not to invoke Congress' power to limit war funding under authority granted by the Constitution. Indeed, several members of Congress who disagree with the war strategy have already stated their intention to cut or "condition" funding for our military as a means of limiting the president's ability to conduct operations in Iraq.

On Feb. 14, I spoke on the floor of the House of Representatives and made clear my opposition to any attempts to cut funding for our soldiers. Such moves to restrict military funding are reckless and amount to nothing more than partisan politics. Although Congress has an important duty to oversee military spending, it is not our job to micromanage the war. Members of Congress may disagree with the president's policies, but undercutting the efforts of our soldiers by restricting their funding is not the answer. Our men and women in the military are putting their lives on the line, and it is critical that Congress continue to support them by providing the resources and funding necessary to execute their missions.

To ensure that we are doing everything in our power to protect the troops, we must be looking for ways to end waste, fraud and abuse in defense spending, and guarantee that our soldiers have the armored equipment they need to conduct their duties effectively. I have been leading efforts in Congress to rein in wasteful spending practices, no-bid contracts and unearned bonuses for defense contractors. I plan to continue these efforts and to make certain that all available resources go where they are needed most; to our military heroes who are serving in harm's way.

As members of Congress, I firmly believe that we should be pursuing meaningful strategies to secure Iraq and bring our troops home, rather than destructive proposals that would hamstring and endanger American soldiers. I will continue to work with both Democrats and Republicans to protect our brave men and women in the military, and I will adamantly

oppose any attempts to cut off funding for American troops who are risking their lives in Iraq.