

Remember our Troops on Independence Day

Although not as famous as the address he would deliver at Gettysburg months later, President Abraham Lincoln, in the midst of the Civil War, used the opportunity of our nation's 87th Independence Day in 1863 to pay tribute to American soldiers. Today, the Fourth of July symbolizes everything that we as Americans cherish and it is vital that we continue to remember our veterans and current soldiers as we tackle the important issues of the 21st century.

And not unlike President Lincoln 144 years ago, our government is facing many crucial challenges that demand effective leadership. Since 2003, thousands of American soldiers have been killed and injured in Operation Iraqi Freedom. While honest minds will disagree over the direction of our strategy in Iraq, it is clear that the American people want a straightforward plan regarding our involvement and long-term interests in the Middle East.

For this reason, I recently joined 44 other Members of Congress - Republicans and Democrats - in introducing legislation that crafts a clear-cut path forward in Iraq. By relying on key recommendations of the Iraq Study Group, this legislation represents the first truly bipartisan proposal for ending this conflict and bringing our troops home.

I believe that it is critical for the U.S. to undertake an intense diplomatic initiative to engage all nations in a collective effort to solve the hardest problems we are facing in the Middle East. This includes working with moderate Muslim countries in the region, to find a fair resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It also means talking to nations who have been agitators in the Middle East, like Syria and Iran, so that we may ease tensions and force these countries to become part of the solution.

Making progress in the Middle East will continue to be difficult, and we owe much to the men and women who have risked their lives to serve in the military. Part of our own history includes overcoming a civil war, a conflict that weighed heavily on President Lincoln's mind when he paid tribute to American independence over a century ago. As reported by the Washington Evening Star, in his 1863 Independence Day address Lincoln remarked, "I say I would like to speak in praise of each of these men, particularizing their deeds, but I am unprepared. I should dislike to mention the name of a single officer, lest in doing so I wrong some other one whose name may not occur to me." As we celebrate Independence Day, there is no better way to describe how difficult it is to express the amount of gratitude we owe to each and every American soldier who has fought for our nation.

Independence Day represents a moment when we reflect on our history, but it should also be a time when we look to the future. As we gather together to watch the fireworks this Fourth of July, let us not forget the challenges we face in the Middle East and those brave soldiers who have served our nation.