

Responsible Iraq Strategy is Crucial -- July 2007

In January, the President put forth a proposal to dramatically increase the American troop presence in Iraq. I voted for legislation disapproving of this troop surge because a military solution alone will not stabilize Iraq. Our men and women in the military have done everything we have asked of them and they have made extraordinary sacrifices, yet progress in Iraq continues to be hindered by terrorist suicide attacks and sectarian disputes. This September, General David Petraeus and Ambassador Ryan Crocker will submit a very important report to Congress regarding efforts to quell violence and reach political compromise in Iraq. This report's findings will be vital as we chart a path forward. And while I am hopeful that the report will show progress, we should not wait any longer to begin developing a responsible post-surge strategy to secure the region and bring our troops home to their families.

One such strategy was put forth by the Iraq Study Group, also known as the Baker-Hamilton Commission, which President Bush asked to develop a comprehensive approach to the conflict in Iraq. The bipartisan Study Group report outlines political, diplomatic and economic steps that both the Congress and the President should be working towards in order to augment our military goals. On June 5th, I joined a group of Democrats and Republicans in introducing the Iraq Study Group Recommendations Implementation Act. This bill would encourage political compromise and greatly expand diplomatic efforts so as to handoff the combat mission to the Iraqis. It is the first bipartisan proposal for ending this conflict and safely bringing American troops home.

Unfortunately, instead of allowing the House to debate the bipartisan Iraq Study Group Recommendations Implementation Act, the leadership in Congress has provided only one option - a hard deadline for our military to withdraw from Iraq. While I believe strongly that we must change course in Iraq and bring our men and women home, it would be a mistake for Congress to think it could disregard the complexity of this conflict by simply picking a random date for withdrawal. A majority of our nation's military and foreign policy experts agree that mandating an arbitrary deadline for military extraction could ignite mass genocide and sectarian chaos throughout the entire Middle East, thereby increasing the likelihood that Americans would have no choice but to intervene again, with even higher stakes.

Clearly, there is no easy solution in Iraq. Still, it is extremely discouraging that the U.S. Congress continues to hold votes on partisan, "symbolic" withdrawal dates, while refusing to consider real strategies for stabilizing Iraq and bringing Americans home. The bipartisan Iraq Study Group bill, which I helped to author, is one proposal that could serve as the framework for a responsible post-surge strategy in Iraq. Other plans, such as Senator Biden's proposal to federalize Iraq, and legislation being advocated by Senators Warner and Lugar to change the mission of our troops are also worthy of debate.

Our men and women in the military, among them hundreds of Delawareans, deserve a strategy that recognizes the danger and complexity of conditions in Iraq. We must get to work on crafting a responsible strategy to bring our soldiers home.

