

## Soldiers Deserve Better Than "Politics as Usual" -- September 2007

The paramount issue on the minds of most Americans is the conflict in Iraq. This week, General David Petraeus and Ambassador Ryan Crocker delivered much anticipated reports to the United States Congress on the status of military and political efforts in the region. Both men are highly respected professionals who have served honorably in Iraq and I believe they offered honest and unbiased testimonies. In the report, General Petraeus described security improvements in certain regions - which I believe is a direct reflection of our dedicated military. The General also stated that troops will begin coming home this month, and will continue to significantly reduce by next summer. In contrast, however, Ambassador Crocker described a complete lack of progress on the diplomatic and political front.

The individuals who defend this nation, and all Americans, deserve a straightforward understanding regarding our involvement and long-term interests in Iraq. Unfortunately, Congress has been consumed by partisan in-fighting, and certain politically motivated groups have only made matters worse by insulting the credibility of our military leaders and playing politics with this crucial issue.

The Iraq war provokes intense and genuine feelings from individuals across the political spectrum. However, "politics as usual" in Washington, D.C. should not be allowed to prevent us from addressing the real challenges we face in the Middle East.

On Thursday, I spoke to the Wilmington Rotary Club and outlined the strategic steps that I believe are necessary to unite Americans and protect our troops. The motivation behind these steps is not to appease any one constituency, but rather to find common ground and chart a course toward meeting the objectives of peace and stability.

First, it is vital that we make clear to the Iraqi government that it must seize responsibility for its own destiny. American soldiers have sacrificed a great deal and it is essential that the Iraqis security forces begin taking control of the day-to-day combat mission.

A crucial part of this objective requires reducing the number of American troops in Iraq and shifting the U.S. combat mission to focus more on tracking and dismantling terrorist organizations. During his testimony, General Petraeus echoed this point and recommended a significant redeployment of U.S. troops in the coming months. As a longtime proponent of a responsible troop redeployment strategy, I am encouraged by the General's proposal and hopeful that it will improve stability in Iraq.

### Redeploying

American soldiers and shifting responsibility to the Iraqi government will be extremely complex and we should avoid further endangering the lives of our soldiers by withholding troop funding or mandating immediate withdrawal dates.

### Second,

the Administration, together with the Iraqi government, must initiate a surge in regional diplomacy. Last December, I was critical of the troop surge plan because it failed to consider key diplomatic objectives, including those outlined by the bipartisan Iraq Study Group. While we have made some progress on the security front in Iraq, General Petraeus and Ambassador Crocker made clear that reconciliation between sectarian groups and outside interference from neighboring governments remain the driving forces of unrest.

### Until

we undertake a truly robust diplomatic and political initiative in the Middle East, our best efforts to improve security in Iraq will be temporary at best. The Iraqi government must come to agreement on key issues, including local governance, economic reconstruction, and oil revenue sharing. Iraq's neighbors must also ramp-up efforts to prevent the flow of weapons and foreign fighters from spilling across their borders.

### Third,

our nation has invested a great deal in this conflict and I feel strongly that Americans deserve a clear assessment of our progress and long-term goals in the region. Congress must exercise proper oversight and make certain that spending decisions and policies are meticulously reviewed to identify instances of waste, fraud, and mismanagement.

### Congress

has been consumed by partisanship and political bickering. Democratic Congressman John Tanner of Tennessee and I recently agreed to bring willing Members of either party together in support of a responsible strategy in Iraq. Although in the days and weeks ahead we will assuredly continue to see partisan activities, it is my hope that our small, but steadily expanding group of centrists will be successful in compelling Members to set-aside politics and focus instead on moving our country forward.

### Our

effort must be bipartisan; "politics as usual" cannot stand as Congress' strategy any longer. Here in Delaware, we determined long ago that working together - putting progress above partisanship - is the only way to get things done. Finding common ground is the solution to bridging the political divide in Washington and the stakes are too high for anything less.