

Rep. Castle Statement on H.R. 4156, FY08 War Supplemental Bill -- November 14, 2007

Mr. Speaker, I rise in opposition to H.R. 4156, the short-term war supplemental appropriations bill. Although I plan to oppose this bill, I am also pleased that its authors included several provisions meant to improve transparency and ensure U.S. troops are adequately trained and mission capable. Hopefully, the inclusion of these provisions signifies the beginning of real progress, and I plan to work with my colleagues to develop a unified approach to address the challenges we face in Iraq.

Our soldiers in Iraq continue to do tremendous work and it is critical that we provide them with the resources they need to improve security. Unfortunately, the bill before us today would delay important troop-protection and equipment funds requested by the Pentagon. According to Department officials, delaying these funds would also force the Pentagon to begin borrowing from its regular defense budget, which in turn could impact important operating funds for troops and military bases.

Additionally, I am concerned that this legislation would condition troop funding on the initiation of an immediate redeployment from Iraq. Although I strongly support a responsible strategy for bringing U.S. troops home, these decisions should not be mandated by Members of Congress without close consultation with our military and foreign policy leaders in the field. Furthermore, the U.S. Commander in Iraq, General David Petraeus, has already set-forth a plan to bring home a full combat brigade this month and at least five brigades by July of next year. Congress should perform strong oversight with respect to the redeployment process, but placing restrictions on our military commanders is not helpful in their efforts to achieve stability and bring troops home.

Still, I support language in the bill that would improve accountability and increase transparency by requiring regular reports on the status of the military's redeployment plans. In the same way, I support sections of the bill that would ensure military units are properly trained and prepared for deployments. Embracing a comprehensive regional security plan and prohibiting torture are also key provisions which I continue to support. In fact, I recently cosponsored legislation identical to the anti-torture provisions included in H.R. 4156.

The leaders of the U.S. Senate have already made clear that this legislation does not have the votes necessary for passage and therefore many of these important provisions will be left on the table. Therefore, I call on my colleagues to embrace the substantive areas of this bill where we can find agreement, and join me in committing to a bipartisan approach for achieving stability.

Mr. Speaker, the Bipartisan Compact on Iraq Debate, of which I am an original author, identifies the areas where Democrats and Republicans have found agreement. Let us embrace these points of agreement and move forward in supporting our troops serving in

combat.