

Daniel Lipinski – Iraq Floor Statement

Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of this resolution, and in support of a new policy in Iraq. Up to this point, the Bush Administration's Iraq policy appears to be one of America's worst foreign policy blunders. More than 3100 of our brave men and women in uniform have been killed, and more than 24,000 have been wounded, many very seriously. And hundreds of billions of dollars have been spent, and in some cases wasted. This has resulted from the tactical mistakes, errors in judgment, and other major missteps by the Bush Administration.

It is painfully clear that a change in strategy in Iraq is needed now. We need a new plan for bringing stability to Iraq and bringing our troops home. Unfortunately, the President's plan to add over 20,000 additional combat troops does not provide this, and therefore I must support this resolution.

I see three main flaws in the President's plan.

First, the Administration has not provided convincing evidence that this surge will succeed after many similar plans have failed. After almost four years in Iraq, the American people are asking, "why should we have faith in this plan and place more troops in harm's way?"

Second, by failing to provide clear benchmarks for success or a timeframe by which we can expect the surge to yield positive results, the President's plan appears to commit our country to a "stay the course" strategy with no clear end in sight. Aid should be tied to deadlines for progress by the Iraqi government.

Third, and most importantly, the President continues to place too much emphasis on a military solution when it is clear that force alone will not solve this crisis. Solutions must support broad international engagement to promote stability and reconstruction in Iraq, and must address political, economic, and religious issues.

Because of the need for such a plan, earlier this year I laid out a set of recommendations, and this week I introduced H.Res. 152 based on these. My proposal consists of three core recommendations:

First, encourage achievement of important goals in national reconciliation, security, and governance by arranging a peace conference for Iraq's ethnic and religious factions, similar to the conference that led to the Dayton Accords. One option for a venue is El Salvador, which has shown a strong commitment to stabilizing and rebuilding Iraq, and has gone through its own recent history of a bloody civil war and ensuing reconciliation. But wherever and however it is done, the political, economic, and religious issues must be addressed if peace and security are to be established in Iraq. And it is essential that more pressure be put on the Iraqi government and all interested parties to find and accept real solutions, so that American forces can begin withdrawal.

The second recommendation is to seek international cooperation to develop solutions for Iraq; this should include calling an international conference that will work on putting together a peacekeeping force and setting up an international reconstruction program. Iraq's strategic position within the volatile Middle East, its potential to become a terrorist safe-haven, its large supply of oil, and the great potential for a humanitarian catastrophe, make security in Iraq a critical international issue. It is time for America to engage the nations of the world to encourage them to come together to work on solutions to this international crisis.

Third, require the Administration to give Congress detailed reports on the situation in Iraq so that informed decisions can be made regarding funding Iraq's reconstruction and deciding when American forces can be redeployed. This new Congress has been vigorously conducting oversight after three and a half years of congressional neglect, but must have the full cooperation of the Administration.

If the recommendations laid out in my resolution are followed, I believe American troops can begin redeployment in 2007, leaving a secure, stable Iraq.

As the US Conference of Catholic Bishops stated, "The search for genuine justice and peace in Iraq requires moral urgency, substantive dialogue, and new directions." Unfortunately the President does not give us this. That is why his plan is discouraging to many Americans, who are very weary of this war. But no one is wearier than our troops and their families. This past weekend I spoke to a soldier who spent 13 months in Iraq and will likely be returning. He told me that it is important to make sure that we let our troops know that they have our complete support. We cannot let anything in this debate be construed otherwise. If this surge occurs even after we pass this resolution, we must continue to support our troops, and pray for them every day, so that by God's grace, they can succeed in their mission.

Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.