

## (March 20, 2007) Lipinski Promotes New Direction for Iraq Policy Before House Foreign Affairs

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Lipinski Resolution Calls for Diplomatic Offensive and Accountability

[WASHINGTON, DC] Today, Congressman Dan Lipinski testified at a House Foreign Affairs Committee hearing in support of his resolution calling for a new Iraq policy. Introduced in February, H.Res.152 calls on the President of the United States to convene a peace conference for Iraqi leaders, diplomatically engage all countries interested in Iraq's future, and provide Congress with greater information regarding the situation in Iraq.

"Rep. Lipinski provided thought-provoking testimony on his legislation concerning the most pressing foreign policy issue that America confronts today - the conflict in Iraq," said Rep. Tom Lantos, Chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee. "The legislation is thoughtful and serious. I appreciate this opportunity to hear from him, and the Committee will consider the legislation carefully."

Congressman Lipinski's proposal has also received praise from former Congressman and the co-chair of the Iraq Study Group, Lee Hamilton. In a letter to Congressman Lipinski, Mr. Hamilton wrote: "I commend you for your excellent proposal. I agree with you completely on the importance of broad-based pressure from a variety of international sources to push Iraqi leaders in the direction of national reconciliation."

"The War in Iraq is one of the most important issues our country has faced in decades, and I thank the Foreign Affairs Committee for taking the time to consider my proposal," said Lipinski. "I believe that my resolution offers the best chance for stability in Iraq and a timely return home of our troops."

The text of the testimony follows.

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I would like to thank Chairman Lantos, Ranking Member Ros-Lehtinen, and the rest of the members of the Committee for inviting me here today. H.Res.152, which I introduced earlier this year, calls upon the President to engage in a diplomatic offensive on Iraq and to provide Congress with the information that we need to reassert our previously neglected oversight role.

Up to this point, the Bush Administration's Iraq policy appears to be one of America's worst foreign policy blunders. More than 3200 of our brave soldiers 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.

It is painfully clear that we need a new plan for bringing stability to Iraq and bringing our troops home. H.Res.152, calls on the President to take the following three actions:

- 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.

- Second, seriously engage everyone with an interest in the region - which includes countries all around the world - to seek solutions and cooperation on Iraq.

- Third, require the Administration to provide Congress with detailed reports on the situation so that we can make informed decisions about America's involvement.

I include more details of the three-part plan in my written testimony, but I will provide a brief outline here.

First, the United States should join with other nations to arrange a peace conference of Iraqi leaders; the purpose will be the achievement of agreements on important goals such as a reasonable distribution of oil revenue, fair and just law enforcement, and plans for provincial and local elections, in addition to other reconciliation initiatives. Broad-based pressure from a variety of international sources resulted in the 1995 Dayton Accords that ended the war in Bosnia. Much like the current conflict in Iraq, the war in Bosnia was fueled by ethnic and religious divisions. With similar international pressure, Iraq's warring factions could be brought to the table. Peace discussions could take place in a country seen as a neutral arbitrator, such as El Salvador, which has proven its commitment to Iraq's stability. El Salvador could provide an easily secured environment, and it has special standing because of its own experience with a civil war.

The second action the Administration should take is a concerted effort to utilize America's considerable diplomatic resources to rally positive international involvement. Iraq's oil reserves, strategic location in the Middle East, and its potential to become a failed-state breeding ground for international terrorism dictate that much of the world has an interest in Iraq's success.

There has been some progress made on this front with the March 10th conference, but a much more serious effort must

be made by the U.S. to arrange a larger, longer-lasting conference that includes higher ranking officials. In rallying support, the U.S. must talk to all of Iraq's neighbors, including Iran and Syria. Engagement does not require ceding to all parties' demands, but talks are necessary if we are to have the possibility of increased international cooperation.

An international conference should work on regional security issues as well as putting together an international reconstruction plan. Inadequate infrastructure and economic hardship remain despite America spending hundreds of billions of dollars; clearly, it is time for Iraq and other countries to step up their reconstruction efforts.

This leads to the third part of the resolution, requiring the Administration to give Congress comprehensive reports addressing critical issues such as security conditions and reconstruction progress. One of the reasons we have reached this point is that Congress gave the Administration free rein without asking questions. The new Congress has acted differently, and must continue to do so - not for the sake of politics, but to ensure accountability. We should require the Administration to provide monthly written, detailed reports, in addition to appearing before committees to answer questions. This will allow Congress to make informed decisions regarding America's Iraq policy.

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."

I believe that if the President follows the guidance in this resolution - a diplomatic offensive and cooperation with congressional oversight - we will be able to leave Iraq a stable, secure country.

I thank the committee for this opportunity and for your consideration of this resolution.