

March 29, 2007 Opening Statement of Chairman John P. Murtha to Secretary Robert Gates and General Peter Pace

For Immediate Release

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OPENING STATEMENT OF CHAIRMAN JOHN P. MURTHA TO SECRETARY OF DEFENSE ROBERT GATES AND
CHAIRMAN OF THE JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF GENERAL PETER PACE HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS
SUBCOMMITTEE ON DEFENSE

110th Congress

Thursday, March 29, 2007

Mr. Secretary

General Pace,

As you know, today's hearing is focused on the Fiscal Year 2008 budget, and not funding for the war. In the future, however, this committee is committed to ensuring that for the purpose of planning and honest accounting, war time funding must be included in the base budget. The fact is that this war cannot be viewed in the vacuum of supplemental spending bills. This War has or will impact the future of Defense programs and spending and the future of our military.

Today, because of the Administration's mishandling of this war our United States military is weaker than it was five years ago. Our forces are stretched thin and are caught in what is now an Iraqi civil war. It is a war that cannot be won solely by the United States military and one that can only be fought by the Iraqis. Our military is being forced by this Administration to abandon its own well established guidelines that have been in effect for years. These guidelines, when followed, maintain our military strength and superiority and ensure that our forces are combat ready and mission capable.

I am deeply concerned about the readiness of our forces to decisively defeat future threats. While our Navy and Air Force can be used to project power, there is no substitute for boots on the ground. I was an early proponent of increasing our overall end strength because we are doing too much with too little.

We have lost too many lives in this war and far too many have received serious and debilitating injuries. These are not just numbers. Each number has a face that should forever be engrained in our consciousness for their sacrifice, dedication and valor. They are the faces of sons and daughters, mothers and fathers, whose lives have been forever altered. These are the faces of those who are loved and cherished by their families and their communities. Every one of

these faces deserves the best that this country can offer. They deserve missions that are clear and achievable, the most appropriate training, the best equipment and the necessary time at home with their families and loved ones, to rest and reconstitute.

I am deeply concerned that this Administration has concentrated too heavily on Iraq and not heavily enough on Afghanistan and other growing conventional threats; Iran, North Korea, Russia and in particular China.

We are desperately short of equipment at home, which not only impacts our ability to respond to disasters at home, but also our ability to train our troops on the equipment they will be using in combat. Our strategic reserve is severely depleted. This is an alarming situation and one that needs urgent rectification. Over the past several appropriations cycles, it has been this committee who has put in the funding for the 30,000 additional troops and the money needed for equipment rehabilitation and replacement.

Serious problems such as these do not come to light and are not solved on their own. I was the one who found the shortages in body armor and the shortages in armor for our military vehicles, during a trip to Iraq in August 2003. A Washington Post reporter was the one that uncovered the conditions at Building 18 at Walter Reed. This is unacceptable. The days of rosy scenarios and misguided optimism must end. Mr. Secretary, you are viewed as an honest, straight-shooting and tough leader. We are counting on you to provide this Congress with honest assessments, realistic recommendations, cooperation and most importantly open communication and dialogue.