

November 26, 2007 Getting Back to Business --- Ending the War in Iraq

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With Thanksgiving behind us, Americans are preoccupied with the holiday season. What's true about this year, as with every holiday season since 2003, is that tens of thousands of American troops are on the ground in Iraq (130,000 in November 2003 and 175,000 in November 2007), and the President refuses to provide the American people with a responsible plan to bring them home.

Though the President declared "Mission Accomplished" after only 42 days of this war, the American people have now waited 1,713 days since the initial invasion for him to provide us with a responsible plan for transitioning our forces and bringing them home.

The Democratic Congress has a plan. The House of Representatives passed a \$50 billion spending bill that provides for the safety of our troops on the ground while requiring the President to begin redeployment of our troops, with a goal of having them home by Christmas 2008. Unfortunately, Senate Republicans continue to stand by the President rather than the American people's call for a new direction in Iraq.

Our troops have done their job. It is not a question of whether or not American troops can be successful. They have been. It is now the Iraqis who need to be as well. The purpose of the surge was to provide a window for the Iraqi Government to make the political reconciliations necessary to achieve stability. Unfortunately they are paralyzed by political stalemate.

As former top U.S. Commander in Iraq Lt. General Ricardo Sanchez, U.S. Army retired, said this weekend, "the improvements in security produced by the courage and blood of our troops have not been matched by a willingness on the part of the Iraqi leaders to make the hard choices necessary to bring peace to their country. There is no evidence that the Iraqis will choose to do so in the near future or that we have an ability to force that result..."

"The funding bill passed by the House of Representatives last week, with a bipartisan vote, makes the proper preparation of our deploying troops a priority and requires the type of shift in their mission that will allow their numbers to be reduced substantially," said General Sanchez. "Furthermore, the bill puts America on the path to regaining our moral authority by requiring all government employees to abide by the Army Field Manual on interrogations, which is in compliance with the Geneva Conventions."

As we begin the fifth consecutive holiday season without a redeployment plan from the President, we are faced with two choices. Either we continue, 1,713 days later, to stick with a policy that sacrifices American blood and resources while putting no pressure on the Iraqi Government to make the political, economic, and diplomatic changes necessary for stability. Or we can listen to the American people, pass the Democratic plan to transition our forces, and bring them home by Christmas 2008.