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COCHRAN INTRODUCES AMENDMENT TO STRIKE WITHDRAWAL DEADLINE

WASHINGTON, DC – Senator Thad Cochran (R-MS), Ranking Republican on the Senate Appropriations Committee, introduced an amendment today that would end an effort to place a deadline on U.S. troop withdrawal from Iraq. The amendment would strike language included in the Senate-reported version of the Emergency War Supplemental, which would lead to a Presidential veto of the bill and prevent necessary funding from getting to troops on the battlefield.

In his statement on the Senate Floor, Cochran said the following about his amendment:

“Madam President, before announcing his new plan in Iraq, the President sought input from his top military and civilian advisors along with Members of Congress, foreign leaders, and other military and foreign policy experts. He acknowledged there was no easy solution to the situation in Iraq and the Middle East, and he determined a temporary deployment of additional U.S. troops in Iraq to support Iraqi security forces would provide a new window of opportunity for Iraqi political and economic initiatives to take hold and reduce sectarian violence. This plan provides the best hope to bring stability to the country and to hasten the day when our troops will come home.

“It is clear to me that it is in our national interest to support the President's new strategy to help provide an opportunity for political and economic solutions in Iraq and for more effective diplomatic efforts in the Middle East region. Of course, we know there are no guarantees of success, but according to the national intelligence estimate and the perspective of some of our most experienced foreign policy experts, maintaining the current course or withdrawal without additional stability in Iraq will be harmful to our national interest and to the entire Middle East region. We need to do what we can to help stabilize this situation and bring our troops home.

“As a beginning point for this strategy to work, we should show a commitment to success. I support the President’s new initiative and urge the Senate to give it a chance to work. This does not mean we should not monitor the situation or that the plan should not be adjusted as new developments occur, but we need to let the forces move forward to brighten the prospects of stabilizing Iraq and bringing our troops home.

“As commander in chief, the President needs our support. I support his efforts and the efforts of our troops. The Senate should provide the resources necessary to accomplish this mission and the funds to do so are included in this bill. Troop levels and missions need to be left to General Petraeus and his commanders, who ought to have the flexibility to react to the situation on the ground and to determine how to deploy troops as needed. Congress should not be tying the hands of our commanders or limiting their flexibility to respond to the threats on the battlefield.

“The inclusion of unnecessarily restrictive language will ensure a Presidential veto, we're advised. In testimony before the Appropriations Subcommittee on defense, we were told that the funding provided by this bill is needed by the end of April. We need to be speeding this funding to our troops rather than slowing it down by returning to a debate already settled by the senate by a recorded vote.”

The language to be removed by my amendment is nearly identical to S.J. Res. 9, which, on March 15, Senators defeated by a vote of 50-48.

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