



U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations

PRESS RELEASE

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Chairman Robert C. Byrd Opening Statement

Appropriations Committee Hearing on Iraq/Afghanistan War Supplemental

Washington, DC.... U.S. Senator Robert C. Byrd, D-W.Va., Chairman of the Senate Appropriations Committee, today delivered the following opening statement during a Senate Appropriations Committee hearing titled, "President's FY 2008 Supplemental Request for the Wars in Iraq and Afghanistan." Testifying before the Committee to discuss President Bush's anticipated war supplemental were The Honorable Robert Gates, Secretary of Defense; The Honorable John Negroponte, Deputy Secretary of State; and General Peter Pace, USMC, Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff. Earlier this week, Senator Byrd spoke on the Senate floor about future war funding and announced that, "This Senator will support no more blank checks for Iraq."

Byrd's opening statement:

Secretary Gates, General Pace, Deputy Secretary Negroponte, thank you for coming here today. I would like to issue a special welcome to General Pace, who will soon retire as Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff after 40 years of service in the Marine Corps. Today marks his last appearance in uniform before the Appropriations Committee. General Pace has been a tireless advocate for those serving in harm's way. On behalf of all the members of the Appropriations Committee, I thank you, General Pace, for your outstanding service in defense of our great nation, and wish you the very best in your future plans.

The Appropriations Committee meets this afternoon to hear testimony on the President's supplemental appropriations request for the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. The Congress has now appropriated over \$450 billion for the war in Iraq. The President has requested another \$150 billion of emergency funding for the wars. It is my understanding that the President intends to seek another \$45-50 billion, bringing the total emergency request for just one year, ONE YEAR, to nearly \$200 billion.

I am disappointed that, four days before the new fiscal year, we still have not received the President's revised request. I considered postponing this hearing until the President

submits his request, but there are so many fundamental flaws in the President's Iraq policy and the execution of that policy, that I decided we should proceed with this public airing of the issues.

To date, President Bush has not requested one dime to fund the cost of his so-called surge-policy next year. I believe the surge is a fatally failed policy. While our troops continue to operate with professionalism and heroism, the mission that the President has given them is flawed at its core. We can not create a democracy at the point of a gun. Sending more guns does not change that reality. This Committee will NOT rubber stamp every request that is submitted by the President.

If the Congress were to approve the President's revised budget request, total funding for the war in Iraq will exceed \$600 billion. Six hundred billion dollars; more than 3,800 American deaths; more than 27,000 Americans wounded. Staggering costs, but even those costs fail to include the many indirect costs of this war that will ultimately be borne by the American people: larger Veterans Administration costs, interest payments on the additional debt, higher oil prices, the long-term expense of rebuilding our battle-weary fighting forces, the losses and stresses on our military families, and the incalculable long-term damage inflicted on our image and good reputation in the world. All of this for a war that General Petraeus, two weeks ago, could not say had made Americans safer.

Now we hear the President talking about a fifty-year commitment in Iraq, similar to our military involvement in Korea. The Congressional Budget Office estimates that such a long-term presence could cost well in excess of \$2 trillion. That's quite a burden this President is leaving to our grandchildren, whose future will have to be mortgaged to pay for it.

The question we should have foremost in our minds is the one that General Petraeus was unable to answer: Is America more secure as a result of this massive, astronomical investment? I believe the answer is crystal clear. We are not!

We are now four and a half years into this war, and seven months into the President's surge-strategy that sent an additional 30,000 troops into Iraq. In January, the President said that this military escalation was a temporary strategy to give the politicians in Baghdad a breathing room-to forge a political consensus. That rationale vanished as it became clear that no progress on the political front is on the horizon. The new buzz word is bottom up,+and a vague hope that incremental progress in the provinces will somehow miraculously lead to national reconciliation.

The President and his supporters claim that we are now, finally, on the cusp of progress and that we must continue to stay the course. Call me a skeptic, but we have heard this tune before. The White House's reasons for our military occupation in Iraq shift with the winds, but the message is always stay the course, continue the calamity.

The American public was sold on this war with metaphors about mushroom clouds and fanciful visions of our troops being greeted as liberators. The fear tactics and half-truths continue, as the President suggests that terrorists will follow us here-if we withdraw from Iraq, and the Administration grasps at every straw to demonstrate progress-on the ground.

As Mark Twain once said, there are three kinds of lies: lies, damned lies, and statistics. Are we really seeing progress toward a stable, secure Iraq? Is our continuing

occupation encouraging the Iraqi people to step up and take responsibility for their own country? Are Iraq's leaders doing the hard work necessary to build a political consensus?

What do we mean when we say "support the troops"? Our brave fighting men and women have been given a near impossible task, which they have performed with dedication, professionalism, courage, and honor. The Congress has provided everything the generals have asked for and more, at times going beyond the President's budget to supply body armor and mine-resistant vehicles for our soldiers. The President has taken that support for our men and women in uniform to imply support and even validation of his policy. Now he talks about some sort of indefinite American occupation of Iraq. How appalling that this President, who started his Administration by saying that he would never allow our troops to be under the control of another government, now holds our troops in Iraq hostage to an Iraqi government that can not govern.

In the fifth year of this terrible, misguided conflict, this Senator believes that it is time for a thorough evaluation of the Bush war in Iraq. If we are serious about supporting our troops, we owe them nothing less.