

## February 16, 2007 - Slaughter: Sending Troops on Wrong Mission Isn't Worthy of their Sacrifice

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Friday, February 16, 2007

Slaughter: Sending Troops on Wrong Mission Isn't Worthy of their Sacrifice

Washington, DC - Rep. Louise M. Slaughter (D-NY-28), Chairwoman of the House Rules Committee, today spoke out against President Bush's planned escalation of the war in Iraq.

"Two thirds of Americans, myself included, do not trust the President's judgment when it comes to this war," Rep. Slaughter said. "It is a conflict that has been defined by mismanagement and misinformation since before it began, and the results have been devastating for the Iraqi people and for our men and women in uniform."

"Corruption, fraud, and a lack of oversight have haunted every aspect of our involvement in Iraq, and have posed a mortal risk to our troops. They have faced armor shortages for years in part because Pentagon contracts were given to companies that weren't up to the job."

"Our troops are being asked to do something that no army can do: find a military solution to a political problem. If the mission we have given our brave soldiers is the wrong one - and the past four years prove that this escalation is the wrong mission - then why would we help our enemies by refusing to change course?"

"If that mission is the wrong one, then how is supporting the mission the same as supporting the troops? If that mission is the wrong one, then how is demanding a change giving up? Giving up means the opposite: it means insisting on a failing strategy."

"We owe it to our soldiers to speak honestly about this conflict, and to refuse to give this Administration another blank check to send our troops on the wrong mission."

The complete text of Rep. Slaughter's remarks, as prepared, are included below:

This week on the floor, the House will provide our nation with a clear, unambiguous answer to the most important question facing the country: will this body side with the President's approach to the war in Iraq, or will we demand change?

Since Tuesday, we have been debating President Bush's plan to escalate the war in Iraq. It is a debate that was long overdue, and one which the American people, and our troops risking their lives in Iraq and Afghanistan, deserve.

The simple reality is that two thirds of Americans, myself included, do not trust the President's judgment when it comes to this war.

It is a conflict that has been defined by mismanagement and misinformation since before it began, and the results have been devastating for the Iraqi people and for our men and women in uniform.

We know that top administration officials, men like Douglas Feith, abused the public trust and misused the work of the intelligence community when making the case for war.

Since then, every piece of evidence suggests that the strategy employed by this Administration has failed in Iraq.

The sectarian strife in Iraq has not abated, with routine bombings that kill dozens of civilians. The unemployment rate in Iraq as of December ranged between 25 percent and 40 percent. Baghdad only has a few hours of electricity per day.

And our troops have continued to pay the price for being caught in the middle of another nation's civil war. 84 troops were killed last month. 48 more have been killed this month. Six men and women from my district have been killed since this war began.

At the same time, M. Speaker, corruption, fraud, and a lack of oversight have haunted every aspect of our involvement in Iraq. Stuart Bowen, the Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction, has uncovered 10 billion dollars in reconstruction funding that simply disappeared once it was sent over-seas.

Projects critical to the rebuilding and stabilization of Iraqi society have been handed out to private firms using no-bid contracts - firms that failed to live up to their responsibilities. To site just one example: the construction of a new Baghdad Police College to train Iraqi security officers, a 75 million dollar project of vital importance to Iraqi stability, was completely undermined by a private construction company. The company's work was so shoddy that the classrooms it built posed a health risk to their students.

That same fraud and lack of oversight have for years posed a mortal risk to our troops. In January of 2006, we learned that 80 percent of the U.S. Marines who had died from upper-body wounds in Iraq would have lived if they had proper body armor.

A Pentagon report released last month stated once and for all that our troops have been sent into battle time and again without proper armor or equipment - a reality which still exists today.

This hasn't simply been a case of going to war with the army you have, M. Speaker. We have faced these armor shortages in part because Pentagon contracts were given to companies that weren't up to the job, and couldn't meet the demands of this conflict.

My friends on the other side of the aisle have made two arguments against this resolution. They have told us that to condemn the President's surge means that this Congress is giving up in Iraq. And they have told us that we cannot support the troops without supporting their mission.

Our troops have done their jobs in Iraq, and risked their lives countless times. But now, they are being asked to do something that no army can do: find a military solution to a political problem. If the mission we have given our brave soldiers is the wrong one - and the past four years prove that this escalation is the wrong mission - then why would we help our enemies by refusing to change course?

If that mission is the wrong one, then how is supporting the mission the same as supporting the troops?

If that mission is the wrong one, then how is demanding a change giving up? Giving up means the opposite: it means insisting on a failing strategy.

And this escalation of the war is the same failed strategy. All it will do is put more of our young men and women in harm's way. That reality has led it to be opposed by a bi-partisan majority of this House. As Republican Representative Steve LaTourette recently said, "This isn't a fresh approach. This is more of the same."

This plan has even been publicly opposed by numerous high-ranking generals, men like General John Abazaid, General Colin Powell, and General James T. Conway, the Commandant of the Marine Corps. He recently said that the Joint Chiefs, quote "do not believe that just adding numbers for the sake of adding numbers - just thickening the mix - is necessarily the way to go," end quote.

We need to stop this surge, and change what we are doing in Iraq. We need to promote a political solution and a diplomatic solution to that nation's problems.

We need aggressive Congressional oversight of everything that is done there.

If we don't do that, M. Speaker, then how can we be sure that money spent will protect our troops instead of being squandered by corrupt contractors?

And we need to stop asking our soldiers to do the impossible.

Speaking honestly about this war won't undermine the morale of the troops. It is our duty to speak honestly in this House - to speak honestly about the burdens we ask our soldiers to bare.

And at this moment in history, to give this Administration yet another blank check to send our troops on the wrong mission - M. Speaker, it wouldn't be worthy of the dedicated soldiers this body claims so sincerely to support.

I yield back the balance of my time.

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