



October 27, 2006

Dear Friends:

Our country is in the fourth year of the Iraq War and the concerns of the overwhelming majority of Americans regarding the conduct of the war, the cost in lives and tax dollars and the negligence of the current "stay the course" strategy is shared by me and many of my colleagues in Congress.

Where are we today? Iraq is in the midst of a brutal and deadly civil war. To characterize it as something else, as we hear from the Pentagon and White House, is nothing more than an argument over semantics. The facts are gruesome: more than 2,800 U.S. troops killed with casualty rates rising, some \$400 billion in tax dollars borrowed to fund the war, and more than 100 Iraqis are known to be killed (often executed) daily by insurgents, militias and death squads within the Iraqi government. More than 140,000 U.S. troops are operating in the midst of this chaos and bloodshed. Right now there are at least 23 separate militias fighting in Iraq and a recent poll of Iraqis conducted by the University of Maryland found that 6 in 10 Iraqis approve of attacks on American forces.

The recently leaked National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) which was compiled by 16 separate intelligence agencies articulates clearly what a majority of Americans knew from simply watching the news -- the presence of U.S. troops in Iraq is inspiring more terrorists to be recruited around the world and is making America less safe. I have personally read the classified version of the NIE and the current "stay the course" policy of the Bush administration is out of touch with reality. While President Bush is determined to keep U.S. troops in Iraq until he leaves office in 2009, there is no doubt in my mind that we need a new strategy to confront the threat of terrorism and achieve stability in Iraq.

President Bush needs to bring our troops home from Iraq safe and soon. Our troops have no business serving as referees in an Iraqi civil war. I believe U.S. troops must start withdrawing from Iraq in 2007, allowing enough time for Iraq's government and their neighboring nations -- Turkey, Syria, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and Iran -- to participate in a regional strategy to contain and eventually resolve the current Shiite-Sunni warfare and atrocities. There is no "military option" left in Iraq for U.S. troops to focus upon. Containing the violence and seeking a political solution inside Iraq, with external political pressure applied by the U.S. along with neighboring nations, is the best option available.

Other steps must be taken as well to remedy this foreign policy disaster. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld should be immediately fired by President Bush. New non-partisan civilian leadership at the Pentagon needs to be in place to restore confidence to our military establishment, Congress, the American public and our allies around the world that we are taking a new course in Iraq.

Second, the Bush administration should enter into a dialogue with Iran and Syria. Both nations border Iraq and both have a large stake in Iraq's stability. Chaos and violence spilling into these countries is clearly contrary to their interests. A dialogue with Iran and Syria can do no harm and may in fact start an easing of tensions the can create an opportunity for positive U.S. engagement in the region.

Finally, the suffering of the Iraqi people at this moment in time is horrific. A recent study by Johns Hopkins University estimates that some 600,000 Iraqis have died since the U.S. invasion in 2003. Iraqis must find the solutions that will allow them to govern themselves and ensure security and stability. The overwhelming majority of Iraq's Sunnis and Shiites believe the presence of U.S. troops is fueling the violence and therefore should end. Iraqi sovereignty should be respected. Those who say the withdrawal of U.S. troops will create a civil war are blind to the current situation and in a state of denial.

Tragically, the failed "stay the course" policy will continue to be the Bush administration policy for the foreseeable future. The most significant "variable" that could pressure a major shift in policy is the make-up of the new Congress that takes office in January. A change in the leadership in Congress could very well force dramatic change in President Bush's current incompetent and dangerous handling of Iraq.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Betty", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Congresswoman Betty McCollum
Serving Minnesota's Fourth Congressional District

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