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'Energy of democracy'

By Jack Kingston

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"Scoop" Jackson must be spinning in his grave. The late Democratic senator would be shocked by his party today. The Democratic Party, armed with fresh polling numbers and firmly in the grip of Michael Moore and Cindy Sheehan, has sought to establish a new position for itself on Iraq and the war on terrorism, which encourages our enemies and threatens the morale of our troops.

Their unhinging began when a newspaper reported that Democratic leader Howard Dean was so "anxious to make political capital of the tragedy of the 2,000th American death in Iraq that he couldn't even wait for the official announcement of the soldier's death before publicly criticizing President Bush and the war." Over the past few weeks, Democrats have tried to revise history and paint the president as a "liar" for drawing the exact same prewar intelligence conclusions they did.

The realization that the radical left has completely hijacked the Democratic Party boiled over when Democratic Rep. Jack Murtha, a well-known defense hawk who serves on the same congressional defense spending panel as I do, called for our troops in the field to admit defeat and cut and run. In fact, House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi has already wrapped her arms around the cut-and-run proposal.

This is the latest example of a party which has been overcome by antiwar extremists, providing daily fodder to international media outlets like Al Jazeera, which emboldens our enemies and sends a defeatist message to our troops.

The Democrats, nationally, have embraced a new strategy for the war on terrorism: Lose, leave and wait. Democrats want to admit defeat, dishonoring the sacrifices of our soldiers. They want us to leave by cutting and running, signaling to the world that the United States no longer stands for freedom, democracy and the defense of human rights in the face of terrorism. And instead, Democrats prefer the French model — to wait for the terrorists to bring murder and destruction to the homefront.

This week, I traveled to Iraq as part of a bipartisan delegation to gauge the morale of our troops, talk with the officers and soldiers about the war, and witness the progress in Iraq and that of the Iraqi people. The bottom line: The war in Iraq is a much different war than the one we read about in the media. Progress is being made.

I represent the first district of Georgia, which has five major military installations, including Fort Stewart, the home of the Army's 3rd Infantry Division. The 3rd ID is currently responsible for maintaining order and defeating the insurgency in Baghdad and is led by Army Maj. Gen. William Webster, a friend of mine.

In Baghdad, I met with Maj. Gen. Webster, where he informed me that over 50 percent of the security in the capital city of Iraq is being done by Iraqi forces. Further, while in Mosul, the commanding officer pointed out that over 25 percent of the security is being conducted by Iraqis.

We later learned that coalition forces are training 9,000 Iraqi citizens to be Iraqi soldiers

and more than 10,000 citizens are already signed up to be the next batch of Iraqi soldiers as soon as spots are available.

These numbers are indicative of true progress.

The generals and troops made one point clear: We cannot set arbitrary withdrawal timelines. The Democrats' call for withdrawal sends the wrong message to terrorists — that America is a paper tiger with a glass jaw. We owe it to the Iraqi people to be resolute and to continue our tremendous progress there.

Yesterday, the president issued the National Strategy for Victory in Iraq, which articulates America's plan for success in Iraq to "clear, hold and build." Our troops are working to clear areas from terrorist control, to hold those areas securely and to build lasting, democratic Iraqi institutions. I agree with this strategy for victory.

Iraq is moving toward the establishment of a democratic government. On Oct. 15, the Iraqi people approved their first democratic Constitution with over 60 percent voter participation. And later this month the Iraqis will elect the first democratic parliament in that troubled region. More than 228 political parties have emerged and put forth candidates to fill the 275-seat Council of Representatives.

I witnessed Iraqi candidates campaigning in the streets. I saw their campaign posters. I felt the energy of democracy taking hold.

We have also made significant progress in helping Iraq improve essential services — such as stable electricity, cleaner water, operational hospitals, better schools, improved sanitation and a working transportation infrastructure.

In the next year, we may reduce the number of troops stationed in and around Iraq. And in the next six months, instead of leaving, I think our troops will be able to take a step back as the Iraqi forces continue to step forward. But our troops will be the first to tell you that their mission ends only with victory and not a day sooner.

In closing, Maj. Gen. Webster reminds us that, "Our troops are trying to get this accomplished. They believe they're doing the right thing. The soldiers believe they're helping." So do I, and so does America.

Rep. Jack Kingston, Georgia Republican, is a member of the Defense Appropriations Committee and vice chairman of the House Republican Conference.

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