



For Immediate Release
December 2, 2005

Completing the Mission

By Congressman Joe Pitts

The President's critics in Congress have been trying to refocus the national debate on our involvement in Iraq recently by offering a number of proposals to withdraw our troops.

These proposals have come in a variety of forms – some calling for immediate withdrawal, others for a more measured exit strategy – but they all share one thing: each proposal calls for President Bush to set a timetable to withdraw our troops from Iraq.

To its credit, the Bush administration has welcomed this debate. But while open to disagreement from the other side of the aisle, the President, Vice President, and other members of the administration have made it clear in recent days that they believe setting arbitrary timetables for leaving Iraq is the wrong policy.

President Bush firmly believes that we must stay in Iraq until the job is completed and he has acted on that conviction with unwavering leadership. In recent days and weeks, President Bush and Vice President Cheney have begun an effort to explain their case for staying the course in Iraq.

I appreciate this administration's willingness to explain its policy decisions to the American people and I think it is worthwhile to review the case for completing the mission in Iraq.

Most importantly, we must keep in mind the stakes involved in this fight. Certainly the cost of winning this war has been great, and I mourn the lives of all of our brave men and women who have paid the ultimate price for this cause. But we must remember that while the cost of winning is high, the cost of losing would be incalculable.

The President was not exaggerating when he said during a recent speech that the terrorists we fight in Iraq and elsewhere have chosen to wage a war against humanity.

The insurgents and terrorists we fight in Iraq are known to have ties to al Qaeda. The people we see beheading innocent civilians on television and blowing themselves up on crowded Iraqi streets share the same ideology as those who have flown planes into the World Trade Center and Pentagon, bombed commuter trains in Madrid, and slaughtered tourists in Bali.

Reminding ourselves of the nature of the enemy we face in Iraq strengthens our determination to see this enemy defeated. As President Bush said recently, "This is an enemy without conscience and they cannot be appeased." He is right, and I commend him for his persistent realism about the nature of the threat we face.

It is also important to understand why these brutal killers have chosen to make Iraq the central front in the war on terror. Having lost their base of operations in Afghanistan due to the exemplary success of coalition forces in Operation Enduring Freedom, the terrorists are now seeking to find safe harbor elsewhere.

Their aim in Iraq is to put up enough resistance to cause us to lose our resolve and pull out before Iraqis are fully prepared to provide for their own defense. With America gone, the door would be open for terrorists to move in and establish a base from which to carry out further attacks against the United States and other civilized nations.

Clearly we must not allow this to happen. When we correctly understand the terrorists' ultimate motive for seeking control of Iraq, it becomes clear that our success there relates directly to our security here at home.

Finally, I believe we must express our commitment to total victory in Iraq in the clearest terms because anything less is simply unfair to our brave men and women in uniform who are putting themselves in harm's way each day.

I distinctly remember, as a young Air Force Officer flying combat missions in Vietnam, the outrage I felt when I heard the politicians in Washington undermining the war effort for political purposes.

We must not do the same to our troops fighting to protect our way of life today. In war there will always be setbacks, but we must keep in mind the tremendous progress our forces have made in Iraq.

It was not long ago that Saddam Hussein's brutal regime oppressed 26 million Iraqis and threatened the stability of an entire region. Today, Saddam is in a prison cell, Iraqi citizens are voting in democratic elections, and a free democracy is budding in a region historically hostile to liberty.

Much progress has been made, but more is left to do. As the President has said repeatedly, we must not accept anything less than total victory in Iraq. Let us honor the brave men and women who have worked so hard and sacrificed so much to get us this far. Let's complete this mission.

###