DeFazio: Bushâ€™s â€˜stay the courseâ€™ strategy in Iraq not working

by Bend Weekly News Sources

U.S. Congressman Peter DeFazio issued the following statement on Wednesday about President Bush's proposal to escalate the war in Iraq by sending more combat troops to Iraq:

"Tonight, the president announced his latest strategy for victory in Iraq. This announcement comes just over a year after he released his last strategy for victory in Iraq, in November 2005. Tonight, the president was eager to appear to be changing course in Iraq in response to the concerns of the American people. However, his new proposal is anything but -- it's a status quo, more of the same, stay the course plan.

Congressman Defazio speaks about the Iraq resolution on the house floor in June 2006."This 'stay the course' strategy is clearly not working. In the last year, the violence in Iraq has intensified, the political situation is more volatile and deteriorates by the day, and the civil war is expanding. The president has proposed benchmarks for the Iraqi government, but since the Iraqi government has ignored past commitments and there are no consequences for failure, these benchmarks are meaningless.

"It is past time to end the open-ended commitment the president has made in Iraq.

"The U.S. military cannot impose freedom, security, and unity in Iraq. They cannot force the Sunnis, Shia, and Kurds to put aside their 1,400-year-old conflict. Only the Iraqis can. The U.S. military should not be forced to remain in Iraq essentially as an army for one side of a civil war. Given the president's pledge of unlimited support, Iraqi politicians and security forces will continue to fail to take the necessary steps to solve their differences, establish an effective and inclusive government, end sectarian violence, and create a secure and prosperous society.

"The president and his allies justify the continuing U.S. presence in Iraq by claiming that if we don't fight there, we'll have to fight here at home. However, the Iraqi Sunni rejectionists, Saddamists, and nationalist Shias, who combined make up the vast bulk of the insurgents and militias committing violence in Iraq, just want U.S. military forces out of their own country. They have no interest in attacking the U.S. homeland.

"It is also misleading to say that if the U.S. leaves, Osama bin Laden will take control of Iraq. There is no chance that the Shias and the Kurds, who represent around 80 percent of Iraq's population, will allow foreign terrorist elements to take control of the country. Even the majority of the Sunnis have grown tired of foreign terrorists operating in Iraq.

"Even worse, the president will withdraw U.S. troops from Afghanistan to send to Iraq, despite a resurgence of the Taliban and al Qaeda, the true architects of 9/11.

"As I said a year ago, instead of an open-ended commitment, we should announce a timeline for bringing our troops home over the next six to 12 months. The Bush administration has always set timelines for political developments in Iraq, arguing they were necessary to focus the energy of Iraq's leaders and to force compromises. We need to do the same on the military side.

"In the interim, front-line combat positions in Iraqi cities and towns should be manned by Iraqis, not U.S. troops. The training and equipping of Iraqi security forces should be accelerated and the sectarian balance should be improved. The U.S. must renounce any interest in constructing permanent bases in Iraq, accelerate reconstruction spending and grant the bulk of reconstruction contracts to local companies employing Iraqis.

"The U.S. must also engage in robust diplomacy with all factions in Iraq, except the foreign terrorists and domestic al-Qaeda elements, and work with Iraq's neighbors in an effort to bring about political reconciliation among Sunnis, Shias, and Kurds.

"Our troops have done all that has been asked of them in Iraq. Saddam Hussein is dead. His allies are on the run or in prison. The threat from WMDs in Iraq is non-existent. Arguably, the war that Congress authorized has been won. It is time to turn over control of the country to the Iraqis to build their own future, and bring our troops home.

"With the abject failure of the administration to formulate a new policy in Iraq, the responsibility falls to Congress to stop its ill-conceived escalation of the war."

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