

Wyden weighs in on State of the Union, disappointed in Bush's Iraq plan

by Bend Weekly News Sources

Statement of U.S. Senator Ron Wyden (D-Oregon) in response to President George W. Bush's State of the Union speech:

"At community meetings from Oregon to Maine, two topics dominate: Iraq and health care. I want to work in a bipartisan manner on both issues and I want to keep my door open to the Bush Administration on both of these issues.

"Thus far, the President has not convinced me that overstretching our military even further is going to make a bit of difference in Iraq and I will oppose the troop increase that he has proposed. Iraq is on the brink of all-out civil war and only the Sunnis, Shiites and Kurds can make the tough choices necessary to reach a political settlement and stabilize the country.

"The Iraqis won't make these tough choices until they see that U.S. troops won't be there forever. We need to start bringing U.S. troops home now to motivate Iraqi leaders to do what it takes to bring stability to Iraq. Our courageous troops have been a crutch that Iraqis have leaned on for too long.

"It disappoints me that the President is suggesting an escalation, which the military commanders, and even the Iraqi government, don't support.

"On another key issue, I appreciate that the Bush Administration has consulted with me on health care issues and I think that by working together, there's a real opportunity to fix health care.

"To fix health care, there are four essentials. The test of any health reform proposal should be: (1) does the proposal get affordable coverage to every American; (2) does it hold down health care costs; (3) does it strengthen the health care system over time; and (4) does it encourage wellness and prevention? It is not clear from tonight that the President's plan passes any of these tests.

"I have communicated my concerns to the Bush Administration about how to fix the broken market. That includes reforming the tax code, ending insurers' cherry picking only healthy people and only providing sick care instead of prevention and wellness programs that keep people healthy.

"My proposal, the Healthy Americans Act, is fully paid for, gets everyone coverage like their Members of Congress and slows the rate of growth so coverage can be affordable today and tomorrow. And individuals

would be purchasing insurance focused on prevention and wellness as well as treatment. The lessons of 1994 are that you can't do health reform by robbing Peter to pay Paul - and those who think they are going to lose coverage are not going to support any further erosion of their coverage. Politically, the President's plan won't be accepted by most Americans who have coverage now.

"I want to work with the Bush Administration in a constructive way to build on what I've introduced."

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