

Statement on Signing the Honest Leadership and Open Government Act of 2007

September 14, 2007

Today I signed into law S. 1, the Honest Leadership and Open Government Act of 2007. This bill represents some progress towards ethics, lobbying, and earmark reform, all of which I strongly support. Strengthening the ethical standards that govern lobbying activities and beginning to address meaningful earmark reform are necessary steps to provide the public with a more transparent lawmaking process. The essence of successful ethics reform is not laws and restrictions, but full disclosure. The legislation includes minimal improvements in the area of disclosure, both for lobbying and earmarks. But there is still more to be done, and I will work with the Congress to improve upon this legislation.

For example, the bill holds Members of the Senate and executive branch employees to a much higher standard of conduct than Members of the House. The specific bill language is confusing, and I believe these increased restrictions would have a negative impact on recruitment and retention of Federal employees. I urge the Congress to make these standards more uniform and less confusing and to do so in a way that will not discourage public service.

In addition, this bill would have the effect of unreasonably burdening sitting Presidents' and Vice Presidents' reelection campaigns. I look forward to working with Congress to amend these provisions to provide a reasonable process for allocating the cost of Presidential and Vice Presidential campaign travel that is consistent with security needs.

I am pleased that the Congress has begun to make progress in bringing greater transparency to the earmarking process. However, this bill falls far short of the reform that American taxpayers deserve. I am concerned that there are potential loopholes in some of the earmark reforms included in this bill that would allow earmarks to escape sufficient scrutiny. This legislation also does not address other earmark reforms I have called on Congress to implement, such as ending the practice of putting earmarks in report language.

I thank members of both parties who worked on this legislation and look forward to working with the Congress to further advance ethics, lobbying, and earmark reform.

NOTE: S. 1, approved September 14, was assigned Public Law 110–81.

Message to the Congress Transmitting the Benchmark Assessment Report *September 14, 2007*

To the Congress of the United States:

Consistent with section 1314 of the U.S. Troop Readiness, Veterans' Care, Katrina Recovery, and Iraq Accountability Appropriations Act, 2007 (Public Law 110–28) (the "Act"), attached is a report that assesses the status of each of the 18 Iraqi

benchmarks contained in the Act and declares whether satisfactory progress toward meeting these benchmarks is, or is not, being achieved.

The second of two reports submitted consistent with the Act, it has been prepared in consultation with the Secretaries

of State and Defense; the Commander, Multi-National Force—Iraq; the United States Ambassador to Iraq; and the Commander, United States Central Command.

GEORGE W. BUSH

The White House,

September 14, 2007.

The President's Radio Address *September 15, 2007*

Good morning. This week, General David Petraeus and Ambassador Ryan Crocker testified before Congress on the progress of America's strategy in Iraq, including the surge in forces. They agreed that our coalition faces formidable challenges. Yet they also said that security conditions are improving, that our forces are seizing the initiative from the enemy, and that the troop surge is working.

Because of this progress, General Petraeus now believes we can maintain our security gains with fewer U.S. troops. He's recommended a force reduction of 5,700 troops in Iraq by Christmas, and he expects that by July we will be able to reduce our troop levels in Iraq further, from 20 combat brigades to 15. He's also recommended that in December we begin a transition to the next phase of our strategy in Iraq, in which our troops will shift over time from leading operations to partnering with Iraqi forces and, eventually, to overwatching those forces.

I have accepted General Petraeus's recommendations, and I have directed that he and Ambassador Crocker deliver another report to Congress in March. At that time, they will provide a fresh assessment of the situation in Iraq and of the troop levels we need to meet our national security objectives. The principle that guides my decisions on troop levels is return on success. The more successful we are, the more troops can return home. And in all we do, I will ensure that our commanders on the

ground have the troops and flexibility they need to defeat the enemy.

Anbar Province is a good example of the progress we are seeing in Iraq. Last year, an intelligence report concluded that Anbar had been lost to Al Qaida. But local sheikhs asked for our help to push back the terrorists, and so we sent an additional 4,000 marines to Anbar as part of the surge. Together, local sheikhs, Iraqi forces, and coalition troops drove the terrorists from the capital of Ramadi and other population centers. Today, citizens who once feared beheading for talking to our troops now come forward to tell us where the terrorists are hiding. And young Sunnis who once joined the insurgency are now joining the army and police.

The success in Anbar is beginning to be replicated in other parts of Iraq. In Diyala, a Province that was once a sanctuary for extremists, is now the site of a growing popular uprising against the extremists. In Baghdad, sectarian killings are down, and life is beginning to return to normal in many parts of the city. Groups of Shi'a extremists and Iranian-backed militants are being broken up, and many of their leaders are being captured or killed. These gains are a tribute to our military, to Iraqi forces, and to an Iraqi Government that has decided to take on the extremists.

The success of a free Iraq is critical to the security of the United States. If we were to be driven out of Iraq, extremists of all strains would be emboldened, Al Qaida could find new recruits and new