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House of Representatives

The House met at 12:30 p.m. and was called to order by the Speaker pro tempore (Ms. CORRINE BROWN of Florida).

DESIGNATION OF SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

The SPEAKER pro tempore laid before the House the following communication from the Speaker:

WASHINGTON, DC,
March 19, 2007.

I hereby appoint the Honorable CORRINE BROWN to act as Speaker pro tempore on this day.

NANCY PELOSI,
Speaker of the House of Representatives.

MORNING HOUR DEBATES

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the order of the House of January 4, 2007, the Chair will now recognize Members from lists submitted by the majority and minority leaders for morning hour debates. The Chair will alternate recognition between the parties, with each party limited to not to exceed 30 minutes, and each Member, except the majority leader, the minority leader, or the minority whip, limited to not to exceed 5 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Maryland, the majority leader, Mr. STENY HOYER.

AFTER FOUR YEARS, NO MORE BLANK CHECKS

Mr. HOYER. Madam Speaker, 4 years ago tonight, our Commander in Chief, President Bush, gave the orders that instigated Operation Iraqi Freedom. Whether they supported the President's decision or not, all, and I emphasize "all" patriotic Americans prayed for our success as well as the safe return of our brave service men and women. And 4 years later, we still do. However, today our success in Iraq is as elusive as it ever was and has ever

been over the past 1,460 days. More than 3,200 American soldiers have given the ultimate measure of sacrifice, and more than 24,000 have been injured. The American taxpayers have spent more than \$400 billion on this war, and the President asked for an additional \$245 billion, including a \$100 billion wartime supplemental spending bill that will be considered on the floor later this week. And thousands of Iraqis have been killed, while literally millions have fled to neighboring countries, triggering a refugee crisis.

Yet despite the sacrifice and hardship, how much progress has been made? Just last week, the Department of Defense reported record levels of violence and hardening sectarian violence in the fourth quarter of 2006, stating, "Some elements of the situation in Iraq are properly descriptive of a civil war."

Administration officials themselves admitted last week that political goals that were to have been met by the Iraqi government this month will take significantly longer to achieve, said the administration. The National Intelligence Estimate tells us the war has increased the global terror threat rather than reduce it. And General Schoomaker, the Army Chief of Staff, has issued strong warnings about the effect of this war on America's overall military readiness and our ability to respond to emerging strategic threats. Indeed, IKE SKELTON of Missouri, the chairman of the Armed Services Committee, said that the situation with respect to America's readiness of its Armed Forces is grave and troubling. Meanwhile, the American people have wearied of administration claims that are divorced from reality. "Mission accomplished" and "the insurgency is in its last throes" are just two of the assertions that have proved, sadly, very badly mistaken.

From the outset, the administration refused to commit a force commensu-

rate with the threat it articulated, and now it asks for patience while a fourth troop escalation seeks to accomplish what three others could not. It profoundly miscalculated the cost of this war. It went to war without a plan for postwar stabilization and security. And perhaps most egregiously, the administration sent our troops into battle without proper equipment.

Madam Speaker, given the repeated miscalculations by the administration over the last 4 years, and given the situation on the ground in Iraq, today it is past time, way past time for the United States Congress, the people's representatives, to insist on accountability and a new direction in Iraq.

As one who supported the authority of the President of the United States to remove Saddam Hussein, and in listening to the President's State of the Union when he said not one of us who voted voted for failure, that was accurate. I certainly did not vote for failure. And I want success and seek success, but the administration's policies have not garnered success. Therefore, more blank checks and questioning obeisance by this Congress would constitute, in my opinion, a dereliction of our responsibility and our constitutional duty. Thus, this Congress, for the first time in 4 years, will have the opportunity this week to change America's course in Iraq and to insist that the Iraqis take control of their own destiny.

The U.S. Troop Readiness, Veterans' Health and Iraq Accountability Act offers the best way forward in Iraq. I urge Members of both sides of the aisle to support it. And I would call the attention to many of our Members to a vote in June of 1997, where so many Members on the Republican side of the aisle voted to set a timetable, set a date certain for withdrawal or exit strategy in amendments sponsored by Mr. BUYER of Indiana in which all the present leaders of the Republican

This symbol represents the time of day during the House proceedings, e.g., 1407 is 2:07 p.m.

Matter set in this typeface indicates words inserted or appended, rather than spoken, by a Member of the House on the floor.



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Party who were in the Congress at that time voted for.

In short, the legislation that will come before us is saying much the same, but after 4 years of a lack of success, why do I say a lack of success? Secretary Gates in his confirmation hearing said that we are not winning in Iraq. That was just a few months ago, and he was right. Again, I would reiterate in my opinion because we have never, not at the outset, not over the last 4 years has this administration deployed assets sufficient to meet the challenge. This legislation is designed to protect our troops, requiring troop deployment to adhere to the Defense Department's current standards for training, not new standards, not new timelines, not new requirements, but the Department of Defense currently articulated standards to keep our troops safe, trained and well equipped, standards for equipment and armor, with the President required to certify if he believes the Nation's security requires DoD standards be waived. None of us want to stand in the way if a crisis is imminent and deployment must be accomplished. However, all of us want to see our troops safe, equipped and trained.

The bill also holds the Iraqi government accountable, measuring its performance by the benchmarks President Bush outlined in his January 10 speech, again, the President's benchmarks, not those imposed by Congress, but the administration's own benchmarks for the Iraqis.

In addition, the legislation provides a responsible strategy for a phased redeployment of U.S. forces, provides greater protections for our troops and veterans, and refocuses our efforts on fighting al Qaeda and the Taliban in Afghanistan.

There are those of course who will claim that this legislation attempts to micromanage the war. They are wrong. There is nothing in this legislation that will be considered this week that micromanages this war. Neither General Petraeus nor any of his commanders on the ground or at CENTCOM will in any way be constrained from the tactics or the strategies that they deem best to employ on the ground in Iraq. The only strings attached are those benchmarks and standards endorsed by the President himself, our Commander in Chief. And let me add, is there anyone who believes that Congress would be strongly asserting itself today if the President's policy was succeeding. The answer, I think, is clear.

This legislation is the justified response of the people's representatives to a policy that is failing and a President who insists that we must continue to stay the course. There is not a new policy here. As I said before, we have increased troops on three different occasions. Unfortunately, lamentably, it did not bring the stability and security that it was planned to bring.

There are others who will argue that this bill will compromise our position

in the war on terror. To them I say that this legislation goes above and beyond the President's funding request, supporting our troops deployed at the tip of the spear, and reaffirming our commitment to fighting and defeating al Qaeda. And there certainly are those who will argue that this bill doesn't go far enough, that even one more day of fighting is one too many. To them I say respectfully that this legislation for the first time sets a date for the responsible redeployment of American troops from Iraq. It is not tomorrow, it is not the day after, but it is a date, a date that provides the Iraqis with the time they need to ready themselves for the responsibility they must assume.

Madam Speaker, the Iraq war is already longer than our participation in World War I, World War II and the Korean War. The specter of 5½ years in Iraq, if our troops remain deployed until August 31, 2008, can hardly be called a precipitous cut and run.

As we enter the fifth year of this war, let us insist on a policy designed to achieve success. As we enter the fifth year of this war, let us respond to the plea of the American people for a new direction in Iraq. And as we enter the fifth year of this war, let us demonstrate to the world that American strength and American wisdom are not set in opposition. I urge my colleagues, vote for a new direction in Iraq, support the U.S. Troop Readiness, Veterans' Health and Iraq Accountability Act.

Mr. President, I did not vote for failure. I pray for the safety of our troops and for their success, but I also strongly believe that the legislation we will bring to this floor on Thursday is a reasoned, thoughtful way forward, a way forward that was initially suggested by the Iraq Study Group, five Republicans and five Democrats, headed up by former Secretary of State and adviser to this administration and previous administrations, James Baker. It is time that the Congress of the United States does not simply rubber-stamp the President's request, but on behalf of the American people exercises its best judgment to make policy for a change, to make policy for success, and make policy to ensure victory against those who would terrorize Americans, terrorize our Nation, and terrorize the rest of the world through the employment of their terrorist acts.

RECESS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 12(a) of rule I, the Chair declares the House in recess until 2 p.m. today.

Accordingly (at 12 o'clock and 45 minutes p.m.), the House stood in recess until 2 p.m.

□ 1400

AFTER RECESS

The recess having expired, the House was called to order by the Speaker pro tempore (Ms. WATSON) at 2 p.m.

PRAYER

The Chaplain, the Reverend Daniel P. Coughlin, offered the following prayer:

Lord of goodness and harbinger of peace, be with the Congress of the United States this week. Guide decisions that will resist evil, establish good order, and strengthen relationships between people of good will. May the impulse toward reconciliation empower Members that they may lead this Nation to transform unjust structures and restore respect for the dignity of all men and women created in Your likeness.

Lord, through rational argument, may our government and others across the globe reawaken the spiritual energy in people that is needed to become true promoters of peace and justice throughout the world. We pray, calling upon Your Holy Name, now and forever. Amen.

THE JOURNAL

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair has examined the Journal of the last day's proceedings and announces to the House her approval thereof.

Pursuant to clause 1, rule I, the Journal stands approved.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Will the gentleman from South Carolina (Mr. WILSON) come forward and lead the House in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Mr. WILSON of South Carolina led the Pledge of Allegiance as follows:

I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

HEAR YOUR GENERALS, MR. PRESIDENT, AND END THE WAR IN IRAQ

(Ms. SHEA-PORTER asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Ms. SHEA-PORTER. We are at the anniversary of the beginning of the war in Iraq. Things are not going well. Our troops are strained. Our generals are speaking to the President of the United States, who does not seem to be listening. I would like to read this to the President of the United States on this day.

General Peter Pace, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, was asked last month by a House panel whether he was comfortable with the preparedness of Army units in the United States, he stated simply: "No, I am not comfortable." Mr. President, that is one of your generals. General Peter Schoomaker, Army Chief of Staff, testified before the Senate Armed Services Committee on Thursday: "We have a strategy right now that is outstripping the means to execute it." Mr. President, that is one of your generals.

The Army Vice Chief of Staff, General Richard Cody, described as