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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 (Mr. RUPPERSBERGER).

DESIGNATION OF SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

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

WASHINGTON, DC,
January 16, 2007.

I hereby appoint the Honorable C.A. DUTCH RUPPERSBERGER 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 New Jersey (Mr. PALLONE) for 5 minutes.

AFGHANISTAN AND THE WAR ON TERROR

Mr. PALLONE. Mr. Speaker, I did not support the resolution authorizing the Iraq war, and I continue to believe it was a mistake, and that we should redeploy our armed forces out of Iraq as quickly as possible. Needless to say, I adamantly oppose the President's latest proposal to escalate the war, the so-called "surge."

Now, part of my concern over the Iraq war is that it continues to distract U.S. policy, both foreign and domestic, from more important concerns. The threat of international terrorism is real, and it came home to us vividly after 9/11, but the focal point of our war against terrorism should be Afghanistan, not Iraq.

While our soldiers continue to die in Baghdad and we spend hundreds of billions of dollars in Iraq, we are neglecting the situation in Afghanistan and its environs, particularly Pakistan, where bin Laden, al Qaeda and the Taliban grow stronger every day.

Mr. Speaker, last Saturday the New York Times did a front page story on the NATO struggle in Afghanistan, which stressed how the Taliban were coming back. The likelihood is there will be a new spring offensive by the Taliban as early as February, next month. The article went on to say that corrupt and ineffective leadership have turned people against the central government and its U.S. allies, and that U.S. reconstruction efforts are a failure.

Mr. Speaker, if there is any place where the United States should be stepping up its efforts, both in terms of resources and manpower, and where we would have international support, again, in terms of other countries' troops as well as other countries' resources and money, it would certainly be Afghanistan. The U.S. was directly attacked from there by bin Laden and al Qaeda operatives, and they were of course harbored by the Taliban.

So you might ask, Mr. Speaker, why does President Bush get on national TV last week and stress the need for a surge in Baghdad and reconstruction dollars for Iraq, and not prioritize Afghanistan instead?

In addition, President Bush continues to appease the military dictatorship in Pakistan, which effectively encourages and provides safe harbor in its frontier territories to the Taliban.

President Bush talks about democracy in Iraq, but what about democracy in Pakistan, which is much more likely to achieve democracy if the U.S. did not prop up the Musharraf dictatorship.

The media, Mr. Speaker, has reported many times that al Qaeda and the Taliban operate freely out of Pakistan where they maintain training camps and receive the support of Pakistan's ISI, the equivalent of the American CIA.

Last fall, the Pakistan government entered into an agreement with the Taliban. In return for not conducting raids into Afghanistan, they were guaranteed effective control of certain frontier regions of Pakistan. However, the incursions by the Taliban into Afghanistan continue while the Musharraf government left the Taliban alone in these areas of Pakistan.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that the U.S. has the opportunity for nation-building in Afghanistan that will continue to elude us in Iraq. Afghanistan's economy is increasingly dependent on drugs; in other words, the opium crop which has expanded while the normal economy falters. Afghanistan needs a major infusion of resources from the United States and its allies to prevent a Taliban resurgence.

I simply ask, Mr. Speaker, as we debate President Bush's surge in Baghdad over the next few weeks, think about the alternative in Afghanistan. Let's not forget where the real U.S. and global threat of terrorism both started and continues this day.

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 38 minutes p.m.), the House stood in recess until 2 p.m.

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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