

**MADAM SPEAKER:**

As Chairman of the Armed Services Subcommittee on Air and Land Forces, my overriding concern on every issue that comes before us is whether and how it supports our men and women in uniform.

Every decision about equipment procurement, endstrength or must meet that test: Does it support our troops?

The question before us today — increasing U.S. forces in Iraq by 21,500 combat troops and, depending on whom you listen to, somewhere between three and 28-thousand support personnel — fails that test in every respect.

Both the immediate and long-term effects of the war in Iraq on our nation's military preparedness are evident and drastic. Extended deployments, premature redeployments and sustained combat under unbelievably harsh conditions have taken a terrible toll on our forces and their equipment.

The results are an overstretched U.S. Army and Marine Corps with no fully mission-capable reserve forces, and an urgent need for billions of dollars to repair or replace worn and damaged helicopters, tanks, other armored vehicles, including up-armored Humvees, and other equipment.

The real and immediate concern is that forces now being deployed as part of President Bush's "surge" will not have the equipment they need when they get here. They'll have to "borrow" from other units.

Chairman Ortiz of the Readiness Subcommittee and I just returned from an inspection of two of the Army's busiest repair depots; Corpus Christi, Texas, where they repair, upgrade and modernize military helicopters the venerable UH-1N Huey and UH-60 Blackhawks to the AH-64A Apache and AH-1W Super Cobra;

And Anniston, Alabama, which calls itself, "Pit Crew of the American Warfighter," where they maintain and repair the Army's heavy and light tracked vehicles, including the M1 Main Battle Tank and the Bradley Fighting Vehicle.

The long-term concern is that if other national security threats materialize, we would not be prepared to respond effectively.

Congress has now considering the Administration's fiscal year 2008 Defense Budget Request for \$481.4 billion, and supplemental requests for Iraq and Afghanistan of \$93.4 billion for 2007 and \$141.7 billion for 2008, a total of \$716.5 billion. Add that to the \$426.8 billion plus already spent — all borrowed.

This is for a war of choice conceived in ideological zeal, cloaked in misinformation and administered with breathtaking incompetence. It is tragic that we haven't had a policy in Iraq worthy of our men and women in uniform. They're the victims in this...they and our children and grandchildren who will get stuck paying for it.”