

Rep. Neil Abercrombie

Talking Points on Military Readiness

- For the last three years, the Bush Administration and majority party in Congress have lived in an alternate universe when it comes to their adventure in Iraq. They have simply refused to face many of the unpleasant consequences.
- One of the most serious, long-lasting and costly in many ways is the alarming deterioration in our nation's military readiness.
- To date, the American taxpayer has spent nearly \$500 billion on the war in Iraq, in addition to annual defense appropriations that are nearly as large.
- But the war is running up another bill above and beyond the \$10 billion per month we're already spending. More than three years of continuous troop and unit deployments in Iraq and Afghanistan have had a terribly corrosive effect on military strength, both on our military personnel and the equipment they depend on.
- How serious is it? Two-thirds of Army units in the United States are not combat ready because of severe shortages in equipment, training and troops.
- Not one of the Brigade Combat Teams in the United States is trained, equipped and ready to be deployed.
- In fact, the Army has had to extend combat deployments in Iraq just to maintain the current force level.

- The Marine Corps is calling 2,500 reservists back to active duty so their units in Iraq can be fully manned. These are reservists who have already served on active duty and are trying to return to their civilian lives.
- The Army has been forced to pay huge re-enlistment bonuses to keep highly-trained military personnel from walking away from the service.
- In 2005, the Army missed its recruiting goal by more than 8% — almost 6700 soldiers — and in 2006, the Army and Air National Guard continue to miss their recruiting goals.
- The war in Iraq has taken a terrible toll on military equipment, as well. The harsh Iraqi climate, marked by extreme temperatures and frequent sandstorms, causes abnormal wear on precision components, such as high-speed turbines in helicopter and tank engines.
- Increased usage and the weight from additional life-saving armor cause equipment to wear out in Iraq at up to nine times the normal rate.
- In other words, our tanks, helicopters and weapons have aged 27 years since they were deployed to Iraq.
- To complicate matters, when many units rotate back to the U.S., they have to leave their equipment behind for the units rotating in.
- As a result, 40% of the Army's total ground equipment is now in Iraq or Afghanistan. That means even longer continuous use; less opportunity for maintenance and refit.
- 66% of the Army National Guard's equipment is in Iraq or Afghanistan, which means the Guard has only one third of its equipment in the U.S. for training or national emergencies and disasters.
- Since the start of the war, the Army has lost over 1,000 wheeled vehicles and nearly 100 armored vehicles.

- The Army Chief of Staff has testified that he will need \$17.5 billion to reset and restore equipment to proper fighting condition, plus \$12 billion a year until at least two years after the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have ended.
- The Marine Corps will need \$11.7 billion to reset and restore its equipment.
- We've reached this situation because the White House and Congressional Republicans have insisted on fighting two wars at the same time — without fully paying for either one.
- It requires both time and money to fix the problem, and the military is being given neither one. In fact, the administration cut \$4.9 billion from the Army's request in the 2006 supplemental appropriation.
- In early August, the National Security Advisory Group, a distinguished panel chaired by former Secretary of Defense William Perry that includes former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, former NATO Commander General Wesley Clark and former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General John Shalikashvili, characterized the decline in military readiness as “a serious failure of civilian stewardship of the military;
- And the panel said the Bush Administration's “failure to adequately support the soldiers who are risking their lives for this nation is unacceptable.”
- The Advisory Group called on Congress to “restore the Army's readiness to the levels needed to safeguard this nation's interests at home and abroad.”
- President Bush likes to remind us that the world has grown more dangerous since 9/11. I'd remind the president that the world has become even more dangerous since March 19, 2003, when we invaded Iraq.

- And, I'd suggest that we have an obligation to the men and women we've sent to war to furnish them with the best equipment, logistical support and training in the world.
- To do any less would be immoral. It would be negligent and dangerously short-sighted. Because, when we allow such deterioration in America's first line of defense, we put at risk our national security.