



News from

Congressman Ron Kind

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Cong. Kind Statement on President Bush's Upcoming Iraq Address

Washington, DC – U.S. Rep. Ron Kind (D-WI) issued the following statement in advance of President Bush's anticipated speech this evening, in which he is expected to propose an increase in U.S. troop strength in Iraq:

"With the swearing-in of the 110th Congress, comes a peaceful change of power in our country. Last week the House of Representatives made history by electing the first female Speaker of the House and by seating the first Muslim-American, Rep. Keith Ellison from Minnesota. Symbols can have a powerful impact. Through the force of our example - rather than our military - we can encourage the principles necessary for meaningful change and reform in the Middle East, such as the empowerment of women and religious tolerance in their societies.

"Militarily, this needs to be a critical time of transition for us in Iraq. Our troops are doing a terrific job under difficult and dangerous conditions. During my three visits to Iraq, I consistently heard from our military command that our objective cannot be achieved through military means alone. The Iraqis must be willing to make crucial political compromises to find a way to coexist peacefully and work together among the various factions to move the country forward.

"A truly new direction in Iraq should emphasize the training of Iraqi security forces in order to help them assume responsibility for their own security. That will enable us to redeploy our troops, first within Iraq, off the frontlines on the main streets of Baghdad, but where they can still serve in a supporting role. Then we can redeploy our forces out of country so we can refocus our goals on our real national security threats – Osama bin Laden and the al Qaeda organization, which is currently reconstituting itself in the global network.

"In order to achieve these goals, we should set benchmarks of progress for the Iraqis as well as involve the nations of the Arab League to help with reconstruction, security, and to add legitimacy to the Iraqi political process. After all, it is not in their interest to see a full-blown civil war at their doorstep that could spread amongst Sunni and Shia populations in the region. Additionally, we should try engaging Iran and Syria so they can play a constructive rather than destructive role in securing a peaceful and stable Iraq. As the Iraq Study Group concluded, we have nothing to lose by this approach.

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“Now the President is proposing another troop “surge” in Iraq. The President has tried troop surges before in 2004, 2005, and 2006 - without success. I do not understand how a fourth time will lead to any other result. Such a strategy has received a cool response from military commanders who are feeling the strains of an over-stretched military. What we need is a president who is capable of calling an “audible” in Iraq rather than the same play over and over again. If President Bush wants to escalate the war in Iraq by exposing more troops to danger and spending billions more in taxpayer dollars, he must convince the Congress and the American people that this time will be different.

“It has been clear for some time that we need a new direction in Iraq and a comprehensive strategy on how to positively engage the Muslim world before it is radicalized for future generations. There is too much at stake to continue down a road with no end in sight. This past week I attended services for a young Marine from Loyal, Wisconsin - the 18th military funeral in the Third Congressional District since the war began and the second in that community. If I don’t have to attend another military funeral I would be supremely happy. The consequences of the status quo are too great; the patience of the American people is wearing thin; the time for serious change in Iraq is now.”