

Mahoney Speaks on Iraq Resolution

Congressman Tim Mahoney

Remarks on House Floor

February 15, 2007

I want to thank the gentleman from Texas for yielding time to me. Mr. Speaker, I normally rise to speak on behalf of the people of Florida's 16th Congressional District. Today, I rise to begin a conversation, not only with my colleagues, but with my constituents.

This week, this legislative body, the "People's House," is engaged in a great debate over the President's decision to stay the course in Iraq by escalating the number of troops.

I have, over these past few days, heard many arguments as to the wisdom of the President's decision to do so. But the one message that all who have spoken agree with, Democrat or Republican, liberal or conservative, is that our brave men and women in uniform have done a magnificent job fighting in Iraq and around the world to protect our lives, our culture, and our country.

I have heard my colleagues argue that the mere act of debating the President's decision to escalate the war sends the wrong message to our troops and the wrong message to our enemies. To these colleagues, I say, do not underestimate the power of democracy. The power of freedom of speech. The very powers we are fighting to give the people of Iraq. Debate sends the message of strength, resolve, and commitment.

This debate is about finding the best way for America to win the War on Terror. I agree with the President that the world is a dangerous place and we need to take the war to the terrorists and those who support terror. But I disagree with the President that by sending more troops to police the civil war in Iraq, America is any closer to winning the War on Terror.

I come to this conclusion as a result of consultations with our military leaders, our diplomats, and those in the White House responsible for executing the President's policies. I come to this conclusion from talking to our men and woman in uniform who have served with distinction.

Democracy can only happen when a people want it. We have seen time and again that a people who yearn for democracy will break the yoke of tyranny and liberate themselves from their oppressors.

America has invested the lives of over 3,000 of its best young men and women, sustained over 20,000 casualties and spent nearly \$400 billion on the Iraq War. We have rid the Iraqi people of a cruel tyrant and have given them the opportunity to live in a democracy.

American men and women securing a street corner in Sadr City will not change the hearts of the Sunni or Shia. Additional troops will not secure democracy. Only the men and woman of Iraq can do that.

Now is the time for the Iraqi people to stand and demand democracy

It is time for America to move forward in our fight against terror.

It is time to focus on eliminating terrorists in Iraq, Afghanistan or wherever they are harbored.

It is time to bring Osama Bin Laden to justice for the crimes he perpetrated on 9-11.

We need to gather our strength and send a clear message to our enemies that their continued efforts to support terror and engage in activity against America or her allies will result in certain and swift justice.

This President needs to do what his father did in the first Gulf War and what President Clinton did in the Balkans: that is to demonstrate leadership by engaging in diplomacy. This President needs to listen to the sage advice of the Baker-Hamilton commission and use America's power and prestige to bring the world together in support of the Iraqi people. The world needs to know that America will provide a democratic Iraq, and those who support her, with political, economic, and military support.

I want my friends in Stuart, Okeechobee, Sebring, LaBelle, and Punta Gorda to know that I am here today because democracy requires us to speak up and speak out and you deserve to have a voice in this debate.

In speaking out, I am supporting our President by letting him know that we are committed to winning the War on Terror.

That we will support a strategy that has diplomacy as its cornerstone, not troop escalation.

And that America will not quit until we have vanquished all who use terror to achieve political gain.

We want the Iraqi people to know that this is their moment to grasp democracy and should they choose to do so, the American people will continue to support them in their efforts to build a better life for their children.

Tomorrow, my colleagues and I will take the important first step in showing the President that we support our troops but we do not support his plan to invest more American lives to mediate a civil war.

Make no mistake; this vote is binding as it binds me and my colleagues to our constituents by forcing us to take a stand.

Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

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