

I Support Benchmarks, Not Blank Checks

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Last week, I voted in opposition to Speaker Pelosi and the majority of my Democratic colleagues by joining a group of conservative Democrats and moderate Republicans in passing an emergency supplemental bill to fund our troops in Iraq and Afghanistan. As an outspoken critic of the Administration's Iraq policy, I was unwilling to play chicken with the President over critical funding for our brave men and women in uniform.

This bill demonstrates that when moderates from both parties come together, we can deliver what the American people want; a new strategy to get America refocused on winning the War on Terror and an end to putting our brave men and women's lives in jeopardy to referee a religious civil war.

When I announced my candidacy in 2005, I proposed a plan that had diplomacy as its cornerstone. I called for the President to refocus our efforts on fighting terrorism and to do what his father did by bringing nations in the region together in support of a fledgling Iraq. The Baker-Hamilton Commission report concurred and laid out a plan that set benchmarks with a clear plan to stabilize Iraq and refocus our mission.

The good news is that not only did we get the funding the troops needed, we got the President talking to our adversaries and for the first time in over five years he is being held accountable for his promises to the American people.

The bill requires the President to report to Congress in July and again in September on the progress in meeting his benchmarks. After the President files his last report, Congress is required to vote again on whether to continue supporting the President's 'surge' plan.

It is time that America takes the next step in ending the use of our troops to police a religious civil war. It is time to listen to the sage advice of Baker-Hamilton Commission to end our misguided and mismanaged policies on Iraq. It is time to rebuild our military. It is time for America to focus our military might on bringing Osama bin Laden to justice, destroying Al Qaeda, and holding states that sponsor terrorism accountable.

Congressman Tim Mahoney

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