

March 31, 2006

Dear Friend:

This past weekend, I traveled to Iraq as a member of a delegation of U.S. senators, governors and representatives, led by Senator John McCain (AZ). I am more convinced than ever that the Administration's foreign policy failed to truly plan for the sectarian violence, for the political instability, and for the insurgency that is now enveloping Iraq. Hope does exist, but if we are to see success, we must change course now.

Although the trip was relatively short, our delegation visited several areas of Iraq and met with many leaders. We spent the first day in the green zone of Baghdad, meeting with Zalmay Khalilzad, the American Ambassador to Iraq, General George Casey, Commander of the Multinational Force in Iraq, Iraqi President Jalal Talibani, and Iraqi Prime Minister Ibrahim Al-Ja' Afari. The second day was spent in Fallujah and Al Hillah meeting with military leaders and others tasked with reconstruction efforts.

During my trip, I also had the honor and privilege of meeting with a number of soldiers from New Mexico and across the country. These individuals serve with sincerity, with dignity and with honor, and I was absolutely amazed by the upstanding manner with which they handle their duties. For sure, these men and women are heroes, and I am proud of their service. All of our thoughts are with their families as we hope every soldier returns home safely and swiftly.

Through their service, there has been some progress. Think about what has happened since our troops arrived over three years ago. Saddam Hussein and his sons have been put out of commission. Iraqis have held three elections and adopted a constitution. We trained over 224,000 Iraqi military personnel and more than 100,000 police and security officers. We have spent billions of dollars in reconstruction efforts.

That is why this visit solidified my belief that it is time for the Iraqi people to build on this progress, step up and take control of the situation in their country. With Saddam Hussein and his power structure gone, we have unleashed religious, sectarian and ethnic tensions and conflicts which must be resolved politically by the Iraqi people and their leaders. Our troops have done what they can to create the conditions for success, but ultimately this is the Iraqis' fight. As President Kennedy said of South Vietnam in the summer of 1961, "In the end it is their country and they are going to have to fight for it."

To bring about that successful change, I believe we must do two things. First, we must begin a safe redeployment of our troops to outside of Iraq with the goal of

completing redeployment by the end of 2006. Second, we must put the Iraqi people on notice that they must take a bigger lead in ending the violence plaguing the country and working to instill a government that will evolve into a stable democracy. We will of course assist the Iraqis during the redeployment with assistance and training to give them the best chance at success.

President Bush has expressed his expectation that our troops will be in Iraq for at least three more years. This could lead many Iraqis to believe that the U.S. is a permanent force within their nation, and thus could result in both anger and apathy. I believe we must work hard to ensure the redeployment of our troops occurs no later than the end of this year. Doing so will encourage the Iraqi people to take charge.

This past Tuesday, I visited the White House with several colleagues who were on the trip, and we briefed the President on our experience. While I appreciate the President's willingness to invite and listen to those with views different than his own, it was abundantly clear that we do have different views. I hope he will be more receptive to the increasing calls for a change of course in our foreign policy.

I am grateful to have had this opportunity to visit Iraq. I met with government leaders and military commanders and, most importantly, with the men and women on the ground. These soldiers' lives have changed dramatically since they arrived, yet there is no end to their dedication and service. They must be given the best resources, the wisest leadership, and the greatest support. I hope we can find a resolution to this war, and can bring our troops home.

Very Truly Yours,

Tom Udall

Member of Congress