

Remarks on Returning Without Approval to the House of Representatives the “U.S. Troop Readiness, Veterans’ Care, Katrina Recovery, and Iraq Accountability Appropriations Act, 2007”

May 1, 2007

Good evening. Twelve weeks ago, I asked the Congress to pass an emergency war spending bill that would provide our brave men and women in uniform with the funds and flexibility they need. Instead, Members of the House and the Senate passed a bill that substitutes the opinions of politicians for the judgment of our military commanders. So a few minutes ago, I vetoed the bill.

Tonight I will explain the reasons for this veto and my desire to work with Congress to resolve this matter as quickly as possible. We can begin tomorrow with a bipartisan meeting with the congressional leaders here at the White House.

Here is why the bill Congress passed is unacceptable. First, the bill would mandate a rigid and artificial deadline for American troops to begin withdrawing from Iraq. That withdrawal could start as early as July 1st, and it would have to start no later than October 1st, regardless of the situation on the ground.

It makes no sense to tell the enemy when you plan to start withdrawing. All the terrorists would have to do is mark their calendars and gather their strength and begin plotting how to overthrow the Government and take control of the country of Iraq. I believe setting a deadline for withdrawal would demoralize the Iraqi people, would encourage killers across the broader Middle East, and send a signal that America will not keep its commitments. Setting a deadline for withdrawal is setting a date for failure, and that would be irresponsible.

Second, the bill would impose impossible conditions on our commanders in combat. After forcing most of our troops to withdraw, the bill would dictate the terms on

which the remaining commanders and troops could engage the enemy. That means American commanders in the middle of a combat zone would have to take fighting directions from politicians 6,000 miles away in Washington, DC. This is a prescription for chaos and confusion, and we must not impose it on our troops.

Third, the bill is loaded with billions of dollars in nonemergency spending that has nothing to do with fighting the war on terror. Congress should debate these spending measures on their own merits and not as a part of an emergency funding bill for our troops.

The Democratic leaders know that many in Congress disagree with their approach and that there are not enough votes to override the veto. I recognize that many Democrats saw this bill as an opportunity to make a political statement about their opposition to the war. They’ve sent their message. And now it is time to put politics behind us and support our troops with the funds they need.

Our troops are carrying out a new strategy with a new commander, General David Petraeus. The goal of this new strategy is to help the Iraqis secure their capital so they can make progress toward reconciliation and build a free nation that respects the rights of its people, upholds the rule of law, and fights extremists and radicals and killers alongside the United States in this war on terror.

In January, General Petraeus was confirmed by a unanimous vote in the United States Senate. In February, we began sending the first of the reinforcements he requested. Not all of these reinforcements have arrived in Baghdad. And as General Petraeus has said, it will be the end of

summer before we can assess the impact of this operation. Congress ought to give General Petraeus's plan a chance to work.

In the months since our military has been implementing this plan, we've begun to see some important results. For example, Iraqi and coalition forces have closed down an Al Qaida car bomb network; they've captured a Shi'a militia leader implicated in the kidnaping and killing of American soldiers; they've broken up a death squad that had terrorized hundreds of residents in a Baghdad neighborhood.

Last week, General Petraeus was in Washington to brief me, and he briefed Members of Congress on how the operation is unfolding. He noted that one of the most important indicators of progress is the level of sectarian violence in Baghdad. And he reported that since January, the number of sectarian murders has dropped substantially.

Even as sectarian attacks have declined, we continue to see spectacular suicide attacks that have caused great suffering. These attacks are largely the work of Al Qaida, the enemy that everyone agrees we should be fighting. The objective of these Al Qaida attacks is to subvert our efforts by reigniting the sectarian violence in Baghdad and breaking support for the war here at home. In Washington last week, General Petraeus explained it this way: "Iraq is, in fact, the central front of all Al Qaida's global campaign."

Al Qaida's role makes it—the conflict in Iraq far more complex than a simple fight between Iraqis. It's true that not everyone taking innocent life in Iraq wants to attack America here at home, but many do. Many also belong to the same terrorist network that attacked us on September the 11th, 2001, and wants to attack us here at home again. We saw the death and destruction Al Qaida inflicted on our people when they

were permitted a safe haven in Afghanistan. For the security of the American people, we must not allow Al Qaida to establish a new safe haven in Iraq.

We need to give our troops all the equipment and the training and protection they need to prevail. That means that Congress needs to pass an emergency war spending bill quickly. I've invited leaders of both parties to come to the White House tomorrow and to discuss how we can get these vital funds to our troops. I am confident that with good will on both sides, we can agree on a bill that gets our troops the money and flexibility they need as soon as possible.

The need to act is urgent. Without a war funding bill, the military has to take money from some other account or training program so the troops in combat have what they need. Without a war funding bill, the Armed Forces will have to consider cutting back on buying new equipment or repairing existing equipment. Without a war funding bill, we add to the uncertainty felt by our military families. Our troops and their families deserve better, and their elected leaders can do better.

Here in Washington, we have our differences on the way forward in Iraq, and we will debate them openly. Yet whatever our differences, surely we can agree that our troops are worthy of this funding and that we have a responsibility to get it to them without further delay.

Thank you for listening. May God bless our troops.

NOTE: The President spoke at 6:10 p.m. in the Cross Hall at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Gen. David H. Petraeus, USA, commanding general, Multi-National Force—Iraq; and Qais Khazali, member, Khazali network. He also referred to H.R. 1591.

Message to the House of Representatives Returning Without Approval the
“U.S. Troop Readiness, Veterans’ Care, Katrina Recovery, and Iraq
Accountability Appropriations Act, 2007”

May 1, 2007

To the House of Representatives:

I am returning herewith without my approval H.R. 1591, the “U.S. Troop Readiness, Veterans’ Care, Katrina Recovery, and Iraq Accountability Appropriations Act, 2007.”

This legislation is objectionable because it would set an arbitrary date for beginning the withdrawal of American troops without regard to conditions on the ground; it would micromanage the commanders in the field by restricting their ability to direct the fight in Iraq; and it contains billions of dollars of spending and other provisions completely unrelated to the war.

Precipitous withdrawal from Iraq is not a plan to bring peace to the region or to make our people safer here at home. The mandated withdrawal in this bill could embolden our enemies—and confirm their belief that America will not stand behind its commitments. It could lead to a safe haven in Iraq for terrorism that could be used to attack America and freedom-loving people around the world, and is likely to unleash chaos in Iraq that could spread across the region. Ultimately, a precipitous withdrawal could increase the probability that American troops would have to one day return to Iraq—to confront an even more dangerous enemy.

The micromanagement in this legislation is unacceptable because it would create a series of requirements that do not provide the flexibility needed to conduct the war. It would constrict how and where our Armed Forces could engage the enemy and

defend the national interest, and would provide confusing guidance on which of our enemies the military could engage. The result would be a marked advantage for our enemies and greater danger for our troops, as well as an unprecedented interference with the judgments of those who are charged with commanding the military.

Beyond its direction of the operation of the war, the legislation is also unacceptable for including billions of dollars in spending and other provisions that are unrelated to the war, are not an emergency, or are not justified. The Congress should not use an emergency war supplemental to add billions in spending to avoid its own rules for budget discipline and the normal budget process. War supplemental funding bills should remain focused on the war and the needs of our men and women in uniform who are risking their lives to defend our freedoms and preserve our Nation’s security.

Finally, this legislation is unconstitutional because it purports to direct the conduct of the operations of the war in a way that infringes upon the powers vested in the Presidency by the Constitution, including as Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces. For these reasons, I must veto this bill.

GEORGE W. BUSH

The White House,
May 1, 2007.

NOTE: This message was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on May 2.