

*February 18, 2007*

Last week I joined with my colleagues, both Republicans and Democrats, in casting a vote against President Bush's proposal to escalate the war in Iraq. I did so because it is my duty to do everything I can to bring about a responsible end to the violence and make sure that our troops have the support they need.

In considering my vote in favor of the Iraq resolution, my thoughts turned to the members of our Armed Forces - especially those who joined the military after September 11 out of a sense of duty and love for country, like my son Michael.

I'm proud and heartened by their commitment to service and patriotism - just as I am of my own son's commitment.

And I'm concerned about their safety and well being - just as I was about Michael's when he was in the service.

For me, supporting the troops is not rhetorical, it's personal.

Support for the troops means setting them up for success, not sending them into harm's way without basic equipment to keep them safe and allow them to perform their mission.

Recently, the Washington Post reported that the Marine Corps and Army brigades that the President proposes to send to Iraq do not have enough advanced armor kits for Humvees. These 'up-armored' Humvees offer our troops the best protection against the roadside bombs that have caused so many of the casualties in Iraq.

In addition, reports also show shortages of trucks and other crucial equipment such as jamming

devices and radios. Lodging and logistical support is also reportedly in short supply.

This demonstrates the severely misguided nature of the President's proposal. A plan for military action must include all the resources necessary to achieve the objective. The President's plan doesn't do that.

Another critical consideration is the impact the dispatch of an additional 21,500 combat troops - along with thousands of support troops - will have on our military.

Already our ability to meet future challenges is strained under current operational demands. Deploying additional troops will significantly hinder our ability to effectively wage the global war on terrorism.

In fact, it is the global terrorist threat that still must be addressed in a comprehensive way. We need a tougher, smarter approach. Regrettably, the President's proposal means a further distraction from the central front in the war on terror: the mission in Afghanistan.

I believe the members of our Armed Forces who have served in Iraq have done so bravely and honorably. And our state has contributed mightily to the effort. Over 325 Californians have been killed in Iraq and over 2,500 men and women from the Golden State have been wounded.

Unfortunately, the President's strategy in Iraq has not matched the solemn commitment with which our troops have served. And the President's recent proposal will send our brave men and women further down the wrong course in Iraq.

We must begin the transfer of responsibility for establishing and maintaining law and order on the streets in Iraq to the Iraqis. Training of those Iraqi units must be done outside of Iraq which will mean more troops trained more quickly, and will lessen the likelihood that Iraqi army and police recruits turn to dangerous militias and death squads.

In order to make progress toward ending the violence in Iraq, we should begin a responsible redeployment of our troops out of Iraq on a public timeline that makes sense - while pursuing the political and diplomatic solution in which President Bush has steadfastly refused to engage.

Both Republicans and Democrats agree; we need a new direction in Iraq.

While always putting our troops first, I will continue to push for that new direction.