

Rep. Ellen Tauscher Addresses The Center for American Progress

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

March 19, 2007

CONTACT: Kevin Lawlor (202) 225-1880

<http://www.tauscher.house.gov/>

Rep. Ellen Tauscher Addresses The Center for American Progress

Stresses Need to Pass Supplemental Funding Legislation

Washington, DC – Today, on the fourth anniversary of the War in Iraq, Rep. Ellen Tauscher delivered remarks at the Center for American Progress. Rep. Tauscher's remarks focused on the need to pass the supplemental bill expected to be voted on by the House of Representatives this week and her legislation with Rep. Adam Smith, the "Change the Course in Iraq Act." The Tauscher-Smith legislation would nullify the existing Congressional authorization on the use of force in Iraq on the grounds that the military mission has changed dramatically, and it would force the Iraqi government to take on a greater role by conditioning further funding for Iraqi security and reconstruction beginning in 2008 based on the Iraqis meeting specific benchmarks recommended by the Iraq Study Group.

The Text of the Speech follows below:

Rep. Ellen Tauscher

Center for American Progress

"A New Way Forward"

Thank you all very much for having me here today. First, allow me to thank my dear friend John Podesta and the entire staff of the Center for American Progress for the forward-looking, innovative work that you do.

Your ideas are a great resource for those of us on the Hill who, like you, want to achieve progressive, pragmatic solutions and believe that as Americans we are all bound together by a shared commitment to justice and freedom.

I appreciate the recent report by Larry Korb and his colleagues, "Beyond the Call of Duty," that addresses the overuse of the Army in the Bush Administration's war of choice in Iraq.

It presents a startling picture of the strain and fatigue being placed on our troops due to four years of repeated deployments, and it echoes my concern that our troops are being sent to combat without the proper training, equipment, and sufficient rest between deployments.

Because of this, their mission is becoming even more dangerous than it needs to be.

I am also honored to be featured in the same program as The Honorable Lee Hamilton.

You have been a consummate leader on foreign and defense policy both in your time in Congress and after.

And your work as a member of both the 9/11 Commission and the Iraq Study Group epitomizes what it means to be a public servant in this day and age.

We all know why we are here today.

There is no need to educate you on the litany of mistakes and miscalculations that have led to the current state of affairs in Iraq, Afghanistan, the greater Middle East and the world.

You are all well aware of the lies that got us into war, the absence of any sort of plan to stabilize Iraq after the capture of Saddam Hussein, and our inability to capture or kill Osama bin Laden and forcefully and adequately address the expanding threat of al Qaeda and Islamic extremism.

On the fourth anniversary of the start of major combat operations in Iraq, it's appropriate to take stock of where we have been.

We pray for the nearly thirty-two hundred brave members of our Armed Forces who have given their lives in Iraq, and for the roughly twenty four thousand troops who were wounded in action and the countless others who will return home to live with the enduring mental scars of war.

Today alone, we will spend two hundred and seventy five million dollars in Iraq, adding to the three hundred and forty four billion dollars already obligated to fund this war.

Yes, it's appropriate to talk about the past, and what our engagement in Iraq has cost us in terms of our treasure and our troops. But it's responsible to ask: Where do we go from here?

What is done is done, and Congress must now look to correct the Bush Administration's mistakes of the past so we can move forward as a nation and once again lead the world in an optimistic and pragmatic way.

This is all the more urgent in light of the Pentagon's assessment last week, finally acknowledging that Iraq is in a civil war, that Iraqi forces are still not leading all combat operations, and that the Iraqi government has failed to make significant progress toward government reform or political reconciliation.

What we need is a new way forward, and that new way begins with passing the supplemental funding legislation that will be before the House this week.

If we have the 218 votes needed to pass the supplemental out of the House, this new way forward is all the more closer.

With 218 votes we can attempt to change the course in Iraq, we can begin a real plan for rebuilding a nation and strengthening a government that has been reduced to nothing, and we can afford the best care possible for our returning troops wounded in combat.

Without the votes, we are back to the drawing board for the fourth consecutive year -- without a plan, without direction, and with a Commander in Chief more than willing to succumb to the status quo of failure and continue to stay the course.

I believe that passing this supplemental funding legislation as written is the right way to move forward – but moreover, it is the only option available to us.

It is an option that we have debated up and down, poured over, and re-written until we came up with what I believe is a unique opportunity for change.

This supplemental will make history. It will be as historic as a spending bill can be.

For the first time since the Iraq war began, we are refusing to hand the President a blank check – instead we are coming as close to exerting Congressional war powers as Congress has in decades.

We are demanding accountability, not only from the Commander in Chief, but accountability from the Iraqi government to step up and contribute to an effort that has already put a drain on our resources, re-directed our national focus, and cost the lives of too many service men and women.

In last November's elections, my Democratic colleagues and I became the majority in large part due to a lack of action by a Republican President and his Republican allies in Congress.

To my colleagues on the other side of the aisle, I say -- listen to the will of the American people, who are tired of our troops fighting and dying in Iraq's civil war.

To my friends on my side of the aisle, I say -- Not passing the supplemental or passing a supplemental without any checks on the President would just be more of the same old "stay the course" approach.

We cannot substitute the Republican Leadership of the past with more of the same idleness that has defined this war.

George W. Bush has led one of the most aggressive abuses of executive power in the history of our nation.

We in the Congress are not doing our job if we answer his administration's power grabs with inaction.

We need to be equally aggressive in our campaign to bring back accountability, to bring back oversight, and to bring our troops home sooner and safer.

Passing the supplemental is a step in the right direction; it is a spring-board that can make all of these things happen.

It is still a long road, but we need to start somewhere if we are to earn back all that we have lost in the last few years.

We need to re-establish our military readiness in a world of new and emerging threats. And, we need to re-establish the diplomatic ties that have been lost due to reckless diplomatic policy.

The much discussed and anticipated 2007 Spring Offensive in Afghanistan has US and NATO forces preparing for the renewed insurgency efforts that are expected.

Afghanistan is the source of ninety-two percent of the world's opium and it appears this year's production will rise above that level.

If the United States doesn't immediately dedicate the troops and resources it will take to get the focus back where it belongs, in Afghanistan, we are making a horrendous choice to put Iraq's civil war over the world's struggle against terror.

We need to earn back the value of our word as a nation that's able to engage the world's problems multilaterally, if we are to move forward as the responsible and pragmatic global leader the world needs us to be.

Once we have passed the supplemental, Congress can continue moving forward with additional legislation to push for and bring about a new direction in Iraq.

I have introduced legislation with my colleague Adam Smith of Washington, "The Change the Course in Iraq Act."

Our bill recognizes that the U.S. military mission in Iraq has changed dramatically from when President Bush first sought Congressional authorization.

The links to al Qaeda were patently false.

The WMDs were never a threat.

And there is no Baathist government left to enforce UN sanctions upon.

That was the statutory basis of Congress's authorization. American troops were certainly not sent to Iraq to fight a civil war.

That's why our legislation terminates the existing authority on the use of force in Iraq.

It's not an attempt to make a political statement. It's a statement of fact — The mission today in Iraq no longer bears any resemblance to the mission authorized by Congress and therefore the authorization is no longer valid.

We require the Secretary of Defense to submit a plan for phased redeployment of U.S. forces.

And, our legislation requires the President to appoint a high-level Coordinator for Iraq Stabilization to step up regional cooperation.

Perhaps most importantly, our bill will force the Iraqi government to take on a greater role in stabilizing Iraq, because we acknowledge that no amount of American troops or Humvees can bring the political reconciliation necessary to end a civil war.

It conditions further funding for Iraqi security and reconstruction, beginning in 2008, based on the President certifying that the Iraqis have met specific benchmarks recommended by the Iraq Study Group, particularly in the areas of oil revenue sharing, de-Baathification, and disarming the militia.

Additionally, our legislation requires that Iraq's constitution be reviewed and amended, if appropriate, and Iraq's security forces must lead operations and exercise control in all Iraqi provinces.

The United States military must focus on the core missions of fighting foreign terrorists, training Iraqi troops, and force protection.

No bill or vote in Congress will bring stability to Iraq. Only the Iraqis can do that.

No bill or vote in Congress will bring our troops home. Only the Commander-in-Chief can do that.

What Congress can do is everything in our power to speak for the American people, and speak out for a better way in Iraq. That's what you saw last month when Congress rejected the President's troop surge in Iraq. And that's what you'll continue to see.

During Vietnam, there were at least twenty bills voted on by Congress to pressure the administration to end the US involvement in Vietnam.

There was no single silver bullet. However there was a starting point, and this supplemental will be our starting point.

We in Congress will focus on a new way forward, that new way begins with 218 votes this week.

Now – I would like to open the conversation and answer any questions you may have.

###