

Chapel Hill, NC - Today, US Rep. David Price (NC-04) released the following statement in the wake of last night's forum at Chapel Hill High School entitled, "How Do We Get Out of Iraq?" Below is the text on which Price based a portion of his opening statement at the forum. It gives his thoughts as to how the US should end its occupation.

"...We must have -- and Democrats must demand -- an exit strategy from Iraq, a strategy for ending the American occupation. The question is not whether but how. The how does matter -- we don't have the luxury of saying things are so bad in Iraq that there's nothing we could do to make them worse. Things can always get worse: we surely have learned to take worst-case scenarios seriously. Think about the Kurds, for example: American policy has twice contributed to a bloody fate for these people, when we embraced Saddam Hussein in the 1980s and when we encouraged a Kurdish uprising and didn't follow through after the first Gulf War. We should take some care to avoid a third such mistake.

"In exiting Iraq, there are goals and values I believe we share: saving American lives, as the Abercrombie resolution [H.J.Res.55] stresses, but also saving Iraqi lives. Minimizing the chance that Iraq will descend into chaos or become a threat to the region. Maximizing the chance that Iraqis can defend and govern themselves. These goals, and their relation to the facts on the ground, should influence how we leave. But we must leave.

"I cannot conceive of any situation that would justify a continuing, prolonged presence for US troops in Iraq. For example, I believe the prospects for withdrawing and leaving Iraqis able to defend and govern themselves will be better if the draft constitution is approved and a government with broad legitimacy is elected. What, however, if the constitution is rejected and the country moves toward a three-way breakup? It seems likely that, in that event, public opinion would become even less supportive of a continuing American presence and it would be even less clear what we could achieve.

"In a comprehensive speech in July and at other times, I have tried to suggest benchmarks to which the administration should be held accountable, and major policy changes that would increase the probability of achieving at least some of our goals. There is not much indication that George Bush is listening, although what some of his generals have said before they were reined in is interesting and perhaps significant. In any event, I and other Democrats have described what we believe is our best shot for ending this misbegotten war. If the President refuses to learn from past mistakes and the quagmire deepens, then our exit will look more and more like merely cutting our losses. That would be regrettable, but it is not a rationale for

prolonging the occupation: exit we must. The how matters, and I hope we can discuss that in a way tonight that broadens our understanding and deepens our unity, but exit we must."

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