Washington, D.C. - US Rep. David Price (NC-04) delivered the following speech on the House floor this afternoon:

"Mr. Speaker, our country is facing a difficult, even desperate, situation in Iraq, with an insurgency that seems to be gaining strength, a reconstruction effort that is lagging, and an international coalition that is deteriorating. President Bush seems determined to put the best face on the situation, but the American people are increasingly pessimistic and distrustful of what they hear. We are overdue for a major course correction. It is my intent today to make the case for such a correction and to outline what its major elements should be.

"What are our objectives in Iraq? A careful reading of the President's Fort Bragg speech of June 28 reveals a shift in emphasis from standing up an independently functioning democracy to preventing Iraq from becoming a basing point for international terrorism. This is ironic, for most analysts, including the 9/11 Commission, agree that the Iraqi regime had no discernable link to the perpetrators of 9/11; it is our invasion and its chaotic aftermath that have attracted al Qaeda and other international terrorists to Iraq. In any event, by whatever definition of the American mission one chooses, our effort is falling short, dangerously short, of what it will take for Iraq to achieve self-rule and the capability of self-defense and for the American occupation to end.

"The news of recent days leaves little doubt that the insurgency, which Vice-President Cheney described as in its 'last throes,'is anything but. In the last two weeks insurgent attacks have intensified again, killing more than 200 people in Baghdad and towns to the south. Last weekend we read of gunmen ambushing a wedding party, killing the bride and wounding the groom, apparently because of his Iraqi army affiliation -- a heart-wrenching account that underscores the insurgents' brutality and their continuing ability to launch lethal attacks. General Abizaid, the top U.S. commander in Iraq, recently acknowledged that the insurgency has not diminished. In fact, estimates of the number of hardcore insurgents now range from 20,000 to 40,000 (up from original U.S. estimates of 5,000); attacks now average 70 per day (up from 25 per day one year ago); and car bombs average 135 per month (up from an average of 20 per month last summer). We are getting better at identifying potential attacks; only 25 percent of car bomb attacks are now successful, compared to 90 percent last year. But while we've been able to reduce the insurgents' success rates threefold, they have increased their attacks six fold, so the number of lethal attacks has actually doubled over the last year.

"How far have the Iraqi police, security forces, and officer corps come toward being able to secure the countryside and control terrorist and criminal activity? 'About half of Iraq's new police

battalions are still being established and cannot conduct operations, while the other half of the police units and two-thirds of the new army battalions are only "partially capable" of carrying out counterinsurgency missions, and only with American help, according to a newly declassified Pentagon assessment," The New York Times reports.

"The Administration claims that approximately 170,000 Iraqis have been trained to assume security responsibilities. U.S. commanders in Iraq have stated that the training is limited, and Joint Chiefs Chairman Myers has publicly said that only about 40,000 are fully capable of deploying anywhere in Iraq. Other estimates go as low as 10,000 Iraqi security forces that are actually trained and capable of performing their security responsibilities. The equipping of these forces is also deficient; according to the Brookings Institution, the Iraqis only have 42 percent of required weapons, 24 percent of required vehicles, 19 percent of required communications equipment, and 29 percent of required body armor. The Iraqis are not now ready to provide their own national security, handle civil policing duties, or deal with a continuing and strong insurgency -- nor will they be ready in the near future.

"What is the state of the reconstruction of Iraq? Successful reconstruction is critical to gaining the support of the Iraqi people and denying the insurgents the benefits of widespread popular discontent. We have made substantial headway in rebuilding bridges, roads and railways, rehabilitating the seaport at Umm Qasr, and installing and repairing telecommunications infrastructure both inside of Baghdad and for the international satellite gateway system. Despite these efforts, we have a long way to go.

"Nationwide, Iraq is only generating 75 percent of its electricity production goal and the nation only has an average of 12 hours of electricity per day. Oil production has barely reached 80 percent of its prewar levels, and Iraqis are experiencing gas lines up to a mile long. Iraqi government sources cited in the Pentagon's report of July 21, 2005, put the unemployment rate at 28 percent, up from 22.5 percent six months ago; most independent estimates are closer to 40 percent. The top five problems Iraqis identified in an April 2005 IRI survey are inadequate electricity, unemployment, healthcare, crime, and national security – all significant indicators of required major reconstruction efforts.

"Are we on schedule for getting an Iraqi constitution adopted and a legitimate, broadly representative government established? The National Assembly is to draft a constitution by August 15, 2005, to be put to a national vote by October 15, 2005. On May 10, the National Assembly appointed a 55-member committee to begin drafting the permanent constitution. The committee missed its own deadline to produce a preliminary draft by July 15. However, several working drafts have surfaced that have sparked serious complaints regarding constriction of the

rights of women and a strict interpretation of Islam as a source of legislation. Despite these conflicts and the missing of the self-imposed deadline, Iraqi leaders say that a draft will be completed by the August 15 deadline. Six subcommittees are working on specific issues of the new constitution, including the thorny questions of Kurdish autonomy and the role of Islam in law. Many other contentious issues remain to be negotiated. There is a provision for a six month drafting extension if the Assembly cannot complete a draft by the specified deadline, but exercising this extension would delay all subsequent stages of the transition.

"Given the enormity of the task we face in Iraq, what is the condition of the 'coalition of the willing' on which our efforts depend? The coalition has always been a pale imitation of the one the first President Bush assembled for the first Iraq War. For Operation Iraqi Freedom, the U.S. share of overall troop numbers has never been less than 84 percent. And now the coalition is deteriorating further. Spain's troop commitment has gone from 1,300 to zero. Italy's 3,120 troops will go to zero by early next year, as will Poland's 1,500. Other countries that have withdrawn their forces or are in the process of doing so include Bulgaria, the Dominican Republic, Honduras, Hungary, Moldova, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Nicaragua, Norway, the Philippines, Portugal, Thailand, Tonga, and Ukraine. In most cases, these withdrawals have taken place amid overwhelming public opposition to the war.

"Troop contingents of 12,000 from the United Kingdom and 2,800 from South Korea remain. But this war and occupation have mainly had an American face, and that has become more and more the case as erstwhile allies have fallen away. American troop strength now stands at about 135,000, and many say that is not sufficient to complete the mission unless the training of Iraqis can be greatly accelerated. American casualties number 13,657, including 1,790 deaths. Of these, 1,653 deaths have occurred since President Bush landed on the aircraft carrier USS Abraham Lincoln to proclaim major combat operations successfully concluded. While there is no definitive source of information, we know the human toll in Iraq is enormous: Estimates of non-combatant Iraqi deaths have reached 25,000, and the Pentagon reports that Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) combat deaths have now exceeded 2,000.

"As for the budget impact, outlays for Iraq operations are now about $1 billion per week. The cumulative cost of the Iraqi war, occupation, and reconstruction has already exceeded $200 billion.

In the face of all this, the American public's confidence is waning. This is not because Americans are cowed by the challenge we face in Iraq. Fully 57 percent in the NBC News/Wall St. Journal poll of July 11 said it was important that America 'maintain its military and economic commitment there until Iraq is able to fully govern and police itself.'

But the public is increasingly skeptical of President Bush's rationale for going to war, they are doubtful that the Administration has a plan for success, and they wonder if they are being told the truth by our country's leaders. More than half say they don't think the war was 'worth it.' Only 40 percent say the Iraq war has made us safer from terrorism; 54 percent say 'less safe.' Nearly 60 percent now disapprove of the job President Bush is doing in Iraq; this has helped drive his overall disapproval rating to 56 percent.

"The President's June 28 speech was widely anticipated as an opportunity for the commander-in-chief to give an honest assessment of progress to date and to chart a realistic and compelling course going forward. The setting of the speech, Fort Bragg, North Carolina, was well-chosen, giving the President the opportunity to express the admiration and gratitude we all feel to 'our servicemen and women across the globe... for [their] courage under fire and service to our nation' and for the sacrifices of their families as well.

"In other respects, however, the speech was a disappointment, offering neither a candid assessment nor a specific strategy for success. The President spoke of 'significant progress' while glossing over the state of the insurgency and ignoring the falling off of international support. He furnished fewer details than I have already given in this presentation. He offered no benchmarks by which success might be measured or his administration might be held accountable. He was defensive about past decisions and oblivious to the obvious need for course correction. As others have observed, he exposed the weakness of his arguments by rhetorically falling back on 9/11, despite the lack of any significant al Qaeda connection to pre-war Iraq. The President asked Americans to stay the course, to continue to pay the heavy price of this war, without holding up his end of the bargain. He and his administration owe those brave men and women in uniform, and indeed all Americans, more than glib assurances and exhortations to steadfastness. He owes all of us a plan for success, for turning Iraq over to the Iraqis, avoiding a reversion to tyranny or chaos, and terminating the American occupation.

"The President's speech has now been improved upon somewhat by the Department of Defense's congressionally-mandated report, 'Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq,' dated July 21, 2005. 'The criteria for withdrawing Coalition forces from Iraq are conditions-based, not calendar-based,' the report states. 'The development of the ISF to a level at which they can take over primary responsibility for their own security is the threshold condition. ISF development in turn, will be helped by progress in political, economic, and other areas.' This is only slightly more specific than the standard suggested in the President's speech: 'As the Iraqis stand up, we will stand down.' Only in limited instances does the report measure present performance against a defined goal, much less specify the conditions under which American responsibility can be scaled back. Moreover, the Pentagon almost always chooses the more optimistic among

analysts' conclusions as to the conditions in Iraq and apparently sees no need to defend those choices. Congress has required that this report be updated every 90 days, and our leaders should insist that future reports meet a higher standard of candor and relevance to future policy choices.

"The coherence of Administration policy was thrown further into doubt this week by Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld and the commander of U.S. forces in Iraq, General George Casey, in their comments reported from Baghdad. Rumsfeld, who last month suggested that the insurgency might last as many as ten to twelve years, displayed a new urgency about moving the constitutional process and the training of security personnel along. Meanwhile, General Casey emerged from a meeting with Rumsfeld and U.S. Ambassador Zalmay Khalizad to declare that 'fairly substantial reductions' in U.S. troop levels might be possible by next spring and summer. That may be a tantalizing prospect politically, but the Pentagon owes the Congress and the public an accounting of the conditions that must be met, and how they are to be met, in order for such a policy to succeed.

"Mr. Speaker, the challenge of Iraq calls for leadership of a high order, leadership that is determined and confident but does not mistake confidence for rigidity, or determination for an unwillingness to acknowledge and learn from past mistakes. The Bush Administration's Iraq policy has been plagued by far too many misjudgments and mistakes, and it would compound those mistakes to fail to learn from them now. We went to war with defective intelligence on the threat posed by Iraq, evidence selectively and sometimes misleadingly presented to Congress and the public. We went to war virtually unilaterally, with too few allies and unwarranted disdain for the United Nations program of weapons inspection and destruction. We went to war with unrealistic expectations as to how our occupation would be received and with grossly deficient postwar planning. We undertook a war of choice, allowing ourselves to be diverted from the war on terrorism and other more dangerous international challenges and foregoing other means for containing and controlling whatever threat Saddam Hussein represented.

"Our current situation in Iraq bears the marks of these past mistakes, and I believe history will judge George Bush and his administration harshly for them. In much of this Congress was complicit, and I am even more convinced than I was on the day I cast my 'no' vote that this body abdicated its responsibility when it gave the President, months in advance, open-ended authority to invade Iraq. But while we must learn from the past, we must face resolutely forward. That means transcending past grievances, rethinking past positions, confronting the unvarnished truth as to our present situation, and weighing our realistic options.

"What alternative possibilities in fact lie before us? The President has proposed 'more of the

same:' persevere on our present course, despite abundant evidence that we are falling short. Others are urging a unilateral withdrawal of American forces - - some say on a pre-announced, fixed timetable. More and more politicians and commentators are expressing this view. They point out that the presence of American troops is not only challenging the insurgency but is also fueling it. Our alien, 'infidel' presence is itself a rallying point for Iraqi insurgents and international terrorists. Moreover, some argue, Iraqis will be more likely to assume responsibility for assembling a workable government and developing their own security forces if they know that their dependence on U.S. troops is coming to an end.

"These arguments have merit, but they underestimate factors beyond the American military presence that are feeding the insurgency and could plunge Iraq into civil war -- or even the conditions of a 'failed state' -- after we are gone. They also underestimate the danger of encouraging our enemies to wait us out and then to strike with devastating force. There is, I believe, a better way. We should indeed signal clearly that we intend ultimately to bring our troops home, that we expect the Iraqi government to assume responsibility for the country's security, and that we have no plans for permanent bases or an ongoing military presence. But we should also put forward a strategy for success -- a plan for course-correction in Iraq, for recognizing and correcting policies that are not working, and for moving Iraq decisively toward self-defense and self-rule.

"A strategy for success requires benchmarks by which we can measure progress and hold our own government accountable. One useful formulation was suggested by the House Minority Leader as an amendment to the FY 2006 Defense Appropriations bill, but was unfortunately denied a vote by the Republican leadership. The amendment would have required the timely submission by the President to the Congress of a report specifying:

(1) The criteria for assessing the capabilities and readiness of Iraqi security forces, goals for achieving appropriate capability and readiness levels for such forces, as well as for recruiting, training, and equipping such forces, and the milestones and timetable for achieving such goals.

(2) The estimated total number of Iraqi personnel trained at [these] levels... needed for Iraqi security forces to perform duties currently being undertaken by United States and coalition forces, including defending Iraq's borders and providing adequate levels of law and order throughout Iraq.

(3) The number of United States and coalition advisors needed to support Iraqi security forces

and associated ministries.

(4)The measures of political stability for Iraq, including the important political milestones to be achieved over the next several years.

"I would augment this list with benchmarks and goals for the reconstruction effort and for the involving of allies and multilateral organizations.

"What are the other ingredients of a strategy for success? Senator Joseph Biden, ranking Democrat on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, gave a wide-ranging speech on June 21 that stressed the need to take advantage of legitimate foreign offers to help train Iraqi security forces and to share responsibility for Iraqi reconstruction internationally. Egypt has offered to train Iraqi police, and the Jordanians have offered advanced military training for the officer corps. Even the French have offered to train 1,500 paramilitary police in France and send them back to Iraq. NATO is establishing an ISF training mission, and the alliance and its member states should be encouraged to do more. Senator Biden, for example, proposed a small NATO force dedicated to border patrol and protection. We must have an ongoing crash course in the training and equipping of Iraqi police, security forces, and the officers corps, and the Bush Administration should be far more aggressive in enlisting international partners in these efforts.

"The same goes for Iraqi political development and reconstruction. The Pentagon's July 21 report commends United Nations support of the constitutional development process and assistance in preparing for approaching referenda and elections. Recent international donors' conferences in Brussels on June 22 and Amman on July 18 made only limited progress in securing financing for Iraqi reconstruction and economic development. Most of the effort was aimed at getting donors to follow through on the approximately $33 billion pledged in 2003 in Madrid. Many potential donors conditioned future support on improvements in the security situation. Unfortunately, both the military and reconstruction efforts continue to bear the marks of the Bush Administration's early unilateralism. This must be overcome, as a matter of burden-sharing and of ensuring the legitimacy and eventual success of the effort.

"Our reconstruction program should have a steady focus on improving the lives of ordinary Iraqis. This will often require us to emphasize smaller-scale projects that have an immediate local impact and/or that mainly employ Iraqis. It also means we should continue to provide reconstruction funds directly to our mid-level military officers. The Commanders Emergency Response Program (CERP) provided for the disbursement in FY 2004 of $549 million by U.S.

commanders at the tactical level. Many members have returned from visits to Iraq, as I did from Kirkuk, impressed by the education and health facilities and other projects these funds have made possible with a minimum of red tape, and the trust and goodwill they have generated.

"Among the worthwhile Iraqi projects sponsored by the U.S. Agency for International Development, I am particularly familiar with the local governance and civil society work of North Carolina-based RTI International. These projects have been forced to use a substantial portion of their funding to provide security, and some efforts have succumbed in a hostile environment. Yet RTI staff, many of them Iraqis, have helped establish representative and accountable governments in many localities and are currently implementing a training and management program for 150 model health care centers in Iraq. This is difficult but important work, and it deserves our continuing support.

"In the midst of the challenges in Iraq and the course correction we must undertake there, it is critical that we not lose sight of related undertakings in the region with a direct bearing on our prospects in Iraq. I will here simply mention Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan and the Israeli-Palestinian peace process. Over the past three years, the Afghan mission, directly related to 9/11 and to the denial of a support structure or sanctuary to al Qaeda and other terrorist groups, has suffered by virtue of the President's initial fixation on Iraq and the human and material resources required by Operation Iraqi Freedom. Osama bin Laden and Mullah Omar remain at large, and it has often fallen to the Congress to augment Administration budget requests for Afghanistan. The Taliban has managed to partially reconstitute itself in recent months; insurgent attacks and government offensives since March have killed more than 800. The obvious intent at present is to disrupt the September 18 parliamentary elections, a critical step in Afghanistan's political development.

"In Afghanistan more than in Iraq, U.S. troops have the benefit of international assistance. The International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) has operated under NATO command since August 2003, providing security and supporting reconstruction and nation-building activities. ISAF currently numbers about 8,800 troops from 26 NATO and 11 non-NATO partner countries, including Canada, Spain, France, and Germany - - all notably missing from Iraq. The Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) - - military-led groups that secure enclaves for the work of reconstruction, aid, and Afghan Interior Ministry personnel - - also display increasing international participation. Of the 21 PRTs now in operation, 11 are US-run, 10 are run by partner countries, and several US PRTs are slated for takeover by NATO/ISAF.

"The Kabul government is still far from exercising effective authority throughout Afghanistan, and the Taliban and other enemy forces are displaying a disturbing resilience. Our Afghan

mission is under severe challenge, and we must not again be diverted. We must also expand the mission's international character and apply the lessons of multilateralism in Afghanistan to Iraq.

"Also critical to a strategy for success is determined U.S. diplomacy aimed at the two-state solution President Bush has advocated for the Middle East. The immediate challenge is to make certain the evacuation of Israeli settlers from Gaza undertaken by Prime Minister Sharon comes off successfully and peacefully, despite predictable acts of sabotage from extremists on both sides. This will require redoubled Palestinian efforts to rein in terrorist groups and prevent attacks against Israeli troops and communities. The Israelis must give such efforts a chance and work with the Palestinian Authority to coordinate the logistics of the withdrawal and freedom of movement in and out of Gaza after the withdrawal. Longer-term, the parties must follow the path of mutual accommodation outlined in the Road Map, eventually undertaking final-status negotiations. 'Gaza First' must not become 'Gaza last.' But none of this will be easy, and it is unlikely to move forward without skillful and persistent U.S. diplomacy.

"The peace process has languished for the last four years, partially because of the disengagement of President Bush and his Administration. This has been terribly costly to the Israelis and Palestinians, who have endured four years of dashed hopes and recurring violence. But it has also been damaging to American interests in the region; the Israeli-Palestinian conflict fuels extremism and anti-American attitudes across the Middle East and greatly complicates our prospects for success in Afghanistan, Iraq and beyond.

"Secretary of State Rice has signaled that the second term will be different. To her credit, she returned to Israel and the West Bank last week as violent attacks escalated dangerously -- a suicide bombing, rocket attacks, retaliatory air attacks -- and Israeli tanks were lining up at the Gaza border. It is extremely important that she and the President stay the course, understanding that Israeli-Palestinian peacemaking, important in its own right, is also critical to any strategy for success in the region.

"Mr. Speaker, the war in Iraq has been terribly costly in terms of lives, resources, and our country's diplomatic and security interests. Our challenge now is not merely to cut our losses, but to extricate ourselves in a way that prevents Iraq from reverting to tyranny or chaos, that denies a basing point to international terrorism, and that leaves the country intact, able to defend and govern itself. We are not now on course to achieve this objective. The Bush Administration neither has a strategy for success nor even acknowledges the need for course correction. We must do better, and it is the duty of this Congress to demand candor, accountability, and a strategy calibrated to achieve our goals.

"We must have an honest accounting of the state of the insurgency, the readiness of Iraqi forces, the progress of the country's reconstruction and political development, and the extent of international collaboration and support. Where there are deficiencies -- and the deficiencies are serious in all these areas -- the Administration must provide benchmarks by which success can be measured and a plan specifying what it will take to reach these goals. Glib reassurances from the President are dangerous -- postponing and preventing corrective action and opening wider the credibility gap with the American public. Those who commit troops to battle on behalf of this great country owe them and us an intelligent and realistic plan to succeed. Members of this body should demand such a plan, and a frequent, truthful accounting of our success in reaching its goals, from the President and his Administration. A mid-course correction in Iraq is worthy of our nation's best efforts, but the window of opportunity is closing."

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