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NEWS RELEASE

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Surge to Success by Senator Larry Craig

In a matter of months, we will pass the four-year anniversary of the coalition forces' invasion of Iraq. When I reflect on this, I am amazed at how quickly four years have gone. Like most Americans, I find myself wishing that the conflict was over, and all our soldiers were safely home on U.S. soil with their families and loved ones.

That doesn't mean I have lost faith in our mission in Iraq, however. I never expected the mission to be easy. I voted to authorize military action in Iraq despite knowing that soldiers could lose their lives, and families could be changed forever. I did not make this vote happily or lightly, but with an overwhelming sense of responsibility to take the actions that – while painful – would benefit the American people in the long run.

It is important for everyone to remember that even though the struggle in Iraq is difficult and painful, it is far from hopeless. The road to success there may not be abundantly clear at this time, but the road to defeat and chaos is very apparent. A premature withdrawal is the surest way to condemn Iraq to failure.

Most experts agree that a sudden withdrawal would undermine the fledgling government, destabilize the country and foment ethnic cleansing on an unimaginable scale. Such a vacuum next door would draw Iran, Saudi Arabia, Turkey and possibly other nations to intervene in Iraq to prevent ethnic cleansing of Shiites, Sunnis and Kurds.

If they sense that the United States is growing tired of the fight, radical Islamic fundamentalists will undoubtedly move in for the kill, intensifying and multiplying their attacks on the United States. Former Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger, recently testified before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and reminded Congress that the fight in Iraq is not just about Iraq or the United States: "Any enhancement of radical Islamist self-confidence therefore threatens all the traditional states of the region, as well as others with significant Islamic populations, from Indonesia through India to Western Europe."

Clearly, at this point, withdrawal is out of the question, but the American people have let President Bush know in no uncertain terms that the status quo in Iraq is also unacceptable. We cannot continue to sacrifice American lives there while no discernible progress is made.

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The best option then, is what President Bush so recently proposed: an increase of more than 20,000 troops. With these extra soldiers, the incoming commander, Gen. David Petraeus, should have enough manpower in Baghdad to effectively carry out the “clear, hold, build” technique that has successfully pacified other cities and regions of Iraq. Gen. Petraeus is an experienced counterinsurgency expert, and I have met him several times. I am confident that he can get the job done, because he has shown on many previous occasions that he can.

However, Gen. Petraeus deserves the chance to show what he can do on a wider scale. If the doubters in Congress get their way and pass resolutions condemning our mission in Iraq, or pull funding from our troops on the ground, he won’t get that opportunity, and we will have committed a grave betrayal of our remarkable soldiers.

Our troops are now caught in a political tug-of-war. The Majority Leader, Senator Harry Reid, refuses to allow votes on all Iraq resolutions on the floor. Because he knows some will pass, Reid won’t allow votes on Republican resolutions that don’t condemn President Bush or pledge not to cut off funding for our troops. Senator Reid’s playing political games with the lives of our troops. I will not leave them stranded and demoralized like that.

The debate raging for the last few months over Iraq is a necessary one. It demonstrates to the Iraqis that our patience isn’t endless, and I think that knowledge will produce results before long. Will we stay long enough to see the mission through and secure the future? The world is watching to see whether the West will tire of defending itself from the relentless attacks of radical fundamentalists. We have the means to carry on, and we should.