

STATEMENT ON U.S. TROOP READINESS, VETERANS' HEALTH, AND IRAQ ACCOUNTABILITY ACT

HON. XAVIER BECERRA

Friday, March 23, 2007

Madam Speaker, I rise in support of H.R. 1591, the U.S. Troop Readiness, Veterans' Health, and Iraq Accountability Act. Today, Madam Speaker, we have a chance to take our country in a new direction to bring coherence and accountability to America's Iraq War policy.

As we enter our fifth year in the Iraq War, Americans have paid a high price for our involvement. Over 3,200 U.S. troops have died, approximately 25,000 U.S. troops have been wounded, and President Bush has squandered more than \$350 billion of taxpayer dollars with his misadventure. Our troops have been fighting and dying in Iraq longer than American soldiers did in World War II, World War I, the Korean War, or the Civil War. This important legislation imposes long overdue accountability on the administration's war policy and will bring an end to President Bush's commitment to an open-ended war.

Specifically, the benchmarks and timelines contained in this legislation will hold both the president and the Iraqi government accountable in how they conduct the war and the transition to a self-sufficient, democratic Iraq. This bill has taken into account both the administration's and experts' advice on how to proceed in Iraq. Many of the benchmarks are similar to provisions that President Bush has publicly supported. The bipartisan Iraq Study Group recommended many of the goals and target dates in H.R. 1591.

Importantly, this bill protects our troops deployed in Iraq and Afghanistan and the troops and veterans returning home. H.R. 1591 provides sufficient funding to ensure that our troops have the equipment to protect themselves from harm while they defend many of the innocent citizens of Iraq. We should all agree that never again will America send its troops into battle without the best equipment to accomplish their mission.

For our troops returning home, this legislation reverses years of neglect and moves us toward a comprehensive effort to address their needs. There is an extra \$1.7 billion for military health care to be spent on military hospitals and a provision that prevents the closing of Walter Reed hospital—the first stop for so many of our wounded troops returning home. The bill also appropriates \$1.7 billion additional funding for veterans' health care, \$2.5 billion for improving the readiness of our stateside troops and \$1.4 billion more for military housing allowances.

Madam Speaker, when an Iraqi Shiite soldier is ready to defend an Iraqi Sunni civilian and an Iraqi Sunni soldier is ready to defend an Iraqi Shiite civilian, then perhaps we will know that the people of Iraq are ready to live in peace with security. But until

such time, our troops have no business sitting in the crosshairs of a bloody civil war. By creating benchmarks and timelines for U.S. troop involvement in Iraq, this bill sends a message to Iraqis that they need to resolve their conflicts at the negotiation table and not through violence. We can help, but they must first prove that they are willing and prepared to help themselves!

I urge my colleagues to support H.R. 1591 and start the process of bringing our troops home. Our men and women in uniform have done all we have asked of them. They won the war against Saddam Hussein and fought valiantly and timelessly to secure the peace in Iraq. Now, it is time for us to do our job: remove our soldiers from the insanity of the Iraq civil war and return them home. Only then can we rededicate ourselves and refocus our efforts to fight against the threat of terrorism.