

Washington, DC -- The members of Vermont's Congressional Delegation - U.S. Sen. Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.), U.S. Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-Vt.), and U.S. Rep. Peter Welch (D-Vt.) -- Tuesday renewed their support for withdrawing U.S. troops from Iraq and disagreed with Gen. David Petraeus' call for freezing troop levels in Iraq and for keeping the door open to U.S. involvement in the Iraq conflict for the foreseeable future.

General Petraeus is testifying this week before the Senate and House Armed Services Committees about the troop surge and about the recent increase in U.S. casualties in Iraq.

Leahy said, "The reality in Iraq is that the troop escalation called the surge has failed to achieve its central goal. Iraq remains riven by ethnic, religious, and tribal differences, and the myriad of groups have made only limited and halting steps toward reconciling their differences. Violence is again on the upswing, and the recently failed Basra offensive has emboldened militant groups while revealing the deep weaknesses of the fledgling Iraq military. Every day more American servicemen and women are killed or grievously wounded, with no end in sight to our involvement there. A deadline for the beginning of the orderly and swift redeployment of American forces, combined with effective diplomacy, would end Iraqi dependence on the United States and force some type of peace agreement."

Sanders said, "The war in Iraq has been a disaster in terms of the number of dead and wounded, the loss of focus on al Qaeda and Afghanistan, and the cost that eventually will exceed \$1 trillion. It is unacceptable that we have an administration that refuses to tell us how many more years we will be in Iraq or how many billions of dollars will be added to the national debt. The United States has a moral obligation to support the Iraqi government and military, but we must bring our troops home as soon as possible."

Welch said, "We need a change of direction in Iraq. Unfortunately, all President Bush is offering is more of the same military policy that has yet to produce the political progress to sustain a functioning Iraqi democracy. This war has cost our troops and their families, our national security, and American taxpayers gravely. Now, in the sixth year of this unjust and unnecessary war, 150,000 of our men and women remain deployed in an extremely dangerous environment, while the Maliki government is fighting its political rivals rather than negotiating a sustainable peace. General Petraeus and President Bush have yet to provide the American people with a strategy to achieve the political reconciliation necessary to bring this horrible war to an end."