

Welch supports 'giant step' forward to end war; bill includes funding for agriculture assistance, MILC, and LIHEAP

Washington, DC -- Rep. Peter Welch voted today in support of historic legislation which imposes a statutory deadline to end the Iraq war.

"We have taken a giant step down a path to end this unconscionable war," said Welch.

The U.S. Troop Readiness, Veterans' Health and Iraq Accountability Act, H.R. 1591, passed on a near-party line vote of 218-212, with just two Republicans voting in favor.

President Bush has threatened to veto the measure. The Senate is advancing similar legislation.

"Congress today is finally revoking the President's blank check for the war in Iraq. With this vote, we are at long last holding this President accountable, replacing presidential lip service with the congressional force of law," continued Welch.

The bill also funds millions of dollars in emergency funding for Vermonters, including long-delayed agriculture disaster assistance, an extension of the MILC (Milk Income Loss Contract) program, funding for Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP), and a boost in funding for veterans' health care.

"Our Vermont farmers are suffering. This bill also provides Vermont farmers the disaster assistance they deserve and an important first step extending the MILC program they need," added Welch.

The measure imposes three firm dates to end the war through a series of benchmarks,

beginning as early as this summer:

- If progress toward meeting key accountability benchmarks is not made by July 1, 2007, a redeployment of U.S. troops from Iraq begins immediately and must be completed within 180 days.
- If the same key benchmarks are not met by October 1, 2007, a redeployment of U.S. troops from Iraq begins immediately and must be completed within 180 days.
- Regardless of success on these benchmarks, a redeployment of U.S. troops must begin by no later than March 1, 2008, and be completed within 180 days.

The legislation also supports our soldiers and ensures they are trained, equipped and protected by prohibiting the deployment of troops who are not "fully mission capable." The President could only deploy "unprepared troops" if he certifies, in writing, to Congress, that deploying those troops is in the national interest.

In addition to providing a firm deadline for the end of the war and funding for soldiers, the bill also includes:

- \$3.7 billion in agricultural disaster assistance many farmers across Vermont and the nation have been waiting for since it was blocked by the previous Republican Congress;
\$283,000,000 for a one-year extension of the MILC (Milk Income Loss Contract) program;
- \$400 million in emergency funding for the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP); and
- \$1.7 billion for veterans' health care, including addressing the maintenance backlog at the Veterans Administration and treating the growing number of veterans.

Watch Welch's statement from yesterday in support of the measure by [clicking here](#) or read the full text below:

Congressman Peter Welch
Floor Statement: A Path to End this Unconscionable War

March 22, 2007

"Mr. Speaker, the President's Iraq policy has been a catastrophe. It must be challenged. It must be changed. We must end this war.

The question we face is clear:

Will Congress rubberstamp a fifth year of a failed policy? Or will Congress, finally, after four straight years of lock-step compliance with an incompetent Administration, compel a new direction that ends the war?

The President has arrogantly asserted he will veto any measure with a timetable.

Mr. Speaker, I will not support any bill without a timetable.

If I had a chance to write this bill- I would bring our troops home yesterday. But I did not write this bill, so I must measure it based on three criteria:

- Does it impose accountability on the President and the Iraqis?
- Does it revoke the President's blank-check? and;
- Does it establish a date certain, with the force of law, to end this war?

This bill meets each of these objectives. Regrettably, if this bill fails, this war will continue unchecked and unabated.

It is time for the Iraqis to accept responsibility for shaping their future.

Even President Bush has acknowledged the importance of imposing measurable benchmarks

of success on the Iraqi government. This legislation replaces presidential lip service with the congressional force of law.

There is a reason President Bush threatens to veto this bill: It's because Congress is finally revoking his blank check.

Mr. Speaker, there is no easy way to clean up the mess in Iraq or to avert further suffering.

Our obligation remains to decide- at this time and this place- whether to stay the President's course or to end the war as soon as possible.

I will support this bill because it finally puts us on a path to end this unconscionable war."