

**Washington, DC** - As the war in Iraq enters its fifth year, Congressman Charles Gonzalez issued the following statement:

"As this war enters its fifth year, the price we've paid is high. 3,218 of our brave men and women have died and more than 24,000 have been wounded. The financial cost of this war is approaching almost half of a trillion dollars. Unfortunately, the President appears committed to an open-ended policy that maintains an indefinite presence in Iraq.

The United States can not continue down a road that potentially leads to a permanent occupation of Iraq. Now is the time for the Iraqi people and their leaders to assume the responsibility of setting aside their sectarian differences and embrace the promise of a democracy. Our troops have accomplished for Iraq all that they can, and the problems facing the country are no longer in need of military solutions. Rather, they require political and diplomatic solutions that only the Iraqi people themselves can provide.

House Democrats have proposed a plan that provides a real change of course for the war in Iraq. The plan displays strong support for our troops, sets a responsible timeline for the phased redeployment of our troops, and requires the President meet his own benchmarks as we move forward in Iraq. The plan also re-focuses our military efforts to fight terrorism on al Qaeda and the Taliban by providing \$1.2 billion more than the President originally requested for Afghanistan.

Adoption of this plan would answer the pleas of the American people - to turn away from the President's open-ended commitment to U.S. participation in this Iraqi civil war and instead provide a responsible, phased plan for requiring the Iraqis to take responsibility for their own future."

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