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Questions How The American People Can Trust
The Administration On The Cost Or Length Of Stay

Washington, DC - In a Congressional hearing to examine the Bush Administration's request for \$87 billion more for military and reconstruction operations in Iraq, Congressman Steve Rothman (D-NJ9) this week grilled President Bush's envoy to Iraq, U.S. Ambassador Paul Bremer, about the Administration's request for additional funds. In his pointed questioning of Bremer, Rothman stated that Bush Administration officials previously testified before Congress and told the American people that the cost of reconstruction to the U.S. would be minimal, but the President is now asking for \$20.3 billion for reconstruction. This is in addition to \$66.7 billion for military operations in Iraq, for a total request of \$87 billion. Following Rothman's questioning, Bremer declined to comment.

"Congress is faced with a request for \$20.3 billion in reconstruction costs when only six months ago Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld and Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz testified before us that the United States would not have the major responsibility for reconstruction and that Iraqi oil revenue would help cover the cost," Rothman said. "As someone who supported President Bush's decision to send U.S. troops to Iraq, I am very troubled that the Bush Administration has continuously made statements about Iraq to the Congress and the American people that have proven to be highly exaggerated or for which evidence has not yet been found."

"Whether it was their saying that Iraq possessed weapons of mass destruction that posed an imminent threat to the security of the United States, that there would be very little post-war resistance to American occupying forces, or saying that the United States would not have to pay almost the entire cost to reconstruct Iraq, the Bush Administration's claims have proven more often than not to be wrong. Therefore, given their previous, inaccurate claims about Iraq and the U.S.'s role there, it is Congress' job to view with a high degree of skepticism anything this Administration now claims about Iraq. Because the Administration has been, at best, loose with the facts about this war effort from the beginning, the Congress and the American people need to question very deeply this Administration's estimates about the future cost of the war and reconstruction, in U.S. taxpayer dollars, but most importantly in the safety of our military men and women."

However, Rothman added that, "Now is not the time to cut and run. Rebuilding Iraq is vital to America's national security. It will stabilize that country, keep it from becoming a training ground for terrorists, serve as a model of democracy in the Middle East, and demonstrate America's resolve not to be intimidated by jihadists and other terrorists. Improving the security situation in Iraq through reconstruction is also crucial to protecting the tens of thousands of U.S. troops on the ground who are subject to snipers and ambushes every day."

During his questioning, Rothman was critical of the fact that the Bush Administration is asking for more money to rebuild Iraq, at the same time it is under-funding important domestic priorities such as homeland security, job training and creation efforts, education, health care, prescription drugs, Social Security, and environmental protection within the United States.

Finally, Rothman said, "It is also unacceptable that the Bush Administration would only present a reconstruction plan for the next fifteen months, and would not even offer an estimate of the total cost for the war and reconstruction over the next five years. Either they don't have a fully thought out plan, or inexcusably they are unwilling to talk about U.S. costs in Iraq that will hit taxpayers after the next presidential election."

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