

There was no objection.

TRIP TO IRAQ

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentlewoman from California (Ms. WOOLSEY) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Madam Speaker, here is a quote: "Victory means exit strategy, and it's important for the President to explain to us what the exit strategy is."

Those words were not spoken by a Member of Congress, not by a prominent opponent of the Iraq War. They were not even spoken about this President or this war. Those words were spoken in April, 1999, about President Clinton's military campaign in Kosovo, and they were spoken by a Republican Governor named George W. Bush.

What a difference 6½ years makes because it is precisely an exit strategy that is missing from our Iraq policy. With 2,000 of their fellow citizens dead and 1 billion of their tax dollars being sent to Iraq every week, the American people have a right to some honest answers to some important questions like: What exactly defines victory? What are the benchmarks of success? What is the long-term plan? What does the end game look like?

We are paying for this war in blood and money. My home district lost a 23-year-old soldier on Saturday. Why will the President not repay us with some honesty and transparency? Why does he insult us with empty platitudes about "staying the course" and "staying in Iraq as long as it takes"?

Madam Speaker, I had the privilege of traveling to Iraq last week with a few of my House colleagues. We were briefed by the commanders on the ground. We saw the military facilities, which I am happy to report are state of the art. The quality of our soldiers' medical care in particular is excellent as far as I could see. Good equipment and the best docs that one could have.

The most rewarding and enlightening part of the trip was simply having meals and talking with the enlisted men and women, mostly those from California and particularly from my district north of the Golden Gate Bridge.

Madam Speaker, these young people are the very best America has to offer. They are brave. They are intelligent. They are loyal, loyal to their country, to their mission and to each other. They are profoundly committed to this mission, even those who told me privately they do not support the policy that underlies it.

These are genuine heroes whose courage and resolve are greater than our accolades can convey. We truly have the most capable military the world has ever known. So what is the problem?

The problem is that we do not have leaders in Washington that are worthy of these fine soldiers. Our troops have not failed. They have been failed by their civilian superiors, those who sent

them to Iraq on false pretenses, on a poorly defined mission without all the tools they needed and without a plan to get them out of there.

This morning's speech from the President was the same old shopworn rhetoric: Terrorism bad, freedom good. We know that and we agree, but that alone does not justify an open-ended military commitment. What comes next? Do not tell us. Show us. Show us that there is some kind of long-term strategy to return Iraq to the Iraqi people and the troops to their families back home.

If the President will not lead, then we will. Last month, I assembled a group of Middle East experts and military strategists to explore viable and compassionate exit strategies.

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I do not have all the answers, and I am not prepared to endorse a single approach, but I have felt for many months now that it was about time we started this conversation about troop withdrawal and started throwing ideas out and on the table.

Madam Speaker, our troops have endured enough sacrifice. We need to plan to bring them home.

At the same time, we must give Iraq back to the Iraqi people through a range of economic, political, and humanitarian partnerships. The American people deserve better than the poor planning that has characterized every phase of this war, and the extraordinary men and women whom I met in Iraq most certainly deserve better. They deserve leaders as courageous and honorable as they are. In return for their unflinching loyalty, they deserve basic competence and integrity.

COORDINATED STRATEGY OF CHARACTER ASSASSINATION

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mrs. SCHMIDT). Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from North Carolina (Mr. MCHENRY) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. MCHENRY. Madam Speaker, tonight I think we need to speak about the partisanship that is not just encountered here in Washington, D.C., not from the people just here in this body, but the partisanship we have seen from a prosecutor down in Austin, Texas. It is part of a coordinated strategy that those on the other side in this House have. It is a coordinated strategy of character assassination.

A couple of months ago I spoke before the House, and I outlined a few simple things. I said the Democrat leadership has led their party on a campaign against Republicans, against the Republican majority of this House, through a conspiracy of character assassination and misleading attacks.

The U.S. News and World Report wrote back in April: "Democratic strategists, confident that voters are increasingly fed up with the Republican establishment, are planning an

all-out attack on what they call 'the abuse of power' by the Republicans."

I said at the time the liberal magazine, the New Republic, published an article entitled: "How Democrats can Overthrow the House," this House, Madam Speaker, and I quote from that article: "Democrats should consider fighting back by extra-parliamentary means, going beyond the standard parameters of legislative debate, and attacking Republicans not on issues, but on ethics, character. In other words, it may be time for Democrats to burn down the House in order to save it."

Those are not my words, Madam Speaker. Those are the words of the liberal New Republic outlining the Democrat strategy to take the majority in this House. "Burn down the House in order to save it," they say.

Well, at the time, a lot of people thought that what I was outlining was something that was far off; that maybe it would not happen; that maybe we would have some high-minded individuals on the other side that would say enough is enough. This is not the right strategy for America; it is not the right type of political discourse we should have in this country. But, no, no, no, we saw this just a week ago with a partisan prosecutor in Austin Texas named Ronnie Earle.

After impaneling seven grand juries, he was able to come up with one charge, conspiracy; conspiracy against our majority leader, our Republican leader in the House. Well, as it turns out, those charges, not only were they false but they also were based on a statute that was not in effect at the time that they claim these events happened.

What we saw was a partisan prosecutor that was so focused on scoring political points that it did not matter what the law said; and so on Monday, he came up with a new charge based on new evidence, he claims. After going through seven grand juries, Madam Speaker, after going through 2 years of investigating our Republican leader, intent on taking him down, they said in 2 days they came up with new information and came up with a new charge.

It is an amazing thing that has happened. The American people have heard it before by watching the TV. They know the details of this.

But I want to outline what a former U.S. Attorney from the Southern District of New York, Andrew McCarthy, outlined. He said, "Ronnie Earle, district attorney of Travis County, Texas, has no business wielding the enormous power of prosecution. A matter of national gravity is being pursued with shocking ethical bankruptcy by the district attorney, by Ronnie Earle. If Congressman DELAY did something illegal, he, like anyone else, should be called into account. But he, like anyone else, is entitled to procedural fairness, including a prosecutor who not only is, but also appears to be, fair and impartial."