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Contact: Harald Stavenas (HASC) (202) 225-2539
Tami Plofchan (Calvert) (202) 225-1986
Kira Maas (Reyes) (202) 225-4831
Rick Terrazas (Hunter) (202) 225-5672

**STATEMENT BY HOUSE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN
DUNCAN HUNTER
AND COMMITTEE MEMBERS SILVESTRE REYES AND KEN CALVERT
REGARDING IRAQI SOVEREIGNTY**

Chairman Duncan Hunter (R-CA), Silvestre Reyes (D-TX), and Ken Calvert (R-CA) of the House Armed Services Committee, during a bipartisan Congressional delegation to Iraq, Kuwait, and Germany, met today in Baghdad with Ambassador Paul Bremer and Lieutenant General Ricardo Sanchez just hours after the transfer of sovereignty to the Iraqi interim government. During the meeting, General Sanchez reviewed the security situation in Iraq and discussed with the delegation the future of U.S. military operations in support of the new Iraqi interim government.

Following that meeting, the delegation received briefings and met with American military forces in Tikrit, Fallujah, and Ar Ramadi. "We visited the soldiers of the famous Big Red One, the Stryker Brigade and the U.S. Marines of the 1st Marine Expeditionary Force," said Hunter. Hunter continued, "What we saw was the best of America — young men and women fighting in tough, difficult circumstances for the American mission, bringing freedom to another people. Our troops are holding firm and there is a lesson for all Americans — we too should hold firm and see this stand-up of the new Iraq through to a successful conclusion."

During the two-day tour of Iraq, the members met with soldiers of the 1st Infantry Division in Tikrit, the 13th Combat Support Command in Balad, the 3rd Brigade, 2nd Division Stryker Brigade Combat Team in Mosul, 1st Marine Expeditionary Force in Fallujah, and the 1st Marine Division in Ar Ramadi. The delegation will continue on to Ramstein Air Force Base in Germany to visit injured servicemembers at the Landstuhl Regional Medical Center.

Hunter went on to describe the historic transfer of sovereignty: "The people of Iraq have been given a running start at freedom, all due to the sacrifice of American soldiers, Marines, sailors, and airmen." Hunter said, "To keep their freedom, a lot of effort and grit will be required."

"On this historic occasion for Iraq and its people, it is important to remember that the road ahead will be long, difficult, and dangerous; but their destiny is in their hands and, with our assistance, they can reclaim their freedom," said Reyes.

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“I was very impressed with our soldiers, sailors, airmen, and Marines who are the front line of our common defense against terror in Iraq,” said Calvert. “The 1st Marine Expeditionary Force in Fallujah from Camp Pendleton is doing a heroic job. The Marines are taking the fight to the thugs and murderers who would deny Iraq its freedom while at the same time they are helping Iraqis rebuild a country devastated by Saddam’s tyranny. As the Marines say with pride ‘we are either your best friend or your worst enemy.’”

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