



Feinstein And 40 Other Senators Say Tomorrow's Election Must Signal Turning Point Between America And Iraq

Democratic Senators call on President Bush to exercise leadership in the months ahead
December 14, 2005

Washington, DC – On the eve of Iraq's parliamentary elections, U.S. Senator Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif) joined 40 other senators today to call on President Bush to make 2006 a year of transition in Iraq. The senators marked the important milestone of these elections and praised our brave men and women in uniform who are making this election possible. In the letter, the senators called on the president to show the leadership that will make these elections a turning point that will make America safer and allow our troops to begin to come home.

The senators wrote that the four months following these elections will be critical in order to forge the necessary political consensus that will allow the political factions in Iraq to finalize the constitution and create a stable government. In making 2006 a successful transition the senators reminded the president that his "leadership will also be needed to ensure that we leverage the influence of the international community and Iraq's neighbors to push for a sustainable political compromise, and that we stand up sufficient numbers of capable Iraqi security forces so that our troops can begin standing down." Without the president's leadership and the delivery of a clear message to the Iraqi people that now is the time to take the training wheels off of their government, a successful transition will not be possible.

The senators also continued their call for the president to lay out a detailed strategy for success in Iraq that makes clear the way forward in Iraq. They wrote that, "while we appreciate your recent speeches on this issue, we regret that the American people have still not been presented with a plan that identifies the remaining political, economic, and military benchmarks that must be met and a reasonable schedule to achieve them." They urged the president to use today's speech to provide that detailed plan that the American people and our troops deserve.

The full text of the letter follows below:

December 14, 2005

The President
The White House
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

All Americans recognize the historic nature of the elections for a permanent, democratic government in Iraq on Thursday. We salute our courageous men and women in uniform, who are serving proudly in Iraq under enormously difficult circumstances, and whose dedication and sacrifice are making these elections possible.

Like you, we hope the elections will proceed peacefully and the Iraqi people will succeed in electing a legitimate government that is capable of uniting the Sunni, Shiite and Kurdish people. We know that successful elections can play an important part in defeating the insurgency and hastening the day when Iraqis can govern themselves without outside assistance.

We also know that the work of the Iraqi people to build the kind of Iraq we would all like to see does not end with these elections. It is vital that the Iraqis move more quickly toward inclusive political solutions. The four month period after the Iraqi elections, when the new government will attempt to finalize a Constitution, is perhaps the most critical time for the Iraqis and our troops. That is why 79 members of the Senate, including 41 Republicans, voted last month for an amendment that said, "calendar year 2006 should be a period of significant transition to full Iraqi sovereignty, with Iraqi security forces taking the lead for the security of a free and sovereign Iraq, thereby creating the conditions for the phased redeployment of United States forces from Iraq." A strong bipartisan majority of the Senate believes Iraqis must now step forward in the months ahead and take the lead in defending and governing their own country.

Your leadership will be essential in achieving this objective. As was stated in the bipartisan amendment that passed the Senate, "the [Bush] Administration should tell the leaders of all groups and political parties in Iraq that they need to make the compromises necessary to achieve the broad-based and sustainable political settlement that is essential for defeating the insurgency in Iraq within the schedule they set for themselves." Your leadership will also be needed to ensure that we leverage the influence of the international community and Iraq's neighbors to push for a sustainable political compromise, and that we stand up sufficient numbers of capable Iraqi security forces so that our troops can begin standing down.

Finally, we also believe that you must engage in a frank and honest dialogue with the American people and our troops about the road ahead in Iraq. As the bipartisan amendment stated, "the [Bush] Administration needs to explain to Congress and the American people its strategy for the successful completion of the mission in Iraq." While we appreciate your recent speeches on this issue, we regret that the American people have still not been presented with a plan that identifies the remaining political, economic, and military benchmarks that must be met and a reasonable schedule to achieve them. We hope you will use Wednesday's speech to finally provide a detailed explanation of your strategy for the successful completion of the mission in Iraq.

The window of time to get things right in Iraq may be rapidly closing. The successful completion of our mission is possible only through the hard work of the Iraqi people and the effective leadership of your Administration. We stand ready to work with the Iraqi people and your Administration in the days ahead.

Sincerely,

Senator Daniel Akaka
Senator Max Baucus
Senator Evan Bayh
Senator Joe Biden
Senator Jeff Bingaman
Senator Barbara Boxer
Senator Robert Byrd
Senator Maria Cantwell
Senator Tom Carper
Senator Hillary Clinton
Senator Jon Corzine
Senator Mark Dayton
Senator Chris Dodd
Senator Byron Dorgan
Senator Dick Durbin
Senator Russ Feingold
Senator Dianne Feinstein
Senator Tom Harkin
Senator Daniel Inouye
Senator Jim Jeffords
Senator Tim Johnson
Senator Ted Kennedy
Senator John Kerry
Senator Herb Kohl
Senator Mary Landrieu
Senator Frank Lautenberg
Senator Patrick Leahy
Senator Carl Levin
Senator Blanche Lincoln
Senator Barbara Mikulski
Senator Patty Murray
Senator Barack Obama
Senator Mark Pryor
Senator Jack Reed
Senator Harry Reid
Senator John Rockefeller
Senator Ken Salazar
Senator Paul Sarbanes
Senator Chuck Schumer
Senator Debbie Stabenow
Senator Ron Wyden

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