

Statement of  
**The Honorable Patrick Leahy**

United States Senator  
Vermont  
January 31, 2007

Statement Of Senator Patrick Leahy,  
Chairman, Senate Judiciary Committee  
Hearing On "Examining The Iraq Study Group's Recommendations  
For Improvements To Iraq's Police And Criminal Justice System"

January 31, 2007

The Committee today continues to focus its attention on the enduring conflict in Iraq. Just yesterday, Senator Feingold chaired an important hearing on the powers of Congress to contribute to finding a better solution. Today, we will concentrate on the challenges of training the Iraqi police and building a working criminal justice system. A competent police force and a functioning criminal justice system are crucial benchmarks in getting the Iraqi government to stand on its own.

I would like to welcome Congressman Hamilton and Attorney General Meese for appearing before the Committee, and for the work they have done in helping to find a better way forward in Iraq.

Regrettably, the situation in Iraq continues to worsen on all fronts. In the last couple of days, the Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction -- the office that some congressional Republicans tried to shut down -- released reports indicating that the U.S. Government has squandered millions intended for police training programs because of "rampant problems overseeing contractors" - as The Washington Post summarized it in its story this morning. The article details an unauthorized Olympic-sized swimming pool, VIP trailers, shoddy construction and unsanitary conditions at the Baghdad Police College, as well as evidence of fraud, as millions, if not tens of millions, are wasted. Not only does this undercut efforts in Iraq; it is doubly shameful in view of the lack of progress in restoring New Orleans and the Gulf Coast here in this country.

This is an issue of overriding importance. In the most recent congressional elections, the American people spoke loudly and clearly. They voted for a new direction and a change in leadership in the Congress. This week, the Democratic leadership in the Senate is charting that new direction by considering better ways to serve our national interests.

At its outset, the Iraq Study Group report states that the situation in Iraq is "grave and deteriorating." I appreciate their honesty. This grim assessment should have been a wakeup call to President Bush and his advisors, and a clear message that it was time to not only to listen to

others, but to act upon their sound advice. Instead, the President has rejected much of the hard work and advice of the Iraq Study Group and, again, decided to go it alone. During the last few days the Vice President went further, by rejecting contrary views as "hogwash" and seeking to trumpet "enormous successes" supposedly made in Iraq.

We now know that the predictions by the Vice President and others of being welcomed as liberators in Iraq and an easy transition to a Western-style, secular, peaceful, pluralistic democracy were a costly fantasy. As the Study Group report indicates, the best we can salvage may be the safe return of our soldiers and some measure of stability for the people of Iraq. The damage already done in terms of providing Al Qaeda with new recruits and the alienation the extended occupation by American forces has caused among young people in the Middle East will be felt for decades and generations. Moreover, we have lost focus on the effort to bring Osama bin Laden to justice.

As Senator Webb and many others I trust from both sides of the aisle have said, it is time for Congress to help guide the way. I hope the President will take good advice when offered -- no matter the source. I urge him to work with Congress rather than defy it and to listen to the will of the American people in order to avoid a confrontation.

I am also grateful to the Iraq Study Group for its express recognition that "Americans can and must enjoy the right of robust debate within a democracy." I agree. The scare tactics and attacks on the patriotism of those who question the President's flawed plan are corrosive, and they are wrong. The work of the bipartisan Iraq Study Group is in the best tradition of America. The hearings this Committee held on the Iraqi refugee crisis, and this week on congressional authority under our Constitution as well as this hearing on the Iraq Study Group's recommendations for improvements to Iraq's police and criminal justice system are likewise a part of that critical democratic debate.

Thoughtful postwar planners would have recognized the importance of law and order in Iraq. Men like Jay Garner and Richard Mayer drew up extensive plans to train and support an Iraqi police force to maintain law and order, only to be pushed aside and see their plans discarded by Pentagon leadership. The result is a disorganized criminal justice system and a weak Iraqi police force with an attrition rate of 30 percent, according to information released by the Pentagon.

More recently we have witnessed the Administration's discontinuation of Iraqi police training at a key training facility in Jordan, and the failure of government contractors to build the Baghdad Police College.

If the Administration had been serious and competent about establishing a functioning democracy in Iraq, it would have seen the need for a trustworthy criminal justice system in which all Iraqis could have confidence. But we have seen very little in the way of progress in establishing the rule of law in Iraq. The Study Group recognizes the importance of this issue. The Iraq Study Group's report includes a dozen recommendations in this area that we can explore today.

To my dismay, in the two major addresses to the Nation President Bush has given recently -- his escalation announcement of January 10th, and his recent State of the Union address -- the

President barely mentioned the Iraq Study Group's work and said nothing about the critical importance of Iraq's civilian police. Of course he also failed to make any mention of the continuing suffering in Louisiana and the Gulf Coast, perhaps the largest domestic disaster and displacement of people in our history.

Today's hearing gives this Committee and the country an opportunity to explore further the Study Group's recommendations and to engage in a robust debate. I hope that we can discuss better ways to contribute to peace and stability throughout the Iraqi neighborhoods that have been torn apart by violence. How can we better ensure that police forces serve the intended purposes of maintaining law and order rather than serving partisan militias and as death squads? How can we better ensure that the principles of the Leahy Law, which prohibits American financial assistance to those forces that engage in human rights violations, are honored rather than ignored?

There is much at stake, as we all know. I look forward to our discussion, and to making progress on finding answers to these questions so that the Iraqi government can be a self-sustaining one. And most importantly, I look forward to our troops coming home.