

Iraq Quagmire Ends

Written by Marc H. Morial
Friday, 04 November 2011 11:55



“After a decade of war, the nation that we need to build – and the nation that we will build – is our own.”

President Barack Obama

Last week, President Obama announced that the remaining 39,000 U.S. service men and women in Iraq will be back on U.S. soil by the end of the year. This essentially brings to a close a nearly decade-long war that the President opposed from the start and vowed to end.

This is welcome news for our troops and their families who have sacrificed so much in what has been increasingly viewed as an ill-advised and costly military mistake.

The nation owes a big debt of gratitude to the more than one million Americans who have been deployed to Iraq since the start of the war in March, 2003. This includes more than 4,480 who died on the battlefield and more than 32,000 who were wounded. Now that the war is ending, we must do everything in our power to ensure that the support our returning vets need to rebuild their lives and the jobs they need to support their families are waiting for them when they come home.

In addition to the human toll, the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have also been a drain on the U.S. economy. At a cost of more than \$800 billion, including billions lost, unaccounted for or stolen, the Iraq War has been a major contributor to the nation’s ballooning debt and deficit. It has also diverted funding that could have been used to create jobs and repair America’s crumbling infrastructure. As the President said, “Over the past decade, we spent a trillion dollars on war, borrowed heavily from overseas and invested too little in the greatest source of our national strength -- our own people. Now, the nation we need to build is our own.”

We could not agree more. In addition to withdrawing our troops, we should also accelerate Iraq’s economic independence. Iraq is an oil-rich nation that has traditionally stifled the growth

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of small businesses and a vibrant middle class due to a culture of rampant corruption and bureaucratic red-tape. It is clear that if Iraq wants to move forward, it must change that culture from within -- not on the backs of the American taxpayer.

The money we have wasted in the war and in rebuilding Iraq's infrastructure could be better spent here in America, rebuilding schools, roads, bridges, community centers, libraries and equipping our young people and returning veterans with the skills they need to enter the world of work.

It is unconscionable that any man or woman who goes abroad to fight our wars has to come home and fight for a job. But sadly that is the case. While overall unemployment remains unacceptably high at 9.1 percent, post-9/11 veterans suffer from a jobless rate of nearly 13 percent. That is why the President's American Jobs Act includes a \$5,600 tax credit for businesses that hire veterans who have been unemployed for six months or longer.

The President deserves our thanks for ensuring that our troops will be home for the holidays. Now it is up to Congress to honor their service and every American who wants to work by passing the American Jobs Act now.

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