

Sen. John McCain: Early Withdrawal from Iraq is Irresponsible; Would Result in Horrible Consequences

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KANSAS CITY, Mo. — In a speech given this morning to the Veterans of Foreign Wars, Sen. John McCain (R. Ariz.) chided political leaders who are calling for an early withdraw from Iraq the “height of irresponsibility and a failure of leadership.” Leaving, he said, might be the easier course of action, but the “consequences would be horrible.”

McCain was in town Monday and addressed a standing room only crowd of 300 combat veterans and veteran supporters at the World War I Memorial. In his 20-minute address, he admitted the American people are frustrated by the mistakes made in the war in Iraq, but America must be patient and support Gen. David Petraeus.

“Four years of a badly conceived military strategy had brought us almost to the point of no return. Sectarian violence in Iraq was spiraling out of control, life had become a struggle for survival, and a full-scale civil war seemed almost unavoidable,” the former Vietnam War POW said, reminding the audience that there has been substantial progress in Iraq since the strategy shift and the deployment of additional troops to the area.

McCain, who recently returned from one of his many trips to Iraq said that since June 2007, sectarian and ethnic violence in Iraq has been reduced by 90 percent and coalition forces and civilian deaths have fallen by 70 percent.

“The dramatic reduction in violence has opened the way for a return to something approaching normal political and economic life for the average Iraq,” he said. “Political reconciliation is occurring across Iraq at the local and provincial grassroots level. Sunni and Shi’a chased from their homes by terrorist and sectarian violence are returning. The “Sons of Iraq” and Awakening movements, where former Sunni insurgents have now joined in the fight against Al Qaeda, continue to grow.”

But McCain added, “I do not want to keep our troops in Iraq a minute longer than necessary to secure our interests there. Our goal is an Iraq that no longer needs American troops. And I believe we can achieve that goal, perhaps sooner than many imagine.”

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Admitting that the road ahead will be hard, McCain said he believes it is the right road and is “necessary and just.”

Calling war a terrible thing, the VFW member of Post 7401 in Chandler, Ariz., told the audience that war is sometimes necessary to secure freedom, which is why he has remained firm in his position about the war in Iraq:

“I hold my position on Iraq not because I am indifferent to the suffering caused by this war but because I detest war, and believe sincerely that should we fail in Iraq we will face an even sterner test in the very near future, an even harder war, with even greater sacrifice and heartbreaking loss than we have suffered over the last five years.”

McCain also praised the sacrifices of the military veterans in attendance, calling for their sacrifices to be “memorialized in something more lasting than marble or bronze or in the fleeting effect of a politician's speeches.”

“Your valor and devotion to duty have earned your country's abiding concern for your welfare. And when our government forgets to honor our debts to you, it is a stain upon America's honor,” he said. “Those who have borne the burden of war for our sake must be treated fairly and expeditiously as they seek compensation for disability or illness.

“We owe them compassion, knowledge and hands-on care in their transition to civilian life. We owe them training, rehabilitation and education. We owe their families, parents and caregivers our concern and support. They should never be deprived of quality medical care and mental health care coverage for illness or injury incurred as a result of their service to our country.”

He also addressed the deficiencies in the government's military disability system and called for changes in the Department of Veterans Affairs treatment of the nation's veterans:

“I believe that we should give veterans the option to use a simple plastic card to receive timely and accessible care at a convenient location through a provider of their choosing. I will not stand for requiring veterans to make an appointment to stand in line to make an appointment to stand in line for substandard care of the injuries you have suffered to keep our country safe. Whatever our commitments to veterans cost, we will keep them, as you have kept every commitment to us. The honor of a great nation is at stake.”

In closing McCain asked the audience to remember the sacrifices of our men and women in war, and to honor those to ensure their sacrifices are not in vain.

“Let us show an appropriate humility by recognizing that so little is asked of us compared to

the burdens we imposed on them, and let us show just a small, but significant measure of their courage, resolve and patriotism by putting our country's interests before every personal or political consideration,” the senator said.

Following the speech McCain met with VFW leadership, as well as toured the Liberty Memorial. --*Story, photos by Gloria Montgomery/VFW Communications*

Note: In January 2006, the VFW adopted [Resolution 440](#) in support of the war in Iraq.