

March 19, 2008: Wittman Statement on Five Year Anniversary of Operation Iraqi Freedom

(Washington, D.C.) - Congressman Rob Wittman released the following statement on the Five Year Anniversary of Operation Iraqi Freedom:

"Today marks the fifth anniversary of Operation Iraqi Freedom. As we look back on the events of the last five years in Iraq, Americans have reason to be confident that our efforts over the last year have led to major military and political accomplishments and that we are headed in the right direction. Optimism continues to grow among the Iraqi people as stability and normalcy emerges in every province of the country. The number of civilian and military deaths continues to decline and the economy is slowly, but surely, beginning to take shape.

"Militarily, our efforts have resulted in tremendous gains throughout Iraq. We are witnessing a consistent reduction in coalition fatalities, while civilian casualties have decreased by 70% since June of 2007. This represents a significant shift in the trends we saw prior to the troop surge. More importantly though, the Iraqi Security Forces have matched our efforts and we have seen their ranks grow in size and ability. Additionally, the emergence of Awakening Councils have provided a much needed boost within individual communities, assisting Coalition Forces with an additional support system in confronting localized threats. These developments have allowed our troops to meet the challenge of stabilizing neighborhoods and aiding the community in their rebuilding efforts. As a result, nearly 80% of all Iraqis feel their neighborhood is safe and secure.

"Economically, core inflation for 2007 was 12.28%, down from 31.92% in 2006. GDP has increased and the economy is projected to grow by 7% in the coming year. These positive trends are proof that the country is on the right economic track. I am confident that as the government continues to work towards a fair and open legal system more foreign investors will begin to look to place resources into Iraq. This is an important step that must be made if the Iraqi economy is to continue its development and I am hopeful that with increased safety and security comes increased national revenue, lower inflation and an expansion of foreign investment.

"Politically, the Iraqi people have had a number of noteworthy developments. Political leaders have passed several key pieces of legislation aimed at bringing the country together, notably the Accountability and Justice Law that allowed former Ba'ath party members to return to the Government. This will be an important step in the reconciliation process and demonstrated willingness by all parties involved to compromise on a difficult issue. Additional laws have been passed to address Sunni grievances and in February, a record \$49.9 billion budget was passed. The Prime Minister and key

lawmakers are currently working towards resolutions on several key pieces of legislation, including laws that deal with elections and the development of Iraq's energy policies. These topics are difficult issues that will require concessions be made by all sides, but if past actions are an indicator of what is possible, I am hopeful that Iraqi leaders will find solutions that will benefit every Iraqi citizen.

"There is still much work to do. But the American people should know that our efforts are working. General Petraeus and Ambassador Crocker's surge policies have resulted in momentous progress. Our troops, the fine men and women who have sacrificed everything to protect our freedoms and share the dream of democracy with the Iraqi people, are a true symbol of all that is good about America. I am proud of their service and their courage. They have carried out their charge with grace and honor and as a result, Iraq is more safe and secure today than it was a year ago. The economy is growing and political leaders are finding solutions rather than arguments. The men and women of the U.S. Armed Forces have exhibited all the characteristics of heroes and I thank them today for the selfless acts of bravery they have given us over the last five years."