

**Congresswoman Betty McCollum
Peace in the Precincts Rally
September 26, 2004**

At this very moment, more than one hundred thousand American troops and millions of Iraqis are all asking themselves: What will happen to me today? When will this killing stop? When will life get better? When can I go home to my family?

In Congress, I represent thousands of families, including troops in Iraq and their families here at home. I respect them and I believe they deserve the truth.

So, unlike President Bush, I cannot and I will not tell them, or you, that the situation in Iraq is looking good and democracy is right around the corner, if we stay the course, because this is delusional rhetoric, not based in reality, from the same people who deceived and misled our nation into this war in Iraq.

I have traveled to Iraq twice to visit our troops and see the situation for myself. The truth is Iraq is a dangerous mess.

This White House and this president have failed the American people, failed our troops and failed the people of Iraq. Our nation's credibility in the world has deteriorated and we are not safer here at home.

The Bush administration's extremism, their incompetence and their shameful negligence has resulted in thousands and thousands of American and Iraqi casualties.

Two days ago, I spoke with a humanitarian worker in Baghdad by phone. She is a European, married to an Iraqi and has lived in Iraq for 35 years. For as bad and frightening as life was under Saddam, she said day-to-day life now is worse – more dangerous and more difficult.

This is the reality of George Bush's war.

The future of Iraq does not rest in the hands of George Bush and Donald Rumsfeld. The future of Iraq rests in the hands of the Iraqi people. For the Iraqis to succeed it will take the entire world standing with them to ensure their voices are heard, their country is secure, their children are free and their dreams are realized.

The Iraqi people do not want a military occupation – they want jobs, clean water, safe streets and open schools.

Therefore, the Iraqi people must decide their own future. Just as Americans want a fair and honest outcome in our national election this November, the Iraqi people want the same for their first election in January.

Ensuring a free, fair and secure election in Iraq is the next critical step towards true Iraqi sovereignty and legitimate self-rule.

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Then, an elected Iraqi government can invite the international community into their country to share the burden and secure the peace, so we can start bringing our troops home.

At the same time, our next president must re-engage the world, repair damaged alliances and restore our nation's tattered credibility.

We must re-engage the world so we can achieve solutions to the global challenges that exist in addition to Iraq, like the genocide in Sudan, like the AIDS pandemic and confronting the expanding threat of global terrorism.

We must engage the global community with a spirit and commitment that will create more hope, more opportunity, more justice and more security in this world.

Let our nation use its enormous power and wealth, our shared principals, our limitless passion, our desire for justice to be a true superpower that unites this world to advance mankind's future...and that includes the future of Iraq.

There are no easy answers to the crisis in Iraq. That's why I am here today, because people of shared values, moral clarity, common sense and a common cause – need to come together in this democracy and take a stand against the dangerous and reckless policies of this administration.

The principles offered here today are a brilliant contrast to the chaos, corruption and lawlessness the world sees in Iraq every day. These principles are a guide, a testament to the strength of moral leadership that our community possesses and our nation can once again extend to the world. But it will take people of conscience and courage to stand by these principles and make them come alive.

But we first have a choice to make – a choice in November.

After more than 1,000 lost American lives, after more than 10,000 lost Iraqi lives, after more than \$150 billion has been taken from our children's future, there is no doubt in my mind, the largest issue facing our country today is the deception that took this nation to war and the deadly quagmire our troops now face in Iraq.

This war was never about an imminent threat to the American people or weapons of mass destruction or phantom links to the 9-11 terrorists.

It has always been about unrestrained political power, an insatiable addiction to oil and multi-billion dollar, no bid contracts for Halliburton.

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In October 2002, I was given a choice. I had the choice to support giving the president unlimited power to wage a unilateral war in Iraq, or deny this president and Secretary Rumsfeld a blank check to take preemptive military action.

I was given the choice and I voted no! Jim Oberstar voted no! Martin Sabo voted no! Mark Dayton voted no! And, Paul Wellstone voted no!

On November 2nd, finally, you have a choice and you get to vote on this war.

You must decide if you want to stay the course in Iraq. Or, if you want a change, a new direction, based on international cooperation, economic justice, human rights, respect for the rule of law, and most importantly, a policy based on reality

You make the choice. You decide. You vote.

And if millions and millions of Americans share our passion for America's highest and best use of our power then I have no doubt that the principals we stand by will carry the day on November 2nd.

The path to security, stability, self-governance and a strategy for our troops to return home safely starts on November 2nd.

We need to keep working together in every precinct across Minnesota and across this country. Working together in the halls of Congress.

It is up to us to help bring peace to the precincts, peace to this nation, peace to Iraq and much, much more peace to this world.

Thank you!