



Congressman Todd Tiahrt's U.S. Capitol Update

October 3, 2003

A Different Picture of Iraq

Most of the national media accounts of the situation in Iraq paint a picture of a country in rubble with unwelcome American troops being attacked and killed by the Iraqi people. After spending time on the ground in Iraq, I can report that reality is quite different than that picture created by the media. I am not the only member of Congress to come away with that same testimony. Almost to a person, every member, Republican and Democrat will tell you the same thing. The Iraqi people appreciate the job we are doing, and enjoy the improvements in infrastructure and security the United States is providing.

Despite what I had heard, all of the hospitals in Iraq were open, the markets were open, the electricity was on in most places, and people were waving at us and the U.S. troops. The roads and bridges in Baghdad were actually quite good, and, with a few exceptions, the only damaged structures were government buildings, Saddam's palaces and military sites. There is definitely a tremendous need to improve and update the country's utility, agricultural and financial infrastructure. However, this need is not due to the U.S. military action against Iraq; rather it is because of 30 years of neglect under Saddam Hussein.

Saddam basically spent the Iraqi oil revenue on three things: his military, transportation infrastructure so he could travel on good roads and approximately 85 palaces throughout the country. While he was living in palaces built of marble and gold, he was allowing Iraqi children to die so the infant mortality rate in Iraq would rise, and he could use it as a political issue against the U.N. sanctions. While he was building up a personal army to protect himself and his family, he was executing innocent Iraqis and burying them in mass graves. It is estimated that he may have executed upwards of 1.5 million of his own people.

For these and other reasons, most Iraqi citizens are glad the United States troops are there. Unfortunately, we are losing American lives, but the perpetrators of these attacks are not usually members of the general Iraqi public. They are either Saddam loyalists, terrorists from other countries or some of the 100,000 criminals Saddam released from prison right before the war. The 42,000 Iraqi policemen have caught approximately half of the released criminals, and Iraqi citizens, including children, are helping the U.S. military find the loyalists and other terrorists.

One of the U.S. generals told me a story about two Iraqi children telling some U.S. troops about a terrorist ambush site. The children showed our troops where some artillery shells had been strung together with a device that could be detonated remotely. These kids helped the Americans because these same troops helped rebuild their playgrounds and their schools, got the electricity running again and were providing a way of life they had not known before. These children did not want to lose that, so they helped those people who had helped provide this new life.

We are doing the right thing in Iraq. I will support the President's \$87 billion request for the war on terrorism and Iraq reconstruction. There is no doubt a lot of work to do, but in this case, reality is better than the perception we get from the national media. We have a great opportunity to help the Iraqi people and build a more secure future for our children and grandchildren at the same time. Meanwhile, our troops will continue to fight the terrorists in the streets of Iraq, which is far better than on the streets of New York, Washington or Wichita.