

(Pittsburgh, PA) - U.S. Representative Jason Altmire released the following statement today following his visit this week to Iraq.

"I return today having seen first-hand the situation on the ground in Iraq. Two things are abundantly clear. First, our troops serving in Iraq are the very best America has to offer. They have done everything that has been asked of them and they are to be commended for their skill, their patriotism and their bravery. They are an inspiration to me and to every American. Second, unfortunately, the same cannot be said for the Iraqi government. The political leadership in Iraq has not only failed to make progress in nearly every measurable way, but in many cases they have gone backwards."

"For all the great work of the American troops in Iraq, there can be no military solution to this four and a half year conflict. The major problem in Iraq - that the Iraqi political leaders have shown no willingness to stand up for themselves and begin to take the reins of their own government - remains unresolved and shows no signs of improvement. This is one issue that our troops cannot solve for Iraq. The Iraqis must do it for themselves. Simply put, America can no longer hold the hands of the Iraqi officials and offer them an open-ended commitment while our best and brightest men and women continue to fight and die in Iraq. The time has come for the Iraqis to rise up to the challenge and manage their own affairs."

"This is why I have never been more certain that our best strategy for success in Iraq remains imposing a timeline on American involvement to show the Iraqis, once and for all, that they must make the necessary political accommodations and not continue to depend on the American military to referee their internal disputes. It is my firm belief that this is the most effective way to get the political leaders in Iraq to take seriously their responsibilities and make the difficult decisions that they have up until now avoided."

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"I am optimistic that Congress will hear a similar message from General Petraeus and Ambassador Crocker in their upcoming report. After that report, I hope that we in Congress will move forward, working with the president, on a strategy in Iraq that is in the best interest of the American people and especially the brave men and women who are serving this country so honorably."

Congressman Altmire was in Iraq on Tuesday, August 28 where he met with: U.S.

Ambassador Ryan Crocker; Army Gen. David Petraeus, U.S. Commander in Iraq; Army Lt. Gen. Raymond Odierno, Commander of Multinational Corps-Iraq; Iraqi Deputy Prime Minister Salam al-Zubaie; and U.S. service members from Pennsylvania serving in Iraq. Congressman Altmire also visited a combat support hospital in Baghdad, viewed an Iraqi security force training session, and traveled outside of the Green Zone to Fallujah where he toured the city and met with Fallujah's police chief to discuss the city's security situation. The following day, Congressman Altmire toured U.S. military bases in Kuwait, visiting Pennsylvania troops, and held additional meetings with U.S. Embassy and military officials in Kuwait.