Tuesday, September 18th 2007 **General Patraeus and Ambassador Crocker:** I'm sure you all heard or heard of the Capitol Hill testimony of Iraq Commanding General Patraeus and Ambassador to Iraq Crocker. I will not repeat what they said. But I will give you my thoughts.

Four months ago, Congress authorized the additional funding necessary to implement the "surge" and related operations in Iraq and Afghanistan for the rest of the year. After that vote in May, there were a number of other votes, some consequential and others merely advisory, on whether and when to withdraw troops from Iraq. Most of these votes followed nearly straight party lines with all but 2 or 3 Republicans voting against immediate withdrawal, and all but about 10 Democrats voting in favor of it. The Republican position was that we should give the military commanders over there a chance to make their new strategy work before making irrevocable decisions. We thought that we should wait for the facts as of September and make more decisions then. I will tell you that many Republicans, including this one, were ready to break with the president and the current strategy absent some progress on the ground.

Clearly, there has been progress on the ground. General Patraeus will begin drawing down the surge troops by the end of this month and return to pre-surge levels by next summer, while still achieving military objectives. There are obviously still many challenges over there, not the least of which are political. But it makes no sense to precipitously make more rapid troop withdrawals and risk a massive destabilization of the region when we can reduce troop levels while maintaining control. The only reason to do that would be if you do not believe that there is any foreign policy benefit to the United States by achieving the objective of "a stable and secure Iraq that denies extremists a safe haven." I happen to believe that there are huge benefits to us if we achieve that objective. Not the least of which is a beachhead in the Middle East as we will soon have to deal with Iran. It is very instructive that the French Foreign Minister said Sunday that the international community must be prepared to "go to war" if Iran obtains nuclear weapons. Yes, that came from France! That shows you how serious the Iranian situation is when the French are preparing to take action (obviously first involving sanctions and other measures to avert their acquisition of nuclear weapons).

In supporting our military's course in Iraq, I am reacting to the facts. If they had been different, I would have reacted differently. Several Democrats who recently visited Iraq also reacted to the facts they saw and said the current strategy should be continued. Unfortunately, many in the moveon.org crowd have demonized those Democrats. I hope that a bipartisan consensus can emerge to rationally and constructively continue progress towards achieving our objectives. That being said, we have had setbacks before and we may have them again.

One more comment on General Patraeus. Commanding Generals matter in warfare. Abraham Lincoln went through seven commanders of the Army of the Potomac before he found Ulysses S. Grant to win the war for him. One of those seven was General George McClelland who by all accounts was a very capable General, but he was not aggressive enough for Lincoln. He ended up being Lincoln's Democrat opponent in the 1864 election. It could be that Patraeus is the right

General at the right time. He also seems to have a rare combination of battlefield abilities (according to officers who serve with him) and political skills, which were evident during the hearings. The attempts by some to discredit him are completely without any foundation, in my opinion. This guy seems to be a uniquely qualified military commander.

The Monument to Me:
Some of you may recall that one of the earmarks that I exposed and tried to eliminate on the House floor was the so-called "Monument to Me" earmark in which Ways and Means Committee Chairman Charles Rangel (D-NY) used $2 million of your tax money to create the "Rangel School for Public Policy" at New York City College. Well, CBS news decided that this self-promoting abuse of taxpayer funds was worth more exposure. So, last Friday night the CBS Evening News aired the following segment on this earmark and my challenge of it.
You may watch it here.

Until next week, I remain respectfully,

Congressman John Campbell