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ONE HUNDRED NINTH CONGRESS

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### **Opening Statement of Rep. Henry A. Waxman, Ranking Minority Member Committee on Government Reform, Hearing of the Subcommittee on National Security, Emerging Threats, and International Relations, "Iraq: Democracy or Civil War?" September 13, 2006**

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for holding this hearing. And I want to tell you I was very impressed and moved by the comments of our Republican colleague Mr. Duncan in the statement he's just made. It is difficult to take responsibility, it's difficult to say that sometimes mistakes are made. And we speak as Americans, not as Democrats or Republicans, as we look at the tragedy that's been unfolding before us. Three and a half years have passed since the invasion of Iraq. But the situation on the ground today can only be described as dismal.

The violence in Iraq is spiraling out of control. In July, 3,000 Iraqis were killed. The number of attacks reached an all-time high. There were more than 1,600 sectarian execution-style killings. By early August, there were almost 800 attacks per week. Death squads and terrorists are running rampant, and independent observers believe a civil war has already started.

And we know the reconstruction hasn't gone any better. In Baghdad they don't have electricity except for a few hours during the day. Millions of Iraqis don't have access to drinkable water, and the oil production in Iraq is below prewar levels.

Well, there are several ways to approach the reality of what we've repeatedly seen. One could be what the Administration has been saying. They're saying that Iraq stands as a shining example of great progress. I don't think there's any basis for this kind of optimism. It took four months to form a government, and the current Iraqi leaders seem to lack the political will to reach agreement on the issues that divide them.

Well, how has the President responded to all of this? Over and over again, we get the same kind of talk from this Administration: we're just about to turn the corner. We get a steady stream of optimistic projections. We're at a key turning point. We're going to have a crucial breakthrough. Before the war began, Vice President Cheney promised the American people that "we will, in fact, be greeted as liberators."

Well, that never happened. And a month later, President Bush stood in front of a giant "Mission Accomplished" sign and said: "We have seen the turning of the tide."

And since then, we've had that steady stream of nonsense. On June 28, 2004, when we turned over sovereignty, President Bush promised that Iraq was at a "turning point," but the violence just intensified.

On the eve of the January 2005 elections, President Bush explained, "Tomorrow the world will witness a turning point in the history if Iraq, a milestone in the advance of freedom." It sounded good, but it was a complete fantasy.

A few months later, Vice President Cheney presented the American people with the ultimate in happy talk. On *Larry King Live*, he said: "The level of activity that we see today from a military standpoint, I think, will clearly decline. I think we're in the last throes, if you will, of the insurgency."

In December 2005, President Bush said: We're making "quiet, steady progress" in Iraq. Well, if 2005 was a turning point, it was definitely a turning point for the worse.

Over and over again, the approach of the Republican Administration has been to tell us we need to stay the course, it's working out well for the Iraqi people and for the American people. That's why I'm so impressed by our Republican colleague making the statement this morning that we've got to face reality.

It is not turning out well. It is a mess.

Now, I know that some people on this committee have said in the past: "I'm one person who believes that our involvement in Iraq is a noble effort." They never say, "I was wrong." Now we have people saying what we need is to have a reassessment of the forces that are needed to provide security in Iraq. Do we trust this Administration to reassess the number of forces that we need to have stability in Iraq? They weren't able to assess the number of troops we needed from the very beginning to maintain security in Iraq.

We heard that we ought to be blunt with the Iraqi leadership, that we should give them a deadline. And if they can't work out their differences, then what? Are we threatening to leave? Well, in the middle of a civil war, if you tell people, "by this deadline, you've got to work out your problems," the aggrieved party in a civil war will not agree to work out the problems, because they would like to see us leave.

But we have no leverage, because we told them we were going to reconstruct the country and we failed. We told them we were going to bring about security and we failed. We told them that they were at a turning point and they turned the wrong way. So it's no solution to say that we need to set some deadlines, tell them to work it all out, and reassess the number of troops. That may get us past the election. But it's not an answer.

What we need is honest talk from the Bush Administration and those who have defended the war as a "noble war." We need to learn that somebody's got to be held accountable. This Administration has to be held accountable. The Republicans and the Congress that supported it

have to be held accountable. The Democrats — after event after event after event — should have learned that we'd made a mistake and that we were getting deeper and deeper in this quagmire. We need to admit that as well.

And after that, you hold people responsible. You move forward. And you don't hold on to a "noble cause" until you lose more and more lives and face the end of the road. And we already may be at the end of the road

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.