

Center for American Progress Action Fund



SPECIAL PRESENTATION

“ASSESSING THE SITUATION IN IRAQ”

MODERATED BY:

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OFFICER, CENTER FOR AMERICAN PROGRESS ACTION FUND**

FEATURED PANELISTS:

SENATOR ROBERT P. CASEY (D-PA)

CONGRESSWOMAN ELLEN O. TAUSCHER (D-CA)

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MR. JOHN PODESTA: Good morning. I'm John Podesta. I'm the president of the Center for American Progress Action Fund. I want to welcome you all this morning. We're honored and very pleased to have Congresswoman Ellen Tauscher and Senator Bob Casey with us to assess the situation in Iraq and offer their ideas on what needs to be done there over the next few months and particularly as we go into this fall and congressional session when we're back to the debate about what our Iraq policy should be.

Both of these leaders have been strong voices on the question of Iraq and they've just both come back from trips over the congressional recess to Iraq. They've been strong proponents of shifting course militarily and politically in the region, so we are very pleased and, as I said, honored to have them here.

They're both pressed for time because of congressional business, so I'm going to give the briefest of introductions to both of our guests. You know them both.

Congresswoman Ellen Tauscher is currently serving her sixth term representing California's 10th Congressional District. During her tenure, she's become a senior member of the House Armed Services Committee. She's a leading voice on national security matters, as you all know. She's traveled to the Middle East six times since the start of the Iraq war. She's been to Iraq four – on four of those trips, and as I said, during the recess she was there leading a bipartisan congressional delegation that met with General Petraeus, Ambassador Crocker, U.S. troops and commanders, and members of the Iraqi parliament. Just before the recess, she authored legislation that passed the House of Representatives to ensure that U.S. soldiers and Marines have sufficient rest time consistent with Pentagon policy which is being ignored, I would say, right now, and that legislation – similar legislation, companion legislation is pending in the Senate as the Webb-Hagel Amendment to the Defense Authorization Bill which I know the Senate is going to come back to hear in the next couple of weeks.

Bob Casey is a former two-term auditor general and state treasurer in Pennsylvania. He has now already become a strong voice in his first term in the United States Senate as a member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on all matters of national security, but particularly on issues relating to the Middle East and Iraq. He recently was on a Senate delegation to Iraq and Jordan with Senator Dick Durbin.

We're very pleased to have worked with both of these distinguished members of Congress over the past couple of years. We thank them for being here this morning and sharing their views. I'm going to let them to give brief observations and opening statements about their impressions about what they saw during the August, but I'd like to frame it up a little bit if I could by saying that as the beginning of this year the president said that the strategy surrounding or around the surge was to try to provide some space for political reconciliation and that the strategy would produce national reconciliation in

Iraq. So I'd like to hear what you both have to say about what you see as the situation on the ground, but I think with a particular focus on whether that strategic mission is being moved forward, whether you see any signs of success. We just had the GAO report come back on the benchmarks, but do you have any sense that the strategy of providing this upswing in troops to provide some security space is having the desired impact that the president suggested at the beginning of the year?

Why don't we start with you, Ellen, then I'll turn to Bob.

REPRESENTATIVE ELLEN TAUSCHER (D-CA): Okay. Thank you so much John and I want to thank the Center for American Progress Action Fund and all of my friends here for having this forum today. It's always great to be able to have a more relaxing way of talking about such a cauldron – conundrum of issues, especially considering the data dump we've had most recently on Iraq. Prior to my going to Iraq for my fourth week, just a couple of weeks ago, we had the NIE come out – the National Intelligence Estimate – which was fairly devastating even in the unclassified form in its opinions about not only what's going on in Iraq as far as the opportunities for political reconciliation, but also their assessment of the Maliki government, which they said they weren't sure could last six to 12 more months.

When I went to Iraq, I didn't go on my fourth trip to go to get more Green Zone fog or to be influenced by a steady stream of rosy projections and talk about how well things were going which is what you get when you're in the green zone. I went really to talk and assess the political surge which was, as John characterized, the whole reason for the president's suggestion that we have a surge. I did not support the surge. I sit on the Armed Services Committee. I have for the last 11 years. I'm the chairman of the Strategic Forces Subcommittee on the Armed Services Committee. We do this every day and it appeared to me that adding more American troops at a time when the political situation in Iraq was not improving was not the best thing for us to do. We are spending \$330 million a day. We've lost 3,700 precious Americans, 30,000 have been devastatingly injured, and we have our military stretched beyond the limits of being ready to deal with any other future contingency.

And the question right now is, what is the strategic interest of the American people? Is it in their strategic interest to keep spending that money every day, to keep putting these soldiers on the line, to have 160,000 troops on the line when we know that we cannot sustain the surge past March? And what is the so-called outcome of the surge when not surprisingly when you add more of the finest troops in the world; you're going to get security where they are. But 160,000 American troops and some Iraqi troops that are out there operating is not a perfect security blanket for Iraq, and apparently that is what this Iraqi government needs in order to do the simple things that they promised to do when they came into office 18 months ago, pass a deBa'athification law, pass the – what's called the hydrocarbon law for sharing of the revenues, to have provincial elections, to begin to do the kinds of things that are going to knit together a one-Iraq strategy that causes not only the Iraqi people to have hope, but also causes Iraqi young men predominantly who are in the military to be willing to fight and die for that country.

And we have reports now coming – yesterday we had the Jones report. We had the GAO report on Monday. All of these are very mixed results, but what they all agree is that there has been no political surge, and without political surge, we are not going to have the ability to have a devolution of the violence. We're not going to have the Iraqis be able to stand up so that we can stand down. And we've also found out some very bad things. We found out that the police force, which is run by what's called the Ministry of the Interior, is a virtual snake pit. They call the Ministry of Interior building, 11-story time bomb. And you can be building an army, as we have, for billions of dollars for the last four years and you can actually get it up to a pretty muscular number and have a robust force, but if you don't have people that are able to patrol the streets every day and maintain a sense of calm and civility and adjudicate small little problems and deal with crime, you're going to have a country that is still unsafe. You're going to still have Iraqis that can't leave their homes or their neighborhoods. And if that police force is included in a sectarian violence regime, then you're really going to have the jeopardy that the Iraqi people have been fearful, especially the Sunnis, for a very long time.

So we have very, very mixed results for the last four or five years, and we have really no political surge. So I'm deeply disappointed that the strategy of the president, which has yet to be articulated for what he really means is success, what he really means is winning, certainly hasn't produced the kind of political outcome I think we need, and I'm very anxious to begin to bring our troops home as soon as we possibly can.

MR. PODESTA: Bob, observations?

SENATOR ROBERT CASEY (D-PA): John, thank you for having us here and I want to thank the Center for American Progress for allowing us to be here today for this forum. And Representative Tauscher, thank you and appreciate the benefit of your experience and the many trips you made to Iraq. And I have to say I agree wholeheartedly with what you had said.

I think on the threshold the initial question you posed, John, about this whole question of the so-called surge, which we – at the time we were debating this, I voted against it as well, spoke of an escalation of troops, which it was, but the stated objective there seems to have been lost in the debate in the last couple of days or weeks where you see on talk shows people debating did the surge work. And I think the measuring stick should be – should be the measure that we were told was the measure many months ago which was, can an increase in troops lead to developments in progress so that this government can be a government of national unity? Can they really govern themselves and have the kind of police force they should have instead of the one that the Representative highlighted full of corruption?

And for me, when I was – interesting to reflect back a little bit, even though it's only a few weeks ago, at the beginning of our congressional recess, I was in Iraq for two days, in Jordan and Kuwait as well, but that was at the beginning of the recess. The last day of the recess, literally Friday, I was standing in a line at a viewing for a soldier who died in Afghanistan from – lived in my home town of Scranton, grew up in a small town down the road and all of the images and all of the emotion of the war in Iraq played out in

that two-and-a-half-hour viewing line where you met his friends who went to school with him. They talked about his leadership, his courage. All of that – I was standing in line and a woman came up to me and thanked for standing there. Her son had been killed in Iraq and she was – her life – she’s been able to deal with it and move beyond it, but all of the horror of the war in Iraq but also all of the bravery and the gallantry and the heroic nature of what our troops are doing there kind of played out in that – in that line for that Army National Guard sergeant.

And one of the images I took from that – his son was eight years old and he left the area where the casket and came outside and was trying to just get some fresh air and he was wearing a State Trooper’s hat which obviously it was way to big for him. They’re too big for most people. They’re big brimmed hats. But in some ways it was an image of what that young eight year old is going to have to live with, that not only is the hat to big for him, but the responsibility or the trauma of losing his father is too much for him at the age of eight.

So it was an interesting kind of book end to the recess and it brought me back to what I saw in Iraq when I visited a patrol base right outside of Baghdad, Patrol Base Murray where you’re seeing our troops take on al Qaeda and being successful. There’s no question about that in that particular circumstance, but unfortunately all of that work, in this case all of that dying – when we were there they’d already lost a couple of guys in May, June, and July, and then four days after we left, they lost five more. But all of that sacrifice is not being matched by a sense of urgency and commitment by the Iraqi governmental leaders to make progress. To the point where the Representative and I just talked briefly a couple of minutes ago. They talk as if they’re in slow motion, and they’re telling us to have patience and telling us to turn back the clock to synchronize with the – the American clock to synchronize with the Iraqi clock. And Senator Durbin and I were saying, “wait a minute. We don’t – we’re almost out of patience here. Look at what we’ve already contributed to this war. Look at what our troops have done. Look at what these families have contributed. You’ve got to get moving.” And it was sometimes pretty tense. We’re trying to be as diplomatic as we could, but there’s a real sense – or lacking I should say a real sense of urgency.

So I think that the trip that I made in no way changed my opinion that we need a change of course, that we are in fact now sending young men and women – as no Americans have ever done before – into the middle of a civil war. And I’m – what we’re reading in the last couple of days, even the last couple of hours about what the administration is saying seems to be yet again another stay the course, give us more time, we need more resources and time to get the job done to maintain the gains that we’ve had. What we need, I think it’s a much more focused mission. The same thing generally that the House and the Senate’s been saying for months now, which is to focus on killing terrorists, to focus on renewed and fully sustained and engaged diplomacy, and to focus on making sure this training imperative is at long last met.

I’ll tell you, when I saw the GAO report and the developments around it and the report – several other reports – we’re in a country of 27 million people. The level one readiness category of training is well below 10,000, by one estimate, only 5,000 Iraqi

security forces trained at that level – impossible to take on the enemy in the next couple of years, not to mention the next generation. So it's frustrating and it angers me and a lot of other people that all you get from the administration is more of the same, more of the stay-the-course language.

I'll conclude with this. The president often when he's talking about this war, when he's talking about what we should be doing, sounds a lot more like a Republican spokesman or the leader of the Republican talking points, than a commander in chief of American forces and a commander in chief for all of America. He shouldn't wake up every morning trying to figure out the right sound bite which will rebut what congressional Democrats are saying. He should be a real commander-in-chief. And I think if we're going to be worthy of the valor of the sacrifice of our troops, we've got to get this policy right. It's not right in its current form and I'm afraid if we go the way the administration seems to be pointed – I don't want to prejudge what they might say next week, but it sounds a lot more like stay the course. And with that –

MR. PODESTA: I want to start by asking a couple of questions and we might have time for a couple of question from the press or from the audience. But one of the things that I think people are confused about – you mentioned the Green Zone fog – I think we're into the Washington fog as well – is what the real situation is with regard to the reduction of civilian casualties in Iraq if there have been any. The military has created some new matrix to judge sectarian violence and there's been some reporting on that this week. But what was your impression, at least of Baghdad? How much of it is being – how much of the claim success about is real? How much of it is function of sectarian cleansing that's already gone on in Baghdad. Just the people being kind of hold up in their own neighborhoods. I don't know if you had the opportunity to really make a judgment about that while you were there from the hearings that have already occurred this week. But I wonder if either one of you would like to comment on that.

REP. TAUSCHER: Well, for somebody like me who tries to spend a lot of time trying to understand this issue and keeping current with it to say I really don't know. It's not because I'm not trying. It's because I felt like I was being subjected to what I call the cherry-picking parsers. I spent 14 years on Wall Street and I can certainly show you how to make a sea of red ink with black in 35 seconds. And I felt as if I was watching a company that I know is tittering on bankruptcy tell me how they were going to make their next month payroll and how they were going do better. And the analogy is that I was getting I think a very shaped view of what they call progress, but at the same time there was a big map of Baghdad there and it was – there was actually kind of a color projection of it. And Baghdad, which is a city of seven million people – and by the way when people talk about Iraq, if they talk about 18 provinces and they talk about how well 13 are doing, that's fine, but that isn't where the people live. The people live – it's like any other place. You have to – if New York City was doing very badly, people couldn't say that New York State was doing great. So – this is the same kind of analogy, so you have to look at what was going on in Baghdad. And the truth is Baghdad has gotten Shi'a, Shi'a, Shi'a. They had this color projection during the Saddam times, very bad times by the way, the civil class were Sunni, and there were many, many, pockets of Sunnis living in Baghdad. And it was very much of a Technicolor map, if you had the tribes by color and

different sects by color. Now, it is – they have the Shi'as blue. It is navy blue on the east side and blue, blue, blue, blue, blue, blue, blue and there's only Amadiya which is a very small sector in the southwest that was – it's called an enclave. "Enclave," by the way, it's a big tip off. It means where they're hiding. And it is basically depending on who you talk to either has Shi'a coming back in or really nobody there. It's a ghost town. So – and of course we didn't get to go there.

My biggest problem is that I no longer can't believe almost anything I'm told, so you always have to go find it, but I found the GAO report very compelling. They have a very mixed message on what's going on in the death tolls. I think that right now we really don't know, but I think our suspicions are that things aren't as good as they're trying to make them sound.

SEN. CASEY: I'd agree. There's a real – as you said, a real conflict in the – or at least tension in the definitions of what the answer it is of sectarian violence and we know that. Now, the time that I spent there with Senator Durbin, we didn't have the opportunity to get a sense of – an intimate sense, I guess, of what was happening in neighborhoods in terms of sectarian violence firsthand, and I think that speaks volumes about what's happening there.

One of the reasons why you can't really get to neighborhoods, obviously, is because they are not secure. We spent most of the time – and this is true of most members of Congress – with body armor on. Literally is a C-130 plane, which when I read that other senators were shot at last week, it kind of brings you back to where we were. But you're wearing body armor and a helmet in the C-130 plane. You get off the plane; get on the helicopter, which I don't recommend you take that itinerary. You could get around. They move those helicopters really fast. I wasn't prepared for that. But you're in body armor and a combat helmet for a lot of the time.

In fact, the second day we were there, we were heading from the Green Zone to President Talabani's residence. Now, here we are going to see the president of the country. Obviously the prime minister has most of the power, but he is the president, does have some power. And we drove through several Sunni neighborhoods. Now, we were inside – inside an SUV which has been retrofitted with steel plates and all of the security. We've got body armor and a helmet on. We're going through this neighborhood. We've got lead cars ahead which are jamming frequencies, doing everything they're supposed to do to keep the enemy from – the bad guys from shooting at you, and I'm thinking "my God, we're going to see the president of the country."

REP. TAUSCHER: And you got two helicopters over your head.

SEN. CASEY: Yes, it's right. And the helicopters – at one point – and they hadn't said this the day before, but they said at the second day I guess when we got used to it. Someone on the car in the front seat, of course they're armed and ready for the worst and when the car stops, they surround the car, but as we're driving through the neighborhoods, one guy says, "if something happens, just stay down and we'll get you in another vehicle." And I thought what's this something might happen that we didn't get

briefed on yesterday. They did a great job of protecting us, but the fact that the closest we could get to a Sunni neighborhood was a convoy with all that security shell around us I think speaks volumes about the security situation in the country.

MR. PODESTA: The – one positive development over – that began with proceeding the surge that seems to have occurred, particularly in Anbar Province are the Sunni tribal leaders who are now working with U.S. forces over there against al Qaeda in Mesopotamia, and I wonder what your assessment of that is. Did you get a strong feel about that? And whether you got a sense that there was any plan in the long run to integrate whatever was going on there and the units that are now essentially standing up on their own part with support from the U.S. with the Iraqi security force. Or what is – is what's really happening that we're kind of hardening our both sides to try to protect themselves?

REP. TAUSCHER: Everybody's got their own Sunni tribal leader anecdote and that is their big news, good new story, and it is true that it started before the surge. And it is true that is apparently sustaining itself in the short term. My concern about it is, is it transactional? What's happened effectively is that AQI, al Qaeda Iraq, that was really – had a beachhead in Al Anbar Province was a very talibanized kind of endeavor, and they were actually killing men that were smoking, having forced marriages, doing all kinds of things that put the Sunni tribal leader, who was like a precinct captain, in jeopardy. And people were coming – his own people were coming to him and say, "Hey, they killed my brother. He was just smoking on the street." Or "they're trying to get my niece to marry one of their guys because they want to integrate and become part of our tribe." And these tribal leaders, like any good precinct captain, said, "oh, I'd better go do something." So the enemy of my enemy is my friend. So not surprisingly, when you look up to find somebody that's going to help you, you see the coalition forces, the Americans, and so these relationships began to develop.

And that is a good news story if it is sustainable. That's the question about all of this. Is it sustainable? Even the surge to the extent that when you add more American forces because they are so good there is going to be security where they are, we all know that in March the 160,000 forces is an unsustainable number. We just don't have enough forces to rotate in to maintain that number.

What I asked over and over again that I did not get any answer to, which kind of leads into the second part of your question is, when we have a drawdown – today's press is reporting a brigade – 5,000. That goes in and out of – out of Iraq every two weeks anyhow, either to wait for rest at home or whatever, so that's de minimis. But down to 130 which was the previous number, or below 130, what is the sweet spot? If we have had gains because we have more security, if we do have Sunni leaders that are now working with us either because they don't like the Taliban more than they don't like us or because there is an ideological change or there is a recognition that the country after four years of extreme violence has (cleansed ?) enough, has – is just – has deal fatigue, tired of fighting. Whatever the reason is, if there is a turn that's happening and we do have this drawdown because of the bad Bush policies of not increasing our ground forces, as Democrats had suggested, in 2003 and doing a number of things that would have created

more opportunity for us to not overstretch out Army, Guard, and Reserve. If those gains are real and we have a drawdown, what is the number we have to have to sustain that, knowing that we don't have Iraqi forces that are ready and we don't have Iraqi police that are ready?

So we are in this tipping point place. What is that number? Is it 130? Is it 100? And I think some of the trepidation that you hear and the pushback by the administration even last night on the idea that Petraeus is going to come back and say that there's going to be a drawdown, is that the worst thing for this failed policy of this administration is to have again, as we had in 2005 and in 2006, a resurgence of the insurgency and a loss of gains that they had claimed. And that would be completely unsustainable for everybody. But I think that there, once again, is a very mixed message, John, and we don't know – many of these Iraqi – I saw the 9th Mechanized Division. Only two of its four brigades are actually C3. That's not even that good, but at least two of them are C3. The other two are C4 and five. Their equipment is bad.

So there're a number of different issues that cause us to think that they can't stand up and question the sustainability of things and whether the Sunni leadership is really making the turn and it's permanent or this was just a transactional situation for them.

SEN. CASEY: I'll just add briefly to what the Representative said about the when you compare what happened in Al Anbar province and other places, and what I saw, which was outside of Baghdad in actually Babel, which is just south. I think she's right in several respects. One is there are distinguishing features about what happened there as opposed to what happened – what is happening or not happening in Baghdad.

One is the idea that the al Qaeda kind of overplayed and kind of drove some of these communities or especially the tribal leaders kind of into our arms, so to speak. We also had great, heroic progress made by our troops. They did a wonderful job in those situations. But I think it is distinguishable from what we see in Baghdad. It's not an urban environment. You don't have that crossfire, sectarian violence where the Americans fighting men and women is fighting a couple of enemies who doesn't – who – which enemy to shoot at, so to speak, in that urban environment. So I think it's different and I think for the administration to continue to assert first of all this by using the name al Qaeda over and over again, they – I guess they've convinced some people that that's the main opponent in the country. *Time Magazine* at the end of July was quoting military sources and others that said 15 percent of the attacks are from al Qaeda in Iraq – 15 percent; not 50, not 80, but 15. But I think there's a world of difference between what was happening in places like Al Anbar or it was happening, frankly, at the patrol base I saw and what is not happening in Baghdad. I think Baghdad's a lot more complicated and we're not seeing the same progress.

MR. PODESTA: There's a lot more violence now in the South, too – Shi'a-on-Shi'a violence. What's your impression of whether there's any strategy to deal with that? We're now talking about bottoms-up reconciliation, but the bottoms up seems to be isolated in western Iraq. Is there –

REP. TAUSCHER: What is so disheartening is that this is really the bubble theory and you pushed all the gas in the bubble, and you press here and it pops out over here. While there clearly is a lot to talk about in the Sunni areas, we still don't know if it's sustainable or whether it actually is going to transfer into the positive kinds of things. We hope it does. The Basra area is now very, very bad. The British have effectively left. I'm not sure if they told anybody they've left, but they've gone. And so what you have in Basra, which is a very key area, as you know it's in the southeast corner. It's where most of their petrochemical business has been. It's where their ports are. It's right on a border with a very vulnerable area with Iran. It's where the Republican Guard apparently have not only infiltrated, but has been operating for well over a year. So you have – once again, apparently in Anbar Province you have some good news, but Basra, which had been a sleepy little enclave that people had forgotten which we had basically outsourced to the British, is now doing very badly.

And so it's one of these situations where two steps forward, three steps back, and that is the constant tango that we're in and it's because we don't have an overall strategy. We don't have an overall strategy. And then what you also hear all the time is "oh, Iran, oh Iran," and no kidding. There's a lot about Iran that really keeps me awake at night, but the president's strategy for Iran can't be to have eight out of 10 of our military Army divisions pinned down in Iraq. Is it? That can't be the strategy for Iran. But apparently, while they're all ginning up Iran, you can't be telling me that you think that what we're doing in Iraq is going to be helpful to any contingency we have with Iran.

So it's a very, very mixed bag.

MR. PODESTA: I'm going to open it up and take a couple of question. We have time for just a couple of question and I'm going to ask – give the press the first shot if they have any questions and we've got one right over there.

Q: (Off mike.) I'm just wondering with the 9/11 anniversary coming up next week, if you could speak a little bit to how we've changed as a country over the past six years. You know, when everything first happened we were very patriotic. How have you seen that move away not only as a country, but as a Congress as well?

SEN. CASEY: Well, I know – I think if anything the patriotism of the country overall has been fortified and enhanced. I think that one thing that we all sense as Americans – set aside the policy debates for a second, just as Americans we cherish our liberty maybe a little more than we did before 9/11 of '01. I think we realize that to take on this enemy, the threat the terrorism is over a generation is going to require sacrifice and commitment, but also this didn't happen with our civilian leadership in Iraq, the kind of planning and the kind of focus that you need to defeat this – to defeat this enemy. And that's one of the reasons why this debate about Iraq is so important because in many ways it's been a distraction from and a draining of resources from the fight against terrorism worldwide.

MR. PODESTA: A question over here. Could you give your – identify yourself.

Q: My name's Josh Drobnik and I'm with the Allentown *Morning Call*.

SEN. CASEY: (Off mike) Pennsylvania guys.

Q: Clearly Congress has been at loggerheads on this issue for the past six months. There appear to be some hints that a middle ground is emerging. Is that your understanding? What might that be and are you both prepared to support that?

SEN. CASEY: I'll let the Representative go first.

REP. TAUSCHER: Well, I – I think that I'm pretty well known as a moderate centrist and the leader of the New Dems in the House, and we'd like to think that we hold the middle ground, but I don't think that Congress has been a loggerheads. I think since the Democrats took over in January, what we have been is continuously frustrated in our ability to represent the American people. The American people in November spoke very loudly about change and specifically about Iraq.

And to the other reporter's question, the anniversary of September 11th is a very, very noble time for us to remember exactly what the threat to this country is, was, and has been, and why it isn't in Iraq. The threat to this country by radical Islamic fundamentalism is significant. It is real. It is something that we've got to deal with, and we're dealing with that while we're pinned down in Iraq. And it is very important, I think, for the Congress to be able to speak their will for the American people.

We've been thwarted continuously by the administration. Even as last night I saw a report that the courts have now overturned some of the Patriot Act for the very reasons I didn't vote for it. We've had an assault on the civil society of this country, not from external forces, but unfortunately from the West Wing. And we now have our own national security in jeopardy because the president cannot be proven wrong even though the facts make it clear that he is. And we have tried, but we don't have a veto-proof majority – the ability to overrule the president in a veto in the House, and we have obviously a tenuous balance of a majority in the Senate. We need 60 votes to go to lunch in the Senate apparently.

So we are in the majority, but we're not – we are not able to do the things that we would like to do and it is enormously frustrating. It's frustrating for the American people. But I think that the president's ratings – below freezing – show that he is not considered to be leading in the way the American people really want him to.

SEN. CASEY: I can say briefly, Josh, that I think there's a willingness in the Senate to reach some kind of consensus, but I'll tell you: every time we seem to be moving in that direction, it seems that the administration does its best to say something or do something which begins to fracture it. And when you see this report that's in the news today about a drawdown of 5,000, that's – it's apparently just a gesture. It doesn't help build the kind of consensus we need to get to 60 votes and really have a true change of course.

I think the administration's language is not only – when it comes to victory and defeat and the defeatists and all the terminology that's applied to Democrats is not only irresponsible and inaccurate – this isn't a victory/defeat World War II Hollywood ending. Everyone knows that, but the administration keeps using that terminology. I think it's not only detrimental to the consensus, but it's deliberately misleading the American people day after day after day. And it doesn't help get us the 60 votes in the Senate.

MR. PODESTA: Right, in the front. We'll take two more.

Q: Jerome Sharon (ph) from the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette. Well, Senator, so what can Congress do to change course in Iraq or is going to be – increasingly – is it going to be difficult? What's going to happen in September – the same as what happened in the spring and early in the year? Is this going to be a replay of what's happened already with the president vetoing any effort to try to change course in Iraq?

SEN. CASEY: Well, I think what we should do is what we've tried to do several times in resolutions and amendments, which is to have a very clear – and I think we have a majority in Congress; we just don't have 60 votes from the Senate – a very clear and unambiguous statement that we're going to redeploy our combat forces. We're going to get out of that – the business of combat month after month and focus on training, that we're going to put the best diplomatic team that our government can assemble on the field and have a whole new approach to diplomacy. That we're going to have a – an intensified and sustained training effort so we don't have these terrible numbers on level one readiness and all the rest. That's really what we've been trying to do for many months. I think there's more support for it now in the Senate, but we're not there yet I don't think and we still have several more weeks of debate on this thing. That's what the Congress can do.

REP. TAUSCHER: We will have the supplemental up by the – probably by the end of the month. The Iraq supplemental, which I understand now may have a supplemental to the supplemental. We're not sure if they're going to ask for more money, which is kind of stunning. I voted against the last supplemental. I'll vote against the future supplementals unless there are very firm parameters and – no benchmark's a bad word again. We have to find new words for metrics – also a bad word because that's been misused. We've got to find ways to either shorten the length of the supplemental, which is something I'm advocating that we do. We've got to do everything we can to put this in a box and find a way to hold it down, and to make it very short term, which is – it's not good for the American people. Anytime that you are spending a lot of money without any predictability for the other side, you're going to spend more because it's just not going to give people – you can't use the power over the money to get good value for it. But I don't know what else to do because all of the other things we have tried to do – look, it's very disappointing. I think that Senator Casey and I and most of our colleagues expected to come back after a hot August with many of our colleagues at home, those on the other side of the aisle having to answer some very tough questions. And whether you're for the war or not, at \$330 million a day of borrowed money, even libertarians are standing up and saying enough is enough. So the question is, when do the Republicans begin to make the move that we anticipated they might this month and join us.

The Democrats are where we've been and most of us have been I think significantly against this war and doing everything we can, but by the way, we need a veto-proof majority in the House and we need 60 votes in the Senate. And really I think the effort to persuade us that they've been persuaded is a little worthless. It's got to be the Republicans that get persuaded now. They've got to be persuaded that – that there is really no strategy here and that we are recklessly endangering our military readiness and not ready for any other contingencies. And we've taken our eye off the ball on this radical Islamic fundamentalist threat that we have. And I think it's about the supplemental.

MR. PODESTA: Last question in the center. The gentleman in red. We're going to give California a little trouble.

Q: Frank Davies, San Jose *Mercury News*.

REP. TAUSCHER: Yay!

Q: Congresswoman – (laughter) – I'd like to ask you, do you think the Green Zone fog that you're talked about is affecting the Washington fog. Some of your colleagues come back and after two days of briefings have come back with some rosy assessments, despite the reports that we've been reading. How – describe the dynamics of that a little bit.

REP. TAUSCHER: Well, I thought it was important when I came back to make it clear that I really came back with three fundamental decisions. The first is that we need to close the Green Zone. The second is we need to get our military leadership out of Saddam's palaces. And the third is that we need what is called a status of forces agreement, which we have with every other country in the world where we have American troops deployed – something I've been asking for for four years. Interestingly, the Jones report yesterday, on pages 128 and 29 say the same thing, and it took me a while to get there, but I was thrilled to see – the optics of having our military leadership in Saddam's palaces after five years is not good. It sends the wrong message to me. It should send the wrong message to everybody else that sees it.

The Green Zone fog is a very dangerous virus, and you're not only drinking the Kool-Aid in the Green Zone, you're showering with it. It's basically invasive and it is like any marketing campaign that you've seen. If they've got you, they've got you, and you're getting it the whole time. And so I find myself listening to Iraqi leaders that were using the same nouns, verbs, and inflexions that I was hearing in the green zone from our folks. And it was a message that was not only coordinated, but it was absolutely probably practiced. This is what you say to them. This is how you say it to them. And it was a long way to go and a dangerous place to go to get what I knew I was going to get, but I really felt I had to go back for the fourth time to see it for myself, almost to get as aggravated as I happen since I came back because it is – it is a dangerous – it's the cherry-picking parsers, as I call them. But I think that if we can understand that they're selling something – and with all due respect to General Petraeus, who I know is a noble

man who has certainly got a significantly military pedigree – he’s the father of the surge and I expect him to sell it. Wouldn’t you?

MR. PODESTA: Any final thought? Just a final comment?

SEN. CASEY: Final comments – (unintelligible). No I just appreciate this opportunity, John. Representative Tauscher, thank you for giving us the benefit of all those trips that you made and the work you’ve done. Now, I just really believe that there’s an opportunity in September to reach a consensus, but I think the administration has to play a much more constructive role in that.

Frankly, I think it goes beyond the administration. I think one of the only ways that I think we can reach a consensus to change courses is for the president to admit that we have to do that. But if he keeps going the stay-the-course path that he’s been on for too long, I don’t think it’s going to happen. I think the president has to be more personally engaged in working with Congress on this. We haven’t seen that. And you can’t just send surrogates when you’re talking about the grave question of war and what we should be doing next, and I’m very concerned that he is not willing to do that.

MR. PODESTA: In that regard, I recommend to all of you Secretary Albright’s very good op-ed piece in the *Washington Post* yesterday. I want to thank Congresswoman Tauscher –

REP. TAUSCHER: Thank you, John.

MR. PODESTA: – and Senator Casey for being with us this morning for a very insightful presentation and I really appreciate your willingness to – your service, your willingness to go over there continuously and keep the American people informed about what’s going on and I look forward to working with you in the months ahead. Please join me in thanking the Senator and the Congresswoman.

(Applause.)

(END)