

POLITICAL PARTISANSHIP IN CONGRESS

Political Partisanship in Congress

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Class 57

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January 3, 2007

## Abstract

The role of government leaders are to serve their constitutes. The American people expect bipartisanship in Congress. The lack of it results in decisions made due to the allegiance to their party. When our elected leaders are more loyal to their party and not the will of the American people it can have dire consequences. One major problem ethical problem facing our Army today is the lack of partisanship in both chambers of government. As a result of some of their decisions over 3,000 soldiers have died in operations in Operation Iraqi Freedom.

### Political Partisanship

It's apparent that both the Republicans and Democrats are unable to work out their differences and make decisions that results in effective defense policy. Both parties were behind the war effort; since it has been constant bickering which each side stating they have the answer to all our problems. When Soldiers are placed in harms way, we expect our leaders to exercise bipartisanship. Politicians promise so much to their constitutes but somehow the interest groups seemed to sway their decisions. Prior to deploying in theater, there were questions of equipment required. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld mentioned that Soldiers go to war with what they have not with what they want. This statement sparked outrage amongst some politicians, veterans, and of course service members. What is missing in our politicians is most of them having never served in the military. They would understand from the Soldiers perspective what is required on the battlefield. It appears that decisions made in Congress are not consistent with the combatant commanders on the ground. It appears that leaders in the House and Senate are seemingly unwilling to embrace change. Partisan politics has effective every facet of our national policy, strategic and undermine our military strategy in the region. There appears to be unwillingness to dialogue anymore. What is wrong with leaders of different opinions sitting across the table discussing candidly their party positions? In the last six years our Congress have been dubbed the "lame-duck" Congress simply appeasing the President on all issues. These "stays the course" talks have encouraged our enemy and have resulted in over 20,000 wounded soldiers and close to 3,000 deaths. As soldiers we are not concern about party affiliation, we serve the interests of our nation and the American people. We expect politicians to embrace to choose the "hard right over the easy wrong". Many interest groups and political action committee are controlling too much politics. Prior to the Operation of Iraqi Freedom, General

Erik K. Shinseki informed the Pentagon that more troops was needed in the region. He faced incredible pressure from Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld. Ultimately resulting in his abrupt retirement. General Shinseki was correct and now the Pentagon and some elected leaders are calling for more troops. The Department of Defense with its sophisticated intelligence could not inform the public Shinseki observations. Now the Bush administration is requesting more troops. Why after four years Senators like John McCain is calling for more troops? General Abizaid, the commander in charge of Central Command stated their need to be a define mission for the increase of troops levels. It is also the point of General Casey, the commander in charge in Iraq. Both Generals want the President to outline a specific mission for the increase in troops. Would the casualty rate be the same? Because of partisan politics, soldiers are spending longer rotations in the region. Our Soldiers are serving on their third rotation and the National Guard and the reserves are stretch thin. Our elected leaders need to revisit decisions and policy and ask what the ramifications are of those decisions. Soldiers are not politicians therefore; we expect that our leaders to make decisions that benefit our national strategy. We would like to have armor on our vehicles and Soldiers. This would have decreased the number of casualties and had less wounded warriors. It appeared that it was not a priority. We were so emotionally galvanized behind the attacks after 9/11 that there was an immediate push to do something. Soldiers expect our leaders to consider all possibilities. There is a lot of discussion being generated about whether we should "stay the course" or go but neither party have an exit strategy. If we are to stay in Iraq then explain it clearly to the American people and be as candid as you can. Our elected leaders must bridge this gap so our Soldiers feel confident that we have a unified concerted effort. This effort and vision must resonate between the public, and all branches of government, and our service members. Most Congressmen have spent time visiting

soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan. When they return they must inform the President of their observations and recommendations. The combatant commanders should articulate the concerns of the Soldiers. It is apparent to that they feel the political pressure to follow the status quo. Once they retire, the Generals speak more openly and candidly about their positions. Why did they not articulate when it mattered? It is because the pressure to follow and be loyal to the current administration or political party. We need strong leaders like General Powell, former Chairman of the Joints Chief of Staffs and Secretary of State. In addition, a notable mention is General Erik K. Shinseki. What would the current situations be if we had taken some of their advice today? It is apparent that we may be at war but have more support due to an exit strategy and not the same rhetoric about the war. Our elected leaders are responsible to seek advice from experienced, reliable, proven military leaders that can represent the Soldiers' perspective clearly. Many of our veteran's benefits have downsize or cut to offset the cost of the war in Iraq. Our elected leaders should inform the American public when they will bring our Soldiers home. Explain in detail the exit strategy. It seems a common theme amongst politicians is that they are out of touch with regards to how to defend this country. The inability of the parties to work together has encouraged the enemy. While it is accurate that the American people support the war on terror it is also apparent there not supportive of the Iraq war. We're told of weapons of mass destruction. Since occupying Iraq, we have not found and it is not clear to Soldiers nor does the American public know what is next. The Department of Defense leadership needs to articulate an effective exit strategy. It's my fervent belief that the American public will always stand behind our soldiers. A recent survey indicated that the American people were extremely supportive and proud of our Soldiers. Congress and our elected leaders do not enjoy that support. There is less trust between our politicians and many Americans because they believe they exist

to support the interest groups. It is my hope that one day we will be able to bridge the gap between the public and Congress. I think it is possible only if we stay true to our belief and recognize why the people elected them. It is important that these elected leaders go back to the grass roots campaign strategy. The Soldiers want an honest, credible, straightforward leader who would go against party lines and make the ethical discussion.

When you observed the House and Senate committee meeting and their record on issues, it is apparent that they are voting along party lines. It is refreshing when one member decides to vote his conscious. For example, Senator Joe Lieberman has been an outspoken supporter of the war effort to the dissatisfaction of his party. His beliefs and values were at the forefront of his decisions. We are asking our leaders to follow his courage and do what they feel right in their heart. Some of our elected leaders go to Iraq and see for themselves what is going on, where I think its important. They get a firsthand account of what really happening. They can clearly advise other members of Congress before making haphazard decisions. Some of the politicians are one's that made several trips to Iraq and Afghanistan to speak directly to the soldiers.

Soldier's really respect the members of our government who's willing to put their lives at risk to get a first hand account of what's really happening. Our President, the Commander in Chief needs to create more dialogue and acceptance of other party members to start the reconciliation process. Some members of this lame-duck Congress felt their voice went unanswered and created the divisiveness that we see today. There were studies done and the question was asked, "What organization do the American people trust? Overwhelmingly the American people placed their trust in Soldiers. What was more interested in this poll what that the study determined that very little trust were given to Congress. However, why is this? I believe it is the bickering and the lack of ethics involved in Congress. In the most recent mid-term elections, the exit polls

reflected that the lack of ethics involved in politics was important. They felt the interest groups and political action committees exerted too much influence in our political system. One of the first recommendations in January by the majority in those of Representatives and the United States Senate is election ethics reform. Creating a system where there are clear checks and balances. This will go along way in the healing process and result in the American public trusting our most prestigious constitution and elected members of Congress. Again, our service members will benefit in the end. The focus will be on what right looks like. Another concern that the House of Representatives and the U.S. Senate faces is the unwillingness to understand each other party affiliation. In order to achieve any meaningful legislation there have to some gives and takes. In conclusion, bipartisanship is an important force multiplier in all forms of government. The American public demands nothing less; allegiance to one side whether republican or democratic instead of what's right will prevent our bodies of government from working as an effective team. It's my goal that one day we'll be there.