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TERRORISM, IRAQ AND NATIONAL SECURITY

As a member of the House Armed Services Committee I am deeply interested in helping Colorado and our nation win the so-called "war on terrorism." The attacks on the Pentagon and the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001 united our country in recognizing the international security challenge posed by extremist Islamic groups like al Qaeda. This challenge involves improving our Homeland Security, building a global alliance against terrorism and the states that sponsor terrorism, supporting our long-neglected National Guard, and making sure our armed forces are well-trained, well-equipped and properly deployed.

I opposed the Bush Administration's decision to launch a pre-emptive war in Iraq because I did not believe we had the global support necessary to shoulder a long-term occupation, nor was I convinced that the Bush Administration had a strategic plan for securing peace after a military invasion. Deposing Saddam Hussein was a worthy goal, and destroying potential WMD made sense to me, but I believe events in Iraq have borne out my cautions. We rushed into war without the right intelligence, and although our military performed magnificently, their valor and courage has not been matched by policy-making and planning that could have ensured success. We are, therefore, now engaged in resisting an insurgency that may serve to hinder rather than help our efforts to quell Islamic terrorism. It is not possible, in my opinion, to turn the clock back now. We have little choice but to try to stabilize Iraq, support the formation of a moderate government and restore peace in this volatile and troubled region.

I have visited with our troops in Iraq and plan to visit again. Seeing conditions first-hand and talking to our soldiers in Iraq has been an important part of my effort to more fully understand the hard strategic issues we face. No matter what the American people may think about the pros and cons of making war in Iraq the centerpiece of our strategy against Islamic extremists, I believe all of us want our soldiers to be successful and to come home as soon as possible. I see my job in Congress and serving on the House Armed Services Committee as an opportunity to focus on improving America's security around the world. I am particularly concerned about the proliferation of nuclear weapons and securing nuclear materials that could fall into the hands of terrorist organizations. That is why I have been a strong advocate of funding for the so-called "Nunn-Lugar" program that secures materials that were once part of the old Soviet Union.

With regard to homeland security, I have long advocated for improvements that make our airports, harbors and borders more secure. Some of these improvements require investments in technology (improving communication between agencies like the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the Central Intelligence Agency), while others are fundamental changes in the way government is organized (creating a new Director of National Intelligence). We cannot spend our way into a flawless security system, but we have to do a better job of deploying resources to meet post-9/11 risks.

THOMAS

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