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June 8, 2009

Bipartisan Congressional delegation to Iraq visits Pennsylvania troops in the field

Washington, DC - A bipartisan delegation of four Pennsylvania Members of Congress – Rep. Tim Holden (D-17), **Rep. Bill Shuster (R-9)**, Rep. Charlie Dent (R-15), and Rep. Kathy Dahlkemper (D-3) — visited Iraq over the weekend to meet with deployed troops of the Pennsylvania National Guard 56th Stryker Brigade and other Pennsylvania troops.

The Congressional delegation met with Pennsylvania troops at Camp Liberty outside of Baghdad and in Taji, Iraq. Activated last October, the new 56th Stryker Brigade Combat Team is one of six elite rapid-mobilization brigades in the Army, and the only one in the reserve component. The Stryker Brigades assist in covering the Army's near term capabilities gap between heavy and light units in a range of environments from combat to humanitarian assistance. Troops of the 56th deployed to Iraq late last year.

The delegation also met with U.S. Deputy Chief of Mission Robert Ford and General Raymond Odierno, commander of the Multinational Force in Iraq (MNF-I). The Members were also briefed by U.S. Embassy personnel on Agriculture and Transportation, and staff of the Iraqi Ministry of Agriculture. Reps. Holden and Dahlkemper are Members of the House Committee on Agriculture; Reps. Dent, Shuster, and Holden are Members of the House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure.

“It was a privilege to lead this delegation to meet with our military and diplomatic personnel to assess the current situation,” Congressman Holden said. “Most importantly, it was an honor to visit with the PA National Guard, 56th Stryker Brigade and thank them for the great work they do and convey to them the pride all Pennsylvanians have for them.”

“The Pennsylvania National Guard is serving their state and their nation with distinction in Iraq and it was good to be able to thank them for their service in person,” said **Congressman Shuster**, who completed his sixth trip to Iraq. “General Odierno spoke glowingly of the Pennsylvania Guard and told us that our soldiers are doing an outstanding job bringing security to Iraq. The situation in Iraq is improving, but it is a fragile improvement that must be protected by our soldiers and supported by the American public. A failure to complete the mission in Iraq would place America and the Middle East in a dangerous position.”

“Pennsylvania’s fighting men and women have made great sacrifices in Iraq, and it was a great honor to spend time with them and thank them for their tremendous efforts,” said Congressman Dent, completing his third trip to Iraq since 2005. “The fact we were able to drive through the streets of Baghdad is a welcome development, and the briefings from General Odierno and Ambassador Ford suggest that the security situation has improved considerably. I was reassured that troop reductions will continue as planned.”

“I am so privileged and grateful to have had the opportunity to meet with the brave Pennsylvanians who are putting their lives on the line for our country,” said Congresswoman Dahlkemper. “This trip was very personal for me as my nephew just completed his fourth tour of duty in Iraq and my foster son continues to struggle with PTSD after returning home from the field. After meeting with these extraordinary individuals and their commanders on the ground, I am optimistic that we can move forward with the strategic redeployment from the region, while ensuring our troops have the resources and tools they need to do their jobs.”

“The delegation left Friday and returned early Monday.

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