

Republican congressman calls Iraq war “a costly mess”

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Representative Doug Bereuter, a 26-year member of the US House of Representatives from southeastern Nebraska, has sent a four-page letter to his constituents saying he has reconsidered his previous support for the US invasion of Iraq and concluded that the war was a disastrous mistake.

Bereuter’s letter was first reported August 18 by the *Journal Star* newspaper, which is published in the state capital of Lincoln, the largest city in Bereuter’s 1st Congressional District. The letter has added significance because Bereuter is vice chairman of the House Intelligence Committee, the panel responsible for reviewing the intelligence claims advanced by the Bush administration to justify the March 2003 invasion. The veteran Republican congressman is also a senior member of the House International Relations Committee.

Earlier this year, Bereuter announced that he would leave the House of Representatives as of August 31 to take the post of president of the Asia Foundation—a fact that undoubtedly helps account for his willingness to publicly break ranks with the Bush administration and the Republican Party on the war.

Bereuter voted in favor of the October 2002 joint House-Senate resolution authorizing Bush to attack Iraq. However, in his letter, sent to constituents who questioned him on the war, Bereuter gives a blunt assessment of outcome of the US invasion and occupation of the country, calling it “a dangerous, costly mess.”

“I’ve reached the conclusion, retrospectively,” he writes, “now that the inadequate intelligence and faulty conclusions are being revealed, that all things being considered, it was a mistake to launch that military action, especially without a broad and engaged international coalition.”

Broadly hinting that the Bush administration deliberately lied about supposed Iraqi weapons of mass destruction and collaboration between Saddam Hussein and Al Qaeda, the congressman adds, “Left unresolved for now is whether intelligence was intentionally misconstrued to justify military action.”

His letter goes on to state: “From the beginning of the conflict, it was doubtful that we for long would be seen as liberators, but instead increasingly as an occupying force. Now we are immersed in a dangerous, costly mess, and there is no easy and quick way to end our responsibilities in Iraq without creating bigger future problems in the region and, in general, in the Muslim world.”

As a result of the war, Bereuter writes, “our country’s reputation around the world has never been lower, and our alliances are weakened.”

Bereuter criticizes the Bush administration for disbanding the Iraqi army and relying on the Defense Department, rather than the State Department, to oversee “reconstruction” in Iraq and the installation of an interim government. He also faults the White House for ignoring military leaders who warned that many more US troops would be needed to pacify the country.

Declaring that “the cost in casualties is already large and growing, and the immediate and long-term financial costs are incredible,” the congressman urges the executive and legislative branches of the government to learn from the “errors and failures” of the war and its aftermath.

Bereuter’s letter gives an insight into the divisions that exist within the American ruling elite over the war, which is increasingly seen as a failure with potentially disastrous implications for US interests around the world. The divisions and recriminations do not arise from any principled differences over the underlying

imperialist strategy of using military force to establish US global hegemony, including the aim of seizing control over the critical oil resources of Iraq and the Middle East. On this there is an overarching consensus that is shared by both big business parties—the Democrats as well as the Republicans.

Bereuter does not suggest, notwithstanding his harsh criticisms, that US troops should be withdrawn from Iraq. Rather, his attack on Bush's war policy reflects growing alarm over the manifest failure of the US to pacify Iraq and alarm that the broader global interests of American imperialism are being damaged by the unfolding events in the Persian Gulf. He speaks for sections of the political establishment that are bitter over the failure of the Bush administration to foresee the consequences of the invasion.

Bereuter's long tenure in Congress has established him as a spokesman for definite sections of the US corporate power structure. His district is a center of agribusiness, farm equipment and meatpacking. Lincoln, the home of the University of Nebraska, is a rapidly growing telemarketing center. In 2002, the Information Technology Industry Council gave Bereuter's performance in Congress a 100 percent rating, and the Chamber of Commerce of the United States rated his voting record at 90 percent.

In line with the concerns of his corporate backers, Bereuter played a key role in 2000 in getting a bill passed to retain China's "most favored nation" trade status, and as chairman of the Asia and Pacific Subcommittee of International Relations, he traveled widely in China and East Asia and held top-level discussions with leaders in the region. He also supported a 2000 measure to allow the sale of food and medicines to Cuba, a measure strongly backed by agribusiness interests.

In 1999, Bereuter opposed the air war against Serbia launched by the Clinton administration.

Politically, Bereuter occupies a position in the center of the Republican congressional delegation—which means his politics would, 25 years ago, have been considered on the right-wing fringe of American politics. In 2002, liberal groups gave him ratings of about 10 percent, while the American Conservative Union rated him at 72 percent and the Christian Coalition at 75 percent.

Bereuter was in line to get the chairmanship of the

International Relations Committee in 2001, but he was passed over, under pressure from more strident right-wing Republicans in the House, tacitly backed by the White House, in favor of Henry Hyde, the Illinois congressman who presided over the impeachment proceedings against Clinton.

Bereuter's statements on the Iraq war place in sharp relief Democratic presidential candidate John Kerry's recent reaffirmations of his vote in favor of the October 2002 war authorization resolution. Earlier this month, in answer to a challenge from Bush, Kerry said he would have voted for the resolution even if he had known at the time that there were no weapons of mass destruction in Iraq.

Bereuter's public reversal serves to underscore the lack of any significant difference between the Democratic Party and the Bush administration on the bloody colonial adventure in Iraq.



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