

Washington, DC - On the fifth anniversary of the invasion of Iraq, Congressman Maurice Hinchey (D-NY) today highlighted the impact that the occupation of Iraq has had on the United States with a particular focus on the negative effects on the economy. While noting that the greatest tragedy has been the loss of life, the congressman discussed the fact that the U.S. has already spent \$500 billion in Iraq -- a figure far higher than the \$50-60 billion originally predicted by the Bush administration -- and that experts now predict the overall cost of the invasion and occupation will reach \$3 trillion. The congressman said the U.S. should withdraw from Iraq and begin investing heavily in domestic initiatives to create jobs and improve the quality of life for hundreds of millions of Americans who have been left behind by the economic policies of the Bush administration.

"Five years after President Bush misled the U.S. into invading Iraq, we remain in the midst of a deadly, tragic, and extremely costly military occupation that has done an extraordinary amount of harm to our country's national security and to our economy," Hinchey said. "The United States has nothing positive to show for its five years in Iraq. Four thousand of our men and women have senselessly died, more than 29,000 others have been wounded, millions of innocent Iraqis have also been killed, wounded, and driven from their homes, the price of oil has soared, and the U.S. economy is in a recession that is beginning to look more and more like the beginning of another depression. It is time to bring our men and women home and get this country back on track. President Bush has failed miserably and he needs to do the honorable thing and admit the truth so that our country can move forward."

Hinchey, who was one of the most outspoken critics of the idea of invading Iraq, voted against the October 2002 resolution in Congress that authorized the use of force in Iraq. The congressman, who voted nine times in the past year to change course in Iraq, said that reconciliation among Iraqis and their political leaders must occur for the violence in Iraq to permanently end. He noted that the only way to begin gaining the acceptance of the complicated internal power and resource sharing agreements is by instituting a timeline for the withdrawal of U.S. military personnel.

Hinchey noted that there is a tragic irony in the fact that al Qaeda has now moved into Iraq -- a country in which it never operated until President Bush invaded and the entire place unraveled into civil war. The congressman said the U.S. should keep a select group of forces near Iraq to deal with any flare ups and send more troops to Afghanistan to hunt down Osama bin Laden and operatives of al Qaeda -- the organization that is actually responsible for the September 11 terrorist attacks, while bringing the vast majority of U.S. troops home.

U.S. operations in Iraq have already cost \$500 billion with that figure rising by \$10-12 billion each month. A new analysis by Nobel-winning economist Joseph Stiglitz and budget expert Linda Bilmes estimates the invasion and subsequent military occupation will cost American taxpayers at least \$3 trillion. That figure does not include the debt raised to fund U.S. operations there, the long-term costs associated with veterans' health care, and the cost of repairing and replacing the nation's military equipment to prepare for future, real threats to our country. Prior to the invasion, Bush administration officials said operations in Iraq would cost \$50-60 billion and former Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld said the cost of the invasion and occupation would be covered by oil revenue from Iraq.

Hinchey said the United States' involvement in Iraq has contributed to the country's economic decline. The congressman said the country is in a recession and that it remains to be seen how deep that recession will go. The congressman has been warning for months on end that the U.S. economy was in very bad shape as a result of the Bush administration's policies that cut domestic spending on critical items, gave tax cuts to the wealthiest Americans who didn't need them instead of the working and middle class -- which has resulted in a dramatic increase in personal debt, and has thus far wasted \$500 billion in Iraq. As a member of the Joint Economic Committee, Hinchey has had the opportunity to question various economic experts, including Federal Reserve Chairman Ben Bernanke.

When Chairman Bernanke came before the JEC last November, Hinchey told him that the problems with the economy reminded him of the stagflation that gripped the country in the 1970's -- the combination of stagnation and inflation used to describe a period of out-of-control price inflation combined with slow-to-no output of growth, rising unemployment and eventually recession. However, Chairman Bernanke disagreed and said he anticipated that economic performance would be much better than the 1970's. Hinchey said today that the country's current economic crisis reinforces the fact that the country is in fact mirroring the economic circumstances of the 1970's. Despite the facts, President Bush continues to say that the economy will be fine if the country just waits things out.

"While there weren't any WMDs in Iraq despite what President Bush said, we have definitely seen a relentless display of weapons of mass economic destruction from the White House," Hinchey said. "The Bush administration has done everything possible to make life more difficult for the working and middle class, while bending over backwards to make the rich even richer in this country. The wealthiest 5 percent of households own more than 57 percent of the wealth in this country, which is a staggering figure that indicates the policies of the United States are unfair and out of whack. We must begin to once again invest in the working and middle class through tax cuts geared towards those who need them and a dramatic increase in resources for infrastructure improvements, which will create jobs while also improving the quality of life for everyone."

Economic conditions across the country have severely worsened under the policies of the Bush administration. President Bush is tied for the worst jobs record of any president since the Great Depression with 3.1 million manufacturing jobs lost. Since Bush took office in January 2001, the number of Americans who have experienced long-term unemployment has nearly doubled. Those who have employer-sponsored health care, have seen their premiums climb \$1,500. At the same time, a record 47 million Americans don't have any health insurance. Additionally, home foreclosures are soaring across the country as a result of the mortgage crisis while causing the values of many homes across the country to drop in value.

Since President Bush took office, the price of gas at the pump has doubled, the cost of home heating oil has tripled, and a barrel of oil has quadrupled in cost. ExxonMobil last month announced it recorded a profit of \$40.6 billion for 2007 -- the largest annual profit in history for an American company. That announcement came after Bush pushed for and helped pass billions of tax cuts and subsidies for ExxonMobil and the rest of the oil industry, while also threatening to veto legislation from the now-Democratic-controlled Congress that would repeal those tax breaks.

"Given that all of President Bush's friends in the oil industry are rolling around in record profits, it's no wonder why he thinks the economy is fine and dandy," Hinchey said. "President Bush needs a dose of reality. He needs to see that all across the country people are literally suffering as a result of his unfair economic policies of mass destruction. The cost of housing, food, health care, gas and oil are all rising rapidly, while wages are holding steady or even dropping while many others lose their jobs. These are very tough times in America and we need a dramatic shift in policy in order to fix things. The Bush administration has been more concerned about rebuilding the streets of Baghdad than it has been about rebuilding highways in America. By committing resources in a serious way to rebuild roads, bridges, railways, schools, hospitals, and other essential infrastructure in our country, we'll not only create jobs and spur more economic growth, but we'll have tangible products that will improve our quality of life from coast to coast.

Hinchey also continued to advocate for a major investment in alternative energy solutions, particularly solar energy, as a way to grow the U.S. economy and rid the country of its dependence on oil and other fossil fuels. Last year, Hinchey helped create The Solar Energy Consortium (TSEC) -- an industry-driven, non-profit organization that provides leadership, organization, resources, and support for the establishment of a major solar energy industry cluster in New York. TSEC is the first organization of its kind for the photovoltaic industry, encompassing research and development, manufacturing facilities, industry promotion and market development.

In less than a year since its creation, TSEC has made extraordinary strides forward. The consortium has forged an unprecedented partnership with six research universities across New York and it signed its first major solar manufacturer, Prism Solar Technologies. The company, which will bring hundreds of new jobs to upstate New York will focus on developing much more efficient solar panels that will also be more affordable. Hinchey is also pushing legislation in Congress to extend solar and other alternative energy tax credits for businesses and individuals across the country so that clean energy products such as solar panels can become more mainstream.