

*Washington, DC* - Congressman Maurice Hinchey (D-NY) tonight released the following statement in response to President Bush's State of the Union address.

"The best thing about this year's State of the Union address is that it was the last one President Bush will ever give. For the past eight years, I've sat in the House chamber and listened to the president make lofty promises in these speeches only to see him take subsequent actions that directly contradicted those goals. Sadly, President Bush will be remembered for using the power of his words in State of the Union addresses to mislead, lie, and spread fear rather than to lead, inspire, and spread hope of a better day in a more united and prosperous America. The Democratic Congress will continue to take important steps to reverse and minimize the impact of President Bush's policies, but to be perfectly frank, this country will not see real change until a year from now when this president packs his bags.

"All across New York and the nation, more and more people and their families are feeling the stinging effects of a struggling economy. Prices are going up, especially for food, gas, and health care, while wages are not. Quality jobs are becoming harder to find and to hold. Tomorrow, the House will pass an economic stimulus package that will deliver critical tax cuts for 117 million American families, provide investment incentives for businesses, and present some relief from the housing crisis. President Bush and Republicans deserve some credit for working with Democrats in Congress to craft this economic stimulus bill. While there is more that I would have liked to have seen included in the economic stimulus package, the bill represents a consensus that all too often is never reached in the halls of Congress.

"However, the stimulus package is only a partial and short-term fix to the country's economic woes. Through President Bush's corporate welfare program and massive tax breaks targeted just to the wealthiest Americans, the richest people in this country continue to get richer, while much of America struggles to make ends meet. We must even the playing field in this country instead of making it more and more difficult for working and middle class Americans to get ahead.

"I also remain very concerned about President Bush continuing to blur the lines between September 11th and Iraq. Despite the president's ongoing attempts to mislead and confuse the public, the American people know that Iraq had nothing to do with September 11th and they know that President Bush has completely mismanaged the occupation of that country. Our troops should be out of Iraq and they should begin to come home now. Congress will continue to pass legislation and exert public pressure on President Bush to do what the majority of

Americans realize we need to do -- get out of Iraq. At the same time, we must work to ensure the president doesn't extend his mismanagement skills into Iran, which would prove to be a huge mistake for the security of our country. Congress also needs to stand up to this president and ensure that he does not continue to scare the country into believing we need to rip up the Constitution in order to protect us from the threat of terrorism. We can successfully track the activities of terrorists in ways that are both effective and respectful of the Constitution.

"We must also not be distracted by President Bush about the financial cost of the invasion and subsequent military occupation of Iraq. The president tonight spoke critically of congressional earmarks, which are a way for members of Congress to target specific needs in their district, state, and across the country with federal funds. He failed to mention that Democrats have made the earmark process much more transparent than Republicans did when they controlled Congress and secretly passed a huge amount of earmarks. But the real purpose of the president's focus on earmarks was to distract the American people from the fact that operations in Iraq have cost this country \$500 billion and counting. Earmarks cost a small fraction of what this country spends in Iraq and earmarks target resources to domestic initiatives within the U.S. If we spent just half of what has been spent in Iraq on domestic needs such as health care, education, and infrastructure, this country would be far better off in every way.

"Finally, when it comes to energy prices, it is clear that we need a radical change in the way the country thinks about energy. Congress made important progress this year in passing an increase in fuel efficiency standards, but that is not enough. The days of oil addiction must come to an end and we must shift to generating energy from alternative sources, particularly the sun. This past year, I helped create The Solar Energy Consortium (TSEC) in New York. TSEC will enable New York to serve as a national and international hub for solar research and development. By investing and making the change to solar and other renewable forms of energy, we will free the U.S. from its dependence on both foreign and domestic oil, create an enormous new sector of our economy with a huge number of jobs, and help save our planet from the consequences of global warming. In the year ahead, we must pass tax credits to make solar products more affordable to produce and purchase so that we can make solar energy more mainstream. And when we have a new president in office, we can take the inevitable giant leap forward in our energy policy -- a leap we must take in order to free ourselves of a dependence on oil and to usher in a new day for this country and for the world."