

## Ensign criticizes critics of Bush strategy in Iraq

### Planned Senate resolutions 'meaningless,' he says

Las Vegas Review-Journal  
February 01, 2007

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WASHINGTON -- Sen. John Ensign on Wednesday urged senators to tone down criticism of President Bush's new strategy for Iraq, saying Bush "has the only plan on the table that doesn't ensure defeat."

"It may not be a perfect plan and it may need to be adjusted in the near term, but it is certainly a change from what we've been doing so far," the Nevada Republican said in a Senate speech.

"We need to face the fact that we are in Iraq," Ensign said. "We need to ask ourselves what do we do now."

"Do we pack up and leave, even though every voice of reason tells us that Iraq would implode into a terrorist state used by al-Qaida as a launching pad?" he said.

Ensign staked out a position as the Senate prepares to debate resolutions on Iraq and Bush's new policy of sending 21,500 more U.S. troops into the war zone in a "surge" to secure neighborhoods in Baghdad and parts of Anbar province.

On Wednesday, senators who had sponsored competing proposals agreed to join together on a resolution that would criticize the plan. It might be debated and voted on next week.

In his speech, Ensign noted that the resolutions are nonbinding and said they are "meaningless."

"We cannot wash our hands of the responsibility incumbent upon us as the leader of the free world," Ensign said. "We cannot afford to fail."

While Bush has said the Senate action would not deter him from carrying out his troop plans, critics said a vote against the troop surge would send a powerful message.

In a television appearance Tuesday, Ensign said he believes the message would be that the United States is officially divided, and that message would be harmful to Americans serving in Iraq.

"I think that there are some messages that we can send to the Iraqis, especially the Iraqi government," Ensign said on "Hardball," an MSNBC program. "But to actually say that

you are against what the troops are going to be doing in the next coming months -- you are not going to stop them from doing it -- but just to say you're against it, I think, actually does damage to the troops' morale.

"We, as leaders, we have to measure, very carefully, what we say, whether it is going to do harm, or whether it is going to do good," Ensign said on the program.

In the Senate on Wednesday, Ensign urged reforms in the U.S. effort to rebuild Iraq.

"We have to stop squandering our resources on reconstruction programs in Iraq that fail to deliver basic security and critical infrastructure," Ensign said, citing a Congressional Research Service report that the government has spent more than \$35.6 billion so far on Iraq projects.