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Lincoln Honors Sacrifice of Service Men and Women on Fourth Anniversary of Iraq War

Washington – U.S. Senator Blanche Lincoln (D-Ark.) Monday released the following statement as the Iraq War reaches its fourth anniversary. American troops invaded Iraq on March 20, 2003.

“More than four years ago, Congress gave President Bush the authority to order U.S. military forces into Iraq. Since that time, our troops have performed their mission with incredible bravery and skill in some of the harshest conditions imaginable. Because of their sacrifice, we have seen a popularly elected government replace a ruthless dictator. And we have seen a democratic Constitution – approved by the Iraqi people – replace authoritarian rule.

“Tragically, we also have seen a civilian mismanagement of this war that is not reflective of the tremendous sacrifice put forth by our men and women in uniform. Today, more than 3,200 service members – 54 with Arkansas ties – have given their lives in this undertaking. More than 23,000 have been wounded. When I visit the wounded at Walter Reed Hospital in Washington, I am deeply touched by the commitment and honor that these brave men and women have bestowed on our great country.

“As Iraq slides deeper into an increasingly violent civil war, the President has chosen an extremely high-risk strategy that heightens our military involvement. This comes at a time when the U.S. intelligence community reports that al-Qaeda has become an increased threat to our national security while we continue to focus primarily on Iraq. And it comes at a time when our own military reports that its readiness has dramatically eroded because it is over-extended and under-equipped.

“For the security of our country and for the sake of our troops, it is time for a new direction. It must be a direction that better reflects the reality that real progress ultimately lies with Iraqis taking responsibility for their own future. That is why I have supported calls to set goals to expedite the transfer of duties to the Iraqis themselves, to more aggressively pursue diplomatic efforts with Iraq’s neighbors, and to redeploy a number of American combat troops. This new direction must also acknowledge that we must do more for our troops – when they are in harm’s way and when they return home. They not only deserve our appreciation and support, they deserve the very best equipment, armor, and other battlefield amenities necessary to complete their mission, as well as the proper care, benefits, and attention once their military service is complete.

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“As we mark another anniversary of the Iraq War, it is important to reflect on the sacrifice and achievements of the past four years. But more importantly, it is crucial that we apply the lessons of the past to better serve our future and the safety and security of our troops. We owe that to our service men and women, and we owe it to the Iraqi people.”