

Let Inspections Work

January 27th, 2003

The Nation

As President Bush prepared to deliver his State of the Union address Tuesday night, he received a letter signed by more than 120 House members of the House of Representatives asking him "to use the opportunity provided in the upcoming State of the Union Address to offer assurances both to the American people and the international community that the United States remains committed to the diplomatic approach and comprehensive inspections process agreed to in the UN Security Council."

The letter, authored by Representatives Sherrod Brown, D-Ohio, and Ron Kind, D-Wisconsin, argues that the weapons inspection process "is an inherently difficult task requiring patience and perseverance." And it goes on to suggest that: "The report (given) by chief U.N. weapons inspector Dr. Hans Blix and Director General Mohamed El-Baradei on Jan. 27, 2003, (assesses) whether the United Nations Monitoring, Verification, and Inspection Commission and International Atomic Energy Agency's comprehensive mission is proceeding in the unobstructed and effective manner necessary to realize the aims of U.N. Security Council Resolution 1441. We encourage your administration to sufficiently weigh future decisions regarding Iraq on the assessment given by UNMOVIC/IAEA, including additional inspection time and resources as appropriate. Your commitment to working through the UN Security Council and your vocal support for Resolution 1441 are critical to UNMOVIC/IAEA's eventual success."

Though the Bush administration has been extremely slow to recognize the mounting opposition to war with Iraq among Americans -- in Washington and, more significantly, beyond the beltway -- the president might want to note the list of signers on this letter. Among them are not just members of the House such as Brown and US Rep. Dennis Kucinich, D-Ohio, who voted against last fall's Congressional resolution authorizing the president to take steps leading to war with Iraq, but also members such as Kind, who voted for the resolution.

Noting Blix's statement that the report should not be seen as a conclusive assessment, and that European allies -- including Great Britain -- have said that Jan. 27 should not be seen as a deadline for action, Kind expressed concern about signals from the Bush administration that the date might be seen as the "final phase" of the inspection process, and hints from administration that diplomatic efforts are being rejected in favor of war preparation.

Echoing the concerns of a number of House members who voted for last fall's resolution, Kind said as he dispatched the letter to Bush, "In previous correspondence to President Bush, I stressed the importance of the administration exhausting all diplomatic measures to disarm Saddam Hussein of his nuclear, biological and chemical weapons, before considering the use of multilateral force as a last resort. The letter Sherrod Brown and I have sent to President Bush today reiterates that sentiment and advocates that the administration continue to work with the international community to secure Iraq's disarmament, as well as (to) provide the U.N. weapons inspectors with the time and resources they need to effectively do their job."

Brown credited the internet activist group MoveOn.org with helping to gather signers for the "Let the Inspections Work" letter. The organization, which coordinated visits by anti-war activists to more than 450 House and Senate offices across the country last week, sent targeted emails to its 700,000 US members urging them to call their representatives and ask them to sign the letter.

Among the House members who voted for the Oct. 10 resolution authorizing the use of force against Iraq who signed the letter were Kind, a leader of the moderate New Democrat Network, and Californians Henry Waxman, Adam Schiff and Ellen Tauscher, Florida's Bob Wexler, Iowa's Leonard Boswell, Massachusetts's Martin Meehan, Maryland's Albert Wynn, New Jersey's Pascrell, and New Yorkers Nita Lowey, Carolyn Mahoney, Anthony Weiner, Eliot Engel and Michael McNulty, and Washington state's Adam Smith.

The overall list of signers released by Brown's office included: Abercrombie, Allen, Baca, Baird, Baldwin, Ballance, Becerra, Berkley, Berry, Blumenauer, Boswell, Boucher, Boyd, Brady (PA), Brown (OH), Brown (FL), Capps, Capuano, Cardin, Carson (IN), Case, Clay, Conyers, Crowley, Cummings, Davis (FL), Davis (CA), Davis (IL), DeFazio, Delahunt, DeLauro, Doggett, Engel, Eshoo, Evans, Farr, Fattah, Filner, Frank, Gutierrez, Grijalva, Hastings (FL), Hinchey, Hoeffel, Holt, Honda, Hooley, Inslee, Jackson, Jackson-Lee, Johnson (TX), Jones (OH), Kaptur, Kildee, Kind, Kleczka, Kucinich, Langevin, Larsen, Lee, Lewis (GA), Lofgren, Lowey, McCarthy (MO), McCollum, McDermott, McGovern, McNulty, Maloney (NY), Matheson, Meehan, Meek, Meeks,

Michaud, Millender-McDonald, Miller, Moran, Nadler, Napolitano, Neal, Norton, Oberstar, Olver, Owens, Pascrell, Payne, Price, Rahall, Rangell, Rodriguez, Roybal-Allard, Rush, Ryan (OH), Sabo, Sanchez (CA-39), Sanders, Schakowsky, Schiff, Scott (VA), Serrano, Slaughter, Smith (WA), Stark, Strickland, Stupak, Tauscher, Thompson (CA), Tierney, Towns, Udall (NM), Van Hollen, Velasquez, Waters, Watson, Watt, Waxman, Weiner, Wexler, Woolsey, Wu and Wynn.