

# Ripon Educational Fund Holds Winter Forum on The Reconstruction and Stability of Iraq and Implications for the Middle East

March 28, 2006

On Tuesday, March 28, 2006, more than thirty Ripon Educational Fund (REF) members, Congressional leaders and staffers, GWU graduate students and friends joined Congressman J. Gresham Barrett (R-SC); Kenneth M. Pollack, Senior Fellow and Director of Research at the Saban Center for Middle East Policy at the Brookings Institution; and REF Chairman Ed Bethune, for REF's first Winter Forum. The roundtable luncheon, *The Reconstruction and Stability of Iraq and Implications for the Middle East*, was held in the Financial Services hearing Room.

The Honorable J. Gresham Barrett (R-SC), a member of the House Budget Committee, the House Committee on Financial Services and the House Committee on International Relations, led the discussion. Congressman Barrett recently returned from his second Congressional Delegation visit to Iraq to view the situation first-hand. The Congressman briefed the audience on the current status in Iraq as well as the changes that have occurred since his first visit in 2003.

Congressman Barrett highlighted the work being done to build relationships and trust with both the Iraqi citizens and leaders. He pointed out the growth in the Iraqi army and saw proof that as the U.S. Army stands down, the Iraqi army is standing up. The Congressman stated that 2006 is a critical year to show both Iraqis and Americans that this mission is achieving positive results.



Dr. Kenneth M. Pollack and the Honorable J. Gresham Barrett address attendees.

Kenneth M. Pollack, Senior Fellow and Director of Research at the Saban Center for Middle East Policy at the Brookings Institution followed the Congressman's remarks by stating that 2006 is a make-or-break year for Iraq. Dr. Pollack described his November, 2005 visit to Iraq and the work he has done at Brookings. He spearheaded the creation of an analysis paper through the Saban Center for Middle East Policy titled *A Switch in Time: A New Strategy for America in Iraq*

([http://www.brookings.edu/fp/saban/analysis/20060215\\_iraqreport.pdf](http://www.brookings.edu/fp/saban/analysis/20060215_iraqreport.pdf)). This 142 page document outlines the need for coalition troops to remain in Iraq along with a strong strategy for moving forward in a positive and constructive way. The situation is

extremely complicated and there is no silver bullet solution, but the task can be accomplished and Iraqi public opinion polls show they want reconstruction to succeed.

Dr. Pollack agreed with Congressman Barrett that positive progress needs to be made. The key element to success is to provide the Iraqis with a safe place to live. Without security, political and economic reconstruction cannot be accomplished. Iraqi citizens are frustrated with the lack of security. And, it is the "first step in saying your lives are better - give us more time." Congressman Barrett agreed that we "don't need to prove everything to everyone, we just need to show progress."

Security issues also impact the cost of doing business in Iraq. The GAO has shown statistics of a 25 – 40% tax being imposed on all business and contracts in Iraq due to security issues, as well as a 40% surcharge for corruption. Shipments are being stolen and factories are being robbed. Building factories in Iraq is currently not feasible, until the security issues are dealt with.

Dr. Pollack also stated the need to rebuild governmental institutions and to deal with the economy and unemployment. He stated that we must make changes if we are to hold on to Iraqi public opinion. If they lose faith in us, there will be a civil war in Iraq whether we want it or not. Following the presentations a question and answer session was held.

The Ripon Educational Fund is a non-partisan, non-profit 501(c)(3) organization that seeks to educate American public officials, corporate leaders and students about major foreign policy issues and facilitate the exchange of ideas among American and foreign government officials, scholars, corporate leaders, and other public policy experts. The Ripon Educational Fund promotes enlightened, balanced and non-partisan international policy discussion and debate in the United States and abroad. During this time of tremendous international unrest, the Ripon Education Fund fosters a unique multilateral foreign policy dialogue in order promote peace, economic prosperity and health at home and abroad.

If you have any questions, please contact REF's President Terri Pazirandeh at (703) 536-4040 or ([tpazirandeh@riponfund.org](mailto:tpazirandeh@riponfund.org)). Thank you for your continued support.