



# Montgomery County Council

*From the office of Councilmember Tom Perez*

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**News Release**

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## **Perez on the Impending War in Iraq**

I applaud Congressman Chris Van Hollen's thoughtful and passionate critique of the Bush administration's handling of the crisis in Iraq. He really made a compelling case against the war in Iraq. I applaud his courage, and hope that the Bush administration will heed the call of the world community, and millions across America, and give diplomacy and the United Nations inspections process a fair chance.

I have great respect for the men and women of the U.S. armed forces. They are brave, talented individuals who will remain in my thoughts and prayers. It is our commander-in-chief with whom I have a major quarrel.

The unilateral instincts of the Bush administration are a real threat to short- and long-term stability at home and abroad. The administration has succeeded in alienating critical allies, as well as world public opinion. A recent poll showed that 70% of the world's citizens believe the United States presents the greatest threat to world peace today - ahead of Iraq and North Korea. There is no question that the United States could "win" a war against Iraq. But the real question is whether the United States can win the peace. I have no doubt that our "go at it alone" approach will prevent us from securing a lasting peace. In fact, this approach, as Congressman Van Hollen and others correctly point out, will foment further anti-American sentiment throughout the world.

Saddam Hussein is a brutal dictator who has used chemical weapons against his own people. The question for me is not whether to remove him but how. The most effective way to secure a lasting peace in Iraq is by acting in concert with our allies throughout the world, and working within the framework of the United Nations. We must give the UN inspections process more time and not go to war in the absence of consensus within the Security Council. The Bush approach puts American lives needlessly at risk, and will do more harm than good. Our myopic focus on Iraq is causing us to ignore growing terrorist threats elsewhere.

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Some question what business a county council member has criticizing the Bush administration. It is important to recognize that this Bush war with Iraq is undermining stability at home. Budget surpluses have evaporated, largely as a result of the reckless Bush tax cuts and the recent military buildup. Deficits are adversely affecting communities across America. Poverty, welfare rolls and gas prices are all rising. In our zeal to begin the war against Iraq, we are ignoring the war against poverty.

In Maryland, we are facing a state budget deficit of \$1.7 billion, while Montgomery County is looking at a \$300 million budget deficit. We are confronting an affordable housing crisis in Montgomery County. Yet we cannot count on federal dollars from HUD because they have been diverted to the war in Iraq and to tax cuts that primarily benefit the wealthy. We have an educational achievement gap and a federal mandate to leave no child behind. Yet the money to meet this mandate has been left behind. The stock market continues to tank because of fears about the Bush war. The rubber hits the road at county government, and the federal budget woes have trickled down to the local level. As a result, local governments across the nation are bearing the brunt of this economic downturn.

Just a few years ago, under the leadership of President Clinton, we had record surpluses and were discussing how to spend the "peace dividend." So much has changed. The unity that existed shortly after September 11 has given way to deep divisions at home and abroad. World public opinion is resoundingly against the Bush war. It is time for the Bush administration to listen to these voices of reason at home and abroad, and to work with our allies and the United Nations to achieve a truly lasting peace.

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