

## Doolittle says U.S. troops likely to remain in Iraq for decades

By Wil Morat  
Staff Writer

Congressman John Doolittle compared the United States' current presence in South Korea to the situation he expects in Iraq, where U.S. troops and bases could stay for decades.

"I think it's a pretty analogous comparison," Doolittle said after a luncheon Thursday with supporters at the Serrano Country Club in El Dorado Hills.

Though he doesn't regret his vote for the war, Doolittle said many of the pre-war projections were miscalculated and wrong.

"I voted for the war. It was the right thing to do," he said. "The projections were obviously wrong. They said it would be in and out — that I never believed. The weapons of mass destruction [claim] was another mistake."

He said a war that has already cost the U.S. more than \$273 billion would soon be as high as \$400 billion



Village Life photo by Wil Morat

**CONGRESSMAN JOHN DOOLITTLE and EDC Auditor-Controller Joe Harn, right, listen to a question from the crowd during a luncheon Thursday at the Serrano Country Club.**

with new supplemental appropriations already in the works.

"We're paying for [the war], and because of that the budget is tight in so many other places," he said. "But we're confronting what may be a greater threat now in Iran. We're in a dangerous era, as dangerous as World War II; it's just manifesting

itself differently."

Doolittle spoke about lighter subjects during the luncheon. More than 130 supporters interacted in a question-and-answer session with the congressman before he toured several EDH businesses in the after-

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Doolittle congratulated the crowd on countywide achievements over the last few years.

"It's exciting to represent a district like this," he said. "You've made a lot of accomplishments in El Dorado County. You got the General Plan passed and that was really critical."

Touting the new American River Bridge in Folsom that is now in President Bush's budget and scheduled to begin construction in 2007, Doolittle addressed water management issues, including a potential dam in Auburn.

"We need a permanent solution to water management for this region," he said. "We have a heightened alertness to the flooding problem because of [Hurricane] Katrina. We're going to have that dam; there's no question. One way or another, it's coming."

Doolittle began his 2006 reelection campaign amid recently publicized ties to disgraced Washington D.C. lobbyist Jack Abramoff, but maintains his relationship with Abramoff was ethical and legal.

There are also ties between Doolittle and Brent Wilkes, who was one of the main sources of bribes accepted by former U.S. House member Randy "Duke" Cunningham.

A recipient of thousands of dollars of campaign donations from Wilkes and his associates, Doolittle directed at least \$37 million in government contracts to Wilkes' company, PerfectWave.

"Those ties [to Abramoff and Wilkes] have made for a very interesting past three months and are going to make for a very exciting election this year," Doolittle said, not wanting to

elaborate.

After the luncheon sponsored by local Chambers of Commerce, Doolittle visited several businesses, including EDH's two biggest employers, DST Output and Blue Shield of California.

DST Output is one of the biggest first class mailers in the U.S. More than 100 million billing statements for some of the largest wireless and telecommunications companies are sent from their location in the EDH Business Park every month.

Doolittle was curious to know how the DST Output on-site physician was assessing a potential bird flu outbreak and how it could affect operations at a 24-hour facility that employs more than 1,500 people.

Blue Shield of California is a not-for-profit

medical insurer and the second largest employer in EDH. Rob Geyer is the vice president of customer service and claims, and showed Doolittle the facility off Latrobe Road near Highway 50.

"This is the most personal business you'll run into," Geyer told the congressman. "You're dealing with people's health as well as their money."

Doolittle also visited a dentist's office, EDH Small Business of the Year 2005 Stoker Insurance Services and Mercedes Benz of EDH. A private dinner at Masque in La Borgia topped off the congressman's busy day.

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