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## **JOHN L. SMITH: Berkley still backs U.S. troops but feels duped over war in Iraq**

Shelley Berkley clearly recalls the anger and disgust she felt when she learned from a general during a confidential briefing that Iraqi President Saddam Hussein not only had weapons of mass destruction, but he had them stockpiled next to schools.

Elaborate maps were displayed for members of Congress with the "WMD" sites clearly marked. Within as little as six months, she was told, the Iraqis might have nuclear capability with a delivery system coming soon afterward.

Weapons of mass destruction? Next to schools?

Nuclear capability and a way to deliver the payload?

It was the ultimate nightmare playing out in real time. The information hit her not only intellectually, but viscerally as well.

Images of children being used as human shields appeared in Berkley's head. Images of a madman with an atomic bomb and clearly defined terrorist ties were vivid and awful.

She reacted decisively with anger and revulsion.

For all those reasons and more, the despotic Saddam had to be stopped.

Congresswoman Shelley Berkley, D-Nev., was a hawk when it came to attacking Iraq. She set aside her differences with President Bush's policies and lined up with the commander in chief.

Little more than a year later, after revelations of wildly inaccurate intelligence and the suspicion the Bush administration knowingly mounted an invasion on a false premise, Berkley continues to support the troops and the cause of peace and democracy in the Middle East.

But she also believes unequivocally that she was misled.

"The reality is setting in that we were all lied to," Berkley says. "What I find most astonishing is that everyone who participated in those wildly inaccurate positions is still in place."

Call her blatantly partisan if you like. She's known as a liberal Democrat, a friend of organized labor, and she's running for re-election. No one has ever called Berkley shy when it comes to criticizing the president and her Republican opponents on a variety of policies and political issues.

But this was different. This wasn't some partisan squabble. This wasn't a rhetorical slapfest over highway dollars or the next budget.

This was portrayed as the possibility of a terror attack with nuclear, chemical or biological weapons. This wasn't conveyed to Berkley and her colleagues as supposition or raw intelligence. This was communicated as a fact.

Berkley says she stood by Bush on Iraq in part because she believed Saddam posed a genuine threat to America, the world in general, and Israel in the region. She believed the intelligence she was presented by supposedly well-informed military minds. And she feels duped.

When Berkley talks about those pre-invasion briefings, her anger returns. Don't misunderstand: She still believes the world and Iraq are better off without Saddam, and the removal of a dangerous dictator is never a bad thing.

But the way the nation was prepared for war was blatantly dishonest, she asserts.

"One year later, there are no weapons of mass destruction," she says. "There was no nuclear capability. And there were no al-Qaida links (to Saddam). It just isn't there."

No matter what Vice President Dick Cheney contends, Berkley says.

Her first six years in Congress have seen Berkley mature on several levels. As a candidate, she always has projected more energy and passion than a dozen contemporaries.

That's the sizzle of campaigning, but issues are the steak of politics. Her understanding of policy issues stemming from her roles on the House committees on Transportation and Infrastructure, Veterans Affairs, and International Relations has taken her to the next level in Congress. In short, she's becoming a player and a distinctive voice for Nevada in areas ranging from highway funding and airport safety to helping to create a new veterans hospital and understanding the essential and complex relationship with our allies.

No matter where you stand on her politics, you almost always know where Berkley stands.

In a game in which the truth is elusive, her candor is refreshing.

John L. Smith's column appears Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday and Sunday. E-mail him at [Smith@reviewjournal.com](mailto:Smith@reviewjournal.com) or call 383-0295.

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