

5 November 2008

Dear Fellow Caucus Members,

I had hoped that I would not have to write this email but due to the circumstances I cannot stay quiet about what has happened to me over the last 6 months. I am now taking what little free time I have over here in Iraq to write this letter so you can understand what has happened.

When my wife forwarded the Caucus election note to me several days ago it was a reminder of a lot that I am missing but at the same time it brought back a lot of frustration. I will try to be brief but I need to tell you the story of what happened to me. It started back in May when I contacted Jay Roberts about the possibility of me voting by proxy in the Caucus election. I knew that the Whip's job would be open and I wanted to make sure that I could vote. The immediate response from Jay was No. I was told the rules did not allow it and they wanted to make sure everyone showed up for the meeting and vote. After a few minutes explaining that I would not be on a pleasure trip but that I would be deployed to the war zone in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom, I was told that he would work on it. I want to be very clear at this point. I believe Jay to be an honorable man and a friend; however I do not believe that leadership was unaware of the situation and at the time I thought something would be done.

I waited until the middle of July and contacted Jay again and was told that he had talked to an attorney and that I could not vote unless the rules were changed and that the caucus would have to change them. I still did not worry because he said he would do everything he could and I thought that with the Caucus meeting coming up in Atlanta in a few weeks it would be worked out there. I was wrong. After the Caucus meeting I heard nothing so I assumed that I was not going to be allowed to vote. I could think of a number of reasons why but at this point I still believed that politics would be put aside and I would be allowed to vote. It stood to reason that since I would be able to vote by absentee ballot from Iraq in the General Election surely I could vote in the Caucus election.

Hearing nothing I decided to make one last attempt 10 days before I was to ship out to Iraq. I had my secretary Julie Jordan hand deliver a letter to Speaker Richardson's office. In the letter I explained briefly the situation and asked for a response and help. I asked that he get back to me within a week because after that I was on standby and could be called to leave at any time. I waited a week and no reply. Not even a note saying someone was looking into this. Nothing. Finally after having Julie confirm the receipt of the letter by the Speaker's staff, I emailed asking for an answer. I was emailed back by the Chief of Staff and told Jay Roberts would call me.

On the night before I was to fly to Iraq Jay called me and told me that there was nothing he could do. He tried to explain that the August Caucus meeting really wasn't a business meeting so the issue could not be addressed during that meeting.

I flew out the next morning having had no resolution to an issue that I started asking about 4 months earlier. As I have said earlier I believe Jay tried but was undoubtedly not supported by the current leadership. However, the thing that disturbed me the most in this whole process was that as a Member of the Georgia House of Representatives, the Speaker of the House did not respond to my letter with either a phone call or email before I left. It was disappointing for me to think that in light of all that I was getting ready to do my own party's leadership did not want to talk with me even if only to say - I am sorry we did all we could. Instead all I got was an email from the Chief of Staff saying someone else would call me. I understand politics but I also understand leadership and not contacting me after I had a letter hand delivered to him shows that all members do not mean the same to this Speaker. This action was made even harder to understand and to swallow after all of the talk by the Speaker about his changing and being available to all the caucus members.

I wish each of you well. I am sorry to have taken a few minutes of your time but I felt that each of you had the right to know my situation and the way the current leadership viewed my vote. I look forward to seeing you all again in January.

Douglas Collins - District 27