

Edwards courts Iowa, defends war support

Jim Morrill

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DES MOINES, Iowa — U.S. Sen. John Edwards pressed his case for the presidency on Sunday with Democrats who will serve as the nation's first jury — Iowa caucus-goers.

The former North Carolina trial lawyer hopes the case turns on one main issue: the economy.

"You put me on a stage with George Bush in 2004," he said, "and this will be the question to the American people: Are you better off than you were four years ago?"

Edwards spoke to more than 300 people and a national C-SPAN audience at a town meeting sponsored by Iowa Democratic Sen. Tom Harkin.

It was his first major appearance since reports last week showed that he'd raised more money — \$7.4 million — than any other Democratic candidate during the first three months of the year. But nine

months before the first contest of the 2004 campaign, he still lags behind better-known rivals in Iowa.

A poll for one TV station last month showed him with single-digit support, despite several trips here and high-profile help for the state party and several local candidates.

Harkin's forum, the first in a series of meetings that will highlight individual presidential hopefuls, gave Edwards a high-profile platform. He spoke, often passionately, to a largely sympathetic audience of activists, teachers and union members.

"Think to yourself 'Who do I want making this case against George Bush?'" he said. "What kind of background — what kind of energy and passion would I want them to have?"

He defended his stand on one issue where he and many seemed to disagree — the war in Iraq.

"I believe in this cause," he said.

"I believe we're doing the right thing. I know there are a lot of you in this room who disagree with that. ... I think it's important to maintain our strength, particularly if we use it for a foreign policy that is multi-lateral. It can be used as a tool that can do a lot of good."

Last week Edwards joined Bush and Republican Sen. Elizabeth Dole at Camp LeJeune in a common show of support for U.S. troops. Edwards said on Sunday that he would "cede nothing" to Bush, "no issue, no part of the country."

Some Democrats think that by supporting the president on the war, they can avoid traditional Republican attacks that they are soft on defense and security.

"We have to show voters in this country we are not only as tough as they are, we're tougher," he said.

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Baghdad

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terrorist camp at Salman Pak, a village along the Tigris River about 20 miles southeast of Baghdad. They took the ground in an overnight attack that they said destroyed 70 percent of the al Nida Division of the Iraqi Republican Guard.

At least 13 Iraqis were killed in the fighting, while others fled from trenches and sandbag nests on rooftops. Marines destroyed tanks, armored personnel carriers and buildings in the compound.

The 1st Marine Expeditionary Force attacked the camp after learning of its location from captured pro-Iraq fighters from other countries including Egypt and Sudan. U.S. officials believe the camp, which included the shell of a Boeing 707 apparently used to practice for hijackings, was used by Saddam Hussein to train foreign terrorists.

"It reinforces the likelihood of links between his regime and external terrorist organizations," said U.S. Brig. Gen. Vincent Brooks, spokesman for the U.S. Central Command in Doha, Qatar.

The apparent desertion of Iraqi forces from potential battlegrounds — punctuated by the discovery near Baghdad of 16 abandoned T-72 tanks, Iraq's best — had military planners scratching their heads and hoping for the best.

"Where have these guys gone?" said Lt. Col. Dave Pere, senior watch

officer at the 1st Marine Expeditionary Force's combat operations center.

"It is my suspicion that there are wholesale desertions."

Marine intelligence officers also reported that all six of Iraq's Republican Guard divisions have been so decimated that they are rated only 10 percent or less battle-effective.

U.S. forces continued to close their circle around Baghdad, even as they faced small attacks on their base at Baghdad International Airport. The first U.S. military aircraft, a C-130 cargo plane, landed there on Sunday.

War planes and drones crowded the skies over the city, so much so that air controllers were added to guard against collision. A massive buildup of U.S. Marines continued on roads leading into Baghdad's eastern edge, where intersections were commandeered and military vehicles blocked roads.

Facing scattered fighting, Army units passed remnants of an Iraqi force already devastated, apparently by air strikes or artillery. Blackened Iraqi tanks and dead soldiers littered the roadside. Dogs fed on some corpses.

"I saw a hundred dead bodies today, easily," said Army Spc. Vince Austin, 24, of Brooklyn, N.Y.

On Sunday, teams were examining two missiles extracted from a mysterious pit near the town of Aziziyah, 50 miles southeast of Baghdad.

Marines were led to the site by villagers who said the Iraqi military buried something recently, then covered it with cement and a layer of dirt. The missiles were marked with a chemical symbol, but it was not immediately determined what they contained, if anything.

As if to underscore the U.S. military might that is being brought to bear on Baghdad, U.S. officials said on Sunday that their soldiers and armor killed about 2,000 Iraqi soldiers during a weekend raid on the capital.

Yet they also said they saw signs of how challenging the battle for Baghdad could be. Central Command said it believes Iraqi soldiers have moved into mosques and hospitals, including the "Mother of All Battles" Mosque and Saddam Hospital, both of which remained on the allied coalition's no-strike list to avoid civilian casualties.

© 2003, Knight Ridder/Tribune Information Services. Gerlin of The Philadelphia Inquirer was with the Marines southeast of Baghdad. Laseeter of the Lexington Herald-Leader was with the 101st Airborne Division at Albu Muhawish, Iraq. Thomma anchored from Washington. Also contributing: Drew Brown with the Army's 3rd Infantry Division at Baghdad International Airport; Ken Dilanian of The Philadelphia Inquirer with the 173rd Airborne Brigade at Bashur, Iraq; Juan O. Tamayo of the Miami Herald at Marine Command Headquarters in central Iraq; and S. Thorne Harper of The Macon Telegraph with the 3rd Infantry Division northwest of Baghdad.

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(As of 5 p.m. April 6)

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Christa Shively / Greg Bae

Pierre Spence / Jack Mantel

Jarrett White / Greg McNeill

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Alyce Chong

Adrian T. Gilmore

Hargobind Khalsa

Damion Meany

Richard Reed

Seat 2

Greg Diamond

Joseph Jenkins

Mike Martell

Kevin Odil

Mena Ravassipour

Seat 3

Colin Andries

Beth Overgard

Mike Sherman

Chris Sittner

EMU Board Finance Senators

Seat 4

Gabe V. Kjos

Rodrigo Moreno Villamar

Julian Pscheid

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James George

Jerad Nicholson

Athletic Department Finance Senators

Seat 7

Andrew Faust

Laura Schulthies

Seat 8

Jesse Harding

Anthony Kuchulis

Vincent Martorano

Seat 9

Anthony R. Cain

Kevin Day

Patrick T. Sullivan

Academic Senators

Seat 11, Undeclared

Rebecca Shively

Seat 12, AAA

no candidates

Seat 13, Arts & Letters, Journalism

Jennifer Guptill

Alicia Lindquist

Stefan Myers

Ashlee Stefani

Seat 15, Social Science

Kevin Curtin

Sami Hayden

Jordan Marx

Dan Occhipinti

Gabriela Serrano

Adam Turcott

Seat 16, Science

Paul Griffes

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