

country and for many Americans. These are times that demand bold and immediate action. The American people do not want any more excuses. They do not want to hear Congressmen and Senators arguing about who is to blame, and they are not impressed by those who constantly criticize the proposals of others but never make any proposals of their own.

Energy prices are too high, and we have heard enough excuses about why America cannot develop our own oil and gas reserves, build more refineries, and develop more alternative fuels to make us more independent of Middle East oil.

Health care and health insurance are too expensive, and we have heard enough excuses about why individuals cannot buy health insurance from anywhere in the country and get the same tax breaks as businesses.

Illegal immigration is out of control, and we have heard enough excuses about why we cannot control our borders.

Social Security is going broke, and we have heard enough excuses why Congress should continue to spend trillions of dollars of Social Security taxes on other Government programs.

We need action now, but we cannot solve these difficult problems that face us if we do not have a strong economy and a more efficient Government. House and Senate Republicans are developing budget reconciliation legislation now that will accomplish these goals to strengthen our economy, create jobs, and cut the cost of the Federal Government.

This package has two parts. The first part is to stop the scheduled tax increases that will soon add new burdens to our citizens and the businesses that pay their salaries. We must not allow new tax increases to steal our jobs and weaken our country at a time when we need all of our economic strength to solve the problems of today and to create new opportunities for the future.

The 2003 jobs and growth plan passed by Congress and signed by the President lowered taxes for capital gains and dividends, and it resulted in greater economic growth. Our economy has grown more than 4 percent a year since 2003, much faster than in the prior 2 years. Over 4 million jobs have been created since 2003, and 7 million seniors saved an average of over \$1200 on their 2004 taxes. And while tax rates have fallen, tax revenues have been increasing. In fact, as a result of a growing economy, Federal tax receipts grew this year by over \$270 billion—\$100 billion more than the Congressional Budget Office estimated earlier this year. If Congress does not pass this important budget reconciliation legislation this year, taxes will go up and economic growth will go down.

During uncertain times, Americans want stability. And that is why Congress must act now to bring certainty to America's families and stop the scheduled tax increases.

The second part of the Republican budget reconciliation package is to cut Government waste and reduce Federal spending. There are many wasteful practices of Government. We have all heard the stories like the dentist who overbilled Medicaid, claiming to perform as many as 991 procedures a day during a 12-month period.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The time under the control of the majority for morning business has expired.

Mr. LEAHY addressed the Chair.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Vermont.

Mr. DEMINT. Could I ask unanimous consent?

Mr. LEAHY. Does the Senator want to ask for further time?

Mr. DEMINT. Yes, if I could have a couple more minutes. I ask unanimous consent for 2 more minutes.

Mr. LEAHY. Provided it will not come out of our time, I have no objection.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. DEMINT. I thank the Senator. I thank the Chair.

Examples like the Medicaid one I just mentioned are maddening. We must stop this wasteful spending, and we also must slow the growth of new spending. If we slow the growth of new spending only, we can save much of the money we need to help our States recover from this year's devastating hurricanes. There is no problem too big for America to solve if we have the commitment and the strength to do it. Mr. President, the time for criticism, excuses, and obstruction is over. I am here this morning to appeal to every Senator to support our budget reconciliation package that will stop new tax increases and help cut the cost of Government so we have all the strength we need to secure the future for every American.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Vermont is recognized.

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, what is the parliamentary situation?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The minority controls 15 minutes which is beginning now.

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that we make that 21 minutes.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection? The Chair hears none, and it is so ordered.

IRAQ

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, 3 years ago when the Congress and the country debated the resolution to give President Bush the authority to launch a preemptive war against Iraq, reference was often made to the lessons of Vietnam.

There are many lessons, both of that war and of the efforts to end it. But one that made a deep impression on me came from former Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara. He was, after all,

the architect of that war. He said our greatest mistake was not understanding our enemy.

Vietnam was a relatively simple country. It had changed little in the preceding 3,000 years. It was for the most part racially, ethnically, linguistically, and even religiously homogeneous. One would have thought it would be easy for American military and political leaders to understand.

Apparently it was not. The White House and the Pentagon, convinced that no country, particularly a tiny impoverished land of rice farmers, could withstand the military might of the United States, never bothered to study and understand the history or culture of Vietnam, and they made tragic miscalculations. They lacked the most basic knowledge of the motivation and the capabilities and resolve of the people they were fighting.

At the start of the Iraq war, those who drew some analogies to Vietnam were ridiculed by the Pentagon and the White House. Iraq is not a Vietnam, they insisted. Our troops would be greeted as liberators. Troop strength was not a concern. Our mission would be quickly accomplished. Democracy would spread throughout the Middle East. Freedom was on the march.

It is true that Vietnam and Iraq are vastly different societies, but the point was not that they are similar but that some of the same lessons apply.

We did not understand Vietnam, a simple country, and we paid a huge price for our ignorance and our arrogance. Iraq, a complex country comprised of rival clans, tribes, and ethnic and religious factions who have fought each other for centuries, we understand even less.

If this were not apparent to many at the start of this ill-conceived and politically motivated war, a war I opposed from the beginning, it should be obvious today. Yet to listen to the Secretary of Defense or to the President or the Vice President, one would never know it.

We know today that President Bush decided to invade Iraq without evidence to support the use of force and well before Congress passed a resolution giving him the authority to do so—actually, authority he did not even believe he needed—despite our great Constitution which invests in the Congress the power to declare war.

Twenty-three Senators voted against that resolution, and I will always be proud to have been one of them.

We know today that the motivation for a plan to attack Iraq, hatched by a handful of political operatives, had taken hold within in the White House even before 9/11 and without any connection to the war on terrorism that came later.

We know that the key public justifications for the war—to stop Saddam Hussein from developing nuclear weapons and supporting al-Qaida—were based on faulty intelligence and outright distortions, and they have been

thoroughly discredited. United Nations weapons inspectors, who were dismissed by the White House as being naive and ineffective, turned out to have gathered far better information with a tiny fraction of the budget of our own intelligence agencies.

We know the insurgency is continuing to grow along with American casualties—1,999 killed, and at least 15,220 wounded, many with crippling injuries, as of yesterday—despite the same old “light at the end of the tunnel” assertions and clichés by the White House and top officials in the Pentagon.

The sad but inescapable truth, which the President either does not see or refuses to believe or admit, is the Iraqi insurgency has steadily grown, in part because of, not in spite of, our presence there.

After baiting the insurgents to “bring them on,” as the President said, we got what the President asked for. More than 2 years later, the pendulum has swung against us and the question is no longer whether we can stop the insurgency; the question is how do we extricate ourselves.

According to soldiers who volunteered for duty in Iraq believing in the mission and who have returned home, many Iraqis who detest the barbaric tactics of the insurgents have also grown to despise us. They blame us for the lack of water and electricity, for the lack of jobs and health care, for the hardships and violence they are suffering day in and day out.

Unlike our troops and their families who are making great sacrifices every day, most Americans have been asked to sacrifice nothing for this war. In fact, we don’t pay the bills. The bills are being sent to our children and our grandchildren by way of our rapidly escalating national debt and annual deficits.

Yet as the hundreds of billions of dollars to pay for the war continue to pile up and domestic programs, such as Medicaid, job training, and programs for needy students, are cut, then the sacrifices are going to be felt as well.

Slogans have become little more than political rallying cries for the White House, slogans as empty and unfulfilled as “mission accomplished.” Our troops were sent to fight an unnecessary war without sufficient armor against these ruthless and barbaric bombing attacks, without adequate reinforcements, without a plan to win the peace, and without adequate medical care and other services when they return home on stretchers or crutches or with eye patches, unable to walk, to work, to pay their mortgages, or to support their families.

Many of our veterans have been treated shamefully by their Government when it sent them into harm’s way under false pretenses and again after they returned home.

Today I worry about places such as Ramadi, where more than 300 members of the Army National Guard from my

State of Vermont are currently serving valiantly alongside their comrades in the Marine Corps and the Pennsylvania National Guard. Dozens of other citizen soldiers from the Vermont Guard are serving across Iraq, while hundreds more are deployed throughout the Persian Gulf region.

Many Vermonters have been killed in Ramadi and elsewhere by roadside bombs and all-too-accurate sniper attacks. The insurgents too often seem to attack and then escape with impunity. You can actually open newspapers and see photos of armed insurgents walking the streets of Iraq in broad daylight.

Many of these cold-blooded attacks are by people who are willing to trade their own lives to kill civilians, security guards, and our soldiers who now have no way of knowing whom they can trust among the general population.

The President has no plan to deal with Ramadi, let alone the rest of Iraq, except doing more of what we have been doing for more than 2 years at a cost of \$5 billion a month—money we don’t have and that future generations of Americans are going to have to repay. Nor has he proposed a practical alternative to our wasteful energy policy that guarantees our continued dependence on Persian Gulf oil for decades to come.

I am sure that what our military is doing to train the Iraqi Army and what our billions upon billions of dollars are doing to help rebuild Iraq—whatever is not stolen or wasted by profiteering contractors—is making a difference. Iraq is no longer governed by a corrupt, ruthless dictator, and there have been halting but important steps toward representative government.

I applaud the Iraqis who courageously stood in long lines to cast a ballot for a new constitution, despite the insurgents’ threats. There are many profiles in courage among the Iraqi people, just as there are in the heroic and daily endeavors of United States soldiers there.

But this progress masks deeper troubles and may be short lived, threatened by a widening insurgency and a divisive political process that is increasingly seen as leading to a Shiite-dominated theocracy governed by Islamic law and aligned with Iran, or the dissolution of Iraq into separate Kurdish, Sunni, and Shiite states.

Mr. President, this war has been a costly disaster for the United States of America. More than half of the American people now say they have lost confidence in the President’s handling of it.

Far from making us safer from terrorists, in fact, it has turned Iraq into a haven and recruiting ground for terrorists and deflected our attention and resources away from the fight against terrorism. If anything, it has emboldened our enemies, as it has become increasingly apparent that the most powerful army in the world cannot stop a determined insurgency.

Regrettably, it is no longer a secret how vulnerable we are. Hurricane Katrina showed how tragically unprepared we are to respond to a major disaster 4 years after 9/11 and after wasting billions of dollars on an unnecessary war.

Our cities are little further than the drawing board when it comes to developing workable evacuation plans for a terrorist attack or other emergency, not to mention how to feed, house, and provide for millions of displaced persons.

This war has caused immense damage to our relations with the world’s Muslims, a religion practiced by some 1.2 billion people, about which most Americans know virtually nothing. We cannot possibly mount an effective campaign against terrorism without the trust, respect, and the active support of Muslims, particularly in the Middle East where our image has been so badly damaged. Our weakened international reputation is another heavy price our country has paid for this war.

Each day, as more and more Iraqi civilians, often children, lose their lives and limbs from suicide bombers and also from our bombs, the resentment and anger toward us intensifies. And every week, the number of U.S. service men and women who are killed or wounded creeps higher and will soon pass 2,000, but, even more tragically, shows no sign of diminishing.

This war has isolated us from our allies, most of whom want no part of it, and if we continue on the course the President has set, it will also divide our country.

Other Senators and Representatives, Republicans and Democrats, have expressed frustration and alarm with the President’s failure to acknowledge that this war has been a costly mistake, that more of the same is not a workable policy, and that we need to change course. My friend Senator HAGEL, a Vietnam veteran, has pointed out the increasing similarities to Vietnam. We learned this week that the administration has even resumed the discredited Vietnam-era practice of measuring progress by reporting body counts.

White House and Pentagon officials and their staunchest supporters in Congress warn of a wider civil war if we pull our troops out. They could be right. In fact, it could be the first thing they have been right about since the beginning of this reckless adventure.

My question to them is: When and how then do we extract ourselves from this mess? What does the President believe needs to happen before our troops can come home? What is his plan for getting to that point?

If we cannot overcome the insurgency, what can we realistically expect to accomplish in Iraq—and at what cost—that requires the continued deployment of our troops? What is it that compels us to spend billions of dollars to rebuild the Iraqi military when our own National Guard is stretched to the breaking point and cannot even get the money for the equipment it needs?

I doubt the President or the Secretary of Defense will answer these questions. Instead of answers, we get rhetoric that conflicts with just about everything we hear or read, including from some of this country's most distinguished retired military officers who served under both Republican and Democratic administrations.

Six months ago, the Vice President said the insurgency was in its last throes. That was just the latest in a long string of grossly inaccurate statements and predictions and false expectations about Iraq.

Secretary Rice, when asked recently when U.S. forces could begin to come home assuming the Administration's rosy predictions come true, could not, or would not, even venture a guess.

Without answers—real answers, honest answers—to these questions, I will not support the open-ended deployment of our troops in a war that was based on falsehood and justified with hubris.

Even though I opposed this war, I have prayed, like other Americans, that it would weaken the threat of terrorism and make the world safer, that our troops' sacrifices would be justified, and that the President had a plan for completing the mission.

Instead, it has turned Iraq into a training ground for terrorists, it is fueling the insurgency, it is causing severe damage to the reputation and readiness of the United States military, and it is preventing us from addressing the inexcusable weaknesses in our homeland security.

The Iraqi people, at least the Shiites and Kurds, have voted for a new constitution, as hastily drafted, flawed, and potentially divisive as it may be. Saddam Hussein, whose capacity for cruelty was seemingly limitless, is finally facing trial for his heinous crimes. Elections for a new national government are due by the end of the year. By then, it will be more than 2½ years since Saddam's overthrow, and we will have given the Iraqi people a chance to chart their own course. The sooner we reduce our presence there, the sooner they will have to make the difficult decisions necessary to solve their own problems in their own country.

Our military commanders say that Iraq's problems increasingly need to be solved through the political process, not through military force. We must show Iraq and the world that we are not an occupying force, and that we have no designs on their country or their oil. The American people need to know that the President has a plan to bring our troops home.

Once a new Iraqi government is in place, I believe the President should consult with Congress on a flexible plan that includes pulling our troops back from the densely populated areas where they are suffering the worst casualties and to bring them home.

It is also long overdue for Congress and the White House to reassess our policy toward this region.

The President has declared democracy is taking root throughout the Middle East, and there have been some small, positive steps. But they are dwarfed by the ongoing threat posed by Iran, Syria's continued meddling in Iraq and Lebanon, repression and corruption in Saudi Arabia and Egypt, the danger that the momentum for peace from Israel's withdrawal from Gaza will be lost as settlement construction accelerates in the West Bank, and the widespread—albeit mistaken—belief among Muslims that the United States wants to destroy Islam itself.

Just as the White House's obsession with Iraq has diverted our resources and impeded our efforts to strengthen our defenses against terrorism at home, so has it made it more difficult to constructively, with our allies, address these regional threats.

As I have said, I did not support this war, and I believe that history will not judge kindly those who got us into this debacle by attacking a country that did not threaten us, after deceiving the American people and ridiculing those who appealed for caution and for instead mobilizing our resources directly against the threat of terrorism.

I worry that many of our young veterans who have gone to Iraq and experienced the brutality and trauma of war and may already feel guilty for having survived, will increasingly question its purpose. As the architects of this war move on to other jobs, I fear we are going to see another generation of veterans, many of them physically and psychologically scarred for life, who feel a deep sense of betrayal by their Government.

If President Bush will not say what remains to be done before he can declare victory and bring our troops home, then the Congress should be voting on what this war is really costing the Nation.

We should vote on paying for the war versus cutting Medicaid, as some are proposing; or pay for the war versus cutting VA programs that are already unable to pay the staggering costs of treatment and rehabilitation for our injured veterans; or pay for it versus rebuilding our National Guard; or rebuilding FEMA; or securing our ports and our borders; or investing in our intelligence so we can finally capture Osama bin Laden; or investing in health care for the tens of millions of Americans who cannot afford to get sick; or fixing our troubled schools, so our children can learn to do a better job than we have of making the world a safer place for all people.

These, and the tarnished reputation of a country that I love and so many once admired as not only powerful but also good and just are the real costs of this war.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Pennsylvania is recognized.

ORDER OF PROCEDURE

Mr. SPECTER. Mr. President, I put all Senators on notice that we will

soon be starting the debate on an amendment to be offered by Senator DURBIN. We had expected to go on the bill at 10, with morning business scheduled from 9:30 to 10, but morning business has run a little late. One of the Senators asked for an extension of time, which was not objected to. Now Senator STABENOW has asked for 5 minutes, which we will agree to. Senator HARKIN and I are on the floor, and we are anxious to proceed with the business of the bill. I know Senator HARKIN would like to make a comment.

Mr. HARKIN. If the distinguished chairman would yield, I am sorry I was off the floor momentarily, but did the Senator from Pennsylvania do anything about the amendment that is pending?

Mr. SPECTER. Mr. President, the request was made to have the amendment which is pending accepted by a voice vote. It is really in the nature of a technical amendment. The amendment reduces Federal administrative costs for the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services by \$15 million with no cuts coming from oversight and enforcement. This reduction is necessary to bring the Labor-HHS bill into compliance with its allocation ceiling. Concerns have been raised that this reduction would reduce the funds available to administer the new prescription drug program. This is not the case—the reduction will come from administrative overhead, supplies and contracts. We had talked about having a vote on it this morning at 10:30, but in light of the request that we not vote on that amendment but vote on the Durbin amendment, that is acceptable to this side.

As I said before, Senator STABENOW has asked for 5 minutes, and we are prepared to yield that time. But we want to put all Senators on notice we are anxious to proceed with the bill, and I will expect to start on the Durbin amendment at about 10:24 and expect to vote on it sometime between 10:45 and 11.

Senator HARKIN and I, backed by the leaders, have said that we are going to do our best to enforce 20-minute votes, 15 and a 5-minute extension. So all Senators should know when we start the Durbin vote that it will be limited to 20 minutes to the extent that Senator HARKIN and I can prevail on that. When we finish the Durbin vote at about 11:15, we would be pressing to have amendments filed. We have a long, complicated bill. There is an amendment lined up at 2:15, but if we are to move this bill along and to avoid pressing for third reading and final passage, we want to avoid lengthy quorum calls.

I yield the floor.

TRIBUTE TO ROSA LOUISE PARKS

Ms. STABENOW. Mr. President, first, I appreciate the courtesies extended to me by the distinguished Senator from Pennsylvania and the distinguished Senator from Iowa.