RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

MORNING BUSINESS

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, there will now be a period for the transaction of morning business for up to 60 minutes, with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each, with the first 30 minutes under the control of the Republicans and the final 30 minutes under the control of the majority.

IRAQ SUPPLEMENTAL

Mr. THOMAS. Mr. President, I think this is certainly one of the most important bills we have had before us and one, frankly, that is the most time-constrained of any we have had before us. Normally, we have a good deal of time to talk about bills and we have budget bills that won't go into effect until next year, but the fact is, this bill, which is for the funding of troops, these dollars need to be available within the next couple of weeks, as we understand it, of course. So it is important that we recognize that and that we understand the purpose of this bill is to fund our troops.

Whether you agree with the troops being there, the troops are there, and the fact is that it is up to us to provide the support they need and the dollars which are necessary to provide them the support they need in the position they are in. If there were ever a bill that should be recognized as having a unique purpose and should not be attached to other kinds of nonpertinent issues, I believe this is one. We are going to have the opportunity to decide whether we want to attach other issues to this bill and extend it, whether we want to have a situation where there is a veto and all those time-consuming things or whether we indeed want to have a clean bill that provides for the support of our troops who are now in Iraq and Afghanistan.

For weeks now, the President has repeatedly said he will veto the bill if it ties the hands of the generals on the ground. What he is saying is he and the generals have a plan, and the fact is the plan seems to be making more advances and accomplishments than we have had in the past, so we need to allow that to continue to work. We have all said the President needs a different plan. The President now has a different plan. There is new leadership in Iraq.

So I think we need to understand where we are with respect to this bill because we certainly have been on notice and are well aware of the looming veto. That veto would simply take more time and keep this money from getting where it needs to be to support the troops.

Not passing this legislation, of course, would only delay the critical resources and the necessary equipment and training for our soldiers who are getting ready to deploy or have, in fact, deployed. Secretary of Defense Gates has warned the Congress that if we delay emergency spending for our troops already deployed, many will not be able to come home. This is a very serious statement, and we need to pay attention to it.

I don't want to portray the President's plan in Iraq as being a success so far, but our commanders on the ground are reporting good news and that we are making progress, and that is what it is all about, of course. We need to be there until we have completed our task. I understand that explaining what the completion of the task is may not be easy, and people have different views about what that should be, but it is pretty clear we need to be able to get the Iraqis in a position to govern themselves before we can return. I am for returning as soon as possible, but I think setting an artificial definition for when they return is not appropriate anywhere and particularly not appropriate on this bill.

I just do not understand how Members on the other side can say one thing in their States and then stand and do the opposite thing—stand for supporting their troops in their States and then come here and have exactly the opposite position in Washington. At this point, we are where we are, and we need to have funding for our troops in the field, no question. Nobody would argue that, and I think no one would dispute that is a time sensitive issue as well.

We are going to be here this week on this bill. We are going to be gone next week. If the bill were to be vetoed, then we would have to go through that whole process. One can see that if we are going to get this done by the date which we have all heard, which is April 15, it is important we take off these kinds of things that are holding it up. We should not play political one-upmanship when it comes to funding our men and women who are in theater or are ready to deploy—I don't think there is any question about that—nor should we attempt to move legislation by buying votes for things that would be at the expense of our troops.

Unfortunately, the emergency legislation we have before us has been larded up with all manner of non-emergency spending and extraneous measures. Not only are we attempting to tie the President's hands by micromanaging the war, but we are trying to push through pet projects at the expense of our troops. I understand the politics of this place. When someone has something they would like very much to have done, the greatest thing to do is to put it on the bill that has to pass, and even though it is inappropriate, even though it is not a part of the purpose of the bill, of course, I understand that helps get it done. But the request submitted to the Congress was to have $100 billion for troops and hurricane relief. The bill we are considering contains an additional $20 billion—$20 billion—for individual Member requests, a minimum wage increase, and small tax packages. The last time I checked, none of these is an emergency, so they do not qualify for this bill. I understand the merits of many of these things, and they should be considered. But, again, in terms of how we do things here, this is an emergency bill, and things that are in here ought to qualify as emergencies or else not be on the bill.

So we have to say: Do they have merit? Of course they have merit. There is no question that many of them do and should be individually addressed in the normal legislative process. They should be considered because they have merit and, indeed, are worth consideration. However, we are also faced with the question that the majority has said we must get our fiscal house in order. That is what we have been hearing, but that is not what we have been doing. It is easy to say that, but it is hard to do it.

We do need to take a look at spending. This is an emergency bill—this is outside the budget—and so it is a wonderful place to pen on a lot of things that are additional spending that really aren't within the limits of spending, which all of us seem to be so proud to be putting on in this Congress. So I think we have to take a look at all those things. Almost to a person, everyone has come to the floor and promised the American public that future spending would be paid for. These things that are added are not paid for. So we are not keeping that promise that has been made.

I think this week the majority will have an opportunity to stand by their words. We must keep Federal spending under control and accountable. To add things that are inappropriate, that do not fit on the bill, that are outside the budget—to use this opportunity is not being accountable. To add projects to emergency spending, which by definition is outside the normal budget process, is not the right way to accomplish this goal.

It is going to be tough. We are going to have projects that everyone on both sides of the aisle thinks: Oh, that is good for my State—whether it is shrimp or spinach or whatever. So there will be support for those things. But the fact is, they do not belong on this emergency bill.

I remind my colleagues of the budget resolution for 2007 which explicitly defines what constitutes an emergency. It says all of the five following criteria must be satisfied in order for something to be considered an emergency: No. 1, is necessary, essential, or vital; No. 2, sudden, quickly coming into being, and not building up over time; No. 3, a pressing and compelling urgent need requiring immediate action; No. 4, an unforeseeable, unpredictable, and