

are supposed to get this done before we leave. We will never get it done if every Senator on the Republican side who dreams up another debate topic is given another half day or 2 days to pursue it.

At some point, leadership involves responsibility. At this point, I think the Republicans are being irresponsible because they refuse to let us do the people's business. They want to protect the status quo. They don't want this to change. They want to make this a do-nothing Congress just like the last Congress, when they were in charge. We are trying our best to avoid that. The honest answer may be that we need more votes on this side of the aisle so we can stop this, so we can move ahead and make some real changes in farm policy and tax policy. We would not reach that point if the Republican strategy continues—filibusters and blocking, coming up with excuses, and spending months on a bill that should have taken days.

That is their plan, their policy. That is what they believe in. That is the best they can offer the American people. That is why the Republican Party leadership in the Congress has been summarily rejected by the American people. They are sick of it. They want bipartisan cooperation, progress, and they want change.

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate now proceed to morning business, with Senators permitted to speak therein, with Senator AKAKA speaking for up to 5 minutes, Senator MENENDEZ for up to 15 minutes, Senator MURRAY for up to 5 minutes, and Senator WYDEN for up to 5 minutes.

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

The Senator from Hawaii is recognized.

COMMENDING THE UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII WARRIOR FOOTBALL TEAM

Mr. AKAKA. Mr. President, I rise today to commend the University of Hawaii Warrior football team, which completed the first undefeated season in the team's history, securing a first-ever appearance in the Sugar Bowl on New Year's Day.

Facing powerful schools from across the country, this dedicated, hard working, selfless team found the courage, strength and discipline to emerge victorious from every challenge. A spirit of support and teamwork, as well as confidence under pressure, made this historic undefeated season possible.

In addition to their victories on the field, the Warrior football players have also introduced viewers to the diverse cultures they represent. They have become positive role models for young people not only in Hawaii, but in Samoa, Australia, around the South

Pacific and in communities across the United States.

They have made many people proud. They honor the people and land of Hawaii before every game. They have shared our unique culture with the world.

The Warriors have brought the people of Hawaii together, united in supporting this incredible team that continues to defy the odds. I join the people of Hawaii in congratulating the University of Hawaii Warrior football team and rooting for victory in the Sugar Bowl New Year's Day in New Orleans.

As we say in Hawaii, "Hana Hou," do it again! Go Warriors!

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Oregon.

COUNTY PAYMENTS

Mr. WYDEN. Mr. President, I thank my colleagues, especially Senator MURRAY and Senator MENENDEZ, for their courtesy. I will be brief.

Today the House and Senate announced a historic package to address the energy crisis facing our Nation. But in addition, as part of that important legislation, the agreement contains more than \$1.8 billion in desperately needed funding for our Nation's rural schools, counties, and communities.

Without the safety net funding provided as part of the energy legislation, rural communities across this country could literally be wiped off the map. Without this critical funding, rural counties across America will once again be staring down into a precipice and a future filled with closed schools, terminated services, and deteriorating roads. Within months, pink slips could again be sent to teachers and to county workers.

Fortunately, some help for those rural communities is now on the way. The energy package contains an extension of the Secure Rural Schools Program that I authored in 2000. This proposal closely mirrors the legislative proposal that was crafted with Senators BAUCUS, BINGAMAN, REID, and myself, a proposal that passed overwhelmingly in this body by a 74-to-23 vote as an amendment that I offered to the war emergency supplemental spending bill last spring.

Specifically, the new energy package provides 4 more years of funding for the Secure Rural Schools Program, commonly known as the County Payments Program. A year of full funding for the payment in lieu of taxes program has also been included. By providing funds through 2011, this deal gets our rural counties off the fiscal roller coaster and back to stable funding so they can get at the real work of planning for the future. Today's announcement would mean \$1.8 billion in critical funding for school and road programs across America.

In our home State of Oregon, particularly when folks are suffering because

of the bad weather, it would mean hundreds of millions of dollars for schools and public safety, roads, and other essential county services. This program has been a successful one. It has been built around collaboration among counties, environmentalists, timber interests, and others, and the funds are absolutely critical to our rural communities.

The legislation that has been agreed to today, the Energy bill, is very important to our country's future. But equally important is the legislation known as the County Payments Program for rural communities.

I am grateful to my colleague, Senator MURRAY, and Senator MENENDEZ, who have been waiting patiently for the chance to make this announcement, and it is my hope that with the unflagging support of rural folks from across the country that this much-needed energy legislation will move forward and the country can look to a brighter future for rural communities. I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Washington.

WASHINGTON STATE FLOODS

Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, I thank my colleague from New Jersey for allowing me to speak before he does. I wish to speak today because, as we all know, in the last several days, the Pacific Northwest has been hit by devastating storms. We have seen wind and dangerous floods and mud slides that have cut off our roads, our homes, cut off power to literally thousands in my State.

Today, the pouring rain thankfully has subsided a bit, but thousands of people are coping with the damage in my State, in my region. We will not know the full impact of this storm for some time, but our Governor has already estimated that the cost is going to be in the billions of dollars.

My heart goes out to everyone in my home State of Washington and in Oregon who are coping with the aftermath of this tremendous storm. Those people are in my thoughts constantly. I am working with all of our State, local, and Federal entities to be sure everyone gets all the service and support they need at this critical time.

I especially thank and mention our Governor, Governor Gregoire of Washington State. She has been very strong in her leadership throughout this disaster and has been working tirelessly to coordinate the rescue efforts.

I especially today send a very heartfelt thanks to all of our rescue workers. They have been working out in these torrential rains, night and day, rescuing people from flooded homes and vehicles. They have been flying in supplies to people who are stranded. They have been working very hard to clear roads and railways that are still tonight swamped.

So far, the Navy, the Coast Guard, the National Guard, and all of our

agencies have rescued about 300 people by helicopter alone. This is our State's largest aerial search-and-rescue operation in over a decade.

Let me paint a picture for all my colleagues of the damage that has occurred so far.

Parts of southwest Washington now look like a sea of brown water. Homes are flooded up to their roofs. Entire communities have been isolated by swamped roads. Out on our coast, winds of up to 100 miles an hour have knocked out power to literally thousands of homes. People feel very isolated today. They don't have power, they don't have telephones, and, in some areas, it is very tough to even assess how bad the damage is yet because we cannot even get to these people who do not have power or telephones.

I know a lot of relatives in the region and across the country are desperately trying this evening to reach their loved ones who have been affected, and our office, along with Governor Gregoire, Senator CANTWELL, and others, is doing everything we can to help.

Finally, I wish to mention one of the hardest hit areas, and that is Interstate 5. This is the major artery that links Portland, OR, and Seattle, WA. That highway has been closed since Monday, and some are saying it is going to be several more days before we even get it open. This has forced cars and trucks that are traveling from Seattle to Portland or Portland to Seattle to detour through the Tri-Cities. For those who don't know my State, that means they have to go over a mountain pass that is snow packed right now, take 4 extra hours, if the roads are good and the snow and ice has not stopped them on the pass used to get to Portland. So this is a major nightmare in our area.

It is very hard to explain the impact of all this damage, but estimates of cost to businesses from delays on that highway alone have been placed at \$4 million a day to our businesses that rely on this major artery to get their goods quickly and safely back and forth.

As I said in a speech earlier today on the floor, the impact of these storms reinforces how important our transportation infrastructure is to absolutely everyone. We are all one rainstorm, one bridge disaster away from huge impacts to our economy and to families' lives.

Again, I wished to come to the floor this evening to send my heartfelt thanks to everyone who is working so hard in my State of Washington and to all those people who have been affected so devastatingly by these storms. They are all in my thoughts every minute. My heart goes out to them, and I know everyone stands ready to be by their side.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from New Jersey.

COST OF THE IRAQ WAR

Mr. MENENDEZ. Mr. President, for more than 4 years now, President Bush has been declaring victory or progress in Iraq. The thousands of soldiers who have lost their legs, gone blind or suffered horrible nightmares might be finding it hard to celebrate. The families of those men and women might not be cheering very loud about the President's view of success. Thousands more whose children, whose mothers and fathers are lost forever might be finding it hard to share in the latest cries of victory.

Yes, the number killed last month dropped to 37, and we certainly rejoice in the fact that fewer soldiers are dying. That is still another 37 families who have no reason to rejoice. More American troops have died this year than any other year.

No matter how much military progress has been made in Iraq, that kind of security can only go so far. No amount of troops will force Iraqi politicians to agree on a fair distribution of oil revenues. No Abrams tank can build trust between Shiites and Sunnis.

The whole point of this surge was to create the conditions necessary for Iraqis to make political progress. But 2 weeks ago, the Washington Post ran a headline that said: "Iraqis Wasting an Opportunity, U.S. Officers Say."

Iraqi security forces are still unable to operate on their own. Any cease-fire between factions could evaporate in minutes. We started drawing down troops to pre-surge levels, but we have to wonder whether we are going to be told again we have to re-surge, do it all over again because the Iraqi Government and security forces are largely still at square one.

Our generals in Iraq have been the first to admit that a solution to the country's conflict has to be more than a military solution; it has to be a political solution. A political solution is up to Iraqi leaders. Right now there has been practically zero progress on the core critical issues necessary to bring a lasting peace.

The administration set 18 benchmarks for the Iraqi Government to meet. They have barely met three. So is it time to turn up the pressure or let them keep squabbling while Americans pay and Americans die?

There is more corruption in Iraq than almost anywhere else on the face of the Earth. We simply don't know where our money is going. It is a pit of quicksand when it comes to money. Some estimates say that as much as a third of the money we spend on Iraqi contracts and grants winds up unaccounted for or stolen—a third of billions of dollars, with a lot of it going straight to Shiite or Sunni militias. Let me repeat that: \$1 out of every \$3 we pay gets either lost or stolen—lost or stolen. Even after billions and billions and billions of dollars in funding, Iraqi society is still dysfunctional.

American money went toward improving, for example, municipal water

systems in Iraq. The Iraqis now break open the pipes and steal the water. American money went toward books for schools. Iraqis steal them from the Ministry of Education and sell them on the street at three times the price. Government officials have sold the furniture right out of their offices. That is what the American taxpayers are funding.

So is it time to change our strategy, or do we ignore the corruption while Americans pay and Americans die? Here is the message we send to Iraqi politicians by sending them a blank check with no expiration date: Continue your squabbles. We will continue to see the loss of American life and continue to empty our treasury for you for as long as you like. That message is: You can sit back while Americans pay and Americans die. I think it is time for a different message, Mr. President.

After seeing a surge in the military that has lasted for months do nothing about a splurge of corruption that has lasted for years, the conclusion we have to draw from that is clear: The only way Iraqis will take charge of their own country and make the tough compromises necessary to form a functional society is when they believe we won't be there forever. That is the only way. It is long past time for the Iraqi Government to take charge, and the only way they are going to step up is if we begin to transition out. A reduction in fighting is not an excuse for a reduction in planning for our involvement to end.

The fact is, the violence has not stopped and the costs of this war have only gone up. The war is costing us \$10 billion or so per month. The debt our Government is taking on, and that taxpayers are going to be responsible for, is exploding at the rate of \$1 million a minute. I heard our colleagues earlier today, when I was Presiding Officer, talk about fiscal responsibility and what we bequeath to the next generation. Well, we are bequeathing them \$1 million a minute of debt, because none of the money the President asked for is paid for—none of it. Yet when we try to invest in America, we are told there is no money for it. But it is okay to continue to saddle the next generation of Americans with a huge debt, \$1 million a minute.

When the numbers are that high, every American taxpayer has to ask him or herself a basic question: How does the President plan to pay for the war?

Well, last week, we got a small part of that answer. He wants to cut funding for counterterrorism at home. According to a leaked administration document, President Bush wants to cut counterterrorism funding for cities by more than half. When I saw that article, I had to do a double-take. When I read that, I thought the report had to be wrong. It had to be wrong. Coming from the State of New Jersey, which lost 700 people—700 of my fellow citizens on that fateful day, and coming