

So Iraq remains as the critical link. Iraq is at a decisive turning point in their journey toward democracy. The surge has created opportunities that the Iraqi people have not taken for granted. The "awakening" is spreading from Al Anbar Province to Diyala Province. I saw it coming years ago. Years ago, I can remember going, as many of my colleagues had, from place to place in Iraq—long before the surge—seeing that our troops, when they would receive goods from home, such as cookies and candies, and they would take their packages and repack-age them in small packages and throw them out to these kids way out in the countryside, and the kids would wave American flags. That was out there. We knew that success was taking place.

The once turbulent and violent Al Anbar Province is returning to Iraqi control—Iraqi control, not our control. The Government of Iraq enacted The Justice and Accountability Act—that law—on January 12, showing real progress toward former baathist reconciliation.

Al-Qaida is a spent force in Iraq. It is retreating to the Horn of Africa.

Speaking of Africa, I have had occasion to be in Djibouti in the Horn of Africa. I have to say this with some degree of pride—this picture you are seeing in the Chamber now is of a little girl who was actually found as a little orphan girl who was 3 days old, south of Djibouti. My wife Kay and I are blessed with 20 kids and grandkids. Our daughter had nothing but boys, so she has now adopted this little girl, and that little girl is my granddaughter.

Some good things are happening over there. But I have to say that looking at the squeeze that is taking place in the Middle East, a lot of the terrorist activity is going down into the Horn of Africa. The occupier of the chair is fully aware that we—both sitting on the Senate Armed Services Committee, we are very proud of the fact that we are setting up and helping the Africans set up African brigades.

Syria has ceased supporting foreign fighters in Iraq. The Saudis are cracking down on supporters of Islamic terrorists in their own country. Iran is isolated. The world must remain focused and steady.

Iraq is an example to the world of how to reject terror and confront those who practice it. It is not going unnoticed. Political leaders see this. The world sees now that little kids are not being tortured to death in Iraq. Girls are now going to school instead of being raped and murdered. No more mass graves, no more vats of acid. And the butcher, Saddam Hussein, is dead.

Yes, we are doing a difficult thing, but we are doing the right thing. Just as Americans always try to do the right thing, we are doing the right thing there. But think of it for a minute. Isn't Iraq trying to do what we were trying to do 230 years ago? We were seeking a parliament at that time 230 years ago, and that is what Iraq is

doing today. We were seeking a constitution. That is what Iraq is trying to do. We were seeking democracy. We were seeking freedom. Iraq is seeking the same things we were seeking some 230 years ago.

The Iraqis are watching us. They are risking their lives, the same as we were risking our lives some 230 years ago. I think of that first election that took place up in Fallujah, when the Iraqi security forces were going—knowing they were going to be shot at, but they were willing to do that—to go vote. Remember the purple fingers. That is what was taking place.

I would have to say this: We went through the same thing in this country. I have always said one of the best speeches made was Ronald Reagan's "Rendezvous With Destiny," when he talked about the Cuban who trying to escape Castro's Cuba. As his ship washed up on the shore of Florida, a lady was there and said—and he was talking about the atrocities of Castro's Cuba—and she said: I guess we in this country don't know how lucky we are. He said: How lucky you are? We are the ones who are lucky because we had a place to escape to.

I would have to say that the first reason was to end the murderous regime of Saddam Hussein. The second reason was to shut down the terrorist training camps. The third is they are doing exactly what we did 230 years ago.

When you stop and think about the message and the inspiration we had from our forefathers, and when you stop and think about the message that was given when a tall redhead stood before the House of Burgesses and made a speech for them at that time—and it is certainly for us today, and certainly for Iraq today—he said:

They tell us, sir, that we are weak—

This is exactly what they have been saying to the Iraqis.

They tell us, sir, that we are weak—unable to cope with so formidable an adversary. But when shall we be stronger? Will it be the next week or the next year? Will it be when we are totally disarmed . . . ? Shall we gather strength by irresolution and inaction? Shall we acquire the means of effectual resistance by lying supinely on our backs, and hugging the delusive phantom of hope . . . ? [We are not weak, if we make a proper use of those means which the God of nature has placed in our power. . . . armed in the holy cause of liberty, and in such a country as that which we possess, are invincible by any force which our enemy can send against us. Besides, sir, we shall not fight our battles alone.

This is important.

. . . we shall not fight our battles alone. There is a just God who presides over the destinies of nations; and who will raise up friends to fight our battles for us. The battle, sir, is not to the strong alone; it is to the vigilant, the active, the brave. Besides. . . if we were base enough to desire it, it is now too late to retire from the contest. There is no retreat but in submission and slavery! Our chains are forged.

Some would say that we should retreat, we should leave. But that man stood before the House of Burgesses and said:

Why stand we here idle? What is it that gentlemen wish? What would they have? Is life so dear, or peace so sweet, as to be purchased at the price of chains and slavery? Forbid it, Almighty God!—I know not what course others may take; but as for me—

Said Patrick Henry—

give me liberty or give me death!

I guess what I am saying is, the Iraqi freedom fighters are not unlike what we were some 200 years ago. Wouldn't it be great if we were to provide the inspiration for them that our forefathers provided for us?

That is what is happening right now. We are winning. We are doing the right thing.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Virginia.

GI BILL

Mr. WEBB. Mr. President, I wish to raise two issues briefly to the Members of our body today.

The first is, if we look back at the State of the Union speech last night, the President, toward the end of his speech, talked about those who have been serving since 9/11—the same individuals my colleague from Oklahoma has been talking about for the last 35 minutes. The President said, at one point:

We must keep faith with all who have risked life and limb so that we might live in freedom and peace. Over the past 7 years, we have increased funding for veterans by more than 95 percent. As we increase funding, we must also reform our veterans system to meet the needs of a new war and a new generation.

Unfortunately, what the President did not speak about in his remarks last night was probably the most important benefit we can be offering to people who have served our country since 9/11; and that is, a GI bill that would give them the same sort of educational benefits as those who served during World War II.

We have heard so many people on this floor and in the administration, in their speeches, talk about how this is the next greatest generation. We hear people lionizing the service they have given since 9/11, and I am one of those who is a great admirer of those young men and women who have stepped forward and served since then. But when they leave the military, they have an educational package that was designed in peacetime as a recruitment incentive in the 1980s and does not allow them to move forward toward truly a first-class future.

Here are a couple of examples for you:

When people came back from World War II—those veterans—8 million of them were able to take advantage of a GI bill that paid all their tuition, bought their books, and gave them a monthly stipend to the school of their choice.

For instance, Senator LAUTENBERG, who is a cosponsor of my GI bill legislation, S. 22, was able to go to Columbia on a full boat. Today, that would

cost \$46,874 a year. Our average veteran coming out of Iraq and Afghanistan is able to receive about \$6,000 a year under this Montgomery GI bill that is in place. That is about 12.8 percent of what it would take for our veterans today to be able to go to Columbia.

Senator WARNER, my senior colleague from Virginia, was able to take advantage of two GI bills. He was able to go to Washington and Lee University for his undergraduate degree, and then he was able to go to the University of Virginia Law School—full boat. Today, the Montgomery GI bill would pay about 14 percent of what it would take to go to the Washington and Lee University, and about 13 percent of what it would take to go to the UVA Law School.

I emphasize that I am standing here as a full beneficiary of Uncle Sam. After I was wounded in Vietnam and left the Marine Corps, I was able to go to Georgetown Law School, with my tuition paid for, my books bought, and a monthly stipend. Today's Montgomery GI bill would pay about 11.6 percent of that.

I think it is time for all of us in the political process, who like to use the words of praise—rightfully earned by the people on these battlefields—to talk the talk and then walk the walk. Let's get them a GI bill that truly allows them a first-class future. We have a majority—an overwhelming majority—of my Senate colleagues on the Democratic side who are cosponsors of this legislation. I am truly hopeful people on the other side of the aisle will understand this is not a political measure; it is a measure of respect, and it is an earned benefit.

We are giving this year \$18.2 billion worth of educational grants to people in this country purely based on their economic status. Certainly we can afford to pay for a meaningful GI bill for these young men and women who have been serving since 9/11.

The senior Senator from Alaska mentioned, during the Christmas break, that we are spending approximately \$15 billion a month in Iraq and Afghanistan. We could fund this GI bill for 1 week of what it would cost for us to run the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Unlike a lot of other comparisons that are made on this floor, this is a direct comparison because a GI bill is a cost of war.

I urge my colleagues to get behind it. Let's get this done early in this session before we go into the political season, and get these young men and women the benefits they not only deserve but they have earned.

COMMISSION ON WARTIME CONTRACTING

Mr. WEBB. Mr. President, the second issue I wish to mention today regards the National Defense Authorization Act, which the President signed into law yesterday. In that act was a commission on wartime contracting, which

Senator McCASKILL and I jointly introduced last year and were able to get embodied in the National Defense Authorization Act.

This is a very important piece of legislation. It will put into place an independent, bipartisan commission that has a 2-year sunset date on it—jointly picked, jointly selected by Democrats and Republicans in the Senate and in the House and from the administration—a commission filled with experts, not Senators sitting around or political people sitting around, to examine the wartime contracting that has taken place since our invasion of Iraq, particularly, also looking at Afghanistan, and trying to bring accountability to the broad range of fraud, waste, and abuse that we all know has occurred during that period.

Now, to my surprise, when the President signed this legislation yesterday, he issued a signing statement along with it saying this, with respect to this wartime contracting commission, that:

This wartime contracting commission purports to impose requirements that could inhibit the President's ability to carry out his constitutional obligations to take care that the laws be faithfully executed to protect national security, to supervise the executive branch, and to execute his authority as Commander in Chief.

He goes on to say that:

The executive branch shall construe such provisions in a manner consistent with the constitutional authority of the President.

In other words, the President of the United States, who has been in charge of the conduct of this war, and whose administration has been in charge of executing these contracts—supervising them, making sure that they meet the requirements of fairness in the law, is now saying that he believes a legislative body can enact a law that he can choose to ignore basically because he says it would interfere with his responsibility as Commander in Chief to supervise a war. I am totally at a loss. I am totally amazed to see this kind of language as it respects this legislation.

The Commission was put into place with broad bipartisan support and bicameral support by both the House and the Senate, the idea being to study systemic problems—the same sorts of things this President, I would think, would want to root out. Its historic precedent comes from the Truman Committee that took place during World War II, when then-Senator Harry Truman wanted to look at wartime fraud, waste, and abuse so we could get a proper handle on the Federal spending that was going into mobilization and into the projects that were being put on line during World War II. We certainly didn't see President Franklin Roosevelt trying to say the Truman Committee's work was going to interfere with his ability to conduct World War II. To the contrary, the President, during that war, saw this was the type of thing he needed in order to bring the right sort of supervision and the right sort of accountability that might eliminate waste, fraud, and abuse.

So we don't quite know what the administration intends with this sort of language, but I want all my colleagues to be aware of it and to be aware that it potentially is an impingement on the rights of the legislative body, in effect saying the President has the authority to ignore a law that has now passed, a law he has now signed.

So we are going to go forward with this Commission. We are going to work with the administration, we hope, to set it up. We are going to move as rapidly as we can because the clock is ticking in terms of statute of limitations on some of the charges that might be filed. I hope the people of this country understand we want to do this for the good of the American people; that we have a responsibility to make sure the Nation's purse strings have been properly taken care of and that we are acting as the stewards of America's taxpayers.

Again, if someone in the administration would like to explain to us what their constitutional issue is with a piece of legislation the President has signed, we would be happy to hear that. In the meantime, we are moving forward with this Commission. It is vitally important to accountability in the Government. I am very proud to have been a sponsor of it, and we are marching forward.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Michigan is recognized.

Mr. LEVIN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to proceed for 5 minutes as in morning business.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator has that right.

DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION ACT

Mr. LEVIN. Mr. President, first, let me commend Senator WEBB for the leadership on the issue he talked about. I am going to speak very briefly on that same issue—the signing of the statement by the President yesterday—but before I do that, I wish to commend him and the other sponsors of this legislation. It is critically needed. It is long overdue. But for the leadership of Senator WEBB and a few other Senators, we would not have had that provision in the bill which was finally signed yesterday.

Yesterday, the President did sign into law the National Defense Authorization Act, which is essentially the same bill the President vetoed last month. In his signing statement, the President identified a few provisions of the act and stated that they:

Purport to impose requirements that could inhibit the President's ability to carry out his constitutional obligations.

The President's statement went on to say that:

The executive branch shall construe such provisions in a manner consistent with the constitutional authority of the President.

The specific provisions the President cited relate to a commission to study