

earlier. The fact remains that the unemployment rate for the long term is twice as high as it was in the recession in 2002. We included extension of unemployment benefits. After all, if the purpose of this package is to put in place the fiscal tools to make sure we can do everything within our power to avert a potential recession, then we have to make sure these tools are absolutely in place to make sure we can avoid a potential decline in our economy that leads to a recession.

In my home State alone, the case for an extension is undeniable. As the State department of labor reported, the announced layoffs for February and March are up an unconscionable 75 percent over the layoffs that occurred in December and January. Unemployment is increasing, certainly in my State. We have seen it reflected in the recent numbers. We have no way of knowing the extent to which it will get worse, but we do know by all accounts and certainly by the economic indicators, by the general consensus of economists, that a recession is a potential, that it could potentially be imminent in the short term. So all the more important to put in place a provision to extend unemployment benefits because it will have the maximum effect in our economy to impact direct spending. Also, I think it is important that it will stimulate the economy. In fact, Mark Zandi of Moody's Economy said that every dollar spent now on unemployment will result in an infusion in the economy of more than \$1.64 cents.

So the beneficiaries of this extension certainly will be those who have been unemployed for the long term, who have seen their benefits expire. If they have already exhausted their 26 weeks of benefits, they will have an additional 13 weeks. For those high-unemployment States, which is triggered at 6 percent or more, they will then get an additional 13 weeks of benefits. It would provide an immediate infusion of cash through a very reliable mechanism that is already in place to the people who very likely will spend that money on consumer goods.

The fact is that long-term unemployment is twice as high today as it was in 2001 and the 2002 recession at a time when oil was only \$25 a barrel, and today we have seen it is almost \$100 a barrel. We cannot afford to ignore this potentially dire situation which this long-term unemployment rate poses. That is why I think it is absolutely important that we do everything we can to ensure that a stimulus package includes the extension of unemployment benefits.

I also am pleased that we have energy tax incentives, as I said earlier, as well. Energy production tax credits will be extended in the first quarter of this year. By all industry estimates, it is indicated that we could create more than 100,000 jobs. I know in my own State of Maine, with some of the investments that have already been made in wind power, for example, there is

more than \$1.5 billion worth of projects that are pending, that are waiting for this energy tax credit.

We know that in the final analysis, we are going to enact an energy tax credit that will cultivate the renewable sources of energy we need to generate in this country so we can reduce our dependency on foreign oil. What better way to do it than through tax credits. We know they have worked, and we know that later this year we will be considering these energy tax credits to extend them. So why not extend them now if we are certain it is going to create jobs? As I said, by industry accounts, the experts have estimated that more than 100,000 jobs will be created as a result of these tax credits.

So it is unquestionable in terms of the benefits economically, it is unquestionable in terms of the benefits to our energy security and our independence, which is inextricably linked to economic security and progress. I do not think anybody in this Chamber can believe that lessening our dependence on oil and lowering its price per barrel, which these approaches will facilitate, will not prove to be an immediate boon to our economy. So these incentives are necessary, in my opinion, because they also address the root causes of our current downturn.

I hope, in the final analysis, when we get to the question of a stimulus package, we will also include financing for low-income fuel assistance.

Two years ago, I advanced a billion-dollar initiative in increasing financing for low-income fuel assistance. At that time, heating oil was \$2.44 a gallon. Today, our families, households are paying an inconceivable, incomprehensible increase of \$3.45 a gallon—nearly \$3,000 just to get through a winter. The average resident in the State of Maine uses about 850 gallons to 1,000 gallons, so that cost is near \$3,000. The eligibility income for low-income fuel assistance is approximately \$13,000. It takes more than a quarter of their income to pay for heating their home—more than a quarter of their income, of the \$13,000. It is absolutely inconceivable that any family could live on \$13,000 and pay more than a quarter of their income toward home heating oil that continues to rise as we speak when we are talking \$3.45 a gallon.

It is only right we fund this indispensable program. We have provided some increases. It is clear we need to do more, and what better way to stimulate the economy and to ensure households have the benefit of an increase in low-income fuel assistance than providing it as part of the stimulus package, particularly at the time of crisis for households in the cold weather regions of this country. I know there will be an amendment offered at the time we are considering the stimulus package.

Finally, I wish to mention as ranking member of the Small Business Committee that there are two vital provisions, as I said earlier, regarding small

business expensing and the extending of the carryback period of operating losses from 2 to 5 years. They are critically important initiatives because they certainly will be a great catalyst for the generation of jobs in America. Small businesses are the key to job creation in this country, key to our economy. They are responsible for creating two-thirds of all new jobs in America. They represent 99 percent of all of our employers. They represent half of the employees in this country, so they are pivotal to the success or failure of our economy. The more we can invest in small business, the more we will see the benefits in terms of job creation. That is indisputable by any measurement, by any account; that they are able to create the kind of jobs directly that benefit our economy, benefit the people we represent, and they can make that investment quickly.

That is certainly true when it comes to expensing, where they will be able to write off up to \$250,000 in this initiative, where they will be able to use bonus depreciation, for example, and other important investments for capital incentives, and also as well for the carryback period, in extending and reaching back to 5 years. Any one of these initiatives or in combination is going to be absolutely vital to helping generate new jobs in our economy and helping to mitigate the downturn in our economy.

The gravity and the urgency of our economic situation cannot be overstated, and it unquestionably requires swift and decisive action. So I hope at the time we consider this stimulus package, there will be strong support for the initiative that passed the Senate Finance Committee.

Madam President, I yield the floor.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Texas is recognized.

Mr. CORNYN. Madam President, I understand the leaders may well be coming to the floor here in the next few minutes, and certainly when they arrive I will defer to them for the business about which I know they will want to inform the Senate.

DEVELOPMENTS IN IRAQ AND AFGHANISTAN

Mr. CORNYN. Madam President, I wish to talk about the global war on terror here for the next few minutes, and to recount some very good progress we happen to be making in Iraq and that the Iraqis appear to be making. I realize that because the news is not as bad as it once was, it has now fallen off the front page of the newspaper. Yet I think it is very important not only to our national security but because we are being asked to support our men and women in uniform in a variety of ways that we keep close track of the developments occurring both in Afghanistan and in Iraq. That is the subject of my comments.

First, I acknowledge a report from the Associated Press indicating that

one of al-Qaida's top commanders in Afghanistan, and a key liaison of the Taliban, Abu Laith al-Libi, was apparently killed in military action at the Pakistan-Afghanistan border. Reports indicate he is actually the fourth person in command of the al-Qaida and the Taliban, right after Osama bin Laden, al-Zawahiri, and Mullah Omar, demonstrating that we continue to take the fight on the offensive against the very people who are responsible for perpetrating the murder of 3,000 Americans on September 11, 2001.

I believe one of the reasons why we have not had a repetition of that horrific day on our own soil is because of the skill of our men and women in uniform, the weapons we have equipped them with, and the intelligence they have been able to gather that allows us to detect and deter terrorist activities not only on our soil but in Afghanistan against ours and allied troops, as well as Iraq. I think that is a bit of good news that we ought to acknowledge.

Secondly, let me say the reason I wanted to come to the floor was precipitated by my visit in January to both Afghanistan and Iraq, where I had a chance to not only meet with Texas troops who are fighting in both of those countries but also military commanders from my State and across the United States, and to learn more as a Senator and member of the Armed Services Committee about the progress in both Afghanistan and Iraq.

I was pleased to meet with GEN Raymond Odierno, from Fort Hood, TX, who is basically the second in command for General Petraeus, head of Multinational Forces, and who I know will be returning, along with many Texans, to Fort Hood in February, much to his family's pleasure. I know after all the time General Odierno has spent in Iraq, his family will be glad he is coming home, and particularly after the good news that was reported to me there and that I want to summarize here.

The good news is that, as General Odierno said in a story in the Washington Post, reported today, we are going to be bringing back about 40,000 troops from the height of the surge until next summer, and then have what General Odierno called a strategic pause to sort of assess the stability of the military and security environment in Iraq. Of course, the hope is always that we can continue to bring more and more troops home, but as I heard in Iraq over and over, as the Iraqis stand up, we will stand down. That was the plan all along. But again, good news.

General Odierno, in this article, was asked: Do you consider Iraq fragile? We have heard that phrase used over and over. While we have been successful, and the Iraqis have been successful, the conditions are still somewhat fragile. General Odierno was quoted in this article as saying: I think if we move forward with operational patience, it isn't that fragile. But he continued. I think if we leave tomorrow, it would be very

fragile—which underscores, to my way of thinking, the importance of us drawing down our troops based on conditions on the ground and not based on some arbitrary or political timetable. If we did that, if we drew the troops down in a precipitous fashion based on some deadline we impose, without regard to circumstances on the ground, in General Odierno's terms, that would create a fragile security situation and perhaps even reverse the significant gains that have been made.

We see another bit of good news, and this is in the Mideast Stars and Stripes today, that an operation led by Iraqi forces and supported by American troops has reopened the main highway linking Baghdad and Dyala Province after 16 months of being in insurgents' hands. That is good news, and another reversal for al-Qaida and the insurgency in Iraq.

This chart indicates the locations of al-Qaida in Iraq in December 2006 and the battle of Baghdad that led to the actual surge. You will see, Madam President, on my left here—to your right—the improvements demonstrated by the shrinking of the red areas, which indicates the presence of al-Qaida in Iraq in December of 2007. This is presurge; this is postsurge. Not only is this a surge of American troops, but during the same period of time in which we surged additional American troops, there were an additional 100,000 Iraqi policemen and military recruited and trained, as well as some 70,000 citizens in these concerned local citizen councils.

We have heard about the Anbar awakening, where people who had thrown their cause in with al-Qaida had finally gotten tired of their barbaric practices and their treachery and had begun to cooperate with Americans and Iraqi forces. That has led to what I would call—some have called—a concerned local citizens council. I have told people it reminds me of a neighborhood watch on steroids. What it does is provide intelligence as to the locations of improvised explosive devices, and perhaps insurgent or terrorist activity, which has allowed our troops and the Iraqi troops to work with the local citizens to help shrink the influence of al-Qaida in Iraq, as indicated by the comparison between this chart on my right in December of 2006, presurge, and postsurge 2007, in December. So that is obviously good news.

We also have four snapshots of sectarian violence in the city of Baghdad. You will recall that at one point we heard from some Members on the floor that the Iraqis were on the verge of a civil war because of the ethnosectarian violence. You will see here that from December 2006, as indicated by the yellow and red, how much of Baghdad was consumed by sectarian violence. This, of course, had all along been the aim of al-Qaida, to incite the sectarian hatred and violence in a way that would consume Iraq. And we saw, in December 2006, that was unfortunately enor-

mously successful. But you can see from December 2006 to December 2007, presurge to postsurge, how these areas of yellow activity are shrunk, and virtually none of the red, the highly intensive sectarian violence, is occurring.

So here we see, in a very remarkable contrast from presurge and postsurge, a reduction in ethnosectarian violence, a dramatic improvement, and perhaps best evidenced by the fact that many refugees are moving back from other places to their homes in these areas.

Finally, perhaps most demonstrative of our success is these charts which indicate an overall drop in attack trends. This chart starts in December of 2006 and ends in December 2007, indicating a tremendous reduction—by about two-thirds—in the number of overall attacks in Iraq. Again, a significant improvement.

I think those are all the charts I have, but let me say that I also acknowledge the tremendous success the Iraqis have made when it comes to political reconciliation. That is another thing that, of course, we all had hoped for. In our meetings with Iraqi leaders—Shiites, Sunnis, and Kurds—we said: Congratulations on the success of this surge of Iraqis and multinational forces, leading to an improved security situation. But Senator COLEMAN and Senator ISAKSON and I, in our visit there, told Iraqi leaders: Now you need to continue your political surge, now that the security situation has improved considerably.

We know as a result of the improved security situation that the Iraqis have now begun a sort of political reconciliation, both at the local, or tribal, level and at the provincial level, which has led to greater security, but also at the national level. They have passed, finally, one of the benchmark pieces of legislation that many Members of Congress had urged them to pass from time to time, known as the deBaathification reforms. The Iraqi Council representatives passed what they called the accountability and justice law, which represents a significant step forward in the political reconciliation between the various sects and bringing back into the Government, back into society, some of the baathists who are at the local level—after they have been vetted to make sure they are no longer a threat. Because of Saddam Hussein's influence, people could not teach in schools, could not engage in civil life unless they were a member of the Baath party. Well, thanks to the Iraqi Council of Representatives, they now have an opportunity to reengage in civic life in Iraq in a way that is very important.

We also know the Iraqi leaders have passed a budget and an important pension law. Recently, Iraqi health care providers gathered in Baghdad for a 2-day medical conference, the first of its kind in more than 15 years.

Madam President, I know we have other colleagues wishing to speak here

on the floor, and I am about through with my comments, but I think it is worth reminding ourselves and reminding the American people what the impact has been of this surge of American and Iraqi forces thanks to the counter-insurgency strategy devised and deployed by GEN David Petraeus. I had an opportunity to see General Petraeus and Ambassador Crocker in Baghdad. They are pleased with the success they have seen, both militarily and from a diplomatic perspective. But they obviously recognize that things still need to continue on the trend toward improved relations, and the Iraqis need to continue their political reconciliation.

I think it is very important, as the story of Iraq tends to go from the front page to perhaps the middle of the newspaper, or from the top of the evening news into perhaps not even being the subject of a news story, that we recall for ourselves and for all Americans the contributions our brave men and women in uniform have made.

This will not only protect our vital national security interests but make sure other people across the world, in places such as Afghanistan and Iraq, can enjoy the blessings of liberty. To me that has been one of the most noble things America has continued to contribute, even to people whom our young troops have not met, to be able to deliver to them the opportunity to live in peace and to achieve their potential.

To me, that is one of the greatest things about this country of ours, that people will put themselves in harm's way, they will risk death itself or serious injury to help other people enjoy those blessings of liberty.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. SANDERS.) The Senator from Washington.

ARMY SUICIDES

Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, I rise this afternoon to talk about a subject that is very important to all of us. I listened to the Senator from Texas lamenting the fact that the war in Iraq has not been on the front pages of the paper recently.

Well, I am here today to say: Actually, it has been. In fact, on the front page of the Washington Post today, an article, "Soldier Suicides at Record Levels. Increase Linked to Long Wars, Lack of Army Resources."

We are hearing several news outlets today reporting on the front pages of papers and in headlines that suicides among our Active-Duty soldiers are at the highest rates since the Army began keeping records back in 1980.

According to those reports, 121 soldiers took their own lives last year. That is nearly 20 percent more than in 2006. The number of attempted suicides and self-inflicted injuries has dramatically increased since the start of this Iraq war. Those findings are tragic.

I know all our hearts go out to those families, their friends, and to the fel-

low soldiers of each one of those service men and women. Our great servicemembers who face deployment after deployment without the rest, recovery, and treatment they need are at the breaking point.

Many of them have seen their best friends killed, they have seen other untold horrors. Yet we still are expecting them to head back to the battlefield to perform unaffected by what they have seen or gone through.

While military suicide is back in the press today, those of us who travel across our States, who go home and talk to servicemembers and veterans who are struggling with mental health care, we know this is an issue, we know it all too well. We know that for family members who live through this tragedy, the pain stays long after those headlines fade.

We owe it to our servicemembers and their families to be outraged when these numbers are going up and up and up and not down. We owe it to them to demand action. On Monday, in his State of the Union Address, the President called on us, Congress, to improve the system of care for our wounded warriors and help them build lives of hope and promise and dignity.

Well, Congress has given the military hundreds of millions of dollars to improve its mental health care system. We have worked hard and pushed through legislation to require the military and the VA to destigmatize mental health treatment, to help increase the awareness of the symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder and do further reach on traumatic brain injury.

But it takes more than money being thrown at the problem, it takes leadership and it takes a change in the culture of war. The President can make all the platitudes he wants, but as Commander in Chief, he needs to lead by example and show he understands what these never-ending deployments are doing to our troops and to our veterans.

While the Department of Defense has taken some action, today's report makes me deeply concerned that progress has not been made and that these programs have not been implemented throughout the system. Some of our soldiers are telling us all they get is a 1-800 number to call if they need help.

Well, many soldiers need a real person to talk to. They need psychiatrists and they need psychologists who understand the horrors of war and the stresses these troops feel after serving their third or their fourth or even their fifth tour of duty in an urban theater.

Too many of our troops today say they cannot even get the military to understand when they are crying out for help. As I said, the Washington Post reported this morning on the military suicides, with an update on Lieutenant Whiteside. The Post wrote about this case the first time in December. She is the 25-year-old medic, an Army medic who attempted suicide

in theater. Then she was charged by her superiors with endangering another soldier.

Now, I met with her father before the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee when we were hearing the nomination of General Peake. Lieutenant Whiteside had experienced a mental breakdown from stress serving in Iraq and she suffered from "demonstrably severe depression," according to her doctors.

But the story revealed that medical opinion was brushed aside in her case and her superiors in the field said: "Mental illness is an excuse."

Well, this past Monday, she was awaiting the Army's decision whether she was going to be court-martialed or not, and she swallowed dozens of pills in another suicide attempt. The Post reported today she left a note that explained: "I am very disappointed in the Army."

According to this article, Lieutenant Whiteside is now in stable physical condition and the charges have finally been dismissed.

But, unfortunately, she is not the only soldier who has struggled to get the Defense Department to understand the real trauma of military service. Her story and the statistics that are being reported today are a reflection of something many of my colleagues and I have said over and over: A prolonged war has stretched our military thin and is taking a tragic toll on the brave men and women who serve in our all-volunteer Army and military. They deserve more.

Some members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff have raised concerns that prolonged and repeated deployments are placing the overall health of our servicemembers at risk. David Rudd, who is the chairman of the Department of Psychology at Texas Tech University and a former Army psychologist, was quoted in this article this morning as saying the Army suicide rates pose:

Real questions about whether you can have an Army this size with multiple deployments.

Over the past weeks, both the President and White House officials have hinted that a reduction of troops in Iraq is likely only temporary. As a result, I continue to be very concerned about the readiness of our military and our ability to sustain these wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

I think we need to ask the question: With the reality of today's reports and the knowledge that extended troop deployments are stretching our military readiness, I want to know, what is the Pentagon's plan to address and decrease the number of Army suicides and suicide attempts?

This afternoon, I wrote a letter to Secretary Gates, and I asked him that question. I want to hear his response. We need to know that the change in culture is more than a talking point; we need to know and be assured our senior leaders in the military are ensuring that their words and programs are being executed out in the field.