

health insurance is treated for tax purposes.

Our current health insurance system is biased toward employer-based coverage due to a historical accident.

During World War II, we had wage controls. Wage controls increased competition among employers for recruiting the best employees, and health care incentivized employers by allowing them to offer health benefits instead of prohibited wage increases.

In 1954, Congress codified a provision declaring that such a contribution would not count as taxable income—an added incentive. This tax policy made it very favorable for individuals to get their health benefits through their employers and consequently has penalized individuals who get their coverage through the individual market.

We must eliminate the unfair tax treatment of health insurance, which will expand choices in coverage and give all Americans more control over their own health care.

The Joint Committee on Taxation estimated that removing this tax bias—and a few related health care tax policies—would save the Federal Government \$3.6 trillion over the next 10 years. That is a lot of money—even around here, that is a lot of money—that can and should be used to expand choices and access and give individuals more control over their health care.

Ten Steps ensures that every American can benefit from this savings whether they get their health care from their employer, from the individual insurance market, or they decide they want to get off of Medicaid and switch to private insurance. So how does the bill do this? The plan gives all Americans who have at least a certain amount of health insurance a standard deduction. The national above-the-line standard deduction for health insurance would equal \$15,000 for a family and \$7,500 for an individual. The bill also gives low-income folks a tax credit equal to \$5,000 for a family or \$2,500 for an individual. The subsidy amount phases out as income gets higher, so folks won't be eligible for the subsidy at all, but everyone is eligible for the standard deduction. Because the bill takes this hybrid approach to coupling the standard deduction proposal with the tax credit proposal, no particular population is adversely affected. The Tax Code would no longer penalize folks who don't get their insurance through their job.

Let me be clear. My goal is not to erode employer-based health insurance, given that Ten Steps does not alter the way employers treat health insurance. Rather, I wanted to provide more options for individuals who don't currently have insurance through their employer. Correcting a flawed tax code would make it easier for working Americans to buy health insurance. Jobs don't need health insurance, people need health insurance. American families who aren't insured through their employers should have the same

accesses to care. Everyone should be treated equally.

I hope we can move forward quickly on making these changes so that every American can get health insurance. It is time for real action. We need to do something. It isn't necessary to wait for the end of a Presidential election to solve basic problems for the American people. These 10 steps will take care of a lot of things. We can do any one of them and make a difference now and show that Congress can get things done.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Wisconsin is recognized.

#### COMPREHENSIVE REPORT ON AL-QAIDA

Mr. FEINGOLD. Mr. President, the Senate will vote later today in relation to two bills I recently introduced with Majority Leader REID addressing the war in Iraq and the disastrous toll it continues to take on our top national security priority, the global fight against al-Qaida.

Many of my colleagues have expressed concern that the exhausting rate of deployments in Iraq and the resources we are committing to that country are undermining our ability to protect ourselves at home and respond to dangers abroad, including the deteriorating situation in Afghanistan and the global threat posed by al-Qaida. While we all hope that the recent decline in violence in Iraq will hold, lasting stability remains elusive and there is a serious danger that our troops will remain mired in Iraq while our ability to combat al-Qaida elsewhere and protect ourselves at home continues to deteriorate.

Senator REID and I have introduced two bills to address these problems head-on. One of these bills, S. 2633, is similar to legislation we have offered before. I am pleased that this bill is also cosponsored by Senators BOXER, BROWN, BYRD, CARDIN, CLINTON, DODD, DURBIN, HARKIN, LEAHY, MENENDEZ, OBAMA, SANDERS, SCHUMER, WHITEHOUSE, and WYDEN. It requires the President to safely redeploy U.S. combat troops from Iraq with very narrow exceptions. Effective 120 days from enactment of this bill, U.S. troops could only remain in Iraq for the following purposes: conducting targeted military operations against al-Qaida and its affiliates, providing security for U.S. personnel and infrastructure, providing limited training of Iraqi Security Forces, providing equipment and training to our own troops, and continuing to redeploy from Iraq.

Unlike previous legislation I have offered, this bill does not have an end date for redeployment. Some of my colleagues who oppose the war have expressed concern about Congress setting such a date, and in drafting this legislation we have tried to address their concerns. By not including an end date,

we are trying to provide additional flexibility in how the troops are redeployed. And we are also making doubly clear that at no point will funding be denied to the troops—they will continue to be fully funded throughout their redeployment.

If there is no end date for redeployment, then (what is to stop the administration keeping troops there indefinitely? The answer is that, after 120 days, troops can only remain in Iraq for the narrowly defined purposes in the bill. Because these exceptions are so narrow, the bill removes any incentive for the President to delay or "slow walk" redeployment.

Now, some on the other side are arguing that this new bill is tougher than previous versions, because the funding restriction kicks in sooner, in 120 days. Of course, these are the same people who oppose any limitations on the war, so I don't take their arguments too seriously. I suspect they haven't actually read the new bill, or they would realize that the bill is quite a bit more flexible, for the reasons I just mentioned.

Right now, the administration is considering various "drawdown" plans, all of which would leave well over 100,000 troops in Iraq through the end of the year. That would continue to require an exhausting rate of deployments that we simply cannot afford—for our military readiness, our fiscal bottom line, and our national security.

This administration has put Iraq first for too long. In an effort to refocus our national priorities, the second bill Senator REID and I have introduced with Senators BOXER, BROWN, BYRD, CARDIN, CASEY, CLINTON, DODD, HARKIN, LAUTENBERG, LEAHY, MENENDEZ, OBAMA, SCHUMER, and WHITEHOUSE, would require the administration to come up with a strategy to wage a comprehensive, global campaign against al-Qaida, without undermining our military readiness. The legislation, S. 2634, does this by requiring a comprehensive report from the Secretaries of Defense, State and Homeland Security, working in coordination with the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Director of National Intelligence. The report will examine the threat posed by al-Qaida and affiliates around the world and recommend ways to ensure that our national security assets are properly deployed to address this threat. To be clear, I am not just talking about military assets, we also have intelligence, diplomatic and other assets that we need to use to defeat al-Qaida. We can't just rely on boots on the ground—we need to use all of the other facets of U.S. power, including aggressive public and private diplomacy, to counter al-Qaida.

Some of the information called for in this bill will probably need to be contained in a classified annex. But there is no reason the administration cannot also provide a public report identifying in broad terms the threat we face and how to respond to it. The American public should be kept as informed as

possible about how we are protecting them from the number one threat we face.

I know some of my colleagues do not want to be talking about Iraq again. I know some of them complain that we spent too much time debating Iraq last year and I know some of them have concerns about whether now is the right time to bring these bills up for a vote. But we cannot allow the focus on Iraq to fade because violence has declined in parts of Iraq. It is true violence levels are down to where they were in 2005, but Iraq is still extremely and unacceptably violent, as it was in 2005. Violence has risen in Mosul and in the south, and U.S. casualty rates in January were higher than in December. All is not calm in Iraq, as the administration would have you believe.

Moreover, the surge has not brought Iraq any closer to legitimate political reconciliation at the national level—and it may, in fact, have undermined the prospects for such reconciliation in the long term. The President's policies have empowered former insurgents and militia-infiltrated security forces with questionable loyalties. By supporting sheiks in al Anbar—and elsewhere—we may have reduced violence in the near term, but only by making it more difficult to achieve national reconciliation in the long run. The Director of National Intelligence, or DNI, testified this month that many Sunnis who participate in local security initiatives remain hostile to the Shi'ite leaders in Baghdad, and that some of those leaders see the Sunnis we are supporting as "thinly disguised insurgents" who are plotting against them. Mr. President, we cannot, and should not, ask our brave men and women in uniform to resolve these sectarian disputes. Military operations are not a substitute for a viable political settlement, and the American people are simply not willing to leave our troops on the front lines indefinitely in hopes that some day such a settlement will arrive.

Recent gains in Iraq are tactical successes at best, devoid of an overarching strategy to integrate local powerbrokers into a broader national framework. Our presence has only added to the complexities in Iraq as we meddle in local dynamics and contribute to internal divisions and sectarian tensions. Keeping a significant military presence in Iraq will not bring lasting stability to that country. Indeed, the Iraqi people and the Iraqi parliament continue to oppose an open-ended U.S. military presence in their country, which is something they have in common with the American people.

Keeping our troops in Iraq will not solve Iraq's problems, and it won't help us address the growing threat posed by al-Qaida around the world. It makes no sense to devote so many of our critical resources and so much of our attention to one country, rather than to the global fight against al-Qaida.

Every year, I hold town hall meetings in each of the 72 counties of Wis-

consin, and over the January and February recess I held some 30 meetings in some of the most conservative parts of the state. I didn't bring up Iraq at those January meetings because I wanted to see whether it was still a major concern, particularly with these audiences. And guess what, in every single meeting, they brought it up with me. And they didn't just bring it up, they asked what we are doing to bring home the troops. But I had to tell them that, instead of getting out of Iraq, we will likely be sending one-third of the members of the Wisconsin National Guard back to Iraq next year, many of whom have served within the last 2 or 3 years.

They will be torn from their family, their jobs, their communities, to be put in harm's way, all in order to create space for a political reconciliation in Iraq that is always just over the horizon. They will not be there to protect the people of Wisconsin in the event of an emergency, nor will they be reinforcing our troops in Afghanistan, who face what one recent report described as a "stalemate" in fighting al-Qaida's ally, the Taliban. Like Americans all across the country, the people of Wisconsin don't think this makes sense. They want an end to our involvement in this war in Iraq, and they want to know what's stopping us from making it happen.

This administration has been so distracted by Iraq that it has neglected to address the top threats to our national security. It has allowed security conditions in Afghanistan to deteriorate tremendously, to the point where former NATO Commander General Jones recently concluded that we are in a "strategic stalemate." I need hardly remind my colleagues that this is the country from which al-Qaida launched the 9/11 attacks, and where it continues to operate.

While agreeing to provide 3,200 U.S. troops to Afghanistan, Secretary Gates has also requested additional ground troops from our allies. If our allies are unwilling to provide those troops or worsening conditions require additional troops, it is far from clear that we will have the forces we need in Afghanistan without further undermining military readiness and homeland security.

Across the Afghan border, in Pakistan, things are also looking bad. The Director of National Intelligence testified recently that "al-Qaida's central leadership based in the border area of Pakistan is al-Qaida's most dangerous component." The DNI also said that since the middle of 2006, there has been an influx of "new Western recruits" into this part of the world, an indication that al-Qaida is "improving the last key aspect of its ability to attack the United States: the identification, training, and positioning of operatives for an attack in the homeland." His testimony closely echoed his warnings from almost a year ago when he noted that future attacks against our nation

were likely to come from that part of the world. It is worth mentioning that this is the same exact warning we received from the July 2007 NIE, which assessed that al-Qaida has regenerated and reconstituted itself in the Pakistan-Afghanistan border region.

The administration has made matters worse by associating itself with an undemocratic, authoritarian regime in Pakistan, one that the Pakistani people, finally given the chance to make their voices heard, roundly rejected. In return for questionable anti-terrorism assistance, we have given the Musharraf regime billions of dollars, not to mention the cost to our credibility, and to our ability to build strong, sustainable partnerships in Pakistan.

Our endless presence in Iraq is distracting us from these core threats to our national security. Instead of dancing around these vital concerns, we need to address them head on and that is why we need a strategy for defeating al-Qaida and its affiliates around the globe. We need a strategy which identifies the gravest threats to our national security and makes recommendations for addressing them with both military and nonmilitary initiatives.

I know there is no silver bullet to defeat al-Qaida. But it has been made very clear to Congress, and to the American public that if we are to protect ourselves at home, there must be a dramatic shift in how we order our national priorities. We cannot continue with the current agenda. We must refocus not just so we have the capacity to respond to other contingencies abroad but also because our heavy footprint in Iraq makes us more vulnerable at home.

We need to rebuild our domestic response capability, which has been severely compromised by repeated deployments of our National Guard. As long as we keep over 100,000 troops in Iraq we will have to continue to deploy Guard units in a manner that compromises their ability to prepare for domestic incidents. Deployments to Iraq have left those responsible for protecting us at home with, on average, only 56 percent of the essential "dual-use" equipment needed to respond to a domestic incident.

Indeed, the National Guard Bureau estimates that it is facing a \$47 billion equipment shortfall, including a \$20 million shortfall in equipment needed to respond to a chemical, biological, or radiological incident at home, notwithstanding the fact that it is the stated intention of al-Qaida to pursue such weapons. The Commission on the National Guard and Reserves concluded that "[b]ecause our nation has not adequately resourced its forces designated for response to weapons of mass destruction, it does not have sufficient trained, ready forces available."

(Disturbance in the Visitors' Galleries).

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Sergeant at Arms will restore order in the Senate.

The Senator may continue.

The Commission characterized this as an “appalling gap.” I wholeheartedly agree. This is unacceptable more than 6 years after 9/11, and is clear evidence that our national security priorities need to be reexamined and realigned.

Rather than giving the National Guard the \$47 billion it needs, the President has asked for another \$100 billion for operations in Iraq in 2008 alone, in addition to the \$86 billion we have already appropriated. If we don’t significantly draw down our troops in Iraq this year, we will end up spending another \$170 billion in Iraq next year.

The Army Chief of Staff has stated that our current rate of deployment is unsustainable, and a recent survey of military officers found that 88 percent believe the demands of the Iraq war have “stretched the U.S. military dangerously thin.”

There are other costs to the war in Iraq, Mr. President, and they are considerable. The war is simultaneously deepening instability throughout the Middle East, undermining the international support and cooperation we need to defeat al-Qaida, and providing al-Qaida and its allies with a rallying cry and recruiting tool.

That is why I am offering, with Majority Leader REID, legislation to redeploy our troops and refocus our national priorities. It is our job to listen to the American people, to save American lives, and to protect our Nation’s security by redeploying our troops from Iraq because the President will not.

This war is exhausting our country, straining our military, and distracting us from our top national security priorities. Even with the recent decline in violence in Iraq, the American people know the war is misguided and they continue to call for its end. They know we need to do a better job of protecting ourselves at home and fighting al-Qaida abroad. I urge my colleagues to vote yes on both of these Feingold-Reid bills so we can finally heed their call to action.

I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from California.

Mrs. BOXER. Mr. President, I am proud to rise in support of Senator FEINGOLD’s two bills. The first bill requires that the President begin the safe redeployment of U.S. troops from Iraq within 120 days. There is no end date for redeployment. It only starts the redeployment. It includes exceptions for missions against al-Qaida, force protection, and training. The second bill requires that the administration provide to Congress a full report outlining a comprehensive global strategy to defeat al-Qaida and its affiliates.

As someone who voted to go get bin Laden after 9/11, I am dismayed that this President has turned away from that mission and put so much into an ill-fated war in Iraq. Senator FEINGOLD is proposing a policy for us that is con-

sistent with common sense and our national security because the war in Iraq has not made us safer. It has made us vulnerable. The war in Iraq has not reduced the influence of al-Qaida. Actually, it has made al-Qaida a hero, unfortunately. It has been seen as one of the best recruiting tools of al-Qaida. I want to get al-Qaida, and that is what Senator FEINGOLD’s bills will result in because we will refocus our attention on capturing bin Laden and getting al-Qaida.

We are in a quagmire in Iraq. We are told that quagmire will go on indefinitely. I believe it is undermining our national security. It is undermining our economic security. When I tell you what it is costing, it is a stunning number. It has diverted critical resources from the hunt for Osama bin Laden. He has been at large more than 6 years. And despite the administration’s rhetoric, our own intelligence agencies again are telling us that the war in Iraq is proving to be a critical recruitment and fundraising tool for the terrorists we want to beat.

We see a toll on our military. We hear phrases such as a “death spiral.” The Washington Post reported that Army and Marine officials refer to the readiness death spiral that senior officers warn puts our Nation at risk. Why? Because we lack the strategic reserve of ground forces to be able to respond to crises throughout the world. This single-minded focus on Iraq and the ever-changing mission there is not making us stronger. It is making us weaker. We now see that suicide attempts among U.S. troops have reached a record high, a sixfold increase since 2002. And while promising junior officers are leaving the military at record rates, we hear that the services are lowering their standards to meet recruitment goals. They are recruiting convicted felons now, people convicted of sex crimes, people convicted of making a false terror threat, assault with a deadly weapon. We are taking felons into the military. This is wrong for our Nation.

Once upon a time we were told that this Iraq war was about weapons of mass destruction that Saddam Hussein was hiding, and it was about also Saddam’s ties to al-Qaida. Our military did its job. They found out there weren’t weapons of mass destruction, and our intelligence people did their job. They said there were no al-Qaida cells in Iraq at the time of 9/11.

Then we were told the war was about getting rid of Saddam and liberating Iraq from that brutal tyrant. Our military did that. Then we were told the war was about holding elections and promoting democracy. You remember President Bush in his flight suit with big words “mission accomplished.” Well, there were many missions accomplished. There were no weapons of mass destruction. There were no ties to al-Qaida. We got Saddam Hussein. We got his relatives. Three elections were held. Our military did every single

thing that was asked of them to the point where the President said “mission accomplished.” But, no, the troops are there. They are suffering. Believe me, there is no end in sight because I personally asked our Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice how long she, at the time, thought we would be in Iraq. She said she couldn’t answer. I said: How much do you think we will have to spend? She couldn’t answer. What kind of administration comes forward with a war and has no way out?

RUSS FEINGOLD is saying: All right. We won’t set an end date. We will change the mission to get our troops out of harm’s way. Let them continue to train Iraqis. Let them go after al-Qaida. Let them protect our forces there and our personnel there. But get them out of the business of kicking down doors in Iraq. We have lost so many of these brave men and women, and so many are coming home who will never be the same.

We have this war based on shifting missions. The President said: Mission accomplished. DICK CHENEY said we are in the last throes. But it goes on and on under shifting rationales, going on 5 long years. Will it be another 5 years? They will not tell us. Will it be another 10 years? They will not tell us.

Some of this administration’s supporters say it will be 50 years. Some say it will be 100 years. How many brave men and women will die in addition to those who have already died? How many will be wounded? There are no answers.

Will we spend \$1 trillion? Will we spend \$2 trillion, \$3 trillion? No answer. The toll is too high already. Thousands dead, tens of thousands injured, \$10 billion a month for Iraq.

The Nation’s Governors met with the President yesterday. On a bipartisan basis they asked to see increased spending on America’s crumbling roads and highways and bridges. They said it would help our struggling economy, and we can’t grow economically if we don’t have an infrastructure. I am chair of the Public Works Committee of the Senate. My friend, Senator INHOFE, and I do not agree on the war in Iraq, but we certainly agree that we need to have an infrastructure. The President said: No, there is no money. There is only money for Iraq, an open checkbook, \$10 billion a month. We can’t fix our falling bridges. The \$10 billion a month is equivalent to \$2.5 billion a week, \$357 million a day.

For less than the cost of 3 months in Iraq, we could enroll every eligible child in America in the Head Start program for 1 long year. For the cost of 1 month in Iraq, we could provide after-school care for our kids for 4 years. For the cost of 2 weeks in Iraq, we could provide health insurance for a year to 6 million uninsured kids. Last year we asked the President to help us with children’s health. He said no. He vetoed that critical investment. He just said no to the Governors on rebuilding the roads and highways. Open checkbook for Iraq; closed checkbook for America.

Do you remember when the President's then-Budget Director, Mitch Daniels, told us the war in Iraq would cost no more than \$60 billion? He was wrong. Paul Wolfowitz assured us Iraqi revenue would pay for the war. No, we remember there were a couple in the administration who said the war might cost as much as \$200 billion. They were ridiculed. The President's most recent supplemental request for Iraq was \$200 billion in itself, bigger than the stimulus package we just passed. The President has spent more than a half trillion dollars on his failed policy, and there is literally no end in sight. I think we need to remember this is all borrowed money. The cost of interest on Iraq-related debt is \$23 billion a year for fiscal year 2008 alone. The President's policy is being paid for on a credit card, and we are sticking my grandchildren and yours with the tab.

The cost of a barrel of oil has tripled since the war began, much to the benefit of countries such as Russia, Sudan, and Iran. According to the Joint Economic Committee, if you factor in the cost of the oil, the President's policy in Iraq has already cost the average family \$416,500, and no end in sight.

It needs to stop. We are hemorrhaging money. The waste in this war is beyond disgraceful. We spent \$32 million for a base in Iraq that was never built. We paid a contractor \$72 million to build a barracks for the police academy in Baghdad and instead got a building with giant cracks snaking through newly built walls and human waste dripping from the ceiling. That is from a report. The administration loaded \$9 billion in cash on to pallets and shipped it into Iraq where it promptly disappeared.

I ask you: Imagine what would happen if \$9 billion disappeared from one of our cities. The people responsible would be in prison. But in Iraq, the President shrugs it off.

When the President vetoed the Water Resources Development Act, he said it lacked fiscal discipline. He said it wasn't fiscally responsible. I would ask rhetorically: Not fiscally responsible to maintain our waterways and keep our commerce moving in this, the greatest Nation in the world? This, coming from a President who inherited a budget surplus and turned it into a huge debt, with the largest budget deficits in history as well, and money for Iraq every day, every hour, every minute, no end in sight, billions missing, billions on bases that were never built. It is breathtaking. The President and his supporters shrug it off. They don't even address it. It is unbelievable. The sky is the limit. But when it comes to investing in America or extending the stimulus for seniors and disabled vets, we are told: Sorry, we need to show fiscal discipline. Thank goodness we were able to get that through above the President's objections.

Our own military leaders tell us time and time again there is no military solution. God bless our soldiers. They

have given us a breathing space. Yet the Iraqi Government is just making changes around the edges.

We have trained 440,000 Iraqis militarily. Imagine, 440,000 Iraqis. Why can't they defend themselves? Countries defend themselves. We have given so much in blood, in tears, in sweat, in dollars, in commitment, in trust. After the elections last year, I thought the President would come to the table when the Democrats took over and said we wanted to end the war. We thought he would come to the table. We were wrong. He did not come to the table. He is continuing this war, no end in sight, no plan to get out.

When I asked that question to Condoleezza Rice, I was stunned. She said: I can't answer the question of how long we will be there. I can't answer the question of what it will cost—as if I didn't have a right to ask the question. That is why I am sent here.

I represent, along with Senator FEINSTEIN, 37 million people. We have taken a hit on soldiers killed. We have taken a hit on soldiers burned. We have taken a hit on soldiers permanently disabled. So you better know I am going to ask these questions.

Today, Senator FEINGOLD is saying: Let's get started. Let's start telling the Iraqis, by our actions not just our words, that they have to step up to the plate.

We have to make a choice as a nation.

Is it time for America? It is time for our families, for our soldiers, for our children, for our grandchildren?

Or is it time to continue this open-ended commitment to a war without an end, a war that has no plan of ever ending, a war that is tying our hands in this recession?

I say it is time for a change in America. It is time to vote for the Feingold bill and start bringing our troops home.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Oklahoma.

#### ORDER OF PROCEDURE

Mr. INHOFE. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that at the conclusion of Senator LIEBERMAN's remarks I be recognized for 15 minutes.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

The Senator from Connecticut.

Mr. LIEBERMAN. Mr. President, I thank the Chair and my friend from Oklahoma.

#### IRAQ

Mr. LIEBERMAN. Mr. President, I rise to speak against the measure introduced by Senator FEINGOLD.

It has been only a year since GEN David Petraeus arrived in Baghdad and took command of American forces in Iraq. But in these brief 12 months, he and the American and coalition troops

under his command have brought about a tectonic shift in Iraq that has altered the course of the war there and, with it, the future of at least two great nations—Iraq and the United States of America—and the lives of hundreds of millions of people in those two nations and so many others threatened by violent jihadist terrorists in the Middle East and beyond.

When the surge first began a year ago, many doubted that the violence then raging in Iraq could be brought under control. Even as American troops began implementing this bold new counterinsurgency strategy, some opponents of the war inside and outside of Congress declared that the war in Iraq was already "lost," that the surge had already been "tried and failed," and that it mattered more, frankly, that we get out of Iraq than that we succeed in Iraq.

They could not have been more wrong. Thanks to the surge, the bravery and skill of American and Iraqi troops and the will of the Iraqi people to be free from terrorists, conditions on the ground in Iraq have been totally transformed from those of a year ago.

A year ago, al-Qaida in Iraq was entrenched, in control of, exercising murderous control in Anbar Province and Baghdad. Now those evil forces of Islamist extremism are facing their single greatest and most humiliating defeat since 2001.

This is not just my opinion. It is a matter of fact. In Baghdad, a fact: sectarian killings are down 95 percent in the last year; suicide bombings are down nearly 70 percent; IED attacks have been cut nearly in half.

In the face of those extraordinary improvements in Iraq—and many more I will speak of in a moment in the social and political and economic life of that great country—however, antiwar forces here in America have reacted not with sighs of relief and gratitude but, instead, by doing everything in their power to downplay or diminish our hard-won gains in Iraq.

Rather than admit the possibility that they had been wrong about the surge and about the capability of reestablishing security in Iraq, they, instead, reached for another rationale for retreat. What they argued was the lack of political progress in Iraq and, therefore, that the surge had failed.

But this argument has also now been defeated by facts on the ground in Iraq.

In the first place, the Iraqi people have taken over their local and provincial governments in a grassroots up democratic revolution. At the national level, a response is occurring. It took too long, but it is now significant. Benchmark legislation has surged forward in the Iraqi Parliament. The budget law, passed; the debaathification law, passed; the provincial powers and election law, passed; the amnesty law, passed.

Thanks to the surge, the Sunni Arabs, who once constituted the core of the insurgency, have now risen, because we stood by them, to join with us