

Mr. CONRAD. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

Mr. CONRAD. Mr. President, this week, the Senate will once again have the opportunity to demonstrate its support for America's family farmers and ranchers by improving emergency agricultural disaster assistance as part of the supplemental appropriations bill.

For over a year, I, along with Senate colleagues from both sides of the aisle, have attempted repeatedly to convince the Congress of the United States and this administration to provide desperately needed disaster assistance.

As part of the hurricane supplemental last year, the Senate approved an agricultural disaster package. That measure was dropped in conference as a result of opposition from the administration. The need for this legislation has only been made more compelling by the severe disasters that have hit California, Colorado, Kansas, Nebraska, New Mexico, and Oklahoma during the final weeks of 2006.

In my own home State of North Dakota, in 2005, we had a disaster that was devastating to thousands of farm and ranch families. This is what we saw across North Dakota—flooded lands, over a million acres of land that could not even be planted and another million acres of land that was drowned out. Then, irony of ironies, the next year we had a devastating drought—the third worst drought in this Nation's entire history, hitting not only North Dakota but right down the heartland of America.

This is a farm field near my home, in Burleigh County. I live in Bismarck. This is a farm field in that same county, and you can see almost nothing growing.

Here is the U.S. Drought Monitor, and they determine on a scientific basis the effect of drought across America. This is from July 25, 2006, and you can see drought right down the heartland of America—in our case, exceptional drought. That is the dark brown right on the border between North Dakota and South Dakota—exceptional drought. The next category going down the scale, extreme drought, an even broader area between the two States. We also see exceptional and extreme droughts in these parts of the country, and then severe drought. That is the tan. Virtually all of North Dakota had exceptional, extreme, and severe drought conditions. And, of course, not just North Dakota, it was right down the heartland of the country.

This is a headline from July 30, 2006, from the Grand Forks Herald: "Dakotas the Epicenter of a Drought-Stricken Nation. More than 60 percent of the United States in drought."

This has been an absolutely bizarre set of circumstances: One year, extreme flooding; the next year, extreme

drought. But that is the reality of what we have confronted, and if assistance is not provided, thousands of farm families will be forced off the land.

The President's chief economic adviser was in my office to visit me on another matter at the same time there were independent bankers from my State there to talk to me about agricultural assistance—bankers talking to me about the desperate need for drought assistance. They told me and told the President's chief economic adviser that if assistance were not forthcoming, they would lose 5 to 10 percent of their clients. These are farm and ranch families who work hard, who love this country, who work the land, and who are some of the most independent people you would ever want to meet. The last thing they want is a government handout, but if they do not have a helping hand extended to them, they are going to be out of business. That shouldn't be the result. We should provide the very basic assistance we have provided in other times in other parts of the country to those who have been hard hit.

Let me make certain that people understand. To get any assistance, producers will need to demonstrate they have had a 35-percent loss, and they will get no help for that first 35 percent of loss. That is the floor. They have to have lost 35 percent before they get anything, and then the assistance will apply to the losses beyond 35 percent.

Nobody is getting rich on this program. Some have suggested this bill will result in farmers becoming more than whole because of crop insurance. That is simply incorrect. Under the provisions, a producer receiving disaster assistance cannot recover more than 95 percent of the expected value of the crop, after both crop insurance and the expected market income from the crop have been deducted.

This is desperately needed. It is done in a way that is fair and balanced and prevents abuse. I hope my colleagues will support it.

I thank the Chair, and I yield the floor.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

NOMINATION OF GEORGE H. WU TO BE UNITED STATES DISTRICT JUDGE

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will proceed to executive session to consider the following nomination, which the clerk will report.

The legislative clerk read the nomination of George H. Wu, of California, to be United States District Judge for the Central District of California.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, there will be 20 minutes for debate, equally divided between the chairman and ranking member of the Judiciary Committee.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Vermont.

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, with this confirmation—and I expect Mr. Wu will be confirmed—we will have confirmed 14 lifetime appointments to the Federal bench so far this year. This is March. I mention that because, when President Clinton was in office and the Republicans controlled the Senate, there were only 17 confirmations during the entire 1996 session of the Senate.

For those who think there is partisanship in the confirmation of judges, yes, there has been. Fortunately, it has been my friends on the other side.

Today the Senate continues, as we have since the beginning of this Congress, to make progress on judicial nominations. The Senate will consider and, I believe, confirm the nomination of George H. Wu to be a United States District Judge for the Central District of California.

With this confirmation, the Senate will have confirmed 14 lifetime appointments to the Federal bench so far this year. There were only 17 confirmations during the entire 1996 session of the Senate. I have worked cooperatively with Members from both sides of the aisle on our committee and in the Senate to move quickly to consider and confirm these judicial nominations so that we can fill vacancies and improve the administration of justice in our Nation's Federal courts.

The Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts lists 48 remaining judicial vacancies, yet the President has sent us only 27 nominations for these vacancies. Twenty-one of these vacancies—almost half—have no nominee. Of the 20 vacancies deemed by the Administrative Office to be judicial emergencies, the President has yet to send us nominees for 10 of them. That means half of the judicial emergency vacancies are without a nominee.

Judge Wu's nomination has the support of his home State Senators, and I thank Senators FEINSTEIN and BOXER for their support of this nomination.

Judge Wu has an extensive record of public service as a State trial judge, a Federal prosecutor, and a law professor. In his 14 years on the State trial bench, Judge Wu has served in the Los Angeles Municipal Court and in the Los Angeles Superior Court, handling an array of criminal and civil cases. Previously, Judge Wu worked on complex commercial matters in private practice for two Los Angeles law firms. Judge Wu has also served as a law professor at the University of Tennessee School of Law, and as an assistant U.S. attorney and later assistant division chief in the civil division of the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Central District of California.

I am pleased that the nominee before us is an Asian-Pacific American. I have urged, and will continue to urge, the President to nominate men and women to the Federal bench who reflect the diversity of America. Racial and cultural diversity remains a pillar of strength for our country and one of our greatest

natural resources. Diversity on the bench helps ensure that the words "equal justice under law," inscribed in Vermont marble over the entrance to the Supreme Court, are a reality and that justice is rendered fairly and impartially. Judicial decisions should reflect insight and experiences as varied as America's citizenry. A more representative judiciary helps cultivate public confidence in the judiciary which strengthens the independence of our Federal courts.

There is still much work to be done. Out of the 875 seats on the Federal judiciary, there are only 5 active Asian-Pacific American judges on the Federal bench, less than 1 percent of all Federal judges. President Bush has nominated only two Asian-Pacific American candidates during his 6 years in office, neither to a seat on a Federal circuit court. With outstanding lawyers like Dean Harold Koh of Yale, Professor Goodwin Liu of Boalt Hall School of Law at the University of California at Berkeley, or attorneys Karen Narasaki, John Yang and Debra Yang, it is not as if there is a dearth of qualified candidates who would be universally endorsed.

Our Nation has highly qualified individuals of diverse heritages who would help to unify our Nation while adding to the diversity of our courts. I hope the President will send us more consensus nominees that reflect the rich diversity of our Nation.

I congratulate Judge Wu, and his family, on his confirmations today.

EMERGENCY SUPPLEMENTAL APPROPRIATIONS

Mr. President, this emergency supplemental bill that we are debating today has been long seen as our best chance of extricating ourselves from the quagmire in Iraq. As one of only 23 Senators who opposed the authorization of the use of military force, I have supported every credible proposal that has come before this body to bring our troops home.

The war in Iraq was not about September 11. It was not about al-Qaida. It was not about making our Nation safer. While no one can prove a negative, I believe the damage this war has done to our national security, our national interest, and our international standing has been incalculable. When we had a chance to capture Osama bin Laden, the master mind of 9/11, we let him get away because the administration, the Bush-Cheney administration, wanted to take our troops out of Afghanistan and send them to Iraq, a country that had absolutely nothing to do with 9/11. The injustices perpetrated at Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo have tarnished our national reputation and leadership, and the way Iraq has become a rallying cry for religious extremists has made the American people less safe.

For whatever misguided reasons, the President started a unilateral, preemptive war in Iraq which has cost us thousands of American lives and made us less safe. I think that historians will

look back at this war as one of the most costly, reckless mistakes made by any administration in this history.

This supplemental contains another \$96 billion to support U.S. military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. I supported the use of military force to remove the Taliban from power, and I support the continued efforts of our military and NATO forces against the Taliban and al-Qaida in Afghanistan. But I did not, do not, and will not agree to the use of the U.S. military to continue putting our people in harm's way in the middle of a continuing civil war in Iraq.

This bill also contains money to help the people of Lebanon rebuild after the devastating war between Hezbollah and Israel last year, aid for refugees in Darfur, the Congo, Uganda, and other humanitarian crises, and to prevent the spread of avian influenza. It contains resources to help Kosovo as it moves toward independence, for Liberia to rebuild after their civil war, and to support the peace process in Nepal which finally has a chance to shed its feudal past.

It contains a provision I sponsored, with the support of both Republicans and Democrats, to fix the illogical and unfair provisions in the Immigration and Naturalization Act that have been used to prevent victims of terrorist groups or members of groups who fought alongside the United States from admission as refugees or from obtaining asylum.

As the chairman of the Senate's Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs, I am also pleased to report the bill includes, for the first time, benchmarks on a portion of the reconstruction assistance for Iraq. We are not going to continue to pour billions of dollars into no-bid contracts that have been plagued by rampant fraud and shoddy workmanship. It is about time we put an end to the practice of handing out American taxpayers' money with no strings attached. These benchmarks reflect what the Iraqi Government itself has pledged and what even President Bush acknowledged is necessary if the Iraqi Government is to succeed in bringing stability to that country.

So there is much in this bill that I support, but despite that, I do not support the funding to continue the military operations in Iraq, and I will vote against this bill unless it contains the provision relating to the withdrawal of our forces, which is similar to legislation which narrowly lost in the Senate last week. I voted for it then, and I will vote for it again.

The withdrawal provision in this bill is not, in some respects, as definitive as what passed the House by the slimmest of margins last Friday. Like many others, I would have written it differently. I wanted a deadline for commencement of the withdrawal of our forces but also for completing it within a target date. I have cosponsored legislation that contains such a

deadline. But this provision represents a 90-degree change of course from the President's policy of escalation in the middle of a civil war. It is our best hope of obtaining the majority of votes needed to begin that process. So I am confident that once the withdrawal of our troops begins, there will be no turning back.

We have to remove our troops from the Iraq civil war. That argument has been made eloquently, including by former senior military officers whose credibility is unimpeachable. Retired LTG William Odom, in an op-ed piece of February 11 in the Washington Post, said it better than I ever could. It is the only way the Iraqis will make the difficult political compromises that can save their country from further destruction.

The President has threatened to veto this bill if the troop withdrawal provision is included. That is not surprising for a White House that has stubbornly refused to change course even in the face of dwindling support from the American people whose sons and daughters are dying. For more than 4 years, President Bush, Vice President CHENEY and former Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld, backed by a rubberstamp Congress, made one incompetent decision after another, arrogantly insisting they knew best and dismissing anyone who so much as questioned their policy for "not supporting the troops." It has been reminiscent of the old "soft on communism" and "soft on drugs" refrains that were used, and still are used, for political purposes to justify failed policies.

None of us should be intimidated by these worn out arguments. If they want to show their support of the troops, they should do something about our VA system. Fix up Walter Reed and fix up the other facilities where we are not giving proper help to our wounded soldiers when they return from Iraq. We Democrats want to support those troops, too, and not just to be at the parades when they go over but to be there to help them when they come back. If this administration wants to support the troops, it should have given them the equipment, the training, and the armor they still don't get in a war that has lasted longer than World War II. And they should take care of the wounded whose bodies, minds and lives have been shattered.

None of us should have confidence in a failed war effort that has already wrought enormous toll in American blood, treasure, and credibility, not after the fiasco this White House has wrought. It is time for the Congress to act as the voice and the conscience of the American people.

Mr. President, I reserve the remainder of my time.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. The senior Senator from Pennsylvania.

Mr. SPECTER. Mr. President, I have sought recognition to urge my colleagues to support the nomination of