

together to meet the challenge and successfully conclude our policies to create a better, positive, democratic, and prosperous future for Iraq. We must pull together and focus on the goal we endorsed when the war started.

I thank the Chair. I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Ms. MURKOWSKI). The Senator from Rhode Island.

(The remarks of Mr. REED pertaining to the introduction of S. 1989 are printed in today's RECORD under "Statements on Introduced Bills and Joint Resolutions.")

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Washington.

VETERANS DAY

Mrs. MURRAY. Madam President, tomorrow our country is going to be celebrating Veterans Day. Together, across the country, we will be honoring the service and sacrifice that so many Americans have made to keep all of us safe and free.

Tomorrow, in the State of Washington, I am going to join with local veterans at a breakfast for the Compass Center, which provides services to homeless veterans.

I will be at a "Service of Remembrance" at the Evergreen-Washelli Memorial Park in Seattle, and I will visit the Washington Soldiers Home in Pierce County.

I am looking forward to those events and the chance to share my thanks with those who have sacrificed so much.

Veterans Day is not just a ceremonial holiday. It is not just an occasion for us to thank others for what they have done for us. It is also a time to ask if we have done enough for those who serve our country. And that is a very timely occasion today with so many veterans coming home from places such as Iraq and Afghanistan, and with an aging veterans population that needs more care today.

So today I ask: Are we keeping our promise to those who served our country? Do our politicians and our budgets reflect the great debt that we owe to so many veterans?

I want to try to answer that question by looking at how we treat our veterans who need health care and how we budget for their needs and how we treat our Guard and Reserve members.

First of all, we recognize we have an obligation to those who serve us. When they signed up to serve our country, we agreed to take care of them. They kept their part of the bargain, and now we need to keep ours.

In my home State of Washington, we have made a tremendous contribution to that effort. I am sad to report that 102 servicemembers from Washington State have made the ultimate sacrifice on behalf of our Nation in this war in Iraq. They have earned a place of eternal honor in a rollcall of freedom.

We owe them and their families a debt that can never be fully repaid.

Many other veterans have come home to us with serious injuries, both visible and invisible. They need our help as well.

Today, more than 6,500 Washington State citizens are serving in Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom.

Since 2001, more than 1 million Americans have served in Iraq and Afghanistan, and of those 20,000 have been from my home State of Washington.

Back in March, I traveled to Iraq and Kuwait. I had the opportunity to meet with a number of our Washington State National Guard who are serving our country there. I saw firsthand they were all operating under tremendously difficult and dangerous conditions. I also saw how every one of them was professional and fully committed to completing their mission.

We need to do right by everyone who serves us because we made a promise and because it keeps our military strong. The way we treat our veterans today affects our ability to recruit new soldiers tomorrow. But don't take my word for it. Listen to what George Washington once said:

The willingness with which our young people are likely to serve in any war, no matter how justified, shall be directly proportional as to how they perceive the Veterans of earlier wars were treated and appreciated by their country.

Those are the words of George Washington. They are just as true today as when he said them.

Let's look at how well we are keeping our promise, starting with health care. We can all be proud the VA provides some of the best health care available anywhere in America. We have a great health care system in the VA, but we don't fund it like a priority. Every year it is a struggle to get Congress to provide the funding that is needed. That is why we need to make veterans health care spending mandatory so it is not subject to budget games every year.

This year we had a big fight to make sure veterans did not lose their health care. Starting last February, I began warning that the lines were growing at the VA and we needed to do more. I pointed to the many veterans who were returning home from Iraq and Afghanistan who needed care. Three times I offered amendments to boost VA funding in the Senate. And three times they were voted down. For months the VA and the administration assured us that everything was fine.

But then in June we learned that the VA was facing a massive shortfall of \$1 billion. Again, I introduced a bill to provide the \$1.5 billion in supplemental that the VA needed for funding. That time it passed.

Today, the House and the Senate are in negotiations to set the final veterans health care budget for fiscal year 2006. I am very concerned we will not provide enough funding. Yesterday, I joined with leaders from six national veterans service organizations to send

a message. Together, we said we are watching. We expect the House and the Senate to keep their commitment to America's veterans. Any dollar below the Senate level is \$1 taken away from a veteran. It is a VA clinic that will not be constructed. It is a VA doctor who will not be hired. It is a veteran who doesn't get the care America promised them when they enlisted. We cannot leave our veterans without care; we have to stick with the Senate budget in the final appropriations bill.

I am also very concerned about how we treat those who have challenges such as post-traumatic stress disorder. Instead of focusing on getting help to those who need it, today the VA is moving to scrutinize and stigmatize our veterans with post-traumatic stress syndrome. That is why I worked with Senators DURBIN and OBAMA to put language into the Senate VA bill that will require the VA to explain its plan to Congress and to hold veterans harmless, except, of course, in cases of fraud. Those protections have to stay in the final bill that emerges from this conference. We will be watching.

As I think about the way we treat veterans health care, it is pretty clear we need to do two more things. First of all, the VA has to provide an accurate accounting of how it is spending the money we have provided. It needs to give us a clear picture of the needs it is seeing throughout the country. Second, the Bush administration needs to start sending realistic budgets, no more gimmicks, no games—send a 2007 budget that is based on real numbers and real needs. They need to send a budget that takes care of both our aging veterans and our veterans of current operations. When I look at our budget and our priorities, I know we have a lot more work to do to keep our promise to our American veterans.

Another area that concerns me is how we are treating our Guard and Reserve members, especially when they come home from the battle front. In this war, we are relying on Guard and Reserve heavily. It is estimated that 40 percent of those on the ground in Iraq are citizen soldiers. Unfortunately, today the support services for the Guard have not kept pace with the way we are now relying on them in this war. They did not often have access to employment services or job training or family support or health care when they return home.

This past summer, I held a series of roundtables around the State of Washington. I heard from Guard and Reserve members who had come home, who could not find a doctor that accepts TRICARE. I heard about reservists who returned home and fell through the cracks without the payments or support they were promised. I heard from veterans who could not find a job when they came home to this country after serving so honorably.

Our transition services are left over from the Cold War. They do not work for a military that now today relies so

heavily on Guard and Reserve members. I fear this administration is moving the cost of war on to businesses and families who are our Guard members. I believe they have already sacrificed enough. To do our part, we have to update transition and employment services that we bring to the returning Guard and Reserve members.

As I evaluate today how we were treating our veterans, one thing is clear to me: America's military personnel are providing the highest level of service to our country, but we have got some work to do to make sure our support of them, when they come home, is equal to the service they have provided. I am committing to keep a promise our country has made. I ask for the support and leadership of every member of the Senate to do the same. We owe our veterans nothing less.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Massachusetts.

Mr. KENNEDY. Madam President, I commend my friend from the State of Washington for an excellent statement and comment. She has been a tireless worker in terms of veterans' rights. Listening to her today, reminds us once again about our responsibility to them. I commend her for her excellent presentation. I certainly want to work with her in every possible way to make sure those efforts are achieved for people not only in the State of Washington and Massachusetts but all across the country.

Madam President, how much time remains?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Seven-teen minutes remains.

Mr. KENNEDY. I ask the Chair to let me know when 1 minute is remaining.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Chair will notify the Senator.

IRAQ

Mr. KENNEDY. Earlier this week, Madam President, several of our Republican colleagues came to the Senate and attempted to blame individual Democratic Senators for their errors in judgment about the war in Iraq. It was little more than a devious attempt to obscure the facts and take the focus off the real reason we went to war in Iraq. Madam President, 150,000 American troops are bogged down in a quagmire in Iraq because the Bush administration misrepresented and distorted the intelligence to justify a war that America never should have fought. The President wrongly and repeatedly insisted that it was too dangerous to ignore the weapons of mass destruction in the hands of Saddam Hussein and his ties to al-Qaida.

If his march to war, President Bush exaggerated the threat to the American people. It was not subtle. It was not nuanced. It was pure, unadulterated fear mongering based on a devious strategy to convince the American people that Saddam's ability to provide nuclear weapons to al-Qaida justified immediate war.

The administration officials suggested the threat from Iraq was imminent and went to great lengths to convince the American people that it was. At a roundtable discussion with European journalists last month, Secretary Rumsfeld deviously insisted:

I never said imminent threat.

In fact, Secretary Rumsfeld told the House Committee on Armed Services on September 18, 2002:

... some have argued that the nuclear threat from Iraq is not imminent—that Saddam Hussein is at least 5-7 years away from having nuclear weapons. I would not be so certain.

In May of 2003, White House spokesman Ari Fleischer was asked whether we went to war because we said WMD were a direct and imminent threat to the United States. And Fleischer responded, "Absolutely."

What else could National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice have been suggesting other than an imminent threat, extremely imminent threat when she said on September 2, 2002:

We don't want the smoking gun to be a mushroom cloud.

President Bush himself may not have used the word "imminent," but he carefully chose strong and loaded words about the nature of the threat, words that the intelligence community never used to persuade and prepare the Nation to go to war against Iraq.

In the Rose Garden on October 2, 2002, as Congress was preparing to vote on authorizing the war, the President said the Iraqi regime "is a threat of unique urgency."

In a speech in Cincinnati on October 7, President Bush specifically invoked the dangers of nuclear devastation:

Facing clear evidence of peril, we cannot wait for the final proof—the smoking gun—that could come in the form of a mushroom cloud.

At an appearance in New Mexico on October 28, 2002, after Congress had voted to authorize war and a week before the election, President Bush said Iraq is a "real and dangerous threat."

At a NATO summit on November 20, 2002, President Bush said Iraq posed a "unique and urgent threat."

In Ft. Hood, TX, on January 3, 2003, President Bush called the Iraqi regime "a grave threat."

Nuclear weapons. Mushroom cloud. Unique and urgent threat. Real and dangerous threat. Grave threat. These words were the administration's rallying cry to war. But they were not the words of the intelligence community, which never suggested the threat from Saddam was imminent or immediate or urgent.

It was Vice President CHENEY who first laid out the trumped-up argument for war with Iraq to an unsuspecting public. In a speech on August 26, 2002, to the Veterans of Foreign Wars, he asserted:

... We now know that Saddam has resumed his efforts to acquire nuclear weapons ... Many of us are convinced that Saddam will acquire nuclear weapons fairly soon.

As we now know, the intelligence community was far from certain. Yet the Vice President had been convinced.

On September 8, 2002, he was even more emphatic about Saddam. He said:

[we] do know, with absolute certainty, that he is using his procurement system to acquire the equipment he needs in order to enrich uranium to build nuclear weapons.

The intelligence community was deeply divided about the aluminum tubes, but Vice President CHENEY was absolutely certain.

One month later, on the eve of the watershed vote by Congress to authorize the war, President Bush said it even more vividly. He said:

Iraq has attempted to purchase high strength aluminum tubes ... which are used to enrich uranium for nuclear weapons. If the Iraqi regime is able to produce, buy, or steal an amount of highly enriched uranium a little larger than a single softball, you can have a nuclear weapon in less than a year. And if we allow that to happen, a terrible line would be crossed ... Saddam would be in a position to pass nuclear technology to terrorists.

In fact, as we now know, the intelligence community was far from convinced of any such threat. The administration attempted to conceal that fact by classifying the information and the dissents within the intelligence community until after the war, even while making dramatic and excessive public statements about the immediacy of the danger.

In October of 2002, the intelligence agencies jointly issued a national intelligence estimate stating that "most agencies" believe that Iraq had restarted its nuclear program after inspectors left in 1998 and that if left unchecked, Iraq "probably will have a nuclear weapon during this decade."

The State Department's intelligence bureau, however, said the "available evidence" was inadequate to support that judgment. It refused to predict when "Iraq could acquire a nuclear device or weapon."

About the claims of purchases of nuclear material from Africa, the State Department's intelligence bureau said that claims of Iraq seeking to purchase nuclear material from Africa were "highly dubious." The CIA sent two memoranda to the White House stressing strong doubts about those claims. But the following January 2003, the President included the claims about Africa in his State of the Union Address and conspicuously cited the British Government as the source of that intelligence.

Information about nuclear weapons was not the only intelligence distorted by the administration. On the question of whether Iraq was pursuing a chemical weapons program, the Defense Intelligence Agency concluded in September 2002 that:

... there is no reliable information on whether Iraq is producing and stockpiling chemical weapons, or whether Iraq has—or will—establish its chemical warfare agent production facilities.

That same month, however, Secretary Rumsfeld told the Committee on