

trust and reliance. Today, we salute one such pillar. The senior Senator from West Virginia enters the record books as the longest serving Senator.

Note, I say that he enters the record books, not the history books. I say that because I expect the senior Senator from West Virginia to be making history on this floor for many years to come.

In an earlier time, we would have called ROBERT BYRD a renaissance man in the mold of such American luminaries as Jefferson or Franklin. Consider that he is a poet, an accomplished musician, an author, the foremost historian of this Chamber, a parliamentary expert, an intensely devout Christian, an unrivaled legislator, a scholar of our Constitution, and earned a J.D. while a Member of this Chamber.

Yet all of these accomplishments as an individual are dwarfed by what he has done and will continue to do for the people of West Virginia. He has brought new industries like biotechnology, biometrics and other high tech, high skilled work to West Virginia. He has fought for dams, roadways, hospitals, and highways. It is hard to imagine that one man might have such a transformative impact on a State. Yet friend and foe alike would concede this point to ROBERT BYRD.

I say today that Senator BYRD becomes America's senior Senator. In many ways, he always has been. No man or woman more rigorously defends the role of this Chamber in our governmental structure, and no man or woman fights more ardently to preserve that beautiful document he carries in his breast pocket—the U.S. Constitution. One of the first things I did when I was sworn in as a Member of this body was to take the whole Landrieu family to see Senator BYRD and have him give us a talk on the Constitution and the role of the Senate.

For the last 6 years, it has been my pleasure to serve under Senator BYRD's leadership on the Senate Appropriations Committee. In that capacity, he has proven repeatedly that he is a friend to the people of Louisiana and understands the tragedy that has befallen them. I thank him for that help and friendship.

Of course, I would be remiss if I didn't mention that today is a bitter-sweet anniversary, for it is also Erma's birthday. A woman whose life, and now memory, Senator BYRD so obviously cherished.

So, Mr. President, I thank America's senior Senator for his service to this country and for his friendship.

I conclude my remarks, as he so often does, with a verse of poetry—one of the Senator's favorites—the final verse of "The Building of the Ship" by Longfellow:

Thou, too, sail on, O Ship of State!  
Sail on, O UNION, strong and great!  
Humanity with all its fears,  
With all the hopes of future years,  
Is hanging breathless on thy fate!  
We know what Master laid thy keel,

What Workmen wrought thy ribs of steel,  
Who made each mast, and sail, and rope,  
What anvils rang, what hammers beat,  
In what a forge and what a heat  
Were shaped the anchors of thy hope!  
Fear not each sudden sound and shock,  
'Tis of the wave and not the rock;  
'Tis but the flapping of the sail,  
And not a rent made by the gale!  
In spite of rock and tempest's roar,  
In spite of false lights on the shore,  
Sail on, nor fear to breast the sea  
Our hearts, our hopes, are all with thee,  
Our hearts, our hopes, our prayers, our tears,  
Our faith triumphant o'er our fears,  
Are all with thee,—are all with thee!

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Hawaii is recognized.

Mr. AKAKA. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that I have 5 minutes in morning business.

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

#### EMERGENCY SUPPLEMENTAL APPROPRIATIONS

Mr. AKAKA. Mr. President, I note my deep disappointment that the conference agreement for the emergency supplemental appropriations bill now pending before the Senate does not include the supplemental funding for VA health care that was included in the Senate-passed measure.

Despite the fact that the Senate spoke strongly on the need to ensure that VA has enough resources during the balance of this fiscal year to be able to treat our Nation's veterans in an effective and timely manner, my amendment to add \$430 million to the VA health care account was not included in the final compromise.

Back in April and May, when we debated the supplemental appropriations measure here in the Senate, I was delighted that my amendment, cosponsored by 21 of our colleagues, to secure a relatively modest amount of emergency funding for VA health care was included in the legislation. The reasons we gave then in support of this funding were clear, and they remain so today.

First, Vet Centers and other mental health programs need to be given more support if VA is to continue to be able to reach out to veterans in need of re-adjustment counseling or other psychological treatment, especially those returning from service in a war zone.

Secondly, across the VA system, facilities need some additional funding to ensure that VA is able to continue to provide quality of care and availability of services for all veterans.

At the time of the Senate debate, after a slight modification to the amendment so as to require the President to request the emergency funding in order for VA to receive it, the Senate voted 84-13 to adopt the amendment and include it as part of the supplemental package.

My colleagues indicated their overwhelming support of the measure through that vote. In light of that show of support, the failure to include this VA funding in the pending meas-

ure is all the more regrettable, all the more unacceptable.

Having just traveled to Iraq to see for myself what the situation is like on the ground there, I am even more steadfast in my belief that VA must have the resources it needs to care for returning servicemembers.

Programs to transition our men and women in uniform who require mental health, prosthetic rehabilitation, or other specialty health care services back into civilian life are a clear, continuing part of the overall cost of war. These services are more important than ever, and we must do our part to support them.

Although we did not succeed in keeping this additional funding in this measure, we will not give up the fight and will do our utmost to ensure that VA has the funding it needs.

Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. VITTER). Without objection, it is so ordered.

#### IRAQ

Mr. BOND. Mr. President, I rise to talk about all of the interesting things going on in Iraq. We saw yesterday the surprise, very important visit by the President to the new Iraqi Cabinet under Premier Nouri Kamal al-Maliki. This marks one more significant step in efforts to bring national unity to Iraq. We all must remember that just a few short years ago, Iraq was ruled by a murderous tyrant, Saddam Hussein. According to the Iraqi Survey Group's Charles Dilfer, Iraq was a far more dangerous place even than we knew. We may not have had the intelligence right, but the intelligence was focusing on the fact of how dangerous this place was. Dilfer said that Iraq was overrun with terrorists, like Abu Musab al-Zarqawi who was then in al-Ansar Islam and later changed that to al-Qaida in Iraq, the butcher who brazenly beheaded innocent Americans and others on television.

Dilfer said that Saddam Hussein had the ability to produce chemical and biological weapons that he had in the past and he was willing and able to sell them to terrorists who could deliver them to our country. This milestone, unfortunately, received not enough attention or appreciation in the media. This is not an isolated example of people trying to downplay good news in Iraq. As Peter Wehner wrote in the Wall Street Journal on May 23:

Iraqis can participate in three historic elections, pass the most liberal constitution in the Arab world, and form a unit government despite terrorist attacks and provocations. Yet, for some critics of the President, these are minor matters.

We have seen time and again the focus of our media, and thus, what many Americans hear is just the killings, the slaughter of innocents in bombings and suicide attacks. We read the tragic stories of the loss of Americans. But the real story, when you talk to our troops on the ground, is how much good they have been doing. They have been completing their mission. They have been pacifying large areas of the country. Schools and hospitals are being built. Women are enjoying newfound freedom. Yet for television, if it bleeds, it leads. That is the only stuff we hear about.

We are told of massacres and chaos, but we aren't told that millions of Iraqis who fled to other countries as refugees by the millions in past years under Saddam Hussein are returning; 1.2 million refugees have returned to their homes. We rarely see positive stories about seminaries which, under Saddam, held only a few dozen students and now have 15,000 pupils from 40 different countries. We don't read about the increase in the value of the Iraqi dinar, the record number of media outlets, the tremendous growth in small businesses forming the economic foundation for Iraq, and the revival of Iraqi agriculture. These stories were told very well by a well-known Iranian journalist, Amir Taheri, who published an article in *Commentary* magazine available on their Web site talking about how Iraq has improved—a man who has watched Iraq for 40 years.

I ask unanimous consent that this article be printed in the RECORD.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

THE REAL IRAQ  
(by Amir Taheri)

Spending time in the United States after a tour of Iraq can be a disorienting experience these days. Within hours of arriving here, as I can attest from a recent visit, one is confronted with an image of Iraq that is unrecognizable. It is created in several overlapping ways: through television footage showing the charred remains of vehicles used in suicide attacks, surrounded by wailing women in black and grim-looking men carrying coffins; by armchair strategists and political gurus predicting further doom or pontificating about how the war should have been fought in the first place; by authors of instant-history books making their rounds to dissect the various fundamental mistakes committed by the Bush administration; and by reporters, cocooned in hotels in Baghdad, explaining the carnage and chaos in the streets as signs of the country's impending or undeclared civil war. Add to all this the day's alleged scandal or revelation—an outed CIA operative, a reportedly doctored intelligence report, a leaked pessimistic assessment and it is no wonder the American public registers disillusion with Iraq and everyone who embroiled the U.S. in its troubles.

It would be hard indeed for the average interested citizen to find out on his own just how grossly this image distorts the realities of present-day Iraq. Part of the problem, faced by even the most well-meaning news organizations, is the difficulty of covering so large and complex a subject; naturally, in such circumstances, sensational items rise

to the top. But even ostensibly more objective efforts, like the Brookings Institution's much-cited Iraq Index with its constantly updated array of security, economic, and public-opinion indicators, tell us little about the actual feel of the country on the ground.

To make matters worse, many of the newsmen, pundits, and commentators on whom American viewers and readers rely to describe the situation have been contaminated by the increasing bitterness of American politics. Clearly there are those in the media and the think tanks who wish the Iraq enterprise to end in tragedy, as a just comeuppance for George W. Bush. Others, prompted by noble sentiment, so abhor the idea of war that they would banish it from human discourse before admitting that, in some circumstances, military power can be used in support of a good cause. But whatever the reason, the half-truths and outright misinformation that now function as conventional wisdom have gravely disserved the American people.

For someone like myself who has spent considerable time in Iraq—a country I first visited in 1968—current reality there is, nevertheless, very different from this conventional wisdom, and so are the prospects for Iraq's future. It helps to know where to look, what sources to trust, and how to evaluate the present moment against the background of Iraqi and Middle Eastern history.

Since my first encounter with Iraq almost 40 years ago, I have relied on several broad measures of social and economic health to assess the country's condition. Through good times and bad, these signs have proved remarkably accurate—as accurate, that is, as is possible in human affairs. For some time now, all have been pointing in an unequivocally positive direction.

The first sign is refugees. When things have been truly desperate in Iraq—in 1959, 1969, 1971, 1973, 1980, 1988, and 1990—long queues of Iraqis have formed at the Turkish and Iranian frontiers, hoping to escape. In 1973, for example, when Saddam Hussein decided to expel all those whose ancestors had not been Ottoman citizens before Iraq's creation as a state, some 1.2 million Iraqis left their homes in the space of just six weeks. This was not the temporary exile of a small group of middle-class professionals and intellectuals, which is a common enough phenomenon in most Arab countries. Rather, it was a departure en masse, affecting people both in small villages and in big cities, and it was a scene regularly repeated under Saddam Hussein.

Since the toppling of Saddam in 2003, this is one highly damaging image we have not seen on our television sets—and we can be sure that we would be seeing it if it were there to be shown. To the contrary, Iraqis, far from fleeing, have been returning home. By the end of 2005, in the most conservative estimate, the number of returnees topped the 1.2-million mark. Many of the camps set up for fleeing Iraqis in Turkey, Iran, and Saudi Arabia since 1959 have now closed down. The oldest such center, at Ashrafiyah in southwest Iran, was formally shut when its last Iraqi guests returned home in 2004.

A second dependable sign likewise concerns human movement, but of a different kind. This is the flow of religious pilgrims to the Shiite shrines in Karbala and Najaf. Whenever things start to go badly in Iraq, this stream is reduced to a trickle and then it dries up completely. From 1991 (when Saddam Hussein massacred Shiites involved in a revolt against him) to 2003, there were scarcely any pilgrims to these cities. Since Saddam's fall, they have been flooded with visitors. In 2005, the holy sites received an estimated 12 million pilgrims, making them the most visited spots in the entire Muslim world, ahead of both Mecca and Medina.

Over 3,000 Iraqi clerics have also returned from exile, and Shiite seminaries, which just a few years ago held no more than a few dozen pupils, now boast over 15,000 from 40 different countries. This is because Najaf, the oldest center of Shiite scholarship, is once again able to offer an alternative to Qom, the Iranian holy city where a radical and highly politicized version of Shiism is taught. Those wishing to pursue the study of more traditional and quietist forms of Shiism now go to Iraq where, unlike in Iran, the seminaries are not controlled by the government and its secret police.

A third sign, this one of the hard economic variety, is the value of the Iraqi dinar, especially as compared with the region's other major currencies. In the final years of Saddam Hussein's rule, the Iraqi dinar was in free fall; after 1995, it was no longer even traded in Iran and Kuwait. By contrast, the new dinar, introduced early in 2004, is doing well against both the Kuwaiti dinar and the Iranian rial, having risen by 17 percent against the former and by 23 percent against the latter. Although it is still impossible to fix its value against a basket of international currencies, the new Iraqi dinar has done well against the U.S. dollar, increasing in value by almost 18 percent between August 2004 and August 2005. The overwhelming majority of Iraqis, and millions of Iranians and Kuwaitis, now treat it as a safe and solid medium of exchange.

My fourth time-tested sign is the level of activity by small and medium-sized businesses. In the past, whenever things have gone downhill in Iraq, large numbers of such enterprises have simply closed down, with the country's most capable entrepreneurs decamping to Jordan, Syria, Saudi Arabia, the Persian Gulf states, Turkey, Iran, and even Europe and North America. Since liberation, however, Iraq has witnessed a private-sector boom, especially among small and medium-sized businesses.

According to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank, as well as numerous private studies, the Iraqi economy has been doing better than any other in the region. The country's gross domestic product rose to almost \$90 billion in 2004 (the latest year for which figures are available), more than double the output for 2003, and its real growth rate, as estimated by the IMF, was 52.3 percent. In that same period, exports increased by more than \$3 billion, while the inflation rate fell to 25.4 percent, down from 70 percent in 2002. The unemployment rate was halved, from 60 percent to 30 percent.

Related to this is the level of agricultural activity. Between 1991 and 2003, the country's farm sector experienced unprecedented decline, in the end leaving almost the entire nation dependent on rations distributed by the United Nations under Oil-for-Food. In the past two years, by contrast, Iraqi agriculture has undergone an equally unprecedented revival. Iraq now exports foodstuffs to neighboring countries, something that has not happened since the 1950s. Much of the upturn is due to smallholders who, shaking off the collectivist system imposed by the Baathists, have retaken control of land that was confiscated decades ago by the state.

Finally, one of the surest indices of the health of Iraqi society has always been its readiness to talk to the outside world. Iraqis are a verbalizing people; when they fall silent, life is incontrovertibly becoming hard for them. There have been times, indeed, when one could find scarcely a single Iraqi, whether in Iraq or abroad, prepared to express an opinion on anything remotely political. This is what Kanan Makiya meant when he described Saddam Hussein's regime as a republic of fear.

Today, again by way of dramatic contrast, Iraqis are voluble to a fault. Talk radio, television talk-shows, and Internet blogs are all the rage, while heated debate is the order of the day in shops, tea-houses, bazaars, mosques, offices, and private homes. A catharsis is how Luay Abdulillah, the Iraqi short-story writer and diarist, describes it. This is one way of taking revenge against decades of deadly silence. Moreover, a vast network of independent media has emerged in Iraq, including over 100 privately owned newspapers and magazines and more than two dozen radio and television stations. To anyone familiar with the state of the media in the Arab world, it is a truism that Iraq today is the place where freedom of expression is most effectively exercised.

That an experienced observer of Iraq with a sense of history can point to so many positive factors in the country's present condition will not do much, of course, to sway the more determined critics of the U.S. intervention there. They might even agree that the images fed to the American public show only part of the picture, and that the news from Iraq is not uniformly bad. But the root of their opposition runs deeper, to political fundamentals.

Their critique can be summarized in the aphorism that democracy cannot be imposed by force. It is a view that can be found among the more sophisticated elements on the Left and, increasingly, among dissenters on the Right, from Senator Chuck Hagel of Nebraska to the ex-neoconservative Francis Fukuyama. As Senator Hagel puts it, You cannot in my opinion just impose a democratic form of government on a country with no history and no culture and no tradition of democracy.

I would tend to agree. But is Iraq such a place? In point of fact, before the 1958 pro-Soviet military coup d'état that established a leftist dictatorship, Iraq did have its modest but nevertheless significant share of democratic history, culture, and tradition. The country came into being through a popular referendum held in 1921. A constitutional monarchy modeled on the United Kingdom, it had a bicameral parliament, several political parties (including the Baath and the Communists), and periodic elections that led to changes of policy and government. At the time, Iraq also enjoyed the freest press in the Arab world, plus the widest space for debate and dissent in the Muslim Middle East.

To be sure, Baghdad in those days was no Westminster, and, as the 1958 coup proved, Iraqi democracy was fragile. But every serious student of contemporary Iraq knows that substantial segments of the population, from all ethnic and religious communities, had more than a taste of the modern world's democratic aspirations. As evidence, one need only consult the immense literary and artistic production of Iraqis both before and after the 1958 coup. Under successor dictatorial regimes, it is true, the conviction took hold that democratic principles had no future in Iraq—a conviction that was responsible in large part for driving almost five million Iraqis, a quarter of the population, into exile between 1958 and 2003, just as the opposite conviction is attracting so many of them and their children back to Iraq today.

A related argument used to condemn Iraq's democratic prospects is that it is an artificial country, one that can be held together only by a dictator. But did any nation-state fall from the heavens wholly made? All are to some extent artificial creations, and the U.S. is preeminently so. The truth is that Iraq—one of the 53 founding countries of the United Nations—is older than a majority of that organizations' current 198 member states. Within the Arab League, and setting aside Oman and Yemen, none of the 22 mem-

bers is older. Two-thirds of the 122 countries regarded as democracies by Freedom House came into being after Iraq's appearance on the map.

Critics of the democratic project in Iraq also claim that, because it is a multi-ethnic and multi-confessional state, the country is doomed to despotism, civil war, or disintegration. But the same could be said of virtually all Middle Eastern states, most of which are neither multi-ethnic nor multi-confessional. More important, all Iraqis, regardless of their ethnic, linguistic, and sectarian differences, share a sense of national identity—*urruqa* (Iraqi-ness)—that has developed over the past eight decades. A unified, federal state may still come to grief in Iraq—history is not written in advance—but even should a divorce become inevitable at some point, a democratic Iraq would be in a better position to manage it.

What all of this demonstrates is that, contrary to received opinion, Operation Iraqi Freedom was not an attempt to impose democracy by force. Rather, it was an effort to use force to remove impediments to democratization, primarily by deposing a tyrant who had utterly suppressed a well-established aspect of the country's identity. It may take years before we know for certain whether or not post-liberation Iraq has definitely chosen democracy. But one thing is certain: without the use of force to remove the Baathist regime, the people of Iraq would not have had the opportunity even to contemplate a democratic future.

Assessing the progress of that democratic project is no simple matter. But, by any reasonable standard, Iraqis have made extraordinary strides. In a series of municipal polls and two general elections in the past three years, up to 70 percent of eligible Iraqis have voted. This new orientation is supported by more than 60 political parties and organizations, the first genuinely free-trade unions in the Arab world, a growing number of professional associations acting independently of the state, and more than 400 nongovernmental organizations representing diverse segments of civil society. A new constitution, written by Iraqis representing the full spectrum of political, ethnic, and religious sensibilities was overwhelmingly approved by the electorate in a referendum last October.

Iraq's new democratic reality is also reflected in the vocabulary of politics used at every level of society. Many new words—accountability, transparency, pluralism, dissent—have entered political discourse in Iraq for the first time. More remarkably, perhaps, all parties and personalities currently engaged in the democratic process have committed themselves to the principle that power should be sought, won, and lost only through free and fair elections.

These democratic achievements are especially impressive when set side by side with the declared aims of the enemies of the new Iraq, who have put up a determined fight against it. Since the country's liberation, the jihadists and residual Baathists have killed an estimated 23,000 Iraqis, mostly civilians, in scores of random attacks and suicide operations. Indirectly, they have caused the death of thousands more, by sabotaging water and electricity services and by provoking sectarian revenge attacks.

But they have failed to translate their talent for mayhem and murder into political success. Their campaign has not succeeded in appreciably slowing down, let alone stopping, the country's democratization. Indeed, at each step along the way, the jihadists and Baathists have seen their self-declared objectives thwarted.

After the invasion, they tried at first to prevent the formation of a Governing Coun-

cil, the expression of Iraq's continued existence as a sovereign nation-state. They managed to murder several members of the council, including its president in 2003, but failed to prevent its formation or to keep it from performing its task in the interim period. The next aim of the insurgents was to stop municipal elections. Their message was simple: candidates and voters would be killed. But, once again, they failed: thousands of men and women came forward as candidates and more than 1.5 million Iraqis voted in the localities where elections were held.

The insurgency made similar threats in the lead-up to the first general election, and the result was the same. Despite killing 36 candidates and 148 voters, they failed to derail the balloting, in which the number of voters rose to more than 8 million. Nor could the insurgency prevent the writing of the new democratic constitution, despite a campaign of assassination against its drafters. The text was ready in time and was submitted to and approved by a referendum, exactly as planned. The number of voters rose yet again, to more than 9 million.

What of relations among the Shiites, Sunnis, and Kurds the focus of so much attention of late? For almost three years, the insurgency worked hard to keep the Arab Sunni community, which accounts for some 15 percent of the population, out of the political process. But that campaign collapsed when millions of Sunnis turned out to vote in the constitutional referendum and in the second general election, which saw almost 11 million Iraqis go to the polls. As I write, all political parties representing the Arab Sunni minority have joined the political process and have strong representation in the new parliament. With the convening of that parliament, and the nomination in April of a new prime minister and a three-man presidential council, the way is open for the formation of a broad-based government of national unity to lead Iraq over the next four years.

As for the insurgency's effort to foment sectarian violence strategy first launched in earnest toward the end of 2005 this too has run aground. The hope here was to provoke a full-scale war between the Arab Sunni minority and the Arab Shiites who account for some 60 percent of the population. The new strategy, like the ones previously tried, has certainly produced many deaths. But despite countless cases of sectarian killings by so-called militias, there is still no sign that the Shiites as a whole will acquiesce in the role assigned them by the insurgency and organize a concerted campaign of nationwide retaliation.

Finally, despite the impression created by relentlessly dire reporting in the West, the insurgency has proved unable to shut down essential government services. Hundreds of teachers and schoolchildren have been killed in incidents including the beheading of two teachers in their classrooms this April and horrific suicide attacks against school buses. But by September 2004, most schools across Iraq and virtually all universities were open and functioning. By September 2005, more than 8.5 million Iraqi children and young people were attending school or university, an all-time record in the nation's history.

A similar story applies to Iraq's clinics and hospitals. Between October 2003 and January 2006, more than 80 medical doctors and over 400 nurses and medical auxiliaries were murdered by the insurgents. The jihadists also raided several hospitals, killing ordinary patients in their beds. But, once again, they failed in their objectives. By January 2006, all of Iraq's 600 state-owned hospitals and clinics were in full operation, along with dozens of new ones set up by the private sector since liberation.

Another of the insurgency's strategic goals was to bring the Iraqi oil industry to a halt and to disrupt the export of crude. Since July 2003, Iraq's oil infrastructure has been the target of more than 3,000 attacks and attempts at sabotage. But once more the insurgency has failed to achieve its goals. Iraq has resumed its membership in the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and has returned to world markets as a major oil exporter. According to projections, by the end of 2006 it will be producing its full OPEC quota of 2.8 million barrels a day.

The Baathist remnant and its jihadist allies resemble a gambler who wins a heap of chips at a roulette table only to discover that he cannot exchange them for real money at the front desk. The enemies of the new Iraq have succeeded in ruining the lives of tens of thousands of Iraqis, but over the past three years they have advanced their overarching goals, such as they are, very little. Instead they have been militarily contained and politically defeated again and again, the beneficiary has been Iraqi democracy.

None of this means that the new Iraq is out of the woods. Far from it. Democratic success still requires a great deal of patience, determination, and luck. The U.S.-led coalition, its allies, and partners have achieved most of their major political objectives, but that achievement remains under threat and could be endangered if the U.S., for whatever reason, should decide to snatch a defeat from the jaws of victory.

The current mandate of the U.S.-led coalition runs out at the end of this year, and it is unlikely that Washington and its allies will want to maintain their military presence at current levels. In the past few months, more than half of the 103 bases used by the coalition have been transferred to the new Iraqi army. The best guess is that the number of U.S. and coalition troops could be cut from 140,000 to 25,000 or 30,000 by the end of 2007.

One might wonder why, if the military mission has been so successful, the U.S. still needs to maintain a military presence in Iraq for at least another two years. There are three reasons for this.

The first is to discourage Iraq's predatory neighbors, notably Iran and Syria, which might wish to pursue their own agendas against the new government in Baghdad. Iran has already revived some claims under the Treaties of Erzerum (1846), according to which Tehran would enjoy a *droit de regard* over Shiite shrines in Iraq. In Syria, some in that country's ruling circles have invoked the possibility of annexing the area known as Jazirah, the so-called Sunni triangle, in the name of Arab unity. For its part, Turkey is making noises about the Treaty of Lausanne (1923), which gave it a claim to the oilfields of northern Iraq. All of these pretensions need to be rebuffed.

The second reason for extending America's military presence is political. The U.S. is acting as an arbiter among Iraq's various ethnic and religious communities and political factions. It is, in a sense, a traffic cop, giving Iraqis a green or red light when and if needed. It is important that the U.S. continue performing this role for the first year or two of the newly elected parliament and government.

Finally, the U.S. and its allies have a key role to play in training and testing Iraq's new army and police. Impressive success has already been achieved in that field. Nevertheless, the new Iraqi army needs at least another year or two before it will have developed adequate logistical capacities and learned to organize and conduct operations involving its various branches.

But will the U.S. stay the course? Many are betting against it. The Baathists and

jihadists, their prior efforts to derail Iraqi democracy having come to naught, have now pinned their hopes on creating enough chaos and death to persuade Washington of the futility of its endeavors. In this, they have the tacit support not only of local Arab and Muslim despots rightly fearful of the democratic genie but of all those in the West whose own incessant theme has been the certainty of American failure. Among Bush-haters in the U.S., just as among anti-Americans around the world, predictions of civil war in Iraq, of spreading regional hostilities, and of a revived global terrorism are not about to cease any time soon.

But more sober observers should understand the real balance sheet in Iraq. Democracy is succeeding. Moreover, thanks to its success in Iraq, there are stirrings elsewhere in the region. Beyond the much-publicized electoral concessions wrung from authoritarian rulers in Egypt and Saudi Arabia, there is a new democratic discourse to be heard. Nationalism and pan-Arabism, yesterday's hollow rallying cries, have given way to a big idea of a very different kind. Debate and dissent are in the air where there was none before a development owing, in significant measure, to the U.S. campaign in Iraq and the brilliant if still checkered Iraqi response.

The stakes, in short, could not be higher. This is all the more reason to celebrate, to build on, and to consolidate what has already been accomplished. Instead of railing against the Bush administration, America's elites would do better, and incidentally display greater self-respect, to direct their wrath where it properly belongs; at those violent and unrestrained enemies of democracy in Iraq who are, in truth, the enemies of democracy in America as well, and of everything America has ever stood for.

Is Iraq a quagmire, a disaster, a failure? Certainly not; none of the above. Of all the adjectives used by skeptics and critics to describe today's Iraq, the only one that has a ring of truth is messy. Yes, the situation in Iraq today is messy. Births always are. Since when is that a reason to declare a baby unworthy of life?

Mr. BOND. This follows closely the story we found when on a codel with my colleagues, Senators BAYH and OBAMA, in Iraq in January. We talked to our people, military and civilians. We had a great meeting with President Talabani and top-elected Sunni and Shi'a officials at the time who all pledged they were going to work together for a unity government.

Now that the President and Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki have formed a Cabinet, this is one more significant step. It is a big step, and it has been completely overshadowed by the killing of al-Zarqawi. But for the long term, this formation of a government is one more step that is vitally important. I am delighted the President was there to highlight it.

It doesn't mean the violence is over. The killing of al-Zarqawi was widely celebrated by our troops abroad and at home because they knew this ruthless butcher was the face, the media darling of al-Qaida in Iraq. There is a supreme irony that he went out with his spiritual adviser. Good time to have your spiritual adviser with you. For al-Zarqawi, he and his spiritual adviser are going to find out at the same time just how good the spiritual advice Sheikh Rahman gave him was.

We know his loss will be a significant loss because of his ability to play the media with his ruthless killings. But we know he will be replaced. They are bringing up another successor to him already. Let us hope that successor has the same short shelf life that al-Qaida's operation commanders, such as Khalid Shaykh Muhammad, Abu Faraj al-Libi, and Hamza Rabia, have had. They have all been captured or killed. We hope we will be able to continue that effort.

We hear some of our colleagues from the other side saying what a few in the media are saying, that we need to bring our troops home immediately. We have sorrowful parents who are very much concerned about their children going into harm's way. They want them brought home immediately. Let me speak to that directly. As a father of a son who was in Iraq and is preparing to go back, I can tell you that it is not without a good bit of concern that we see our young people going into harm's way. But we are very proud of them. We are very proud of them to know that they are willing to stand up and take the risk of going to war to defend our freedom and peace and security in the world. They are doing a good job. Yes each death of an American soldier or marine or airman is a tragedy. As a parent, you suck in a little wind and say a prayer when you hear about them. But these brave young men and women who are volunteers go there because they know they have a higher mission. By carrying the fight to the terrorists, they help make our country safer.

It is no accident that our country has not had a major attack since September 11, not only because of homeland security but because of the strong efforts we have taken in Afghanistan and Iraq to disrupt terrorist strongholds, the safe havens for terrorists.

Our young men and women over there are in harm's way. But they are not afraid of taking the risk of war. Let me tell you what they really fear. They fear that a lack of political will in this body and in the United States will cause a premature withdrawal of our troops before the Iraqi Government has adequate military and police in place to provide the security that country needs to continue to grow and flourish and be safe from terrorism. They worry that if we bring our troops back before the Iraqi military and police are able to secure the country, there will be chaos—chaos which fosters the rejuvenation of terrorist groups, chaos which will permit a form of state-sponsored terrorism, preparation of chemical and biological weapons that could be used against us, so the next 9/11 might be with a weapon of mass destruction. They know there is a danger that violence between the factions, the Shi'a and the Sunnis, could engulf Iraq and maybe the rest of the Middle East.

They want to complete their mission. They didn't go there and take the risk and make the sacrifice and see some of

their colleagues lose their lives and have to take inventories of their personal belongings and send them home. Yet they fear the lack of political will to continue and succeed in the necessary battle more than they fear the dangers of the battlefield. If we walk away, the sacrifices of these brave men and women will have been in vain. We have to complete the transformation and the transition in Iraq to a functioning government of national unity, able to defend the country against terrorists and insurgents.

I hear some of my colleagues talking about how tragic the activities were in Haditha. They have seized on reports of horrible incidents. They are presuming the American soldiers are guilty without having a hearing. They want to set up a 9/11-type commission. What a tragedy it would be if we were to follow the political game plan to make guilty parties out of soldiers who have not even had their day in court in order to win political points against the Department of Defense and the President.

As we all well know, these events will be thoroughly investigated. If there was wrongdoing, it will be prosecuted. We prosecuted the out-of-line soldiers who were at Abu Ghraib. We don't tolerate those things. We don't tolerate misconduct. Our military justice system will prosecute any who are guilty. But please, let us not jump to the conclusion that they are presumed guilty because of reports of outrageous actions. There are other sides to the story. Let the normal process work. There could be hearings in the appropriate committees, the Armed Services Committee or the Appropriations Committee, if they are warranted. But to set up another commission now is a dangerous political game and one I hope we will not accept. Instead of demanding more commissions, we should be demanding that the facts come out. If any wrongdoing took place, those who did it will be punished accordingly.

There are those who want to continue to take cheap shots at the administration over anything that goes wrong in the war. When you have wars, unfortunately, things go wrong. There is no guaranteed success rate. It is not an unbroken path of success. We need to look at what went on in Haditha. The negative news reports will continue, and we expect the news media, when there are negative things, to report on them. But we would hope they would also report on the positive things that are done. If we had followed the advice of all the naysayers earlier this year who dominate our television with their defeatist political rhetoric, we would not have seen free elections in Iraq, a unity government, or the elimination of al-Zarqawi. He would be running free, plotting his next attack and seeking to reach out beyond Iraq to neighbors, possibly in the United States. Thankfully, we did not pull out of Iraq. Iraq is a much different place, a much more hopeful place because

America and its brave men and women are committed to making the world a safer place.

I sincerely and deeply urge my colleagues not to let our troops down, not to bring them home because parents are concerned about them. We value and honor their service. Let them do their jobs and let the process of the military justice system go forward before we jump to the conclusion that American soldiers are guilty because we don't happen to agree with the war or the efforts they are making.

I thank the Chair and yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Idaho is recognized.

Mr. CRAIG. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that I be allowed to proceed for no more than 5 minutes.

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

Mr. CRAIG. Mr. President, like my colleague from Missouri, I come today to address the Senate and my fellow countrymen on the developments in Iraq and to speak to the American public about the war and our efforts in the Middle East.

Before I begin, let me quickly state that, like many Americans across the country, I have and will maintain steadfast and strong support for our men and women in uniform. Also, like many Americans across the country, I, too, over the last good many months have had moments of doubt regarding the progress in Iraq and the overwhelming challenges that the Iraqis and Americans and coalition forces have faced there. When I go out to Walter Reed Hospital to visit with our young men and women who are having new parts put on their bodies as a result of the explosions and bombings in Iraq, and I feel their spirit and desire to continue to serve and I speak to them of the mission they were involved in, I come back to my office on Capitol Hill more dedicated than ever to assure that these young men and women are allowed to continue to work to finish their mission.

However, seeing through the fog of war, seeing through the interpretation by the liberal media is a frustration that most Americans are consumed with at this moment. Only the bad is reported and rarely the good. But the other day something good happened that could not be denied by the media of this world. That was the annihilation of Zarqawi and the unquestionable proof that intelligence and informants have the al-Qaida on the run in Iraq. The liberal media could not step away from the reality of that message. Two 500-pound bombs delivered it loudly around the world. While it says a lot about our own intelligence, it is my opinion and I am told it says a great deal about the Iraqi people who are fed up with the way they are being treated by the insurgent forces in Iraq, and many of those forces are from outside their country.

Some in this country, and even some in this body, are saying: Well, that was

just then, and we have to deal with now and into the immediate future. Let's get out of there, let's cut and run. It is time we bring our soldiers home.

I suggest that it may be time to adjust tactics. They have a new government in Iraq. It is now whole, it is stood up, it is running, and it is putting its own people out in front in defense of its country, both in the military and in the civilian police. Now is not the time to leave this fledgling new country standing alone. Our tactics may change and we may step back a bit, but I believe we have to be there to continue to strengthen and allow them to grow. The message of turning away from the recent successes and turning away from Iraqi men and women and children who are on the verge of freedom for the first time sends a phenomenal ill-fated doomsday message to the Iraqi people and speaks loudly to the world. And, most importantly, it sends a strong message to the terrorists that all they have to do is be patient, take their losses along the way, because America's will will melt and we will leave.

First and foremost, if we cannot and won't finish the job we set out to do, we will forever question our own future, and the people around the world will question our resolve. Simply put, we are at, I believe, a defining moment not only in the future of Iraq, but in the future of our own Nation with the message we send around the world. Therefore, it is imperative that this country and the people of this country stand up and send a message to the terrorists and to the Iraqi people that we will not be deterred, we will finish our job in cooperation with the Iraqi Government. I believe that is the message our President delivered in the last 24 hours as he flew to Iraq to visit with the new Government and our troops.

Right now, there is a new al-Qaida leader somewhere in Iraq. I will bet he is not sleeping at night. I will bet he is running from house to house. My guess is that his immediates around him are doing the same thing because we receive now thousands and thousands of informant messages, and this man, while he has a new title of leader, is being hunted by a young man from Twin Falls, ID, or from Manchester, England, or from Kirkut. Those are the realities of war.

That is why we stand on the Senate floor talking on behalf of this country's future and the men and women who wear our uniform and the mission we have sent them to do.

Removing U.S. forces, that are standing side-by-side with Iraqi and coalition forces, will effectively and instantly remove the fear that we have now embedded within al-Qaida members now on the run in Iraq.

I am certain that those Members in this body advocating for the U.S. to pull out fully understand and appreciate the role foreign assistance played in helping our colonies become the great Republic it is today. Without

French military and economic assistance the will of the American Revolutionaries would have been broken long before our final push was fought to gain a free, independent, and sovereign republic.

To cut and run today, especially in light of our recent successes, would be equivalent the U.S. colonies fighting without French assistance.

Simply put, without foreign military assistance to this country none of us would be standing here today in the world's greatest deliberative body and the bell of liberty would never have rang.

So, today, I ask my friends on the other side of the aisle to step up, look in the mirror, and recall how our very own country was established. Failure to stay the course on this endeavor is short-sighted, hypocritical, and goes squarely against the principles and the very reason this country was conceived and founded upon.

Mr. President, we have much to be thankful for today. As such, I urge my colleagues to help give the Iraqi people what this country so desired in 1776, freedom.

I yield the floor and suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

#### CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Morning business is closed.

#### EMERGENCY SUPPLEMENTAL APPROPRIATIONS ACT FOR DEFENSE, THE GLOBAL WAR ON TERROR, AND HURRICANE RECOVERY, 2006—CONFERENCE REPORT

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will resume consideration of the conference report to accompany H.R. 4939, which the clerk will report.

The assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

The committee of conference on the disagreeing votes of the two Houses on the amendment of the Senate to the bill (H.R. 4939) making emergency supplemental appropriations for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2006, and for other purposes, having met, having agreed that the House recede from its disagreement to the amendment of the Senate and agree to the same with an amendment, and the Senate agree to the same, signed by a majority of the conferees on the part of both Houses.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Democratic leader is recognized.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, the supplemental appropriations bill has had a

long and arduous course getting here. I congratulate the chairman and ranking member for working so hard to get it here.

This legislation will provide funds to support the brave men and women who risk their lives every day in Iraq and Afghanistan on behalf of our country. The legislation will provide assistance to those in the gulf coast still struggling to recover from Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, and also will help bolster border security and prepare for the threat of bird flu. These matters are all vitally important, so I expect the conference report to win broad support in the Senate. It should.

But while I strongly support the goals of this legislation, I also have real concerns about the many Senate-backed provisions that have been left out of this conference report.

For example, the Senate included \$648 million to bolster port security. One would think that protecting our ports would be a priority for this Congress, given the ongoing threat of terrorism and the grossly inadequate safeguards for our Nation's ports. But the House leadership completely rejected any additional funds for port security. That is a serious mistake.

We learned during the Dubai Port debacle, the Dubai Port what I call scandal in our country, of the inadequacy of the security of our ports. We knew it before that, but it was certainly much worse than we ever expected.

The House conferees almost completely eliminated the relief the Senate proposed for farmers who have been suffering from recent drought conditions. Many of these farmers, particularly in the Midwest, are struggling financially, just as farmers in regions directly affected by Katrina. Yet they will be shut out from any assistance under this legislation.

This is very typical. Always the farmers, it seems, when there is an emergency, look to the Democrats for help, as they should, because if history is any example—and it usually is—Republicans simply don't pay attention to farmers' and ranchers' problems.

I have talked about port security, I have talked about the ranchers and farmers, but there is something else that was dropped in conference, and that is the proposal to beef up VA medical care for our Nation's veterans. As Senator MURRAY said yesterday and Senator AKAKA today, our Nation's veterans are in peril, but in this bill the move to help them was dropped.

Another proposal to include compensation to health professionals, first responders, and others who may be harmed in the future by experimental flu vaccine has also been dropped.

I wonder why the majority leadership is so opposed to improving port security and helping farmers and veterans. I don't understand. They say they are concerned about cost. It is hard to take such statements seriously when we consider what else has happened in the Senate this week. Costs? At the same

time the majority was stripping a few hundred million dollars to bolster port security, to help our farmers, and to help veterans, they, the majority, proposed spending \$1 trillion to provide a windfall to a handful of our Nation's wealthiest families. When I say "handful," I mean that of a country of 285 million or 290 million people, they want to help, at the most, 12,000 individual estates, less than two-tenths of 1 percent. At the same time they are asking for this trillion dollars that would have to be borrowed—of course, we have borrowed from China, Japan, Saudi Arabia; more than half the money we use to finance our country's operations is borrowed from foreign countries. At the same time they are dropping help for veterans, farmers, and port security, the majority has proposed a tax break worth—for example, they say Paris Hilton's tax break alone would be in the \$14 million–\$15 million bracket.

At the same time they are eliminating these programs I have mentioned for farmers, ranchers, veterans, and security for our country, they are proposing a tax break for the family of the former Exxon CEO worth \$164 million, all paid for by more debt, largely from countries, as I have indicated, such as China, Japan, and Saudi Arabia.

So I think we should erase from the equation the majority's commitment to fiscal responsibility. The Republican majority in the Senate has proven, along with President Bush, that fiscal responsibility is not part of their mantra. When it comes to helping average Americans and the middle class, Washington leaders are all for spending cuts. When it comes to handing out tax breaks that explode the deficit, they insist no billionaire be left behind.

I am disappointed by what has been left out of this conference report and by the values and priorities these decisions reflect. Still, at the end of the day, the items contained in this legislation are vitally important. We must support our troops. We must assist the gulf coast. We must tighten border security and prepare for a possible bird flu outbreak. But this legislation should never be here. Why? Because it should have been included in our regular budget. We are in the fourth year of the war in Iraq—the fourth year—but he didn't put it in his budget. Why? Because it would demonstrate clearly when that budget was given to us how much more red ink there was in the budget.

I read in the papers that Senator JOHN MCCAIN of Arizona is going to offer legislation on the bill that we will have before us this afternoon, the Defense authorization bill, to no longer let the President do that, to no longer use the unusual procedure; that is, we are in the middle of the war, we have ongoing expenses, not to include these expenses in his budget.

As I read the paper this morning, Senator MCCAIN said he is going to