

people to support American men and women in harm's way nearly 11 weeks ago. The bill that came to the floor tonight had that amount of resources, and then some. It had over \$20 billion in extra money, Madam Speaker, money that nobody could honestly say with a straight face was appropriate in an emergency supplemental bill.

In addition to that, it also had all sorts of timelines and arbitrary benchmarks that make it so that the Speaker of the House and every single Member of this House is in fact a commander-in-chief.

There was celebration on the other side of the aisle when this bill passed, muted. I would suggest, Madam Speaker, it was a little embarrassed, because they understand in their heart what they have done. What they have done is a shameful action, Madam Speaker.

General Petraeus came to visit the Congress today. General Petraeus is the Commander of Coalition Forces in Iraq. General Petraeus and his men and women are putting their lives on the line, day in and day out.

He came to the House today. He came to Congress today to ask for clarification of what Congress had intended. He asked for the opportunity to inform the House of Representatives, the Members of the House. And from what I heard this evening, Madam Speaker, the majority party didn't listen and they didn't learn. All they have done, apparently, is to work on legislation that will ensure defeat.

Madam Speaker, this majority party is vested in failure. Vested in failure. Their actions do a disservice to our troops. They say to our troops, we have got no faith in you. We don't believe in your mission. We don't believe in you. That is what this majority party says.

They send the wrong message to our allies. What they say to our allies is that you can't trust America. America's word is not good, given this majority party.

And they send the wrong message to our enemies. What they say to our enemies is, all you have to do is wait.

Madam Speaker, this is a sad and a shameful day. The majority leader in the United States Senate has said that this war is lost. "This war is lost."

I stood with parents of a constituent of mine this weekend, Madam Speaker, this past weekend, who was on his way to Iraq that very day. They asked me, what am I supposed to say to my son? It is a heart-wrenching question, Madam Speaker, when you have the majority leader in the United States Senate saying that the war is lost. It is in headlines across this Nation that the majority leader says this war is lost.

Madam Speaker, I think it is incumbent, given that kind of statement by the majority leader in the United States Senate, for the House Democrat leaders to come down to this floor and say what they believe. Do they believe the war is lost? Do they agree with Senator REID?

Madam Speaker, their silence is deafening. Do you hear them? What do they say? Are they here tonight? Are they here to say what they believe about our troops? Are they here to say that they believe in the men and women who are protecting our freedom and working as hard as they can to protect themselves?

Madam Speaker, this Democrat silence is deafening. What a shame. What a terrible shame.

Madam Speaker, it pains me and it saddens me to say what appears to be leading these new Democrats is the same as the old, and that that it is all politics all the time. What a shame.

### 30—SOMETHING WORKING GROUP

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 18, 2007, the gentleman from Connecticut (Mr. MURPHY) is recognized for 50 minutes as the designee of the majority leader.

Mr. MURPHY of Connecticut. Madam Speaker, I am very pleased to be able to kick off what I hope will be a very interesting hour. Every week we try to get together at least once as members of the 30-Something Working Group at the pleasure of the Speaker of the House to talk about some of the most pressing issues, not only to this country at large, but in particular to the young people of this country. I appreciate the Speaker giving us this opportunity.

We are hopefully going to be joined today by some of the veteran 30-Something Members, but we are going to kick today off with Mr. ALTMIRE of Pennsylvania and myself and our special guest today from New Hampshire, young-at-heart PAUL HODES.

Madam Speaker, I think the gentleman from Georgia is right on one point at least, that this is a sobering week here in the halls of Congress. We have had a lot of bad news this week. We have mourned the death of far too many young people at Virginia Tech. We have mourned the loss of one of our own here on the House floor. We are wrapping up a month in which we have seen 86 more soldiers die on the battlefields of Iraq amidst a growing civil war, a war now that has cost over 3,300 lives, 24,000 wounded and \$379 billion spent.

Our friend who just gave the final 5-minute speech on the other side of the aisle suggested that the silence was deafening from the Democratic side tonight in this Chamber. Well, we were talking all day. We were talking last week and the week before. There was no silence on this side of the aisle. For the first time, for the first time, this Congress picked its head up out of the sand to realize what is really happening over in Iraq.

You can talk all you want about failure and defeat and victory, but you have got to be a little bit clear about what we are talking about over there, because maybe we entered into a fight

with an army commanded by Saddam Hussein, but we have now got ourselves mired in what is a civil war.

Madam Speaker, I got the chance, along with five other Members of this body, three Republicans, three Democrats, to go over to Iraq and Afghanistan a few weeks ago, and we asked the generals on the ground a very simple question: Of all of the fire that you find yourselves in the middle of on the streets of Baghdad, tell us what percentage of that which is directed at U.S. forces is a fight from insurgents directly against the United States, and tell us what percentage of that fire is sectarian strife, Sunnis and Shia fighting each other.

I have to tell you, listening to the other side, you would have no clue that the answer was 90 percent. Ninety percent of the fire directed at U.S. forces is simply by virtue of us being in the middle of what has become a civil war there.

So you can continue to bury your heads in the sand while we talk about this tonight, but we choose not to. We chose to side with the American people, 60 percent of whom say unequivocally that they want a timetable to bring our troops home. We sided with the Iraq Study Group, some of our top foreign policy leaders in this country, Republicans and Democrats, who unanimously stood up to say it is time to redeploy our forces. We stood with some of the brightest and most courageous military generals.

We have come to the position that it is de rigueur for generals to speak out against the war, because it seems that there is a new one coming out and talking about the tragedy of this war every day. Well, this didn't happen up until the Iraq conflict. You have never seen this number of former military men standing up and suggesting we need to set a different course.

So maybe this is a little bit of a quiet room tonight after a very long day, but, yes this was a loud and boisterous hall earlier tonight, because for the first time in a long time, this Congress stood up and excerpted the will of the American people.

Before I kick it over to Mr. ALTMIRE and Mr. HODES, let me just quickly talk about what we did here today.

You want to talk about supporting the troops. Let's talk about the fact that this bill had every dollar that the President asked for in it, and more. And more. We put in more money to make sure that every single troop has the equipment, the protection, the armor that they need.

This bill has \$1.7 billion in additional money beyond what the President asked for for veterans, \$1.7 billion beyond what the President asked for for healthcare for our existing armed forces.

You want to talk about supporting the troops, then you better look at the words and the numbers in this bill, balls what the President wanted, he got, and we put more on top of it to

make sure that every single soldier is taken care of on the battlefield, and when they return to this country, they are not just given average healthcare, but they are given the gold standard of healthcare when they come back here.

What we did on that bill was for the first time suggest that this commitment cannot be open-ended. For Mr. HODES and Mr. ALTMIRE and myself, we have gotten the opportunity over the last few weeks to go back and talk to our constituents, and you are having to turn over a bunch of different rocks as time goes on to find people who are still willing to say that we should have absolutely no end to our commitment there. That we should do virtually nothing to force the Iraqis to stand up for themselves.

Let me give you one important quote from this week. Folks on the other side of the aisle will say that this timetable is somehow harming our efforts there. They maybe should speak to our own Secretary of Defense, who just this week said this: "The strong feelings expressed in the Congress about the timetable probably have had a positive impact in terms of communicating to the Iraqis that this is not an open-ended commitment."

Our own Secretary of Defense, the spokesman on matters of war for this President, says that our discussion here about ending our open-ended commitment, about forcing the Iraqis to stand up for themselves, has had a positive effect. So to our friends on the other side of the aisle, they might want to check with the administration before they cast aspersions on the work that we are doing here.

The last thing to say. The last thing to say. We better put some definition on what war we are fighting here. I know Mr. HODES wants to say something about this as well. This is not a war for us that needs to be fought between two sectarian parties in Iraq. This is a war on the people that attacked this country. Maybe some people on the other side of the aisle haven't noticed, but the people that attacked this country came from Afghanistan, a country that we have left behind.

We had a chance to visit Afghanistan just a few months ago, and we found that the Taliban is in a resurgence there. We found that the new power player in the Middle East, Iran, is starting to meddle in the affairs of Afghanistan, in part because we haven't put the money and the troops and the resources and the infrastructure dollars behind our effort there to make sure that it is a self-governing country.

We have got fights all over the globe that this country needs to be a part of if we really want to talk about making this country safe. So when we talk about redeployment, we mean it. It is not just about withdrawal. It is not just about taking every single troop who is over there and bringing them home to their families. We would love to do that. There is not a single one of

us who hasn't spent an amount of time with the National Guard and the Reserve troops that have been so heavily stressed by these multiple deployments. There is not one of us who has not sat with active duty families who have seen their family members deployed once, twice, three times, over to Iraq and Afghanistan.

We would love to bring every single one of them home. But we know that the reality of this new world order is that we have got to have a much more global view. We have got to make sure that we have the troops necessary to be committed all over the globe, to make sure that we recognize how broad the threat to this country is today.

That is not what we are doing right now. That is not what we are doing. In fact, what we have done is created a safe haven for terrorists. We have created what our own intelligence community calls the cause celebre for the Islamic extremist movement in this world, to find shelter in Iraq, to breed, to train, and then to present an even greater threat to this country.

So, yes, Madam Speaker, there was a little bit of celebration on this side of the aisle when we passed this bill tonight. Not because this isn't the most serious subject that this House will face over the next 2 years. It certainly is. We take that as a grave responsibility that it so deserves. But because it is about time that we picked our heads up out of the sand and said in our gut, in our conscience, we cannot allow our military forces to continue to be the referee of a civil war. And in our gut and in our conscience and in our head we know that this fight is broader than just what happens on the streets of Baghdad. This is a global fight against the people that took us on, and by redeploying those forces, by doing the right things by the soldiers who are on the ground in the middle of this civil war, by making a commitment as strong as ever to our troops and to our veterans, we finally, we finally, started imposing a foreign policy that will guarantee the security of this country, not just for the next week or the next month, but decades and hopefully centuries.

Madam Speaker, I would like at this point to yield, if I could, to a good friend and one of our new 30-Somethings, the gentleman from Pennsylvania, Mr. ALTMIRE.

□ 2230

Mr. ALTMIRE. I thank the gentleman from Connecticut. And I wanted to spend some time talking about what this bill actually does, because I heard some rhetoric during the debate from the other side that I couldn't believe I was hearing, because it had nothing to do with the facts of what's really in this bill. I heard Members stand up and say that the goal of the Democrats is to cut the funding for our troops and cut and run and do an immediate withdrawal. And none of that is in this bill. That is not what we voted on today.

And the great thing about democracy, the great thing about this House, the House of Representatives of the United States is that we have people who represent every side of the political spectrum. And there are a handful of Members who feel so strongly about this issue that they feel we need to immediately cut the funding and immediately withdraw our troops and bring them home. And they are very vocal. And what's interesting about that group is they didn't support this bill. The people who feel so strongly that we need to cut the funding and bring our troops home immediately voted against this bill, along with the Republicans.

So when I hear Members on the other side talk about what our goals are, and then I think of the fact that they are the ones that voted with the people who want to bring our troops home immediately and immediately cut the funding, that leads me to believe that perhaps they didn't read the bill closely enough, or maybe there's just some rhetoric that's being thrown around that they know is not true.

And what I would suggest to my colleagues, and certainly to the American people, is you look at what is in this bill. And we've talked about this before when we passed the first bill before it went to conference. We give the President more money than he asked for. The conference report that we voted today, 4 billion more dollars to go to Iraq and support our troops than President Bush asked us for. That's not cutting the funding. That is supporting our troops.

We increased funding for the Department of Defense health care facilities to make sure that situations like Walter Reed never happen again. We increased funding for the Veterans Affairs health care system to make sure that we have adequate coverage for our Nation's veterans, because, as we have talked about many times on this floor, there is no group that should stand ahead of our Nation's veterans when it comes time to make funding decisions.

And this bill, for now the fourth time in 4 months, we have voted to increase funding for the Veterans health care system, and not continue the past 6 years of chronic underfunding for the VA health care system.

And finally, this bill does, in fact, add some accountability to the process. The only remaining leverage that we have left in Iraq, almost 4 years to the day after we were told the mission was accomplished, that date was May 1, the only remaining leverage we have left is our presence there.

The gentleman from Connecticut talked about how he was in Iraq, and I don't want to put words in his mouth, but I am sure you spoke to some of the leadership over there and experienced the fact that the Iraqi government has not stepped up to manage their own affairs and administer their own government. In fact, they have failed miserably in that action, and they show no

sign of being willing to step up to the plate. And the only leverage we have to make that happen, and that is the only solution to this conflict, is a political solution. There's no military solution because, it has, as you said, degenerated into a civil war. The only leverage we have there is our presence there. And until we say, loud and clear to the Iraqi government, that our presence there is not open ended, that we do consider this to be a situation that they need to step up, administer their own affairs and run their own government, nothing's going to change. And we did have, 4 years ago today, an announcement that the mission was accomplished; and we'll be here next year and the year after and the year after, and we'll still be waiting for the Iraqi government to step up unless we take affirmative action to add some accountability, which is what we did in this bill today.

So I'm going to give it back to the gentleman so he can talk to Mr. HODES momentarily, because I know he's chomping at the bit to say what he has to say. And I'm looking forward to hearing it myself.

But I just want to be crystal clear, this bill, in no way, represents a cut in funding for our brave men and women who are serving us in Iraq. It has more money in it for our troops, direct aid for our troops, than the President asked for. Make no mistake about that.

So at this point I would yield back to the gentleman from Connecticut.

Mr. MURPHY of Connecticut. I want to read it one more time, Mr. ALTMIRE, just because it backs up everything you said. I want to read it one more time. Secretary Gates. "The strong feelings expressed in the Congress about the timetable probably have had a positive impact in terms of communicating to the Iraqis this is not an open ended commitment." I mean, that's worth saying again, because for all the rhetoric that we get about what we are doing here and what kind of impact it has in Iraq, we have our Secretary of Defense telling us exactly what has been our intuition for years; that the only way, Mr. ALTMIRE, just like you said, the only way for us to exert any pressure on the Iraqis to stand up for themselves, to get their military shop in order, to get their civil shop in order, to get their political stop in order, is to tell them that we are not going to be the crutch that they can rely on in the long run. We've recognized that here for a very long time. Our Secretary of Defense now joins us in that.

And at this point I would like to turn it over, yield to Mr. HODES.

Mr. HODES. Well, I thank my friend from Connecticut and my friend from Pennsylvania for being here. You know, I'm on the something side of 30, but we are all new Members here tonight. And we came here, in large part, because the American people are way ahead of the politicians in this country. And the American people have had

it with this exercise in Iraq. In overwhelming numbers, they, in their wisdom, have had it, and they spoke loud and clear to that in November of this year and that, in large part, is why we, and many of our colleagues, are now privileged to serve in the House of Representatives.

And what we have done today in passing the Iraq accountability bill is truly historic. And it started here in the House; it went to the Senate through the wisdom of our founders. There was a conference of House and Senate leaders. The bill came back here in slightly altered form. And now, as we sit here tonight, speaking about this bill, it's on its way to the desk of the President of the United States. And the President of the United States has a choice to make about the direction of this country. He, now, has a choice to make. He has a choice to make about supporting the troops. He has a choice to make about holding the Iraqis accountable, as he said he was going to do. He has a choice to make about supporting our veterans. He has a choice to make about supporting our wounded, whose care has been a disgrace, as many of us have seen. The President of the United States has these choices to make.

Now, we have had a lot of rhetoric in the chamber today, and our colleagues on the other side of the aisle called this shameful. They accused us of weakening America. They essentially questioned our patriotism. They said we didn't support the troops, and that is poppycock. It's disinformation. It's not true.

We all, whether we are Democrats or Republicans, and I know this is true of the people in this country, care deeply about this country. And what we want to see is an America with real strength that is protecting the real security of the American people, and that is leading the world, as we once did, as the most credible of nations, as the nation which, in World War II, stood up to lead the fight against fascism, and then had the courage to put Nazis on public trial in the Nuremberg war trials because we were strong enough to have a transparent due process system. We weren't afraid. And we shouldn't be afraid in resolving this conflict in Iraq, in acting with the real strength that means real security.

Now, our brave troops have done everything that we've asked of them. They fought through an invasion, and after that, it was an ill advised invasion, but then, through the incompetence and mismanagement of this administration, they have been left in the quagmire of a civil war.

And I want to turn now to the words of somebody with far more military experience than me, to talk about the effect of what we have done here in the Congress tonight. Major General John Batiste, United States Army Retired, said, this important legislation sets a new direction for Iraq. It acknowledges that America went to war without mo-

bilizing the Nation, that our strategy in Iraq has been tragically flawed since the invasion in March 2003, that our Army and Marine Corps are at the breaking point with little to show for it, and that our military, alone, will never establish representative government in Iraq. And Major General John Batiste said, the administration got it terribly wrong. And I applaud our Congress for stepping up to their constitutional responsibilities because this Congress, as Major General John Batiste has recognized, unlike the rubber stamp Congresses that have preceded us for years now, is finally the accountability Congress. We are holding our government accountable by passing the Iraq accountability act, which forces the Iraqi government to take responsibility for their own stability.

We are into the fifth year of this war. Hundreds of billions of dollars, and still, no progress on reforming the Constitution.

What about reconciliation? What about all the ministries in the Iraqi government fighting amongst themselves? What about the Sunni/Shia divide that al-Maliki does not seem to want to face and deal with? The Sunnis and Shiites killing each other, and our troops in the middle of it.

So we hold our government accountable to our troops, to our returning soldiers and our veterans. This accountability Congress has held oversight hearings to investigate government mismanagement and corruption in Iraq. We found, for instance, in oversight hearings, that this administration shipped \$12 billion of cash over to Iraq without accounting for it, and gave it away to Iraqi ministries to use as they would, without ever asking for a single shred of accounting. No paper trail, no nothing. We're restoring accountability to contracting, ending the massive waste caused by no bid contracts.

And the contractors in Iraq, just so we are clear, on this, we now know that, in addition to the 150,000 troops, give or take, currently in Iraq, there are 126,000 private contractors. And as John Murtha so eloquently talked about the floor tonight, we've got a situation where our brave soldiers are standing there, they are making \$25,000 a year, let's say they are pumping gas and doing some security details. And next to them there's a private contractor making \$80,000 a year doing the same job. Some of these private contractors, we heard, are making \$300,000 a year. That's more than any government official in the United States government. And you want to know where our billions and billions of dollars have gone.

So we're restoring some accountability to government with the Iraq Accountability Act tonight. We're restoring openness and transparency to government, to repair the fabric of our democracy that has been undermined in the course of this administration.

So this President does have a choice to make tonight. And I think of the

words of Zbigniew Brzinski, the former National Security Adviser, who called this war an increasingly immoral, futile exercise in presidential hubris, because, my friends, I'm sorry to say that the President of the United States has said that he's going to veto what Congress has passed. He is going to essentially turn his back on the will of the American people. He's going to go against the advice of retired generals in droves who've come out to talk about the reality. And I believe the American people are going to be disappointed in that veto because they want a new direction in Iraq. And that is the course we have set tonight. I'll kick it back now to Mr. MURPHY.

Mr. MURPHY of Connecticut. Well, thank you very much, Mr. HODES. The three of us are new Members. We came here on that tidal wave of increasing popular angst against this war. And this place shouldn't be dictated just by what happens in elections, but elections have to mean something. When the people get a chance to go out there every 2 years and weigh in on the direction of their Federal Government, they have to feel, at some level, like what they say matters.

□ 2245

And, Mr. HODES, I mean you are right. When they pick up the paper whatever day it is going to be when he actually vetoes this, the feeling inside, that voter who thought they went out and cast a courageous vote for Mr. ALTMIRE or Mr. HODES or Mr. MURPHY who decided to make a change when it doesn't happen very often that you have a change like this, maybe once every decade or every two decades, well, they are going to lose just a little bit of faith in this process. And every day that we continue to have an administration that refuses to honor where the American people want the course of this war to go, which, as we have said over and over again, it is not just the American people but it is the American people being backed up by generals, being backed up by the foreign policy community, the Iraq Study Group, there is a little piece of democracy that dies every day that that happens.

Let me just bring up an additional topic here. When I got out into Baghdad on the day that we were in Baghdad, what we saw was the escalation in progress. What the escalation essentially is, is it is asking these soldiers who are on their second or third tour of duty over there, who would normally do 12-hour shifts patrolling these incredibly dangerous streets, trying to dodge sniper fire, trying to keep clear of the increasing number of IEDs, roadside bombs, now those troops, after the 12-hour shift, aren't going back to safe barracks; they are lodging themselves in the neighborhoods, in some of the most dangerous, war-torn neighborhoods of Baghdad. They are living in bombed-out buildings with little or no electricity or running water, in squalid

conditions. That is what the escalation is.

Now, if this was a fresh round of troops, if this was a group of young men and women who were there for the first time, maybe you could understand putting them in that position. But that is not what this is. Twenty-three percent of all the troops who are being deployed right now are National Guard and Reserve troops. Eighty-eight percent of those National Guard and Reserve troops are so poorly equipped that they are rated not ready right now. That is from the Washington Post, about a month back.

We know that the number of Active Duty and Reserve brigades in the United States that are considered combat-ready, zero. None of them. We have maxed out our military. We have asked, Mr. HODES, as you said, our men and women to do everything we have asked them to do, and we have got to start asking ourselves the question, have we asked them to do too much?

One day they are in the middle of a firefight. The next day they are sitting down and trying to mediate a dispute between two rival neighborhood groups. The day after that they are overseeing the construction of a water filtration plant. They are, within a 3-day period, being asked to be fighters, diplomats, and civil engineers.

Having gotten to spend a couple days on the ground with these folks, they are by all measure the best people that we could send over there, the bravest, the most capable. If there is anyone in this world that could do this job, I know it is them. I knew it intuitively from back here in the United States. Having spent a few days on the ground, you know it from the moment you talk to them. But we have maxed them out.

And why I try to get here as often as I can to hear Mr. MURTHA speak here on the floor is because there is no better in talking about this subject than Mr. MURTHA. He said it here tonight: There is no one more in touch with the troops than he is. And our danger is not just in asking them something they may not be able to do, but permanently damaging the capability of this military going forward.

Mr. HODES. Madam Speaker, the interesting thing about what this bill does, I mean the reality of what it does, is it gives this President an opportunity, it gives him a fabulous opportunity, to face reality, as a leader should, and understand that he is being given the opportunity for a new direction, for a new direction that is tough and smart, and smart about our security, because it is designed to make sure that our interests in the Middle East are taken care of in a responsible way. The American people know that. They want us to be responsible in the way we resolve the situation in Iraq.

Major General Paul Eaton addressed the notion of why this is so responsible when he said, "This bill gives General Petraeus great leverage for moving the Iraqi Government down the more dis-

ciplined path laid out by the Iraq Study Group. The real audience for the timeline language is Prime Minister al-Maliki and the elected Government of Iraq." Because it gives the general, it gives the President, the leverage to say, folks, it is time that you stepped up, to say to Prime Minister al-Maliki it is time you stepped up. Are you serious about reconciliation? Are you serious about the political stability that Iraq needs? Are you serious about the economic stability Iraq needs? Are you serious about it, or are you just waiting because we are going to be there forever? Because right now, the President has made an open-ended commitment, and this bill responsibly puts an end to that open-ended commitment.

Now, the folks on the other side of the aisle have said, time and time again, that this somehow weakens us because it gives notice to our enemy, whoever that may be. They say it is al Qaeda. We are in the middle of a civil war. There is some al Qaeda there to be sure. What Major General Paul Eaton said is, "The argument that this bill aids the enemy is simply not mature. Nobody on the Earth underestimates the United States' capacity for unpredictability. It may further create some sense of urgency in the rest of our government, beginning with the State Department."

Because we have got to ask, where are the diplomats? Where are the diplomats? There are some provincial reconciliation teams on the ground, working around the country and they are talking about more. But where have been the diplomats? Where has been the diplomatic effort that everybody acknowledges is really what is necessary to bring some stability in the Middle East?

Why did it take Speaker PELOSI to go to Syria to begin some dialogue? Because everybody recognizes that we have got to talk to people, even those who are our enemies in this complex world in the 21st century.

So this bill gives the President, it gives the generals, the leverage to force a new direction.

Mr. MURPHY of Connecticut. Madam Speaker, I want to yield to Mr. ALTMIRE in a second.

But let me just underscore this to say none of us are happy to be in this situation. Myself, I think that this is the best course. I think that we need to set in law a sense of when our commitment is going to end there. The only way we will finally complete the training of our military and our Armed Forces within the Iraqi community is to give them a sense of when they will have to stand up for themselves.

Now, at the same time, there is no perfect option. In fact, there may be no good option here. We all have to admit at some level, Republicans and Democrats, that we have gotten ourselves into a mess here that there is no pretty way out of. And that is part of what government hasn't been pretty good about talking about. This administration, it is all about black and white to

them. It is good or evil. It is right or wrong.

There is a lot of gray, and we created most of that gray by being the bull in the china shop there. But what we put forward today, what the majority of this caucus supported this afternoon and this evening is not the perfect, and it is probably not even the good, but it is the best that we can do in a very bad situation. And it is certainly the best that we can do by the brave men and women who are fighting.

So as proud as we are, I think, Mr. HODES and Mr. ALTMIRE, standing up today and finally getting our head out of the sand and putting some direction in what has been a directionless conflict, at the same time it is a sobering day because we all admit, especially as new Members who didn't participate in the lead-up to this very troubling time, that getting ourselves out of it isn't going to be an easy process and it is not going to be a very brief process.

With that, I will turn it over to Mr. ALTMIRE.

Mr. ALTMIRE. I thank the gentleman from Connecticut for yielding.

I want to talk about what these charts mean that the gentleman from New Hampshire is holding up next to where he is speaking. These are examples of generals, people who have seen firsthand what is happening on the ground in Afghanistan, people with the utmost military experience, who have said clearly, without ambiguity, that the President's course of action is wrong. And the course of action that we took today here in this House is endorsed by these generals. And this is a further example of the President's not listening to anybody but himself and his very, very close circle of advisers, any of whom, if they differ from him, find themselves reassigned or out on the street. And for some reason, the President doesn't listen to his generals. He doesn't listen to the Iraq Study Group.

You will recall, and I would like to remind my colleagues, that he said, when the Iraq Study Group formed and was going about their business of studying this situation and coming up with their report, that he was going to pay attention to what they said and take some of their advice. Well, unfortunately, the report came out and was promptly discarded by the administration, and they did nothing about what was in the Iraq Study Group.

Now, some of the things that were talked about that we should engage in diplomacy with countries like Iran and Syria, we know where the President stands on that. He is not going to change with that. The Iraq Study Group recommended that we do set a timeline on our activities to increase our leverage with the Iraqi Government, as I talked about earlier. But the President chose to discard that. He chose to discard what his generals on the ground said. Those that disagreed were reassigned, and some of them now, as Mr. HODES has pointed out, are

saying that what we are doing is the right course of action. But what is most important and what is most relevant for what we did today in this House, the President is ignoring the American people.

We have all seen the polls about where the American public feels about this. But we shouldn't legislate by polls; we should legislate based on we are elected Representatives of the American people. There are 435 districts in this House, each of whom has a voice, and it is our responsibility as Representatives to go back into our districts, listen to what our constituents have to say on these issues of critical importance, return here on a day like today, debate the issue the entire day, come back at 11 o'clock at night and we are still debating the issue. But we took a vote and we had to put it on the line, yes or no, where do you come down on this issue? The Congress has spoken. At least the House has spoken. The Senate is going to speak in the next day or two.

And I want to make one thing clear. Let there be there be no discussion about this. If the Senate passes the conference report, which we expect, and sends this bill to the President, as Mr. HODES said, he has a decision to make. He can either sign that bill and provide the troops the funding that they need to continue the mission, or veto the bill and deny them the support that they need. That is his choice. The Congress has spoken on that.

So when any Member of this House has one of their constituents come up to them and say, well, when are you going to give our troops the money that they need to continue this fight? Well, we did it today. The answer to that question is we did it today. The Senate is going to do it tomorrow, perhaps the following day.

Then the President has a decision to make. And if he chooses to veto that bill, the troops' funding will be delayed. But that won't be because of us. That will be because of a decision that was made down the street at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue.

Mr. MURPHY of Connecticut. Madam Speaker, reclaiming my time, I want to make sure everybody knows that there are no hard lines in the sand in this House. And, in fact, the bill that we voted on today is different from the bill that we voted on about 2 weeks ago. In fact, what this House voted on, and what many Members insisted upon several weeks ago, was a hard deadline in the sand that said that we had to be out of Iraq by next spring or, at the latest, next fall. And many of us stood up and said, for the reasons we talked about tonight, that in order to get the Iraqis to finally stand up for themselves, we have got to give them that sense.

The bill that we voted on today in an effort to bring the President to the table, to get him to sign a bill that puts every dollar he asked for, and, more for troops and veterans was a

goal. It was a goal. Now, there are a lot of us who wanted to see more than a goal. All of this is an effort in compromise. But that goal even is apparently objectionable to this President. And I have a feeling that this House will move again and will try to come up with yet another means of resetting our policy and our course in Iraq that is acceptable to this President.

□ 2300

So if anybody has any idea out there that the House of Representatives is just saying X and the President is just saying Y, no, we're trying to make that effort. And you know what? People are going to look in the paper this morning and see a vote that has a lot of Democrats voting for it and a lot of Republicans voting against it. Lest they think that that's been the case day in and day out here, in fact, it's been the exception to the rule in how we have conducted ourselves in this House. The 100 hours agenda, making changes on our economic policy, our health care policy, our national security policy, our homeland security policy had record numbers of Republicans. We stood together and we have stood together on everything from the minimum wage to stem cell research to even the budget.

So we have made great progress, I think, in this House on bringing back together some of that partisan divide. Lest people look up at the vote that we took tonight and think that we didn't honor our pledge to really start to bring that back together, I think we have in large part.

And I think that's important to say because I know, Mr. HODES, that as important as it is to the new Members to get Iraq right, to get health care right, to get energy right, it's also really important for us to start bridging some of the gaps here. And it pains us when these things do hit party lines, but on something as important as Iraq, the vote is what the vote is. And we'll get back to building those bridges as soon as we get beyond it.

Mr. HODES. I thank the gentleman.

You know, I was hopeful that we could bring both sides of this House together on this bill because our goal is a common goal, to achieve real strength and real security for America.

We all honor our troops. We have a difference in opinion, apparently along party lines primarily, about how best to achieve that. Our friends on the other side of the aisle, and the President, apparently, think that an open-ended commitment and putting more troops into a city of 7 million people into a civil war is the way to do it. We believe that there is a smarter way to help the Iraqis step up and to achieve that security.

Let me just talk briefly about what this bill does, because it really does three important things. First, it adopts the military's own guidelines for troop readiness, training and equipment. We've been sending our soldiers without the right equipment, without adequate training, and without enough

rest between deployments. They're stretched. They've been deployed two times, three times, four times. The length of their deployments have been stretched. And we've adopted the military's own guidelines to say that before troops are sent to Iraq they must be properly equipped, they've got to be trained, they've got to be ready to go.

I can't understand why the President would veto a bill that adopts the military's own guidelines for troop readiness. Because by his veto, he will therefore be rejecting the military's guidelines for troop readiness. He will be saying to the American people, I am perfectly satisfied with sending troops that aren't ready into combat.

The second thing this does is it fully funds the troops, as we have said. In fact, it provides \$4 billion more than the President asked directly to the troops. So if he vetoes the bill, he will essentially be saying I'm vetoing, I'm rejecting funding for our troops. I am rejecting the funding that he asked for. I don't understand how he will do that, but that's what his veto will mean.

And finally, we provide a responsible way to redeploy that actually answers the concerns that people had about flexibility for our military commanders on the ground. Because what we do is we set a date based on benchmarks for the Iraqis that the President himself set out in a January 10 speech for the beginning of a strategic redeployment, and we give the military commanders the flexibility on the other end to reach the target goals. So if the President vetoes his own announced benchmarks for the Iraqis, I just don't understand it because he will be vetoing what he said in a speech to the American people on January 10 as his idea about what the Iraqis ought to be doing for themselves. He set the benchmarks, and now he said that he intends to veto his own benchmarks. It's beyond me to understand why he's going to veto what he said he wants to do.

If I can just go on for one more moment. I want to talk about some of the other money in this bill because this is really important. People have complained, I've heard it at home, about what they think is excess domestic spending in this bill. But here's what this bill does in terms of funding that is related to supporting our troops.

This bill provides \$3 billion more for mine-resistant ambush-protected vehicles for troops in Iraq.

Mr. MURPHY of Connecticut. That doesn't sound like pork.

Mr. HODES. That's not pork. This bill provides \$2 billion more for a Strategic Reserve Readiness Fund to meet the troops' readiness needs.

Mr. MURPHY of Connecticut. That doesn't sound like pork either.

Mr. HODES. That's not pork either.

It provides \$1.1 billion more for needed military housing. Does that sound like pork?

Mr. MURPHY of Connecticut. That doesn't sound like pork to me, Mr. HODES.

Mr. HODES. The bill honors our returning veterans by providing \$2.1 billion more for military health care than the President requested, including \$900 million for post traumatic stress disorder and traumatic brain injury care and research, and \$661 million to prevent health care fee increases for our troops. Because what they are now facing under this President's policies is getting sent off to war to fight for their country and coming home to find that their health insurance costs more, that the military health system is too overloaded to take care of them, and that the veterans' system has been overloaded beyond capacity.

Now, if the President vetoes these increases for the veterans and wounded warriors that his policies have created, it will be something that I don't understand and I don't think the American people are going to understand. And so he has a challenge in front of him. He has a challenge and a choice to make. And maybe between now and when this bill hits his desk, he will have one of those moments on the road to Damascus and decide that he will face the reality and do right by our troops, do right by the American people, do right by this country and set a new direction in Iraq.

I will kick it back to you, Mr. MURPHY.

Mr. MURPHY of Connecticut. We've got a few minutes left, so I'm going to throw it over for some closing remarks to Mr. ALTMIRE.

Mr. ALTMIRE. I wanted to change the subject here just momentarily here, if I could, here at the end and just mention something, because unfortunately, since we're not in session on Monday due to the unfortunate funeral that many of our colleagues are going to be attending for one of our colleagues, I wanted to mention the fact that Monday is going to be Paul Hayes, the House reading Clerk's last day. Paul has been here for 20 years, and to many viewers around the country of C-SPAN, he is the voice of the House of Representatives. I was going to do a 1 minute on Monday, but I will just do it today because we're not going to be in session on Monday and just say what an honor it has been for me, Paul, to be able to spend a few months as a Member with you here.

I was a staffer, as Mr. MURPHY knows, on Capitol Hill for 6 years in the early 1990s, and we used to watch Paul Hayes at work. And it has just been a great experience for me to come back as a Member of Congress and briefly be able to, for about 4 months, to be able to serve and work with you, Paul. So I just wanted to say congratulations, and we wish you all the best.

Mr. MURPHY of Connecticut. Well, it pains me to admit that I spent far too much of my life watching this House from a distance. And so I share those thoughts and I am so glad Mr. ALTMIRE would bring that up on this day.

With that, before we end our hour, we're going to allow our honored guest,

who we hope is joining us for the first of many visits with the 30-Somethings.

As our veteran Members abandon us, our new Members step up. And Mr. HODES, if you might inform folks how they might find us via e-mail and via the Web.

Mr. HODES. Well, as I said at the beginning of the hour, Mr. MURPHY and Mr. ALTMIRE, I'm on the "something" side of 30, but I am glad to be with you because I am hoping that we, together, have brought an energy to this Congress that really has set a new tone and will help us set a new direction for this country, not just on the war on Iraq, but on health care, on energy, on education and all the policies that the American people want us to get to work on and we've been working hard on.

Before we go, I do want to say that Speaker PELOSI's 30-Something Working Group can be e-mailed at 30somethingdems@mail.house.gov. The 30-Somethings, whom I am now a proud guest, being on the something side, can be visited, and here is the Web site address on this chart, www.speaker.gov/30something/index.html.

So I invite everybody who has been working tonight to visit the 30-Something Web site for information on what the agenda for America is that Democrats have been working on. And I thank you for the opportunity to be with you.

Mr. MURPHY of Connecticut. Thank you very much. I thank the Speaker for giving us this opportunity once again.

#### THE FUTURE OF MEDICINE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 18, 2007, the gentleman from Texas (Mr. BURGESS) is recognized for 50 minutes as the designee of the minority leader.

Mr. BURGESS. Madam Speaker, I come to the House tonight to talk about something that isn't number one or number two or perhaps even number three on the list of things that people are concerned about, it is number four, it is health care, health care in our country that is provided by the private sector, that is provided by the public or the government sector. It is a debate that we will be hearing a lot more about as we get deeper into a year that's going to be consumed by presidential politics.

Right now in our country we have an amalgam, if you will, of health care, part paid by the government, part paid by the private sector. I am oversimplifying for the purposes of debate, but the public or government sector, in pure dollar amounts, accounts for about 50 percent of the health care expenditures in this country. The private is sector insures about 160 million Americans, and that is roughly 50 percent of the lives covered by private insurance in this country. And we will have the debate, as the presidential