

our country. We have had two of Senator KENNEDY's brothers who have been assassinated. He had a brother who was killed during World War II. So Senator KENNEDY deserves more attention than I have given him here today, but I have so much admiration and respect for him for what he has done for me.

He has this great public persona, but for those of us who work with him, he is a man with a lot of humility. He is always willing to step back into the shadows and let others get the attention. His record of speaking for civil rights, education, working people, senior citizens, and people with disabilities is unparalleled. And as to his ability to work together, no one can testify to that more than the current President Bush in the White House. The legislation President Bush has been fortunate enough to pass has been landmark legislation with which Senator KENNEDY has helped him. So I value Senator KENNEDY's wisdom and leadership and, most of all, his friendship, and certainly recognize and congratulate him on his 15,000th rollcall vote.

PAST AND PRESENT CHALLENGES AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Mr. REID. Mr. President, August was a time for us to leave Washington for a while, spend time listening to and reconnecting with our friends, neighbors, and constituents back home. Someone this morning on the telephone asked me what I remember most about the August recess, and I said I think it is best represented in an extended conversation I had with someone on the telephone at my home in Searchlight. You can look out my windows and see for miles. There is a range of mountains called Timber Mountains. They do not match the Rockies or the Sierras, but to me they are important. During the summertime, there are storms there all the time. They do not last very long, but they are beautiful to see. I was telling my friend that is what I remember most, talking on the telephone and trying to explain to my friend what I saw out there. We call them cloudbursts. It rains so hard you can't see the mountains, and the lightning is coming frequently. It is beautiful to watch. It is what nature is all about, and that is what I remember most about my trip home this August.

But it certainly was a chance for me, and for all of us, to ignore the pundits and hear from the people of the State we represent. I traveled this past month to many places in Nevada, and the message I heard was very clear: Nevadans want us to do something about the high cost of energy and start reversing the damage that nonrenewable fuels are causing our environment. They want us to help them find affordable health care solutions so low-income kids can get regular checkups, so senior citizens can pay for their medicine, and everyone, rich or poor, can afford health insurance. We are pushing

50 million people with no health insurance. They want us to fight the skyrocketing cost of a college education.

Above all, Nevadans want us to finally bring the war in Iraq to a responsible end. They want us to take our brave troops out of another country's intractable civil war so we can rebuild and refocus our military on the grave and growing challenges we face throughout the world. These concerns are, of course, not unique to Nevada. I know my colleagues are hearing the same warnings in every corner of our country, the same concerns I have heard and more. I want to share with my friends in Nevada and all Americans that we hear you. We share your concerns and your sense of urgency, and we are working every day to reach these goals.

When this new Congress began in January, we knew the challenges ahead of us, but the expectations were even greater than the challenges. We started the year with an ambitious agenda for introducing 10 bills on the first day. Now, as we begin our busy fall calendar, we have made progress on almost every one of those. Coming into the previous work period, we have already sent to the President the first raise in the Federal minimum wage in more than 10 years; the recommendations of the 9/11 Commission, after having been pushed aside for years; the toughest ethics and lobbying reform in history, which today is on its way to the President. We passed a bill to give the hope of stem cell research to millions of Americans who suffer, and we will soon attempt once again to override the President's veto. We believe we are only one vote short of being able to override that veto.

We passed disaster relief for the gulf coast, western wildfires, and farmers who have suffered drought and other disasters. We provided funds for our troops and National Guard with the equipment they need, for example, the Mine Resistant Combat Vehicles, to do their jobs more safely. We passed a bill to finally hold the administration accountable on Iraq with real benchmarks for progress.

We have been able to do a number of important things dealing with Iraq, even with Senator JOHNSON ill. We were sometimes in a minority. One of our colleagues, who is one of the most loyal Democrats we have and have ever had, our nominee for Vice President, the distinguished Senator from Connecticut, Senator LIEBERMAN, votes with the President on the Iraq matters most every time, even though he votes with us on everything else. We were many times in the hole 49 to 50. So what we were able to do was certainly very good. I applaud the few Republicans who helped us. We were able to pass a bill to send to the President that he had to veto.

We also passed a balanced budget which restores fiscal discipline and cuts taxes for working people. Of course, we wish we could have done

more in Iraq, but we did the best we could, with a pay raise and better health care for our troops, who are being asked to shoulder a larger burden than ever before.

This past work period we added to that list other accomplishments: passing the Energy bill, which included, among other things, raising CAFE standards, fuel efficiency, for the first time in 25 years. We haven't sent that to the President yet because we need to work out our differences with the House.

We reauthorized the Higher Education Act to give Americans the largest expansion of student financial aid since the GI bill. As I indicated in my opening statement, we are going to finish that this week and send it on to the House.

Beginning debate on the Defense authorization bill on September 17, we will make critical investments to address troop readiness problems in the military caused by what we believe is mismanagement of our Armed Forces.

These legislative accomplishments will make a real difference for working families, students, senior citizens, and those who protect us at home and abroad. Our progress makes one thing clear: when you put partisanship aside, we can do great things for the American people. But when partisanship divides us, our work suffers.

For all our success so far this year, we have done more than people ever expected. Now, we could have done a lot more than that, but Republicans have sought to block our progress, it seems sometimes at all costs. We could have reduced the cost of prescription drugs, but Republicans filibustered that. We could have passed comprehensive immigration reform, but we only got 12 Republican votes. We could have ensured our troops received sufficient rest and time home between deployments—that was the Webb amendment—but once again we were blocked by most of the Republicans.

The minority has forced 42 cloture votes already this year, many on legislation that wasn't even controversial. I hope the delay and stalling is in the past, and that the minority has proven they can make us go to cloture but it hasn't accomplished anything. I hope we can move forward in a less burdensome manner.

Our progress has been in spite of those efforts. When we have worked together across the aisle, the record speaks for itself. We know it can be done because we have done it already. Today, I reach out to my Republican colleagues on every piece of legislation. I hope and expect the minority will reciprocate so we can move beyond hyperpartisanship and obstruction to keep making the kind of progress the American people deserve. We must do this because the issues we now confront deserve nothing less.

The Senate Appropriations Committee has reported 11 of the 12 annual appropriations bills. We plan to devote

considerable time this work period to these bills. I have indicated we are going to do three before we take our break for the Jewish holidays. We have already done Homeland Security appropriations. If we do that, we would wind up doing a third of all the bills we need to do, which is progress.

So in the next 2 weeks, it is my hope we can complete the bills I have talked about. Each of these bills was reported out of the committee unanimously, or nearly unanimously, and I hope bipartisan cooperation continues on the floor.

We must move forward on a number of other issues. The Children's Health Insurance Program is a bill that received wide bipartisan support in the Senate. I hope we can complete that. It is important that we do that. I know just a few people can cause a lot of trouble here. Both the distinguished Republican leader and I realize that.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUEST—H.R. 976

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that when the Senate receives a message from the House on H.R. 976, the CHIP legislation, the Senate disagree to the House amendment, if appropriate, and insist on its amendment, request a conference with the House on the disagreeing votes of the two Houses, and that the Chair be authorized to appoint conferees on the part of the Senate.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Is there objection?

Mr. McCONNELL. Reserving the right to object.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The minority leader.

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, the message has not yet been received; therefore, the request is a little premature. We would need to consult with our colleagues on this when they receive the request from the House; therefore, for the time being, I would object.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Objection is heard.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, above all, every day we must continue to fight for a sensible, responsible path out of Iraq in order to restore America's national security. Later this month, President Bush will issue a report on the state of the war that Congress required of him. We hope he will use this report as an opportunity to finally do the right thing and begin to change the core U.S. mission and begin reducing U.S. forces in Iraq. We will receive this report with an open mind. We will consider the White House findings carefully and thoughtfully, but we must remember the President's report comes after more than 4 years of war, with almost 3,800 dead American soldiers, sailors, marines, and airmen, tens of thousands more injured, and American taxpayers having to foot a bill of more than half a trillion dollars.

President Bush will send General Petraeus to Capitol Hill to testify. There is not one Member of this body who does not respect General Petraeus.

He is a good man and a good soldier. But Senator BIDEN said over the weekend that there are not 12 Senators out of 100 who support the war as it is now being conducted—not 12. He said that over and over again. I agree with Senator BIDEN.

But the President cannot hide behind the generals. This is George Bush's war. He is responsible for the mistakes and missteps that leave our troops mired in a civil war with no end in sight.

The mission has not been accomplished. When he said "Bring 'em on," that was the wrong thing to say. According to the President when he set forth his escalation policy, the purpose of the troop increase was to give the Iraqis space and safety to forge political progress—to build a sustainable government and provide for their own security.

None of this has happened. Take, for example, the LA Times today, the headline: "Troop Buildup Fails to Reconcile Iraq," or today's GAO report, which tells us the President's strategy has failed to achieve 15 of 18 key benchmarks. Sectarian strife is deepening and violence shifting. Last month was the deadliest for the Iraqi people in the history of the war. Contrary to the assertions of the President, Iraq's leaders have not honored the sacrifices of our troops by taking meaningful steps toward building a country that can stand on its own. That is not our troops' fault, nor is it a problem our troops can solve. It is an Iraqi political problem, not a U.S. military problem. We cannot continue to sacrifice American lives, deplete our Treasury, and weaken our national security in pursuit of a goal that the Iraqi people themselves show no interest in achieving.

Meanwhile, al-Qaida is resurgent, and we all know Osama bin Laden remains at large. There are countless stories that highlight the human toll this war has taken. Let's look to Nevada for one.

As I was flying back, I was stunned by reading in the Las Vegas Sun newspaper a heartbreak story of Army PFC Travis Virgadamo, 19 years old, in his second tour of duty in Iraq. He loved his country. He loved serving in the military. That is what he always wanted to do. Yet after months of serving in Iraq, as he described it, "being ordered into houses without knowing what was behind strangers' doors, walking along on roadsides fearing the next step could trigger lethal explosives"—those were his words—he left. He tried to get help. He came back, told his parents he did not want to go back. He told his military superiors he didn't want to go back. He was given medicine. The newspaper reported it was Prozac. As I said, he sought therapy, mental health care while overseas, but last week the military informed his family he committed suicide. He was 19 years old.

Last year, the Veterans Affairs Department reported that more than

56,000 veterans of Iraq have been diagnosed with mental illness. We have heard countless examples of our troops receiving inadequate mental health care, and in many cases being sent back into battle, like this young man, PFC Travis Virgadamo.

My heart goes out to his family. They are quoted in the paper, as to what he said when he was trying to stay here and not go back. They have suffered so much. We owe them a change of course.

Many of my Republican friends have long held September is the month for a policy change in Iraq. Those who opposed our early efforts asked for time and patience to let the war continue. The calendar has not changed. It is September. We have reached this goal. It is time to make a decision. We can't continue the way we are. We cannot afford it militarily and financially.

We will soon hear, as I have indicated, from the President and his generals what we know already, political progress has failed. Now it is time for our Republican colleagues—I so admire and appreciate those who have joined us in the past. For example, on the Webb amendment we got 57 votes. With Senator JOHNSON coming back we need two more Republican votes to do the right thing: When you go to Iraq for 15 months, you stay home for 15 months. That is what WEBB did. That is why we picked up Republican votes. We need two more Republican votes.

It is time for our Republican colleagues to join with us, to stand for our troops and the American people to responsibly end this war; to do things that will change it.

I began with words of tribute for two of our most distinguished colleagues, Senators WARNER and KENNEDY, one Democrat, one Republican, both firmly committed to progress, progress for our country. They recognize and they have shown it can only be accomplished by bipartisanship. All of us appreciate the Herculean efforts of Senator KENNEDY, working with Democrats and Republicans alike on immigration, Leave No Child Behind, and Medicare. The work that Senator WARNER has done for years, especially on the Defense authorization bill, on a bipartisan basis—I appreciate it; many of us do. The country appreciates it. The people of Virginia appreciate Senator WARNER's courage to stand up to the President of his own party and reach across the aisle to reach a responsible end to this war. As we tackle the challenges ahead, the outstanding work of these two great Senators ought to be our compass.

I am confident and hopeful all 100 of us will follow their lead and keep America moving forward.

RECOGNITION OF THE REPUBLICAN LEADER

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Republican leader is recognized.