

The bill mimics Democrats' previous challenges to Iraq policy and likely will stall emergency funds, which would pay for about three months of warfare while lawmakers debate the rest of the \$196.4 billion war-funds request for 2008.

The top Democrats—House Speaker Nancy Pelosi of California and Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid of Nevada—say they will withhold troop funds for at least the rest of the year if Mr. Bush does not accept the pull-out timetable.

"There is a growing sense within our caucus that it is time to play hardball," said Rep. Jim McGovern, Massachusetts Democrat and outspoken war critic. "This is George Bush's war. He started it. He's got to finish it."

White House press secretary Dana Perino said Democrats used the pullout bill "for political posturing and to appease radical groups."

"Once again, the Democratic leadership is starting this debate with a flawed strategy, including a withdrawal date for Iraq despite the gains our military has made over the past year, despite having dozens of similar votes in the past that have failed and despite their pledge to support the troops," she said.

"The president put forward this funding request based on the recommendation of our commanders in the field," Mrs. Perino said. "The Democrats believe that these votes will somehow punish the president, but it actually punishes the troops."

House Majority Leader Steny H. Hoyer, Maryland Democrat, said recent progress in Iraq—a sharp decline in U.S. casualties, fewer Iraqi civilian deaths and fewer mortar rocket attacks and "indirect fire" attacks—were temporary improvements from the troop surge this summer.

"What has not happened is what the administration predicted would happen, [that] an environment would be created where political reconciliation would occur," Mr. Hoyer told reporters on Capitol Hill.

"Violence is down. I am happy that violence is down," he said. "What is not up is, this year, we've lost more people than any other year in this war. This year, more refugees were created than any other year in this war."

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. BROWN). The Senator from Oklahoma.

BUSINESS AS USUAL

Mr. COBURN. Mr. President, I wanted to spend a few moments this morning talking about the business as usual in Washington.

As a nearly 60-year-old male baby boomer, I believe we face some of the most serious challenges we have ever faced as a nation, and certainly in my lifetime. The challenges are going to continue to grow unless Congress changes how it works, how it does business, and starts setting priorities. The last election was about change. We heard a lot of great promises, and I think they were well-intentioned. But let's look at what has happened.

After the last election, we were told we would have an earmark moratorium until we had a real reform process that was in place. We do not have a reform process; we have a faint claim for a reform process. Instead, we have seen thousands—the average is 2,000 earmarks per bill. The American people were told that the earmark process

would be more transparent. Yet we have seen Congress backtrack on that at every opportunity.

The earmark reform has really been a triumph of "business as usual." The original Senate version of S. 1 required Senators to publicly disclose the following within 48 hours of the committee receiving the information: the earmark recipient, the earmark's purpose, certification that neither they nor their spouse would directly benefit from the earmark. Now, what is in the real language? The real language was secretly changed. It no longer requires public disclosure of who is going to get the earmark or the earmark's purpose. That is the Senate's rules.

You know, there is a foundational principle; that is, you cannot have accountability in anything unless you have transparency. What we have is obfuscation of transparency.

We don't want the American people to see who is going to get an earmark or what its purpose is. Thankfully, we passed the transparency and accountability act that starts this January so the American people are going to see it anyway, except they are going to unfortunately have to see it after the fact.

Yesterday my office learned of another attack against transparency. The just-released conference report for the Transportation-HUD spending bill contains an earmark provision that attempts to prohibit the White House from releasing publicly its budget justifications. When they send up their budget, they send the reasons for why they want that money spent in certain ways. I worked last year to make sure that OMB agreed that the American people were entitled to see the justification for why they would want to spend money in certain areas. The appropriations process doesn't want that to be public. Why should it not be public? Why should we not want to know why the administration wants to spend certain money in certain ways and their reasoning and justification?

There is a reason why this was added. This was added so the authorizing committees won't have the same information the appropriations committees have. We are not supposed to be appropriating anything that isn't authorized, yet we continue to do so. This is a commonsense approach to make transparent to the American public as well as the rest of the Members of this body the justification and reasoning of the administration.

I agree, the broken promises we have seen have contributed to the 11-percent favorability rating of Congress. It isn't a Republican or Democratic issue. No Americans want their leaders to say one thing and then do another. The American people are tired of hearing the same defenses of the earmark favor factor. They didn't work when Republicans were in control, and they will not work today.

Let's talk about that for a minute. The earmark system exists to serve

politicians, not local communities. Members earmark funds rather than advocate for grants because they want the political credit for spending money. Earmarks oftentimes are worthwhile, but the system under which they are propagated is not. Earmarks are the gateway drug to overspending, one of the No. 1 issues for which the American people have a problem with Congress. Our problem is, we refuse to make the tough choices families have to make every day, every week within their own budgets. Consequently, we now have this last week surpassed \$9 trillion on the debt. We have \$79 trillion worth of unfunded liability which is going to cause us to break the chain of heritage of this country. That heritage is one of sacrifice where one generation works hard, makes sacrifices to create at least the same or hopefully better opportunities for those generations to come.

We have heard complaints that it is illegitimate to single out or strike an earmark with an amendment. It is not our money. It is the American people's money. What is scandalous is how few of the special interest projects are ever challenged on the floor. Only one-tenth of 1 percent of the more than 60,000 earmarks passed since 1998 have ever received a vote. Where is the accountability with that? Where is the transparency?

Finally, we hear Senators complain that it is partisan to strike individual earmarks. I can't speak for anyone else, but I have been going after this process for a decade. No one has gone after more Republican earmarks than I. Plus, if you don't like my amendments, I ask the body to offer some of their own. I would appreciate the help. In spite of a lot of grand talk about earmark reform, we haven't seen anyone on the other side of the aisle attempt to strike an individual earmark. Does that mean all these projects are worthwhile? Is there not a single earmark in the 32,000 requests this year that should not be debated on the floor of the Senate?

The conference report on the Transportation-HUD bill includes a number of questionable earmarks, some of which I will try to eliminate when the bill comes through the Senate.

We developed a new rule that one can't earmark in conference. Yet in the new conference report on the Transportation-HUD bill, 18 new earmarks were air dropped, new earmarks violating the rules the Senate just set up. We can't help ourselves. Such earmarks as an international resource center, the Coffeyville Community Enhancement Foundation, Minihaha Park development, buses, upgrades to airports, may be good things to do, but are they good things to do when the projected budget deficit is around \$300 billion? Are these the priorities we should have?

I won't spend a whole lot more time on this issue today, but I can tell my colleagues that the American people

are fed up with this process, not just the process of earmarking but the lack of accountability and the absolute lack of transparency when it comes to how we make priorities in spending their money, not ours, every year. I think preserving Social Security, fixing Medicare to where it is available for those after the baby boom generation, solving our budget deficit today might be greater priorities. The real balance is between us and our grandchildren, and we lack the courage to make the hard choices now because it impacts our political careers. We have taken our eye off the ball. The ball is what about the future of the country? What about the opportunity for those who follow us? What about the liberty and freedom they are going to have or not have as a consequence of us ducking the hard choices today?

I yield the floor.

Mr. DORGAN. I 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. BROWNBACK. I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

Mr. BROWNBACK. Mr. President, I believe we have 4 minutes remaining, if I may inquire of the Chair.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. There is 2 minutes remaining.

Mr. BROWNBACK. I ask unanimous consent to speak for a total of 8 minutes.

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

IRAQ

Mr. BROWNBACK. Mr. President, I will try to be brief and to the point, if I cannot be eloquent. I want to talk about the Iraq situation.

A number of Senators have spoken about that this morning. They are looking at the progress that is taking place with the surge. I had great question about the surge at the outset. I questioned whether this was the right route to go. Yet I have to say my concerns were proven wrong.

Look at the numbers: U.S. deaths are down more than 50 percent since June. Iraqi deaths are down more than 50 percent since August. Sectarian violence is down dramatically. Areas of Baghdad are opening. October saw the fewest roadside bomb instances since September of 2005. Mortar rocket attacks are at their lowest level since February 2006. Nobody would say it is over, we have won, but they would say these are very positive events that have taken place.

The area we have to emphasize now is the political solution to capture the moment of getting more stability on the ground in Iraq. For some time Senator BIDEN and I have pushed a federalism approach that this body en-

dorsed by 70 votes. Now is the time for us to push much more aggressively on this political solution. We are seeing this already taking hold in the Kurdish region which has had a head start. Under Saddam Hussein, the Kurds were protected by our air power in the north. They have stabilized a government and have been operating basically that region. We now have Anbar stabilizing, the Anbar awakening. But they are not particularly interested in the federalism solution because they don't have oil. So what we have to have take place at the national level in Iraq is an oil law that distributes oil on a per capita basis around the country, not in regions, so federalism roots can take hold—not one Iraq but several regions and not necessarily on a sectarian basis.

Several Iraqis I have met with are saying they believe in federalism. They think it is the route to go. But they say: Don't say we are a Sunni region here or a Shia region there. These are going to be multisect regions so we can get together on a regional basis and not on a division basis around the country. This is a very promising route to go, but we need a political surge to take place in Iraq. We need to put emphasis on a political surge to capitalize on the stabilizing situation that is taking place on the ground.

We need a diplomatic surge. We need to push the Iraqis to get oil laws and debaathification taking place on a national level. We should prioritize local and provincial elections and encourage Iraq to devolve power from Baghdad. We should provide additional humanitarian assistance for those Iraqis who fled sectarian violence and relocated to other areas, or they are coming back. Some people are not coming back to areas because there is no housing left; it got blown up in all the violence that took place. Instead of pretending that nothing has changed, our debate needs to reflect the reality on the ground, that the security situation is much better, that we have a real moment here. The reality is that security has improved. The reality is that centralizing power in Baghdad is not the route to go. Creating federal regions provides a chance for that success to be captured and moved forward.

I question what came out of the Joint Economic Committee on the funding of the war. I am ranking Republican on that committee. That was not a committee report. I believe there are significant problems with how that funding level was arrived at. I don't think that was accurate. I don't think it was a positive way to move forward. Instead, now is the time to say: OK, let's capitalize on the surge. Let's go on a bipartisan basis with Senator BIDEN and myself on federalism. Let's push that to capture this, and then we as America can declare victory—not a Republican victory, not a Bush victory, but we as Americans can say it is now stabilized and we can start to pull our troops back. That is the talk that is

penetrating now, and it is the talk we need to have a lot more of.

Iraqi President Talibani endorses federalism as a political solution. The Kurds have announced they will convene a federalism conference. Some Iraqi Shia groups are openly discussing the creation of a region that would be a federalism model. The Sunnis do not particularly want to because they do not have oil, so we have to get that oil devolved.

I think there is a real route forward for us to all be able to say, soon, we are making progress, it is sustainable, and we are handing it off to the Iraqis.

Mr. President, I thank you for your indulgence.

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

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

Mr. DORGAN. Mr. President, I understand I have time in morning business. Let me claim that time.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator has 15 minutes.

APPROPRIATIONS BILLS

Mr. DORGAN. Mr. President, I want to talk about several things today. I want to start with this question of why, at the end of the legislative session, there is such intractability in trying to get the appropriations bills done.

It is a paradox to me that President Bush, who has come to this town in the last 7 years, and at the start of his Presidency said, "I want a fiscal policy that moves in a certain direction." He had a sufficient number of votes in the Congress to accommodate that so he said, "Look, it appears in the next 10 years we are going to have very large budget surpluses, so I want put in place very large tax cuts, most of which will go to wealthy Americans." I did not support that, but a number of people in his party did, so it became enacted. I said we ought to be conservative. We ought to worry things might change. Maybe these surpluses won't appear. We do not have them yet. They are only projections.

Well, guess what? The President got his fiscal policy, and those surpluses did not, in fact, appear. We faced a recession, 9/11, a war in Afghanistan, a war in Iraq, and a continuing war against terrorism—all of which has been very costly. We have run up \$3 trillion in debt with this President's fiscal policy—\$3 trillion. Now, I think it is unusual that at this stage of this session of Congress the President has done two things. He has sent to this Congress a request for \$196 billion in emergency funding for the war in Afghanistan and Iraq—mostly for Iraq.