

And SP Peter Manna says:

If they don't think what we are doing is a good job, everything that we have done here is all in vain.

Engel concludes:

Apache Company has lost two soldiers and now worries their country may be abandoning the mission they died for.

We cannot send that message to our troops and to their families, that we disagree with the mission we are putting them in harm's way to try to achieve. As these three young men, our finest, have said, speaking to the American people: You can't say you support the troops if you don't support what we are trying to do here, what we might die trying to accomplish.

That is why we have to be careful about resolutions in the Senate. Every Senator has an immense capability of expressing his or her point of view. We have all done that. We all continue to do it. We can get before the cameras any time we want to. We can let our folks back home know what we feel. And I dare say there are probably 100 different opinions in this body of 100 people. We all have a little different view of it. And we can tell our constituents what we think.

We certainly can communicate that to the President and people in the military. What we don't have to do is to go the next step and pass a resolution that first of all is nonbinding and has no effect on the implementation of the strategy, which is already beginning and will go forward, but can have a very detrimental effect on our enemies, on our allies, and on our own troops.

When General Petraeus was here testifying before his confirmation, he was asked a question about the resolutions to the effect of would it be helpful, and he said: No, it would not be helpful. Then he went on to talk about the object of war being to break the will of the enemy. He said: This would not help us—it would hurt us—break the will of the enemy, especially in a war like the one we are fighting with terrorists around the globe today—a war of wills.

It is important for us not to send the signal that our will is flagging, that there is great disagreement in our country about the desire to continue. In this war of wills, we should be unified and in support of the mission we are sending our troops to try to accomplish, and in support of the general whom we have confirmed to carry out that mission.

So I hope my colleagues will think very carefully about the words they speak, the actions they take, and reflect on what others will think of what we do here in this body. We are not simply speaking to the President, trying to send him a message. Everyone else in the world will get that message. And as much as we might manipulate the words in a resolution to try to bring 60 Senators all in consensus to what the resolution says, we all know what the headlines the next morning are going to say all around the world if

a resolution like this were to pass: "Senate Declares No Confidence in President's Strategy." "U.S. Senate Goes on Record as Opposing Bush Plan." You can write the headline. Those are the words that will resonate around the world.

Let's not make any criticism of the President or his plan become a self-fulfilling prophecy. Let's be as united as we can in supporting our troops by supporting the mission we are sending them on, hoping it will succeed; if we want, expressing concerns we have about that, but doing so in a way that doesn't undercut the message. We can do both of these things in this great open society. People expect us to have debate about important issues such as matters of war and peace, and we can do that without undercutting the mission here.

I go back to where I started in quoting former Representative Lee Hamilton, cochairman of the Hamilton-Baker commission in his testimony yesterday here in the Senate:

So I guess my bottom line on the surge is, look, the President's plan ought to be given a chance. Give it a chance, because we have heard all of this. The general that you confirmed 80 to nothing the day before yesterday, this is his idea. He's the supporter of it. Give it a chance.

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

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

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

IRAQ

Mr. BIDEN. Mr. President, I would like to make a few brief comments this morning on the Warner resolution and the negotiations that went on yesterday, led by Senator LEVIN, to deal with Iraq.

Three weeks ago before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Secretary Rice presented the President's plan for Iraq. The Presiding Officer, among others, was there. Its main feature was to send more American troops into Baghdad, in the middle of a sectarian war, in the middle of a city of over 6 million people.

The reaction to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee from Republicans and Democrats alike ranged from profound skepticism to outright opposition. That pretty much reflected the reaction across the country.

Consequently, Senators HAGEL, LEVIN, SNOWE, and I wrote a resolution to give Senators a way to vote their voices, vote what they had said. We believe, the four of us, and I know the Presiding Officer does, as well, that the quickest, most effective way to get the President to change his course is to

demonstrate to him that his policy has little or no support in this Senate, in our committee, or, quite frankly, across the country.

After we introduced our resolution, Senator WARNER came forward with his resolution. The bottom line of the resolution is essentially the same, and it was: Don't send more American troops into the middle of a civil war.

There was one critical difference between the Biden-Levin and the Warner amendment. Senator WARNER's resolution, in one paragraph, left open, I think unintentionally, the possibility of increasing the overall number of American troops in Iraq—just not in Baghdad. So from our perspective it wasn't enough to say don't go into Baghdad with more troops; we wanted to say don't raise the number of troops, as well.

The provision in the Warner amendment that allowed for that, if read by the President the way he would want to read it, I believe, would have allowed an increase in troops. We believe very strongly—Senator LEVIN, myself, HAGEL, SNOWE—that would send the wrong message. We ought to be drawing down in Iraq, not ramping up. We ought to be redeploying, not deploying into Baghdad. We should make it clear to the Iraqi leaders that they have to begin to make the hard compromises necessary for a political solution.

A political solution everyone virtually agrees on is the precondition for anything positive happening in Iraq. Now, I make it clear, I and everyone else in this Senate knows that it is not an easy thing for the Iraqi leadership to do, but it is absolutely essential.

So we approached Senator WARNER several times to try to work out the difference between the Biden and the Warner resolutions. I am very pleased that last night, through the leadership of Senator WARNER and Senator LEVIN, we succeeded in doing just that. The language Senator WARNER removed from his resolution removed the possibility that it can be read as calling for more troops in Iraq.

With that change, I am very pleased to join Senator LEVIN, now known as the Levin-Warner resolution, as a cosponsor of that resolution. For my intent, at the outset when I first spoke out about the President's planned surge of American forces in Iraq, when I spoke out before the new year, I made it clear that my purpose was to build bipartisan opposition to his plan because that was the best way to get him to reconsider. That is exactly what this compromise does.

Now we have a real opportunity for the Senate to speak clearly. Every Senator will have a chance to vote on whether he or she supports or disagrees with the President's plan to send more troops into the middle of a civil war. If the President does not listen to the majority of the Congress—and I expect the majority of Congress will vote for our resolution—if he does not respond to a majority of the Congress and a

majority of the American people, we will have to look for other ways to change his policy. But this is a very important first step.

Also, I would like to take a moment to present what I believe are the principal findings of our 4 weeks of hearings, over 50 hours, if I am not mistaken, of hearings in the Foreign Relations Committee. While no unanimous prescription has emerged, there is remarkably broad consensus on three main points: First, American troops cannot stop sectarian warfare in Iraq, only a political settlement can do that; the second point of consensus, we must engage in intensive regional diplomacy to support the settlement among Iraqis; third, the U.S. military should focus on combatting terrorists, keeping Iraq's neighbors honest, training Iraq's troops—not on policing a civil war. Indeed, combat troops should start to re-deploy as soon as our mission is narrowed.

Those three points were overwhelmingly agreed upon by an array of the most well informed foreign policy experts, both military and civilian, that we have arrayed before that committee in a long time.

Since a political settlement is so critical, we have examined this issue in detail. We have looked at the benchmarks the President has proposed—on oil law, deBaathification reform, constitutional reform, and provincial elections—but the divisions are so deep and passions run so high now in Iraq we may be beyond the point where such modest measures can stabilize Iraq.

I believe, and have believed for some time, something much broader is necessary, something much bolder is necessary. Les Gelb, the chairman emeritus of the Council on Foreign Relations and a former Defense Department official, and I put forward just such a proposal 9 months ago. It is premised upon our conviction that the heart of the administration's strategy—building a strong central government—will, in fact, not succeed. As a matter of fact, in the testimony we heard, most pointed out where countries have been drawn by the slip of a pen by world leaders after World War I and World War II—the Balkans, Iraq, and many other places we could name—there have basically only been two models that have brought stability: A straw plan, a la Saddam, or a Federal system, a la the Iraqi Constitution.

The reason a strong central government will not work, although desirable, is there is no trust within the Government, no trust of the Government by the people of Iraq, no capacity of the Government to deliver services, no capacity of this new Government to deliver security.

In a sense, it is understandable. Indeed, we must bring Iraqis' problems and the responsibility of managing those problems down to local and regional levels where we can help the Iraqis build trust and capacity much more quickly and much more effectively.

We have proposed that the Iraqis create what their constitution calls for: three or more "regions" they call them—not republics—three or four more regions consistent with their constitution. We call for Iraq's oil to be shared equally with a guarantee that the Sunnis get their share and have some international oversight to guarantee it. We call for aggressive diplomacy—which, again, most every witness called for, including the Iraq Study Group—we call for aggressive diplomacy in the creation of a contact group consisting of Iraq's neighbors and the major powers in the world, including large Islamic countries to support a political settlement.

We believe we can redeploy most, if not all, of America's troops from Iraq within 18 months under this plan, leaving behind a small force in Iraq or in the region to strike at terrorists, the jihadists, the al-Qaidaists, keeping the neighbors honest, and training Iraqi forces. The time has demonstrated this plan is more relevant and inevitable than it was even the day we put pen to paper and set it out 9 months ago. It takes into account the harsh reality of self-sustaining sectarian violence; it is consistent with Iraq's Constitution; and it can produce a phrase used by a New York Times columnist in describing our plan. It can produce "a soft landing" for Iraq and prevent a full-blown civil war that tears the country apart and spreads beyond its borders.

I might also add, as people have come to understand, what I am calling for is not partitioning, not three separate republics; what I am calling for is what the Iraqi Constitution calls for: decentralization of control over security and local laws with the central government having responsibility for the Army, distribution of resources and currency and other things that a central government must do.

As that has become clearer and clearer, some of the most powerful voices in the American foreign policy establishment have come forward to suggest it makes sense.

Secretary Kissinger told our committee yesterday:

I'm sympathetic to an outcome that permits large regional autonomy. In fact, I think it is very likely this will emerge out of the conflict that we are now witnessing.

Former Secretary of State Albright said:

... the idea of the ... constitution of Iraq as written, which allows for and mandates, in fact, a great deal of regional autonomy, is appropriate.

James Baker, former Secretary of State, coauthor of the Baker-Hamilton commission report told us that there are indications that Iraq may be moving toward three autonomous regions, and "if it is, we ought to be prepared to try and manage the situation."

Time is running out. We are going to have as a consequence of the compromise reached between the Biden-Levin resolution and the Warner resolution, now known as the "Levin-War-

ner whoever else is attached to it" resolution—we are going to have for the first time a full-blown debate in the Senate.

I hope the administration will be listening. I suggest we are coequal—Congress, along with the President—in deciding when, if, how long, and under what circumstances to send Americans to war, for shedding America's treasure and blood.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. BROWN). The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to speak for 10 minutes in morning business.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator has that right.

Mrs. MURRAY. Thank you, Mr. President.

HEALTH CARE

Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, I rise this morning to talk about the health care proposals President Bush mentioned in his State of the Union Address last Tuesday. For too long, our working families and our businesses have really struggled with rising costs and shrinking access, and Washington, DC, has virtually ignored that health care crisis.

Now, with Democrats in control of Congress, the President is finally bringing some ideas to the table and saying he wants to be part of the solution. Well, I want to thank him for joining the debate, and I hope he is serious about working with us to address the challenges that have only gotten worse over the past 7 years. There may well be valuable ideas in his proposals. I want to get more details than we heard in just the State of the Union Address because there may be areas on which we can agree.

However, I have to say, from what I have seen of the President's plan so far, I do have some serious concerns that his initiatives will undermine the employer-based health insurance system; may push people into the risky and expensive individual insurance market; may fail to provide coverage for our most vulnerable; and may divert funds for the health care safety net to experimental programs.

My first concern is that the President's proposal will jeopardize the employer-based health insurance system. The most stable form of health insurance for America's working families today is through their employers. Mr. President, 155 million Americans receive health insurance today from their employers.

One of the primary reasons why employers offer health insurance to their workers is because those benefits are