

NOMINATION OF GEN GEORGE W. CASEY JR.

Mrs. FEINSTEIN. Mr. President, I voted last Thursday in opposition to the nomination of GEN George W. Casey, Jr., to be the 36th Chief of Staff of the U.S. Army.

This decision did not come easily, but after watching the slow failure of our Iraq strategy since the invasion in March 2003, it was time for some accountability.

This is not to say General Casey, alone, should take the blame for the multitude of mistakes in Iraq. In fact, there is no doubt that the buck stops at the President's desk and this is his war.

It is President Bush more than any other individual who is responsible for the dire situation we face in Iraq today.

It was he who ordered the invasion and he who has stubbornly stuck to a strategy that has put success in Iraq increasingly out of reach.

In addition to President Bush, Vice President CHENEY and former Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld were some of the strongest public backers of the campaign to invade Iraq that failed to plan for the chaotic aftermath that we are now mired in today. And it should not be forgotten that it was George Tenet, then the Director of the CIA, who presided over the flawed intelligence analysis that suggested that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction and was in the process of developing a nuclear capability. It was Tenet who told us that this intelligence was a "slam dunk."

Yet, that said, our military strategy over the past several years should not be free from criticism.

General Casey has served as the commander of Multi-national Force—Iraq since July 2004. Over these past 2½ years, I can see little to applaud regarding our military strategy on the ground.

Too many times, in my view, General Casey, and those around him, failed to provide the Congress with accurate assessments of what has been happening in Iraq. For example, it was General Casey who suggested that the situation in Iraq would improve enough following the December 2005 elections that troop reductions could take place in early 2006. He even went so far as to provide specific projections of troop withdrawals, saying in August 2005 that the level of U.S. troops in Iraq could be drawn down to about 100,000 by the spring of 2006.

Earlier, in June 2005, he said, and I quote:

I'm confident that we'll be able to continue to take reductions over the course of this year based on the security situation and the progress of the Iraqi security forces.

Time and time again General Casey came before us in Congress and painted an overly optimistic view of the situation on the ground in Iraq. Just last week, at his confirmation hearing in front of the Senate Armed Services

Committee, General Casey suggested that, rather than a "slow failure," he sees "slow progress" in Iraq.

Since General Casey took over as commander of all coalition forces in Iraq, we have seen the following:

Car bombings have grown from 30 a month when General Casey took command to about 80 today.

Daily insurgent attacks have skyrocketed from 50 to some 200 today.

The training of Iraqi forces, which General Casey touted as the means for an exit of U.S. troops from Iraq, has been slow and inconsistent.

In fact, though General Casey called 2006 the "Year of the Police" in Iraq, we have seen increased infiltration of Iraqi police forces by Shiite militias and growing Iranian influence.

While 320,000 Iraqi troops have been "trained and equipped" according to the Pentagon, our troop level today, 140,000, is just a few thousand less than when General Casey took command in July 2004.

Iraqi security forces have 91 brigades that are taking the "lead" in counterinsurgency operations throughout the country, yet these forces are now responsible for the security of only 2 of Iraq's 18 provinces.

I have no doubt that General Casey is a good man with an impeccable character. Many of the mistakes regarding our Iraq strategy are not the result of his leadership.

But it is time that the Senate insists upon accountability.

It is past time for the Senate to provide oversight by showing that we will not accept anything but unvarnished, forthright candor from our military leaders.

We expect independent views from our military leaders,

and this has simply been too often lacking over these past few years.

General Casey deserves credit for his long, dedicated service to this country. But I did not believe he should be promoted to Chief of Staff of the Army. Therefore, I regretfully cast my vote against his nomination.

CELEBRATING OREGON'S BLACK HISTORY

Mr. SMITH. Mr. President, each Congress I rise to honor February as Black History Month. Each February since 1926, our Nation has recognized the contributions of Black Americans to the history of our Nation.

This is no accident; February is a significant month in Black American history. Abolitionist Frederick Douglass, President Abraham Lincoln, and scholar and civil rights leader W.E.B. DuBois were born in the month of February. The 15th amendment to the Constitution was ratified 136 years ago this month, preventing race discrimination in the right to vote. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People was founded in February in New York City. And on February 25, 1870, this body welcomed its first Black

Senator, Hiram R. Revels of Mississippi.

In this important month I want to celebrate some of the contributions made by Black Americans in my home State of Oregon. Since Marcus Lopez, who sailed with Captain Robert Gray in 1788, became the first person of African descent known to set foot in Oregon, a great many Black Americans have helped shape the history of my State. Throughout this month, I will come to the floor to highlight some of their stories.

Reverend Jesse James "J.J." Clow was a beloved minister and a prominent figure in the struggle for civil rights in Portland, OR. In 1936, Reverend Clow began a service of ministry at Portland's Mount Olivet Baptist Church. Mount Olivet was the first African-American baptist church in the State of Oregon and during the 1940s and 1950s was also the largest Black church in the State. It was from this vantage point that Clow lived and preached a social gospel that contributed to the civil rights battles of Portland's WWII challenges and continued through the turbulent 60s.

Clow was born in Hufsmith, TX, 1 of 15 children. Clow finished high school at Tuskegee Institute and received his B.A. from Virginia Union University. His first pulpit was in Virginia, a second in Georgia, before arriving in Portland. His experiences growing up in the South helped prepare him for a lifetime of activism for justice and civil rights.

During the World War II years, Clow served as president of the local chapter of the NAACP. He was also deeply involved in the establishment of a Portland office of the Urban League. Along with these national organizations, Clow and other Portland area Black leaders worked tirelessly to improve housing and employment opportunities for African Americans. These efforts were largely responsible for ridding the city of many traditional economic and social segregation policies, including Oregon's first civil rights ordinance in 1953.

Upon his retirement from Mount Olivet in 1963, Reverend Clow spoke warmly of the progress he had witnessed during his lifetime. He continued to believe that Christianity must be interpreted in terms of how men behave towards one another and not just to comfort them. Until his death, Clow encouraged the community of Portland to more fully embrace democratic ideals in its social, political, and economic sectors.

Reverend Clow is only one example of the Black men and women who changed the course of history in Oregon and in the United States. During the remainder of Black History Month, I will return to the floor to celebrate more Oregonians like Rev. J.J. Clow, whose contributions, while great, have not yet received the attention they deserve.