

more if it is worth working to make more.

Regardless of where we set it, 17 percent to 19 percent seems to work because, at least in my judgment, a very commonsense judgment, it is a level of taxation that there has not been a revolt against. It is a level of taxation that 50 years of our country shows has increased the standard of living for the American people very dramatically.

If we consider the AMT to be fundamentally an unfair tax, any tax that would replace it would be equally unfair. Anyone who wants equity to be a fundamental value represented by our Tax Code or who wants fair treatment for this country's taxpayers must support complete repeal of the alternative minimum tax and should support the Baucus-Grassley bill, which is the Individual Alternative Minimum Tax Repeal Act of 2007, a bipartisan bill.

I yield the floor, and I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Ms. STABENOW). The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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 President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. WHITEHOUSE). Without objection, it is so ordered.

IRAQ

Ms. STABENOW. Mr. President, I rise today to speak about the continued obstructionism in the Senate, led by our Republican colleagues, concerning the vote on supporting or opposing the President's escalation of the war in Iraq.

For 2 weeks our distinguished majority leader has been trying to get an agreement to just proceed to a fair debate, to just have the opportunity on the floor of the Senate to have a debate on whether we support the President's escalation of the war in Iraq. He has offered an up-or-down vote on two different proposals—one opposing the escalation, the second supporting it. At every turn he has been stymied.

Our Republican minority claims they want to debate the war in Iraq, but they have done everything they can to obstruct the debate. I would like to go through some of the history of this obstructionism. Since the first of the year, Republicans have rejected at least three different compromises that would have allowed the Senate to move forward with a vote on the escalation of the war in Iraq. In an effort to obtain an up-or-down vote on the bipartisan resolution disapproving the President's plan, Senate Democrats offered to schedule an up-or-down vote on the McCain-Graham resolution supporting the President's plan. Unfortunately, the Republican leadership rejected this offer on what they claimed to support.

Then we, as Senate Democrats, offered the Republican leadership up-or-

down votes on two other resolutions—the Gregg resolution and a resolution stating simply that the Senate does not support the surge and demands that the troops deploying to Iraq receive the body armor and other equipment they need. The Republican leadership again rejected the offer.

Finally, Senate Democrats offered to allow votes on the bipartisan resolution and the McCain-Graham resolution that would each have required a supermajority of 60 votes. The Republican leadership again said no.

The pattern of obstruction has, unfortunately, continued. On February 5, all but two Republican Senators opted to block a debate, including the distinguished author of the resolution—chose to block debate on whether we support the President's escalation plan. The reaction across the country was echoed in numerous newspaper headlines.

The Washington Post:

GOP Stalls Debate On Troops Increase.

The Washington Times:

Senate GOP Blocked Iraq Resolution.

The New York Times:

GOP Senators Block Debate On Iraq Policy.

USA Today:

Vote On Iraq Is Blocked By The GOP.

Denver Post:

GOP Blocks Iraq Debate.

A.P.:

Republicans Block Senate Debate On Iraq.

Reuters:

Republicans Block Senate Debate On Iraq.

CNN:

GOP Blocks Senate Debate On Iraq Resolution.

Los Angeles Times:

GOP Bats Down Resolution Debate.

After almost 2 weeks of more stalling by the Republican leadership, Senate majority leader HARRY REID today, again, offered a compromise that would have allowed all of us the opportunity to stand up and take a position and vote our conscience. Simply put, every Member of the Senate would be given the opportunity to vote on a bill equal to the House resolution opposing the President's escalation of the war in Iraq and also a resolution supporting the President's plan to send even more troops into combat operations in Iraq.

What could be simpler? What could be more fair? The reaction by the Republican leadership, sadly, was not surprising. They again said no. They don't want to vote. I find it interesting that earlier today colleagues on the other side of the aisle who voted to stop us from going ahead to a vote are now saying we should not adjourn until we vote. Well, in fact, our distinguished majority leader and the majority agree. Therefore, we will have that vote after the House votes tomorrow. We will have that vote on Saturday.

Supporters of the war in Iraq have claimed that one of their goals is to spread democracy throughout the Middle East, throughout the region. That

is an ironic statement, considering that they are stifling the democratic process on the floor of the Senate. Recent public opinion surveys have shown that a clear majority of Americans—in some cases as many as 70 percent of American citizens—when asked, say they oppose the President's plan to escalate the war in Iraq. From our biggest cities to our smallest towns, the American people are demanding accountability on the war in Iraq. They have questions and they are looking to their leaders for answers. They are looking to their leaders—to us—for focus and debate and a willingness to take a position and speak out and make change happen.

The Traverse City Record Eagle, in Michigan, in their editorial page, summed it up, I believe, on January 25. They said:

Someone frozen in time for the past 2 years could have listened to President Bush outline his new Iraq policy in his State of the Union Address Tuesday and wondered what the fuss was about. That is because there is no "new" policy.

Today, the road ahead looks just like the road behind—stay the course. Only this time there will be about 20,000 more American troops in harm's way [not counting support troops]. Before we know it, we'll be at 4,000 Americans dead and 30,000 wounded and nothing will have changed.

They went on to say:

The awful reality, as many who watched Tuesday surely realized, is that the President has no exit strategy. He has no clue how to get Sunnis and Shiites to stop killing each other, let alone form a stable government. He has no evidence they even have any desire to do so. There is only his war, and it goes on and on.

Mr. President, our troops and their families, more than anybody else, deserve better. They deserve better than this strategy, and they deserve better than tactics designed to stop us from a full and open debate about the President's strategy. They deserve better than people avoiding taking a stand, taking a vote on this President's escalation in Iraq.

This debate is already taking place all across America, all across Michigan—in coffee shops, diners, union halls, office parks, at church dinners, and at VFW halls. Americans are speaking out and asking tough questions about this administration's misguided escalation of the war. And in the Senate, in a move that clearly disregards the opinions of the majority of Americans, the Republican leadership has refused to allow a real debate and a vote on the President's escalation.

Four years ago, I stood in this Chamber alongside 22 colleagues and voted no on giving the President the authority to go to war. It was a hard vote. It was a lonely vote. But I was proud to do my duty, along with all of my colleagues, and stand publicly and take a position and have our votes counted. It strikes me as sad that the Senators who support the President's escalation of the war have decided to hide from this opportunity to do the same—to

vote their conscience and to tell the American people where they stand, win or lose.

This should not be a discussion of politics. This is a discussion of the most serious policy. Any soldier will tell you that there are no politics in a foxhole. The American people—Republicans, Democrats, and Independents—are asking us to take a look, long and hard, at what we are doing in Iraq. We were not elected to stand silently by while our fellow citizens demand answers. American men and women are in harm's way. Unfortunately, it seems that the Republican leadership doesn't see it that way.

Let me again say, as clearly as possible, that I believe the escalation of this war is not the answer. Putting more Americans in harm's way will not bring our men and women home any sooner. Why would we go further down a path that has led us to this point? Why would we repeat our previous mistakes and call it a "new strategy"?

A free and stable Iraq can only be secured by the Iraqis. They must embrace responsibility for their collective future and decide that living and dying at the hands of sectarian violence is not the future they want for their children and grandchildren.

We must support their efforts, but we cannot substitute American troops for Iraqi resolve. With the freedom of self-determination comes a responsibility of collective security. I believe we must continue to train the Iraqis and equip them and provide sensible military support, based on the advice of our generals and military experts. And we must lead them by example—by embracing, not turning our backs on, our own democratic process.

The Detroit Free Press, in response to the President's announcement of the escalation, echoed the concerns of people all across Michigan and from around the country, I believe, as well, on January 11, when they wrote:

President George W. Bush at least acknowledged past failings and did not promise roaring success in outlining his new strategy for Iraq in a grim-faced address to the Nation Wednesday night. In fact, he braced the American and Iraqi people for at least another year of bloodshed—maybe the worst yet.

But that does not make this escalation of the war—the President didn't use the word, but that's what he intends to do—the best course of action. It is based on hope without demonstrable evidence that the Iraqi Government and its military are truly ready to take control of their country instead of taking sides in an internal combat. It is based on the belief that an American force of 157,500 can achieve what a force of 135,000 could not, given a little more leeway to act. And it is based on the President's conviction that a decisive military victory in Iraq can somehow break the back of global terrorism.

It won't, any more than the escalation of the war in Vietnam stopped the advance of global communism. Economic and political forces played the larger roles in that. Granted, there are elements of each in the President's new strategy, but where is the functioning government to implement them? Demanding accomplishment does not make it

so, and the new leaders of Iraq have accomplished precious little to date.

They continue:

This is certainly not the strategy the American people had in mind last November when they repudiated the President by stripping his Republican Party of control of Congress. It runs counter to much of what the Iraq Study Group and past military commanders have recommended. It further strains a U.S. military already hard pressed to meet its obligations.

I believe the American people want a new direction in Iraq. What they don't want is more legislative games designed to stop debate or hide from the realities of the situation on the ground which our men and women are facing. Wishful thinking and best-case scenario planning will not make the situation in Iraq any better. Our troops in the field and our fellow citizens here at home demand leadership, critical analysis, a willingness to change course when the evidence shows that we must, and they deserve action.

The Republican leadership can stonewall a vote on this resolution, but they cannot silence the debate. They cannot avoid reality. They cannot avoid the truth.

To every American around the country asking questions, I say thank you—thank you for asking questions, thank you for speaking up, thank you for being a part of the democratic process we hold so dear, and thank you for following your conscience.

There is nothing simple about the situation in Iraq. We all know that. But there is nothing complicated about what America is asking us to do. It is time for all of us—those who oppose the escalation of the war and those who support it—to stand up and have our votes counted.

This is not the time for legislative games. This is too serious a time and too serious a topic. The President has presented a plan. It is time for us to vote.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Maryland.

Mr. CARDIN. Mr. President, I take this time, first, to commend the majority leader, Senator REID, for doing everything in his power to bring up the most important issue we face as a nation, and that is the future of Iraq.

I must tell you, as I travel through the State of Maryland, the citizens of my State ask: What are we doing to change the course in Iraq? What are we doing?

Senator REID has proposed a way that we can have an up-or-down vote on the most pressing issue of our time, and that is whether we are going to introduce more American troops, escalate our presence in Iraq—an up-or-down vote. The other body will be holding that vote some time tomorrow. Every Member of that body will go on record either for or against the President's proposal to escalate our presence in Iraq with additional American troops.

We need to have that same vote in this body, and we should not be looking

at procedural obstacles that prevent us from going on record whether we favor or oppose the President's proposals.

I look at what the President is suggesting, putting additional troops in Iraq, as more of the same, not a new plan. If we learned anything at all from the elections last November, it was that the people of this Nation want to see a change in direction in Iraq. They understand our plans have not worked, that we need to look for a new direction. And yet the President is giving us more of the same.

What we need to do is start by saying no to the escalation of additional troops, and then we need to look at what are the right policies in Iraq. Quite frankly, to me, we need to have the Iraqis stand up and defend their own country, with Iraqis assuming principal responsibility and American troops starting to come home. We need to engage diplomacy. We are in the middle of a civil war.

We need to engage the international community to look for a political solution so that Iraqis have confidence in their own Government and Sunnis and Shiites can live together in one country. We need to engage the international community to help rebuild Iraq. They need help in the rebuilding of their country, and they certainly need the help of the international community in training Iraqis to take care of their own needs.

Americans have made a significant investment in this country. We have given so much. Four years ago, I opposed the military presence of America in Iraq. I voted against it in the other body. I said at that time:

I have grave concerns about the consequences of a unilateral preemptive military attack by the United States. Such a course of action could endanger our global coalition against terrorism, particularly from our moderate Arab allies. It also may increase terrorism activities around the world.

Unfortunately, I was right. I remember the predictions that were made 4 years ago that this would be a relatively brief military operation, that we would be welcomed by the Iraqis, that the Iraqis would be able to take care of the security of their own country, that the standard of living for the average Iraqi would increase dramatically.

Unfortunately, that has not come true. The reality of the situation is that over 3,100 American soldiers have lost their lives in Iraq. Over 20,000 American soldiers have had life-changing injuries as a result of their service in Iraq. Hundreds of billions of dollars of U.S. taxpayer money has been spent in Iraq, and terrorism is on the increase in that region, not diminished. And we are in the middle of a civil war, with sectarian violence increasing.

The Iraqis, having passed their constitution, have elected their Government, and it is time for the Iraqis to take responsibility for controlling the sectarian violence in their own country. More troops will not solve the

problem. More American troops will not solve the problem in Iraq.

I am a member of the Foreign Relations Committee. We completed over 3 weeks of hearings concerning the current status in Iraq. We heard from military experts and foreign policy experts, generals and policy people. I must tell you, they raise serious questions as to whether we can win the war in Iraq on the battlefield. They are telling us over and over again that what we need is a surge in diplomacy, not additional American troops. We need to signal the Iraqi Government, the international community, and, most importantly, the American people that our presence in Iraq is not indefinite. More American troops will not bring about victory in Iraq. More diplomacy might. More engagement of the international community might. But more American troops will not.

It is time for this body to act. It is time for us to debate the current circumstances in Iraq and the President's policy, and it is time for us to take action on the President's plan to escalate. That should be our first vote, and that is what Majority Leader REID is attempting to do. But my colleagues on the other side of the aisle are trying to use procedural roadblocks so we cannot have an up-or-down vote on the President's plan. We should never play politics with our American troops who are in harm's way. We shouldn't be doing that. But let us have a vote up or down on the President's policy, and then we need to look at other options.

The majority leader indicates that we will certainly be taking up the recommendations of the 9/11 Commission, to implement their recommendations, and we will have an open debate and the opportunity to offer amendments as to how we can bring our troops home with honor, how we can engage the international community, how we can move forward in the Middle East. That we need to do. But we first must stop the escalation of American troops, and that is the vote the other body will be having as early as tomorrow, and I hope, with the support of my colleagues, we can have that vote by Saturday. That is what we should do.

I urge my colleagues to allow us to have the debate on this floor and an up-or-down vote on the President's plan to add additional American troops. Then I hope we will find some way to listen to what the experts are telling us, to listen to what the American people are telling us, that they want to see from our country a changed policy in Iraq. They want America to exercise its international leadership that only we can do. They want us to find a way to honorably bring our troops home, to energize the international community on diplomacy and on rebuilding Iraq. And they want the Iraqis to stand up and defend their own country in the midst of a civil war, and we will help end that civil war by allowing the Iraqis to take control of their own country and by energizing

a diplomatic solution so that all the people in Iraq have confidence that their Government will protect their rights, and then working with the international community, helping build a type of country where the people can live in peace and prosperity. That should be our mission.

But let us start by removing the procedural roadblocks. Let us start by having an up-or-down vote, as the other body will have, on whether we support or oppose the President's plans to escalate American troops.

IRAQ

Mr. SANDERS. Mr. President, the issue of American presence in the Middle East is of great importance. We are currently engaged in a war in Iraq from which, according to poll after poll, a majority of the American people believe we should withdraw.

In the face of the momentous elections of this past November, in which the American electorate indicated their dissatisfaction with the President's policies in Iraq, President Bush has responded with a call for more troops, not less. At this moment, he is escalating the war, not redeploying our brave men and women out of harm's way. He is sending these troops into the middle of a civil war.

Now there are reports that the President may be considering expanding this tragic war into Iran. The President has no constitutional authority to make war on Iran without congressional approval, nor has he historical precedent. I offer today a resolution "expressing the sense of Congress that the President should not initiate military action against Iran without first obtaining authorization from Congress." The resolution sets forth the constitutional grant of authority to Congress for declaring war and funding any war, it cites Federalist Paper No. 69 on the intention of the drafters of the Constitution, and it cites Presidents Washington and Jefferson on the power reserved to Congress to authorize war.

The resolution strongly and unequivocally affirms that the President does not have the power to initiate military action against Iran without first obtaining authorization from Congress, that neither of the existing authorizations to use military force in Iraq gives him such authority, and that the President must seek congressional authority prior to taking any military action against Iran.

Mr. President, I yield the floor, and I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. DURBIN. 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. DURBIN. Mr. President, at this moment across the Rotunda, not far

from here, in the House of Representatives, there is an ongoing debate about the war in Iraq. It has been 2 or 3 days of debate with Members each allowed 5 minutes to express their feelings about this war. It is historic. It happens rarely that that procedure is used, almost always in cases involving war. I have been through it as a Member of the House of Representatives and can recall the sleepless nights that led to votes on questions of war. You know that at the end of the day, if the decision to go forward on a war is made, people will die.

Many decisions we make on the floor of the House and Senate have little consequence, some are purely ceremonial, and some just deal with money. But when it comes to war, it is a matter of life and death. So I am sure every Member of the House of Representatives, regardless of their feelings about this war, has thought long and hard about what they are saying. They have taken this matter very seriously because they understand that America is taking this very seriously.

We have lost over 3,100 of our best and bravest soldiers, men and women who have gone off to war with parents behind and families crying, wondering if they will return safely. Unfortunately, they did not, some of them. There are some 23,000 or 24,000 who have returned with serious injuries. Some are minor, but some are very serious, such as amputations and blindness, traumatic brain injuries and many other injuries that will haunt these soldiers for a lifetime as they try to return to normal life.

We have spent a lot of money on this war, over \$400 billion. As we labor with this new budget, we see the result of the decision to go to war. From the monetary side, it shortchanges America in terms of what we desperately need. Whether we are talking about additional medical research, help for education, money to schools that need a helping hand to make No Child Left Behind work, assistance for families to have health insurance and health protection, this war has been costly to America. For those who believe the money would have been better spent right here at home, that a strong America begins at home, there is a serious concern about when this war will end and what the ultimate cost will be.

We know our military is much different today than when we invaded Iraq. It was an invasion this President decided to make without provocation and, frankly, without evidence that there was any serious threat against our country. Having made that decision, having gone overseas and lost these lives and brought back so many injured soldiers, we understand now we live in a different Nation. We live in a Nation where we watch, sadly every day, evidence of violence in Iraq, evidence of innocent people being killed on their streets, and unfortunately our own soldiers are caught in the crossfire of their civil war.