

next 30 minutes will be under the control of the majority leader or his designee.

The Democratic whip is recognized.

IRAQ

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I am glad we are discussing this issue. I am glad we are on the floor of the Senate to discuss the war in Iraq. I think this is an issue that is being discussed across America—over coffee pots in offices, in doughnut shops in the morning, at schools, in living rooms, and in churches. Everybody is thinking about this war, as they should. Those of us who are fortunate enough to live in the safety of America know full well that we have over 130,000 of our best and bravest sons and daughters, brothers and sisters, husbands and wives, risking their lives at this very moment in Iraq.

I have listened carefully to my colleagues from the other side of the aisle as they have come to the floor, including the last two, Senator CORNYN of Texas and Senator MARTINEZ of Florida. I have the highest respect for both of my colleagues. I count them as friends. I work with them on many issues. I respectfully disagree with them on their views on this war.

Senator CORNYN mentioned earlier he felt there should be a consensus among Democrats about what to do with this war, that if we have 50 or 51 Members on the floor, we ought to have a point of view. I say to the Senator from Texas that there are some things we agree on, on this side of the aisle. For example, when there was a vote 10 or 11 days ago on whether we should escalate the number of troops we are sending to Iraq, whether we should follow the President's proposed plan to send anywhere from 21,000 to 48,000 more soldiers into harm's way, 49 of 50 Democrats voted no.

We were joined by seven Republicans who crossed the aisle. Is there a consensus on the Democratic side on the President's plan? Yes. And it isn't just a consensus on the Democratic side; it is a consensus across the Nation.

This morning's Washington Post on the front page has the disclosure of an ABC News poll. Some 53 percent of the American people think it is time for a deadline for withdrawing forces from Iraq, and an overwhelming majority think the President's strategy is wrong.

To argue that the Democrats don't have a consensus position is not an accurate statement. It does not reflect what occurred in a vote that just took place a few days ago.

I am also troubled by the continuing reference to support of our troops. May I put that to rest for just a moment. Twenty-three of us in the Senate voted against this war in Iraq—1 Republican and 22 Democrats. But I will tell you, Mr. President, when the President came and then asked for funds to support our troops in Iraq, this Senator,

and the overwhelming majority of those of us who oppose the policy, gave the President every penny he asked for. Our thinking was very clear: Though we may disagree with the policy, we can't put the burden of what we consider bad policy on the backs of our soldiers. We cannot shortchange them in any way in battle, even if we disagree with the battle plan of the Commander in Chief. So I voted not for \$1 billion, not for \$100 billion, but hundreds of billions of dollars for this war that I think is the wrong war. Why? Quite simply, if it were my son or daughter in uniform in this war risking his life, I would want him to have everything necessary to be safe and to come back home safely.

So, yes, we support our troops. Whether we disagree with this foreign policy or agree with it, Members of the Senate support our troops. But one cannot overlook the obvious. When it comes to the support of our troops, it goes way beyond a speech on the floor of the Senate.

On Sunday, February 18, Dana Priest and Anne Hull of the Washington Post wrote an article which has seared the conscious of America. It was part of a series about a military hospital, Walter Reed. I visited that hospital many times to visit our soldiers, marines, airmen, and sailors who were in recovery. I have been so impressed with the men and women, the medical professionals who perform medical miracles for these men and women who come home injured from the wars.

I listen to the soldiers and their families, and they are so grateful for what they have received at Walter Reed. As the article says at one point, Walter Reed has always been viewed as "a surgical hospital that shines as the crown jewel of military medicine." And so it should be. Our men and women in uniform who have made the sacrifice deserve the very best.

If that were the message of this series in the Washington Post, it wouldn't have been noted or remembered by anyone because it would have been repeating the obvious. But, sadly, this series tells us something different.

Just a few minutes' drive away from where we are meeting in this Senate Chamber, at Walter Reed Hospital, there are buildings which are in deplorable condition. There are veterans and soldiers who are being treated in ways that are absolutely unacceptable. Let me quote a few words from this series in the Washington Post describing one of the buildings at Walter Reed Hospital:

... [P]art of the wall is torn and hangs in the air, weighted down with black mold. . . . Signs of neglect are everywhere: mouse droppings, belly-up cockroaches, stained carpet, cheap mattresses.

The article goes on to say:

The common perception of Walter Reed is as a surgical hospital that shines as the crown jewel of military medicine. But 5½ years of sustained combat have transformed the venerable 113-acre institution into some-

thing else entirely—a holding ground for physically and psychologically damaged outpatients. Almost 700 of them—the majority soldiers, but some Marines—have been released from hospital beds but still need treatment or are awaiting bureaucratic decisions before being discharged or returned to active duty.

They suffer from brain injuries, severed arms and legs, organ and back damage, and various degrees of post-traumatic stress. Their legions have grown so exponentially—they outnumber hospital patients at Walter Reed 17 to 1—that they take up every available bed on post and spill into dozens of nearby hotels and apartments leased by the Army. The average stay is 10 months, but some have been stuck there for as long as two years.

Disengaged clerks, unqualified platoon sergeants and overworked case managers fumble with simple needs: feeding soldiers' families who are close to poverty, replacing a uniform ripped off by medics in the desert sand or helping a brain-damaged soldier remember his next appointment.

Here is a quote from Marine SGT Ryan Groves, 26 years old, an amputee who lived at Walter Reed for 16 months. Here is what he says:

We've done our duty. We fought the war. We came home wounded. Fine. But whoever the people are back here who are supposed to give us the easy transition should be doing it. . . . We don't know what to do. The people who are supposed to know don't have the answers. It's a nonstop process of stalling.

Walter Reed Hospital, the crown jewel of medical care for our soldiers who are giving everything in Iraq.

So now let's ask the question: Who is working to support our troops? Who is working at Walter Reed to support our troops? Rhetoric is easy on the floor of the Senate, but for these troops and for the families, it will take more than words of loyalty and respect.

I can recall when this debate started. As a Senator, I faced the toughest vote any Senator can face—a vote on a war. You know at the end of the day, if you go forward with the war, people will die—not just the enemy but our brave soldiers, as well as many innocent people. It is the kind of vote that costs you sleep, and it should.

I remember it so well. It was October 11, 2002, within weeks of the election. We had been subjected to a steady barrage of statements from the President and the administration about why this war was necessary. We had been told of weapons of mass destruction which not only threatened the region but even threatened the United States. We had been told of a ruthless dictator in Saddam Hussein who had gassed and killed his own innocent people. We had been told there was a connection between Saddam Hussein and the terrible events of 9/11 in the United States. We had been told even of nuclear weapons and the possibility of mushroom-shaped clouds if we didn't respond, and quickly, in Iraq.

But what we were told turned out not to be true. What we were told as the reason for the war turned out to be wrong. I was a member of the Senate Intelligence Committee, and I sat behind closed doors at confidential hearings and heard disputed evidence about

statements being made by the administration. I was sworn to secrecy. I couldn't walk outside the room and say: Wait a minute, this morning's headline about mushroom-shaped clouds is about nuclear weapons that even this administration is not agreed on. I couldn't say it because of my oath of loyalty to make certain I didn't disclose classified information. But I knew when it came time to vote that giving the President the authority to start this war was a bad decision, and that is why I voted against it. I think it was the worst foreign policy decision in my time in Congress. It is one that will haunt us for years to come.

Iraq has not become the last battle in the war on terrorism. Sadly, it has become a proving ground, a testing ground, a preparation place for training even more terrorists. Those are not my conclusions; those are the conclusions of our intelligence agencies.

When I listen to the Members on the other side say what we need to do in Iraq is send more Americans into that battleground, I ask myself: To what end? We were asked to do several things by this President, and we did them and did them well. We deposed that dictator, dug him out of a hole in the ground and held him accountable in the courts of his own nation. We searched high and low for weapons of mass destruction to destroy and could find none. We gave to the Iraqi people a chance for a free election, something they never had in their history. Our soldiers stood guard at the polling places so the Iraqi people could finally have their own voice and their own future. We let them choose their own leaders. We let their leaders form their own Government. We gave them more opportunities at the cost of American lives, American blood, and American treasure than any nation has ever given to Iraq in its history. We have achieved those things. We should be proud of those successes. But, unfortunately, despite all we have done, the Iraqis have not faced their own political responsibilities. After all of the years, after all of the money, after all of the training, and all of the time, they still don't have a police force that can stand up and defend the people of Iraq in the streets of Baghdad. If there is a threat of terrorism anywhere in the world, it isn't the army that has the major responsibility, it is the police force.

What do we know of the Iraqi police force in this surge, in this escalation? The press report over the weekend was troubling. We are sending American soldiers into the meanest streets and toughest neighborhoods of Baghdad where death is at every corner, death is at every door. They are searching these houses to try to find the insurgents who are causing the civil war. They are looking for weapons. They are looking for evidence of these bombs that are being set off and blowing through our humvees and armored vehicles, killing and disabling our soldiers. That is what

our American soldiers are doing now, house by house, street by street, in this dangerous part of Baghdad, and they are accompanied by Iraqi policemen.

It sounds like a good thing until one hears the details. The details are that the Iraqi police are preceding American soldiers to the homes, warning the people in the homes to hide their weapons because the Americans are right behind them. We know this because our translators are telling our soldiers the Iraqi police are not helping. The Iraqi police are trying to cover up the insurgents' tracks.

So one wonders why some of us believe it is time for the American soldiers to start to come home? I think it is past time, it is long overdue. It is time for the Iraqis to stand up and defend their own country, to put their lives on the line, the lives of their policemen and their soldiers, to make the political decisions that need to be made that Iraq can someday stand on its own. As long as the Iraqis believe they can dial 9-1-1 and order up American soldiers to come and stand and fight and die in their streets, they will not accept their own responsibility for their own future.

Those on the other side say give this plan a chance. I regret to say we have given this plan a chance three different times. This is the fourth time the Bush administration has proposed sending more American troops in for a surge to end the war. I think there is reason to be skeptical, particularly when it is at the risk of more American lives.

Incidentally, when they make reference to the Iraq Study Group, this bipartisan group headed by former Secretary of State James Baker and former Congressman Lee Hamilton, when they talk about their proposal for a surge or escalation of troops, they forget to add the one important or two important elements: That was part of a surge in diplomacy, something this administration is loath to enter into. See, they believe we should be sitting down as a nation with nations in the region and trying to work out some stable resolution to this conflict in Iraq. The Bush administration has been reluctant to do that, but the study group called for it and, yes, they did call for the possibility of a surge in troops but only if we are bringing our troops out as of the end of March in 2008. They had a definite timetable for the removal of most American troops from this theater. The other side doesn't talk about that point, and certainly the President doesn't either.

One of the Senators came to the floor and said those of us who are critical of the President's policy are micromanaging the war. Somebody needs to manage this war. Somebody needs to manage a war which, as of this morning, has claimed 3,154 American lives.

We have been losing about three American soldiers every single day while we have been debating this war. I looked through this morning's list of soldiers, and I watch it on the news-cast, and it is heartbreaking:

Specialist Christopher Boone, 34 years old, of Augusta, Georgia; Sergeant Richard L. Ford, 40 years old, of East Hartford, Connecticut; Specialist Louis Kim, 19 years old, of West Covina, California; Staff Sergeant David R. Berry, 37 years old, Wichita, Kansas; PFC Travis Buford, 23 years old, Galveston, Texas; Staff Sergeant Joshua Hager, 29 years old, of Broomfield, Colorado; and PFC Rowan D. Walter, 25, of Winnetka, California.

That is this morning's list. Sadly, every morning there is a list.

If there is a sense of impatience on this side of the aisle, if there is a sense of impatience across this land, it is because we know each and every one of those lives is so valuable to their families and to every single one of us. We want the day to come when soon these soldiers who are serving us so nobly and gallantly in Iraq can come home safely to the hero's welcome they deserve for serving their country so well.

Those of us who question this policy are being criticized because we are trying to micromanage this war. I wish I could. I wish I had the power. I do have the power, as a Senator, to speak up on this floor, to appeal to my colleagues to stand up, to ask them on a bipartisan basis to reach a compromise which will start to bring these troops home.

It is true we only have one Commander in Chief, but we also only have one constitution, and the Constitution makes it clear that the President, despite all of his power, doesn't have all the power in this town or this Nation. His power is shared, shared with the American people through their elected representatives in Congress, and that power gives us the authority to stand and debate.

Much has been said about Senator CARL LEVIN, who spoke on a television show, "Meet the Press," this last Sunday. I watched that show, and I couldn't have been prouder of my colleague from Michigan. I respect CARL LEVIN so much. As chairman of the Armed Services Committee, he takes his job so seriously. I don't know of a more conscientious Member, carefully weighing every word of every bill, trying to make the right judgment not just for the moment but for the Nation. When he spoke on that bill about reauthorizing, about questioning the authority given to the President in October of 2002, I think he was right. I know what that resolution said. We passed it in October of 2002. It addressed two challenges and two threats that no longer exist. There is no Saddam Hussein and there were no weapons of mass destruction.

I think it is appropriate that we address this issue again and that we try to decide what we are going to do to move forward; first, revoking any authority given in a previous resolution that no longer exists; and, second, carefully defining the way we will bring our troops home, making certain we understand the assignments and responsibilities they will have into the future.

This is an awesome responsibility to discuss this war, to debate it on the floor of the Senate, and to do it in a constructive and positive way. I sincerely hope my colleagues on the other side of the aisle, those who are loyal to the President and those who are loyal to the President's policy, will encourage this debate, that they won't stop us with procedural obstacles, that they will allow the Senate to speak, to debate, and to express its will. We have tried before unsuccessfully, but we are going to try again. I believe this is an extremely important priority, perhaps the highest we face.

Having said that, the first bill that is likely to come up tomorrow, maybe later today, is on the 9/11 Commission recommendations. The 9/11 Commission, my colleagues will recall, was an effort to assess America's vulnerabilities after the attack on 9/11. That commission published a report that was widely read and applauded because of the leadership of Republican Governor Kean of New Jersey and Congressman Lee Hamilton, a Democrat of Indiana. They cochaired a panel, a very distinguished bipartisan panel, which came up with recommendations to make America safer.

Some several years later, we have not lived up to their recommendations and we haven't carried out their agenda. There is much we can do to make this country safer and we want to move immediately to considering their recommendations and implementing them, whether it is port security, whether it is a communication system in Illinois or other States that allows the police, firefighters, first responders, and the medical community to communicate quickly in the midst of an emergency, whether it is a matter of mass evacuation drills, which I have been asking for and which are included in this legislation. There are many things we can do, and specific things.

There are many who think we should move immediately to the debate on the war. We are only going to postpone it long enough to discuss these 9/11 Commission recommendations. The families of the survivors of 9/11 have appealed to us to make this a high priority. For that reason, and for that reason only, we may set aside the Iraq debate for a few days but not indefinitely. This debate needs to take place for the very simple reason that as we debate on the floor of the Senate, unfortunately, our sons and daughters are still in peril in Iraq. They are still caught in the crossfire of a civil war, and we are still losing too many good American lives every single day because of this confrontation taking place in Iraq.

In the meantime, we will be stepping forward to do something about Walter Reed Hospital, but we won't stop there. Walter Reed has to meet its obligation not just for inpatients, where they do a magnificent, an excellent job, but for those who are outpatients as well. We have to take this issue to the veterans

hospitals and we have to ask the hard questions about whether the veterans of this war and all of our wars are being treated with the dignity and respect and care they deserve.

I salute the Washington Post and those who wrote these articles. I am sure they will receive recognition for bringing this to our attention. This will be a clear example and a clear opportunity for those of us who stand on the floor and give speeches about supporting our troops to prove we mean it.

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

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

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

Ms. LANDRIEU. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to speak in morning business for up to 10 minutes.

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

SENATOR KENNEDY'S 75TH BIRTHDAY

Ms. LANDRIEU. Mr. President, I come to the floor today to join many of our colleagues in honoring one of our colleagues who celebrated a very special birthday last week; Senator KENNEDY from Massachusetts turned 75. He was congratulated and applauded and heralded throughout these last few days on that milestone. I have come to the floor to give a few brief remarks in honor of this tremendous achievement because it has been 75 years well lived, in dedication to this country.

He has been an inspiration to me and to many of us in the Senate. His energy, his commitment to his work, his constant thinking about new approaches and innovation is a testament to his presence and his service in the Senate.

I also wish to acknowledge that, at first, coming to the Senate I felt very close to the Senator. Mr. President, you would appreciate this because you are from a large Catholic family yourself. Senator KENNEDY was raised some years before I was but in a similar kind of situation, in a large and loving Catholic family, with strong parents and a real focus on community service and service to the family. That is apparent in his work. His Catholic upbringing and his deep religious beliefs are reflected in the teachings of the Catholic Church, about thinking not of yourself but of others, of service, of sacrifice. Many people talk about religious values, and I am getting somewhat skeptical the more I hear people talk. I am never skeptical of Senator KENNEDY because he actually lives the values he preaches. Sometimes some of the greatest things I see him do are not evident to the camera. I would like to

share one of them. I could give plenty of examples.

Many people might be surprised to know that not only is Senator KENNEDY a champion of education, but he actually, for over 2 years, took time out of what is an extraordinarily busy and hectic Senate schedule to tutor a child, teaching him how to read. How would I know this? Because, on occasion, I had the great honor of sitting next to him in the library down the street, where I was trying to keep up with him and thinking if Senator KENNEDY can carve an hour out of his schedule, certainly I could try to do that as a freshman Senator. Needless to say, I could never keep up with the schedule. But I watched him and observed him one-on-one with a child no more than 10 years old, patiently teaching him how to read. The next year it was a little girl.

One particular day, he even had the foresight or kindness to bring his pet bunny from home. He has many pets—Splash the dog, being one, and Sonny. He brought his pet rabbit to the school, to the joy of the children perhaps to encourage them to read about animals, which is a good way to get kids interested in reading, to actually show them. He knew this instinctively. Maybe that is because of the family he is from or because of the kind of guy he is. He is an extraordinary and a very different kind of Senator. I have been inspired by him, and I am confident our colleagues have been as well.

I also wish to acknowledge the tremendous partner he has in Victoria Reggie Kennedy, a daughter of Louisiana. I have watched this couple grow in love and support of one another. I think they are a model for couples who are in public office. We could not find a better couple, in terms of their commitment to each other, to this body, to the Nation, and to the State of Massachusetts and, when they have extra time, to Louisiana. That was brought home when we experienced the last two hurricanes, Katrina and Rita. As you know, they struck our State in the latter part of the year 2005.

These storms were of historic proportion. It was hard to describe the damage—which I still struggle with trying to describe to this body. But there was one Senator to whom I did not have to take too long to describe the damage, and that was Senator KENNEDY, who got it immediately, perhaps because he has walked through south Louisiana with Vicki Reggie, his wife; perhaps he just has a big heart and great mind that can grasp situations fairly quickly; and perhaps because he leans forward always in his ability and his desire to help people in need. He didn't need the situation to be explained to him. He understood.

Not only did he help us pass one of the most extraordinary pieces of legislation in that whole confusing time of the first 6 months when we didn't know what levees had broken, where they had broken, whose they were, whose