

EMERGENCY SUPPLEMENTAL APPROPRIATIONS BILL

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, the House of Representatives passed an emergency war spending bill on Friday that includes tens of billions of dollars for projects that have no connection whatsoever to the needs of our troops in Iraq and Afghanistan, that tells U.S. generals how to do their jobs, and which pulls out of thin air a date for evacuating U.S. troops from Iraq.

It was meant to send a message to the Commander in Chief, but its only real effect is to delay the delivery of urgent material support to our troops. The President has said he will veto any legislation that includes a surrender date and which substitutes the judgment of politicians in Washington for the judgment of commanders in the field. Those who voted for the House spending bill on Friday, therefore, knew it had no chance of being approved. It was an empty promise to the troops.

The Constitution gives Members of Congress a concrete way of expressing their opposition to a war, and that is to vote against funding it. But House Democrats are trying to have it both ways: They call their bill a statement against the very war it continues to fund, a promise of support for the troops that has no chance of being signed.

Who loses out in this strange calculus? American soldiers and marines deployed in Afghanistan and Iraq and their worried families here at home are the losers.

The Secretary of Defense said as much last week. He said delaying the approval of funds would slow the training of units already headed into Iraq and reduce the funds available for repairs to buildings and equipment. He said it would force the Army to consider cutting funds for renovations to barracks and cut off repairs to equipment that is needed to support troop deployment training.

The House brushed these concerns aside to express a point of view. But troops who have been sent into battle with assurances of support got another message: Don't count on it from us.

Some have said the Senate version of the war spending bill is more palatable. They say this because its date for withdrawal is only a goal. They think that by retaining this provision, they will eventually force Republicans to accept the notion that battlefield commanders should be tied to arbitrary timelines. Believe me, they are wrong.

The week before last, we prevented legislation that would have told our enemies the date on which we will give up. A majority in the Senate showed it won't approve a bill that shares our battle plan with the enemy or which tells soldiers and commanders how to do their jobs.

We won't let timelines be used as the toll booth for getting aid to the troops, and we need to send the President a bill that doesn't include them so he can

sign it without delay. I urge my colleagues to put an end to this unfortunate and misguided effort to set an arbitrary date upon which to withdraw from Iraq and to strip language from this emergency spending bill that only guarantees our troops will have to wait for the help they need and the support they deserve.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro temore. The majority leader.

EMERGENCY SUPPLEMENTAL APPROPRIATIONS

Mr. REID. Mr. President, the first 3 months of the 110th Congress have been very productive. We have shown the American people that when Democrats and Republicans work together results flow. It is interesting, when that happens, there are a lot of positives that can be said by both parties. When we don't accomplish something, there is a lot of criticism that is shared by both parties.

This productive work began in January when we passed the ethics bill, the most sweeping reform in the history of our country. Next we worked to raise the minimum wage for the first time in a decade. After minimum wage, we finished the fiscal work of the last Congress, the 109th Congress, by passing a responsible continuing resolution with no earmarks. Then we went to homeland security and ensured that 5 years after 9/11, all the recommendations of the 9/11 Commission will be implemented. Last week, we passed a balanced budget which includes over \$180 billion in tax breaks for middle-class families and says in the future, if you are going to lower taxes, if you are going to increase spending, you have to have some way to pay for it. Ethics, minimum wage, the continuing resolution, the 9/11 recommendations and the budget—it is a record of which all of us can be proud. But, of course, we have so much more to do. From stem cell to immigration to energy, there are challenges ahead, and this week the Senate will turn its attention to the most pressing challenge of them all—the debacle of Iraq.

Today we begin consideration of the 2007 supplemental appropriations bill. This legislation includes more than \$121 billion. The vast majority—90 percent of it—is for the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. It is also for enhancing military readiness generally, for improving veterans health care—and certainly in the wake of Walter Reed and other scandals regarding how veterans are being taken care of, this is certainly something that is necessary—for national priorities such as rebuilding the gulf coast and homeland security and I mention, Mr. President, drought assistance, farm disaster.

In the western part of the United States, because of this global climate change, we have had millions—I am speaking directly—millions, not thousands, but millions—of acres burned,

and unless we figure out some way to restore that vegetation, that land is going foul, to say the least. That is what this is all about—farm aid assistance. Willie Nelson could sing for weeks about the need for this assistance to take place in the West. I am not an expert on wheat, corn, rice, and all those other products—a lot of people here are—but I am about range-lands and what has happened to Nevada.

The bill contains critical money, as I have indicated, for our troops. We need to get the money to them as quickly as we can. Our troops are serving under difficult conditions. The Senate will ensure they have everything they need to continue this fight as we have done.

Our support, though, for the troops does not stop at funding. We must also ensure our soldiers have a strategy for success. The Democratic-controlled Congress is listening to the American people and fighting to give our troops what they need and strategy—strategy worthy of their sacrifices. That is why in addition to the much needed changes for our troops, the bill also contains a strong message for President Bush: Change course in Iraq.

My friend, the distinguished Republican leader, criticized what is in this bill that will be reported to the floor shortly, saying it is not good for the troops. David Brooks, the very conservative editorial writer for the New York Times, said last Friday on the "Jim Lehrer NewsHour": This is ridiculous for anyone to criticize a democracy for debating the most important issue of the day, the war in Iraq. The very conservative David Brooks said this is what democracies are all about. The troops over there know this is good.

I have my BlackBerry on my hip. Someone BlackBerried his friend, one of my staff members, who is a full colonel in the Army National Guard out in Nevada. He keeps in touch with his friends. He said what happened in the House and what we put in our bill is good for the troops—this is a soldier emailing my friend from Iraq—because it lets the Iraqi Government know we are serious. He went on to say the deadline is important for the Iraqi people and the soldiers, and the Iraqi people know that.

Secretary Gates, when asked about this timeline, provisions in the bill relating to Iraq, said it doesn't affect the troops adversely at all.

Certainly the troops know we care about them. We give them everything they need. But last week, we entered the fifth year of this war. Think about that, the fifth year of this war, and there is no end in sight, I am sorry to say. The news this morning, when I first got up, was five more soldiers were killed yesterday, 238 this year alone. March 26, 238 dead Americans, just like the boy Raul Bravo, from Elko, NV. I talked to his mother—237 just like that young man. Three thousand two hundred forty-one so far in this war—dead Americans—25,000

wounded. One hospital in Texas has handled 250 amputations. There are 2,000 double amputees as a result of this war.

The war continues to move in the wrong direction and yet—instead of digging us out of the hole it created in Iraq—instead of stopping this downward spiral of destruction—instead of taking the fight to the terrorists who attacked us on September 11—this White House wants us to keep doing more of the same in Iraq.

In January, President Bush said he would escalate the conflict and send 21,500 new troops for a few months. Of course, we were misled on that. We now know the number is around 30,000, and they will be there indefinitely, and the President has said he might ask for more troops. There is no short-term surge, as the President has described. It is more of the same. The President is placing troops in the middle of an Iraqi sectarian civil war. More military solutions to a problem that General Petraeus, our top commander in Iraq, has said can only be solved politically. Our commander on the ground in Iraq has said that only 20 percent of it can be won militarily. That is not good enough for me. We need to find a new way forward.

If the President will not listen to the generals, if he will not listen to the American people, who have spoken for a new direction, then perhaps he will listen to us, Congress, when we send him a supplemental bill that acknowledges reality in Iraq. We must find a new way forward. The President can swagger all he wants, but we have 3,241 dead Americans.

The Iraq measure in this bill changes the mission of U.S. troops from policing a civil war to counterterrorism, training, and force protection. It rejects the notion that this war can be won militarily, and it sets a goal of redeploying our troops by March 2008. It includes a requirement for a political, diplomatic, and economic strategy to be implemented in conjunction with the redeployment.

The Iraq language is based on a simple premise: Iraq can be won only politically. In short, it offers a responsible strategy in Iraq that the American people asked for last November 7—a strategy that will enhance our country's ability to wage war on terror.

Contrary to what President Bush believes, the key to success in Iraq is not escalating the conflict by adding tens of thousands of additional troops to tread down the same dangerous road. It is to find a new way forward.

I urge my colleagues to support this supplemental. After 4 years of war, our troops deserve a strategy to help them complete the mission so they can come home.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Massachusetts.

Mr. KENNEDY. Mr. President, I wish to thank our leader for his comments about the progress that has been made in the Senate on issues that affect the

working middle-class families of this country and also for his responses on the issue of the war in Iraq, where there should be an opportunity, as we focus on the particular amendment, to get into that in greater detail. But I thank him for his very worthwhile comments this afternoon.

NORTHERN IRELAND PEACE PROCESS

Mr. KENNEDY. Mr. President, the leaders of Northern Ireland took another giant step toward lasting peace earlier today when Sinn Fein and the Democratic Unionist Party reached a landmark agreement to share power in a joint administration to be established on May 8. The agreement gives hope to all who have worked so long and so hard to bring unionists and nationalists together in government on a permanent basis.

Prime Minister Ahern of Ireland and Prime Minister Blair of Britain have been strong allies for peace. John Hume and many others have been heroes along the way. But the indispensable persons in this historic agreement today are Gerry Adams, the leader of Sinn Fein, and Ian Paisley, the leader of the Democratic Unionist Party. In reaching this agreement, they have acted to strengthen democracy and create a future of peace and stability for the future of that troubled land.

Today, the people of Northern Ireland salute them both for reaching this new day, and the world congratulates them as well. We know it was not an easy step to take. Their past disagreements have been intense and deep. The challenges they have faced often seemed irreconcilable, and the scars of the past have often seemed impossible to heal. Compromises have been difficult and painful to achieve. But with this agreement, Sinn Fein and the DUP have finally taken the essential step of looking forward together—not backward—and have agreed at long last to work with one another for the future of Northern Ireland.

The eyes of the world will be on them on May 8. All who care about lasting peace and stability look forward to the permanent restoration of the Northern Ireland Government at that time. In a world where political resolution often is elusive, these leaders deserve enormous credit for giving us hope.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

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

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. HATCH. 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.

Mr. HATCH. Mr. President, I listened with interest to the remarks of the distinguished Senator from Massachusetts. I do, myself, feel a great sense of

pleasure and comfort in what has transpired today with regard to Ireland, and I wanted to say so.

THE EMPLOYEE FREE CHOICE ACT

Mr. HATCH. Mr. President, on March 1, the other body passed the horribly misnamed “Employee Free Choice Act,” H.R. 800, and we may soon be called upon to consider that bill or a similar Senate counterpart. The bill was steamrolled through the House of Representatives in less than a month from its introduction, with only a single day of subcommittee hearings, at which only one expert witness critical of the bill was permitted to testify. It was considered in the House with only limited amendments allowed to be offered. Obviously, it is incumbent on us to make certain the Senate takes the opportunity for fuller debate on a measure of such wide impact.

The chairman of the Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee has scheduled a hearing tomorrow, where we will undoubtedly hear how “unfair” the current unionization system is and how it must be amended to allow for greater unionization. I am sure we will have a full and robust debate in this body. But as we kick off this debate over whether to deny private ballots to workers who wish to unionize, it is my hope we will be able to at least hold fast and true to the facts. There should be a full debate on these facts.

There is ample evidence to indicate that we should be wary of amending the National Labor Relations Act, the NLRA, in a way that would upset the balance in national labor policy between labor and management and employer and employee. We must not rely on slogans, anecdotal stories, and questionable secretly commissioned and selective statistics about alleged unfair labor practices.

The NLRA and its attendant volumes of reported decisions and case precedent by the National Labor Relations Board is an extremely complicated, interwoven area of law. Amending it in the way the sponsors of H.R. 800 envision could rip a gaping hole in the precise weave of this complex fabric and have a dramatic impact with many unintended consequences.

It must also be considered that amending the NLRA will not only affect the welfare of unions, but it will also have a negative overall impact on workers, employers—especially small employers—and on the economy and America's ability to be competitive in a global economy.

So let us begin the discussion of the bill. The Employee Free Choice Act is designed to increase union membership, which currently stands at 7.4 percent of the private sector workforce. The bill would accomplish that through an artificial, union-controlled “card check” certification procedure in place of the traditional NLRB-supervised private ballot election or, as