

time the Iraqi security forces take over.

If this body, in its “wisdom”—an oxymoron in this case—says pull out on such-and-such date, and the Iraqi security forces are not ready to take over, what would happen? Three things—all of them bad.

No. 1, the killing, sectarian violence between Shia and Sunnis would escalate. You would see many more thousands killed, as we would no longer be there to serve as a buffer and as adviser to prevent that from happening.

No. 2, the goal of al-Qaida, as expressed by Osama bin Laden and his No. 2 man, Ayman al-Zawahiri, to achieve the headquarters of the caliphate in the “land of the two rivers,” i.e., Baghdad, would be achieved. They would have a safe haven. They would have a safe haven from which they could train, recruit, perhaps even get back to turning on the dual-use facilities Saddam Hussein set up for turning out chemical or biological weapons.

Now, the third thing that would happen, which is a true disaster, would be the neighboring countries would have to come in to back up their co-religionists. If the Sunnis are being oppressed by the Shia, then the Sunni states will be ready, and they will come in. If they come in, Iran and its Shia partners are all ready to come in.

What happens then? We have a conflagration in the Middle East bringing in many countries in a region-wide war that will draw, unfortunately, perhaps hundreds of thousands of American troops to prevent the disaster from spreading, to support our friends in Israel.

General Petraeus has promised, in his confirmation hearings, that he will tell us if the new plan, the new rules of engagement—putting the Iraqi security forces out front, with American advisers continuing to supply American troops to go after the high-value targets, the radical Salafist jihadists of al-Qaida and other entities—we will continue to hunt them down so they do not overwhelm the Iraqi security forces.

General Petraeus will tell us. He should know by this summer if it fails. If it fails, he said he will tell us, and I would trust he would begin making such changes as are necessary, without tipping off the enemy what they are planning to do. The important thing is not telling the enemy what our timetable is.

I think it is perhaps illustrative to share with you some comments from an e-mail I received from a marine who has been in Iraq and who is going back. He was commenting on a timetable. He said: I haven’t polled all of them. I don’t speak for all of them, but I can tell you, a lion’s share think a timetable is a disastrous idea. I don’t know what possible benefit you can assess that would come from a timetable. Where is the help toward mission accomplishment?

He said: Iraqis understand that progress is being made. I think the

Iraqi forces are getting ready to take over and with our help should be able to do it sometime in 2007. But if we tell everyone exactly when that is going to be, it gets a lot easier for the merry mujahedin to claim victory, lay low, and then wreak havoc when the coalition packs up shop.

This particular marine said: I’m not wild about going back to Iraq, but I would sure as heck rather do that than essentially invalidate everything we’ve done to date by leaving too early and inviting chaos.

That is the choice. Does a political timetable give Members cover back here? Maybe. But I have even heard that ridiculed. I have heard that ridiculed. I ask this body to strike the language, let General Petraeus run the war, let him pursue every avenue to assure Iraq is stable and secure. He and the President have said, if it does not work, we will change policy. But let’s give it a chance to work.

Mr. President, I appreciate the indulgence of my colleagues and yield the floor.

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Morning business is closed.

U.S. TROOP READINESS, VETERANS’ HEALTH, AND IRAQ ACCOUNTABILITY ACT, 2007

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the Senate will resume consideration of H.R. 1591, which the clerk will report.

The bill clerk read as follows:

A bill (H.R. 1591) making emergency supplemental appropriations for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2007, and for other purposes.

Pending:

Cochran amendment No. 643 (to amendment No. 641), to strike language that would tie the hands of the Commander-in-Chief by imposing an arbitrary timetable for the withdrawal of U.S. forces from Iraq, thereby undermining the position of American Armed Forces and jeopardizing the successful conclusion of Operation Iraqi Freedom.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from North Dakota.

Mr. DORGAN. Mr. President, before my colleague from Missouri, Senator BOND, leaves the floor, I wonder if I might just engage him in a colloquy for just a moment.

Mr. BOND. Sure.

Mr. DORGAN. Mr. President, I came to the floor to speak about agriculture disaster provisions in the emergency supplemental bill. We had some people on the Senate floor yesterday questioning whether they are valid, whether they are necessary provisions to help family farmers. I noted the Senator from Missouri was a cosponsor of mine, as we worked together to put the agriculture disaster program in the emergency supplemental bill.

Let me make a point and then ask a question of my colleague from Missouri.

First of all, I appreciate very much his help. I know Missouri has been hit with a devastating drought and other weather-related disasters for family farmers. It has been the case in other parts of the country as well. We have been working for some long while just to reach out a helping hand to those farmers out there struggling who got hit with weather-related disasters to say: You are not alone. As is the tradition in this country when you get hit with a weather-related disaster and lose everything, this country wants to help you some. We help everyone around the world. It is time to take care of things at home. That is what this provision is about.

I ask the Senator from Missouri about his motivation for being a part of those of us who worked together to get this put in the emergency supplemental bill. I know he strongly supports it.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Missouri.

Mr. BOND. Mr. President, I thank my colleague from the Dakotas. Before he arrived on the floor, I made the case for it. The Senator asked about the situation in Missouri. I told them about the devastating ice storms. We have had a historic drought. What we need is a comprehensive national policy to deal with the problems and not just for the Dakotas or Missouri but for Colorado, Texas, Nebraska, Kansas, California—throughout this country—where people have been devastated by extreme weather conditions.

We have livestock producers who were hit the hardest. There is no safety net in place for livestock producers. They are not protected by crop insurance, the farm bill, or disaster protection under the USDA since the standard is crop loss and there were no crops to be lost in the middle of the winter in an ice storm. But the devastation is there.

This body and this Government came to the rescue of people who were absolutely wiped out by Hurricane Katrina and other natural disasters. Well, the impact in the farm area is very severe. No, it is not the same as a hurricane, but the weather disasters have caused tremendous hardships and threaten to put many farmers under and destroy rural communities.

That is why I am very pleased to join with my colleague in urging this body to keep the agricultural disaster program, the relief we have not had for 3 years, in this bill.

I thank my colleague.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from North Dakota.

Mr. DORGAN. Mr. President, I thank the Senator from Missouri for his leadership on this issue as well.

Let me say that the Congress did help farmers in the gulf region who lost their crops. I understand we helped cities that were devastated and lost buildings and lives and so on. We also helped farmers who lost their crops.

My point is—and I think the point of the Senator from Missouri is—there is

no difference between a person who loses their entire crop in Missouri or North Dakota or in the gulf region because of a hurricane. We do not name droughts. We name hurricanes. But if Hurricane Katrina took your entire crop away, this Government would say: We want to help you. So, too, should we help in the case of a drought or ice storms, as the Senator from Missouri just described. I certainly appreciate his help on these matters.

I wanted to come to the floor because yesterday there was some discussion by several Members of the Senate referring to the agriculture disaster piece as pork. Now, our farmers know about pork, and they know you do not legislate pork, you eat pork. There is a big difference.

I am just curious, why is it every time you try to do something in this country to help people who need help, it is called pork. Well, if you invest, for example, in public policy, as we have, to say build a road in Iraq, that is national security. If you have a provision in an appropriations bill that says build a road in this country, it is pork. If you build a health clinic in Iraq, that is national security. If you build it here, it is pork. If you build a water project in Iraq, that is national security. If you build it here, it is pork.

Why is it, to someone in this Chamber, investing in this country is always pork, but as long as it is investing somewhere else in this world, that is just fine. Mr. President, \$18.1 billion went out of this Chamber in unbelievable ways for reconstruction in Iraq. Let me tell you, any time someone is sending one-hundred-dollar bills out of the back of a pickup truck, you don't think there is going to be graft and fraud and corruption? You take a look at what has happened with respect to the taxpayers' money and the way it was spent in Iraq. I described some of that on the floor of the Senate previously.

We paid a corporation \$220 million to reconstruct 142 health clinics in Iraq. Twenty got done. The rest—122—never got done. A courageous Iraqi doctor went to the Iraqi Health Minister and said: Well, can I see these Iraqi clinics that were supposed to have been rehabilitated with American taxpayer dollars?

The Iraqi Health Minister says: Well, those were "imaginary clinics."

The money was not imaginary. The American taxpayer got fleeced. The money is gone.

But why is it when we come to this Chamber and talk about investing in people's lives in this country—a farmer, his wife, and two kids, who live out under a yard light, who planted in the spring, trying to make a go of it, hoping it would not rain too much, hoping it would rain enough, hoping it would not hail or they would have crop disease or insects, hoping they would raise a crop. Finally, when they get a crop, they hope the price is sufficient so maybe they can make a living.

Then, along comes a storm, an unbelievably devastating storm—perhaps an ice storm, perhaps a torrential rain—that wipes out their entire crop, washes it away. Or maybe it is a drought. All of a sudden, that farmer has nothing. Oh, they put the seeds in the ground, but nothing came up, or they put the seeds in the ground, and it washed away. The farmer ends up with nothing.

Look, the grand tradition in this Chamber has always been to provide some disaster aid to farmers who lose everything. Why? Because we want to maintain a network of family farms in this country. This is not new. We have been doing it for some long while. When we have devastating weather-related disasters hit family farmers, we help them with a disaster bill. It is only recently that has become controversial.

Twice I have run that disaster bill through the Appropriations Committee. Senator CONRAD, myself, and others put together a bipartisan bill. As an appropriator this year, I offered it with my colleague, Senator FEINSTEIN from California, and Senator BOND from Missouri—bipartisan. We offered it a third time. It is going to come to the floor now. It is in this bill, and we have people complaining about it. This is investing in our country's strength. This is the best notion of our country to say to family farmers: You had some trouble. It wasn't your fault. We want to help you through this difficult time.

Now, we have usually done this without great controversy. The controversy this time is because the last two times I got this through the Senate, I was a conferee and I went to the conference. The President was threatening to veto a bill that had agriculture disaster help in it for family farmers. So twice we went to conference and the U.S. House conferees, at the request of the then-Speaker of the House, Mr. HASTERT, blocked it on behalf of the President.

Well, it is here a third time and we will go to conference. This time I will be a conferee and my colleague Senator FEINSTEIN will be a conferee, Senator BOND will be a conferee, and there will be bipartisan support on the Senate side. The difference this time is we go to the conference and the House conferees will come to conference having passed their own disaster bill for family farmers. This time we are going to get this to the President's desk, at long last.

Some say: Well, why just farmers? Why family farmers? There is something unusual about those who produce from the land in this country. It goes back to the homestead days in sod huts out there, alone, trying to raise a family, raise a crop, make a living. We could do, I suppose, without family farmers, but it wouldn't be the same country. You could have corporate agri-factory farms from California to Maine, but it wouldn't be the same country. Once they control food pro-

duction, then ask yourselves: What is going to be the cost of food in this country?

Someone once wrote, and I have mentioned him on the floor a few times—Rodney Nelson, in fact, a North Dakota rancher who wrote a piece of prose about ranching and farming. He asked this question, and I think it is important for the country. He said: What is it worth for a kid to know how to plow a furrow, how to teach a newborn calf to suck milk from a pail? What is it worth for a kid to know how to weld a seam? What is it worth for a kid to know how to build a door, to build a lean-to, to grease a combine, to pour cement? What is it worth for a kid to learn all of those things? There is only one university in America where you learn all of that, and that is the family farm, America's family farm. It is an unbelievable asset to this country.

We are asking for something very simple that has been done routinely prior to this President beginning to block it, and that is when trouble comes, when weather disasters wipe out an entire crop, we say to families living out there under the yardlight, trying to raise a family and raise a crop: You are not alone. This country wants to help. That is why we brought this in this bill to the floor of the Senate. It won't make anybody whole, but it does say to farmers: Maybe you will have a chance to keep going. They live on hope. How else could you plant a crop and do anything other than hope that things will work out?

This country has a rich tradition of supporting family farmers, because it is in this country's interests. The seedbed rolls from big cities to small towns and enriches and nourishes this country. We have always known that and we have always done the right thing.

Family farmers have been hard hit in the last couple of years with weather-related disasters. This Congress took action with respect to one facet of those weather-related disasters. We said farmers in the Gulf of Mexico who lost their entire crops due to a hurricane named Katrina, you are going to get some help. The rest of you, we are sorry. Well, listen. I was supportive of saying to those farmers we are going to give you some help. It doesn't matter to me whether it is a Katrina or a drought that doesn't have a name or an ice storm that is not named, weather-related disasters that destroy farmers' crops, in my judgment, ought to be responded to by this Congress to say to those family farmers: This has destroyed your crop, but not your hope. We want to give you hope to be able to continue farming. That is what this disaster piece is all about. I am proud to stand here and support it. Those who believe this is some kind of pork do not understand what essential investment in this country's strength is all about. An investment in America's family farming is a good investment in this country's future.

My colleague from California who worked with me in the Appropriations

Committee to get this done is on the floor, so let me yield the floor to her and thank her for her leadership in responding to these needs as well.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from California is recognized.

Mrs. FEINSTEIN. I thank the Senator very much. Thank you, Mr. President.

I very much commend the Senator from North Dakota. I think he said it well and in a very inspiring way. If I had to summarize it, it would be that we in America try to take care of our own—not only people in other nations, but people who have been the victims of real disaster in this country.

The fact is we haven't been doing it for 3 years, and the disasters have piled up: in 2005, 2006, and 2007. This package takes care of that problem. In my State, California, we suffered two devastating disasters in the last 2 years which have resulted in Federal disaster declarations: a heat wave and a freeze. We are currently suffering a drought. Governor Schwarzenegger has certified through March 13 a loss from the freeze of \$1.397 billion. The total damage has yet to be figured.

I think people don't understand how big this was in California. We have losses in 35 out of 58 counties, many the most productive in the country, that produce more agricultural products than 22 other States, in 40 different types of crops. They include avocados, strawberries, grapes, walnuts, guavas, lettuce, broccoli, cauliflower, artichokes, asparagus, and celery.

The losses include \$817 million in damage to California's citrus crops. Lemons, limes, mandarins, grapefruit, navel oranges, and Valencias are dead in the field. Here is what some of it looks like. This is one tree.

Now, most people know Florida has oranges, but those are the oranges we make juice out of. When you eat an orange, a tangerine, or a grapefruit, or you put a lemon in your ice tea, those fruits are from California. But not this year. We have lost at least 50 percent of the navel orange crop, 65 percent of the Valencia crop, and 65 percent of our mandarins. My farmers need this assistance.

Some of my colleagues are asking, why do we need to provide this funding? Farmers should have their own insurance. The answer is, in California most farmers already do have insurance, but here is the rub: It is not going to be nearly enough to cover the damage.

Let me provide an example. According to the Department of Agriculture's Risk Management Agency, citrus growers will be able to collect up to \$311 million in crop insurance. Now, that sounds like a lot, but the farming costs for California's citrus industry for this year's operations alone total \$560 million. What do I mean by farming costs? This is the amount farmers have spent to irrigate, spray, prune, everything

that is necessary to prepare a crop for harvest. But this year, there is no harvest. Therefore, they absorb the \$560 million.

They also have to begin to get ready for next year's harvest. They need to get their loans. That will also be an incurrence of \$560 million in normal farming costs. That adds up to \$1.2 billion in regular farming costs, and only \$311 million—at most—in available insurance they can recoup. And they are not guaranteed a crop next year.

Add on to that the \$100 million these growers spent in January on wind machines, irrigation, and other methods to protect their orchards from the freezing temperatures, plus the costs they are incurring now to remove the dead fruit and branches.

Now, 85 percent of citrus is grown by family farmers—that is just a fact—not the big agricultural combines. These are responsible farmers. In fact, 75 percent of the citrus acres in California are insured, but again, insurance alone will not cover the needs of my constituents. This is why we need this assistance.

When some people saw there was also an appropriation for dairy milk loss, some people actually laughed. I was offended, because in July of 2006, California experienced 2 weeks of blistering, triple digit temperatures. For 12 days the San Joaquin Valley, the most productive agricultural region of this country, had temperatures over 105 degrees.

What does this mean? Well, 20,552 milk cows died and 10,738 calves died. Those are counted animals—over 30,000 dead. That doesn't include our losses in poultry. There were so many dead carcasses, the rendering plants could not handle the load. The State temporarily lifted the ban on burying dead livestock in landfills, but that was still not enough. These cows died because of the heat. Even the cows that survived produced 25 percent less milk than is normal. So the death of these animals, plus the stress put on the ones still producing, resulted in more than \$228 million in milk losses for my dairymen.

In addition, because regular breeding could not take place for a month because of the death of so many animals, my farmers will again face at least \$228 million in losses for 2007. That is why my colleague, Senator BARBARA BOXER, has joined with me in helping us push for the addition of this relief into our emergency supplemental.

This is a total of \$460 million in losses. We are asking for only \$95 million, and that is in this supplemental. What is more, this funding can be accessed by dairymen on the gulf coast, including Mississippi, Louisiana, and Arkansas, who also suffered losses due to the hurricanes.

Let me conclude. This has not been easy, and I thank Senator BYRD, Senator DORGAN, Senator CONRAD, Senator KOHL, and Senator REID for their work on this Agricultural Disaster package,

and also the Republican leadership on the Appropriations Committee who acceded to the request.

America is a great nation, and one of the reasons we are a great nation is we don't only care about others; we care about our own. If there is ever a time when we could help our own, it is in this supplemental appropriation. So what I say is: Hands off, please. We have worked hard to get where we are. The losses have been substantial. The disasters have been large. Families who can't pay their mortgages, who lose their boats if they are fishermen, lose their farms if they can't make the payments, can be helped by this assistance. So I hope it remains in. I hope we resist an effort to remove this from the supplemental package. Again, I thank those who have helped with this.

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

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

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. DORGAN. 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.

Mr. DORGAN. Mr. President, we are considering the supplemental appropriations bill. I spoke earlier about the agricultural disaster piece in that bill. I believe other colleagues will be over to talk about that as well. My colleague, Senator FEINSTEIN from California, just finished discussing it. She was a major cosponsor of it. I have indicated previously that my colleague, Senator CONRAD, is coming. He worked to create a coalition of interest and support of the agricultural disaster piece. So when others come, I expect we will have more discussion about this important issue.

I wish to talk for a moment about the supplemental appropriations bill and the issue of Iraq. Earlier, one of my colleagues was describing the issue of Iraq and the controversy that the Congress might get involved and somehow interfere and that there cannot be 535 commanders in chief. I understand that. I wish to make a couple of points about Iraq, however.

The issue of Iraq, as you know, casts a shadow on virtually everything else in this country. We are spending, in terms of the lives of American soldiers and America's treasure, an unbelievable amount with respect to the war in Iraq. All of us want this country to succeed. There is nobody here who doesn't want America to succeed in whatever we are involved in.

I wish to make this point: The National Intelligence Estimate has just been completed. There is a classified and an unclassified version. The unclassified version tells all of us and the American people that what is happening in Iraq is largely sectarian violence. It is not a fight against the "terrorists." It is sectarian violence—Shia

trying to kill Sunni, Sunni trying to kill Shia. That is a civil war by classic definition. That is what we face in Iraq. There is an al-Qaida presence in Al Anbar Province. We understand that. What is happening there is largely a civil war.

Now, the head of our intelligence services in this country testified twice. The former head, Mr. Negroponte, and the current head have testified within the last 2½ months. Both of them have said exactly the same thing. They have both said the greatest terrorist threat to this country is al-Qaida, its networks around the world, and its determination to strike us in our homeland. So the greatest threat to our homeland is from the terrorist group al-Qaida. Both have described al-Qaida as operating in a safe hideaway in northern Pakistan.

If the greatest threat to our country is al-Qaida, if the leadership of al-Qaida is directing threats against our homeland and they are in a secure hideaway in northern Pakistan, if that is the greatest threat to our homeland, and if, in fact, what is happening in Iraq, according to the National Intelligence Estimate, is a civil war, then I think the question is, What better protects our country? Is it beginning to extract from a civil war? After all, the Iraqi people have seen Saddam Hussein executed. They have seen the opportunity to vote for their own new Constitution. They have been given the opportunity to vote for their own new Government. The only question remaining is, Do those same people have the will to provide for their own security? So the question is, What better protects our country? Is it the opportunity to extract from a civil war at some point soon or is it the determination to ignore the presence of the al-Qaida leadership in northern Pakistan?

If we begin to withdraw and extract from a civil war in Iraq, do we then have a better capability to keep our eye on the ball, the greatest threat to our country, the leadership of al-Qaida and their network around the world? If that were the case, wouldn't this country wish to begin to take action against the greatest threat to our homeland and threat to our security, the leadership of al-Qaida?

That is not me describing that. That is from the National Intelligence Estimate, the combined judgment of the intelligence communities in our Government.

You can make a pretty strong case that Osama bin Laden, who boasted about murdering innocent Americans on 9/11/2001—he still speaks to us from time to time from a “secure hideaway,” as described by the head of our intelligence. Al-Zawahiri and Osama bin Laden, after all of these years having passed since 9/11, still exist. Their leadership apparently is still intact, according to the head of our national intelligence services. We generally know where they are. They are apparently in a country that is supposed to be cooperating with us—Pakistan.

The question is, Why have we not brought to justice the leadership of al-Qaida, if that is our greatest threat? The answer, I suppose, is because this country has 140,000-plus soldiers in Iraq prosecuting a war in the middle of what is now a civil war in Iraq.

We can debate forever, perhaps, the conditions that got us to this point—terrible intelligence, the most unbelievable intelligence failure, perhaps, in the history of this country. This country told the world that the country of Iraq possessed weapons of mass destruction that threatened America. Now it turns out, we understand, to take one example, that the issue of mobile chemical weapons laboratories—that intelligence was given to us by German authorities. That came from a fabricator who is now alleged to have been a drunk—a single source, perhaps drunk, fabricator persuades this country to tell the world Iraq has mobile chemical labs. But it turns out they didn't.

I could go on at great length about the intelligence failures. Whatever the intelligence failures were, we went to Iraq. This country went to Iraq, and a number of things have happened. We have unearthed mass graves. Several hundred thousand Iraqis were murdered by a brutal regime headed by Saddam Hussein. There are a number of brutal regimes in this world. We don't take it upon ourselves—unless it is in our national interest—to send troops to those brutal regimes. But Saddam Hussein was, in fact, a brutal dictator. He has been executed. The world is better for that. The country of Iraq has shed itself of a brutal dictator. His execution comes amid other opportunities for the people of Iraq. They have a constitution, a brandnew one; they wrote it and voted for it. They have a new government. They have created and voted for that government. And now we have tens and tens and tens of thousands of American soldiers in Iraq, in the middle of a civil war.

We have taken our eye off the ball because the issue really is the terrorist organizations that wish to commit acts of terror against our country. The head of our national intelligence says that al-Qaida is the greatest terrorist threat to our country. They are in secure hideaways in northern Pakistan. It seems to me that the ability to begin to extract ourselves from the middle of a civil war in Iraq gives us the opportunity to put pressure on and work with other countries to bring to justice the greatest terrorist threat to this country, the terrorist organization that murdered Americans on 9/11/2001. That ought to be our overriding goal. If that is the greatest terrorist threat, it seems to me our most important job is to eliminate that threat, and sooner rather than later.

So I end where I began. No one in this Chamber has a difference of opinion about whether we want our country to succeed. We love our country, and we want to succeed. We honor our sol-

diers, and we insist, when we send America's sons and daughters to war, that they have all the things they need and the support they need to do their job. But from a policy perspective, I believe this President has made very serious mistakes.

One of my colleagues, this morning, said the general will tell us whether things are going well. I cannot tell you how many briefings I have been in—top-secret briefings—month after month after month and year after year in which the top generals have come to us and said things are going really very well, when, in fact, that hasn't been the case. Only later have we discovered it was not the case; it never was the case.

It seems to me that this country has to evaluate what it can do at this point to begin to find a way to withdraw and extract from a civil war in Iraq. Perhaps there needs to be partitioning, I don't know. I know that is a tough subject to introduce these days. But if there are no alternatives, perhaps you have to partition the parties fighting each other, the Sunnis and Shias, and try to find another device to deal with the issue.

In any event, it seems to me it is in this country's best interest to keep our eye on the ball, and the ball here is, according to head of our intelligence, that the greatest terrorist threat to our country is the leadership of al-Qaida and their network. We have not, in my judgment, with respect to al-Qaida and the deepening problems of the Taliban in Afghanistan, kept our eye on the ball. That is one of the reasons there needs to be a change.

This notion of “stay the course” or “cut and run,” which was the slogan—there is the slogan of the week or the slogan of the month. The administration's slogan of the month last year was “stay the course” or “cut and run.” It was always a false choice that was never a substitute for thoughtful debate. It was a thoughtless chant of things that mattered very little.

What matters most to this country is that we are engaged in pursuits which will provide opportunity to strengthen this country, which do honor and justice to the efforts of our soldiers, and which relate to responding to the terrorist threat because the threat against this country is a very serious, abiding, long-term threat. All of us want to succeed in dealing with that threat.

Mr. President, one of my colleagues, Senator CONRAD, has arrived. I think he intends to speak on this agricultural disaster issue. Let me at this point yield the floor, and I think other colleagues will speak on the agricultural disaster piece I spoke on earlier.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. CONRAD. 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. CONRAD. Mr. President, this week, the Senate will once again have the opportunity to demonstrate its support for America's family farmers and ranchers by improving emergency agricultural disaster assistance as part of the supplemental appropriations bill.

For over a year, I, along with Senate colleagues from both sides of the aisle, have attempted repeatedly to convince the Congress of the United States and this administration to provide desperately needed disaster assistance.

As part of the hurricane supplemental last year, the Senate approved an agricultural disaster package. That measure was dropped in conference as a result of opposition from the administration. The need for this legislation has only been made more compelling by the severe disasters that have hit California, Colorado, Kansas, Nebraska, New Mexico, and Oklahoma during the final weeks of 2006.

In my own home State of North Dakota, in 2005, we had a disaster that was devastating to thousands of farm and ranch families. This is what we saw across North Dakota—flooded lands, over a million acres of land that could not even be planted and another million acres of land that was drowned out. Then, irony of ironies, the next year we had a devastating drought—the third worst drought in this Nation's entire history, hitting not only North Dakota but right down the heartland of America.

This is a farm field near my home, in Burleigh County. I live in Bismarck. This is a farm field in that same county, and you can see almost nothing growing.

Here is the U.S. Drought Monitor, and they determine on a scientific basis the effect of drought across America. This is from July 25, 2006, and you can see drought right down the heartland of America—in our case, exceptional drought. That is the dark brown right on the border between North Dakota and South Dakota—exceptional drought. The next category going down the scale, extreme drought, an even broader area between the two States. We also see exceptional and extreme droughts in these parts of the country, and then severe drought. That is the tan. Virtually all of North Dakota had exceptional, extreme, and severe drought conditions. And, of course, not just North Dakota, it was right down the heartland of the country.

This is a headline from July 30, 2006, from the Grand Forks Herald: "Dakotas the Epicenter of a Drought-Stricken Nation. More than 60 percent of the United States in drought."

This has been an absolutely bizarre set of circumstances: One year, extreme flooding; the next year, extreme

drought. But that is the reality of what we have confronted, and if assistance is not provided, thousands of farm families will be forced off the land.

The President's chief economic adviser was in my office to visit me on another matter at the same time there were independent bankers from my State there to talk to me about agricultural assistance—bankers talking to me about the desperate need for drought assistance. They told me and told the President's chief economic adviser that if assistance were not forthcoming, they would lose 5 to 10 percent of their clients. These are farm and ranch families who work hard, who love this country, who work the land, and who are some of the most independent people you would ever want to meet. The last thing they want is a government handout, but if they do not have a helping hand extended to them, they are going to be out of business. That shouldn't be the result. We should provide the very basic assistance we have provided in other times in other parts of the country to those who have been hard hit.

Let me make certain that people understand. To get any assistance, producers will need to demonstrate they have had a 35-percent loss, and they will get no help for that first 35 percent of loss. That is the floor. They have to have lost 35 percent before they get anything, and then the assistance will apply to the losses beyond 35 percent.

Nobody is getting rich on this program. Some have suggested this bill will result in farmers becoming more than whole because of crop insurance. That is simply incorrect. Under the provisions, a producer receiving disaster assistance cannot recover more than 95 percent of the expected value of the crop, after both crop insurance and the expected market income from the crop have been deducted.

This is desperately needed. It is done in a way that is fair and balanced and prevents abuse. I hope my colleagues will support it.

I thank the Chair, and I yield the floor.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

NOMINATION OF GEORGE H. WU TO BE UNITED STATES DISTRICT JUDGE

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will proceed to executive session to consider the following nomination, which the clerk will report.

The legislative clerk read the nomination of George H. Wu, of California, to be United States District Judge for the Central District of California.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, there will be 20 minutes for debate, equally divided between the chairman and ranking member of the Judiciary Committee.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Vermont.

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, with this confirmation—and I expect Mr. Wu will be confirmed—we will have confirmed 14 lifetime appointments to the Federal bench so far this year. This is March. I mention that because, when President Clinton was in office and the Republicans controlled the Senate, there were only 17 confirmations during the entire 1996 session of the Senate.

For those who think there is partisanship in the confirmation of judges, yes, there has been. Fortunately, it has been my friends on the other side.

Today the Senate continues, as we have since the beginning of this Congress, to make progress on judicial nominations. The Senate will consider and, I believe, confirm the nomination of George H. Wu to be a United States District Judge for the Central District of California.

With this confirmation, the Senate will have confirmed 14 lifetime appointments to the Federal bench so far this year. There were only 17 confirmations during the entire 1996 session of the Senate. I have worked cooperatively with Members from both sides of the aisle on our committee and in the Senate to move quickly to consider and confirm these judicial nominations so that we can fill vacancies and improve the administration of justice in our Nation's Federal courts.

The Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts lists 48 remaining judicial vacancies, yet the President has sent us only 27 nominations for these vacancies. Twenty-one of these vacancies—almost half—have no nominee. Of the 20 vacancies deemed by the Administrative Office to be judicial emergencies, the President has yet to send us nominees for 10 of them. That means half of the judicial emergency vacancies are without a nominee.

Judge Wu's nomination has the support of his home State Senators, and I thank Senators FEINSTEIN and BOXER for their support of this nomination.

Judge Wu has an extensive record of public service as a State trial judge, a Federal prosecutor, and a law professor. In his 14 years on the State trial bench, Judge Wu has served in the Los Angeles Municipal Court and in the Los Angeles Superior Court, handling an array of criminal and civil cases. Previously, Judge Wu worked on complex commercial matters in private practice for two Los Angeles law firms. Judge Wu has also served as a law professor at the University of Tennessee School of Law, and as an assistant U.S. attorney and later assistant division chief in the civil division of the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Central District of California.

I am pleased that the nominee before us is an Asian-Pacific American. I have urged, and will continue to urge, the President to nominate men and women to the Federal bench who reflect the diversity of America. Racial and cultural diversity remains a pillar of strength for our country and one of our greatest