

Well, we find that right now home State training of National Guard units had to be suspended because of the supplemental not being funded, and deployment of all military units is going to have to be slowed.

In other words, there are people who are part of our Armed Forces who have been in Iraq, who have served their time, who are expecting to come home. Their time of coming home is going to be delayed because their replacement will not have the resources to get back into the fight.

The administration's position on the bill is that the war supplemental should remain focused on the needs of the troops and should not be used as a vehicle for adding on emergency spending, and also for policy proposals that I find are more destined to make a difference in the political fight than they are in the fight against the enemies of our country.

Mr. President, I conclude by reading a letter that was written by Army LTC Charles P. Ferry, regarding the death of his comrade, his fellow soldier, Army Ranger SSG Joshua Hager, a young man who died in the service of his country.

The lieutenant colonel wrote:

On February 22, 2007, the Scout Platoon and I were conducting a vehicle movement at night along a route we had traveled many times before. Joshua and the rest of the Scouts had every inch of this road memorized. About halfway to our destination, Joshua's vehicle was struck by a large, deeply buried improvised explosive device (IED). Joshua was instantly killed by the blast, and the two other Scouts in the vehicle were wounded.

The lieutenant colonel continues to write:

I have been in the Army for about 23 years and served in numerous Infantry, Special Forces, and Ranger Battalions. I have served about three years collectively in combat in Somalia, Afghanistan, and Iraq, and Staff Sergeant Joshua Hager is one of the best Sergeants I have ever served with and I trusted my life with him. He was the consummate professional and the absolute standard bearer for his platoon. He died doing what he loved and what he was very good at and I was proud to serve with him. I hope and pray that our Nation will always appreciate the ultimate sacrifice he and his family have made. I will never forget Joshua and I carry his memory burned into my heart as we continue to fight in the city of Ramadi.

I have spoken with the father of Sergeant Hager. We talked a number of times about his son and his son's beliefs. I cannot imagine the pain Mr. Hager feels, but I can tell you what he did say to me. The message from Joshua's father that he wanted me to relay here was Joshua understood his mission. He understood what he was over there fighting for. He knew this was a war worth fighting, and worth winning.

Young Joshua Hager told his dad these things and added:

I'll stay in Iraq for another year or however long it takes to defeat the enemy—so that my son won't have to fight this battle when he grows up.

That statement, I believe, embodies the spirit of our soldiers in the field.

They get it. They know their mission. We should know ours as well. We ought to get to work. We ought to strip out of this bill the timelines that would constrain and tie the hands of our military commanders. We should strip the pork, the unnecessary, nonemergency, nonwar-related pork that is in the bill, and send a clean bill to the President that he might sign it and get the resources to the troops they so desperately need, not only in Iraq but just as well as back here at home as we continue to attempt to keep our National Guard properly trained and properly prepared.

This is a difficult issue. I know very much how much this issue can divide our country. But I also know how very important it is to those of us who I believe clearly understand the threat our country faces in the global war on terror, the issues that relate to the security of this Nation, and the very difficult situation we find ourselves in. We should not make this situation more difficult by injecting domestic politics into the atmosphere.

I do believe it is very important that we continue to fund the troops, that we give the troops our support and our backing, and we do so in a timely manner.

I yield the floor, and 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.

Mrs. LINCOLN. I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

Mrs. LINCOLN. Mr. President, I know the Republican side has additional time remaining. That will be reserved for them. I wish to speak under the Democratic time.

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

TRAGEDY AT VIRGINIA TECH

Mrs. LINCOLN. Mr. President, I would like to take a few moments to extend my heartfelt condolences to the Virginia Tech community and the families comforting them. The entire Nation obviously is grieving with them over their tremendous loss. We want them to know that all of our States, particularly the great State of Arkansas, stand with them as they cope with this senseless tragedy. We will continue to be with them, keep them in our thoughts and prayers in the coming weeks and months.

I attended Randolph-Macon Woman's College just down the road from Blacksburg in Lynchburg, VA. I remember when I was in college, Virginia Tech was well known for its strong and passionate student body. They had tremendous strength. They had a strong will, a strong determination, and a strong and bright spirit. I certainly

know that all of those strengths remain in today's student body at Virginia Tech. I also know that their alumni will be there to comfort them and stead them well in the coming months. We hope they know we have them in our thoughts and prayers.

WAR IN IRAQ

Mrs. LINCOLN. Mr. President, news from the Pentagon last week hit so many families throughout our great State of Arkansas particularly hard. Four years into the conflict in Iraq, the Army National Guard put 13,000 reservists, including nearly 2,000 from the largest National Guard unit in Arkansas, the 39th Infantry Brigade, on notice that they should be prepared for a second deployment at the end of this year. The Pentagon's decision to potentially deploy these troops marks the first time during Operation Iraqi Freedom that full Guard units would be called up for a second tour of duty. Our Arkansas troops already have performed bravely in Iraq, and we know they will do so again.

Today, along with many Arkansans honorably serving in the Active-Duty military, over 1,600 of our citizen soldiers have been activated for service in the Middle East and along our southern border with Mexico. The 142nd Fire Brigade based in Fayetteville, AR, mobilized last week and is expected in Iraq this summer. Eighty members of the 213th Area Support Medical Company are preparing for their mobilization orders in June. Many of these members served in Iraq before with the 296th Ambulance Company. The headquarters company, the 871st Troop Command, is also expected to be mobilized in June.

Since the war began, our troops have performed their mission with incredible bravery and skill in some of the harshest conditions imaginable. Their families have supported them and kept them in their prayers, have been there with them each step of the way, both in the harsh conditions and when they have returned. Their communities have supported them, many of which are rural communities. They are communities that, when these soldiers have been deployed, have to find someone else to fill positions while they are gone, positions such as mayor or principal of the school, fire chief or police chief, small businesses that keep the economies in those small rural communities thriving.

Because of the sacrifice of these brave men and women, their families, and these communities, we have seen a popularly elected government replace a ruthless dictator.

We have seen a democratic constitution approved by the Iraqi people replace the authoritarian rule they had known. Tragically, we also have seen civilian mismanagement of this war which is not reflective of the tremendous sacrifice put forth by our men and women in uniform. Today, more than

3,300 servicemembers, 56 with Arkansas ties, have given their lives—the ultimate sacrifice in this undertaking—and more than 24,000 have been wounded.

Now, as our troops contemplate the thought of returning to Iraq to continue an undefined mission, President Bush has chosen to question the resolve of Congress to provide our troops with the resources they need to finish the job. He has questioned us. I take great exception to the President's comments. I find them disingenuous, and I wish to make clear to the American people that Congress is committed to providing our troops with everything they need to safely and effectively complete their mission. I believe that we have worked diligently to bring about a bill which would provide just that.

Last month, I voted with the majority of my Senate colleagues for an emergency spending bill that was above the President's request for our troops and would provide nearly \$100 billion for operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. We met each of his requests and provided every nickel he asked for and more. The additional dollars we approved provide for their combat equipment, housing, and much needed health care, particularly addressing mental health issues for those suffering from traumatic brain injuries and post-traumatic stress disorder. Our soldiers in the field deserve no less. Our returning veterans deserve no less. We should be doing everything we possibly can to provide what the President has asked and more. We do just that in the supplemental bill we will send him.

Our legislation also sets measurable benchmarks for the Iraqi Government such as assuming control of their own security operations, containing the sectarian violence, and making the tough decisions toward political reconciliation that desperately need to be made—the very same benchmarks the President himself has continually called for.

The Senate did this in record time. In the past 2 years, it took well over 100 days to get to a supplemental. This Senate, recognizing the urgency of the issue, moved quicker than we have in the last 2 years. We have been more expeditious, and we acted in less than 50 days to get it passed in the Senate. We now anticipate sending him a bill next week. Despite our best efforts to find common ground, however, the President has threatened to veto this bill once it reaches his desk, although the final language still needs to be negotiated in a conference package. I hope it will be done in a way that does expedite getting the resources and needs to our soldiers.

What is so egregious about our approach that the President will not consider signing it and has been so adamant? The President points to two particular issues. First, he claims this bill would impose restrictions on our military commanders and set an arbitrary

date for withdrawal from Iraq, giving our enemies the victory they desperately want. I argue that the constantly shifting objectives of this war make it difficult to imagine an end to the U.S. commitment, unless we present the benchmarks the President has spoken about and called for. The American people are exhausted with this war, and the President's justification for staying in Iraq becomes harder and harder to stomach each and every day if we do not call on the Iraqis to step up to the plate and seize their opportunity to create their own security.

As Iraq slides deeper into an increasingly violent civil war, the President's high-risk military strategy has increased our military's involvement. This strategy comes at a time when the U.S. intelligence community reports that al-Qaida has become an increased threat to our national security because we have devoted so much manpower, resources, and attention solely to Iraq. We have in a sense spread ourselves so thin in one place that how can we react in the multiple places where al-Qaida is strengthening itself? It also comes at a time when our own military reports that its readiness has dramatically eroded because it has been overextended and underequipped.

Listening to my military leaders in Arkansas, my guardsmen and reservists, who know full well what is going to be asked of them, one of the first things on their list of concerns is the lack of medical and dental readiness for their soldiers. They find that when some of their troops get called up, because they are citizen soldiers and they may not have regular health care—which is a whole other issue to be dealing with in this body—they are held back on medical hold because they don't meet medical readiness or, in some of the more horrific stories, they just simply pull that soldier's teeth and send them to Iraq because they don't have time to give adequate dental care to bring them to that medical-readiness status. It is unacceptable and inexcusable that we should be putting those many pressures on the brave men and women who fight for this country.

Our bill seeks to address these issues. In the Senate bill, we acknowledge that the conditions in Iraq have changed substantially since we originally authorized the war in 2002. We are no longer fighting an enemy that will one day show the white flag and surrender. Instead, we are now in a referee position of a brutal fight for dominance between two warring religious sects and countless militia who are all hungry for power. Oftentimes, soldiers come home and say they don't even know who the enemy is when they go into these communities and seize what they think are civilians and don't know whether it is a militia that will lash out and cause great harm.

While I agree with President Bush that we should not leave Iraq in chaos, we don't have to. That is the point we make in this bill. We don't have to if

we make sure, as we do in this bill, that the Iraqis understand what our expectations are of them, the benchmarks we have laid down, and the expectations we have of the Iraqis to stand up so our American soldiers can step down, as President Bush has so frequently said.

U.S. troops should not be in the position of policing a civil war with an open-ended commitment. The American people realize that and are clamoring for us to move forward in a positive way to bring our troops home.

That is why U.S. policy must focus on policy that encourages Iraqi leaders to take responsibility for their country and attempt to find a political solution to this grave conflict.

America is no stranger to that. In looking for our own freedom hundreds of years ago, we realized there were commitments that had to be made. We knew there were steps that had to be taken, courageous steps that had to be taken. The Iraqi people know that, too. We must encourage them now to take those steps.

Our efforts are already having their intended effect. On Tuesday, the President's own Defense Secretary, Robert Gates, stated:

[T]he debate in Congress has been helpful in demonstrating to the Iraqis that American patience is limited. The strong feelings expressed in the Congress about the timetable probably has had a positive impact in terms of communicating to the Iraqis that this is not an open-ended commitment.

The President has also chided Congress for providing much needed emergency funding. This is one of the other areas he brings complaint about our supplemental—for providing this much needed emergency funding for items such as Katrina recovery, agricultural disaster relief, the State Children's Health Insurance Program, known as SCHIP, and firefighting, just to name a few. He has attempted to paint this funding as porkbarrel funding when the reality is these are dollars which will be used to rebuild the gulf region; dollars which will be used for farmers to offset losses over the past several years from drought and hurricanes and other types of natural disasters; dollars which will be used for health care needs for our Nation's neediest children, our most precious blessing; and dollars for our first responders and on and on.

I am reminded of a conversation I had with my grandmother one time when she said to me: It is crazy, but some people will sometimes ask you, Which of your children do you love the most? How do you respond to something like that? As the mother of twins, it is impossible. President Bush is the father of twins. He knows how important it is that all of your children—all of your children—know they are loved. Yes, some, though, who are the neediest may need more attention. That is why—that is why—the soldiers, the brave men and women serving in uniform from this country, are the

first priority on our list here. But that does not mean we forget the rest of the members of our American family. That does not mean we forget the children who need health care or the farmers who are experiencing disaster or, Heaven forbid, we forget the members of our American family in the gulf region who have yet to get the resources and the help from their Federal Government they need to begin to rebuild their lives.

These are people who are a huge part of our American family and who strengthen the fabric of this great country. It is so critically important that they, too, be included as a part of strengthening this country to which our soldiers will one day return home. These are funds which are needed now. The supplemental offers the best opportunity to address these emergencies. It is the typical place where we address emergencies in the Congress.

Moving forward, I am pleased President Bush met with Majority Leader REID and Speaker PELOSI yesterday. I see that as a sign of progress. But I am also very disappointed that the President continues to put veto threats out there about a bill that is so vitally necessary to our soldiers and to our entire American family.

For the security of our country and for the sake of our troops, it is time for a new direction. It must be a direction that better reflects the ability, the reality, and the real progress that ultimately lies with the Iraqis taking responsibility for their own future. We know—we know—it can happen if the Iraqis understand what is expected of them.

This new direction must also acknowledge we must do more for our troops when they are in harm's way particularly but also when they come home. The love and care—particularly health care—they and their families need is essential to keeping our American family whole. They not only deserve our appreciation and support, they deserve the very best equipment, armor, and other battlefield amenities necessary to complete their mission and to bring them home, as well as the proper care, benefits, and attention once their military service is complete.

Our troops are worthy of this commitment from us. We should come together as a Congress and an executive branch to make that expression, to show our troops and to show our entire American family that at this time, at this difficult time in our Nation's history, we come together in a bipartisan way, in an American way, to recognize the needs of this great country and to move us forward.

I strongly believe this bill offers the necessary guidelines to bring our soldiers home safely, and as soon as possible, to care for this incredible country—these communities they will return home to, to keep them whole and to keep this incredible fabric of our American family strong.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Mississippi.

Mr. COCHRAN. Mr. President, how much time remains to this side of the aisle under the order?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Twelve and a half minutes.

SUPPLEMENTAL APPROPRIATIONS

Mr. COCHRAN. Mr. President, I am pleased to be able to come to the floor and urge the Senate to expedite the consideration of the supplemental appropriations bill that is now in conference between House and Senate members on the Appropriations Committee. This supplemental request for funding for our troops in Iraq and Afghanistan has been pending now for way too long, without action to send this bill to the President for his signature.

Over 2 weeks ago, I received a letter from the Joint Chiefs of Staff outlining the urgency of this appropriations bill. I am going to read a couple of excerpts from that letter now:

With the increasing pace of operations and material needs in Iraq and Afghanistan, we ask that the Congress expeditiously complete its work on the Fiscal Year 2007 Emergency Supplemental. Timely receipt of this funding is critical to military readiness and force generation as we prosecute the war on terror. Given the current status of this legislation, we are particularly concerned that funding could be significantly delayed.

It is very clear that delay is occurring, and it is a serious matter. We are talking about life-and-death situations, the ability to furnish the equipment, the weaponry, the training that is necessary for our Armed Forces to carry out their mission.

This is not a time to play politics with the well-being of troops in the field. I am afraid that is what we are witnessing. I do not have any particular problem with the Senate and House members of our conference committee seriously engaging in a discussion of our differences and resolving those and submitting a final conference report as soon as possible. I urge that is what we do. But we are seeing more and more delay. That is just not justified under the circumstances in which we find ourselves.

In this letter I received the other day, here is another thing that is pointed out by the Joint Chiefs of Staff:

Without approval of the supplemental funds in April, the Armed Services will be forced to take increasingly disruptive measures in order to sustain combat operations. The impacts on readiness and quality of life could be profound. We will have to implement spending restrictions and reprogram billions of dollars. Reprogramming is a short-term, cost-inefficient solution that wastes our limited resources. Spending restrictions will delay and disrupt our follow-on forces as they prepare for war, possibly compromising future readiness and strategic agility. Furthermore, these restrictions increase the burden on servicemembers and their families during this time of war.

I do not know how the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and those who

are working closely with him in this very difficult period could be more clear about the importance of action now on this supplemental appropriations bill.

I am not going to belabor the point, but I think for us to continue to engage in who is going to win this political struggle about deadlines, forced redeployments from Iraq and Afghanistan, suspension of activities of this kind or the other, and who is in charge, it makes the world wonder whether our Nation is competent to deal with an emergency that threatens the very security of our country.

I know when I came to Congress, you would hear it said that partisan politics should stop at the water's edge, that whatever is going on in other parts of the world that affects our security, our economic well-being, threatens us all as a nation, Democrats, Republicans, young and old, the military, and the civilian leaders of our country—we are all in this together.

We need to work out our differences and resolve them somehow. Let's look to compromise that is fair, that carries out the intent as expressed in these bills by those who have supported and passed an appropriations bill in the Senate and one in the House. Let's resolve the differences. That is what we are waiting on. And do you know what. The conference committee has not even met. There has been no meeting of the conferees on the part of the House or the Senate to discuss the differences. Now, that is inexcusable, and I lay that at the feet of the leadership of the Senate and the House. We are all in this together. I am not saying just the Democratic leadership or the Republican leadership, but we as Members ought to call on our leaders now.

Let's end this logjam. Let's end this confrontation and the political grandstanding that is going on on the part of some. I think we need to immediately move to conference. Let's work on these bills. Let's get them resolved in a conference report that the President can sign.

We are talking about a supplemental appropriations bill for our military forces. There have been other things added in both the Senate and the House. Well, that is not unusual. That happens. What we can agree on, let's agree on and send it to the President. But let's stop the delay, the procrastination, the finger-pointing, the political accusations that the President does not have the interests of the country at heart—whatever is being said in so many words. It is a political attack against the President. This is not the time for partisan politics. This is the time for the Senate and the House to get together, resolve our differences, and move on, support our troops, and protect our national security interests. That is what this bill does.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that a copy of the letter signed by Peter J. Schoomaker, General, U.S. Army, Chief of Staff; Michael G.