

RECOGNITION OF THE REPUBLICAN LEADER

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Republican leader is recognized.

TROOP FUNDING

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, let me echo the remarks of the majority leader on the question of the troop funding bill. It appears as if it is now in a form that is satisfactory to the President and will, in fact, get the necessary funding to the troops for the mission through the end of September.

I share the view of the majority leader that we ought to wrap this matter up at the earliest possible time, as soon as we get it from the House of Representatives, which could even be later today. So I think we are in the same place on wrapping this bill up and getting it down to the President for signature at the earliest possible time.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

MORNING BUSINESS

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, there will be a period for the transaction of morning business for up to 60 minutes, with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each, with the time equally divided and the first half of the time under the control of the Republicans and the second half of the time under the control of the majority.

The Senator from Tennessee is recognized.

ORDER OF PROCEDURE

Mr. ALEXANDER. Mr. President, Senator SALAZAR and I asked the leadership for 30 minutes this morning to discuss Iraq. I thank the leadership for giving us that time.

I ask unanimous consent that the time be allocated in the following way: 5 minutes each for, first, Senator PRYOR, then Senator BENNETT, then Senator CASEY, then Senator GREGG, then Senator ALEXANDER, and finally Senator SALAZAR. If the Chair would let each Senator know when 5 minutes has expired, I would appreciate that.

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

IRAQ

Mr. PRYOR. Mr. President, let me say that I am very honored today to join my friends, Senator SALAZAR of Colorado and Senator ALEXANDER of Tennessee, in their efforts to try to restore some nonpartisanship to our discussion on Iraq. I feel very strongly

that we should never have a party-line vote on Iraq. We have 160,000 troops on the ground. It is just too important an issue for one party to take one side, the other party to take another side, and for the White House to do one thing and Congress to do another. In fact, we talk often in this Chamber about how there needs to be a political solution inside Baghdad. The truth is, there needs to be a political resolution inside of Washington, DC, when it comes to Iraq.

I am honored to lend my name today to this effort by Senator SALAZAR and Senator ALEXANDER.

One thing I have noticed in the last several weeks and months—maybe in the last year—when it comes to Iraq is that there is a lot of rhetoric. To be honest, that is not helpful. It is not bringing our troops home earlier. It is not providing more stability inside Iraq. It is not allowing Iraq to function as a sovereign nation. We need to tone down the rhetoric and roll up our sleeves and work through this together.

I also understand that Senator BENNETT, Senator GREGG, and Senator CASEY have all joined in this effort as well. It is an honor for me to be part of this bipartisan solution.

One of the things we are going to emphasize here is Iraqi accountability. We know that is something which needs to happen inside Iraq. The Iraqis need to take responsibility for their own country. The Iraq Study Group talked about this a lot in the pages of their report, where on page after page they talk about what they believe needs to happen inside Iraq.

So this bill which Senators SALAZAR and ALEXANDER will be filing in the coming weeks talks about diplomatic efforts, about securing Iraq's borders, promotes economic commerce and trade inside Iraq, political support, and it talks about a multilateral diplomatic effort. It talks about milestones and also about redeploying troops. After talking to so many people in my State and around the country, I think that is where America wants us to be. They want a stable Iraq.

It is a little bit like what Colin Powell said: It is the Pottery Barn principle; that is, if you break it, you own it. Well, we went into Iraq, and we have a lot of responsibility there. I think most Americans understand that. They don't like what they see on the front pages of the papers every day or on the evening news, but they do know we have a responsibility inside Iraq, and they want us, in the Senate, in the House, and also at the White House, to show leadership. This is a time for leadership, a time for us to come together on these principles which the Iraq Study Group laid out—not that every one of them is exactly right, but they laid out a lot of principles that I believe many people in this Chamber can rally around and hold on to. If we implement these and make that our national policy, then I think we can

get better results on Iraq than we have had in the past.

I know General Petraeus has mentioned that we cannot rely on a purely military solution inside Iraq. I think he is exactly right; I think he is 100 percent right on that. It needs to be a multifronted effort—security, political, economic, and diplomatic. We need to do a lot to help Iraq get back on its feet and become a functioning nation again.

Mr. President, I am honored to join my colleagues in this effort. I invite other colleagues to look at the Salazar legislation and consider joining it as well in the coming weeks.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. SALAZAR). The Senator from Utah is recognized.

Mr. BENNETT. Mr. President, I am honored to join with my friends in this particular effort. I congratulate the occupant of the chair, Senator SALAZAR, and Senator ALEXANDER for putting this forward. We are seeing people come on board in equal numbers on both sides of the aisle to demonstrate that this is a bipartisan effort.

Some might say this is an attack on the President's plan. I do not see it in that fashion at all. I think this is a demonstration of bipartisan support for an American plan, to see what we can do to get a more stable Iraq.

When I go to Iraq and talk to the experts, they tell me the war is being fought on two fronts: It is being fought in Iraq and in Washington, DC. Al-Qaida has declared Iraq as the front line of their war on the "great satan," which to them is the United States of America. The battle being fought in Washington, DC, has to do with America's resolve in standing up to al-Qaida. The word that is going out from Osama bin Laden in his audiotapes, and the letters that are being circulated, is that if we can just hold on long enough, the battle will be resolved in Washington, DC, as the Americans decide they no longer want to continue the fight.

By demonstrating in a bipartisan fashion that the Senators of the United States are willing to talk about long-term commitments and long-term solutions, we are making our contribution to winning the war in Washington. General Petraeus has been charged with the security portion of the war in Iraq. The Iraqi Parliament and the Iraqi Government themselves must deal with the political problems in Iraq. We must not let them down by partisan bickering in Washington that encourages al-Qaida to believe America will walk away from its responsibilities.

This piece of legislation is not about name calling or blaming for past mistakes. There is no question there have been past mistakes. We will let the historians sort that out. Our responsibility is to do today what is needed to bring about an eventual proper resolution.

In every war America has been in, there have been times of darkness,

times of despair. Think about Abraham Lincoln and what he faced with the continuing bad news from the front in his effort to keep the Union together. Think about World War II and the bad news that came out of the first encounters in North Africa and some of the other American efforts where we were repulsed. If we had all said we are going to turn our backs on this and walk away, we would not have the kind of world of peace we have received as a result of our efforts in those wars.

Now is the time for the Congress to say: Regardless of what may or may not have been a mistake in the past, we still have to stand together and move forward on the basis of intelligent analysis, and we are using as our starting point as that analysis the Iraqi Study Group. The President is not hostile to this. I think he is open to it, and I think it is incumbent upon the Congress to say to him: Look for new solutions, but base them on sound analysis, and if you will, we will be with you, we will move forward in a bipartisan manner to see to it America does not fail in Iraq.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Pennsylvania.

Mr. CASEY. Mr. President, I am honored today to join in a bipartisan initiative to introduce legislation based upon the recommendations of the Iraq Study Group. I proudly stand with my distinguished colleagues—you, Mr. President, as well as Senators ALEXANDER, BENNETT, PRYOR, and GREGG—in affirming that this bill will offer a new way forward for the United States in Iraq.

The detailed recommendations contained in this bill offer a comprehensive blueprint for renewed diplomacy, restructured economic assistance, and a redeployment of U.S. military forces in Iraq to emphasize training and equipping of Iraqi security forces, conducting limited counterterrorism missions, and protecting our own forces.

These recommendations were issued in December 2006, over 5 months ago, but, if anything, their utility is even more apparent today.

Our troops should not be refereeing a civil war. And so this Congress and the President must come together—must come together—to form and to forge a new path. The Iraq Study Group's final report is the only comprehensive plan on the table to do that.

I approach this bill from a slightly different perspective than some of my cosponsors. In fact, I cosponsored the Reid resolution to change our direction in Iraq, with a goal of completing that redeployment no later than March of 2008. That position has been reflected in the votes I have cast, the questions I have asked as a member of the Foreign Relations Committee at hearings, and the statements I have delivered on the Senate floor. I strongly opposed the President's decision to escalate the number of combat troops in Iraq. For that reason, I voted for the first supplemental bill sent to the President's

desk which called for a more restricted U.S. military mission and a phased redeployment of our combat forces from Iraq.

A majority of Congress has made clear their desire to change course. Yet unless we achieve a more bipartisan consensus in the Congress that change is necessary, an impasse will continue and our troops will continue to pay the price. It is for that reason I believe the Iraq Study Group's prescribed course of action represents our best hope for a bipartisan consensus in an approach to wind down this combat role in Iraq and successfully transition our mission there.

The members of this Iraq Study Group included foreign policy and military experts, as well as other distinguished Americans with impressive experience in public service.

There is no challenge greater than determining how the United States can salvage our effort in Iraq in a manner that protects our core national interests, that does right by the Iraqi people, and enables our troops, who have accomplished every mission they have been given over the past 4 years, to come home finally.

After months of study and focused deliberations with almost 200 experts, including leading U.S. and Iraqi Government officials and regional scholars, the Iraq Study Group released last December a detailed report with 79 recommendations. This report prescribed a comprehensive diplomatic, political, and economic strategy that includes sustained engagement with regional neighbors and the international community in a collective effort to bring stability to Iraq.

There are a few recommendations in the Iraq Study Group report that I, in fact, disagree with personally. But the comprehensive plan put forth by the group, and particularly the elements emphasized in our bill, represents the best thinking we have on how to resolve the Iraq dilemma in the long run.

Time is running out to change course in Iraq. In Pennsylvania, 166 men and women have died. Yesterday we learned 9 Americans were killed in a series of attacks across Iraq. Meanwhile, we continue to search for two American soldiers taken hostage, and at the same time we hear the grim news that the body of a third missing U.S. soldier was identified yesterday.

It is time for a change, and I know of no more detailed proposal, no more exhaustively researched set of recommendations and findings and no more comprehensive solution than that offered by the Iraq Study Group. This bill, brought forward by a bipartisan group of Senators, with a diverse set of perspectives and opinions, transforms the recommendations of this group into the declared policy of the U.S. Government.

This bill offers our best chance to forge a change of direction at long last in Iraq and to do so in a fashion that, indeed, brings our Nation together.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from New Hampshire.

Mr. GREGG. Mr. President, I join my colleagues this morning especially in thanking and congratulating the Senator from Colorado and the Senator from Tennessee for bringing forward this approach. There is no question but that we are going to begin disengaging from Iraq. The question is: Is that disengagement going to be done in a manner which strengthens our security as a nation or is it going to be done in a manner which undermines our security as a nation? Are we going to leave an Iraq which is stable enough to govern itself and maintain its own security and have a government that functions or are we going to leave an Iraq which becomes divided into warring factions which may lead to literally a genocidal event with an element of the country which is a client state for Iraq, an element of the country which is a safe haven for al-Qaida, and an element of the country which is perceived as a threat to Turkey?

Clearly, we cannot precipitously abandon the people of Iraq or our own national interests in having a stable Iraq. So we need to look for a process which is going to allow us to proceed in an orderly way and in a way which, hopefully, can start to bring our own Nation together as we try to address this most difficult issue.

Looking to the proposal of the Iraq Study Group is, in my opinion, the appropriate way to proceed. It is interesting that today we are going to see, I believe, the passage of a supplemental bill which will fund our soldiers in the field, which we absolutely have an obligation to do, which, after a lot of pulling and tugging and different ideas being put on the table, has reached a position which, hopefully, will have a consensus vote and will represent a majority which will be able to pass that bill and, thus, fund the soldiers in the field in a manner which has both sides working together, the Democratic leader having endorsed the language and the President having endorsed the language.

But this agreement today which has in it the Warner language, which I supported, is a precursor to the next step, and the next step should be a broader coalition within our political process of developing a plan for disengagement from Iraq that assures the security of the United States and the stability of that country. Thus, I think the step which is being proposed today by the Senator from Colorado and the Senator from Tennessee and is supported by the Senator from Pennsylvania, the Senator from Arkansas, the Senator from Utah, and myself is an effort to set out a blueprint or a path which we can, hopefully, follow in a bipartisan way as we proceed down this road.

The Iraq Study Group did this country an enormous service—former Congressman Hamilton and former Secretary of State Baker—in extensively

studying the issue and coming back with very concrete and specific proposals as to how we can, hopefully, effectively deal with settling the Iraq situation.

I congratulate both of these Senators for this initiative. I am happy to join in it. I look forward to it being the template upon which we build a broader coalition which I hope will be bipartisan and which I hope can settle a little of the differences which are so dividing our Nation and which will give not only the Iraqi people the opportunity to have a surviving, stable government, but will give ourselves the direction we need to assure our safety as we move forward in this very perilous time confronting terrorists who wish to do us harm.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Tennessee.

Mr. ALEXANDER. Mr. President, I thank the Senator from New Hampshire. I can think of no two Senators on our side of the aisle whose words are listened to more carefully and more respectfully than the Senator from New Hampshire and the Senator from Utah. I salute the Senator from Pennsylvania for his statement and leadership, and the Senator from Arkansas, who spoke so constructively, and especially the Senator from Colorado, who is the principal sponsor of this legislation and whom I am proud to join.

Senator PRYOR is exactly right when he said this morning that it is time for us to stop having partisan votes on Iraq. If I were an American fighting in Iraq, I would be looking back at us and wondering: What are they doing in Washington, DC, arguing and sniping at each other while we are fighting and dying? I would be thinking: If they are going to send us to Iraq to do a job, at least they could agree on what the job is.

We owe it to our troops and to our country to find a bipartisan consensus to support where we go from here in Iraq. We need a political solution in Washington, DC, as much as we need a political solution in Baghdad.

The announcements today by four more Senators, each well respected—Senators PRYOR, BENNETT, CASEY, GREGG—suggests the recommendations of the Iraq Study Group is the way to do that. Three Republicans, three Democrats from the North, South, East, and West, some relatively new Senators, some who have been here a long time, fresh voices, a fresh approach for a fresh attitude for this debate. Before the end of the week, I believe there will be two more Senators—one Democrat, one Republican. Then in June when we return to Washington, the six or the eight of us intend to offer the legislation Senator SALAZAR and I have drafted to implement the recommendations of the bipartisan Iraq Study Group.

Today we are only six, perhaps eight—a modest beginning. But even we six or eight are a more promising

bipartisan framework of support for a new direction in Iraq than we have seen for some time in the Senate. Those who know the Senate know we usually do our best and most constructive work when a handful of Senators cross party lines to take a fresh look at a problem, embrace a new strategy, and try to do what is right for our country.

We are not going to put hundreds of thousands of American troops into Iraq. We are not going to get out of Iraq tomorrow, and the current surge of troops in Baghdad, which we all hope is successful, is not by itself a strategy for tomorrow. The Iraq Study Group report is a strategy for tomorrow. It will get the United States out of the combat business in Iraq and into the support, equipment, and the training business in a prompt and honorable way. It will reduce the number of troops in Iraq. Those who stay will be less in harm's way—in more secure bases, embedded with Iraqi forces. Special forces will stay to counter al-Qaida. The report says this could—not must but could—happen in early 2008, depending on circumstances.

The report allows support for General Petraeus and his troops by specifically authorizing a surge, such as the current surge. Because there would still be a significant long-term presence in Iraq, it will signal to the rest of the Middle East to stay out of Iraq.

It aggressively encourages diplomatic efforts. The President of the United States has spoken well of this report recently, and embraced parts of it, but it is not his plan. The Democratic majority has borrowed parts of the Iraq Study Group report, but it is not the Democratic majority plan. That is why the report has a chance to work. It has the seeds of a bipartisan consensus.

We six or eight, or hopefully more, will introduce our legislation in June, making the recommendations of the Iraq Study Group the policy of our country and inviting the President to submit a plan based upon those recommendations. I hope President Bush will embrace this strategy. I hope more Senators will.

It is ironic for the oldest democracy, the United States, to be lecturing the youngest democracy, Iraq, about coming up with a political consensus when we, ourselves, can't come up with one. This is the foremost issue facing our country. The Iraq Study Group report is the most promising strategy for a solution: getting out of the combat business in Iraq and into the support, equipping, and training business in a prompt and honorable way.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Colorado.

Mr. SALAZAR. Mr. President, how much time remains?

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The majority has 20 minutes.

Mr. SALAZAR. Mr. President, I rise this morning, first of all, to congratu-

late my colleagues. Senator ALEXANDER has worked tirelessly with us in putting together the legislation on the implementation of the Iraq Study Group recommendations. He has been a key leader in trying to pull a group of us together to try to develop a new direction going forward in Iraq. I thank him for his leadership.

I also wish to thank both Senator PRYOR and Senator CASEY for joining us as cosponsors of this legislation. They are people who are trying to search for a solution on the Democratic side, and I very much appreciate their efforts. As for Senator GREGG and Senator BENNETT, I appreciate also their statements, their cosponsorship of this legislation, and their desire to come forward to a solution that might unite us in the Senate on a way forward.

Let me say at the outset that when we think about what it is we are trying to do with respect to Iraq at this point in time, we have a lot of people who are looking backward and saying there are lots of problems, lots of failures that have happened—from prewar intelligence, to decisions going into Iraq, to the prosecution of the war, et cetera—but the fact is we are there now. The fact is, we have 140,000 American troops on the ground in Iraq today. So the real question for us ought to be, as the Congress, how it is we are going to move forward together.

I think in the broadest sense there is not a disagreement on what it is we want. What is the end stake for us in Iraq? We want to bring our troops home. I think we all would like to have our troops back home, reunited with their families and out of harm's way. That is the goal we want to get to. The second goal we want to get to is a stable Iraq and a stable Middle East. The fact is, Iraq does not stand alone. It is in a sea of very difficult political turmoil at this point in time. So we want us to have success in Iraq.

There has been a lot of debate about what it is we ought to have been doing in Iraq over the last several years. But the only group that has taken a significant amount of time and thought through the best way forward in Iraq was the Iraq Study Group. It was this bipartisan group of leaders, led by former Secretary of State James Baker and Congressman Hamilton, as co-chairs of a bipartisan commission of elder statesmen and women, that came up with the most thoughtful, comprehensive approach on the way forward.

The essence of what that report said is that the Iraqi Government has a responsibility to move forward and to meet the milestones that are set forth for success in that report. It says: If you do that, Iraqi Government, we, the United States, are going to be there to help you. On the other hand, if you don't do that, we, the United States, are going to reduce our help to you. It is an effort to put pressure on the Iraqi Government and the Iraqi people to

deal with the sectarian violence they have in place and to move forward in a fashion that will create stability in Iraq.

I am hopeful, as we move forward from this day, and by the time we come back from the Memorial Day break, that besides the six Senators who have joined as cosponsors of this legislation, we will have additional cosponsors. At the end of the day, it seems to me that we, as the Congress, have a responsibility to the men and women who are on the ground in Iraq to try to find a common way forward.

On the issue of war and peace, there should not be a Republican and Democratic divide. What we ought to be doing is trying to find a common way forward where we can bring Democrats and Republicans together to an understanding of how we will ultimately achieve success in Iraq and bring our troops home.

Mr. President, I yield the floor, and I thank my colleague from Tennessee, Senator ALEXANDER.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Rhode Island.

HEALTH CARE

Mr. WHITEHOUSE. Mr. President, I return to the floor to continue my series of remarks on health care reform.

As I have said, I recognize the difficulty of figuring out a better way to finance our health care system, a better way than part employer insured, part Government insured, and part uninsured. I am committed to working to achieve universal coverage for all Americans, but we have to recognize also that the underlying health care system itself is broken. It is broken in the way it delivers and pays for care, it creates massive costs and poor health outcomes, and those massive costs and poor health outcomes make the financing and access problems actually harder to solve. So I wish to focus now on system reform to give us a better operating health care system.

We have to start by recognizing that America's health care information technology is decades behind where it could be. The Economist magazine has described it as the worst in any American industry except one—the mining industry. As a result, we are losing billions and billions of dollars to waste, to inefficiency, and to poor quality care. Ultimately, and tragically, lives are lost to preventable medical errors because health care providers do not have adequate decision support for their decisions on treatment, medication, and other care.

Let us stop on the financial question for a moment. Some pretty respectable groups have looked at health information technology to see what they think it would save in health care costs, and here is what they report: RAND Corporation, \$81 billion, conservatively, every year; David Brailer, former National Coordinator for Health Information Technology, \$100 billion every

year; and the Center for Information Technology Leadership, \$77 billion every year. If you average the three, you get \$86 billion a year. For RAND, the number I quoted was a conservative number. Their high-end estimate was a savings of \$346 billion a year. So there is a huge amount of money at stake.

The question is: Are we making the investments we need to capture these savings? Well, say you are a CEO, and one of your division heads comes to you with a proposed investment to reduce production costs in your facility by \$81 billion a year. How much would you authorize her to spend to achieve those savings? I suspect it would be quite a lot of money. Well, here is what we authorized ONCHIT to spend this year—the Office of National Coordinator of Health Information Technology. This Congress authorized \$118 million. That is about 14 hours' worth of the \$81 billion in annual savings conservatively estimated by RAND. Would it not be worth spending more to capture those savings?

You say, well, maybe the private sector will spend it for us. But look at the way our complex health care sector is divided into doctors, hospitals, insurers, employers, nurses, patients, and more. Which group do you expect to make the decisions about a national health information technology system? And they are not homogenous groups. Whom within them do you expect to make decisions about a national health information technology system?

Go back to imagining that you are a CEO. You want to install an IT system in your corporation. Your corporation has five major operating divisions. Would you pursue your corporate IT solution by waiting for each division to try to build the entire corporate IT system, without even talking to each other? Of course not. It would be a ridiculous strategy. None of your divisions would want to go first. Each division would like to wait and be a free rider on the investment of another division. Each one would face what I call the "Betamax risk," that they will invest in a technology that proves not to be the winning technology, and each would have to figure out how to pay for the system, the whole system, out of only its own share of the gains. The result is the capital would not flow efficiently.

This pretty well describes where we are in America on health information technology. So here, in Washington, we have a job to do. First, we have to set some ground rules. In the old days, when our Nation was building railroads, the Government had a simple job to do: It had to set the requirements for how far apart the rails were going to be. That way a boxcar loading in San Francisco could get to Providence, RI, and know it could travel the whole way on even rails. The development of the rail system would never have happened without those ground rules.

In health information technology, there are ground rules we need to decide on, too, to get this moving—rules for interoperability among systems, rules for confidentiality and security of data, rules for the content of an electronic health record. All of that is the job of Government to organize.

The second job is to get adequate capital into the market. Software costs money. Hardware costs money. Entering data costs money. Most important, the disruption to the work flow of hospitals and doctors costs time and money, and it takes time and attention away from patients. So developing adequate health information technology is not going to be easy or cheap. But for savings of \$81 billion a year, maybe \$346 billion a year, it is worth a big effort.

So how do we get that capital flowing? Well, one could argue the way to solve this is to treat the health information highway similar to the Federal highway system—a common good that we pay for with tax dollars because it is so valuable to the economy to get goods cheaply and reliably from point A to point B. So maybe we should pay for this through taxes, similar to the national highway system. But a highway is pretty simple technology. Because the health information network is so much more complex, and because I think we need a lot more market forces at work and a lot more initiative and profit motive than the Federal highway funding model provides, I looked around for another model, a model that provides the central decisionmaking that is required to get the boxcars rolling, a model that provides access to capital, and a model that captures the vibrancy of the private sector.

I found one. We have actually been here before, or pretty close anyway. There was, some time ago, a new technology. Similar to health information technology, it would transform an industry; similar to health information technology, it would lower costs and expand service; similar to health information technology, it was a win-win situation for business and for consumers.

But the technology was, like health information technology, stuck in a political and economic traffic jam.

Our President at the time came up with the solution. The technology was communications satellites. The President was John F. Kennedy. The solution was COMSAT.

The COMSAT legislation broke the logjam. The COMSAT legislation created a publicly chartered corporation with a private board that raised the capital, launched the satellites, was profitable and successful for decades, and eventually merged into Lockheed-Martin—a true public-private success story.

My proposal, in a nutshell, is to create a not-for-profit, modern COMSAT for health information technology. Because of the complexity of the health care information puzzle, legislation is