

can create more jobs here. We would like to reward outstanding teachers and outstanding school leaders. We can debate that. We would like to give Pell grants to low-income kids so they can have more choices of schools. We would like to implement the America COMPETES Act which we agreed on in a bipartisan way. We would like to lower energy costs by more conservation and nuclear power. We would like to lower the cost of Government by fewer rules and regulations. As Senator CORKER was talking about, we would like to lower health care costs.

The words that we could most easily agree on on this side of the aisle—and there might not be so much objection over there either—are “every American insured.” There is a step-by-step process to get to that. We have over 800,000 Tennesseans without health insurance. We have about 47 million Americans without health insurance.

We are at a time in our history where reports by distinguished journals of medicine, such as the New England Journal of Medicine, the Institute of Medicine, and the Trust for America's Health say today's children are likely to be the first generation to live shorter, less healthier lives than their parents. That is a health care crisis. At the same time, the most rapidly growing part of the Federal budget is spending for Medicare and Medicaid. It is growing so rapidly we can't sustain it, so we need an overhaul of our health care system. We need to lower health care costs for the average family so each family can be able to afford at least a basic health insurance policy that doesn't go away when they lose their job.

On the way to lowering health care costs and giving every American access to such a health care insurance policy are several pieces of legislation, many of them bipartisan, which we could pass this year. For example, the Kerry-Ensign e-prescribing bill would provide for electronic transmittal of prescription information from the doctor to the pharmacists. In addition, we could pass legislation to allow small business health plans this year. Senator ENZI has been the leader on this issue, and he has worked on legislation that basically would allow small businesses to pool their resources in order to offer health insurance to their employees at an affordable rate—to let them do the same thing big businesses can do. Senator ENZI estimates that could provide insurance to more than 1 million Americans who are not now insured.

Senator MARTINEZ has introduced legislation to help get rid of fraud and abuse in Medicare and Medicaid. Tens of billions of dollars are wasted there, and it would lower health care costs to pass the Martinez legislation.

Senator GREGG has offered legislation which isn't bipartisan but deserves to be. I hope it can be. It would put limits on punitive damages from lawsuits against doctors who serve pregnant women. Medical malpractice in-

surance has gone sky high, over \$100,000 a year because of lawsuits in some States. As a result, the doctors are leaving the rural areas, and pregnant women are having to drive 40, 50, 60 miles for prenatal health care or to deliver their babies, because the doctors aren't there anymore. In a few places such as Mississippi, Texas, and Kentucky, steps have been taken to say: As long as you are damaged, you can collect, but there is a limit on the punitive damages in those States. Where the rules have been changed, doctors are moving back into those States and back into rural areas. That also lowers health care costs.

I am here today as a cosponsor of three different health insurance bills which I hope will move us toward the idea of every American insured, and I would like to talk about two of them today. Senator COBURN, Senator BURR, and Senator CORKER have one of those bills, and I am a cosponsor. Senator WYDEN and Senator BENNETT have another of those bills, and I am a cosponsor of that as well. It has six Republicans and six Democrats. I don't agree with every part of the Wyden-Bennett bill, specifically the mandates from the beginning, but I agree with the spirit of what they are trying to do. Most Americans like the fact that they are working across the aisle to try to make real the idea that every American can have access to health insurance, and they are willing to include—and we would emphasize—the private sector in that solution.

We have a whole year. This is a Presidential year. That doesn't mean we should take a vacation. We got off to a pretty good start with the stimulus package. We got off to a very good start with the FISA bill. Unfortunately, the House took a vacation without acting on it. I suggest that Republicans are ready to join with Democrats and take steps this year toward the goal of every American insured.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator has used 10 minutes. Mr. ALEXANDER. I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Georgia.

IRAQ TROOP WITHDRAWAL

Mr. CHAMBLISS. Mr. President, I rise to speak in opposition to the Iraqi troop withdrawal bill that we are discussing, the bill as proposed by Senator FEINGOLD. We have been here before, simply stated. The Senate has voted to reject measures similar to this bill at least three times over the past year. The only thing that has changed since we have had those votes is that conditions on the ground in Iraq have continued to improve as a result of the President's new strategy. Even the opponents of the surge have had to acknowledge that it is, in fact, working. In the midst of this progress and of al-Qaida's continued retreat in Iraq, the Senator from Wisconsin would have us surrender to an enemy that is on the run.

I understand his concern for the welfare of our soldiers and for those who have sacrificed in Iraq. But the way we pay tribute to those who have sacrificed and to our brave men and women still fighting in Iraq today is to finish what we started so that we honor them and bring those who are still in Iraq home victorious and not defeated. If we are trying to reverse the progress we have made in Iraq, embolden our enemies and the enemies of the Iraqi people, and ensure that our mission fails, I probably could not have crafted a better bill than that of the Senator from Wisconsin.

As a result of the U.S. troop surge, the Al Anbar awakening, significant al-Qaida in Iraq defeats, and the unilateral cease-fire last August declared by Muqtada al-Sadr, the security in Iraq has steadily improved. Violence has reached its lowest level since the insurgency began, and there has been a large increase in Iraqi security forces trained and equipped. Today that stands at about 440,000 men. In the last year ethnosectarian-related deaths have decreased 95 percent. Suicide attacks in Baghdad have gone from 12 a month in January of last year to just 4 last month, a 66 percent decrease. Attacks have decreased in 17 of the 18 provinces in Iraq, and IED detonations are down by 45 percent in Baghdad itself. Security incidents countrywide and in the 10 Baghdad security districts have declined to their lowest level since February 2006 when the Samarra Golden Mosque was bombed.

As Sunnis in Al Anbar got frustrated with AQI, the troop surge provided the opportunity for them to work with coalition forces to disrupt AQI operations. Al Anbar now will be transferred to Iraqi security control in the near future, bringing 10 of the 18 provinces in Iraq under the sole control of Iraqis. AQI attempted to shift operations to Baghdad and its surrounding northern provinces, but the Al Anbar awakening movement prompted other awakening movements and concerned local citizen groups began to spring up all over Iraq. As a result, AQI has been disrupted. But as the DNI told the Senate Intelligence Committee in February, “AQI remains capable of conducting destabilizing operations and spectacular attacks, despite disruptions of its networks.”

These successes cannot blind us to AQI's abilities or to their resolve in attacking Americans. Kurdish areas in northern Iraq were the safest in Iraq a year ago, but today AQI is taking advantage of this safety by establishing around Mosul and launching attacks against the population. This is an area where U.S. troops are used sparingly. In my humble opinion, that is no coincidence. U.S. operations forced AQI out of al-Anbar, restricted their operations in Baghdad, and they are now moving to more rural areas with less U.S. military.

If this legislation passes and our troops must withdraw from Iraq, AQI

will have the freedom to terrorize the rest of Iraq and beyond. The Director of National Intelligence stated that he is "increasingly concerned that as we inflict significant damage on al-Qa'ida in Iraq, it may shift resources to mounting more attacks outside of Iraq Although the ongoing conflict in Iraq will likely absorb most of AQI's resources [over] the next year, AQI has leveraged its broad external networks—including some reaching into Europe—in support of external operations." Forcing our troops out of Iraq would result in a resurgent AQI which could mount attacks from Iraq against Americans and our allies.

Security is not the only aspect improving in Iraq. On the political front, the Council of Representatives is taking steps to institute necessary legislation to help reconcile Iraq.

Earlier this month, the Council of Representatives passed a deBaathification law which will help reintegrate former regime officials into society. Two weeks ago, the Council of Representatives passed three key pieces of legislation: an amnesty law, a provincial powers law, and the 2008 fiscal budget. For the first time, Iraq's main political parties compromised in order to support passage of these bills. The provincial powers law requires the council to pass an election law within 90 days and for provincial elections to occur no later than October 1, 2008. These are encouraging steps. In spite of the fact that the provincial powers law was vetoed yesterday, it is encouraging, and I am very hopeful we are going to see the differences reconciled in short order and that law become permanent.

By limiting our military actions to specific areas, this bill would ensure that every one of these successes and improvements in security is reversed. In the midst of progress in Iraq, which no one denies, and with a strategy that is working, it simply does not make sense to tie the hands of the commanders on the ground and force them to implement a strategy which will lead to failure—a strategy that in the best judgment of our military leaders, our intelligence agencies, and from the perspective of countless outside observers have stated will lead to the failure of our mission and the rapid deterioration of conditions in Iraq and for the Iraqi people.

Hopefully, it is evident to people who are watching this debate and have examined the Feingold bill that the strategy which inspires the provisions and limitations in this bill is not a military strategy; it is a political strategy. The tactics being used by those who would enact conditions and limitations on our involvement in Iraq, such as those contained in this bill, are not based on strategic thought or analysis. Rather, they appeal to a political base that has always opposed the war, refuses to acknowledge the progress we are making, and wants to see our mission fail.

Political strategies for fighting wars such as the rhetoric some are now exploring all have one thing in common: They all result in failure. They are shortsighted, politically motivated, do not serve any national security objective and, most importantly, are a disservice to the men and women who have been called into action and are on the ground in Iraq.

We are making progress in Iraq. The strategy our President and our military commanders have implemented is working. We are receiving positive updates from our leaders in the field. Our leaders are adjusting their strategy in accordance with those developments on the ground as well as the realities back home. They are doing this wisely, not hastily or in response to opinion polls, but according to good judgment and a realistic assessment of what will work, what will not work, and what is appropriate at this point in time.

The Feingold bill will stop our leaders' ability to do this. It will keep them from doing the jobs we sent them to do; and that is to lead, to decide, to make judgments, and to report back to us on their effectiveness. Most importantly, it will keep them from completing the job we have sent them to perform. This is unacceptable. For these reasons, I urge my colleagues to vote against this bill.

Mr. President, I yield back.

Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

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

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

ORDER OF PROCEDURE

Mr. BUNNING. Mr. President, I request that the time I use in morning business not be counted against any of the Democratic time that has been set aside.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

The Senator from Kentucky is recognized.

IRAQ TROOP WITHDRAWAL

Mr. BUNNING. Mr. President, I rise today to speak in opposition to pulling our troops out of Iraq based on political timetables conceived in the Senate.

I have voted against similar measures in the past. I intend to vote against them again this week. These bills do nothing more than tie the hands of our commanders on the ground while pandering to special interests here in the United States—antiwar groups.

These are the same commanders who are risking their lives daily that our

mission in Iraq can continue to succeed. And our mission is succeeding. General Petraeus is succeeding. Violence in Iraq is at the lowest since the insurgency began. Suicide bombings are down 70 percent. IED attacks have been cut in half.

The surge is working. Since it began less than a year ago, we have succeeded in putting al-Qaida on the run, while rooting out the terrorists neighborhood by neighborhood. In return, Iraqis have partnered with U.S. troops, forming their own security forces, and stabilizing their own neighborhoods. These efforts have served to unite torn communities, such as Anbar Province, and pave the way for political reconciliation.

The other side has said for months the surge has failed because it has not created an environment for political progress in Iraq. Well, they are wrong. The correlation between the surge and security is obvious. In the past few weeks, as we continue to see increased stability throughout Iraq, the Iraqi Government has made great political strides.

On February 13, the Iraqi Council of Representatives passed three key pieces of legislation: An amnesty law, the 2008 budget, and a provincial powers law. These political milestones are made possible by Sunnis, Shiites, and Kurds reaching out to each other and working to find solutions that represent all Iraqis.

This is General Petraeus's counterinsurgency at work. It worked when he was commander of the 101st Airborne Division in Mosul, and now it is working all across Iraq.

So I ask my colleagues across the aisle: Why, when you see our mission in Iraq is succeeding, and the Iraqi people are making real political progress, do you want to pull the rug out from underneath our commanders and our troops?

Last July, the Senate overwhelmingly supported, by a vote of 94 to 3, a sense-of-the-Senate amendment stating that it is in our national security interests that Iraq not become a failed state and a safe haven for terrorists.

Well, wake up. Cutting and running from Iraq will only benefit the terrorists, while jeopardizing our national security and that of the Iraqi people.

Make no mistake, Iraq is the central battleground in our fight in the global war on terror. This is not just my opinion. Osama bin Laden has called Iraq the "central front" in his war against America. He knows that the premature withdrawal of U.S. troops from Iraq will strengthen his terrorist organization, enabling him to set up training camps in that country.

Although it has been over 6 years since we have experienced a terrorist attack on U.S. soil, we must never forget that there are those out there who wish to do us harm on a daily basis. And those who wish to do us harm will benefit if we pull out of Iraq and leave a failed state behind.