

the majority and minority is the majority would like to bring the troops home right now. "Enough is enough," says the majority leader.

The Republicans, on the other hand, believe we have to finish the job. And while great progress has been made as a result of the surge implemented by General Petraeus several months ago, the job is not finished. And until the job is finished, there is a great danger that were we to pull out prematurely, al-Qaida, not totally defeated, would infiltrate right back in, reestablish its presence, begin the terrorism which has taken us so many months now to repress, and that we would have to then come right back in again, all at a greater cost than if we simply see the job through right now.

It is possible every day to have a headline from a newspaper revealing a suicide bomber attack or some other incident similar to that in Iraq. That is the unfortunate reality. Everything is not yet "just fine" in Iraq. But it is also true that because the surge has worked to essentially defeat al-Qaida, it has now resorted to the most reprehensible tactics of all: using women, children, the disabled as suicide bombers to go into places where those people are not suspects and they can blow up innocent people in Iraq.

That is the situation we need to help stop, not turn our back and walk away from. It is also true many Iraqis have now been trained by our forces. That is the good news that will enable us eventually, hopefully sooner rather than later, to withdraw our troops from Iraq. We are withdrawing them now.

We will, by June as I recall, be down to a level that is very close to the level that existed prior to the surge. We will be able to do that because the surge has worked. What happens after that, we will await a report from General Petraeus when he comes back to the Capitol and briefs us on the situation in Iraq.

In the meantime, Ambassador Crocker and others have noted significant progress on the political and diplomatic front as well as the economic front in Iraq. The Parliament there is now engaging in vigorous debate, passing resolutions. I note that one was vetoed yesterday. It kind of reminds me of the process in Washington, where we do not always agree on everything and we have a robust debate about it.

We should not be critical of the Iraqis because they cannot agree always on everything, but we should continue to push them to move forward with alacrity, so the things that need to be done politically to enable us to eventually remove our troops can be done. I know we all, Republicans and Democrats, share that goal.

So the bottom line is, we will continue this debate today. I would conclude with this point: One of the important reasons for having this debate today about a strategy for dealing with al-Qaida is because there is a difference of opinion between the House of Rep-

resentatives' leadership and the Senate on this issue.

The Senate voted with 68 Senators, Democrats and Republicans, to reinstitute FISA, the law that enables us to gather intelligence on these terrorists abroad. That law had to be reauthorized because it expired 6 months after we first passed it.

So we had to reauthorize it and make one additional change; that is, to make sure the telecommunications companies that are cooperating with us are protected from lawsuits that have been filed against them simply for their participation with the U.S. Government in collecting this foreign intelligence.

Without that liability protection, they are not likely to continue to help us. So we made that change. It was recommended by the Intelligence Committee on a vote of 13 to 2, a very bipartisan recommendation. The Senate then passed it with 68 affirmative votes. It went to the House of Representatives and there it sits. It sits without a law in force today that enables us to begin new intelligence surveillance activities against terrorists abroad.

This represents a deficiency in our intelligence gathering at a time when as both Admiral McConnell, the Director of National Intelligence, and Attorney General Mukasey have noted that we are losing intelligence every day that would help us in the war against these terrorists.

Every day that goes past that we cannot intercept a communication because the law has not been reauthorized is a day of lost intelligence, intelligence we will never get back. The terrorists are not going to make the phone call a second or third time to accommodate us so we can finally collect the intelligence we need, so we can find out who he is calling and what they are planning. We cannot do that.

So phone calls that occurred yesterday or the day before or the day before that, they are gone, they are lost forever. It is critical we reestablish this capability for collecting foreign intelligence on terrorists.

The legislation passed by the Senate will do that. The President says he will sign it into law, and it is critical that the House of Representatives' leadership allow the House of Representatives to vote on it. If they do, it will pass and it can be sent to the President and it will be signed.

The reason, I gather, it has not been brought forth is because the leadership of the House knows it will pass and, for whatever reason, they do not want this Senate-passed bill to become law.

It is critical the Congress fulfill its responsibility to ensure that our intelligence-gathering capabilities continue on. I would urge again that the best strategy for dealing with al-Qaida starts with authorizing the kind of intelligence collection that we understand is critical to understanding al-Qaida's intentions and thus being able to defeat them.

So in developing a strategy for al-Qaida, No. 1, the House of Representatives' leadership should bring this legislation up for a vote, allow those who support it to send it to the President for his signature, and we can get on with this important collection.

I urge my colleagues to come to the floor and let us know when they wish to speak so we can organize the debate today with an eye toward the minority and majority leader being able to get together and work out a time schedule that would be acceptable to all of us.

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 now be a period of morning business for up to 1 hour, with the time equally divided and controlled between the two leaders or their designees, with the majority controlling the first half and the Republicans controlling the final half.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Washington.

VETERANS CARE

Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, our servicemembers in Iraq are fighting under incredibly stressful conditions each and every day. We are on the floor today talking about an Iraq resolution. We are focused on the war or the surge. I wish to talk today about the soldiers themselves who are called on. Many of them, as we know, have come home with terrible injuries that need specialized care. Yet there are too many examples that show today the Bush administration was caught unprepared to take care of these men and women when they have come home.

So as we continue to talk about Iraq, I think it is important we also talk about the toll that this war is taking on our troops and our veterans. I wish to focus today on the need to ensure that our injured servicemembers and veterans can get the care they need and deserve by reminding all of us what happened in the last year and how much we still have to do.

A year ago this month, the Washington Post published a story that uncovered the depth of the problems facing our servicemembers who were being treated at Walter Reed Army Medical Center. The Post reported then that servicemembers were living in rooms with moldy walls and broken ceilings while they waited, waited to get care. The Post found that many of our servicemembers and their families felt trapped at the time in a bureaucratic catch-22 as they fought to get the disability benefits they had earned.

The news of the extent of the squalid conditions was a watershed moment in

the care of our military men and women. It focused the attention of the American people on the needs and treatment of our injured servicemembers and veterans. It put a spotlight on the frustrating redtape that was facing servicemembers as they transitioned out of the military and into the VA.

I am very proud that Congress, led by the Democratic majority, moved quickly to investigate the problems, not just at Walter Reed but throughout the military and VA systems to take that action.

Shortly after the Washington Post story ran, the Democratic leaders went to Walter Reed and met with our injured servicemembers. The Veterans' Affairs Committee and the Armed Services Committee joined in a historic partnership to address the problems we saw there and at military and VA facilities across the entire country.

Many of us have continued to go to Walter Reed and other facilities on a regular basis, as we had even before those stories ran. In fact, I was up at Walter Reed a short time ago to tour the mental health ward and learn about what efforts are being made to decrease the stigma attached to mental health care and to help improve care.

As a result of the action we took, our country has made a lot of changes in its care for our servicemembers and our veterans. One of the most significant was the Wounded Warriors Act, which was included in last year's Defense authorization bill.

With the Wounded Warriors Act, we laid out a clear path, directing the Defense Department and the VA to address the shortfalls in the care of our injured servicemembers. So a year after the Walter Reed report, we required the Defense Department and the VA to work together to develop a comprehensive plan to prevent, treat, and diagnose traumatic brain injury and post-traumatic stress syndrome, and we directed the Defense Department to create Centers of Excellence for TBI and PTSD to improve our understanding of these devastating injuries that were impacting our soldiers.

We are addressing the frustrating bureaucracy with which our troops have struggled. We have now directed the VA and the Defense Department to develop a joint electronic health care record. And we are requiring the military and the VA to work together, finally, on disability ratings.

The Defense Department is investing in new technology, more equipment, and state-of-the-art treatment to better care for injured soldiers. Walter Reed and facilities across the entire country are making similar improvements. In fact, in my home State of Washington, Fort Lewis has taken great strides in its treatment of wounded servicemembers who are recovering there. In one example, leaders there are working very hard now to help our servicemembers and, critically, their families understand the benefits available to them.

I am optimistic the action we took is changing the way our military and the VA operates. But as I stand on the floor today, I must tell you we have a lot of work left to be done. Yesterday, the GAO reported to Congress the Army has significantly improved its support for servicemembers at Walter Reed and our military hospitals.

According to the Washington Post this morning, there is an article today: Army officials say they have transformed the way they care for soldiers and their families.

But the GAO also said, as has been reported this morning, there are still shortages of staff and other gaps we have to address. In fact, one-third of warrior transition units are still understaffed. And that, to me, raises concerns about the progress of a streamlined disability ranking system.

We still have a long way to go to provide our servicemembers with the care they deserve. And some of these changes are actually going to require a cultural transformation within the military. We have to keep our eye on the ball.

I got a personal reminder of this when I reconnected recently with Army retired SPC Rory Dunn. He is an amazing young man who comes from my home State and lives in Renton, WA. Rory was horribly injured when his humvee was hit by a roadside bomb outside Fallujah in 2004. When I first saw Rory, he was in front of me with his entire skull crushed in, his head crushed from ear to ear. He lost an eye. He lost his sense of smell. He lost much of his hearing. He still today, in fact, has shrapnel in his brain. Rory, sitting in front of me, had visibly sacrificed for our country, nearly losing his life several times as he was moved from Fallujah to Germany and finally to Walter Reed. When he got to the United States, he was sent to Walter Reed, and there the Army tried to discharge him before he completely had recovered.

He and his mother have struggled to help make sure he gets the benefits he needs, not just that, the lack of medical care as he progressed. When I saw Rory at one time he was excited. He was being sent to Richmond, VA polytrauma center for treatment. Recently he told me about the horrific experience he had there. I hope much has improved since then, but he told me at the time, even though he could not get out of bed because of the tremendous extent of his injuries, he would wake up in the morning, ring his call bell, which apparently was not plugged in, and wait for a nurse to come and help him with basic restroom needs. No one came for hours. Rory was left there. A soldier who fought for his country in the Iraq war, had done everything his country asked of him, injured horribly, was left to sit in his own waste in a polytrauma center in Virginia.

Thankfully we have come a long way from there. Rory should never have had to go through that.

He was then sent on to Palo Alto for reconstructive surgery. They did an amazing job. In fact, when I first talked to Rory after his injuries, he asked me to pin his Purple Heart on him when he was awarded that. But he wanted to wait until he had his face reconstructed because he wanted the picture to look good. So he had to wait many months before I finally met him in Seattle and was so proud to pin that on his chest as his mother sat and watched with tears running down her face.

That was several years ago. Rory has continued to struggle every single day, a young man, barely out of his teenage years, injured dramatically in the war in Iraq, 4 years later, still struggling to do everything he can to be an American. What is Rory doing with his time? He and his mother, who has now spent 4 years helping Rory recover, are back at Walter Reed and other VA facilities to make sure no soldier goes through what Rory did, advocating for them, making sure they understand what they need, making sure they get the help and support and, importantly, making sure I continue to understand what is happening in the military in our VA system and making sure that no soldier goes through what he did when he came home. Rory told me a few weeks ago: There is much work left to be done. He still talks to soldiers who have been left behind, who are not getting the help they need, who feel like second-class citizens, who feel they are still fighting their Government when they come home.

For me, Rory is the face of this war. I think we have to ensure that the changes we are making to improve the conditions for all of our servicemembers and veterans such as Rory are not a flurry of action while the cameras are rolling. We have to work to ensure that action doesn't drop off once the media has moved on to the next story. I remain firmly convinced that we have to remain vigilant on three specific fronts if we are going to talk about real change for our troops and our veterans. I believe, first, we have to ensure that we cut through the bureaucracy between the military and the VA. It is simply unacceptable that after fighting for our country, our servicemembers have had to return and fight against the Government for the care they deserve. It isn't only from this war. Go back and talk to Vietnam-era, Korean-era veterans who have been fighting for years to get the disability benefits they deserve.

Thanks to the Wounded Warrior Act, we have now started a pilot project to work out ways to make the Defense Department and the VA disability rating systems compatible so our soldiers do not face this, but we do have to remember, this is the first step between bridging the gap between the VA and the Defense Department. It is only a pilot. We have a lot more work we need to do to ensure that those agencies don't do a pilot project and put it on

the shelf; that they look at how it is working, what is working, what is not, what are the challenges in front of us, are we making sure that we stay on them every day. Congress has to keep a close watch to make sure this isn't because the cameras were rolling a year ago or today but something that is effective far into the future. We have to work to make sure they meet those goals.

Secondly, we have to focus our attention on treating the new injuries to our servicemembers who are suffering in Iraq and Afghanistan, particularly traumatic brain injury. TBI is a significant wound of this war, but we have only just begun to understand how we treat it. We have to recognize that whenever there is an explosion in Iraq or Afghanistan or wherever we have soldiers on the ground, the effects of that, not just on the soldiers in the vehicle but even those close by and sometimes hundreds of yards away, can have a damaging impact on the brain, called traumatic brain injury. We still don't know all we need to about how to treat TBI, and we still have soldiers coming home every day, every month who have just been diagnosed with TBI or perhaps not diagnosed, and we need to make sure they get the correct diagnosis and treatment.

Congress has authorized millions of new dollars for research, but we have to ensure that we get the results from that research. Then we have to make sure we take action based on what we have learned.

I am extremely disappointed that the President seems to have lost sight of that already. He has proposed to this Congress an 8-percent cut for VA medical and prosthetic research in his fiscal year 2009 budget. That is incredibly shortsighted, and he can be sure—and every Member of this body can be sure—I am going to fight that every step of the way. We need to find out how to better treat TBI, how to diagnosis it, how to deal with PTSD and how to diagnose and treat it effectively. That takes research, and we have to stay on top of it.

Finally, and most difficult, we have to change a military culture in which servicemembers are told that mental illness is an excuse for their pain and which fails to recognize that psychological wounds can be more serious than some of their physical injuries. Congress again has given the military hundreds of millions of dollars to improve its mental health care system. We have pushed through legislation this past year requiring the military and the VA to destigmatize mental health treatment, to increase awareness of the symptoms of post-traumatic stress syndrome, and to do further research on traumatic brain injury. But recent reports show that the Army's suicide prevention efforts need a lot more work. The numbers of suicides have risen since the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan began, and last year as many as 121 soldiers committed sui-

cide. That is a 20-percent increase over the year before.

I was struck by a recent report by the Associated Press which was a stark reminder of how serious this issue is. That article reported on a VA study which found that more than half of the veterans who took their own lives from 2001 to 2005 were members of the National Guard or Reserve, even though the Guard and Reserve have made up less than a third of U.S. forces in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Prolonged deployments are stretching our troops to the breaking point. Earlier this week General Casey acknowledged his concern about the strain on the military. He told the Senate Armed Services Committee that the Army is under so much stress from extended deployments that we must reduce the length of combat tours as soon as possible. Many of our servicemembers have seen their best friends killed. They have seen other untold horrors. Yet somehow we expect them to come back from the battlefield, come back home unaffected by what they have seen, or their experience. We have to ensure that the military takes action to ensure that our troops are getting the psychological care they need. We need to see a change in the culture. That change has to be more than a talking point. Senior military leaders have pledged to do more, but they have to ensure that their words and their programs are being executed in the field. They have to work to break down the stigma that is, unfortunately, associated with seeking mental health treatment. They have to ensure that troops have psychiatrists and psychologists to talk to, and they have to ensure that those who seek help aren't then penalized. We have to find ways to reach out to servicemembers who are discharged and are not seeking care from the VA. This is especially important for our Guard and Reserves who oftentimes, when they come home, don't think of themselves as veterans. They return from the war and go back to their civilian jobs without ever getting help.

In my State of Washington, over 10,200 Guard and Reserve members have now served in Iraq and Afghanistan. Our troops and veterans are heroes who are sacrificing for our Nation. It is time for our Government to wake up and provide them with the care they need.

I voted against going to war in Iraq. But I have said consistently that no matter how anyone feels about the war, we have an obligation as leaders to make sure our men and women who fight for us get the care they deserve. I am proud of the way this Congress, led by the Democratic majority, moved to address the problems facing our returning servicemembers, which clearly wasn't a priority for the Bush administration. Here in Congress, we said: Not on our watch, not anymore.

A year after the Walter Reed story drew attention to the treatment of

servicemembers, we have made progress. But we cannot let this issue fade away. After examining the President's VA budget proposal, I have to tell my colleagues, I am disappointed that the administration still doesn't seem to get it. In his State of the Union Address this year, President Bush said he was dedicated to providing for our Nation's veterans. But at a time when thousands of new veterans are entering the VA system with serious medical needs as a result of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the administration is underestimating the cost of medical care and is cutting funding for construction and medical and prosthetic research. At a time when our older veterans are seeking care in record numbers, the President is proposing fees for them and copays that are essentially going to shut the door of the VA to thousands of people who served our country. That is wrong. I am going to be working very hard this year to ensure that those misguided proposals do not become reality.

The same is true as we address the budget for caring for our troops. Our servicemembers risk their lives for our security every single day. They have done everything we have asked. We have to live up to our commitment to them.

I yield the floor and 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. CORNYN. 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. CORNYN. Mr. President, we are advised by the Democratic cloakroom there will not be a member of the majority who will come in to use the remainder of their morning business time, so I ask unanimous consent that I be allowed to speak during the remainder of that time as well as the 30 minutes allotted to the minority.

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

Mr. CORNYN. I thank the Chair.

IRAQ

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, we are confronted with a piece of legislation introduced by the distinguished Senator from Wisconsin, Mr. FEINGOLD, which calls for setting forth the global strategy of the United States to combat and defeat al-Qaida and its affiliates. The question I guess I would ask is: Where have those who propose a new strategy been? Have they been paying attention to the good news that has been coming out of Iraq and Afghanistan when it comes to our ability and