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Senate

The Senate met at 10 a.m. and was called to order by the Honorable JON TESTER, a Senator from the State of Montana.

PRAYER

The Chaplain, Dr. Barry C. Black, offered the following prayer:

Let us pray.

Eternal Spirit, unite us. Help the Members of this body to work together, finding common ground and resolving differences. Match their fervency with compassion, their zeal with civility. Erase from their spirits all feelings of arrogance or contempt. May they strive to understand and respect each other with a spirit of humility. Lord, make our Senators an example to the Nation of how to strive together for the common good. Give them a fresh burst of enthusiasm for the next chapter in the unfolding drama of the American dream. Energize their efforts with the power of Your spirit. We pray in Your sacred Name. Amen.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Honorable JON TESTER led the Pledge of Allegiance, as follows:

I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

APPOINTMENT OF ACTING PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will please read a communication to the Senate from the President pro tempore (Mr. BYRD).

The assistant legislative clerk read the following letter:

U.S. SENATE,
PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE,
Washington, DC, April 8, 2008.

To the Senate:

Under the provisions of rule I, paragraph 3, of the Standing Rules of the Senate, I hereby appoint the Honorable JON TESTER, a Sen-

ator from the State of Montana, to perform the duties of the Chair.

ROBERT C. BYRD,
President pro tempore.

Mr. TESTER thereupon assumed the chair as Acting President pro tempore.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

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

SCHEDULE

Mr. REID. Mr. President, we will be in a period of morning business, following my statement and that of the Republican leader, with Senators allowed to speak for up to 10 minutes each, with the times equally divided and controlled between the two leaders. The majority will control the first half, the Republicans the final half.

Then we will begin again the consideration of H.R. 3221, the housing legislation. The first vote today will be at 2:15 this afternoon on a motion to invoke cloture on the substitute amendment to H.R. 3221.

IRAQ HEARINGS

Mr. REID. Mr. President, as we speak, there are extremely important hearings taking place on Capitol Hill. General Petraeus and Ambassador Crocker are here. The hearings started 35 minutes ago. Clearly, the eyes of the world will look upon the Senate as General Petraeus and Ambassador Crocker testify today before the Armed Services Committee and the Foreign Relations Committee. These two committees are chaired by two of our most senior Senators and two of our most able Senators, Senator LEVIN and Senator BIDEN.

The appearances of these good and honorable men, General Petraeus and Ambassador Crocker, are meant to cre-

ate an open, honest, and productive dialogue with Congress on the state of the war in Iraq and the future of military operations in Iraq. I hope it does occur in that manner, that there will be an open and honest and productive dialogue with us. As the American people weigh the testimony and consider the best course of action in far-off Iraq, only two questions matter: First, has the troop surge brought us closer to the day when our troops can come home? Second, is the war in Iraq making America safer? Sadly, by all accounts, the answer to both questions is no.

The stated purpose of the surge, according to President Bush, was "return on success," meaning that if the surge worked, the troops could come home. Now, the President claims success, but where is the return? It is clear to anyone that the violence has surged. Eleven Americans have been killed since Sunday in Iraq. Dozens and dozens more have been gravely wounded, including three dozen in one rocket attack. Attacks on the Green Zone have intensified. That is supposed to be the safest part of Iraq—the Green Zone. The conflict between al-Sadr and al-Maliki shows no signs of progress; in fact, there is deterioration. Has the surge brought us closer to the day when our troops come home? We have already heard General Petraeus has requested a freeze of troop levels and that President Bush is likely to accept that request.

Has the surge brought us closer to the day when our troops come home? Clearly, the answer is no. Has the war made us safer? No.

Military experts agree our Armed Forces are stretched thin beyond sustainable levels. We are taking in—13 percent of our recruits are young men and women who have committed crimes: felonies, violent crime—13 percent. One out of every eight of the people we are bringing into the military

• This "bullet" symbol identifies statements or insertions which are not spoken by a Member of the Senate on the floor.



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today are people who have criminal records.

Because our manpower and equipment is in Iraq, we are not committing the resources to hunt down our No. 1 enemy: bin Laden and his al-Qaida network. Because we are bogged down in Iraq, we are not fully engaged in the global challenge of Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran, and the Middle East, among others.

The moral authority of our great Nation has suffered grave damage, with our former allies refusing to stand with us in even greater numbers.

Has the war in Iraq made America safer? There is no question it has not.

The surge may have provided a temporary window for the Iraq Government to make progress, but it is becoming increasingly clear every day the Iraq Government has squandered that opportunity. Even now, with the war in its sixth year, President Bush has failed to articulate an exit strategy.

A person running for President, Senator McCain, has said we should be there another 50 or 100 years.

President Bush likes to say we will only leave Iraq once victory has been achieved. It is time for the President to be honest with the American people. What does victory look like to President Bush? How does all this end?

We must not commit our courageous troops to the endless task of policing another Nation's bloody civil war. The job of America's Armed Forces—a job to which they risk and often give their lives and limbs—is to protect our country and its interests. It is time to recommit to that crucial purpose and begin a responsible end to this war.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

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

CELEBRATING THE VICTORY OF THE KANSAS JAYHAWKS

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I note the presence of the Senator from Kansas in the well of the Senate. He must be coming over to celebrate the victory of the Kansas Jayhawks last night. I assume that is the reason for his presence. I will let him address that and whatever other matter he may have in morning business. But in noting his presence, even though I know he has some K State leanings, he nevertheless must be incredibly proud of the Kansas Jayhawks, as they won the national championship last night.

EXTENDING SYMPATHY TO THE DOLE FAMILY

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, on another matter and a sad matter, I wish to start with news of the passing of John Hanford. John was a World War

II vet, a great patriot, and the dear brother of our colleague, Senator DOLE, who I know is very close to him and will miss him terribly.

This is a sad day for the Dole family, and I wish to extend our deepest sympathies to Senator DOLE and all her relatives and friends.

HOUSING CRISIS

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I know the main event isn't housing, but I would like to start by thanking the majority leader once again for realizing the only way to address the housing crisis was to do so on a bipartisan basis, and we are on the verge of doing that. We have now made significant progress, and I am confident that before the week is out, we will be able to stand together to announce completion of a good and responsible bill.

Most homeowners will be relieved to know one of the earlier proposals we heard from the other side—a proposal to let bankruptcy judges rewrite the terms of existing mortgages—will not be a part of the Senate's final product. Although well intentioned, this proposal would have led to a sharp increase in mortgage rates for millions of homeowners, and Republicans weren't going to allow that at a time when families are already stretched quite thin.

The final bill will help neighborhoods that have been hit hard by foreclosure with provisions that limit the amount of time empty homes sit on the market—a proposal by Senator ISAKSON. This, along with the economic growth package we passed earlier this year, will put more money in the pockets of homeowners, and it will help homebuilders climb back from the slowdown.

Americans don't want to bail out the speculators and those who tried to game the system at everyone else's expense, so this is a targeted bill that will help homeowners in the short term without jeopardizing the long-term economy. Its likely passage later this week is something we can be proud of on both sides of the aisle.

IRAQ WAR TESTIMONY

Mr. McCONNELL. Now, to the testimony on the Iraq war in committees today. General Petraeus and Ambassador Crocker will be here, as we all know. This is an eagerly anticipated update on political and military progress being made in Iraq.

Less than a year after our counterinsurgency plan went into full effect, we have been getting a steady flow of positive reports on the security situation in Iraq. Overall violence in Iraq is down. Civilian deaths are down. Sectarian killing is down. Attacks on American forces are down. As a result, thousands of U.S. troops have already begun to come back home.

Another measure of the Petraeus plan's success is the dramatic increase

in Iraqi security forces since the full implementation of the counterinsurgency strategy last June. Between December 2007 and last month, Iraqi security forces have increased by more than 40,000, bringing the total number to more than 530,000. This includes 141,000 assigned soldiers and officers and a police force of 347,000 strong. Over the last year, the so-called surge of Iraqi security forces has been three or four times larger than our own surge. As we stand here, the Iraqi security forces continue to expand, with young Iraqis signing up for local police forces to protect the border and for special operations.

As the Iraqis take over more of their own security needs, Congress can help by passing a supplemental appropriations bill that has been on request for more than a year. These funds are also needed to ensure the combat readiness of the force and our forces over in Afghanistan as well.

Increased security in Iraq has led to political progress in Iraq. Although significant benchmarks remain unmet, progress on other significant benchmarks that seemed far off a few months ago is now underway. These include such things as passage and approval of deBaathification legislation, an amnesty law, and measures leading to greater centralization of the Iraqi security forces. It is also worth noting the Iraq Government has started to meet more of its own expenses, including three-fourths of the costs of its security forces and a new jobs program.

The success of General Petraeus's strategy is the best reason we have for listening closely to his advice as we move forward. Last August, he said security and local political progress will enable us to reduce the number of U.S. troops to presurge levels, and we have reason to hope the progress that has been made, both politically and in security, will, in fact, lead to a reduction in troop levels.

But General Petraeus has a better grasp than most on whether the gains we have seen are secure enough for a full reduction to begin. For the sake of our long-term security, we should listen very closely to what he has to say.

When Democrats on the campaign trail tout their plans for Iraq and Afghanistan, they often cite the need to listen to the generals. The junior Senator from New York likes to say one of her first actions as President would be to convene the Joint Chiefs of Staff to help her draw up a plan for withdrawal of U.S. troops from Iraq. If military advice is needed to draw up plans for withdrawal, shouldn't it be important to draw up plans for success?

Our friends on the other side are rightly concerned about military readiness. I share their concern. But the best way to ensure the military's readiness is not to scrap a plan that has been working in Iraq. The best way to improve readiness is to approve the Defense supplemental without arbitrary dates for withdrawal and to fully fund the 2009 Defense appropriations bill.