

health care and some of the things he intends to do with it. I have heard other speeches from other candidates. We do not need to wait for a Presidential election to do something in health care, to do anything in health care. When a person gets elected President, they give us pretty good suggestions, but they no longer get to vote on any of the issues. We have to do the votes. We have to draft the legislation. We have to do the debate. There is no reason to wait until we have a President, no need.

There is a need—a critical need, an understood need—by the people of America that we need to do something on health care and we need to do it right now. It is such an issue of great concern to the American people that it transcends politics as usual.

I never ask when I am in Wyoming whether a person is a Republican or Democrat when they bring me an idea or a problem. I just want to know what the idea is or what the problem is, and I do like it when they provide a solution with it as well. If it is doable, we do it. That is what we need to do on health care.

If we make sure that we transcend politics, if we get away from the polarization of a political year, we will have an opening to get something done that will help patients and doctors.

I am going to suggest we use my 80-percent rule. I came to Washington as a firm believer in the 80-percent rule. That is, we can reach agreement on 80 percent of the issues and we are probably never going to reach agreement on the other 20 percent. By focusing on 80 percent of the issues we can agree on, we can get something done. If we continue to let the 20 percent we disagree on serve as a roadblock, we will let some great opportunities pass. That is something we cannot afford to have happen again and again.

I truly hope this is the year we stop talking about health care and start doing something about it because Americans cannot wait another year. They do not want to wait for an election to see some changes. They certainly do not want to wait another year to stop their health care costs from going up and up. They want to see change, and they want to see change now.

Our small business owners, our working families, our millions of uninsured cannot afford to wait, and we can do it. We can do it now, and we can do it together.

Last week, we passed the genetic nondiscrimination bill. That has the potential to provide health care as opposed to sick care. That has the potential to let people have their blood tested to find out what possibilities there are to what could happen to them based on their genetic information so they can keep that from happening.

What the bill does is make sure that the information you get from that testing cannot be used against you by your insurance company or your employer.

That should give you encouragement to find out more about yourself so if there is something that could be a preexisting condition, you can keep it from becoming a preexisting condition and your insurance company cannot make it a preexisting condition until it actually happens.

We have a chance to do a lot of things in health care. We have done something in health care. I hope we will get health IT done in health care this week or next week. There is no reason we cannot. The small business health plans, to let the companies group together over State lines, there is no reason that cannot get done. There are several ideas out there that have been put together well that can be combined to get something done. I hope it goes through the regular process, which means through committee. I also noticed legislation that does not go through a committee around here does not get done, and that is because it has not had that chance to be worked on in a very individual way. When we are in committee and doing a markup and there is a problem three or four people have, they can go off and work on that problem and come up with a solution. Sometimes it is a compromise; sometimes it is leaving something out; sometimes it is a brandnew way. That is where the innovation happens, in committee. Whenever we avoid the committee, what we are saying is: We have this legislation we want to shove down your throat. It will help make each side take some bad votes, and this is an election year, so maybe we should have some bad votes. I don't think that is necessary. I think there are solutions out there, solutions we can reach agreement on, solutions we can finish, and what is more, I think the American people expect it and, more importantly, demand it. We can do it. Let's do it.

I yield the floor.

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, is there a unanimous consent agreement with respect to the order of speaking or the time?

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. There is no consent with respect to the order of speaking.

Mr. DURBIN. It is my understanding there is 39 minutes remaining on the Democratic side?

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator is correct.

Mr. DURBIN. I ask unanimous consent to be recognized for 9 minutes and to be notified by the Chair when that time has expired.

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

NEGLECTING AFGHANISTAN

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, so much of the debate here in the Senate is consumed by the seemingly endless war in Iraq. I just left a hearing of the Democratic policy conference. It was the 13th hearing relative to the waste and

abuse that took place during the course of this war. To think that we have spent almost \$700 billion in the course of this war and how much of it has been wasted. We asked those who were testifying who were actually on the ground a few years ago in charge of allocating equipment and watching conduct. The estimates ranged from 30 percent to 80 percent of the money spent being wasted—taxpayers' dollars, dedicated to make a safer place for our troops—actually wasted and stolen. Unfortunately, little or nothing has been done about it.

The hearing from the Democratic policy conference began with Senator DORGAN back when the Republicans were in control of Congress and refused to hold the same hearings in the official committee structure. Now there are more hearings and more investigations both on the House and Senate side. But we can only hope, when a new President is elected, that President will decide it is time for a thorough investigation of the billions of dollars, taxpayers' dollars, that have been wasted in this war in Iraq—money not spent to make our troops safer, not spent to achieve our objectives but, rather, to line the pockets of greedy people.

This isn't the first war in which this has happened, but it is certainly the only time I can recall when an administration has been so cavalier when it comes to this occurrence.

We talk a lot about the war in Iraq. We should not forget what is happening in Afghanistan. This is a war that was declared shortly after September 11, unanimously in the Senate. Given how much blood and treasure has been lost in Iraq, it is easy to forget the stakes in Afghanistan.

Afghanistan was the original home for al-Qaida. It is where Osama bin Laden planned his attack on the United States. He may very well still be alive in the border area of Afghanistan or nearby in Pakistan. If Taliban hosts freely allowed al-Qaida terrorists to train in camps there, we understand the threat that could pose. The Taliban also ruthlessly suppressed its own people, particularly its women.

Let's remember what the 9/11 Commission said about Afghanistan:

Bin Ladin appeared to have in Afghanistan a freedom of movement he lacked in Sudan. Al-Qaida members could travel freely within the country, enter and exit it without visas or any immigration procedures, purchase and import vehicles and weapons. . . . The Taliban seemed to open the doors to all who wanted to come to Afghanistan to train in the camps. The alliance with the Taliban provided al-Qaida a sanctuary in which to train and indoctrinate fighters and terrorists, import weapons, forge ties with other jihad groups and leaders, and plot and staff terrorist schemes.

Why revisit this history? Because the Taliban and al-Qaida have been regrouping along the Afghan and Pakistan border. In fact, now, more than 6 years into the war in Afghanistan, we are at risk of losing some of our hard-

fought gains, gains paid for with the blood of American soldiers.

Recently, Admiral Mullen, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, stated the obvious—that the U.S. military has too many troops tied down in Iraq to send reinforcements needed in Afghanistan. It is clear again this President decided before he won the war in Afghanistan to start a new war in the Iraq, at the expansion of our original mission. According to Admiral Mullen, “There are force requirements [in Afghanistan] that we can’t currently meet.” He said, “Having forces in Iraq at the level they’re at doesn’t allow us to fill the need that we have in Afghanistan.”

The GAO just released an assessment of U.S. efforts to counter terrorist activity in the border area of Pakistan. The report concluded that the United States has not met its national security goals in Pakistan’s tribal areas and that “. . . al-Qaida has established a safe haven near Pakistan’s border with Afghanistan.”

A top Army commander, MG Jeffrey Schloesser, warned that Afghanistan could see record levels of violence this year.

Just the other week, the British charity Oxfam released a report noting that Western countries have failed to deliver \$10 billion of nonmilitary assistance pledged to Afghanistan since 2001. The United States is responsible for one-half of that shortfall. Despite the billions that have been spent in Iraq, we have failed to keep our promises when it came to humanitarian assistance, nonmilitary assistance, in Afghanistan.

This is not isolated. The World Bank has spent approximately half of its commitments to Afghanistan; the European Commission and Germany, less than two thirds; and the Asian Development Bank in India, a third.

Take another example—support for the National Solidarity Program, widely regarded as one of the most successful development efforts in Afghanistan. The 5-year-old program is funded by international donors, administered by the Government of Afghanistan. It is one of the few to reach into rural areas. In this program, village residents work collaboratively with local governments to identify developing needs. There is a feeling of ownership, of participation. Women are actively involved. Because of the sense of ownership, the Taliban is less likely to destroy these local projects.

Take for example the recent example profiled in the Washington Monthly. In the village of Dadi Khel, residents came together to decide on developing a small hydroelectric turbine for the nearby river. When finished, it will be able to provide electricity to about 300 families in the village.

Next to the site is a poster nailed to a tree that clearly shows to all the disbursement of funds for the project. A local teacher told the reporter, “This is our money. All the time we are checking whether it’s spent correctly.”

Yet this novel program is facing a shortfall of hundreds of millions of dollars to continue work in existing communities—let alone to expand into Afghanistan’s remaining 7,000 villages. While Canada, Germany, and the U.K. have all increased financial support for this program, U.S. funding was reduced between 2006 and 2007.

It’s not surprising therefore that the Oxfam report said that international development aid to Afghanistan remains “woefully inadequate.” Oxfam noted that only \$7 is spent in international development assistance in Afghanistan for every \$100 in U.S. military expenditures.

That translates into less development aid per capita in Afghanistan than the world spent in postconflict Bosnia or East Timor.

How could we let this happen? How could we take our eye off the ball?

Of course, part of the answer is that this administration diverted critical military, intelligence, and civilian assets from Afghanistan to Iraq.

Just imagine how much more progress we could have made in Afghanistan if we had not gone into Iraq.

But another part of the problem is that we have not done enough to support long term development efforts so critical in winning the hearts and minds of the Afghan people.

I remember during a visit to Afghanistan last year that there were only six American agricultural experts for the entire country—I think today there are eight. That is right, for a nation with an agricultural economy and record poppy harvest, only a handful of agricultural development experts.

Sadly, I suppose this is not really surprising. USAID has seen its number of full time Foreign Service officers drop from a historic high of over 5,000, to only 1,000 today. The Peace Corps has seen its budget in real dollars drop by almost 40 percent since its inception in 1961.

America’s strength comes not just from its military might, but from the power of its ideas, from its generosity, and from its ability to serve as a beacon of hope, human rights, and democracy. I fear in recent years a measure of this leadership has been lost.

We must ensure that the efforts in Afghanistan, and in Pakistan, receive the resources they deserve. We must invest in development activities that work to develop economic and educational opportunities. We must help with agricultural and democratic development.

And, we must work with our allies to ensure that the Taliban and al-Qaeda do not reemerge.

I hope all Members of the Senate will understand that as this administration comes to an end in just another 8 or 9 months, there will be a temptation on the other side of the aisle to blame this woeful state of affairs somehow on the Democratic Party. But this war in Iraq was initiated by this President with the overwhelming support of his party.

This President has refused to change the policy in Iraq, and we continue to see an endless war, costing us dramatic sums of money, creating sacrifice in the United States, still endangering our troops, with no end in sight. That is the legacy of the Bush administration in Iraq, and that is why the war in Afghanistan, today, continues to be a challenge to the United States.

I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Texas.

GAS PRICES

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, as the summer travel season rapidly approaches, the cost of gasoline continues to skyrocket and the American people are left to wonder whether Congress has any plans to do anything about it. Unfortunately, every “commonsense solution” that has been offered seems to be far from common sense or a solution because most of those that have been offered within the last year would only serve to raise, not lower, gasoline prices.

So far, Congress has offered the American people little more than newsclips and sound bites from hours of endless hearings lambasting, usually, the oil companies. The result, of course, has not been any reduction in gasoline prices but proposal after proposal to raise taxes on America’s energy companies, which—guess what—would ultimately be passed on to the consumer, thus raising prices and not lowering prices. This policy posture reminds me of a quip from former President Ronald Reagan, who said, “Congress’ approach is that if it moves, tax it; if it keeps moving, regulate it; if it stops moving, subsidize it.”

History has shown that a tax increase ultimately has the effect of not only passing along costs to the ultimate consumer but of drastically reducing supply. From 1980 to 1988, this same tax idea, so-called windfall profits tax, actually caused a decline in oil production, reducing domestic oil by as much as 8 percent—that is right, reducing America’s supply of its own natural resources and increasing our dependence on foreign sources of oil. The result, of course, was not eliminating a perceived windfall but, rather, causing a precipitous fall in production of American oil and, as I said, an increased dependence on foreign oil.

The problem, then, is the same as the problem today—not a cabal of oil executives conspiring to swindle the American people but a shortage of oil around the world. With burgeoning economies such as those in China and India, demand for oil has skyrocketed, while the supply has lagged behind. Raising a tax on domestic energy companies only takes away from the capital that could be used to reinvest in domestic energy discovery and production. It does nothing to address the world’s stagnant supply of oil.

We can pass a lot of laws here in Congress, and we can actually repeal a law