

on the floor, and I am about through with my comments, but I think it is worth reminding ourselves and reminding the American people what the impact has been of this surge of American and Iraqi forces thanks to the counter-insurgency strategy devised and deployed by GEN David Petraeus. I had an opportunity to see General Petraeus and Ambassador Crocker in Baghdad. They are pleased with the success they have seen, both militarily and from a diplomatic perspective. But they obviously recognize that things still need to continue on the trend toward improved relations, and the Iraqis need to continue their political reconciliation.

I think it is very important, as the story of Iraq tends to go from the front page to perhaps the middle of the newspaper, or from the top of the evening news into perhaps not even being the subject of a news story, that we recall for ourselves and for all Americans the contributions our brave men and women in uniform have made.

This will not only protect our vital national security interests but make sure other people across the world, in places such as Afghanistan and Iraq, can enjoy the blessings of liberty. To me that has been one of the most noble things America has continued to contribute, even to people whom our young troops have not met, to be able to deliver to them the opportunity to live in peace and to achieve their potential.

To me, that is one of the greatest things about this country of ours, that people will put themselves in harm's way, they will risk death itself or serious injury to help other people enjoy those blessings of liberty.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. SANDERS.) The Senator from Washington.

ARMY SUICIDES

Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, I rise this afternoon to talk about a subject that is very important to all of us. I listened to the Senator from Texas lamenting the fact that the war in Iraq has not been on the front pages of the paper recently.

Well, I am here today to say: Actually, it has been. In fact, on the front page of the Washington Post today, an article, "Soldier Suicides at Record Levels. Increase Linked to Long Wars, Lack of Army Resources."

We are hearing several news outlets today reporting on the front pages of papers and in headlines that suicides among our Active-Duty soldiers are at the highest rates since the Army began keeping records back in 1980.

According to those reports, 121 soldiers took their own lives last year. That is nearly 20 percent more than in 2006. The number of attempted suicides and self-inflicted injuries has dramatically increased since the start of this Iraq war. Those findings are tragic.

I know all our hearts go out to those families, their friends, and to the fel-

low soldiers of each one of those service men and women. Our great servicemembers who face deployment after deployment without the rest, recovery, and treatment they need are at the breaking point.

Many of them have seen their best friends killed, they have seen other untold horrors. Yet we still are expecting them to head back to the battlefield to perform unaffected by what they have seen or gone through.

While military suicide is back in the press today, those of us who travel across our States, who go home and talk to servicemembers and veterans who are struggling with mental health care, we know this is an issue, we know it all too well. We know that for family members who live through this tragedy, the pain stays long after those headlines fade.

We owe it to our servicemembers and their families to be outraged when these numbers are going up and up and up and not down. We owe it to them to demand action. On Monday, in his State of the Union Address, the President called on us, Congress, to improve the system of care for our wounded warriors and help them build lives of hope and promise and dignity.

Well, Congress has given the military hundreds of millions of dollars to improve its mental health care system. We have worked hard and pushed through legislation to require the military and the VA to destigmatize mental health treatment, to help increase the awareness of the symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder and do further reach on traumatic brain injury.

But it takes more than money being thrown at the problem, it takes leadership and it takes a change in the culture of war. The President can make all the platitudes he wants, but as Commander in Chief, he needs to lead by example and show he understands what these never-ending deployments are doing to our troops and to our veterans.

While the Department of Defense has taken some action, today's report makes me deeply concerned that progress has not been made and that these programs have not been implemented throughout the system. Some of our soldiers are telling us all they get is a 1-800 number to call if they need help.

Well, many soldiers need a real person to talk to. They need psychiatrists and they need psychologists who understand the horrors of war and the stresses these troops feel after serving their third or their fourth or even their fifth tour of duty in an urban theater.

Too many of our troops today say they cannot even get the military to understand when they are crying out for help. As I said, the Washington Post reported this morning on the military suicides, with an update on Lieutenant Whiteside. The Post wrote about this case the first time in December. She is the 25-year-old medic, an Army medic who attempted suicide

in theater. Then she was charged by her superiors with endangering another soldier.

Now, I met with her father before the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee when we were hearing the nomination of General Peake. Lieutenant Whiteside had experienced a mental breakdown from stress serving in Iraq and she suffered from "demonstrably severe depression," according to her doctors.

But the story revealed that medical opinion was brushed aside in her case and her superiors in the field said: "Mental illness is an excuse."

Well, this past Monday, she was awaiting the Army's decision whether she was going to be court-martialed or not, and she swallowed dozens of pills in another suicide attempt. The Post reported today she left a note that explained: "I am very disappointed in the Army."

According to this article, Lieutenant Whiteside is now in stable physical condition and the charges have finally been dismissed.

But, unfortunately, she is not the only soldier who has struggled to get the Defense Department to understand the real trauma of military service. Her story and the statistics that are being reported today are a reflection of something many of my colleagues and I have said over and over: A prolonged war has stretched our military thin and is taking a tragic toll on the brave men and women who serve in our all-volunteer Army and military. They deserve more.

Some members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff have raised concerns that prolonged and repeated deployments are placing the overall health of our servicemembers at risk. David Rudd, who is the chairman of the Department of Psychology at Texas Tech University and a former Army psychologist, was quoted in this article this morning as saying the Army suicide rates pose:

Real questions about whether you can have an Army this size with multiple deployments.

Over the past weeks, both the President and White House officials have hinted that a reduction of troops in Iraq is likely only temporary. As a result, I continue to be very concerned about the readiness of our military and our ability to sustain these wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

I think we need to ask the question: With the reality of today's reports and the knowledge that extended troop deployments are stretching our military readiness, I want to know, what is the Pentagon's plan to address and decrease the number of Army suicides and suicide attempts?

This afternoon, I wrote a letter to Secretary Gates, and I asked him that question. I want to hear his response. We need to know that the change in culture is more than a talking point; we need to know and be assured our senior leaders in the military are ensuring that their words and programs are being executed out in the field.

Our troops are heroes who are sacrificing for this Nation. It is time for this Government to wake up and provide them with the care they need.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority leader is recognized.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I wish to express my appreciation to one of the best soldiers we have ever had in the Senate, the Senator from Washington, Mrs. MURRAY. No one looks out for the troops more than she does. Her statement today is certainly reflective of a problem we have with suicide, which I know something about.

LYLE SENDLEIN

I want to make one brief correction in the statement I gave this morning—not a correction, an addition. I talked about National Football League players and how they are not treated right, the old-timers who have been hurt playing professional football.

I talked about someone I went to high school with by the name of Rupert Sendlein, who was a fine high school football player. But his son was an All-American at the University of Texas, played many years of professional football.

What I said this morning is that his grandson, Rupert's grandson, Lyle, was also a star All-American football player at the University of Texas. What I failed to mention is he started a number of games this year for the Phoenix Cardinals. He is much bigger than his father and his grandfather. He is 6 feet 6 inches, weighs 310 pounds, and is also a professional football player. I want the RECORD to reflect that I forgot to mention he was playing professional football.

ORDER OF BUSINESS

There will be no rollcall votes today. I am disappointed we have had one rollcall vote all week. There is no reason to point fingers. It sometimes happens. We have two extremely difficult areas of legislation, one dealing with the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act and the other dealing with the stimulus package. These two things have been very difficult to work out.

I have been told, with the last conversation I had with the Speaker, as a matter of fact, to try to work out one of the chinks we had on our side with the FISA legislation. I think that is worked out on our side. You never know what is going to come up.

But that is the way it is. It is my understanding the Republicans are going to now, once the agreement has been written, they are going to hotline that and see if we can get that done. But regardless of that, the Republican leader and I spoke a while ago, and we hope we can get this done so it will give us a way to end this early next week.

But there will be no votes today. It would not be fair to everyone to start on this bill, as we would not be able to

do it for another 45 minutes or an hour the way things go.

I wish to say a couple things. The package we got from the Senate Finance Committee yesterday deserves the attention of the American people and deserves the attention of this body, Democrats and Republicans. Why? Because it is a stimulus package. Is there anything wrong with the House package? Of course not. It is a good package. But ours is so much better. If we are talking about stimulating the economy, I think we need to understand that 21.5 million seniors will stimulate that economy. And they would get one of these rebates, all 21.5 million of them.

If we are concerned about stimulating the economy, who would spend it more than disabled veterans? We have 250,000 disabled veterans who are part of our package. That is important and that is good.

Unemployment benefits. I am not here to boast about it, but my State, the State of Nevada, for the first time in a long time, has a problem with unemployment. We had, for 20 years, the most booming housing market in the country.

People thought they were economic geniuses. They were buying homes and selling them. But when the downturn came, almost half the people who are in foreclosure did not live in the home. They are buying them for speculation purposes. They made a lot of money in the previous years, but the man came to the door and said: You cannot do that anymore.

So unemployment is a difficult problem we have. I visited this afternoon with the labor leaders of southern Nevada and northern Nevada. We have a real problem. Unemployment benefits are part of the Senate Finance Committee package. It is important and deserves a vote. We are going to have one on this at the right time.

Also, housing. The President in his State of the Union message talked about a number of items. One of the things he talked about was to set up a tax-free bond provision. In the past, most of these bonds have been used to build new homes. Well, we are not building new homes.

So what the President wants and Senator JOHN KERRY wants is to use these bonds to refinance homes. A great idea. The President likes it. We like it. That is part of the Senate Finance Committee package.

We also have in this package something, again, being very provincial, talking about something important to the State of Nevada, renewables. We have to ween ourselves from this oil that we get from deserts around the world. Venezuela, and some of the most tyrannical governments in the world in the Middle East. They are shipping us oil every day and around the rest of the world. Venezuela, interestingly enough, the leader of Venezuela comes to the United Nations and calls our President names.

Now, the fact is, before the United Nations, on American soil, no one should have the right to call my President names like this man did. What we should have told him is: Keep your oil.

We couldn't do that. We depend on his oil. We depend on Venezuelan oil.

This legislation that is coming from the Senate Finance Committee sets up some tax incentives for people to develop renewable fuels. People say: Is that going to stimulate the economy? You bet. If we provide tax incentives for these companies, they will start investing tomorrow—tomorrow—which means jobs; not scores of jobs, not hundreds of jobs, not thousands of jobs, tens of thousands of jobs. In the little town of Searchlight, NV, where I am from, I got a call when I was home from Senator Richard Bryan. He owns some property a few miles out of Searchlight. He said: They want to put up some windmills on your property. Do you want them to do that?

I said: Look, I don't want anyone to think I am getting any money from windmills, so have them put up all the windmills they want. I don't want anything from it. So put up the windmills.

Now I understand they are going to put as many as 200 of these huge windmills near my town of Searchlight. These windmills would be maybe 2½ miles from my home. Good, 200 megawatts of electricity. And they are waiting for tax incentives. Right now we have tax incentives for a very short period of time. What we have done with the Senate-passed provision, it will extend some of them up to 2 years because there is already a year to go on some of them.

Also extremely important, the business package is something for which the business community is clamoring. The House package has some good tax incentives in it for small business and businesses, but ours is better. This is in no way to criticize what the House did, but it is also underlining how good our package is. So we are going to work to pass the Finance Committee bill.

I have been told—I got a couple Blackberries today—by Members of the minority, the Republicans, surprisingly, but I don't want to mention names on the floor because things can always change—but I was surprised that people are supporting this, Republicans are supporting our package. So I think we can get 60 votes. If not, we are sure going to try. I think as time goes on and people look at what we have done, it is going to become even more appetizing. It is going to be better each day that goes by. So we will get to this legislation long before the cutoff date that I said we would complete it; that is, February 15. We have 15 days to go. We are going to finish this bill, I would hope, early next week or sometime next week. We are certainly going to try.

One of the calls I got today was from AARP. This organization, I don't know how many members they have, but millions. The one thing they have identified this past year is this. This is going