

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

The Senator from Connecticut is recognized.

DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION

Mr. LIEBERMAN. Mr. President, I rise to speak on behalf of amendment No. 5368, which Senator GRAHAM of South Carolina and I have filed. It is an amendment to the National Defense Authorization Act, which we hope to be able to call up in the next day or two.

This amendment expresses the sense of the Senate recognizing the strategic success of the troop surge in Iraq and expressing gratitude to the members of the U.S. Armed Forces who have made that success possible.

It was exactly 1 year ago today, September 10, 2007, that GEN David Petraeus came to Capitol Hill to testify about the situation in Iraq. At that time, General Petraeus laid out the facts. He gave us an accurate and honest assessment of the situation on the ground. He presented the growing evidence that the surge was working and that security there was improving.

Many, I fear, did not want to listen to General Petraeus, because many had already made up their minds about the surge. They were wedded to the idea that the surge was a mistake because they were wedded to the idea that the war was a mistake and that, in fact, we had already lost it. They didn't want to hear evidence that General Petraeus presented that day that America could still win this critical fight. As a result, even before GEN David Petraeus set foot on Capitol Hill, this honorable American soldier was met by a hail of preemptive attacks by opponents of the surge and the war.

One group, moveon.org, made the absolutely irresponsible and offensive accusation that General Petraeus would try to cook the books to justify the surge. But 1 year later, we know the truth. It was, in fact, moveon.org that was cooking the books, not General Petraeus. The general was right that the surge was working, and his critics were wrong. Had we heeded their advice to abandon the surge and retreat from Iraq in 2007, the United States would have suffered by its own decision a catastrophic defeat in Iraq that would have had terrible consequences far beyond Iraq for years to come. Fortunately, we did not abandon General Petraeus and his brave troops, and as a result, the situation in Iraq has now completely reversed.

In the 12 months since General Petraeus came before Congress to testify on this very day a year ago, almost every imaginable indicator of progress in Iraq, particularly political, economic, military, and security, has changed for the better. The surge is not just a tactical success, as some of its opponents have suggested. It is a strategic success for the United States and for the cause of freedom. Because of the surge, our two most threatening

enemies in the world today—al-Qaida and Iran—are weaker and America is safer.

I don't believe this is a matter of opinion by this Senator. I believe it is now a matter of fact that should be acknowledged. I know some opponents of the surge have recently tried to write off this remarkable success by claiming it doesn't matter. They say the success of the surge is irrelevant because Iraq itself is irrelevant, a distraction from the real central front of the war on terror which they say is Afghanistan.

This is a profoundly mistaken and misguided argument. Both Iraq and Afghanistan are important, but I ask my colleagues: Does anyone here believe it is irrelevant if al-Qaida wins or loses in Iraq, a nation that historically has been at the heart of the Arab world? Does anyone here really believe it is irrelevant if Iran succeeds or fails in its efforts to seize control of Iraq? Does anyone really want to tell our brave men and women in uniform in Iraq that the hard-won gains they have achieved over the past year, the lives that have been lost in that effort through their struggle and sacrifice are irrelevant? The answer, to me, is clearly no.

So let there be no doubt, the outcome of the war in Iraq is anything but irrelevant. On the contrary, in my opinion, there are few matters more important to the safety and security of the United States today than whether we win or lose in Iraq.

If there is anyone in this Chamber who doubts the strategic stakes in Iraq, I urge them to listen to General Petraeus. Listen to General Petraeus who warned us in an interview published today in the Washington Post that "Iraq is still viewed as the central front for al-Qaida." Let me repeat that: "Iraq is still viewed as the central front for al-Qaida," which is to say by al-Qaida. Not Afghanistan, Iraq; not Pakistan, Iraq.

This is not the opinion of a Member of Congress. It is not the opinion of a politician running for office. It is the judgment of America's most successful battlefield commander in the war on terror which began 7 years ago tomorrow when America was brutally attacked on 9/11/2001. This is the judgment of a general whom this Senate confirmed as the Supreme Commander for U.S. Forces in the Middle East and South Asia, who is soon to become the Commander in Chief at CENTCOM. What this general tells us is that it is Iraq, not Afghanistan, that is the central front of al-Qaida's war on us as defined by them, by the enemy.

One year ago, many in Congress did not want to listen to General Petraeus. In the 12 months since then, however, we have been presented with ample evidence why that was a mistake. I hope we will not repeat that mistake again.

So today on the 1-year anniversary of General Petraeus's testimony before Congress, let's resolve to come together across party lines. It is time to

recognize reality. It is time to acknowledge that the surge has been a strategic success in the central front of the war on the terrorists who attacked us 7 years ago tomorrow morning. It is time to express thanks to our courageous men and women in uniform who made the surge possible, rather than undercutting their struggle and sacrifices as irrelevant. And it is time to pledge that the hard-won gains secured by the surge will be honored and preserved, not squandered by attempts to impose arbitrary timetables for withdrawal, regardless of what is happening on the ground in Iraq.

The good news is that all of the troops who were sent to Iraq as part of the surge, approximately 30,000, have now returned home because of the success of the surge, and they are not being replaced. President Bush announced just yesterday that an additional 8,000 troops will be withdrawn by next February. Again, because the surge has worked, because the Iraq Security Forces are more capable of protecting their own country, because the political leadership of the country has come together to govern—giant steps along the path to what we have been hoping for throughout this conflict.

That is why Senator GRAHAM and I have offered this bipartisan amendment to the National Defense Authorization Act. We hope the Senate can unite to take up and adopt this amendment. It is not going to happen today on the 1-year anniversary of the Petraeus testimony, but I hope it will happen soon.

Let's stop for a moment, is what we are asking, and acknowledge the historic significance of what has been achieved at great sacrifice by the men and women who have worn the uniform of the United States, by the coalition forces who have been there, and, indeed, by the Iraq Security Forces themselves.

Eighteen months ago, Iraq was in chaos. Very few thought we could achieve success there. Yet now in the space of less than 2 years an extraordinary turnaround, one of the most remarkable in the history of the American military, the proud history of the American military, has been brought about. I truly believe the men and women who have served there under General Petraeus, now soon under General Odierno, a wonderfully prepared and able and strong leader, will be viewed by history as America's next or newest "greatest generation."

Obviously, there is still much we need to do to secure ultimate victory in Iraq. Of course, we still face other great challenges from terrorists throughout the world and from others, such as autocratic powers rising again.

But at this moment, particularly on this day, I wanted to give thanks for the truly historic achievement that belongs to GEN David Petraeus and the men and women of the American military who have served under him. I hope this amendment can be brought up, and

when it is, we will come together as Americans who are grateful to our troops for a job well done.

I thank the Chair. I thank everyone here who stayed until I finished.

I yield the floor and wish everyone a good night.

ADJOURNMENT UNTIL 10:30 A.M.
TOMORROW

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate stands adjourned until 10:30 a.m. tomorrow.

Thereupon, the Senate, at 7:46 p.m., adjourned until Thursday, September 11, 2008, at 10:30 a.m.