

Obama Reid Schumer
Reed Sarbanes Stabenow

The nomination was confirmed.

Mr. FRIST. I move to reconsider the vote.

Mr. REID. I move to lay that motion on the table.

The motion to lay on the table was agreed to.

Mr. FRIST. I ask that the President be immediately notified of the Senate's action.

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

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

Mr. FRIST. I ask that the Senate resume legislative session.

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

Mr. FRIST. I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. FEINGOLD. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. THUNE). Without objection, it is so ordered.

IRAQ

Mr. FEINGOLD. Mr. President, I rise once again today to comment on the deeply disturbing consequences of the President's misguided policies in Iraq. I have spoken before about my grave concern that the administration's Iraq policies are actually strengthening the hand of our enemies, fueling the insurgency's recruitment of foreign fighters, and unifying elements of the insurgency that might otherwise turn on each other.

But today I want to focus on a different and equally alarming issue, which is that the Bush administration's policies in Iraq are making America weaker. None of us should stand by and allow this to continue.

It is shocking to me this Senate has not found the time and the energy to take up the Defense authorization bill and give that bill the full debate and attention it deserves. Our men and women in uniform and our military families continue to make real sacrifices every day in service to this country. They perform their duties with skill and honor, sometimes in the most difficult of circumstances. But the Senate has not performed its duties, and the state of the U.S. military desperately needs our attention.

The administration's policies in Iraq are breaking the U.S. Army. As soldiers confront the prospect of a third tour in the extremely difficult theater of Iraq, it would be understandable if they began to wonder why all of the sacrifice undertaken by our country in wartime seems to be falling on their shoulders. It would be understandable if they and their brothers and sisters in

the Marine Corps began to feel some skepticism about whether essential resources, such as adequately armored vehicles, will be there when they need them. It would be understandable if they came to greet information about deployment schedules with cynicism because reliable information has been hard to come by for our military families in recent years. And it would be understandable if they asked themselves whether their numbers will be great enough—great enough—to hold hard-won territory, and whether properly vetted translators will be available to help them distinguish friend from foe.

At some point, the sense of solidarity and commitment that helps maintain strong retention rates can give way to a sense of frustration with the status quo. I fear we may be very close to that tipping point today. It is possible we may not see the men and women of the Army continue to volunteer for more of the same. It is not reasonable to expect that current retention problems will improve rather than worsen. We should not bet our national security on that kind of wishful thinking.

Make no mistake, our military readiness is already suffering. According to a recent RAND study, the Army has been stretched so thin that active-duty soldiers are now spending 1 of every 2 years abroad, leaving little of the Army left in any appropriate condition to respond to crises that may emerge elsewhere in the world. In an era in which we confront a globally networked enemy, and at a time when nuclear weapons proliferation is an urgent threat, continuing on our present course is irresponsible at best.

We are not just wearing out the troops; we are also wearing out equipment much faster than it is being replaced or refurbished. Days ago, the chief of the National Guard, GEN H. Steven Blum, told a group of Senate staffers that the National Guard had approximately 75 percent of the equipment it needed on 9/11, 2001. Today, the National Guard has only 34 percent of the equipment it needs. The response to Hurricane Katrina exposed some of the dangerous gaps in the Guard's communications systems.

What we are asking of the Army is not sustainable, and the burden and the toll it is taking on our military families is unacceptable. This cannot go on.

Many of my colleagues, often led by Senator REED of Rhode Island, have taken stock of where we stand and have joined to support efforts to expand the size of our standing Army. But this effort, which I support, is a solution for the long term, because it depends on new recruits to address our problems. We cannot suddenly increase the numbers of experienced soldiers so essential to providing leadership in the field. It takes years to grow a new crop of such leaders. But the annual resignation rate of Army lieutenants and captains rose last year to its highest rate since the attacks of September 11,

2001. We are heading toward crisis right now.

Growing the all-volunteer Army can only happen if qualified new recruits sign up for duty. But all indications suggest that at the end of this month the Army will fall thousands short—thousands short—of its annual recruiting goal. Barring some sudden and dramatic change, the Army National Guard and Army Reserve too will miss their annual targets by about 20 percent, missing their targets this year by 20 percent in terms of recruitment. GEN Peter Schoomaker, the Army's Chief of Staff, told Congress recently that 2006 “may be the toughest recruiting environment ever.”

Too often, too many of us are reluctant to criticize the administration's policies in Iraq for fear that anything other than staying the course set by the President will somehow appear weak. But the President's course is misguided, and it is doing grave damage to our extraordinarily professional and globally admired all-volunteer U.S. Army. To stand by—to stand by—while this damage is done is not patriotic. It is not supportive. It is not tough on terrorism, nor is it strong on national security. Because I am proud of our men and women in uniform, and because I am committed to working with all of my colleagues to make this country more secure, I am convinced we must change our course.

As some of my colleagues know, I have introduced a resolution calling for the President to provide a public report clarifying the mission the United States military is being asked to accomplish in Iraq, and laying out a plan and a timeframe for accomplishing that mission and subsequently bringing our troops home. It is in our interest to provide some clarity about our intentions and restore confidence at home and abroad that U.S. troops will not be in Iraq indefinitely. I have tried to jump-start this discussion by proposing a date for U.S. troop withdrawal: December 31, 2006.

We need to start working with a realistic set of plans and benchmarks if we are to gain control of our Iraq policy, instead of simply letting it dominate our security strategy and drain vital resources for an unlimited amount of time.

So this brings me to another facet of this administration's misguided approach to Iraq, another front on which our great country is growing weaker rather than stronger as a result of the administration's policy choices, and that is the tremendously serious fiscal consequences of the President's decision to put the entire Iraq war on our national tab. How much longer can the elected representatives of the American people in this Congress allow the President to rack up over \$1 billion a week in new debts? This war is draining, by one estimate, \$5.6 billion every month from our economy—funds that might be used to help the victims of Hurricane Katrina recover, or to help