

pension plans throughout the country. These pension plans were maintained by companies in the troubled steel and airline industries.

For all these reasons and more, we know that Congress must act on pension reform legislation so employees can continue to count on the retirement security provided by employer-sponsored pension plans. That is why Senate Democrats strongly supported pension reform legislation and were eager to go to conference on this bill. We recognize this is an important bill and strongly believe the Senate and House must get to work immediately to hammer out the compromises necessary to produce a final bill.

Senators agree. I think, from our perspective, we are united, Democrats and Republicans. Senate Democrats believe we can and should name conferees right now, this morning, and send the bill to the House so they can name their conferees. Nevertheless, some recent press reports on the status of the pension reform bill have suggested that Democrats are preventing this bill from moving to conference.

I wish to take a few minutes and correct this record. We strongly support the improvements this legislation will bring to our private pension system. We support improvements this legislation will bring, improvements to our private pension system. We want to improve pension funding so employees will know their employer's pension promise will be fulfilled. Democrats believe it is important to provide certainty to employers who are trying to plan their pension costs. Democrats believe it is important to clarify the rules governing cash balance pension plans so older workers are protected. Democrats believe it is important we act quickly to provide relief to those airlines that want to maintain their pension plans but need some time to recover from the downturn following the attacks of 9/11. Democrats believe it is imperative that we shore up the finances of the PBGC.

In other words, Democrats want this bill to go to conference today, and we can do that if the majority will agree to a reasonable number of conferees. Throughout this process, Senate Democrats have worked closely with Republicans to move pension reform legislation in an expedited manner. The pension reform bill was reported by the Finance Committee by voice vote on July 26 of last year. The HELP Committee reported the bill on September 28 by a vote of 18 to 2. After consideration, the two committee bills had to be reconciled into one proposal. Senators ENZI, GRASSLEY, KENNEDY, and BAUCUS worked long and hard on a bipartisan basis to produce that legislation. At each step during this process, Democrats worked with the Republicans to produce a bipartisan bill.

When it came time to consider the bill on the Senate floor, Democrats again worked to move this legislation forward. Senate Democrats worked

with the majority leader to reach agreement on a limited number of amendments. Democrats also worked to limit debate so the bill could move forward. Democrats did not have to forego their rights to offer amendments to the pension bill, but we did. Democrats didn't have to forego their rights to debate issues raised by this legislation, but we did. There are any number of steps that can be taken to slow down the progress of legislation if a Member of the Senate is so inclined. Democrats have not chosen to take any of these steps and are not choosing to take any of these steps now.

We are eager to go to conference on this legislation and we are not contesting the Republicans' desire to have a two-vote advantage in the conference. The majority leader set the margin at 7 to 5. We believe fairness is 8 to 6. All we are asking is that each committee which is a party to this legislation be adequately represented. We believe that appointing 14 conferees in a ratio of 8 to 6 gives the Senate the best opportunity to bring back a bill from the conference that will garner strong support by the Senate.

The majority leader has said he will go 9 to 6. That is not fair, to have a three-vote advantage. I urge the majority to consider its opposition to our very reasonable request so we can get to work on this legislation. Together we can improve our Nation's pension system and make America better.

Mr. President, simply it is this: Are we going to go to conference on this bill? We want to go. Arbitrarily, the majority leader said it will be a 7-to-5 ratio. We wanted 8 to 6. We will go to conference right now. It doesn't seem fair. We are not holding up the conference. We are not holding up the conference as indicated by the fact that we are willing to go from 7 to 5 to 8 to 6.

The distinguished Senator from Tennessee comes back with the suggestion that, well, we will go 9 to 6. That isn't fair. We want to go to conference, but we want at least to have a semblance of fairness. We are willing to go with the two-vote margin but not three votes.

MORNING BUSINESS

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, there will be a period for the transaction of morning business for up to 1 hour, the first half of the time under the control of the majority leader or his designee and the second half of the time under the control of the Democratic leader or his designee.

The Senator from Missouri.

ORDER FOR FILING DEADLINE

Mr. BOND. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the filing deadline for first-degree amendments to S. 2271 occur at 12 noon today.

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

THE PATRIOT ACT

Mr. BOND. Mr. President, I come to the floor today to speak about the war on terror, progress in Iraq, and the PATRIOT Act. In spite of the negative press you see on the nightly news, Iraq is progressing toward the goal of being independent, free, and democratic. It has been nearly 3 years since our brave men and women in the military and our other agencies freed a people from the grip of a tyrannical and murderous dictator and began to work to establish a democratic society in the heart of the Middle East. In doing so, they are also making the world and all of us much safer.

Since then, the people of Iraq have set up a constitutional government and braved death by voting in free elections.

Surely more remains to be done, but let there be no doubt, progress is being made. But challenges remain. We recognize that and we must.

The recent bombing of a mosque in Samarra has highlighted the challenges Iraq continues to face. Who did it?

Following the attack, a prominent Iraqi Shiite cleric, al-Sistani, recognizing the hallmarks of al-Qaida, called, for the first time, for street demonstrations against the bombing, and thousands of his angry supporters protested, shouting slogans against al-Qaida and its supporters, accusing them of fueling hatred and violence, which is surely what they did.

News of the attack only underscores why we are in Iraq and what is at stake. When our delegation met with Sunni, Shiite, and Kurd leaders last month in Baghdad, those leaders recognized, as our able Ambassador emphasized, the dangers of sectarian violence. They committed to work together, knowing that they have to bring about a national unity government.

Recent news reports suggest that with the intervention of enlightened leaders such as al-Sistani, people are beginning to work together again. But the disturbing news of the bombing of the mosque and resulting reactions and killings simply seems to embolden all the hand-wringing naysayers who have incessantly talked of civil war in Iraq and American withdrawal. A greater lesson, however, lies within this tragic development.

Simply put, what is the alternative?

Is America to retreat from Iraq and simply seek to be left alone and leave the world's problems to others to fix?

In the age of bin Laden, al-Zarqawi, and al-Sistani, that is a course America and the world cannot afford to take. We should have learned our lesson on 9/11.

As the Wall Street Journal recently pointed out, the fact is that under the Bush administration's policy, four democratic governments have come to power in the Middle East—Iraq, Afghanistan, Lebanon, and Palestine. Yes these democracies will face serious challenges along the way, from insurgents to bloody ethnic feuding.