

and farmers all across this country have struggled to fill their tanks with gas and to have enough money in their bank accounts to do that which they need to do. But they have seen these big oil companies get the tax breaks that I personally do not think they deserve. I don't think the American people believe they deserve them either.

For too long, all Americans have worried about the direction of the war in Iraq only to see Congress refuse to have a real debate on the issues. On a personal basis, I have encouraged the President to listen to what the Baker-Hamilton working group has to say, and I know he will do that. I think it is important that he is willing to meet with those people. They are a tremendous group of very patriotic Americans with significant experience. On the Democratic side, as an example, you have the former Secretary of Defense and former Presidential Chief of Staff. They are good people, Democrats and Republicans, who are going to be talking to the President. If we are going to have a new direction in Iraq, the President must listen to new ideas. This is a step in the right direction.

That is why last week I asked the President to convene a bipartisan congressional leadership group and invite other people, too, if he wants, of course. It is his meeting. But if he wants, to have Secretary Baker, Congressman Hamilton, members of the military. I think if we spent a couple of days doing this—however long the President sees fit—I think it would be helpful to have if he heard what we had to say. If we are going to have a new direction in Iraq, the President must listen to new ideas. That is why I felt comfortable in suggesting this to the President.

We Democrats have some very concrete ideas as to what we think should happen. First of all, again on a bipartisan basis, with 79 votes on the Defense Authorization bill for the previous year, Democrats and Republicans joined together to put a provision in that bill that said the year 2006 will be a year of significant transition in Iraq. The year 2006 is coming to an end. We need to implement that law.

We, as Democrats, also offered an amendment that received 40 votes called the Reed-Levin or Levin-Reed amendment, however you want to look at it, to begin a change of course, to set a framework to change course. For example, in that legislation, we called for responsibly redeploying our troops to transform the mission to training, counterterrorism, logistics, force protection. Does this mean pulling all the troops out now? Of course it doesn't. But it does say we must start redeploying troops as soon as possible.

Second, the sectarian differences must be reconciled. They are plaguing the country. We have had in the last 2 days, just that we know of, almost 200 Iraqis killed, 3 American soldiers, 4 British soldiers. We must push for changes to the Iraqi Constitution and power and resource sharing.

I believe it is time for our President to call for a regional conference that he participants in. I spoke to the King of Jordan today. He thought it was a good idea to have the President call for a meeting of the leaders of Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Jordan—even Syria. It is a regional problem. Let's talk about this regionally. It is more their problem than our problem. They have more to lose or win than we do. So I think a regional conference would be very important to regionalize our strategy.

We must revitalize the failed construction efforts. It was stunning to see in the weekend news how much less oil is being produced there in Iraq than before the war. It was stunning to see how little potable water is being produced there than before the war. And to see that the electricity in Baghdad—as an example, prior to the war it was 16 hours a day, and now it is down to less than 4 hours a day. We have to revitalize our failed reconstruction efforts.

Finally, we have to rebuild our military. We do not have a single undeployed Army unit that is battle ready. Everything is in need of repair or replacement—replenishment. The Pentagon has told us it will cost \$75 billion to bring the military up to what it was before the war. We want to work and see if we can accomplish that. Those are our suggestions.

From Iraq to the economy, there is much to do in the next few weeks and then at the beginning of the new year and a new Congress—so much to do. We must take advantage of the next few weeks and get as much done as we can.

There are 55 Republicans, there are 45 Democrats, we understand that—for the next 60 days. After that, it is going to be a very slim majority that we have, but it is one that we believe will open the door for bipartisanship. I hope, for the good of the American people, we can continue to look forward—not dwell on the past but look forward.

I hope very much we can get our so-called tax extenders done. The reason these are important to do is they are critical tax relief for American families and businesses that will expire if we don't do something—a deduction for college tuition, deduction for State and local sales taxes. The manager of the bill on military construction is Kay Bailey Hutchison from Texas. This has been her issue because the large State of Texas is losing those families' tax deductions, deductions for out-of-pocket expenses incurred by teachers and for businesses, the research and development tax credit, the work opportunity tax credits and Welfare-to-Work tax credits. These things are extremely important. Unless we act to extend this relief in the next few weeks, families will be facing a tax increase next year. That is not acceptable and we need to act.

It is a new day in the Senate. Let's work together and move America forward. I offer my hand to my friends on the other side of the aisle. I have

reached out to my friend, Senator FRIST. We are going to do everything we can to have the country know we are doing good things in the next few weeks. And I reached out to my friend, MITCH MCCONNELL, who I understand will be the next Republican leader, to work together on the issues of the next Congress as we have on many issues in the past.

I suggest the absence of a quorum. The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

BIPARTISANSHIP

Mr. SALAZAR. Mr. President, I thank both the majority leader and minority leader for their comments this afternoon and for setting forth the tone of moving forward in a spirit of bipartisanship on behalf of our country. I want to quickly make four points.

It is going to be very important for us in the weeks ahead, and in the new Congress, that we do find the seeds of bipartisanship which we have found in the past in many of the efforts that have gone on in this body. For me, during my first 2 years as a Senator, one of the things I will always remember as one of the best times of the Senate is when we came together with the Gang of 14, with 7 Republicans and 7 Democrats, to make sure that this Senate was able to get beyond the very difficult issue that it faced. I hope we find more and more of those opportunities as we move forward on the great issues of our time, including Iraq, energy, health care, and the rest of the issues with which we must deal as a country.

I will say this as well. In the days ahead, we will hear many things about some of our colleagues, some of whom are newcomers to our institution, the U.S. Senate, and some of them who are leaving. For me, it is a sad day that Senator CHAFEE and Senator DEWINE, who were members of the Gang of 14, will not be around to be a part of that future bipartisan coalition that we are going to have to have in the Senate. But I hope, on the side of both the Democrats and the Republicans, that there is a great number of Members of the Senate on both sides of the aisle who will come together to address those significant issues that face us as a country.

As I spent my time in Colorado for most of the last month and traveled around the State, most of the people in my State were making one statement to us as a Congress and that was to get about the people's business. They want us to do the work that they so fervently want to be accomplished for this country. I believe in my State—which I believe is reflective of what is happening around the country—they want

us to set a new direction and to be successful in our undertaking in Iraq. I join the minority leader, Senator REID, in his comments about how we ought to move forward in trying to create a bipartisan approach to achieving success in Iraq.

As I traveled around my State, and as I traveled around the country as well, I think the issue of energy independence has become an issue on which people very much want us to get beyond the rhetoric they have heard for the last 30 years. The Energy Policy Act of 2005 was one of the few bipartisan efforts that ultimately succeeded in this Congress. I hope, as we move ahead on the issue of energy, we will find ways of embracing conservation, embracing renewable energy, embracing the new technologies of today so we can in fact get our hands on energy independence, which is so critical. It is critical for our Nation from the point of view of the national security of the United States of America and the world. It is critical for our Nation in terms of our economic security, and it is critical for our Nation in terms of the environmental security which is also at stake on the issue of energy. Finally, it is critical to our country as to how we provide new opportunities for rural America as we grow our way to energy independence in this country.

Finally, I would like to make a comment on an issue which I believe continues to break the backs of the American people and bankrupt American businesses today and that is the issue of health care and the costs of health care, which have risen astronomically. We have left almost 50 million people of our country without health insurance, 77,000 in my State of Colorado alone.

I hope this institution, the Senate, working with the House of Representatives, can deliver real results for the people of the United States of America in the weeks and years ahead.

Mr. President, I yield the floor, and I suggest the absence of a quorum.

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

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mrs. HUTCHISON. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Ms. MURKOWSKI). Without objection, it is so ordered.

MILITARY CONSTRUCTION AND VETERANS AFFAIRS AND RELATED AGENCIES APPROPRIATIONS ACT, 2007

Mrs. HUTCHISON. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the immediate consideration of H.R. 5385, the Military Construction and Veterans Affairs and related agencies appropriations bill for 2007. I further ask consent that the committee-reported substitute be agreed to as original text for the pur-

pose of further amendment, with no points of order waived by virtue of this agreement.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

The clerk will report the bill by title.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (H.R. 5385) making appropriations for military quality of life functions of the Department of Defense, military construction, the Department of Veterans Affairs, and related agencies for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2007, and for other purposes.

The Senate proceeded to consider the bill, which had been reported from the Committee on Appropriations, with an amendment to strike all after the enacting clause and insert in lieu thereof the following:

That the following sums are appropriated, out of any money in the Treasury not otherwise appropriated, for military construction, the Department of Veterans Affairs, and related agencies for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2007, and for other purposes, namely:

TITLE I

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE

MILITARY CONSTRUCTION, ARMY

(INCLUDING RESCISSIONS OF FUNDS)

For acquisition, construction, installation, and equipment of temporary or permanent public works, military installations, facilities, and real property for the Army as currently authorized by law, including personnel in the Army Corps of Engineers and other personal services necessary for the purposes of this appropriation, and for construction and operation of facilities in support of the functions of the Commander in Chief, \$2,172,622,000, to remain available until September 30, 2011: Provided, That of this amount, not to exceed \$199,540,000 shall be available for study, planning, design, architect and engineer services, and host nation support, as authorized by law, unless the Secretary of Defense determines that additional obligations are necessary for such purposes and notifies the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress of the determination and the reasons therefor: Provided further, That of the funds appropriated for "Military Construction, Army" under Public Law 109-114, \$43,348,000 are hereby rescinded: Provided further, That of the funds appropriated for "Military Construction, Army" under Public Law 109-13, \$125,800,000 are hereby rescinded: Provided further, That of the amount provided under this heading, \$34,800,000 is designated as an emergency requirement pursuant to section 402 of S. Con. Res. 83 (109th Congress), the concurrent resolution on the budget for fiscal year 2007, as made applicable in the Senate by section 7035 of Public Law 109-234.

MILITARY CONSTRUCTION, NAVY AND MARINE CORPS

(INCLUDING RESCISSIONS OF FUNDS)

For acquisition, construction, installation, and equipment of temporary or permanent public works, naval installations, facilities, and real property for the Navy and Marine Corps as currently authorized by law, including personnel in the Naval Facilities Engineering Command and other personal services necessary for the purposes of this appropriation, \$1,238,065,000, to remain available until September 30, 2011: Provided, That of this amount, not to exceed \$71,626,000 shall be available for study, planning, design, and architect and engineer services, as authorized by law, unless the Secretary of Defense determines that additional obligations are necessary for such purposes and notifies the Committees on Appropriations of both

Houses of Congress of the determination and the reasons therefor: Provided further, That of the funds appropriated for "Military Construction, Navy and Marine Corps" under Public Law 108-132, \$30,000,000 are hereby rescinded: Provided further, That of the funds appropriated for "Military Construction, Navy and Marine Corps" under Public Law 108-324, \$8,000,000 are hereby rescinded.

MILITARY CONSTRUCTION, AIR FORCE

(INCLUDING RESCISSIONS OF FUNDS)

For acquisition, construction, installation, and equipment of temporary or permanent public works, military installations, facilities, and real property for the Air Force as currently authorized by law, \$1,214,885,000, to remain available until September 30, 2011: Provided, That of this amount, not to exceed \$71,381,000 shall be available for study, planning, design, and architect and engineer services, as authorized by law, unless the Secretary of Defense determines that additional obligations are necessary for such purposes and notifies the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress of the determination and the reasons therefor: Provided further, That of the funds appropriated for "Military Construction, Air Force" under Public Law 108-324, \$2,694,000 are hereby rescinded: Provided further, That of the funds appropriated for "Military Construction, Air Force" under Public Law 109-114, \$19,816,000 are hereby rescinded: Provided further, That of the funds appropriated for "Military Construction, Air Force" under Public Law 109-13, \$10,800,000 are hereby rescinded.

MILITARY CONSTRUCTION, DEFENSE-WIDE

(INCLUDING RESCISSIONS AND TRANSFER OF FUNDS)

For acquisition, construction, installation, and equipment of temporary or permanent public works, installations, facilities, and real property for activities and agencies of the Department of Defense (other than the military departments), as currently authorized by law, \$1,162,281,000, to remain available until September 30, 2011: Provided, That such amounts of this appropriation as may be determined by the Secretary of Defense may be transferred to such appropriations of the Department of Defense available for military construction or family housing as the Secretary may designate, to be merged with and to be available for the same purposes, and for the same time period, as the appropriation or fund to which transferred: Provided further, That of the amount appropriated, not to exceed \$172,150,000 shall be available for study, planning, design, and architect and engineer services, as authorized by law, unless the Secretary of Defense determines that additional obligations are necessary for such purposes and notifies the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress of the determination and the reasons therefor: Provided further, That of the funds appropriated for "Military Construction, Defense-Wide" under Public Law 108-132, \$9,000,000 are hereby rescinded: Provided further, That of the funds appropriated for "Military Construction, Defense-Wide" under Public Law 108-324, \$43,000,000 are hereby rescinded: Provided further, That of the funds appropriated for "Military Construction, Defense-Wide" under Public Law 109-114, \$72,065,000 are hereby rescinded: Provided further, That of the amount provided under this heading, \$100,886,000 is designated as an emergency requirement pursuant to section 402 of S. Con. Res. 83 (109th Congress), the concurrent resolution on the budget for fiscal year 2007, as made applicable in the Senate by section 7035 of Public Law 109-234.

MILITARY CONSTRUCTION, ARMY NATIONAL GUARD

(INCLUDING RESCISSION OF FUNDS)

For construction, acquisition, expansion, rehabilitation, and conversion of facilities for the training and administration of the Army National Guard, and contributions therefore, as